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ABSTRACT

The authors of the reviewed chapter, Eve Bearne and Gabrielle Cliff Hodges, tackle upon reading rights as a basic principle of an individual, often neglected by the scholars. That principle should be the starting point and the moving force of the entire teaching/learning process because if those rights are respected and implied then both the teacher and school system can more easily foster motivation which is the primary factor in student's achievement. Teachers can motivate their students in various ways and meta-language is one of them. By reflecting upon Bearne and Hodges's article, this review will account for the importance of teaching/learning reading and it will provide suggestions for fostering motivation in classes focused on reading.

Keywords: reading rights, reading responsibilities, meta-language, motivation.

Introduction

According to a new study published by the Suton and Durham University in the UK, there should be more effort put into examining the efficiency of particular methods used in teaching of reading (Adams n.p.). Reading is not only a crucial skill in mastering a second and/or foreign language, it is also essential in improving L1 no matter how basic it sounded. Many teachers neglect the importance of this language component placing emphasis on irrelevant issues such as pronunciation if not even accent. They insist on students' accent and they force them to read out loud forgetting that it may harm their initial understanding of the text and that it may consume their energy in vain. The study also indicated that more traditional styles in teaching reading were favorable compared to the modern ones such as “discovery learning” where students are expected to unravel key ideas all by themselves (Adams n.p.). Still, different teaching styles work in different contexts and since there is no universal rule for teaching reading it is absurd to claim that there is a single all-encompassing method or formula: “There is no one method, medium, approach, device or philosophy that holds the key to the process of reading” (DES 1975 qtd. in Bearne and Hodges, 2000).

However, there are certain issues that can be considered in detail and observed in a universal context in order to find out more about the importance of reading for both the student and the teacher and to explore “fruitful ways of teaching reading” (Bearne and Hodges, 2000). One of those issues is the rights and responsibilities of reading. This essay will review the first chapter, "Reading Rights and Responsibilities," in the book Issues in English Teaching.

Discussion

The authors of the chapter, Eve Bearne and Gabrielle Cliff Hodges, tackle upon reading rights as a basic principle of an individual, often neglected by the scholars. That principle should be the starting point and the moving force of the entire teaching/learning process because if those rights are respected and implied then both the teacher and school system can more easily foster the motivation and commitment. The reader is not only a learner i.e. student but also an individual who "makes choices according to inclination as well as need" (Bearne and Hodges, 2000). Nowadays, as teaching methods and school systems evolve, teachers are expected to create space for individual students' needs and preferences, but space for learners to employ their right to choose should also be insisted upon (Bearne and Hodges, 2000).

The goal of every dedicated teacher should be to nurture critical thinking in his or her students. The authors postulate that "the principle of fostering avid, committed and critical readers can only be realized in practice if students are motivated" (Bearne and Hodges, 2000). Motivation is crucial in teaching anything especially reading because not all students are excited about reading lessons. The study of students' motivation has been in focus of the SLA research and applied linguistics for more than four decades. The reason for that is its complex nature and inevitable impact on the student's success (Dörnyei 1994). Gardner (1985) created a stepping stone in the research of learner's motivation. He defined motivation as "the extent to which the individual works or strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction experienced in this activity" (Gardner 1985). Other notable scholars like Dörnyei, Crookes and Schmidt agreed upon Gardner's finding that motivation...
influences student’s achievement but they criticized his socio-educational model for not concentrating enough on the learning context. Thus, Dörnyei (1994) constructed a new model of defining motivation that consists of three motivational components: a) language level, b) learner level, and c) learning situational level. Evidently, the teacher as the facilitator and the primary factor of the learner’s context cannot be neglected in arousing motivation in students. This is applicable to reading lessons as well. Thus, if the teacher manages to render this motivation, the student will learn to read with in-depth analysis and understanding, both of which are elements of a critical thinker. The teacher can motivate his/her students by carefully selecting the material and even if the material is sometimes uninteresting, the teaching method can bring it closer to the student. For instance, they can create role plays for students after reading drama pieces, which will actively engage students in the process, they can tell them to draw their impressions of the text, they can ask them to write a similar story, etc. By assessing the capacities and needs of their students, teachers can tailor their approaches and open the door for an entirely different experience of learning how to read i.e. understand a text.

Furthermore, teaching reading should be of extreme importance not only in an ESL classroom but at home with the primary teachers i.e. parents. Parents as teachers of reading are of high relevance, namely because they provide a basis for the child especially in an implicit, indirect manner. There are many assumptions about reading at home and many teachers and scholars have divided opinions about it. Some of them consider comics, newspapers, computer texts, and father’s "evening gazette" harmful for the learner whereas some believe that those so called "impoverished" texts can be扬shaped our students’ minds. In order to keep up with the developments in the field of advertisement does not exist. They indeed do and they are (Spratt and Sturdy qtd. in Bearne and Hodges, 2000). We are all sorts of text—fiction, fact and the communication media” (Spratt and Sturdy qtd. in Bearne and Hodges, 2000). We are all sorts of text—fiction, fact and the communication media” (Spratt and Sturdy qtd. in Bearne and Hodges, 2000). We are all sorts of text—fiction, fact and the communication media”.Information from various surveys displayed in this chapter reveals that ‘cineliteracy’ obtains increasing significance in the students’ reading: "We need to expand our concept of reading so that we can teach pupils to be critical readers of all sorts of text—fiction, fact and the communication media” (Spratt and Sturdy qtd. in Bearne and Hodges, 2000). We cannot pretend that the soap dialogue or the visual language of advertisement does not exist. They indeed do and they are shaping our students’ minds. In order to keep up with the technological age, we need to tailor our approach to students of reading in the most precise and dedicated manner placing emphasis on the moral values of the content we are teaching.

