

A Book Corner in the Classroom

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When I joined a private school as a teacher, I really enjoyed teaching the children in my class. I always felt that the lessons I taught were understood very well by all the children because they were all scoring good marks in the examination. This may be because I was teaching in a private school where all the children came from well-educated families. After working there for a few years, I went on to join a school that was getting grants from the government and children came from many different kinds of backgrounds.

Within a short time, I realised that the children here either did not understand what I was teaching or were not preparing well for the exam. I even started giving them tests during the examinations and revised the whole course, but there was no improvement in the results. Some years passed by and I was still not able to find the reasons for their under-performance.

In due course, I understood the cause of the problem: I realised that the children did not know how to read even when they entered grade 5. This meant that they did not understand or remember what was being taught. I asked children with weak reading skills to read one page every day and make them read it in front of me the next day. But they would slow down while reading a new page. They were not able to give the meaning of the sentence they read.

I continued with the same strategy but did not realise that making them read a page was not helping the children because they felt that they were being forced to read, whereas if it were something interesting and humorous, then they would read it on their own without being told. At this point, I came to know that, at home, they only had their textbooks and no other reading material. At the library where I went to get books for the children, I was told that since young children tear books, they could not be given any books! So, I took some old books from my home and gave them to the children and found that the children enjoyed reading them as they had never read such books before. Those who did not know how to read also

started flipping and turning over the pages. That was when I got the idea of creating a library, or book corner, in the classroom.

The books that I took from the school library were old and were to be sold as waste and did not need to be returned. Magazines such as *Nandan*, *Champak* and *Bal hans* had short stories and they were the first few books of my class library. I kept these books in the classroom cupboard and gave the children the freedom to pick any book to read, the only condition being that they had to finish their classwork first and only read in their free time. Initially there were some hitches, but gradually the children started reading them in the classroom in an organised manner. The number of books kept in the library started decreasing, which meant that the children were taking them home to read.

Now I realised I needed to observe which child was reading, whose interest was increasing and what the children with weak reading skills were doing. Books had been kept in the classroom for two to three months now, yet the children with weak reading skills were only looking at the pictures. When these children began to recognise and read words, I was encouraged to see that things were moving in the desired direction and I was right in thinking that if children get something interesting and new to read then they can overcome exam anxiety and enjoy reading.

The children were given a lot of freedom to read in the classroom throughout the year and they began to read better with the help of their classmates. When their reading speed improved a little, a Cloze test was conducted for the entire class to check their understanding. They were also given a maths paper with statement sums. Both the tests were planned to find out whether they were able to read with understanding and whether children could answer the questions based on that understanding. The results of these two tests were very positive, so it was clear that the children who had been unable to read with the help of their textbooks for four or five years had been successful in learning to read by their own efforts by reading books of their

choice. It was also clear that what they read they understood.

Because of the success of this experiment, a Book Corner has been created in all the classes of the school. Class teachers select the books according to the level of class and students' interests and get them issued from the library and keep them in their class, so that the children can use them when they get free time. These books are changed from time to time so that the children get a chance to read different types of books and get the opportunity to learn more. Children, gradually, started using the library for various programmes and competitions. This increased their interest in books and its impact began to show on their exam results.

After a few years I went to a government school to teach. where again children from grades 5 to 8 had very poor reading skills. There also I continued to help children to read books by talking to the librarian, dealing with problems and making books available to the children according to their level.

The idea of the reading corner is to help children to learn about the world and expand their knowledge outside textbooks and classrooms. Reading other books makes them realise that they can use this skill whenever they want to understand the world around them.

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