
**MODERN AND PRODUCTIVE STRATEGIES ENGLISH TEACHERS CAN USE TO
MAKE READING MORE ENJOYABLE FOR THE STUDENTS WHO DISLIKE
READING**

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Abstract: Reading is undoubtedly one of the biggest challenges English teachers face. Whether they are native teachers working in an English-speaking country, or non-native ones, a great number of them are constantly struggling to get students to read a few paragraphs, when they barely have the patience to watch a ten-minute clip on what they should be reading. With the student having the possibility to access the Internet and find a great deal of information on the literature they are assigned to work on, they no longer feel the need to pick up a book and make the effort of finding it out for themselves. Students nowadays refuse to engage in reading for many reasons. Some of them find reading too time consuming and opt for the “good-old-copy-and-paste” approach when they come across relevant information on literary web pages. Others lean on the information they gather from film adaptations, even if they know it differs greatly from the one they can find reading the original books; and others are petrified of having to read a piece of literature which had been written in a language or style they have difficulties understanding. While it is true that each student is different, most of them have one opinion in common when it comes to reading – it is just not worth it! Most of the time, all they care about is receiving a passing grade, and in order for them to get one, all they have to do is skim through the summary section at *Sparknotes*. When doing so, they produce a “satisfactory” answer to a complex and more demanding question and simplify a segment the author had spent a great deal of time and energy to compose. However, if students look at reading with resentment, it does not mean that teachers should exclude them from participating in the classroom activities and direct their full attention to those few students who beam at the thought of literature. On the contrary, no matter how challenging the task, it is our job as educators to instil motivation and interest and engage uninterested students to participate in the classroom reading activities without them feeling pressurized. In the first part of this paper there will be mentioned several reasons why students refrain from the reading activities as well as some of the reasons why reading is so essential for their intellectual and personal development. Lastly, as the main purpose of this paper, we will look at some of the most effective strategies that could surprisingly have most of the students in the classroom, if not all, discover the excitement of reading. This will be done by selecting some of the strategies that had already been used in the classroom and which have proven to be successful.

Keywords: students, reading, challenges, strategies

1. INTRODUCTION

During my one year of teaching English as a foreign language at a private foreign language centre I have had the chance of working with kindergarten pupils, elementary and secondary students, and even adult learners. Before I started, I had a few thoughts about how teaching a foreign language at a centre would be like – having students who would be willing to learn material beyond the one already given in their public-school textbooks. While all of the above had proven true, it was not always the case with the latter. My objective is to help students achieve excellent marks on their tests at school, but also engage students in participating in free-reading activities which may not be directly related to their receiving such a mark. They, more often than not, have various excuses up their sleeves ready to come out whenever the topic of reading a book comes out. Some of them see reading as a waste of time if it does not contribute to the improving of their mark, without being aware that reading is able to improve them in both personal and intellectual level. Some of them would rather watch a film version of the book they are assigned to read if there is one, while others scan through the summary section of literary web pages such as *Sparknotes* and *Shmoop*. There are many more reasons why students cringe at the thought of reading, but there may be a way for us educators to have students just think about picking up an interesting book from the library. The aim of this paper is to analyse the numerous reasons why some students refrain from reading so much and to provide some useful strategies English teachers could use to help students regard reading as anything but dull.

2. REASONS WHY STUDENTS DISLIKE READING

1. Usually, when teachers have students read a paragraph or even a one-page-long text, they do it. They rarely rebel and they patiently carry out their “duty” until the end, because, as they are used to being said: “You are a student and you should obey!”. While it may be true, and at times beneficial when it comes to behaviour management, it

also tends to lead to the number one reason students dislike reading, and that is simply because they see as reading as something they have to do. When asked about whether they enjoy reading, many of my students answered that they did not mind reading a book if that was going to get them a good mark, but it would be an overstatement to say that they enjoyed it. The educational system incorporates literature books which are meant to be read, understood, and thoroughly analysed. English teachers enthusiastically prepare their lesson plans and number of fun and engaging activities that they could do once students have read the assigned piece of literature. However, when they don't see the same doze of excitement in their students, they ask themselves "Why do my students dislike reading?". As Terry Heick, the founder of a teacher website *TeachThought*, says in his article on *Why So Many Students Dislike Reading*, "We focus on giving kids "tools" and "strategies" to "make" sense of a text. To "take it apart." To look for the "author's purpose"—to bounce back and forth between a main idea, and the details that "support" the main idea, as if the reading is some kind of thing that students happen upon by chance while on some purely academic journey. And we push the illusion of the "otherness" of a text by promoting the lie that they simply need to decode this, recognize that, and analyse that and that and that, and they'll be able to "read"" (Heick, 2019). Unfortunately, students nowadays have grown accustomed to the same instructions each time they are assigned to read and study a book given a specific due date which they should obey. While it is important that they analyse the narrative or a piece of poetry, the thought of having to spend hours searching for crucial information related to characters, plot, or literary devices, takes away the slightest will they had for reading. Furthermore, they feel no connection with what they read. They live in the 21st century, when their everyday lives are not nearly as similar to the ones depicted in the narrative of *The Miserables*. If any student who had not previously been a great fan of literature became an avid reader is because he/she had found something in a certain piece of literature, regardless if it is a classic or contemporary, that appeared relatable to them.

