

READ THROUGH THE HEART OF A SECONDARY SCHOOL READING TEACHER

by:

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How does it feel to be a reading teacher in secondary school after the pandemic?

"It's tough sometimes. I frequently think about my students, their issues, and my lessons while I lay in bed at night."

I've been teaching for over ten years, but after the pandemic, handling struggling readers has become more difficult. Reading gaps existed long before the pandemic. How much more when students stopped face-to-face schooling where they are exposed to everyday reading?

As students return to school, it is critical to evaluate the pandemic's effects on those who might not have improved their reading abilities as much as anticipated. This is so because the development of early literacy skills – the ability to move from learning to read to reading to learn – lays the groundwork for future academic achievement. According to the results of Phil-IRI reading assessments, many students are falling behind on these key skills. Many students fall under frustration level. Unfortunately, some are even really non-readers.

As we undergo remedial in reading, it feels like my effort isn't enough to achieve my goals. There were times I almost wanted to give up, thinking that my students who have reached high school but are still struggling readers is in a hopeless case. Even before the pandemic, there are struggling readers, but it became worst thereafter.

However, when I come face to face with those students, whenever I hear how they pronounce simple words incorrectly, and most especially, whenever I look into their weary eyes, truly my heart melts, and then I close my eyes, take a deep breath, and say “ Alright, I can do this. I have to do this. And this is the engine that keeps me going.

Teaching reading when your students have too many issues which are also the roots of their difficulties isn't an easy job. Well, who cares if they won't learn how to read? After all, I won't lose my job. But I am not only a teacher. I am also a mother. Though they are not my biological child, the responsibility of rearing them as my own is instilled in my heart the moment I took the oath of this teaching profession.

Others might laugh at what I am saying. They might say teaching reading isn't a big issue. What a weak soul you have if you take it as a problem. What kind of teacher are you? Let me answer this through this test.

According to a researcher at Cambridge University, it doesn't matter in what order the letters in a word are, the only important thing is that the first and last letter be in the right place. The rest can be a total mess and you can still read it without a problem. This is because the human mind does not read every letter by itself, but the word as a whole. (<https://www.atimetolaugh.org/humanmind.html>)

If you are an efficient reader, you can read the above paragraph with ease. You can also grasp its meaning though the letters are not correctly arranged because you have mastered reading well. But in the eyes of a non-reader, this can make their world in chaos until they break out and give up.

The same goes for a teacher in a secondary school. Teachers in high school are not trained to teach reading. Our lessons are much different from the lessons in elementary. Yes, we can teach reading but how efficient can we be? DOLCH'S basic sight words, Fuller Method Approach, or whatever method it is, isn't our forte. So just like our struggling

readers, we are in the chaos of what method to use, of where we should start. We are also lost like them.

Elementary teachers are not to blame for this. In my interview with struggling readers and their parents, it's obvious that their prior teachers have done their part well. They have exhausted all their efforts. I am thankful that when students come to us in high school most of them are already readers. Elementary teachers' job is hard because they start from scratch. I guess no matter how they had done all their means, some students stop the moment they stop mentoring. My observation is that some issues need to be resolved first and be taken into consideration. It's just that some students need special help.

The point is, no matter how good a reading teacher is, there should be training for them in handling struggling readers. There should be a specialized program that teachers can use to effectively raise readers from frustration to independent level.

The majority of a reading teacher's instruction will be remedial, even if he/she could get the chance to deal with proficient readers. As a result, the teacher has to spend a lot of time dissecting the various reading skills and honing them one after the other. Teachers frequently begin by teaching their students decoding techniques like letter recognition, letter sounds, and vocabulary memorization so that they can read and process information more quickly, fluidly, and easily. Teachers will assist them in understanding the intricacies in passages, the underlying themes, and subtle wordplay once they have mastered comprehension skills.

Finding reading problems in students who are struggling is a big part of a reading teacher's job. Reading tutors should be taught to search for specific signs that a student is not understanding words the same way that normal students do. Dyslexia is a common reading disability that shows itself as issues with spelling, writing (sometimes flipping letters), and understanding. It is estimated that five to 17 percent of the population is

affected by this illness. Furthermore, it can be challenging to keep their focus while reading or reading teaching because it's estimated that 30% of students with dyslexia also have attention deficit disorder (ADD). But how can teachers determine these problems if there is no training for them, especially at the secondary level?

How does it feel to be a reading teacher in secondary school after the pandemic? Now, it's your turn to answer it. If it feels different from my sentiments, please let me know and I'll be more than willing to consider your best practices.

References: