

TEACHERS' ROLE IN FOSTERING READING SKILL: EFFECTIVE AND SUCCESSFUL READING

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ABSTRACT

Reading bestows enjoyment and enlightenment. It unlocks the unknown. It is a complex cognitive activity that is indispensable for the kind of knowledge society. So the students of today's world must know how to learn from reading and to enter the present literate society. One who reads can lead others to light. People who read can be free because reading banishes ignorance and superstition. Reading has the power to revolutionize everyone's ways of thinking and living. It makes everyone think critically and creatively.

Teachers must emphasize all kinds of reading, especially critical reading which is not just reading on the lines but it deals with reading between and beyond the lines. A critical reader challenges the author's assumptions, inferences, and conclusions, and judges the accuracy, reliability, quality and value of what he reads on the basis of sound criteria or standards developed through previous experiences. This kind of reading paves clear path for students to acquire better comprehensive ability through SQ3R techniques, computer multimedia and other activities such as skimming and scanning. Although there are ways and means to acquire reading skill, there are a few factors which affect it severely. Teachers must be careful in avoiding these hindrances and make their wards' reading easy, effective and successful. Teachers are the prime source for students in cultivating their reading habit. Their advice and encouragement will help the students move a step further in developing their attitude towards reading.

Teachers can teach phonetics to readers of initial stage and help them pronounce the sounds of letters and words properly. They should also emphasize writing task in the primary grade as it is directly associated with reading programme. They can teach them syllabication to recognize new words. Special assistance may be given to students with regard to the selection of materials for reading based on their age, time and capacity and determine their reading levels. They must realize that they have to play major role in encouraging and engaging the students to become voracious readers.

Keywords: Critical Reading, Skimming and Scanning, SQ3R Techniques, Multimedia.

INTRODUCTION

A gorgeous precept from Francis Bacon's (1993: 129) one of the essays, 'Of studies' affirms that reading makes a full man, conference a ready man and writing an exact man. Reading is a complex cognitive activity which is indispensable for the kind of knowledge society that one envisions in the globalized context. So the students of today's world must know how to learn from reading and to enter the present literate society. One who reads can lead others to light. Thomas Jefferson, a famous educationist, states that people who read can be free because reading banishes ignorance and superstition. Of course, the printed

words have the power to revolutionize our ways of thinking and living.

To have a full-fledged involvement in the reading process, the mind of the reader should be free from all sorts of internal and external distractions. Real reading takes place when the reader is able to perceive the words of the reading material, comprehend their denotative and connotative meanings, react to them and assimilate them. Perception and comprehension are the two ways in a reading process; the former one is a mechanical and the latter involves cognition.

How and when Actual Reading Occurs?

When the light rays from the printed page hit the retinal cells of the eyes, signals are sent along the optic nerve to the visual centre of the brain. The brain functions in the process, the signals are interpreted, and the reader gives significance to what he reads. He brings meaning to the graphic symbol and brings to the text his past experience and present personality. Under the magnetism of the ordered symbols of the text, he marshals his resources and crystallizes out from the stuff of memory, thought, and feeling a new order, a new experience. If the words remain mere words and sit quietly on the page; if they remain nouns, and verbs and adjectives, then the readers are truly blind. But if the words seem to disappear and their innermost self begins to laugh and cry, to sing and dance, and finally to fly- if they are transported in all that they are, to a brand new world, -only then can they say- they can read (Weaver, 1980: 10).

The ultimate goal of reading is not the process of reading itself, but the unraveling of the meaning represented by the words, phrases, and sentences. Sometimes, "reading between the lines" is demanded. In the latter case, the association between the letter and the sound does not often play a crucial role. Crystal (1987: 210) says that the sound is never far from reading, and hence both in oral and silent reading, readers do often move their lips and perhaps the tongue and other sub-vocal mechanisms. What they see is to be converted into some sound values.

Reading even in the initial phase is considered to be of paramount importance because it is the stage where students move from simple to complex i.e. word to phrase, and sentence to paragraph and learn all linguistic items. It is the responsibility of every teacher to look into this matter very seriously and prevent the beginners from ever losing their love for reading. If they meet any strange or unfamiliar word, it can be clarified contextually. If not, in the later standards, they may find it very difficult to comprehend what they read, and as a result, they may develop an aversion towards reading. But once they developed a positive attitude they can flourish their language and become excellent readers. Hence, the teachers must to be cognizant and vigilant at this level in leading the

students to the right path. They can introduce the students to know about the different kinds of reading at the later stage to improve their reading.

Kinds of Reading

Reading is classified into three kinds: extensive reading, intensive reading, and oral reading. *Extensive reading* is the best way for students to learn reading a great deal of comprehensible material. *Intensive reading* is used to refer to the actual learning of reading skills in an instructional setting. Students are exposed to a variety of materials and asked to perform activities such as answering comprehension questions on the passage given. They may be trained to look for critical information in the passage they read, and make inferences, etc. Intensive reading is instruction-based one. Oral reading does attract much attention, but it is an integral part of learning reading.

Extensive Reading

The aim of extensive reading is not linguistic. The primary objective of reading is to obtain information from the given reading material. When extensive reading takes place the reader is concerned with getting the overall meaning or idea of the passage. It is known as 'reading for information'. Teachers may help the students to develop the skill of locating, evaluating, and organizing, retaining what is read. These academic skills can be cultivated by students only when teachers are enriched with the proper academic setting and equipped with a planned curriculum. To foster extensive reading, students can be given materials that are interesting to them. It is good to give them new materials to read aloud (Bowen *et al*, 1985: 240). Materials like Journals, magazines and daily newspapers are coming under this type of reading. Teachers may launch a reading club at schools and can give an opportunity to every student to perform different reading activities. Success of reading depends a lot on the initiative the learner takes and the positive attitude he or she has towards reading. The learner should find for himself or herself how studious reading habits help them perform better in English at all the levels - speaking, listening, and writing.

Oral Reading

Oral reading is very important because it ensures that the

student associates the spoken word with the printed symbols appropriately. It provides practice in developing students' speech habits. They are supposed to read with correct intonation and pronunciation. Oral reading is the foundation for silent reading in the later stage and this will lead to fluent reading which has long been considered a hallmark of well-developed reading skill. Fluency is also closely related to reading comprehension. Fuchs *et al* (2001) say that the efficient procession of lower level reading skills (i.e. word recognition) characterized by fluent reading frees up cognitive resources for higher level reading skills i.e. comprehension. Coyne & Simmons (2001) remark that reading fluency reflects the complex orchestration of both lower and higher level processes. Researchers can consider it a reliable indicator of overall reading proficiency. If a reader has to spend too much time and energy figuring out what the words are, he or she will be unable to concentrate on what the words mean.

Intensive Reading

A meticulous and comprehensive study of any subject is known as intensive reading. While reading intensively, the reader may come across unfamiliar lexical items, different idiomatic expressions, ideas hidden in the passage and so on. This is otherwise called 'reading for comprehension' or 'critical reading'.

Critical Reading

The term 'critical' implies an attempt at objective judging so as to determine both merits and demerits. 'Critical' means to be discriminative or evaluative when it is applied to reading. There are generally three kinds of critical reading viz., (i) reading on the lines (ii) reading between the lines and (iii) reading beyond the lines. Successful reading includes critical thinking and studying. Alfassi (2004) asserts that students are required to understand the meaning of text, critically evaluate the message, remember the content, and apply the new found knowledge flexibly. Critical reading is not just reading on the lines but it deals with reading between and beyond the lines. Ahuja & Ahuja (1995: 103) state that it demands an interpretive, alert and inventive mind. Critical reading skills are necessary if the students are to make intelligent decisions based upon the material they read. Critical reading involves critical thinking.

Reading and thinking are not always synonymous. Thinking is involved in arriving at generalizations, drawing conclusions, and making inferences and applications. Critical reading is similar to a successful detective work.

Teachers must train the students in critical reading which is not only concerned with what the author writes but is with what the author means. Teachers should kindle their intellectual curiosity, their desire for veracity, validity, their questioning attitude characterized by problem-solving, analytical and judgmental ability while giving them training. They should elucidate with examples how a critical reader challenges the author's assumptions, inferences, and conclusions, and judges the accuracy, reliability, quality and value of what he reads on the basis of sound criteria or standards developed through previous experiences. Teachers must help their wards know how to examine the author's implications, tone, diction and style employed in the reading material.

Active Reading

Reading of any sort is an activity. A complete passive reading is impossible; no one can read with his/her eyes immobilized and their minds asleep. Active reading will yield better performance. One's success in reading is determined by the extent to which he/she receives everything the writer intended to communicate (Adler & Doren, 1972: 7). While reading, pupils do not simply decode words or encode some meaning inherent in a text. Rather they intend to reconstruct the writer's meaning. Similarly, while writing, pupils do not simply compose with words. They construct textual meaning from experience and knowledge of language, content and text features, so that potential readers will grasp the message at once (Stewart-Dore, 1988: 9).

Routine reading leads to the cultivation of general vocabulary. This includes mastery of meaning, pronunciation, and spelling. Surely training in intelligible enunciation and legible penmanship; understanding of oral directions, explanations and discussion; and comprehension of suitable expository reading matter are also essential to all students. These skills are used - well or poorly- in every class. Good practice inevitably results in improvement, bad practice in deterioration. No teacher

can wash his/her hands of these skills (Halman, 2004: 5).

Speed-Reading

Speed-reading is not just about reading the words fast, but it is being able to read at a speed appropriate for the material the students read. If they read too slowly, their mind will wander; they are likely to become bored and forget everything. If they read too fast, they will reduce the chances of remembering what they want and will probably become frustrated and stressed and even less likely to remember. The more flexible they are with their reading, the faster they will be able to read and the more information they will retain.

When students read, they must be able to convert the information embedded in groups of words into ideas, images, thoughts, feelings and actions. Although the purpose of reading is to get the message that the passage carries, it does not necessarily mean that students have to grasp the meaning of every word. When they read fast - especially when they start to get used to reading more than one line at a time- they might at first get confused because the words may be presented to them in a different order to the one that was intended. When they read with their eyes, they will find, however, that this does present a problem because their brain works out what the sentence means regardless of what order the words are in.

Reading comprehension

Pearson and Johnson, great educationists vie that comprehension is building bridges between the new and the known. Comprehension is not simply a matter of recording and reporting verbatim what has been read. It involves a great deal of inference making. Reading comprehension is a process that involves the orchestration of the reader's prior experience and knowledge about the world and about language. It involves such interrelated strategies as predicting, questioning, summarizing, determining meanings of vocabulary in context, monitoring one's own comprehension, and reflecting. They are holistic processes for constructing meaning.

In the classroom atmosphere, students are usually given a piece of paragraph followed by a few questions. The questions generally start with 'what' 'where', 'who' and 'when'. The students can search for right answers to the above

question very easily but it's somewhat difficult to answer intellectual questions starting with 'how' and 'why'. Where there is no room for thinking intellectually, laziness will dwell in their mind and their attitude towards reading will be unevaluative, unanalytical and unquestionable. It's not the matter of taking in the words on the page but comprehending what they read. Unless there is a proper guideline to students from the teacher's part, skill of comprehension cannot be developed. Development of the comprehension process relies heavily on what Taba (1965) identifies as 'cognitive commerce'- the active cognitive transaction that occurs when the child interacts with his environment.

Techniques for Better Comprehension

Teachers may give enough training to students in speeding up their reading. They can introduce the SQ3R technique which stands for *Survey, Question, Read, Recall* and *Review*: This will lead the students earn better comprehension.

Survey: This is a rapid preview of the material. Here, students are looking for the main points of its content and its approach. This will form a basis for the next part of their reading. Survey means gathering the information they need to focus on the work and set goals.

Question: Students should develop a questioning attitude to the writing. Active reading will help them digest the materials. Here's what they should do for 'active reading'.

Read: Students can now start reading the materials carefully and in depth. This may be a slow, once-only reading of the book, perhaps taking notes. It could be a rapid skim-reading followed by a slower re-reading. They should engage themselves actively with their material.

Recall: It is nothing but making a summary of the material. This will help the students remember what has been highlighted. They might highlight important passages or make marginal notes.

Review: When the students have finished reading, they should go back over the material for a quick re-reading which may help them fill in any gaps or make corrections. If done immediately, it will help fix the subject in their memory. This should be an important part of their revision.

Skimming and Scanning

The difference between skimming and scanning is that when a person scans for information he stops once he obtains it. Scanning is used when he is looking for specific information; an answer to a particular question. Skimming is used when a person looks for and wants a general impression of what the text contains.