2. Another reason why some students refrain from reading is that they feel they would obtain the same information more quickly by watching a short clip on YouTube about the book they should analyse or a film adaptation, rather than spending a great deal of time and effort finding them out on their own by reading the book. (Lombardi, 2019) Unfortunately, when the film crew produces the motion picture, it does not always capture every part of the source book or even the most important essence of it; so when they narrate its plot at school they are met by the confused teacher saying: "That's not what happened in the book." On the other hand there are some who rarely bother to dedicate an hour or two to watch the film and simply copy and paste the crucial information they can find on literary web sites such as *Sparknotes* or *Shmoop*. As a result of the advanced development of technology, students have grown accustomed to attaining information within a matter of seconds, which makes their life easier and gives them much more time for leisure activities. Books, on the other hand, do not have the same ability, and because of that, they tend to be discarded by students. M. Farouk Radwan, MSc says that "Before the internet age people had to go to libraries to look for information but as information became readily available so many people developed the "I want it now" attitude. Because most books can't deliver information fast so many people started hating books." (Heick, 2019) As an addition to this, their attention span and patience are too short. When they read, especially something they don't enjoy, they tend to "zone out" and let their minds wander off, "getting lost" in the plot. Then, they find themselves irritated going back 5 pages because they had completely forgotten what they had read about. This is because they are used to receiving the information they need in a short period of time thanks to the modern technology – thus, they never developed the habit and patience to look for information themselves. "Modern technology has also helped greatly in reducing people's attention spans and in making them even more impatient. Long ago people weren't bombarded with content like they are today and because of that many grew impatient and lost their ability to stay focused." (Heick, 2019)

3. One of the most common reasons why students, especially the non-native speakers of English, shift in their seats at the mention of reading a book in English is that they are afraid they will not be able to understand the plot. Just the thought of them having to read pages and pages in English with their dictionary by their side and looking up every other word both terrifies and tires them. Another thing both native and non-native speakers of English struggle with understanding is the language style with which the book had been written. While William Shakespeare's works were written in Early Modern English language, even native speakers are struggling to make sense of what is written. That is not only due to the less known version of their mother tongue, but also due to the vast incorporation of various literary devices.

4. Although there are many more reasons as to why students do not read, one of the most common is that they presume they would not have any benefit from it. They would say: "I do not need to read *Crime and Punishment* to understand that killing is not only wrong and punishable by law, but that it also causes detrimental and permanent damage to my conscience". They do not engage in the act of reading because they find it absurd to spend such a long time going through almost 600 pages if they already know the moral of the story, because that is the only thing they

could care about. According to their point of view, they can only benefit from that sole information, which they can easily obtain with one Google search, and not from the reading itself. However, this act of reading can give them so much more than they think. In the next part there will be covered some of the reasons why reading is, in fact, beneficial to them, and how they can be convinced that it is.

3. REASONS WHY READING IS BENEFICIAL

Trying to explain to my students why reading is beneficial for them, I came up with an interesting abbreviation called *CRUMBS*, covering some of the assets of their personal and professional lives which can be improved by reading, whether it is a fiction or non-fiction piece of writing (*Creativity, Reality, Understanding, Motivation, Broadmindedness, Self-confidence*). If students began to look at books as little *CRUMBS* scattered on the ground, they would probably be curious to find out where they lead and where they might take them. Along the way, as they read, they would realize that somehow their *Creativity* had been boosted. But how does reading boost their creativity, and in which real-life situations can they implement it?

1. First of all, as far as fiction books, it is a well-known fact that they give them the opportunity to create their own mental picture about everything that goes on in the narrative. They enter a situation in which they have to engage their brains a little more than they would watching a film. They get a sense of what the surroundings and the characters look like, and they even get in synchronization with their senses – they imagine rain pouring down on them, they hear the snow crunching as the character walks on it, and they smell the mixture of scents from the market place. Some students who were born to be artists can get inspired to produce something based on the book and add their personal touch to it. For instance, students with a talent of painting can extract some of those abstract mental images and turn them into a concrete drawing or painting; and students-musicians can compose their own authentic musical pieces and name them after the book or one of the characters.

