

PLEASURE READING CURES READICIDE AND FACILITATES ACADEMIC READING

By

J. MARY JENNIFER *

R. JOSEPH PONNIAH **

* Research Scholar, Department of Humanities, National Institute of Technology, Trichy.

** Associate Professor, Department of Humanities, National Institute of Technology, Trichy.

ABSTRACT

Pleasure reading is an absolute choice to eradicate readicide, a systematic killing of the love for reading. This paper encompasses the different forms and consequences of readicide which will have negative impact not only on comprehension but also on the prior knowledge of a reader. Reading to score well on tests impedes the desire for reading but in fact it causes the fear of failure, and anxiety towards reading. In order to eradicate readicide, pleasure reading is suggested as a powerful tool because it has the potential to instill love for books by providing pleasant input. Interestingly, pleasure reading promotes both practical and linguistic knowledge and, in fact, it helps readers score high on tests and upholds a lifelong reading habit that will enable them to become literate and well-informed adults.

Keywords: Aliteracy, Cognition, Pleasure Reading, Deep Reading, Graded Orientation, Learning Orientation

INTRODUCTION

Reading helps an individual to be a well-informed and a dynamic citizen. It is a powerful means to seek information. The regular reading habit influences readers in academic performance, professional success, personal development and social engagement (Howard, 2011). The reading literacy performance encourages them to take part in cultural activities such as to attend plays, arts, museums and operas and visiting public libraries (Krashen, 2005). Today, due to the large impact of media, many researchers have found there is a decline in the habit of reading (Krashen, 2005; Clark and Rumbold, 2006) and this causes 'aliteracy' which means people possess the ability to read and not the desire (Mikulecky, 1979). This aliteracy will lead to "the systematic killing of love of reading, often exacerbated by the inane, mind numbing practices found in schools" (Gallagher, 2009). This paper discusses the reason for the decline of reading habit and in order to promote reading, pleasure reading can be used as a tool to instill a desire for reading.

1. Reasons for Readicide

Learning experiences at schools affect negatively the reading habit of children because most of the designed curricula tend to develop memorizing skill rather than the skills required for comprehension which is a basic ingredient

for acquiring reading skill and, moreover, it is challenging for teachers to concentrate on the development of comprehension of each child because cognition of mind differs from individual to individual. When a passage is given in a class for reading, an active reader catches up the content at once as his/ her cognition is exercised by the regular reading habit. But, it takes a little more time for a passive reader to comprehend the same text as he/she has not experienced more reading. The difficulty in understanding a reading text will raise the anxiety level of readers (Krashen, 1982) and it will discourage them from reading but active readers will continue to read as reading becomes pleasurable experience to them (Ponniah & Priya, 2014).

In the present world of technology, even active readers are distracted by television and films as stories of the kind of books they read are screened. The screen techniques and audio-visual experiences attract readers as audience and, as a result, even active readers express reluctance to read (Hincks & Balding, 1988). The change in a recreational environment is one of the predominant reasons for causing readicide. In earlier days, people had less access to technology and media and so literates spend most of the leisure time reading for fun. But, in recent days, people depend on technology and media for entertainment and

sometimes they read by free voluntary surfing for information. Moreover, the immediacy in digital reading and instantaneous presentation of expansive information (Wolf, 2008) inhibit readers from doing deep reading. As a result, while reading for pleasure, they are unable to have aesthetic experiences and even, at times failed to scan the crux of the matter as they desire to gather.

Tests instill fear of failure (Pulfrey et.al 2011) and time constraint compels learners for shallow reading and hence they become superficial thinkers by skipping hard parts and choosing familiar topic or a shorter book to get higher grades on tests. It does not mean that they are unmotivated to learning but instead, they are placed in "graded orientation" rather than "learning orientation" that sets a goal for getting better grades (Kohn, 2011). This "graded orientation" has negative effects on deep learning and in which learners are trained as test-takers and this prevents them from deep thinking and hence they become victims for standardized tests (Gallagher, 2009). In addition, these tests measure the temporary acquisition of knowledge and skills more than genuine understanding (Kohn, 2011). In particular, motivation, the real essence of learning, creates adverse effects in learners for getting better grades. Thus, testing strategy affects reading and deep reading negatively and hence causes readicide.

