INCULCATING READING HABITS AMONG CHILDREN OF DIFFERENT AGE GROUPS: A CASE STUDY OF THE EXPERIMENTS OF APEEJAY SCHOOL KHARGHAR, NAVI MUMBAI, MAHARASHTRA

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ABSTRACT

Good reading habits are a source of knowledge and learning. Inculcating good reading habits in children has always been a concern for all stakeholders in the education field world over, and making school education meaningful and relevant so that it acts as a powerful tool for human resource development. An attempt is made in this paper to sketch the experiments made at Apeejay School Kharghar, Navi Mumbai, Maharashtra, to enhance the reading habits of children. It can be observed that an integrated approach along with cooperation and collaboration of all stakeholders is required to inculcate, enhance and promote reading habits.

Keywords: Reading habits; School children; India; Maharashtra; Navi Mumbai; Khargar; Appejay School

1. INTRODUCTION

Reading is an essential and important aspect for creating the literate society. It shapes the personality of an individual and helps them to develop the proper thinking methods and creating new ideas. It has a crucial role to play in creating independent learners, promoting literacy and attaining education. It is considered as the vital foundation on which other academic skills are built. Reading is an important means of introducing the child to the world that surrounds the child as it is regarded as one of the major avenues for acquiring information as well. Reading is the very foundation on which the edifice of the child is to be built. It is one of the most important components of our language and an essential tool for lifelong learning. Reading holds the most significant place in education as a means of communication in a highly literate society.

It can form part of an individual to the extent that it becomes a habit which once developed, become very difficult to break. If inculcated at the school in general and primary level in particular the reading habit will create a lifelong advantage for children and help them to achieve curricular and co-curricular excellence. In fact, it is in the primary school that the foundations of good habits are laid. This necessitates schools to provide conducive environment in the school premises and adopt proper strategies to inculcate reading habits among schoolchildren. School library can play a vital role in enhancing the reading habits of children as it is created with the following purposes.

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2. PURPOSES

1. Support the teaching programme of the school
2. Guide students on the choice of relevant materials for study
3. Provide resources to enhance academic growth and development
4. Assist the pupils to develop skills in the use of books and libraries
5. Acquire the relevant books and non-book materials to meet the requirement of the school curriculum.

It can be deduced from above that the school library is of paramount importance. It guides the students in all areas of their academic endeavour, inculcate in them the desired reading culture and also provide appropriate materials to supplement classroom teaching. Hence an effort is made in this paper to place it on records the efforts being made at a school library in Mumbai to inculcate and enhance the reading habits of children based on the initiations made in the Apeejay School, Kharghar, Navi Mumbai.

3. APEEJAY SCHOOL, KHARGHAR, NAVI MUMBAI

Apeejay School, Kharghar, Navi Mumbai, is a CBSE-affiliated school. The school was established in the year 2000 with 29 students. Today it has been rated one among **Top 10 schools** in Navi Mumbai with approximately 2300 students and 80 teaching staff. The school is promoted by the Delhi-based Apeejay Education Society (AES). The school offers Pre-primary, Primary and Secondary courses from Montessori to class XII. The school ensures a life-enriching experience for students by facilitating them with the best faculty, infrastructure, opportunities and environment.

The School follows Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) pattern mandated by CBSE (Central Board of Secondary Education) with effect from October 2009, to enhance students' formative skills, and co-curricular and extra-curricular activities such as elocution, art, drama, creative writing and sports to make learning and teaching both joyous and creative for students and teachers.

The school has developed an excellent infrastructure over the years. It is functioning on a land measuring 12,897 sq mtrs; out of which 6000 sq mtrs are for the building and 6897 sq mtrs for the playground and other activities. The school building is a ground-plus-two-storeys structure, with 61 classrooms and four laboratories. The school is also equipped with computer laboratories comprising 50 PCs, two multi-purpose halls which seat 500 and 800 students respectively.

The school has a well-equipped library with a rich collection of latest books in different fields of study and of general nature. At present there are 10240 books in the library. More than 13 periodicals and journals are subscribed in order to update the students with current affairs and also help them develop with a view to take on the competitive world of today. At present a professional

librarian with one Class IV employee manage the routine library operations. However the class teachers assist the librarian during library periods. The library functions from 8.00 am to 4.00 pm on all working days.

The collection in the library includes dictionaries (monolingual and bilingual), thesaurus, encyclopaedias, biographies, yearbooks, text books, reference books, fiction, nonfiction, pictorial books, pop-up books, story books and short stories in English, Marathi and Hindi, rhymes and short poems, animal and nature stories etc. The collection of the library is built on the advice of the principal with recommendations from the teachers. The teachers recommend books based on their interaction with children and their parents. Curricular and co-curricular needs of the student community is given due weight age in the selection process.

