



CHAPTER 2

IMPROVING STUDENTS' LIBRARY SKILLS

1. PROMOTING THE READING HABIT

As members of modern society, we are all aware of its varied needs. Education is perhaps the most important among them, for it helps to mould a well informed, knowledgeable and responsible citizen who alone will be able to contribute to its progress and advancement. The advantages and opportunities which literacy, reading and communication by written word offer, will only be secured if posterity grows up with an understanding of the importance of books and the habit of using them in the formative period of childhood. To bring students and books together successfully, students have to experience the pleasure of reading. There is a need to promote reading as a skill among them, so that, they are able to bring their past knowledge and experience to the information and text, and create new understanding, solve problems, draw inferences and make connections to other texts and experiences.



Fig. 1. Students reading books in the Library

Unfortunately, the reading habit has lost its importance as both the young and the old are glued to the Television. As far as the educational institutions are concerned, coaching students for the examinations seems to be the be-all and end-all of our education system. However, after the home, the most obvious

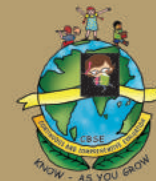


place to develop the habit of life-long reading is the school, and specifically, its Library. It is, however, a sad fact that, although today every school affiliated to the Central Board of Secondary Education can take pride in a library, yet invariably, these libraries function largely as repositories for storage of a set number of books required as a condition of affiliation or where the students come once a week or fortnight for issue and return the books, rather than functioning as real a Resource Centre for Learning. It must function as the ‘hub’ of all activities in the school, a place where creative ideas can germinate, where exciting innovative experiences in learning take place, where students come joyfully to spend some of their precious time browsing through books in a peaceful, pleasing and inviting atmosphere.

Apart from the printed material, different kinds of audio-visual aids are also needed to enrich the learning space to expose students to the larger world around them, The Library as a Resource Centre should have a section devoted to films-slides, photographs, maps, posters, charts, as well as hardware in the form of a radio, television set, if possible connected digitally with a set-top box, audio recorder and player, LCD projector, computers, printer and reprographics / photocopy machine, so that, the Library develops into a real Learning Resource Centre, where both students and teachers can explore new paths of learning. Obviously this will be difficult for all the schools in the initial stage, so a process of sharing under the school cluster system may be initiated.

According to the standards for the school libraries developed by the American Association of School Librarians (a division of the American Library Association), the school library in “addition to doing its vital work of individual reading guidance and development of school curriculum, should serve the school as a centre for instructional materials. Instructional materials include books – literature for children, young people and adults-other printed materials, films, recordings and other latest media developed to aid learning. The function of an instructional materials centre is to locate, gather, provide and coordinate the school’s materials for learning and equipment required for the use of these materials”.

It is observed that in some schools, a distinction is made between a ‘Library’ and the ‘Resource Centre’ and both are maintained as separate entities under separate management, while the library remains confined to print materials, while the non-print media is taken care by the Resource Centre. It would be desirable if the library is also made the resource centre, and made responsible for non-print and electronic media as well. Both these units should function under the overall supervision of the School Librarian.



One of the most important tasks of the School Library is to inculcate reading habits among the younger generation. Books are mute entities; their application does not come automatically. It always requires some human agency that can induce the value of books among the students. In the school environment, this human agency is the Librarian or the Teacher. To achieve this, there must be close coordination between classroom teaching and the use of library resources.

It is an important part of the Librarian's or Teacher's role to encourage reading and library use positively. To assure the best results, it would be necessary to provide regular and continuous service by the Librarian in the use of the Library. The student needs to be informed about the variety of books available in the Library, how to select books, how to read them, how to take notes, how to relate information collected from various books, maintenance and handling of books, etc. Of course, it includes, the use of card catalogue, loan procedures, knowledge of books, audio visual materials, computer assisted facilities, use of bibliography, reference books etc. Infact, it would be more desirable to organise a Library Project to acquaint students with the Library.

Students will not learn to use the library, if teachers do not use it regularly and profitably. Teachers should see the possibility of library use as an instructional aid and simulate its use through procedures they employ in their teaching.

The teachers can achieve this by:

- ❖ discussing with learners about books that might be of their interest.
- ❖ permitting learners to go to the library as the need for reference material arises.
- ❖ designing assignments requiring the learners to access library resources.
- ❖ planning projects which will require intensive use of library resources.
- ❖ distributing suggested reading lists through mimeographed materials.

Emphasis is to be given to the study of classics, autobiographies, biographies, travelogues, essays, fiction and poetry. Dictionaries, encyclopedias, year books, children's magazines, illustrations, maps and charts and other reference books should be made available. A diversified choice of books for reading will help the students to build emotional balance and stability and promote intellectual curiosity. Students should also be helped to write **Book Reviews** which could be displayed on the library notice board.



2. CLASS ROOM LIBRARIES

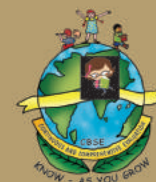
Although the library should be the focal centre of learning in school, it needs to reach out to classroom also. This is where a good interaction between the librarian and teacher needs to be generated. Classroom libraries consisting of select fiction books, non-fiction, and reference material should find a place in every classroom under the direct control and supervision of the Class teacher and a student librarian of the class. These class libraries can be used by students who finish their class work more quickly than others or as loan service for the class to supplement the books they read from the main library, or when a teacher is absent and no other substitution programme can be arranged. The collection of these class libraries can be interchanged section-wise and new ones added each year so that the class gets a wide variety of reading material available to them at any given time. Dictionaries, atlases, globes and maps should form a part of the classroom libraries.

3. LIBRARY PROGRAMMES AND PROJECTS

There are many programmes a librarian can introduce with the help of teachers to motivate students to read. For young ones, 'story hour' is always a welcome treat, especially when it is supplemented with flash cards, charts, slides or a video film. A story told with puppets is another attraction for children. This can be followed by story narration by children themselves, by creative dramatisation of stories finally whetting their appetites to turn to the book itself. Preparation of **Wall Magazines**, **Wall Newspaper** or **Class Magazines** containing student's writings in prose and poetry, their cartoons and illustrations, mathematical puzzles, science quizzes and amusing anecdotes and jokes, all these stimulate interest and help develop creative thought and expression right from the earliest years.



Fig. 2. Pre-primary level students enjoying library projects



4. BOOK SEMINAR

A programme which can be very stimulating for the older students is a **Book Seminar**. The students select and read a chosen book and then have a round table discussion on it, led by a knowledgeable moderator. This often leads to students wanting to read more books by the same author. Preparing projects on different authors and poets is another method of encouraging the reading habit. Students gather as much information as possible on writers, prepare their project report, and then give a presentation to the class inviting questions from classmates. This gives students the opportunity to familiarise themselves with different poets, authors, and dramatists, especially when there is an interchange of project material in the class. **Meet the Author** sessions can also be enjoyable when contemporary writers are invited for discussion with the students about their books. **Science Symposia**, when students choose a current topic of their interest and make presentations before the class or science clubs, is another way of attracting students to pore through the latest books in science and technology to find out about new inventions and discoveries. If participation from the audience is also encouraged, more students will wend their way to the library to search out unexplored questions to tax the minds of their fellow speakers.

5. HOLIDAY PROJECT WORK

During the long summer vacations, many students are at a loss as to how to spend their time fruitfully. They do not relish the usual type of routine home assignments, but if they are asked to prepare some interesting models, charts and projects on subjects of their choice, using material from the books, it is amazing how much creative work is produced - working models made out of scrap material, colourful charts and albums containing exciting new information on the latest technological developments taking place in different countries of the world; as well as in the creative and performing arts; on global issues like pollution, ecological degradation; the population explosion - in fact on any topic under the sun. These can be displayed at a 'holiday assignment exhibition' when the students come back to school and parents can be invited to view them. If incentives are considered necessary, outstanding work may be awarded in the form of prizes, or extra bonus marks can be added to the student's grades in the term report.

6. BOOK FAIRS

Since the material collected by students for their projects is gleaned from books, this can be a good time to arrange a 'book fair' in the school, inviting local publishers and booksellers to put up stalls



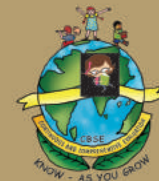
for display and sale of their books. These 'book fairs' give parents an opportunity to see what is available in the market without having to travel from place to place, and if they can be arranged on Saturday and Sunday when the parents are usually free from their work, the response would normally be very favourable. The book fairs encourage students to spend their pocket money on buying books for themselves or as gifts for their friends. They also help librarians and teachers to select the books for the library.



