



**Lead children to reading or tempt them into reading –
or: what is meant by
pedagogy of reading and literary comprehension?**

Barbara Knieling

in:

**Lese(t)räume mit den Büchern von Kirsten Boie –
Literaturpädagogische Vermittlungsmodelle aus der Praxis für die Praxis**

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Translation:

Annette Meyer

Lead children to reading or tempt them into reading – or: what is meant by pedagogy of reading and literary comprehension?¹

Tempt somebody into reading? Isn't this a contradiction in itself?

On the one hand a tempted person may do something against her will but on the other temptation is inevitably connected to being allured and enthused. An avid reader is eager to share his enthusiasm with others even to induce anyone to indulge in the same addiction.

Is that to be called temptation or rather persuasion or even compulsion? Does it depend on the point of view or is it rather a question of the “tempter's” attitude and his motives? What shall be achieved? Is it to make someone compliant or to make him fulfil a duty? Or shall the tempted be enabled to make exceptional experiences, to gain a new point of view, or, to get into reflecting? What is your motivation when you enthusiastically tell someone about a book you have read? And – what is mine?

The French author Daniel Pennac sums up 10 rights of a reader in his book “Comme un roman” published in 1992. The first one is the right not to read. What seems to be a paradox is in fact the key to reading as well as to pedagogy of reading or literacy.

The approach and mode of action meant will be developed in the following.

You can only tempt somebody being curious or expectant and – who has the chance to say “No!”. Accordingly pedagogy of reading and literary comprehension has to grant the approached person the right not to be infected by your passion but to refuse to be.

To perceive reading as an enjoyment

This is one of the most trying tasks for a pedagogue of literacy. Especially as he definitely knows how important reading and writing skills are for the individual education and self-development as well as for social participation. Yet he also is aware that any plea fails its aim, if the intrinsic motivation is missing – when, for example a child must read, must practice although its mind is set on something absolutely different. This describes a dilemma many children and youths, teachers and educators suffer from, a dilemma that is fuelled by the concern of a high number of parents who want their children to be ideally prepared for life.

To learn reading and writing is particularly an essential part of school education. Yet, children not even having attended primary school come under pressure caused by mediocre results of German students at IGLU- and Pisa-Tests. More precisely the pressure is due to the concern not to let them queue up in the number of 7.5 million “functional illiterates”² between 18 and 64 years of age. But to impart reading and experience of literature as a delight is more likely the chance to prevent (functional) illiteracy. Let a child experience to read just because it wants to read – no matter what kind of book or text it goes for. It is precisely this, what pedagogy of reading and literary comprehension understands as its main challenge.

¹ The German headline „Zum Lesen (ver-)führen ...“ plays with the change of denotation of the word ‚führen‘ meaning basically ‚lead (to)‘ by the prefix ‚ver-‘ that expresses an act of temptation or allurement

² Leo.- Level-One Studie. Presseheft. Hamburg, 2011

Stories as Door Openers

It all starts with a good story, the sooner the better. At best the story is told or read aloud. Unfortunately, this kind of ideal situation is not to be found in every family. In the 21st century children get into contact with stories in many different ways and manifestations. Several of them are presented with fixed or moving images embedded in playful interactive activities offering unexpected possibilities of wiping, tipping and playing. What they have in common is their focus on entertainment or instruction, now and then in a successful combination. Yet, there is a significant difference between those medial encounters with stories and story telling or read-alouds that is essential for the later reading competence. Now, what is the reason underlying that difference?

Situations of story telling and reading aloud for children by adults mostly take place casually, just for fun. During this kind of occasion children can experience the undivided attention of someone capable, “a partner along making contact with stories who has already acquired the skills how to attend to literature”³.

Stories and books as a source of pleasure that grant more than one kind of benefit. There are stories that help to understand every day life, stories that help to understand yourself and others. There are non-fiction books giving answers or rather raising questions or even seeking for new answers. There are books that evoke associations and others that intensify knowledge. Some books invite to contemplate and view images or to share your impressions with somebody. Still others can be studied all on your own offering opportunities for memorizing and recapitulation. And not to forget, there are books with plots that just make fun and are highly entertaining. By reading occasions of that kind children acquire the basis of literacy and literary comprehension implying the understanding of fictionality and become able to connect their experiences with acquired knowledge. In short the resulting strategies and competences are highly useful for the next step of reading acquisition and are essential for a successful participation in school education.

From the point of view of a pedagogue of reading the early encounter with stories and books goes beyond that aspect by making children less vulnerable and strengthening the development of their personality – “instead of doing mischief because of mere boredom”⁴ as Marie-Sabine Roger puts these words into the mouth of Germain, a (functional) illiterate in her novel “Das Labyrinth der Wörter”.⁵

Media Diversity Welcome

“Click-Tip-and-Wipe-Children” achieve the strategies mentioned to a smaller extent because their activities have to remain in the limits of the particular program. In contrast to children who are used to listening and settings of reading they not only have to learn the reading technique, parallel they have to achieve the strategies for understanding and reflecting. To prevent any misunderstanding: For pedagogues of reading and literary comprehension this is no matter of either/or using books or digital media than a focus on accompanying children and youths in their individual reading and writing process.

