

Rearing a READING HABIT

M S SRIDHAR lists out the reading phases of children and gives tips on how to get your child to read more.

A century ago, more than 80% of people were unskilled laborers engaged in manual vocation. But today, a large majority is directly or indirectly engaged in intellectual profession, which presupposes ability to read and the need for life long self-education. Thus, reading is no more restricted to a small cross section of a privileged society. However, reading beyond textbooks and fiction are

crucial for developing a good reading habit.

Apart from improved academic achievements, reading non-fiction develops an inquisitive attitude in students. In children, 8 to 13 years age is considered to be the golden age for developing reading habit as a leisure activity and children in this age show maximum interest in reading as well as visiting libraries. After passing this age, interest in reading fades and relationship with books

vary with motivation to read replaced by other dominating interests like love, adventure, etc. Reading habit is considered as 'passport' to many different new 'worlds' like the world of past, future, technology, nature, outer space, other countries and above all the innermost part of human heart. And in children, if developed in the right age, reading habit remains strong and grows continuously through out life. The talent and interest developed through non-fiction re-

ading is for lifetime and the knowledge acquired and updated through regular reading habit is the source and a way for developing character. In order to inculcate reading habit in children, understanding the five reading phases is necessary.

1) Integral-personal, self-centered starting phase, (2 to 5/6 years) in which child makes little differentiation between the inner and outer worlds, loves reading because of rhythm and sounds with strong plastic power of the ideas.

2) Fairy tale reading age (5 to 8/9 years) of magical realism in which child is primarily susceptible to fantasy though delight in rhythm and rhyme as well as love for poetry continue.

3) Environmental story age (9 to 12 years) of the 'factual' reading in which child starts construction of a realistic, rationally-ordered, practical facade in front of a pseudo-realistically masked adventure-magical background. The child begins to orient himself in the concrete, objective world with frequently adding the questions 'how?' and 'why?' to 'what?'. The interest in fairy tales and sagas is still evident in this age group but the longing for the adventure-some also begins.

4) Adventure story age (12 to 14/15 years) with adventurous realism (or a psychological sensationally-oriented) reading phase. During the pre-adolescent developmental process the child gradually becomes conscious of his won personality. He loosens or undoes previous bonds and displays toughness. In this 'second age of independence and defiance', gang forming predominates the child and the 'devilish child' is often in the foreground with interest in cheap sentimentality and self-adulation. He is interested primarily through plot, events, and sensationalism (and of course with girls). Naturally, adventure books, sensational novels, travel books and trash and cheap sentimental stories are attractive to him.

5) The years of maturity (or the 'literary aesthetic sphere') of reading development age (14 to 17 years) involves discovery of one's own inner world of critical self-centeredness as well as development of a plan for life and scales of values. In this phase, beside plot, form and content are also valued with interest in the outside world replaced or supplemented by participation in the inner world and the world of values. Reading on travel, adventure with more intellectual content, historical novels, biographies, love stories, topical subjects, engaged literature and factual material with vocational preferences is expected in this age group.

Unfortunately, school libraries rarely organise their collection according to above phases. Further, there are four deterministic factors that affect reading habit in children. The first significant factor is the number of books known to the

child. If the child is exposed to more books, it helps him to develop a strong liking for reading. For example, good picture books make children love books much before they can read them. Unfortunately number of such good picture books is declining due to high production cost and price-cutting competitive marketing methods and shrinking markets as each country is trying to develop distinctive style of illustrations.

The second strong factor is the child's language skills. This means, not only books appropriate to the level of language need to be provided but also enough care should be taken to constantly improve the language skills of the child. The third factor which affects reading habit in children is the IQ of the child. Lastly and the least in strength is the occupation of parents (particularly, father). The most important point is that teachers and parents are the role models for children in cultivating reading habit and with little extra care they can effectively overcome such socio-economic barriers affecting reading habit in children.

Some motivations in children to read, as discovered in the past research, are interesting. First and foremost motivation is simply the fun of practicing the newly acquired reading skills, the delight in the intellectual activity and in mastering the mechanical skill. The second is the drive to use and train the intellectual-spiritual aptitudes like fantasy, thought, will, sympathy, the ability to identify, etc. This results in development of aptitudes and expansion of the self.

The third motivation is the need to become acquainted with the world, to enrich one's own ideas and to have intellectual experience resulting in formation of a philosophy of life and understanding the world around us. Lastly, the inner motivations and interests corresponding to definite experience of the child like the delight in encountering familiar thing and people or unfamiliar and new things, the longing to escape reality and live in a world of fantasy, the need for self-assertion, the search for ideas, advice, entertainment, etc. are also important.

Reading aloud leads to perception of stored word groups in two strokes thought units, visually and in pronunciation. It also trains the child to read word by word rather than to grasp thought units and hence results frequently in regression and reading errors.

However, some practice of reading aloud is necessary for speech education and aesthetic experience of literary works. Otherwise, silent reading, which leads to better comprehension, is the basis for individual reading education. Though the reading speed (i.e., broadening the eye fixation span) is important, the quality of comprehension is more important than reading speed. When quality of comprehension improves reading as a 'thought process' is further catalyzed by questioning attitude.

