



Reading begins in school...



BY NENI STA. ROMANA-CRUZ

to read voluntarily for pleasure and to find information.

WHAT CAN TEACHERS DO?

How can teachers create the atmosphere for reading, writing, listening and speaking to promote literacy? Here are concrete steps to take:

The Right Environment

- Provide the physical space for children to read in a relaxed manner—put a mat or throw pillows and create a Reading Nook, and keep books in the classroom
- Read and tell stories to children
- Provide opportunities for silent reading or reading with a partner

Literacy is too important and too big an issue to be left only to parents or only to teachers. There must be collaboration between home and school. Here's how teachers and parents can work together to promote literacy.

It's not an easy task for a child to become a reader. American novelist John Steinbeck describes this task as "the greatest single effort that the human mind undertakes, and he must do it as a child." How can we help students learn to read more effectively?

SCIENTIFICALLY SPEAKING

Don Holdaway, a language-education specialist from New Zealand, suggests that apart from just teaching, educators should make fun and engaging literacy activities available to students so they can learn better.

According to Holdaway, four processes help children learn to read:

- 1. Observation.** Children learn to read when they observe adults reading, or when adults read to them.
- 2. Collaboration.** If children collaborate and interact with an adult or another child, learning is more effective.
- 3. Practice.** This allows the child to

try out and experiment with what has been learned, without adult assistance. **4. Performance.** This gives the child the opportunity to share what has been learned and receive approval from adults and other children.

OLD VS. NEW THEORIES

Some teachers may wonder, is the way we traditionally teach reading no longer effective? We don't mean that. Specialists still believe that "it doesn't matter what the latest fad is. Let's think about what's best for children." It is still recognized, after all, that there must be a balance between skill development (phonics, mechanics) and function (comprehension, purpose, meaning).

In 1991, the National Reading Research Center declared that the objective of teaching reading is to develop "engaged readers"—those who possess all the skills needed to read independently and understand what was read. Engaged readers are motivated

What is literacy?

- Literacy is being able to read, understand, respond to what has been read, and to write down ideas based on this. The highest level of literacy is being able to summarize, analyze, and use what has been read.
- Most readers lead better lives than non-readers. Readers are more likely to have better-paying jobs, for example, which leads a better living environment, better schooling and nutrition for their children, etc.
- "Functional literacy" is survival literacy, the ability to read food labels, street signs, medicine instructions, and so on.
- Illiteracy is the inability to read well enough to function in society.
- Reading or literacy should be the birthright of every child.
- Reading and writing are twin skills that go hand in hand. Children learn to become better readers by writing. Writing leads to reading.

PHOTO BY ERICK LACSON SHOT ON LOCATION AT THE ALABANG ELEMENTARY SCHOOL READING/RECOVERY CENTER

- Encourage children to read when they have time in the classroom
- Create bulletin boards and posters related to books, reading and writing
- Be a reading model yourself—show that you enjoy books too

Activities

- Have the class do choral reading
- Have the children talk to the class about books they have read and reassure them that it's okay NOT to like all the books
- Write letters to book authors
- Have children read to one another or to younger children
- Connect stories read to curriculum topics in content areas
- Act out stories
- Make books (individual, group, or class books)
- Write advertisements promoting reading or recommending books
- Build DEAR (Drop Everything and Read) time into your regular class day; during this time, students and teachers must stop what they are doing and read a book for a scheduled amount of time, like 20 minutes
- Play word games

Discussions questions

- Was anything especially interesting to you in the story? Funny? Sad? Scary?
- If you could change part of the story, what would it be?
- Has anything that occurred in the story ever happened to you?
- Does the story remind you of another story, movie or TV show?
- Have you met people like the characters in the story?
- What was your favorite part?
- Was there a part you didn't like? ★

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...and at home

Parents can also do their part to promote literacy. Here's how they can make reading a wonderful experience for their children. Teachers, please share this information with the parents of your students. Feel free to make photocopies or reprint this, translating into Filipino when necessary.

Parents, help your children to read!

Is your home a place where children can read for fun and improve their skills? Reading is a basic skill that will help your children in school and later on, in life. Don't just rely on the school to teach your child to read. Make reading a fun, pleasurable experience at home, too. Here's how you can do it.

- Be a model. If your child sees that you read often (even magazines and newspapers), he is likely to follow.
- Read storybooks aloud to younger children for at least 20 minutes a day.
- Ask older children to read books aloud to you, and spend time really listening to them. Make some quiet time available, too, so they can read by themselves.
- Share reactions with each other about the book being read. Ask your children to say whether they liked a book or not.
- Talk to your children about what they're reading. Ask about favorite books, authors, characters, etc.
- If your children have questions about what they're reading, listen and answer. This tells them that you consider what they're doing important. Don't feel pressured to know all the

answers. If you don't know, just be honest. Then try to discover the answers together.

- Read recipes, magazines and even newspapers together. Always leave reading material lying around.
- Praise them during and after reading time. Tell them it makes you very happy to see them reading.

Writing is also an important part of learning language. Help your children communicate better by doing the following:

- Write letters to people. You can even write notes to family members.
- Give your children paper, pens, crayons and pencils so that they can write and draw for fun. Display their work around the house.
- Encourage younger children to copy letters and words from magazines, labels, wrappers, etc.
- Ask your children to label their personal possessions. They can even make a list of everything they own.
- Ask your children to help you make the grocery list. Your kids can help you look for the items on your list while grocery shopping.