



## EDUCATING STUDENTS THROUGH BOOKS

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### Abstract

It has been hypothesized that reading habits are indispensable to develop one's literacy skills and a wealth of research on reading also has revealed that reading positively influences cognitive and language elements in human brains. The reading habit begins and gradually develops in the childhood stage and the reflections would appear in the adolescent and adulthood stages. So, it is obvious that reading must be promoted or started from classrooms. Teachers' role is crucial in creating flexible reading environments. This article attempts to discuss the role of teachers as facilitators in a reading environment promotes reading habit of students. Besides, the paper cites a fictional evidence in which the changes that a protagonist undergone behaviourally, culturally and psychologically through reading experiences.

Key words: Pleasure reading, change, cognition, reading experience, reading environment



## **Introduction**

In the present scenario, education requires changes in terms of academic and non-academic activities both indoors and outdoors of schools and therefore it is necessary for an individual to accept the changes in all spheres of life including professional and social lives in order to be a successful lifelong learner. Successful learning for lifetime is possible only through self-directed learning which is otherwise called “autonomous learning”. An usual postulation is that an autonomous learner is a “good learner” (Alvarez, 2012) and it can be initiated through individualized successful reading experiences as they hold the gateways of knowledge and unfold the learning strategies involving higher-order thinking such as to be critical, creative, and recognize information and to reflect upon the received knowledge. In fact, reading can do a great change in reader’s career if teachers as catalysts inspire learners to read through independent reading. Certainly, independent reading is crucial for learning but it is not the only way students get multiple exposures (Nagy, Anderson, & Herman, 1987). Also, Research on reading instruction suggests that teachers continued to be catalysts to make students learn and achieve (Layne, 2009). Similarly, Coelho (2008) defines a teacher as “a master is not someone who teaches something, but someone who inspires the student to do his best to discover a knowledge who already has in his soul”.

### Teacher as a Catalyst

In learning period, especially in childhood and beginning stage of adulthood, students seem to have an imitating tendency of what they look, read and observe. They spend most of the times in classrooms and obviously tend to follow captain of the ship - the teacher, who is a navigator, researcher, mentor, mediator, scaffolder and a model. And, teachers are best readers and writers to be found in classrooms for students. The teacher can create a reading sanctuary in a classroom where s/he scaffolds the reading activities by providing comprehensible and pleasurable texts for students based on their linguistic knowledge and subject knowledge as well. For instance, teachers can stimulate the reading interest of the readers on same content that they read and this sharing experience would motivate them to involve in independent reading. Especially, when climax of a story is unrevealed to the students, they become more curious about the ending of the story and they will be motivated to read more. And it becomes continual by promoting shared reading experiences among the



student peers. Here reading becomes reciprocal that enriches the reading environment and promotes healthy interaction among their counterparts. In this way, the reading activity turns to be contagious (McCormack & Pasquarelli, 2010).

Some of the tips for teachers to create a reading environment:

- Providing access to various genres of books and allowance of liberty to students to choose what they want to read, improve reading motivation, and comprehension (Guthrie & Humenick, 2004)
- Every child should experience reading every day and they should be provided time for silent leisure reading in everyday classrooms
- Motivating students to read by initiating, literary discussions, shared reading experiences and book chats
- Arousing curiosity about a particular book through book chats, giving a narrative voice of the main characters or an interesting fictional plot without climax
- Promoting the aesthetics of reading help students for real learning

Reading as Transmitter for change

Reading is beneficial in private and professional life as well. It helps to have a closer connection with the inner self that regulates the balanced emotions without any stress. Specifically, reading fiction helps out readers to empathise with the people around them and to have a deeper understanding of human emotions and psyche as well (Hawes, 1939). On the other hand, reading serves as an intellectual bridge for academic performances especially gaining good scores on standardized tests which almost is the deciding factor for choosing better profession in future years. Not only has it provided intellectual upliftment but also widen the knowledge of diverse people and their cultures. For instance, when a student reads a fiction which is about a special tribe, s/he becomes aware of their language and culture and tries to interpret the text in the same aspects. This approach to a text provides the students a vast experience and knowledge.

