

Developing Reading Skills in Pre-primary and Primary School Education

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Abstract: The present course aims to present techniques and specific ways that can be used for developing reading skills in pre-primary and primary school education. Over time, a lot of these techniques have already been validated with positive results. Recently, we proposed strategies that have been adapted to the current educational needs. However, it is anticipated that the reading act should be introduced already from a very young age such as prenatal stage. Depending on the stage of intellectual development of the child (developmental stages described by Jean Piaget), parents and those in care of the children should gradually strengthen the development of reading through concerted efforts. Additionally, some of the techniques presented in this article undertake the stimulation of reading for students in secondary school, through becoming more self-motivated and developing a routine of reading, therefore becoming a sine qua non element of the adult's lifestyle. These techniques were applied by a lot of our (former) students enumerated at the end of this article.

Key-words: *reading skills; pupil/student; development;*

On the Importance of Reading

Numerous studies have shown that "Reading engages the mind into a more active state rather than watching television or focusing on various gadgets such as the computer. /.../ The reading of a novel, no matter how easy the literary genre is, it instantly shifts the mind present perspective into one of the book themes. Therefore, this act challenges your thinking, stimulates your imagination and eventually along with the escape from the daily routine that one gets when reading a book, we could also benefit from finding answers related to our daily life quests."⁴

It should be mentioned that we cannot establish precisely which of the next valences appear strictly because of the act of reading, and which are a result of the fictional content of reading. In some cases, things seem unambiguous⁵, while in others the valences have a double causality, hard to quantify to the extent that they are either the result of the reading act or either to the specific content that has been read⁶. These results are: enriching the vocabulary and its nuanced use; stimulation of interest, passion for reading, desire to know more, and the desire to individual study; stimulating creativity and artistic intelligence; offering examples of desirable behavior (the latest to form a judicial spirit). Moreover, it expands the view and interests of education in the spirit of high moral qualities in accordance with traditional moral norms (honor, dignity, patriotism, courage, truth, etc.), but also with those of contemporary society, an expression of the educational ideal; it promotes teamwork spirit and awareness of the small petting world (and the animal world in general). The most important out of all, the reading act it strengthens mental processes (thinking, memory, imagination, etc.) it cultivates a sense of will and self-control of self-control and will; it

⁴ Petrea, Irina, *Și tu poți fi supernanny 1. Cum să-ți crești copilul* [Even you can be supernanny 1. How to grew up your child], Ed. Trei, 2012, p. 235

⁵For example, vocabulary enrichment and refinement, providing models and anti-models of behavior, learning teamwork etc. is due to the content of the reading, while the cultivation of self-control and will (especially the reading of large texts, usually, the novels) is especially relevant to the act of reading.

⁶e.g.: development of mental processes (certainly, it has dual causality, but we have not the ability to measure how much is due to the reading effort and how much is due to the content of reading)

cultivates aesthetic taste; it forms its own axiological perspective; it familiarizes us with various professions and trades; it provides solutions to solve ontological problems; possible and desirable isolation from automatism (temporary, of course) in a virtual universe; catharsis⁷.

In the article *Reading as a Teaching Adventure*, it is shown that the reading act „is one of the few ways to stimulate the curiosity and the desire of discovering in children of all ages. It is said that the reading act is one of the gates of a pleasant escape from the pressures of a system of the great distance between the flexible school curriculum and the strictness of the evaluation”.⁸ Without this bookish adventure, Michel Houellebecq showed that adults can be harmed: „Living without reading is dangerous; you have to limit yourself to life, and it is not without risk”⁹.

Recent studies recommend reading therapy¹⁰, but also reading as an ingredient of happiness. Moreover, Roland Barthes rightly showed the ineffable character of the delight / seduction exercised over the lecturer¹¹.

Concrete ways of stimulating independent reading in preschool and primary school

The first step in shaping the interest in reading is initiated by the parent or any other people in care of the children. As most researchers show, since the intrauterine period the fetuses should be introduced to sounds which consists of aloud works from children’s literature.

In the pre-primary school education

In the beginning, the familiarization with **coloured cover** of the book - illustrated, tactile, colouring etc. - is likely to sensitize the child to the book. The next step is to determine along with the future readers a description of the book contents (animals, numbers, letters etc), which in turn will be resulted in the verbalization and the intuition of the book images by the child alone. Moreover, another approach that helps in stimulating the curiosity and the interest in reading is **to surround the children with a library containing magazines, story volumes which are illustrated**, fables, snoops, novels, legends, science books etc. The children who are not introduced to books from a very young age will have their interest for reading any kind of content considerably low, and difficult to develop later into adulthood.

Bath stories are realized using floating books (that have a support that permits to the books to float) or pneumatic/inflatable books.

Bed time stories involve a ritual with many valences, because "stories enrich the child's soul, giving him various affective feelings"¹². They stimulate children’s imagination, they bring into the child's life positive examples which have an impact in shaping positive attitudes. Once this approach is very well embedded in a child’s routine and consistently followed, it will also become a ritual for an adult’s routine.

We can also use **motivational image with cute animals reading** (Fig.1), because for a child it is important that a rabbit/cat/monkey/pig/dog/puppy/hedgehog reads...

⁷Here is an enumeration of the valences of reading and of the literature for children in eclectic way, without specifying the subject and the literary species illustrated by a text, considering the sphere of literature for children, from which we assume that various works are selected!

