



Role of Class Libraries in Primary Classes

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Abstract:

The paper deals with the role of classroom libraries in promoting reading habits in primary classes. It spells out the current state of libraries and the problems associated with them. It draws from emergent literacy approach and highlights the merits of class libraries that can be instrumental in developing reading behaviors, strategies, concepts of print etc. in early readers. It suggests some practical ideas that educators can implement with ease to support the concept in school systems. National Curriculum Framework 2005 highlights the importance of libraries that should serve as a place for holding discussions, storytelling and should have a child friendly ambience with a positive ethos, good lighting and seating arrangement. However what is visible in most schools is the apathy towards developing libraries. In most cases libraries serve as storehouse of books stacked in tall, dusty racks and the poor infrastructure makes this place not so user-friendly. Further, in some schools primary children have zero access to library books as they are not allowed to enter main library and in some cases we shall find no allocation of library period in the timetable. Libraries are either used by teachers or students of senior classes for reference work. It rarely becomes a place that is accessible to children and can be used for reading for pleasure. Thus developing reading habit as a goal of library remains unaccomplished in most cases. This happens generally due to the centralized main library which do not provide a ready access to the learners.

NCF'2005 guidelines suggest us that the use of library to one period a week seldom allows children to cultivate a taste for reading. Such a limited exposure takes away from children opportunities to handle books and talk about them. Silence is usually observed in main library that is quite contrary to the active nature of the child. Children converse with pictures and text in the books and engage in book talks with peers. This is the whole idea behind class libraries for young children that can also function as activity centers for them. Thus it is worthwhile to allocate space within the classroom where a reading corner or a class library can be started. Such a reading space solves the problem of access and availability of books to children. Further, it also acts as an energizer activity corner where children can be at leisure and read for pleasure. Such a ready access to books within classroom offers engagement to learners and boosts their literacy levels as class libraries then becomes a significant part of class routines. Research reveals that students are likely to spend more time reading when they are in classrooms with adequate classroom libraries (Allington & Cunningham, 1996; Krashen, 1998; Routman, 2003). For example: Morrow (2003) and Neuman (1999) note that students read 50-60 percent more in classrooms with libraries than in classrooms without them. Let's examine some facets of class libraries.

Keywords: Classroom libraries, Primary classes, Reading habits, Role

1. Infrastructure and display

Class libraries can be started with minimum infrastructure. Certain things that can be used are as follows:

- Empty cardboard cartons can be used as a table or a rack depending on the availability of space in the class.

- It is important to display books that reveal their personality and attract young readers. The books need not be stacked where only the spine is visible. The cover page carries the visual appeal.
- Books procured by library which are subsequently hardbound to ensure longevity hide the cover and fail to catch the attention of young readers. Thus as an educator the emphasis should be on usability of the book rather than longevity. Hardbound, dull binding should be avoided.
- Make this reading corner attractive and comfortable by putting a small rug for children to spread themselves and read. Create an environment that is supportive of early writing by making sure paper, crayons, pens, pencils, and markers are available. (Barclay, Benelli, & Curtis, 1995; NAEYC, 1997). Let children write or draw if they feel like responding while reading.
- Use flashy slogans, poems, banners that talk about a new book and motivate children to read. It is analogous to advertising.
- Novelty is key to motivation and thus the content of class libraries should change frequently. Main libraries can become feeder for these class libraries. They need to be regularly updated with new books from the main library so as to keep the vein of enthusiasm alive.

2. Role of librarian

- He/she plays a dynamic role to motivate and educate teachers about the functionality of class libraries.
- He/she can help teachers ideate and make some persuasive slogans, advertisements for books, write abstracts, prepare learning logs, charts, plan activities around the books.
- He/she shall ensure that there is not only circulation of books in class libraries but also the resources prepared by a teacher are shared.

3. Content

- A class library needs to be equipped with a variety of reading material as follows. It is important to understand that there are multiple sources that children can explore beyond books.
- A variety of children's literature should be available to readers. This includes wordless picture books, fantasy stories, humorous stories, mysteries, tall tales, biographies, experiential stories, folk tales, fables, poems etc.
- Other reading material like catalogues, brochures, pamphlets, magazines, newspapers, menu cards, advertisements etc related to the theme should be available.

4. Creating ownership

- Children should feel class library to be their own and not an inaccessible space. Thus they should be empowered in multiple ways to use this space creatively. Their voices need attention and demand implementation. This can be attained in these ways.
- Children's projects, diaries, work, journals, self made books ought to be displayed. This should be a space for learning together and not for giving stars, grades and displaying the best. Efforts are important not the final products.
- It is worthwhile to visit resource room or the main library with children and allow them to select material for reading and place it in their class library. Student reading interests need to be considered when selecting books for classroom libraries (Routman, 2003).
- Children can be engaged in making abstracts, slogans etc to attract the readers.
- Wear and tear of books is natural. Children should be engaged in mending books and thus tapes, scissors, glue should be provided to them.
- Encourage children to share the books they read at home and place it in class library for a day or two for others to read.

5. Set class routines

- Give at least 15-20 minutes for reading daily in the morning. This is the time teacher should also read to set an example.

- Introduce sharing time when children share their reading experiences. This can be a whole class activity and can later be followed up in small groups. This gives children real material and audience to share.
- Engage learners to respond to what they read. This can be oral in the beginning and can shape into written reviews later. The idea is their opinion about the read material and the view point needs to be respected.

6. Issue books

Books from the class library should be issued to inculcate reading habit in children. Children can select books of their own liking and home works can be framed around these books. Children should know both reading for pleasure and also reading for a purpose/ task. Rosenblatt(1986) calls this as aesthetic or efferent stance to reading. The reader's stance means what the reader chooses to focus on while reading. A stance reflects the reader's purpose. The efferent stance pays more attention to the cognitive, the referential, the factual, the analytic, the logical, and the quantitative aspects of meaning. The aesthetic stance pays more attention to the sensuous, the affective, the emotive, and the qualitative aspects of meaning. We usually adopt an efferent stance when reading a newspaper, a textbook, or a legal brief. We usually adopt an aesthetic stance when reading poetry, narratives, and other literary texts. As educators we need to expose children to both. Thus at times we can choose to allow children to read for pleasure and also at times we can give them task focused reading experiences.

7. Diversify Languages

Emphasis of the class library should not be only English. The purpose is to expose them to languages so that eventually they become proficient readers and writers. Thus it must have material available in the regional language. Children draw parallels between languages and thus cross language exchange needs to be encouraged.

8. Nature of activities

The teacher can ask children to read and narrate a story, make picture books using the characters of a story but altering the plot, frame riddles about the characters they studied and play a quiz, build story maps. Other literary activities may include writing an introduction for a book, making a poster, role play, letter writing. Entire gamut of genres we want children to explore can actually be blended with the material from the class library.

9. Economic costs

Some people might just reject the idea of class library thinking it to be too expensive an affair, however it is not. Quality children's literature is available in market published by National Book Trust, Children's Book Trust, Eklavya, Pratham, Scholastic, Tulika, Katha amongst many others that can suit the running costs of the library. One can attain healthy reading and learning levels in a classroom if one allocates space for class libraries that is accessible to children. Children require a literacy rich environment to develop as proficient readers and writers. This can only be possible when they are immersed in language. Class library does provide meaningful engagement to learners and provides a rich learning experience. It requires main libraries to act as feeder libraries. It also entails understanding of the reading process and pedagogy and integration within the day to day planning.

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