In her article “Lese Freude ist der Schlüssel”⁶ Kirsten Boie specifies pedagogy of reading as a method of support that draws its material from a rich and manifold repertoire. Hence “any kind of media

³ Becker (Hrsg.), 99 neue Lesetipps – Bücher für Grundschul Kinder, Seelze 2012. S. 247

⁴ Roger, Das Labyrinth der Wörter, München 2013, S.77 „... statt aus bloßer Langeweile Dummheiten zu machen.“

⁵ English title: „My Afternoons with Margueritte“

⁶ Enjoying Reading Is The Key

animating reading”⁷ is included. The examples in this book demonstrate that to an impressive extent. Pedagogues of reading and literary comprehension use all these methods and media increasing the attraction of reading because they know that humans mainly read “... because they want to understand and shape the world”⁸ So, for obvious reasons it is an important issue to enable children and youths likewise “to understand and shape the world” by pedagogical reading activities. Thus they can find their way and develop a self-reliant personality, capable of critical thinking.

Reading as a duty destroys the motivation to read

Even children having gone through a period of positive contact with reading during their preliterate phase in their family or kindergarten sometimes experience a break in their relationship to reading in primary school. Unconditioned, voluntary settings of reading resulting in delight for reading situations change into a matter of obligatory exercise: “You have to read.” Daniel Pennac calls this unfortunate aspect a dogma⁹ as futile as the demand “Love me!”¹⁰

Fun converts to duty – quite often to frustration – leading rather to avoiding reading than to delightful reading. But delight exactly is the added value that readers of all ages need if reading is to become an integral part of their self-concept. The underlying question is how reading benefits me personally. Among the various answers possible there are e.g. relaxation, information, entertainment or acquiring knowledge. Accordingly the added value is defined by the individual intention of reading. Making this “added value” recognisable and gratifying to children and youths is a further aim of pedagogy of reading and literary comprehension.

No recipes

That aim cannot be achieved by standardized proposals that often merely focus on a single aspect. On the contrary, the very book with its manifold kinds to affect its readers or even not to – what must be accepted as well – has to be seen as the centre of pedagogy of reading literacy. Aiming to make the occupation with a book to an “encounter with the self”¹¹ which is possible because “...it is not reduced to pre-defined images but evokes singular imaginations”¹² pedagogues of reading and literary comprehension bring elements of other pedagogical approaches into play, e.g. from art, music, play and theatre. Books or stories are not only figuratively taken apart but practically also transformed and assembled in many different manners without any inhibiting awe. Some examples: By following the lingering sound of words children or youths search for a matching soundtrack or compose one of their own. Stories are changed into role-plays or are discussed or become the starting point of experiments of thought. These methods are used with the awareness that solely intrinsic motivated experiences ensure a process of internalization. Pleas of whatever kind do not achieve the desired objective as any librarian, bookseller, parent or teacher wherever know to tell. Far more promising is the direct experience with literature in interaction with attached figures respectively significant others taking the child’s world of experience seriously and not constraining the contact with books and reading. This is an aspect that pedagogy of reading and literary comprehension can take up whereas school education is largely excluded from that way by its fixation on specific results.

⁷ <http://www.bundesverband-lesefoerderung.de/lese-und-literaturpaedagogik/> called up 2014-10-01

⁸ <http://www.bundesverband-lesefoerderung.de/ueber-uns/satzung-und-leitbild/> called up 2014-10-01

⁹ Pennac, *Wie ein Roman*, Köln 1994, S. 69

¹⁰ *ibid.* p.13

¹¹ Kittel, U./ Munzel, F., *Lesen ist wie Wasser in der Wüste*, Freiburg 1992, S.31

¹² *ibid.* S.31

The Principle of Voluntary Reading

Based on a specific book the approaches described thus far allow more intensive conversations, at best leaving their traces in the life of a child or youth on an emotional level. Meaning traces that change non-reading children into voluntary readers because they have found out that you can talk about something you have read as casual as you talk about a film or football results – or because they have discovered that literature offer the chance to understand your fellow man and yourself a little bit better. Self-knowledge and the ability of empathy are two important capabilities for living together successfully whether in the basic unit, the family or a in a school class, a town, a region or in global dimensions. When children make experiences like those presented above pedagogues are simply happy because this only happens when they have succeeded in highlighting the book instead of asking what has been understood. With that kind of attitude they follow Daniel Pennac’s principle of reading as a voluntary act that he not only supports by the right not to read but moreover by the right to say nothing. Thereby we single out another difference to school education.

The overview of projects on different books by Kirsten Boie you find in this book demonstrate a small selection of the potpourri set into action in the work of pedagogues of reading and reading comprehension. We hope that they will lead to more creative ideas to give children a chance they yet have not been granted.

“Auch wenn sie alles dafür taten,
keine Vorurteile zu haben,
waren sie nicht wirklich dagegen gefeit.
Nicht, solange ihnen das Leben noch keine
Chance gegeben hatte, die Vorurteile
durch wirkliche Erfahrungen zu korrigieren”¹³

Is the correction of experiences similar to a temptation? Decide on your own, by letting the ideas in this book inspire you.

You can flip through the brochure at

<http://www.bundesverband-lesefoederung.de/startseite/uebrigens>

or directly at

<http://www.oetinger.de/fileadmin/verlagsgruppe-oetinger.de/Livebooks/Lesetraeume-mit-den-Buechern-von-Kirsten-Boie/index.html>

¹³ Boie, Schwarze Lügen, Hamburg 2014, S.373f. „Even if they did anything not to have any prejudices they were not really immune tot hem. Not as long life hadn’t given them the chance to correct their prejudices by genuine experiences“