2. Another way books can boost the student's creativity is by enriching their vocabulary first. One of the many reasons why school programs incorporate mainly classics is because they are rich in so many captivating words and phrases. It goes without saying that when people incorporate advanced words and phrases every now and then, they are more likely to excel in many areas of their lives. Using such vocabulary, and even book quotes is both refreshing and impressing and it makes everyday conversations a little more interesting. Moreover, there are countless of words and phrases which can be used in debate situations to make arguments stronger. A lot of the words and phrases that we use today were coined by authors themselves. Authors like Shakespeare, Jon Milton, Geoffrey Chaucer, and Edgar Allan Poe coined new words and phrases, because they needed them to capture the nature of a particular situation – much like we do today. Even though creativity isn't measured by how many sophisticated words and phrases students, just knowing that they have a chance at inventing a new word when all of the already existing ones do not capture what they are trying to express, can really sky-rocket their creativity.

The second part of the *CRUMBS* abbreviation covers one of the most important aspect of personal and professional development, and that is *Reality*. When we read a book, we do not engage only with the plot, we are also with familiarizing ourselves with the characters. Not only do we get to know their personalities, but as we read, we also study their relationships with other characters, until we ourselves become a part of their world and vice versa. The characters in the books may be fictional, but most of the time, the stories that take place are based on real-life situations. According to an online blogger Courtney Seiter, "*We can use fiction to explore ideas of change, complex emotions and the unknown. Keith Oatley, an emeritus professor of cognitive psychology at the University of Toronto, proposed to the New York Times that reading produces a kind of reality simulation that "runs on minds of readers just as computer simulations run on computers."* (Seiter, 2018)

The following part is firmly linked to the previous one, and that is *Understanding*; understanding of the characters, the events which revolve around them, even the use of literary devices. Once they understand why the narrative evolves the way that it does, they gain new wisdom for reality; once they understand why characters develop they way they do, they develop a certain empathy for them; and once they gain understanding for the characters' personalities, they can link this information with any use of literary language that is typical for the characters.

When it comes to students reading a book, it takes a great deal of *Motivation*. They need to know exactly why they are supposed to read a specific piece of literature and what they can truly learn from it. But, once this is crossed off the list, they will realise that this is a two way street. This means that just as soon as they gain an external motivation to read just one book, they will see that that book may just be the source of their internal motivation to read another one. The only thing we as educators can do is to procure a little bit of motivation so we can give them a little push and let them take the wheel.

Now that they have gained enough motivation that they have already gone through several books on their own, they will begin to realise that they've reached the next phase of *CRUMBS*, and that is *Broadmindedness*. Needless to say,

broadmindedness is crucial for their intellectual and social development, because it helps to consider multiple options when they are faced with a challenge and “see the bigger picture”.

Finally, once they have gained creativity, a new sense of reality and understanding, and found their inner motivation which lead to their broadmindedness, they realise that reading has lead them greater *Self-confidence*, which is the last part of the *CRUMBS* abbreviation. Knowledge of the world, which they have gained through reading, leads to self-confidence, which is one of the most crucial assets they can use to excel in any field of their lives, be it personal or professional.

In the next and final part of this paper, we will look over some of the modern and efficient strategies which English Teachers can use in their classrooms to make reading more enjoyable for those students who claim to dislike reading. These strategies will help students take baby steps to becoming avid readers, and help them realise that they can truly benefit from reading.

4. MODERN AND PRODUCTIVE STRATEGIES ENGLISH TEACHERS CAN USE TO MAKE READING MORE ENJOYABLE FOR THE STUDENTS WHO DISLIKE READING

1. *‘Show – not tell’ strategy*: One mistake teachers make when they introduce a piece of literature to the students is telling them straightaway what the book is about. Towards the end of my first year as an English teacher I wanted to hold a summer book club where I could gather my students once a week and read a book I had previously obtained. A week before the book club was supposed to commence, I told them that we would read and work on the Mark Twain’s *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*, an abridged version of the original book tailored to their language knowledge. Once I briefly told them what the book was about, showing them a brief clip of one of its film adaptations, I received a fairly positive feedback from them. However, I could not help but wonder where my error was when one week later only one out of my eight students appeared. Having time to research and form the thesis of this paper, I have come to the conclusion that telling them what the book was about right away may not have been the right move. Instead, teachers should strive to show. One way to do this is to show the students a picture of the main scene of the book and have them guess what the book may be about. Once they take the initiative, they will feel more active and more interested. Another way is through games if younger students are supposed to read a fiction book, or by asking young adult students whether they had ever been in a situation, which they will come to know that it is the same one the main character has been in as well. In certain situations, however, it would not be such a wrong move to simply tell the students what the book is about in the very beginning. Books have short summaries at the back which we all read to know what happens and then we decide whether we want to read it or not. However, if teachers do this, they should be enthusiastic about it. The tone of voice is the key to captivating the students’ attention and interest, and one of the best ways to accomplish that is to present each book as the best one they will ever read.