Skimming is not a mere hit- or-miss procedure; it is a well-defined exercise in reading. Skimming is the master key to rapid and efficient reading. When readers' eyes alight upon any piece of reading matter, they should be consciously looking for certain specific things. This means that the readers must get away from it that they may see it whole. Getting away from the page refers basically to a psychological detachment rather than a physical act. As the first act, readers should hold for a moment at arm's length whatever they intend to read. They should take into account the highlights of the page i.e. the typographical features such as title, by-line, subdivisions, section, headings, paragraphing, italics, bold face and so on are placed to expedite their reading (Leedy, 1956: 181).

Factors Affecting Reading

There are many factors affecting reading. Teachers must be careful in avoiding these hindrances and make their wards' reading easy and effective.

Head movement: The recurrent muscular activity hastens fatigue at the time of head movements while the process of reading is going on. This may lead to ache in the neck. So the students' posture of reading should be scientific.

Finger pointing: Instructing the students to point out each word with their fingers will not only mar the rate of speed reading, but also tarnish the habit of good reading. So teachers should better instruct the students to avoid this method of reading a passage.

Flexibility in speed: Student should be trained up in such a way that they can accelerate the rate of speed while reading extensively or skimming and reduce speed while scanning a reading material in a detailed manner. A good reading will not reflect monotonous plodding.

Regression: Teachers are not supposed to persist the students to develop the habit of analyzing each and every

word and its origin, structure, either synonym or antonym, or prefixes or suffixes or various forms of vocabulary. Of course students are hardly in need of them to have an excellent language building. But at the same time, it will take the readers away from the main stream of what they have been reading and create diversion and regression.

Poor vocabulary: The students may get blocked at a place where they meet an unfamiliar vocabulary. Students may refer it to the dictionary at once. But this will hinder their reading and the chain of thought will be blocked or missed. This practice can be avoided at the time of reading but at the same time the exact meaning of unfamiliar words can be seen in the dictionary after the reading is completed.

Acquisition of rich vocabulary helps readers to have great comprehensive ability. It means that the reader must be familiar with the words and their meaning. Teachers may advise the students to develop the habit of learning at least five new words a day and it will yield a gradual outcome in accumulating their vocabulary and pave a way for a perfect development in reading. Accumulation of vocabulary is not an immediate action, but a gradual activity. It happens throughout one's life.

Word by word reading: Reading word by word will damage the very essence of the sentence and obscure its meaning. While reading, the students should be taught to bring a whole phrase or a sensible group of words within their eye span to have a good sense of meaning. Otherwise it will be difficult for them to make out what they read.

Loud reading: It's good for the beginners, not to the adults. They should be advised to read silently. When students read aloud, they are very soon exhausted out of energy and cannot finish the lengthy material within a short span of time. It will also hinder two things namely comprehension and efficiency. So the teachers should not encourage loud reading.

Visual efficiency: Clear vision is a distinctive factor for successful reading. Poor vision leads the readers to regressive eye movement frequently and this will be a handicap in reading. The relation of eye movements to reading efficiency has been extensively studied. Photographic records of eye movements show that the

eyes move smoothly across the line of print but in a series of stops and starts (Ahuja & Ahuja, 1995: 40). Teachers are expected to check up the eye sight of the poor or slow readers and if they suspect any defect in their vision, they must be advised to get treatment at once.

Auditory: One can be an efficient reader if he has good auditory acuity and auditory perception. If the pupils have good ability to hear sounds accurately they can read fruitfully. Testing of auditory for students is essential. If not, they will feel the numbness words while the process of reading is going on. So teachers should shoulder the responsibility to identify such students and recommend for good treatment at the initial stage.

Speech Defects: Speech defect is a prominent type of motor coordination often associated with reading inefficiency. There appears to be a reciprocal relation between facility in speech and reading. Imperfect articulation may directly affect reading by presenting confusion in the sounds of words to be associated with written and printed words. So teachers must check whether their wards articulate the letters properly and pronounce the words correctly and if they find any complication with regard to this particular matter, it is better to provide them sufficient speech practice.