2. Pleasure Reading as a Cure for Readicide

Reading needs thousands of exposures (Wolf, 2009). Maximizing exposures is possible only with comprehensible texts which provide readers with language competence and content. In addition, curiosity of the content presented in texts evokes the mind of a reader, persists with a flow that sustains interest and extends the time devoted for reading. Similarly, reading will be interesting if the text provides comprehensible input with pleasure component. In fact, readers find more pleasure in recreational books than in academic texts. Exposure to high interest texts enables learners as readers to continue reading for pleasure which will help them analyze critically the themes and characters and hence affects cognition. Further, they become autonomous learners as they do self-selected reading. Moreover, neurons in our brains have 'plasticity', its 'protean capacity' accepts change and reorganizes itself for new

skills (Wolf, 2008). This indicates pleasure reading reorganizes the brain to experience academic language which is of higher level. In other words, it will serve as a bridge to academic language.

2.1 Pleasure Reading and its Characteristics

Pleasure reading has different labels which includes sustained silent reading, extensive reading, leisure reading, independent reading, out-of-school reading, self-selected reading, reading for fun, free voluntary reading, Drop Everything And Read (DEAR) and so on. It provides readers to choose reading materials for themselves based on their linguistic competence (Day and Bamford, 1998). In this kind of reading, they can read whenever the need arises and in fact, even without the guided instruction by the teacher. In addition, Krashen (2004), claims that pleasure reading helps develop the properties of language including spelling, grammar, vocabulary and writing style. Besides, reading for pleasure facilitates the reader to be engaged in the reading process. The active engagement with content makes readers to forget themselves in the message and they even may forget that the printed text is written in a foreign language (Krashen, 1982). Moreover, the 'forgetting' happens for the aesthetic readers (i.e., readers who read for pleasure) and efferent readers (i.e., readers who read for information). Significantly, it contributes to the development of language and to perform better in the academic tests as well. And, in the view of Schorkhuber (2008) quoting Davies, pleasure reading can be implemented in ELT classes in a second or foreign language context as given below.

As extensive reading programme is a supplementary class library scheme, attached to an English course, in which pupils are given the time, encouragement, and materials to read pleasurably, at their own level, as many books as they can, without the pressures of testing or marks. Thus, pupils are competing only against themselves, and it is up to the teacher to provide the motivation and monitoring to ensure that the maximum number of books is being read in the time available. [...] [B]ooks are selected for their attractiveness and relevance to the pupils' lives, rather than for literary merit (Davis 1995: 329).

3. Building Spark with Books

Pleasure reading affects vocabulary, grammar, spelling, and linguistic skills by providing rich input and, in fact, it creates a desire to read. The “willingness to read” promotes intellectual value (Yamashita, 2013) and the pleasure of learning new ideas and knowledge sustains the reading habit. This kind of reading can be promoted among readers by choosing a reading text for themselves. This gives autonomy to readers in the reading environment in addition to the joy of intellectual satisfaction (Judge, 2011). Recognition of choice of materials can be encouraged by providing opportunities such as book chats, discussions on the books read. Besides, they also learn presentation techniques such as introducing a character through physical description and comparing characters with the well-known or real life person (Layne, 2009). Moreover, this intellectual discussion evokes readers to read more. The book talk will help readers know about the books read by other readers and it creates curiosity to read more books.

Selecting interesting books for reading enables readers to continue reading. If they could not choose the right text that matches with their level of understanding, they cannot read and as a result it will create anxiety in the reading environment. Teacher as a reading advisor assists such readers by providing techniques to help choosing books to initiate in-school and out-of-school reading. Layne gives some suggestions to novice readers as to how to choose books for reading:

1. Rate the title because it introduces the content.
2. Look at the name of the author in order to have some idea about the themes discussed.
3. Read the 'dedication' page which tells readers about the purpose of the book.
4. Read the titles of chapters to know more about the story line of the book, characters and themes.
5. Read the front cover flap to know the plot summary.
6. Read the back cover to know more about the most exciting part of the story, remarks from readers and critics and an excerpt from a story.
7. Look at the CIP-Cataloging- In –Publication Data as this information describes the entire story in a sentence

(Layne, 2009).