Fig. 3. Visitors buying books at a book fair

7. BOOK WEEK

Although the library programmes should go on throughout the year, some schools organise 'Book Week' every year to focus the attention of the whole school - the Head, the faculty, the students and parents - on the value of books and the habit of reading, and to make the school community more library - conscious. During the 'Book Week', a variety of programmes can take place catering to the interests of each age group of students. The programmes may include talks and lectures, discussions, book reviews, book exhibitions, visits to local libraries, screening of films and so on. The 'school book week may coincide with the 'National Book Week' organised by the National Book Trust or the Indian Library Association during 14-20 November each year. Each faculty may also like to organise a faculty day, such as **Social Studies Day**, **Mathematics Day**, **Creative Arts Day**, **Language Day**, **Science Day**' etc. The Arts Department of the school can organise painting contests on the **Joys of Reading**; put up catchy slogans; prepare attractive 'book marks' and 'book covers', and beautify the library.



8. **BOOK DONATION DRIVE**

As a part of **Book Week**, the schools may organise a **Book Donation Drive** and the students may be encouraged to share their book with others and donate some of their good books to the library. Parents and well wishers may also be requested to donate books. This can be very useful in the initial stage when the school is building up its library, and, if it is well-endowed then the 'Book Donation Drive' can be directed towards the collection of books for a mobile library, for the local hospital; or neoliterates or less well-endowed rural schools. When donating books, however, students should be impressed upon that the books must be in good condition, fit to find a place in the library.

9. **(A) BOOK CLUB**

The National Book Trust, India publishes a wide variety of books, keeping in mind the diversities in language, culture, age-groups and tastes of readers. Thus, books range from those that are informative, pertaining to the science, the arts, the environment and many others; fiction from different regions of the country, and beautifully illustrated books for children.

NBT books are available in 32 Indian languages and in English, at affordable prices. It has been a consistent effort on the part of the Trust to make its books available in every district by enrolling Book Club members across the country through a very good network of its authorised booksellers.

In order to ensure the availability of Trust's publications, the Trust has been running a Book Club Scheme since 1994. Any individual or institution in India can become a member of the NBT Book Club with a nominal, lifelong non-refundable membership fee is Rs.100/- for individuals and Rs.500/- for institutions.

(B) NATIONAL CENTRE FOR CHILDREN'S LITERATURE (NCCL)

The National Centre for Children's Literature (NCCL) was set up in 1993 as a coordinating agency to promote children's literature in all the languages of India. Set up by the National Book Trust, India (an autonomous organisation of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India), this Centre helps in the creation and translation of useful books for children. At the same time, it also works to monitor, coordinate and aid the publication of relevant children's literature in the country.

The primary objective of this centre is to collect and make available interesting and appropriate Indian and foreign language materials and expertise to publishers, authors, illustrators and others interested for



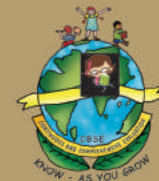
the rapid and balanced development of children's literature available to parents, teachers, educationists and planners. It involves public and private agencies for the purpose on a regular basis.

Library use and reading habits can also be considerably augmented through other activities like talks, stories sessions, display, homework facilities, outside library visits, reading programmes, scripts reading groups, quizzes, library clubs, brain trusts, dramatic shows, (where space permits), book exhibitions and exhibitions of children's art and handicraft in the Library.

Many organisations are also working for the development of the reading habit among the younger generation. One of such organisation is the "International Board on Books for the Young" with its headquarters in Switzerland, having as its goal, to make accessible to children, books from different parts of the world. So, that they grow up understanding each other more. Efforts are also being made to encourage the reading habits in children through a strong library movement. This organisation also suggests the need for a certain attitudinal change on the part of parents who stress overly on academics. What they don't realise is that, the child who reads more fares better academically and develops greater powers of expression, besides developing more general awareness.

In the European countries, a lot of attention is given to the development of the reading habit among children. Writing children's books is taken very seriously and writers and publishers are encouraged to produce quality literature. In India, only a small number of publisher e.g. about 10%, publish books for children, and children's literature. Children's books are seldom published on good quality art and glazed paper with attractive illustrations as in the foreign publications. In India, children's books are largely imported from the well-known foreign publishers, Besides, Penguin, Collin, Hamlyn, Ladybird, Hodder and Stoughton etc., However, in recent times some Indian publishers have tried their hand in this terrain, e.g., India Book House has brought out popular editions of 'Amar Chitra Katha' and 'Pustak Mahal', Delhi has created a Knowledge Bank (in 6 volumes) for children and published several unique and informative titles under its Children Science Library Series. Rajpal and Sons, Diamond Pocket Books, Vivalok Comic Series are also doing well by bringing alive grassroots people's stories and other works. Such work is also being done by the Children's Book Trust and the National Book Trust.