Environmental Factors

Lighting: The eyes of the reader require adequate light. Only sufficient quantitative and qualitative illumination on the reading material can help the reader perceive the printed letters clearly. Quantity of light means the correct amount of illumination for ease of seeing and quality of light means distribution of light and brightness over the task and its environment. Broom (1942: 31) is of the view that adequate light and proper lighting contribute materially to efficient performance in the physical aspects of reading. If the quantity of light is inadequate for reading, the eye must strain to see the poorly reflected image; what is seen is hazy and indistinct. If too much of light is available on the reading surface, glare may result, and fatigue is almost certain to inhibit reading performance without too much lapse of time. Teachers are expected to provide facility in getting sufficient light for their students either in the library or in the classroom.

External Readability of the matter

There are many aspects which cover the external readability of the matter. A printed page which is not readable can obscure vision and produce visual discomfort and fatigue. Many factors include the size and type of the font, the length of the printed line, the quality of the paper and the ink used in the printing of the page, the kind and size of illustrations, the use of colour and the presence or absence of decorations on the page margins. So teachers should take these factors into account and verify the readability of the materials before they issue them to the students.

Internal readability

Internal readability of the reading materials in the form of comprehension levels also affects the reading efficiency of an individual. Reis *et al* (2008) say that to achieve growth in student reading skills and ensure later school success, teachers must provide all students with appropriately challenging instructional materials. The reading material may be of independent, instructional or frustration levels.

Ahuja and Ahuja (1995: 44) state that researches have shown that in order for the reading materials to be suitable for use in a supervised instruction the student should be able to answer at least 75 per cent of the questions asked him about the materials and that in order for the materials to be suitable for use in the students' independent study, he should be able to answer 90 per cent of the questions. When the reader shows 50 per cent or even less comprehension, the reading material is considered to be of frustration level.

Johnson and Kress (1971: 4) are of the opinion that these three levels have special significance for the teacher. It is necessary to know the level of material the child can handle adequately when working on his own. Unless materials at the proper level are provided, the students can hardly be expected to do an adequate job in independent work and thereby establish for themselves high standards of performance. An avid reader derives pleasure and satisfaction if the reading materials are with maximum level of comprehension.

Interest: Interest serves as internal motivation. Interest captures the student and makes his reading a habitual

activity. The interest of the reader is influenced by informative, aesthetic and recreational reading materials. Cummins and Fagins (1954: 49-58) suggest that interest is an emotional involvement of likes or dislikes which is associated with attention to some object. Interests arise through the interaction of one's basic needs and the means he/she uses to satisfy them.

Purposeful reading

Teachers should make the students cultivate a purposeful reading whenever the reading activity is started. They should know for what they are going to read and why they read. This may lead to individualized reading later. Ediger (2007) says that purpose in reading should be emphasized throughout each lesson or unit of study. He lists out several forms of individualized reading. One of these is that students are encouraged to take library book home to read. During sharing time in school, they individually may tell of a few interesting things read from home reading. The second one is that the students to read a self-chosen book during sustained silent reading which helps them enjoy reading and refine skills and the third one has an extended evaluation session to ascertain students' comprehension, skill in word recognition and fluency in reading progress. Carrillo (1965) remarks until teachers learn to give specific purposes, and until materials carefully stating purposes are available, the problem of reading for purpose is likely to be the major problem in the development of flexible reading.

Encouraging to Engage Pupils to Become Readers

In order to comprehend and ultimately enjoy reading a text, a reader be engaged in it. It is a difficult task to make the students engage with texts. Malin (2010) says "to encourage all students to become readers, they need to assume the creative attitudes and literate behaviour of engaged readers. To be able to reflect on a reading event, engaged readers need to first decode, then comprehend, and finally transact with the text to construct meaning. However, nonengaged readers are often unable to reflect on their reading as a result of lack of interest, poor reading skills, limited comprehension strategies, or lack of personal experiences to use to construct meaning."

Malin (2010) assures that the educational and aesthetic value of a particular digital video reading aid can help the

students engage in reading literature and he suggests that this reading solution can not only engage students in the text but also help them comprehend, critically analyze and enjoy the reading experience as a whole.

When students do not see anything when they read, they cannot think about or experience the text. Jacob (1976) found that the major difference between good and poor readers was their ability to use imagery during a reading. Eisner (1976) says that the image-visual, tactile, auditory-plays a crucial role in the construction of meaning through text. Those who cannot imagine cannot read. It is possible that non-engaged readers can be encouraged to enter into story world and, in turn become engaged readers. As Enciso (1990) posited, mental imagery or visualization of a story has many powerful positive effects for readers and is vital for comprehension, engagement, and response."