4. INCULCATING READING HABIT: EXPERIENCES AND EXPERIMENTS

Inculcating reading habit in the initial stage of a child has become an important aspect and need of the hour. The library is a partner in the education of a child. Libraries play an important role in developing reading skills and love for books. However, it is not enough just to stack books in libraries. The child should be allowed to pick up, touch, handle and turn the pages as and how he wants to. There must be time and space to let children look at books, choose for themselves and try to read or just look at pictures and texts according to their likes and dislikes. Attractive books will give the same pleasure and joy that toys may give and if allowed to handle them, the child will develop the same love for books as for toys. Telling stories from books adds to the pleasure derived. A good teacher may read out stories to groups of children, showing them illustrations that go with them. Proper voice modulation, dialogue delivery and bits of action will enhance the effect of the story. Children can be asked to read aloud the dialogues of different characters from the stories. Acting out roles, painting scenes from stories and other activities associated with the story can be undertaken by the teacher and the children. This will help create interest in the book and motivate the child to read.

Besides, some of the guidelines are laid down by CBSE in order to promote the reading habits among children. Schools can organize a number of activities like:

- Dramatization of the story
- Debating and defending the actions of characters in the story.
- Making an audio story out of a novel/ text to be read out to children.
- Interacting with the author
- Holding a literature fest where various characters interact with each other
- Symposiums and seminars for introducing a book of an author to the children
- Creating their own stories

- Critical evaluation of the characters, plot and the storyline
- Book reviews of the book of any genre chosen by a student that can be assessed by the teachers and even displayed on the notice board.
- Refresh the library books as often as is practical. Kids love to discover new things and the easiest things to discover are those closest to hand. Sometimes refresh can simply mean moving the books around.
- If possible, make sure children have a quiet place and a quiet time where they can always find a refuge for reading.
- Schools' participation in the literary fest and other such activities in and around the city.
- Intra-class and interclass reading competitions can be extended to inter school competitions too. Topics like Cultural Heritage of India, Lives of great philosophers and thinkers like Gandhiji, Ravindranath Tagore, Swami Vivekananda, Ramakrishna Mission etc., relevant to Indian culture and philosophy and traditions can be taken up
- Lecturers and symposiums with experts to motivate the students on `reading habits'
- All prizes should be in the form of books of famous authors and writers.
- If the student/students pen down some book or story, the respective school should come forward to assist the young writer/author in publication, printing or even giving it a nice launch pad.
- Any other relevant activity as per the discretion of the school/institution.

A librarian working in a children's library according to Ugboma (2010), must line up various activities to be able to achieve this goal which include these: Story- telling, Craft making, Film shows, Puppetry, Talks, Book exhibition, book talks and Library weak. The reason for all these activities is to promote the objectives of the library which is to bring the library alive to the children, and to make them library users; both as a youth, and as an adult in the society. If the library is made to occupy a significant place in life of a child, he or she would grow up with the concept and significance of a library permanently etched into him/her.

For a school librarian every hour is a challenge as he/she will come across children of different age groups belonging to different culture with different IQs and EQs. Children of the present day are rather technology savvy. They have very little interest in reading. Sitting in one place and taking a book and reading is very difficult for them. It's been rightly pointed out by The Hindu (2004) that in an age where browsing the net, children playing with funky handsets and passing non-stop SMSs seem to be the order of the day, reading a book in a peaceful corner of a library has become an archaic idea for most of the children. While technology is taking a steady control over individual lives, the reading habit is fast vanishing into thin air.

Under the circumstances following experiments have been made in the library to inculcate and enhance the reading habits. These activities have been undertaken in collaboration and discussion with teachers, Principal, school authorities and parents. Though emphasis is given on curricular reading to satisfy the curricular needs of the children, co-curricular and extra-curricular reading is encouraged on the whole to expand the horizons of knowledge among children.

Library period: There are two library periods per week for students from Class II to Class IV while there is one library period for students from Class V to Class XII, where their teacher accompanies them to the library.



KG Children interacting with their teacher in the library period.

Library tour: Interacting with pre-primary children is a great challenge as they are less than 5years 10 months. Pre-primary sections comprise of LKG and UKG classes. Class teachers of Pre-Primary sections take the children on library tour to the library and introduce them to the concept of library. First of all they are happy to be out of the class and have come to the different world of books. Children will be shown all the materials in the library and are introduced to the book world. After the library tour their smile makes the difference. As they don' t have a library period their class teacher reads the story books, sometimes they are shown short films on fantasy stories which they can easily connect to themselves. Picture books, pop-up books, games, puzzles are also provided to them. The librarian acts as a facilitator by providing appropriate books to the class teacher. These children are too young to understand the concept of reading habit. Efforts are being made to inculcate reading skills through the way they are able to connect to the world of books.