4. Pleasure Reading Promotes Academic Reading

Pleasure reading is a tool that makes children to not only realize the power of reading but also develop a habit of reading. Creating in-house reading atmosphere for at least fifteen to twenty minutes a day promotes a desire to read. It is more effective to spend a little time each day than spending a large segments of reading at the end of the week or twice a week (Krashen, 2004). In other words, this atmosphere is referred to as 'reading sanctuary' where readers learn to read a lot, read fluently, read books that they can read and develop thoughtful literacy in a less anxiety environment (Pruzinsky, 2014). Also, it develops the taste for reading and even stimulates reluctant readers to do more reading and even out-of-school reading.

For instance, readers involve in reading magazines, newspapers, and blogs to know more about current affairs which promotes socio-cultural literacy and this kind of reading sustains reading habit. It evokes reader's imagination (Wolf & Barzillai 2009). Subsequently, they encounter “imaginative rehearsals” for the real world and this facilitates readers to understand complex thoughts (Burke, 1968) and increases reading speed and level. Furthermore, those who spend their spare time in reading have more content knowledge and score higher grades in achievement tests (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1991; Krashen, 2003).

5. Pleasure Reading as a Ladder to Deep Reading

Many readers hit a “Literacy ceiling” in the beginning stage where “they are unable to access the knowledge and information in books and other printed materials that are part of a curriculum” (Schoenbach et.al., 2000) because the academic style of a text requires higher level of thinking to predict, to analyze, to synthesize and to infer supported by comprehension. If the text is well-within the linguistic competence, the message enters into the minds of the learners (Day & Bamford, 1998). In contrast to this, a reader cannot comprehend the message if the text is beyond the linguistic knowledge of the reader. Teacher's guidance is mandatory for reading academic texts because, when a learner has only a little exposure to reading, he/she has to be taught the necessity of reading explaining how reading

affects language and knowledge through proper motivation before entering into the world of ample exposure where he/she reads to learn. Moreover, the vocabulary, syntax and writing style used in academic texts differ from the style used in books meant for light reading and this leads to reading difficulties. In order to make academic reading easier, teachers have to explain concepts to make the text comprehensible. In addition, readers can be asked to do repeated reading of the texts and, moreover, they can be motivated to involve in narrow reading which means reading different texts on the same topic. This kind of reading helps learners understand academic texts.

Readers need to be taught the deep reading strategies in order to make academic texts easier. This kind of reading helps bring out the meaning of words with critical, analytical, analogical and inferential insights. This array sophisticates different layers of meaning while approaching the text every time and, in fact, it provides effective reflections and insights of the text. Deep reading not only settles with getting information and grasping content but also demands metacognition. It requires interest to continue reading for better comprehension in order to connect and relate with prior knowledge by meditating and reacting on the thought itself. In effect, the reader takes the role of a thinker who views the text beyond the wisdom of the author. In fact, this type of reading saves readers to be deluded and it promotes real love for reading. It is also mentioned by (Tanny McGregor, 2007) as "text plus thinking equals real reading."

The learners inside classrooms are not trained to this type of reading. They do superficial reading in order to survive competition. Superficial reading provides only the temporary benefits such as test scores, rewards and praise through skimming and scanning the texts. And, they search for immediate information which, in fact, deceives when it is not arbitrated. This kind of learning creates superficial readers. On the contrary, vocabulary encountered in pleasure reading materials helps to guess meaning of academic texts and the already acquired prior knowledge prepares learners for deep reading (Krashen, 2010).

Conclusion

Decline in reading habit of children creates aliteracy and, in fact, it is more dangerous than illiteracy. In order to eradicate aliteracy or readicide and to inculcate the habit of reading among children, pleasure reading can be used as a tool as it provides more comprehensible input in a low anxiety situations. Moreover, this kind of reading will make the academic language easier. Instead, testing students often with a view to improving the performance on tests will result in shallow reading and, in fact, this kind of learning will badly affect the cognition of children.