In India, the majority of students belong to villages and study in the vernacular medium. There must be variety of publications in Hindi and other regional languages. What is needed is a close interaction between various Indian languages. The translation of children's books from one language to another could usher in a silent reading revolution. If popular books are translated in many languages it would



produce an excellent crop of popular literature for children, and feel a great need for suitable reading materials.

Children by nature are inquisitive. We must kindle their desire for discovery. Unfortunately, seldom is it realised that readership cannot be produced suddenly. It has to be nurtured from childhood. Neglecting childhood will eventually lead to an adult world which has no relationship with books. So, the child readership has to be provided with its share of food for thought, more fun, subtle sensitivity, creative information, fantasies and tales.

10. SUGGESTED LIBRARY ACTIVITIES

An array of fun activities designed with pre-determined learning outcomes can rejuvenate the school library and also hone the library skills of the students.

- ❖ The librarian, along with subject specialists, could hold story telling sessions. These should be done creatively with voice modulation. Different sounding voices can be used to make the characters come alive.
- ❖ Display of Book Reviews by students can be done. Students should be encouraged to write reviews of books they have read. This would enable them to critically analyse what they read.
- ❖ Children should be encouraged to prepare colourful shelf guides for the library.
- ❖ Producing class magazines for the library is an engaging activity. This is an excellent literary activity which truly polishes the reading as well as the writing skills of the students. Each class could be given a theme. Students should be encouraged to write articles, poems, make cartoons etc. around that theme and develop their own class magazine. In doing these, children explore the relationships between different literary forms. These could be bound together and can form part of the library collection. Due recognition should be given to the students involved.
- ❖ Graphic Novels can be brought out by students. They could re-create or convert stories, plays from their literature text into graphic novels. Same could then be displayed and form part of the school library collection.
- ❖ Acrostic Poems can be composed on books they have read, or favourite characters from a story or any celebrity they like.



- ❖ Summer Reading challenge during the vacation can be conducted. Suggested reading list could be given to students. They could be encouraged to read as many books as they can. Students can then create their reading journals by incorporating details of the books that they have read. This is a wonderful personal reading record which will help students to analyse and do a self-assessment of their reading competency. It will also create an awareness of which book is in great demand and those who have missed on it would also like to read it. If these records are exchanged among students, they could also prove to be motivational for the reluctant readers.
- ❖ A **panel discussion** on a book or any current event about which the students have read in different newspapers and journals in the library can be conducted.
- ❖ **Weave a Tale** is an interesting activity which brings alive the creative faculty of all involved. Students should be made to sit in a circle. The Librarian puts across a story prompt and speak for two minutes. In turn, all students will speak for two minutes building up the story. The final story can be typed, bound and form part of the school library collection. Students who have part of the activity should be acknowledged.
- ❖ **Making Bibliographies:** This could be done as a group activity. Students create their own bibliographies based on the available stock in the school. Various groups can select a category of their choice for which they want to create a Bibliography. Groups could work on Non-fiction, Encyclopaedias, Atlases, Fiction-Ghost stories, Fables, Crime Thrillers etc. The librarian may guide the students on how to incorporate bibliographic data sequentially. This data could be put on attractive charts which can be displayed in the respective sections.
- ❖ **Reading Time:** The school can observe an exclusive reading time every day when all other activities are put on hold and all stakeholders (Right from the Head to the support staff) are involved in pure reading. Reading material could be newspapers, journals, library books (fiction or non-fiction) etc.
- ❖ **Drop Everything and Read [DEAR]**, is a programme which can easily be structured in the school timetable. One period in a week, per class, can be structured for this. Children will devote the entire period for pleasure reading. This can be well supported by the library. This will be apart from the entire period and enhance their reading skills which in turn stimulate independent thinking, research and writing skills.



- ❖ **Library Clubs** (Ref. to chapter 13), could meaningfully contribute to organising these events. Such events would stimulate students into inquiring and critiquing their own, each other's and any available work in the library. It is hoped that through such activities, students will carry out independent research. This will truly help in increasing the standard of written work and reflective assessments.