Reading Skill through Multimedia

Multimedia enables the students learn reading autonomously. They can be given enough training through some activities. Driscoll (2008:4-5) emphasizes skimming and scanning of many things can be done through websites. Now-a-days computers play a major role in assisting reading. There are diverse programmes of reading instruction that sound favourable involving computers. Use of computer and other means of technology are ways of guiding students in learning reading. Marlow Edger thinks that there are numerous means of utilizing personal computers in teaching students in the area of reading (Sharma & Sharma 2006: 153). Abundant software packages help the students to improve their reading skill. Some software packages give drill and practice if the students face difficulties in learning reading. At the most basic level, reading is sometimes thought to consist of translating symbols on a page, or nowadays on a computer screen, into sounds, in what is sometimes referred to as 'barking print'. Some people would argue that it isn't reading at all. But it is clear that there is more reading than merely being able to perform the neat trick of vocalizing the sounds that are represented by the symbols (Fairbrain & Fairbrain, 2002: 18).

A host of multimedia options help students develop critical reading skill in both decoding and comprehension

(Cooper, 2008:192). Students may select to read a library book whereby the recorded voice is contained in a cassette directly related to the printed words. As the cassette or CD ROMS plays the sequential words, they may follow along in their own chosen book (Ediger & Rao, 2004: 22). In this kind of activity students gain an increasing number of sight of words for reading as well as increasing skill in reading. This way of reading facilitates the students identify new words and comprehend the content read. The recorded voice helps the pupils to grasp ideas which would not be possible without recording. This will also eliminate individualized reading difficulties. Teachers can give phonemic drills to the students with rich AV aids, PowerPoint slides and Snapshots.

Newspaper in Teaching Reading

The variety of subjects and topics makes newspapers interesting and motivating for the students to work with. Newspapers report real-life events, and this arouses students' curiosity. Newspaper-based activities in the classroom may engage students in enjoyable activities and encourage them reading further. As newspaper is an invaluable source of authentic material, it creates interest among them and that leads to motivate them. Motivation leads to more reading. The more students read, the more they explore. "People learn through reading, and reading about interesting new things in one's interesting subject, undoubtedly helps motivation" (Sanderson, 2002: 117).

Newspapers are also a great source for teacher-educators. They can be used as teaching materials to develop students' language skills. They can be used effectively with a wide range of levels from elementary to advanced, either interpreting them or using them as they are. Some newspapers are easy to read, easy to use. The committed teachers can design exercises to develop reading comprehension, critical thinking skills, writing skills, grammar skills, vocabulary, map/chart reading skills, geography skills, social study skills and more. Having a lot of newspapers and information the teachers should be careful with the way how to organize a certain activity using them. So, they are particularly suitable for mixed-ability classes, depending on the activity, questions, etc. In planning a lesson using a newspaper, the teacher should

take into consideration the length of the article, paragraph, the complexity of the language, the density of information, the subject-matter and content, the time available and the level of the students. The students should cultivate reading habit so as to be enriched with the knowledge of diction, pronunciation, phrase, different structures and vocabulary. This is the era of rapid technological changes in mass communications. Through internet, students can access thousands of newspapers and magazines worldwide. Internet has increasingly become a major source of newspapers and magazines for language teachers. But they should be very careful in choosing suitable newspaper materials to use with their students (Tafani, 2009).

Conclusion

Reading as a skill permeates all the areas of curriculum. It is an inherent part of language learning as well. Teachers are the prime source for students to cultivate the reading habit. They can execute this task only when they have the competence to play their role effectively. Their advice and encouragement will go a long way in the achievement of the goal. Teachers need to train young learners in pronunciation, enrichment of vocabulary, acquisition of fluency and accuracy. Special assistance may be given to students with regard to the selection of materials for reading based on their age, time and capacity and determine their reading levels. Teachers should insist on the importance of reading the hour in school or college library at least thrice in a week.

Reading bestows enjoyment and enlightenment. An inward desire to know more is born when reading becomes an enjoyable one. It makes everyone think critically and creatively. As reading unlocks the world of the unknown its importance should be insisted on by every teacher.

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