Reading as a cognitive process, where thinking becomes a predominant action in mind. When readers decode texts for information, they interact with the texts and get involved in the content while searching for meaning. And, at times they get pleasurable reading experiences



and use books as a searching tool for thirst of knowledge and hence they consider reading as a pleasurable and meaningful activity. And anything that learnt with pleasure has a great value. Most importantly, in this pleasurable reading activity, the reader gets into various roles such as a thinker, analyst, critic, problem-solver, knowledge seeker and a writer during reading process and after completing it as well. And, reading process involves various levels of thinking, and notably, an existing level of thinking is elevated to next level when a thought transforms into an emotional content. Moreover, the intellectual upliftment occurs through various literary experiences which are also called “imaginative rehearsals” that they are anticipating in real life atmospheres (Gallagher, 2009).

#### Reading for change: A fictional analogy

A fictional tale “The Uncommon reader” by Allan Bennett has been analysed to emphasize the role of a teacher as a catalyst in order to inspire reading. The plot of the story illustrates how reading affects professional and private life of a queen. It is about the self-transformation happens in Queen Elizabeth’s life through reading. Initially, she doesn’t believe in reading while her kitchen staff Norman enjoys sharing his reading experiences. And she also says, reading is static and inert because it makes a reader only to imagine rather than to act upon. Even sometimes, she feels that reading is opposite of “doing” and she certainly is a doer.

Norman, a former servant in the royal kitchen assists the queen’s intellectual growth through reading. He guides and supervises her reading activities and so he is promoted to queen’s “amanuensis” (49). As a novice reader she begins with easy readings and later she discovers that reading one book leads to the other. “The Pursuit of Love” by Nancy Mitford seconds her reading, which turned the queen a passionate reader and to seek more and more books. In this way, she comes to read about more writers Sylvia Plath, Henry James, Samuel Beckett and so on. Later, she inquires the classic texts written by Henry Fielding, Charles Dickens, Jane Austen, Joseph Conrad etc. and religious and historical texts as well. These reading exposures helps her find the value and power of reading. In particular, she started to think on her own which is not possible before as the people around her took all decisions. And she believes that reading is an active experience where a reader unfolds different layers of meaning and imbibes knowledge. It is evident from the quote given by her that “Briefing is antithesis of reading.



Briefing is terse, factual and to the point. Reading is untidy, discursive and perpetually inviting. Briefing closes down a subject, reading opens it up” (22).

The pleasure of reading creates positive effects on people in general, and all the more on the Queen of Great Britain. For instance, The *Guardian* journalist Edward Marriott (2007) comments that the novella is “a gloriously entertaining comic narrative, but it is also much more: a deadly serious manifesto for the potential of reading to change lives, for its ability to broaden horizons, to imagine oneself in others’ shoes, and to enable one (...) to break out from the constraints of upbringing, class and education and lead the life you’ve always wanted. And, Bennett ponders, who might need that more than the Queen?”(6)

The changes that the queen finds in her attitude, emotion, cognition and behaviour are given below:

Aspects of Change	Reading before	Reading after
Attitudinal Change	She keeps distance with the people and maintains her status	She feels that ‘Books did not defer. All readers were equal.’ She includes her readings in all her official visits and public engagements
Emotional Change	The Queen was “bored, uncooperative and glum”, “bad-tempered and difficult”	She empathized for her people, “if she took note of it now it was because she knew more of people’s feelings than she used to and could put herself in someone else’s place” (106)
Cognitive Change	Reading is a passive activity that is unfit for “doers” of life	Reading a book will lead to another and it is an active experience



		Experiencing a large amount of reading inspire her to write. And, she feels “Writing is a duty of the reader”.
Behavioural Change	She is keen on decorum and etiquette.	She began to observe the things which were not noticed before. Now, she “looks down on the tops of people’s heads a good deal and from that perspective even the most unsympathetic personality seems touching: the beginnings of a bald patch, the hair growing over the collar” (80). The world of books unlocks “human side” of the monarch to her.

Reading is voluntary and self-directive in character. The real essence of this novella lies in a message that we could very easily replace the Queen’s character with any other person and still receive the same message from this novella. A real teacher must take the role of Norman as he navigates the queen for variety of successful reading experiences which has a strong positive effect on her transformation in private and professional life. Thus the story becomes an exemplary tale with a meaningful ending “reading changes perceptions of men, about men and also about real life”.



## Conclusion

Norman & Phillips (1987) point out that reading is more than just saying what is on the page; it is thinking. And, Beck (1989) asserts “there is no reading without reasoning”. This thinking skill would make students to be expert citizens by being creative, taking right decisions, culturally and socially active, commitment towards work, dedication and lifelong learning. (Stenberg, 2008). Finally, this would regulate the self-transformation and help others to participate in the reaction of change.

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