⁸Elisabeta Roșca, Rodica Lăzărescu, *Lectura ca aventură didactică*, în: *Tribuna învățământului*, nr. 948 (2829), 5-11 mai 2008, p. 8

⁹In rom.: *Să trăiești fără lectură este periculos; trebuie să te limitezi la viață, și nu e lipsit de riscuri*- Michel Houellebecq, *Platforma*, Ed. Polirom, 2003, trad. Emanoil Marcu, p. 82

¹⁰De exemplu, Paola Santagostino, *Cum să te vindeci cu o poveste*, în românește de Corina Popescu, Ed. Humanitas, București, 2008

¹¹Barthes, Roland, *Plăcerea textului*, în românește de Marian Papahagi, Ed. Echinoc, Cluj-Napoca, 1994

¹²Elena Popescu, *Cum să ne creștem copiii bine*, Ed. Booklet, 2000, p. 105

Moreover, **stories of various famous characters such as Spiderman, Batman** could make the children's learning more fun and interesting and the knowledge easier to acquire. For example: When students learn their letters, some of the letters could be presented such as *B* from Batman, Spiderman starts with letter *S*.

In the primary school education

In primary school, the students' interest for independent reading is stimulated mainly by the class teacher, who proposes **a list of textbooks to be read**. Additionally, along with the textbooks there are various activities that could be performed during lesson, based on what has been read by the students.

In the beginning of every school year, in the first literature lesson, **the textbook is presented and debated** over its cover's artwork, the identification of its coordinates etc. Any kind of perspective from the student is welcomed, as this sensitizes the student to the printed book and draws a series of expectations on its reading.

They are also encouraged to read through an attractive book **by selectively reading fragments** (which can be extracted from the text, with some autonomy) **and debate them** in more detail with a workbook support (that contains a lot of activities, exercises, questions based on the textbook at hand). For this purpose, the teacher must compile a list of literary works age appropriate, with the appropriate informational level and psychological development. **Students are advised on how to make summaries, quotes, or various transcripts of information.**

Moreover, only the act of reading itself is it not enough. The reading act has to be educated in such a way that students understand what is being read and why. They have to be taught what to do with extracted information from a specific content and how it can be applied or updated in real life. Therefore, **the students have to be challenged through different activities** or tasks that are gradually increased in difficulty for a better understanding of the textbook.

It is very important **to have a positive and an active attitude during reading** for attaining a correct understanding of what is being read and taking small steps in acquiring a set of self-training skills for reading. Kieran Egan believes that, what children lack most often is the reason why they should make the effort of reading, pointing out that "humanities are addressing intellectual ecstasy". "If I want pupils to learn to read, the most important step is to give them reasons to worry about and give them the chance to ask questions".¹³ Consequently, the author pleads for "ecstasy" as a reading argument: "None of the research I have conducted has mentioned about the idea of ecstasy, and it seems to me that this concept is a irreducible core to what actually literature is".¹⁴

In partnership with a teacher of preschool and primary education, who is welcoming both parents and children for **a discreet pleading of reading** (for example, by a remark such as "If X reads the work Y, surely would have done otherwise / had the solution to the problem / would have expressed more care, etc. "...)

For the same purpose, **we can use motivational quotations**, such as: "There is no other more beautiful and useful in all man's life restfulness than the reading of the books."¹⁵ (Miron Costin, chronicler, 1686)

Recommended literary works for second, third and fourth grades, offers the student the option to choose from a number of titles, with the possibility of choosing two or three

¹³ idem

¹⁴ idem

¹⁵ In Romanian: „Nu este alta mai frumoasă și mai de folos în toată viața omului zăbavă decât cetitul cărților.” - Miron Costin, *De neamul moldovenilor, din ce țară au ieșit strămoșii lor, Predoslovie* (1686)

books for every literary genre. Moreover, having a diverse list from where the student can choose for himself what he would like, it will also help the student in familiarizing himself with works of different types of literature.

Storytelling, summarizing model, expressive, nuanced reading by teachers and students of the subject, types of techniques that could be applied to incite the act of reading. Similarly, **the selective, and expressive reading** of some texts with relative autonomy, done by the teacher, **the interruption of reading at an interesting time** of the text action or providing the text with incomplete information, all of these techniques raise the students interest to continue reading independently.

Attendance at a library or a bookstore (or online platforms) is more than welcomed, followed sometimes with someone reading to a group of colleagues or friends. Strategic partnerships with different institutions such as libraries with book presentations, or participation in meetings with various writers, the organization of thematic exhibitions, presentation of manipulation techniques, maintenance and refurbishment of books are good ways that could be introduced to students. These aim to raise interest and curiosity in students about certain subjects, themes etc where the answers could be found only by researching through books.

Organization of regular literary contests (e.g.: *The most passionate reader / The professional reader / Literary work that I liked the most* etc.) **or a literary club, workshop, medallion literary** mobilizes students to read and to be rewarded with different incentives. These are meant to provide satisfaction and motivation to the student. Consequently, it is recommended **to highlight the reader of the week or of the month on the school's notice board**, also in front of his classmates, other schoolchildren, in order to stimulate his motivation and to demonstrate a positive behavior to the other students.

Some lessons of **introducing different books of some writers, meetings with writers, as well as promoting literary contests** for age appropriate, contribute to shape an attitude favorable to the act of reading.

We also suggest comparing a recommended book (e.g.: *Nobody's Boy/Alone in the world* by Hector Malot) with another book that students preferred or read recently. The comparison is based on many elements as possible for example: cover design, graphics, cover art, format, characters, the readiness to read it, any new words etc., could be another way to stimulate reading in pupils.

We consider the most stimulating way to mold the desire for independent reading, has to contain **successful exercises to persuade students to read something that they have been attracted** by at a given time during reading. **A student is invited to persuade others to read the literary work he/she has read.**

It is good to have at least two propelling pupils who have read something interesting from the recommended bibliography and are driving curiosity and could also offer more recommendations about the book in other classmates or future readers. We can recommend to students to encourage other students to read by telling them that reading done with vigor is really rewarding and satisfying feeling.

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Fig. 1

