AN OPEN PAGE

by:
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Looking back at my own journey, I realized that my passion for reading developed through the freedom I had as I grew up. This is where my conviction comes from in believing that reading is a free choice and that no one must be told what to and what not to read. As a reader myself, I had the luxury of choosing whatever I wanted to read. Therefore as a young child, I enjoyed reading – including those that I understood little – because they challenged me to go one step higher. Therefore, today, I am firm that we must never discourage learners to read materials beyond their reading levels.

Reading may be for literary or for informational purposes (Chamberlain, 2008). But no matter what the purpose it serves, experts claim that teachers should allow students the freedom to choose the reading material they want. Combined with the concept of i+1 by Krashen (1988), this will result in the understanding that learners may read beyond their reading levels. Instead of discouraging them, students must be encouraged for a higher level of thinking skills. Reading books beyond their levels will propel this. Students get encouraged when we allow them to read materials that they find interesting, even if it is beyond their reading level.

One might argue that if children or even teenagers read stuff that is difficult for them to comprehend, they might get discouraged by the whole reading process and just stop reading at all. However, with proper guidance extended to the learner who has chosen a complex reading material, teachers can scaffold and facilitate learning (Is it OK, n.d).
Another consideration I have in my claim lies on the proposition of the “reading level myths” proposed by Schwanenflugel and Knapp (2017). These psychology experts debunk three myths on reading level including the claim that each reader has a discreet, accurately measurable level of reading skill. Simply stated, one can never fully determine the reading level of a student or learner. In this regard, one can never determine whether a text is age-appropriate as age is not a determiner of students’ capability to accommodate a text or reading material.

No wonder why a book discussion in The Guardian said that learners like to test pushing themselves outside of their comfort zones and they themselves determine what they can and can’t tolerate in reading (ABitCrazy, 2014). It further claims that children are constantly growing out of the books they read and that they want seeking out for something new and exciting.

Reading level is absurd. Why would a child continue something he/she does not understand? If a child reads something that is not suitable for them, won’t they stop reading and move on to another book which they find more interesting? As a reader myself, I know that readers of any age (or reading level) know what they can and what they want to read (Ness, as cited in Flood, 2012). Again, telling learners what books to and not to read will limit them to move higher and greater heights in reading.

In answering this enduring question at hand, it is important that we consider the varied reading preferences of learners, not ours. These students, who must find enjoyment in reading, have different tastes and needs. Adams (as cited in Flood, 2008), chair of the youth libraries group at Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP), emphasized that we run the risk of having confident readers being put off books that are appropriate to their abilities. Thus, if a learner finds comfort in reading a book - even if it is way beyond what we perceive is appropriate to their levels - we must extend an encouraging hand.
In sum, whether or not reading-level is a myth, the reality that teachers must encourage reading among their learners remains. Teachers must not be prescriptive as they cater to learners with varied abilities and capacities. At the end of the day, whether being told or not, the learners themselves decide what is appropriate for them and what is not.

Learners know. Learners think. Thus, learners read!

References:


Is it OK for kids to read books outside their reading levels? (n.d.) Common Sense Media. Retrieved from https://www.commonsensemedia.org/reading/is-it-ok-for-kids-to-read-books-outside-their-reading-levels