Primary sections comprise of classes from Class I to Class IV, where children aged between 6 and 10 pursue their studies. Children of Class-I have their class library. Children of class II to class IV are asked to bring a story book or fantasy or popup book or short story book or any book which they want to share with fellow classmates from their home. They are instructed to write their names and other details on the book. And at the end of the year they are returned the books by the class teacher which they take them back home.A child who is responsible is made in charge of these books (monitor) and the child will take care of the class library. Whenever children want to read the story

books from the class library monitor in charge gives the book and takes the book back at the end of the period. All the children are instructed that these books should not be taken home. Children really enjoy reading their friends books, sometimes they are made to read these books in front of everyone in the class. They enjoy reading and queue up to get their chance. It is fun to get involved with these children as they come up with lots of stories and activities with their own creations. This is one of the innovative activities taken up with the support of school authorities and teachers to develop the reading habits of children.



Primary class creating their own story with their art skills.

In free periods they are given these books to read otherwise their teacher reads the books for them. Sometimes they are also shown adventure, fantasy, short documentary films where they watch these films with lots of curiosity. They are too young to understand the word described in the books but are very curious to understand each and every line in the books. They are also introduced to picture reading. It is a fun doing this activity. They come up with lots of their own stories and experience through actions. They come up with lots of doubts and questions and ask single question more than 10 times. These children have to be answered with utter care and accuracy. By this way they try to read more books to understand universe of knowledge in a better way.

Children from class II to Class IV have a library period weekly once. They are accompanied by a teacher to the library. After getting introduced to them, they will be shown the library materials, and later instructions on how to use library materials will be given - such as how to hold the books, how to turn the pages, how to start reading and not to write anything in library books and how to behave in the library etc. Children in this age group are very curious and will become too enthusiastic after seeing the library books. They are given such books which have bold font and colourful pictures. They are told to bring a pad or a note book where they write difficult words, some interesting facts, etc. They are also given instruction to always keep a pocket dictionary with them, so that they can use the dictionary to see the meanings of the difficult words by themselves. They take it as an activity to find the word meaning and enjoy doing it. Occasionally story-telling, games, puzzle solving activities will be used to enhance the reading habits of children. Within 10

minutes books are exchanged among children and children come up with numerous questions which need to be answered carefully as they expect flawless answers to all their questions. They are too tender in age they share all their happiness and naughtiness with the librarian. It's a great uphill task while handling these children and making them to sit in one place and read. But it's a great challenge to the librarian and the accompanied teacher. Hindustan Times student edition is circulated among children of Class IV every-day.

Secondary sections comprise of classes from class V to class XII, where children aged between 10 and 17 pursue their studies. These children have library period once a week and are given a library card. They can borrow a book for a week. Children of this age group are already introduced to reading as such they are always looking for the library period so that they can borrow new book. Fictions, nonfiction, novels, biographies, etc are heavily borrowed by these children. They have their mind set about the books they have to read. Sometimes children have been asked to write book reviews of whatever they have read in the library or from the borrowed book in every week. They will write book reviews of Indian as well as foreign author's books including classics and popular ones.





Secondary section students browsing in the library and reading their book review in the class.

Newspaper reading is made compulsory for this age group of children. The Times of India Student edition is circulated among children from Class V to class XII. These children are free to access library materials and go around to select the books of their choices. They read, discuss, interact with the librarian speak about the books, etc. They also interact with librarian about the books they have read and also suggest some good books to be read by children which are not available in the library.

Weekly one or two children are asked to show the cover page, contents pages and read out the book review in the assembly. Some other children are asked to critically analyze the book review that has been read by other child. This activity has been introduced on the advice of the Principal.

Children use the library for informational and recreational reading. They also use the library to get informational support for their completion of projects which are included in their curriculum. Children of the school who go for various literary competitions in and out of Mumbai make use of the library as maximum as possible.

CBSE recommended activities like dramatization of the story, debating and defending the actions of characters in the story, introducing a book of an author to the children, creating their own stories, critical evaluation of the characters, plot and the storyline, book reviews of the book of any genre chosen by a student are quite regularly followed. Library books are refreshed as often as is practical. Library is quite a quiet place where in children can spend their precious time in reading.

The school normally participates in the literary fest and other such activities in and around Mumbai city and the library and the librarian will extend their helping hand to assist the children with right information. Of course concerned teacher will always be there to collaborate with the librarian. Reading competitions are also regularly organized on the campus and on occasion's lectures by experts will motivate the students on `reading habits'. Whenever prizes are to be distributed to the winners of various competitions, all prizes are preferred in the form of books of famous authors and writers. The write ups, poems, stories, and other writings penned down by the students are normally published in the school souvenir to be brought out every year on the occasion of annual day.

5. CONCLUSION

The Apeejay School, Kharghar, Navi Mumbai thus is making its sincere efforts in promoting and enhancing reading habits among the school children throughout the academic year. It can be noticed that a conscious attempt to encourage reading habits among school children had been taken up in the school. It is a challenge to convince students to pick up books and engage with the author, story, character and ideas presented in the reading passage or book. In order to promote independent/ reading skills specific initiatives have been introduced which are yielding fruitful results. Library and librarian have been given prime importance in the process. The school

authorities recognize library as heart of the institution and that library plays a vital role in all the academic activities of the school. Promotion of reading habit cannot be done in isolation as it is evident from the experiment that cooperation and collaboration from all stakeholders is required.

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