**Reading Across the Curriculum**

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*Introduction*

“Every teacher is a reading teacher.” This is a well known statement that is controversial between some teachers. Some feel that teaching reading should only be taught in elementary school or language arts class. Others think that all teachers, no matter their subject or grade level, should teach reading. Which side is correct?

*Elementary School*

It all begins on the first day of school. Students walk up to the big doors of the elementary school with their backpacks and lunch boxes. Once they enter the classroom, learning starts to take place. Some students may have already learned their letters at home but for others it may be the first time anyone has tried to teach them the alphabet. Students’ first introduction to literacy in the classroom will probably be when the teacher reads a story. Then it will progress to learning the alphabet, reading sight words, sentences and then books on their own. In every classroom there is a range of reading levels and as well as excitement for reading. However, studies have shown that elementary students need to read an average of 90 minutes a day at school (Sanacore).

Learning to read in elementary school is foundational for a person’s success later in school, but ultimately in life. If a person misses the building blocks of reading in lower elementary, the older they get, the harder it will be to catch up. Teachers need to be educated and readers themselves so that they will have the qualifications to teach others, so students don’t get behind. California’s Department of Education has started hiring teachers that are “skilled in developing literacy instruction in content areas and provide strong instructional leadership” (Reading). It takes a qualified person to teach literacy and the United States is beginning to realize that they need to seriously consider new programs to encourage literacy than what has been done traditionally.

Some methods that teachers use to get young students excited about the reading material are called *Oral Reading Strategies.* The website of the Department of Education in California has highlighted some common ones. The first method is called Readers’ Theater. This is when students act out the material they are reading. It is helpful because it requires actors to use inflection and emotion when reading a passage. The second method is Think-Pair-Share when students are paired with a partner, either on the same or different reading level. They read a passage independently and then discuss it together. The third method is Popcorn Reading when students take turns reading out loud from the same book. This makes students follow along with the text closely because they don’t know when the teacher will *pop* their name. Guided reading is also a method that teachers use when working with children in small groups (Reading). All of these strategies, if effectively used in the classroom, will encourage students to view reading as a fun activity instead of a boring chore.

*Middle School*

When a person enters middle school he/she will be expected to read much more than what was required in elementary school. Students travel from classroom to classroom and have different teachers and subjects. Students that are not prepared for the demanding reading workload will need extra help from teachers so that they won’t get discouraged and give up. Teachers need to be consistently encouraging and motivating students to read.

In the past, the responsibility of enhancing reading in middle school was placed upon the language arts teacher. This is not the case anymore because now teachers in all subjects are required to incorporate reading in their lessons. Textbooks are the most obvious way for content teachers to expect students to read. However, it is not surprising that most students don’t read their textbooks. A study was taken on a college campus over the percentage of students that read their assigned readings. The results were drastically low, even on the college level. On average, students read 27.46% of the assigned readings from their textbook (Bauer). If this is the case among college students, how much more do middle school students eliminate textbook readings. Evidently, textbooks are not the solution for increasing reading proficiency in the United States.

If textbooks are not the solution to encourage middle school students to read, then what is? This is when the teacher needs to use creative measures to facilitate reading in the classroom. It’s natural for people to do what they *want* to do so if students find a book they are interested in, they are more likely to read it. The first step for the teacher is finding out what the student likes and dislikes. The next step is providing opportunities to read in an informal setting. An urban school in New York recognized the importance of allotting time during the school day to read and came up with a solution. In the English, social studies, science and math classes one day per week is set aside for independent reading. The few minutes left at the end of the period is spent discussing what they read with each other (Sanacore). Independent reading should not be overlooked and is crucial in reading efficiency. The Clearing House Journal of Educational Strategies states, “Independent reading is an empowering part of the advancement of young adolescents’ literacy growth” (Sanacore). If the administration at every school saw the importance of independent reading the country would see an increase in literacy development.

*High School*

If a student has difficulty reading in middle school, by the time high school comes he/she may have already given up or is about to. The National Research Council said, “The educational careers of 25%-40% of American children are imperiled because they don’t read well enough, quickly enough, or easily enough to ensure comprehension in their content courses in middle and secondary school” (Myers). Teenagers entering high school are expected to be able to read fluently with comprehension skills. Most classroom assessment is in the form of tests or papers and reading is an essential skill that students must possess to complete these assignments. Elementary school was about learning to read and building the foundations for life. In high school, however, reading is used to learn the content of a class (Teaching).

It is estimated that 67%-90% of the content in a high school classroom is based on the class textbook (Myers). It is common for students to refer back to their textbooks before a test to review information that they missed in class. Here is the problem for the struggling reader. Textbooks are not easy reads and contain complex vocabulary and ideas. If a student does poorly on a test, it could possibly be traced back to his/her reading ability. “Because of these demands on reading skills, secondary students with poor literacy skills are at risk in many of their subject-area courses” (Teaching). It is often forgotten, but there is a direct correlation between a student’s reading ability and how he/she does in the content classes.

*Conclusion*

Learning the basics of reading begins in elementary school and continues as a lifelong process. People can never read enough or know every vocabulary word. It is the responsibility of the teacher to equip young students with the foundational elements to achieve reading success, in their present and future circumstances. Teachers should encourage and motivate students so that they may become independent readers outside the classroom and influential in today’s society.

**Works Cited**

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