When we talk about moral values, the texts we read are its sources and the teachers are there to extract and indoctrinate them. There lies the responsibility of reading. What the students read is what will shape their psyche and ethical reasoning. This is where the teacher plays the crucial role because reading within the school system is inevitably political. Students are assigned the reading tasks and they are expected to respond to them. Initially, it may seem that they are given the freedom to resonate on their own. However, as the reader develops his reading competence, his reading conscience is being developed by what he reads. This is why home reading should never be neglected. There should be a moral awareness of both the system and the teacher, an awareness that creates a balance between what is ethically acceptable and what the student finds pleasurable as long as it does not violate the rights of others. We do not want to create robots but insightful, critical thinkers with an unrestricted imaginative spirit.

Teachers can achieve this balance by using meta-language to prompt readers to talk about their reading experience. Meta-language, in its broad term, refers to "a specialized form of language or set of symbols used when discussing or describing the structure of a language" (Cambridge Dictionaries Online). Using meta-language, teachers can instigate learners to reflect upon their reading strategies and eventually, the purpose of the very act of reading. Meta-language provides a separate discourse that brings the discussion of the text beyond itself, it develops a new layer of understanding that enables the reader to contextualize his reading habits and gain control over his reading process. Meta-language (i.e. talking about reading) can raise awareness of the significance of reading, it can help learners discuss a text from a critical point of view. Fostering meta-language activities incites interaction and provides a direct insight into the reader’s habits, preferences, and interests. By having this source of “rich material,” the teachers can "construct different frameworks for teaching rather than leaving us to attempt to fit everything into a single model” (Bearne and Hodges, 2000). The authors of this article demonstrate that one of the ways of using meta-language are reading-journals which help the student develop an "internal and independent dialogue" (Bearne and Hodges, 2000). They are valuable because they train readers to reflect upon a text with an individual approach that has no right or wrong qualities. The reader learns that s/he can observe a text in his/her own way and this will set a basis for later, serious work in his/her education. Reading-journals disclose a note of gradual development of the reader and his/her ideas and opinions. The reader will feel that his/her account matters and it will help him/her build self-confidence and thus encourage him/her to read more than s/he used to. This will pave the way for the learner to involve his imagination into the process of interpreting someone else’s imaginative work. S/he will learn both to be a critical thinker and a free-minded individual with capacities and freedom to interpretation. Lankshear (1997) provides a resumé of the importance of meta-level knowledge in the best possible manner:

It is more than merely knowing how (i.e. being able) to engage successfully in a particular discursive practice. Rather, meta-level knowledge is knowing about the nature of that practice, its constitutive values and...
beliefs, its meaning and significance, how it relates to other practices. (Lankshear et al., 1997 qtd. in Bearne and Hodges 2000).

By writing about the text, the student is encouraged to: "predict, reconsider earlier reading, to write questions that they want the text to answer for them at a later stage, and to be explicit about how they are drawing on their own social, cultural or intertextual experiences in order to make sense of what they are reading" (Bearne and Hodges, 2000).

The writers of this chapter also observe the issue of gender in the reading process. It is as complex as any other aspect of the subject. Elaine Millard researched the gender difference as a factor in reading practice among secondary-school students and she derived a conclusion that three reasons stand out: "cultural attitudes, reading material, and the way in which the reading is conducted in the classroom" (Bearne and Hodges, 2000). In my view, all three reasons are actually a product of socio-cultural mindsets because they are the ones that create difference in the reading achievement along the gender line. Similarly, Caroline Daly, in her research that investigated reading behavior of Year 9 students, concluded, "boys as well as girls know well how to act like a reader" (qtd. in Bearne and Hodges, 2000). Nevertheless, the issue remains complex and no matter how much we tried to blur the differences and create universal reading material that would attract both sexes, it is inevitable that boys and girls do not have similar interests when it comes to reading topics.

Conclusion

Conclusively, it is important to highlight that teachers should not treat reading as merely a language skill but as a right, a responsibility, and a choice in itself. It is a part of our life that distinguishes us as human and that is why we need to approach reading as a "delicate business that requires finely tuned instruments to record and assess progress and development" (Bearne and Hodges, 2000). Shaping a young, fragile mind is undoubtedly contextualized in teaching of reading and if we neglect it, we risk ruining a potential that lies in every student.

Works Cited