2. *Technology strategy*: Technology plays a big role on today’s modern education, so incorporating a smart board or tablets will most certainly capture their interest for participation. *PBSkids.org* is a website which offers a wide range of different reading games with characters the students are familiar with and *Storyline Online* streams videos featuring celebrated actors reading children’s books alongside creatively produced illustrations. (Cox, 2009-2019a) (*19 Educational Websites to Enhance Students Reading Skills*, 2018) (Cox, 2009-2019b) Some students may even take reading to a new level and create their own short e-book stories. (Cox, 2009-2019c)

3. *Connect fiction with real-life*: Another strategy English teachers can implement to capture the students’ attention and make reading more enjoyable is to convince them that they, contrary to their beliefs, will benefit from reading and extract many important life lessons from reading, even if they are to read a fantasy book with fictional characters and unrealistic events. Regardless of that, characters’ relationships and behaviours are always real and they have a great impact on students’ own personal behaviours and relationships with others.

4. *‘No pressure’ strategy*: Some students enjoy reading, but they always frown when it comes to analysing and presenting to the class. One thing teachers can do is to take away that pressure from students. Students should primarily read a book for the sake of enjoyment rather than for the sake of scholastic objectives. Moreover, when people reach for a book to read, they always look for a comfortable nook they can read at. So do students. If a small cosy reading space in the classroom is all some students wish, than the teachers’ job is to deliver. What they can do is arrange the classroom objects according to the target group. If they work with the younger age groups, they can provide a comfortable furniture or simply some pillows and a colourful carpet on the floor. That way they feel more at home and can enjoy reading much more than they had anticipated.

5. *Background author information*: Students have great interest in celebrities. They are not only interested in their songs, performances or acting, but also in what goes on in their private lives and talk passionately about them whenever they are mentioned. Teachers, on the other hand, consider literary authors as their celebrities and crave

for the moment they can talk about them with their students with the same enthusiasm. If teachers present a few interesting facts about the authors to them, besides their basic information and past whereabouts, students will be more eager to get to know them through their works. For instance, the 50-word book by Dr. Seuss *Green Eggs and Ham* was a product of a bet. The publisher Bennett Cerf bet Theodor Seuss Geisel (aka Dr. Seuss) that Geisel couldn't write a book using only 50 words. Geisel did, and won \$50; and Antoine de Saint-Exupéry was inspired to write *The Little Prince* while stuck in the desert post-plane crash. (Whelan, 2017)

6. If what stands in the way of students enjoying a book so much, especially if they are non-native speakers of English, it is the foreign language barrier. They refuse to pick up a book in English because they will spend most of their time looking up every other word on a dictionary and analyzing unfamiliar grammar tenses, which will drain all their interest in reading, and they will eventually give up. What English teachers can do to soften the blow is to distract them from the task of doing that, and instead choose an illustrated version of the book so they can make sense of the different contexts. According to Horiba & Fletcher, "*Meaning is filtered down from a larger picture view of the text to the smaller units. Words are within a context and unless the context is understood, the meaning of the words may be elusive. It has been found that top-down processing assists L2 readers in their formation of localized text meaning, and that it increases their recall of a text's structure.*" (Horiba, van den Broek, & Fletcher, 1993) (Bedle, 2017)

5. CONCLUSION

It is presumed that the majority of the students detest reading so much for many reasons, that they are thought to never become one of the avid readers. What can be concluded from this paper is that there are not as many students who stay impartial to reading as it is thought there are. The interest in reading can be born in every student as long as teachers and parents/guardians as well find useful ways and strategies. The strategies provided in this paper have been tried in numerous native English and ESL/EFL classrooms. Therefore, if any teacher wishes to make passionate readers out of their students, they need to practice some of these strategies in order to instill motivation and interest. However, there may be students who will not give the expected feedback despite all the efforts teachers and parents/guardians have put into, but the important lesson all teachers can extract is to never exclude them from the classroom activities.

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