

The School Library - a Rich Resource in Language Education

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The school library is traditionally seen as responding to, and supportive of, the school curriculum. So apart from having a comprehensive and well-selected collection of material, it is the responsibility of the librarian to alert and inform teachers and students, of new, relevant and useful resources that the library has. However, I would like to add a vital dimension in which the library actually initiates activities and programmes to enrich the curriculum. For the library to perform in this way, there are some pre-requisites:

1. An enlightened and pro-active management
2. A dynamic and user-friendly librarian
3. An involved and open teacher-body
4. A lively and interested student population

All these working as a harmonious team bring about what I call the Open Library. None of these are in watertight compartments. The vibrant presence of even one can bring about change in the other three. The rest is the energy and will to make it work.

Let us examine how the library plays its part in the development and enhancement of language education in schools.

The 'Esquimos' have no word for 'War' :

Language may have begun as a functional tool but it has evolved over time into a complex and sophisticated system for expression of every kind. It is not only a means to convey ideas but also sets us thinking, reflecting and responding. It provides a window to understanding culture, habits and societal norms and is a mirror to evolving trends in a community of peoples. To come alive, language must be heard, spoken, read and written. The strand that weaves all these together is enjoyment, appreciation and a facility in understanding and using it at different levels.

Give every man thy ear and few thy voice :

Apart from having a strong resource collection, which

teachers and students can draw upon, the librarian must meet children of every class at least once a week in a library period. This can be used to initiate many activities in language learning.

Storytelling and reading out are the most popular listening activities. To make this a rich experience, judicious selection of reading material is crucial.

1. Reading out of myths and legends is invaluable for the young child. She comes in contact with language that reflects the history, tradition and natural wealth of a culture.
2. Well-known classical tales of every language can lay the foundation for appreciation and further reading as children get older.
3. Short stories are read out at first; gradually leading to longer books read over a whole term. This brings about an awareness of the different uses of language for each of these genres. The craft of an author lies in using language economically and effectively, as well as in being able to express herself at length, conveying the leisure and subtlety of the language.
4. Stories with different themes give the child a chance to encounter descriptive, narrative or conversational styles in language.
5. Listening to the language of poetry is the best way to introduce it to young children. They are gradually able to see how language can, at times, perform calisthenics and can, at other times, be reflective and very personal.
6. Non-fiction is often forgotten when it comes to reading out to children. But it is a powerful tool where language can be used to inform, discuss, argue, persuade, inspire and even make you laugh!

All these examples of reading out can be extended till the oldest classes. In this way, the learning of the language is getting sharpened and deepened to prepare them for the other requirements of language learning - speaking, reading, and writing.