



“Less Face and more Book”. Reading as liberation.

“—
| If you want to feed a man one day, give him a fish.
| If you want to feed him all his life,
| teach him to fish.

Kuan-Tseu

—”

I agree very much with the Chinese proverb of the philosopher Kuan-Tseu, Teach him to fish! However, I live in a semi-desert area, in Saltillo, Coahuila, Mexico. So here, among so much xerophilous scrubland in which the most impressive dinosaur skeletons have been found, there is no choice but to look for a metaphorical sea from which to survive.

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Almost 12 years ago, in 2010, I came up with a project called “Less Face and more Book”, in order to lessen the negative influence that social media can have, and presenting reading and writing as the best recreational option: in this project there is a lot of writing and a lot of reading.

So, the students of the Ignacio Zaragoza School, to which I belong, have written more than two thousand books in this project!

I am Imelda Rétiz, a teacher at La Salle Evening Preparatory School. I am sharing with you this reading and writing project, which can be used at any age and in any subject. All

needed is the enthusiasm of both a few committed teachers and the support of some of the school's administrators who share the same ideas.

The project is carried out in each class of the Reading and Writing Workshop or Literature subject, and consists of the following:

1) All sessions start with a moment for reading, any book is perfect. Five minutes timed.

I am convinced that reading provides the greatest tools for growth to those who have access to it. Among other objectives for this first moment is to encourage the habit of reading, as the student should always bring a book to carry out this activity.

Then, we deliver students with a glimpse of letters a broad horizon of ideas as seen through the eyes of writers who have transcended the clock of time. By providing a brief moment in the classroom, students can exercise their memory, vocabulary and spelling. In a few pages read, we give them the possibility of acquiring values such as empathy, or of broadening their perception of culture; perhaps it can serve for recreation or to stir the fibres of their sensitivity. Another option is that this moment of reading may help them to tackle some of their problems through the story of a pleasant author. In addition, those who have access to literature thus improve their oral expression and have an endless number of topics to talk about. As if that were not enough, reading is excellent in providing tools for the study of any subject and making people more critical of any subject. In summary... "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32). Reading is the best way to know the truth. This is not only based on experience. I have taken on the task of doing a scientific research of what I am sharing with you.

To end this moment, a student is given the floor to share what he or she has read. Another variant is to ask the large group for the name of the protagonist, or for everyone to share the place where the story takes place, or the page on which each one is on, a feature of the antagonist, how many pages the book has, what percentage coincides with daily life, whether or not they identify with any character, the period in which it was written, the name of the author, etc. The aim is to make them aware of what they read, as it gives them tools to strengthen their own writing style.

2) Then, a five-minute timed moment is set aside to present one of the most famous authors of all times, accompanied by relevant information about their life, their most outstanding works and some excerpts of their work.

The aim of this part of the class is to provide the student with a range of personalities and styles from which he can draw in order to develop his own.

I have tried to speak with singular enthusiasm about Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, Mary Shelly, Antoine de Saint Exupéry, Gabriel García Márquez and an endless string of interesting writers.

3) Another very important part of the class is to provide a ten-minute timed period for the writing of a micro-story of their own creation.

Writing is achieved through various stimuli presented, such as: projected images to be inspired by them, proper names given beforehand to the characters, providing various creative titles that can be taken up again to write... All these micro-stories are grouped together to form a book at the end of the school year.

It is fascinating to motivate, meet and guide young writers. The amazing stories that come out of their minds are an incentive to keep going. The catharsis that the moment provokes is indescribable. So the 15-17 year olds write about their emotions, loves, desires, repressed experiences, fantasies, frustrations, areas of interest, productive and destructive family relationships, desires for the future... It is enriching to read each of their short stories about whatever the subject is. It is rewarding to return their written work corrected, to learn from their mistakes, to look up what is necessary in order to give good writing advice. And it is very exciting to see the surprised and happy faces of the students who for the first time have a book written by themselves in their hands.

4) The final part of the class, which includes 20 minutes, also timed, consists of dealing with the contents programmed in the dosage proposed for the subject. Here a link is made with the previous moments. For example, on the subject of the use of capital letters, we can use the micro-story that they wrote today and apply the rules. Any topic lends itself to application in everyday writing. Even topics outside the language.

At this point, the routine described above, the timed one, is combined with the creativity that will make this class different from others. Then there can be some dynamics, a plenary to share, brainstorming, mind maps... The end of the class is a meta-cognitive closing: key words of the class, important names or perceived emotions.

The completion of the project involves the presentation of the books. We organise a party! The party of letters! We make it match with 23 April, International Book Day. Mr Armando Fuentes Aguirre, "Catón", a famous chronicler of Santillo and a dear Lasallian, an old student of our school, gives us the opening speech to the acknowledge of almost a thousand spectators, as the parents, friends and grandparents of the new young writers proudly attend.

The party doesn't end there; that's where it begins. The students initially print two books; one of them is kept in the school's Reading Room, where it is read by the rest of the school's students, who identify with its contents. The other copy is given to whoever likes it most in another project entitled "Libros Libres" (Free Books), where we distribute batches of five hundred books around the city, taking the books of our young people along with those of other famous writers free of charge. The books carry a legend that reads: "This is a "Free Book", enjoy it and leave it in a public place for someone else to read. Send your comments to Facebook # Libros libres Prepa CIZ " (Free Books Ignacio Zaragoza Preparatory School) This is another great project that has given us a lot of contentment, as to date we have distributed more than five thousand books in the city.

And the party goes on, because the students who have already been closely guided in the world of reading and writing feel the security of being able to handle these subjects which they can apply in their future professional or educational fields.

The “Less Face, More Book” project has transcended in countless ways, for example:

- We have 12 books for sale on Amazon.
- A book published in France.
- Multiple book presentations on local radio stations and on Radio Guantánamo and Radio Habana in Havana, Cuba.
- We have also participated in dozens of fairs, festivals and workshops and have presented this experience to other Lasallian schools in Mexico and Colombia.

The pandemic time has been difficult. However, we have been able to work almost as normal, online, with remote presentations. The teacher Adrián Vara, from the Morning Preparatory CIZ, has joined in and between us we will publish 250 texts from the boys.

Others have joined in: Colegio La Salle Hermosillo, Mexico, is running this project and also Colegio de La Salle Bogotá, Colombia.

I invite you to opt for letters, to teach your students to fish so that they will never go hungry. There is no better gift you can give them that will last a lifetime. Introduce them to the world of knowledge and give them the opportunity to be self-educated. Remember that all that is required is a teacher who intends to follow the project and a supportive administrator.

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