References

- [1]. Burke, K. (1968). *Psychology and form*. In Counter-statement, 2nd ed. Berkley: University of California Press.
- [2]. Clark, C. & Rumbold, K. (2006). *Reading for pleasure: A research overview*. National Literacy Trust. Retrieved from <http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/assets>.
- [3]. Cunningham, E. & Stanovich, K. E. (1991). "Tracking the unique effects of print exposure in children: Associations with vocabulary, general knowledge, and spelling", *Journal of Educational Psychology*, Vol.83, pp.264- 274.
- [4]. Davis, C. (1995). "Extensive reading: an expensive extravagance?", *ELT Journal*, Vol. 49, pp. 329-335.
- [5]. Day, R. & Bamford, J. (1998). *Extensive reading in the second language classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [6]. Gallagher, K. (2009). *Readicide: How schools are killing reading and what you can do about it*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.
- [7]. Hincks, T. & Balding, J.W. (1988). "On the relationship between television viewing time and book reading for pleasure: the self-reported behaviour of 11 to 16 year olds", *Reading*, Vol.22 (1), pp.48-49.
- [8]. Howard, V. (2011). "The importance of pleasure reading in the lives of young teens: Self-identification, self-construction and self-awareness", *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, Vol.43(1), pp.46-55. doi: 10.1177/09 61000610390992.
- [9]. Judge, B. (2011). "Driven to read: Enthusiastic readers in a Japanese high school's extensive reading program", *Reading in a foreign language*, Vol.23, pp.161-186.

- [10]. Kohn (2011). *The case against grades*. Educational leadership.
- [11]. Krashen, S. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. Pergamon Press Inc.
- [12]. Krashen, S. (2003). *Explorations in Language Acquisition and Use: The Taipei Lectures*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- [13]. Krashen, S. (2004). *The Power of Reading*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- [14]. Krashen, S. (2005). *The decline of reading in America poverty and access to books and the use of comics in encouraging reading*. Teachers College Record.
- [15]. Krashen, S. (2010). "Is light reading enough to fully acquire academic language? The bridge hypothesis", *Indonesian Journal of English Language Teaching*, Vol.6(1), pp.30-37.
- [16]. Layne, S.L. (2009). *Igniting a passion for reading: successful strategies for building lifetime readers*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.
- [17]. Mcgregor, T. (2007). *Comprehension connections: Bridges to strategic reading*. Heinemann: Portsmouth, NH.
- [18]. Mikulecky, L. (1979). "A changing view of literacy", *Reporting on Reading*, Vol.5(3), pp.1-5.
- [19]. Ponniah, J. & Priya, J. (2014). "Pleasure reading and the acquisition of second language by adult ESL students", *The International Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*, Vol.9(1), pp.16-22.
- [20]. Pruzinsky, T. (2014). "Read books, every day, mostly for pleasure", *English Journal*, Vol.103(4).
- [21]. Pulfrey, C. Buch, & Butera, F. (2011). "Why grades engender performance avoidance goals: The mediating role of autonomous motivation", *Journal of Educational Psychology*, Vol.103, pp.683-700.
- [22]. Schoenbach, R. Greenleaf, C. Cziko & Hurwitz, L. (2000). *Reading for understanding: A guide to improving reading in middle and high school classrooms*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.
- [23]. Schorkhuber, V. (2008). *Extensive Reading*, GRIN Verlag.
- [24]. Wolf, M. & Barzillai, M. (2009). "The importance of deep reading", *Educational Leadership*. Vol.66(6), pp.32-37.
- [25]. Wolf, M. (2008). *Proust and the squid: The story and science of the reading brain*. United States: HarperCollins publishers.
- [26]. Yamashita, J. (2013). "Effects of extensive reading on reading attitudes in a foreign language", *Reading in a Foreign Language*, Vol.25(2), pp.248-263.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

J. Mary Jennifer is currently pursuing Ph.D in the Department of Education at National Institute of Technology, Tiruchirappalli, India. Her research interest includes Reading and Cognition, Reading-Writing Relationships and Promoting Extensive Reading in the Second Language Classroom.



Dr. Joseph Ponniah is currently working as an Associate Professor in the Department of Humanities at National Institute of Technology, Tiruchirappalli, India. He has eighteen years of experience as an ESL teacher at Arts and Science and Engineering colleges in India. His papers are widely published in peer-reviewed International Journals.

