THE MATTHEW EFFECT AND ITS IMPLICATIONS TO YOUNG LEARNERS

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What is the single most important year of an individual’s academic career? The answer isn’t junior of high school or senior college. It’s third grade.

What makes success in third grade so significant? It is because, according to studies, third grade is where students transition from breaking down words using their familiarity with the alphabet into reading to understand and learn. The books children are expected to master are no longer simple primers but fact-filled texts on the solar system, Philippines History, and English stories. Unfortunately, children who are slow-readers from prior grades and haven’t made the transition yet are most likely to get left behind in this grade. For most of them, this gap will only become bigger as they approach higher learning. Moreover, statistics shows that students that are not proficient in reading during their year in third grade are the most likely to end up as a high school dropout.

More often than not, this is the scenario: low-level of reading proficiency in 3rd grade translates to being a fourth-grade slump which would often perpetuate until one loses confidence and becomes a slouch. On the other hand, his or her peers are moving on and becoming extremely knowledgeable.

This phenomenon is what researchers call “The Matthew Effect”. The name is from a Bible verse from the book of Matthew: those who are abundant will have more and those who are poor will have less. In other words, the academically rich get richer and the poor get poorer. But the Matthew Effect can be prevented through well-timed interventions.
Recognizing the importance of this juncture, the Department of Education has been keen. Third graders who aren’t reading at the level they are expected to be don’t get promoted to fourth grade. In paper, this should prevent the learning gap of slow students from snowballing.

However, this resolve could be demeaning for a child and their interest towards education could take a hit. The ideal alternative is for teachers and parents to collaborate on the creation of an individualized learning plan for each third grader who needs help in reading. This plan can include tutoring, summer classes, or specific and personal academic instructions.

Any other way, the Matthew Effect is a real thing that educators need to consider. Interventions are important so as to make sure that no learners are getting left behind.

References: