

Chapter 13

The Power of Love: Action Plan for Preservice and Inservice Teachers

Marie Maxwell

Tarrant County College, USA

ABSTRACT

Reading for pleasure, or aesthetic reading, brings about a colossal number of benefits. Only half of Americans can say they read even one book a year for pleasure. The rate of teachers who read for pleasure is approximately the same as the general public. The standards-based approach to education, which resulted in a surge of standards-based testing, has not resulted in a significant improvement in reading teaching or learning for students. In fact, the achievement gap and the plight of the struggling learner has not improved at all. The standards-based testing movement may be partially to blame for the reduction in reading enjoyment. Increasing a love of reading in students can make a significant impact on a student's academic career. The teachers now in the classroom do not have a love a reading to model or pass on to students. Teachers have the power to impact how students feel about reading. As higher education instructors it is time to take actions that will bring about more success for our students and their students.

INTRODUCTION

While avid fiction readers profit greatly from their love of reading, schools are actively hindering students from reaching a love of reading. Multiple studies indicate that avid readers tend to exhibit less bias and prejudice toward others, have greater levels of empathy toward others, have higher verbal skills, vocabulary development and math skills, are more articulate, achieve a higher income bracket, are more informed, score higher on standardized tests, are given more choices in school, live longer and are healthier people. (Mar, 2018; Mumper & Gerrig, 2017; Barden, 2009; Vezzoli et al, 2015; Bavishi et al., 2016; Applegate and Applegate, 2004; Ritchie & Bates, 2013; Sullivan, 2015; Sullivan & Brown, 2015; Nell, 1988a, Nell, 1988b; Krashen, 2004). In addition, the reading of fiction and poetry has been

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found to be successful when used to improve mental health, bring about positive social contact with peers, improve one's self-perception, improve memory and bring about discussion that provides emotional support and increased feelings of enjoyment (Dyer 2010; Cardarelli, 1992; Barden, 2009, Healey et al., 2017). However, schools continue to use teaching strategies that students deem as boring or 'reading dull books' or doing reports that were uninteresting or teachers who 'did not make reading interesting' (Applegate, 2004, p. 560). When schools are actively disengaging students in reading, how are they to develop a love of reading?

Teachers have the power to impact how students feel about reading. As higher education instructors it is time to take actions that will bring about more success for all students. Preservice and inservice teachers must be taught to love reading so that they can pass their love of reading on to their students. It is imperative that math teachers, science teachers and English teachers alike pass a love of reading on to their students. Elementary school teachers and English teachers alone cannot be expected to bring this about (Miller, 2014). Preservice and inservice teachers need to be taught best practices in literacy education, and how to most effectively use read alouds and silent reading time. Finally, all teachers must come to understand how to draw families into the mission to engage all students in reading for pleasure.

Why is this mission to bring about reading for pleasure so important? An amazing longitudinal study started in 1970 by Alice Sullivan and Matt Brown found, "...that those who read books often at age 10 and more than once a week at age 16 gained higher test scores" and that reading for pleasure "...was linked to greater intellectual progress, both for vocabulary, spelling and mathematics" (2015, p 5). This impact was four times higher than the impact of having a parent with a college degree, one of the biggest predictors of student success. Sullivan and Brown went on to say, "those who read for pleasure frequently at age 42 experienced larger vocabulary gains between adolescents and mid-life than those who do not" (2015, p.6) With such extensive evidence pointing to the fact that avid fiction readers fare better, why is it that the Pew Research Center found in 2019 that over one quarter of adults in the United States admit to not reading a single book a year? A March 2018 study by the Pew Research Center found that 24% of Americans surveyed had not read a book in the last 12 months. That means that only one in four adults have read a book in any format (eBook or paper book) in the last year (Perrin & Perrin, 2018). That is 32% of men and 22% of woman admitting that they do not read a single book in a 365-day time period (Perrin, 2021). If, as research shows, people who view themselves as readers make more money and live longer, why is America producing a culture of nonreaders? This is a frightening wake up call for American schools! Avid readers fare better. It is imperative that the American education system produce avid readers!

For years, the rate of illiteracy has been discussed in America. In fact, in 1966 the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) declared that literacy was a basic human right and necessary to take part in society (Keefe & Copeland, 2007). Less researched is the plight of the alliterate. The 2010 Handbook of Reading Disability Research described aliteracy as, "...the form of reading difficulties in which students, though able to read skillfully, choose not to use their reading abilities in school and in out-of-school contexts" (McGill-Franzen & Allington, 2010). Merga (2013) points out that, "Adolescent aliteracy levels are rising as teenagers become increasingly disengaged in recreational book reading" (p. 232). Krashen, in his 2004 book explains that while as a nation we have set ourselves to cure illiteracy, the level of literacy needed to actively engage in our society has skyrocketed. No longer are individuals reading on a second or third grade level, able find adequate employment and actively participate in the highly literate society that has evolved. Krashen goes on to say,

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