

READING FICTION WORKS BY TEACHERS - *LOISIR* (LEISURE) AND NECESSITY

Larisa Ileana CASANGIU, PhD
Ovidius University of Constanța, Romania
Mariana NOREL, PhD
Transilvania University of Brașov

”Not having anything around to read is dangerous: you have to content yourself with life itself, and that can lead you to take risks.” (Michel Houellebecq⁶)

Abstract: *The benefits of reading fiction are today unquestionable. Numerous studies show this. Reading fiction can be a form of therapy, a special way to meet and understand others, to develop the empathy, to improve thinking and creativity, to avoid / release stress, to risk less to suffer Alzheimer’s disease, to open one’s mind, to improve capacity of communication, to feel happier, to be more informed, to learn more and more. The extent to which these things happen is variable. What is appropriate for an IT guy or for a lawyer is not usually/necessarily suitable for a teacher. The present article aims to provide some benchmarks regarding books that every teacher should read. At the same time, we will present a taxonomy and an example of the works that a teacher is due to read, both to guide the career beginner to organize their reading, and for those tempted to become teachers.*

Key-words: *must reading; teachers; need; necessity; self-/other’s development.*

Like many specialists working for others, starting from certain books regarded as either canonical or supposedly *sine qua non* for the field they operate in (actors, priests, historians, etc.), the teacher is required to continually use books for both their teaching endeavour, the achievement of their educational objectives, the updating the acquired knowledge, and especially their emotional balance, transforming the time into *loisir* (leisure) and finding the cheapest and most efficient resources to complete the sabbatical year, in the cultural spaces where this is not granted. We speak, therefore, about both the teacher-researcher and the teacher-person, in search of his spiritual fulfillment through the book.

⁶In Romanian.: *Să trăiești fără lectură este periculos; trebuie să te limitezi la viață, și nu e lipsit de riscuri* - Michel Houellebecq, *Platforma*, translated by Emanoil Marcu, Polirom Publishig House, Iași, 2003, p. 82

The reasons why a teacher needs to read are numerous: the need to know the curricular provisions year by year, to know the school textbooks they work with (even though these are mainly student guides, are used with the teacher's support, and the synopsis and use directions are meant for all - teacher, student, tutor), the auxiliaries they use, the supporting texts (some large ones) to which it refers, the innovations in the psycho-pedagogical and teaching field, the recent innovations that take place in the scientific, technological field, and from critical exegesis, the aesthetic transformations of the artistic domain, but also their well-being and emotional comfort.

Taxonomy of Works that a Teacher Should Read

A first category is represented by the "**canonical literature**" for the teacher. This includes the curricular documents (frame plan, school curricula, methodological guides and letters, textbooks, auxiliaries, etc.), but also the integral works which the textbooks supporting texts are parts of (we mainly consider here the disciplines of the *Language and communication* curricular area)⁷.

At the same time, it is also instrumental to find in this category the scientific literature that can innovate certain contents of the taught disciplines, through the discoveries and inventions that require the updating of some technical and scientific fields.

Equally important are the legislative regulations regarding the conduct of the teaching process (*Law of National Education*, various orders of minister, etc.). In this is a series of documents that underpin the implementation of current school curricula, such as *The European Language Portfolio*⁸, especially addressing teachers who teach disciplines in the *Language and communication* curriculum area.

Each teacher active in secondary education⁹ should know the *Documentation of the foundation of the new framework plan for the secondary school* (2016)¹⁰, following *the focus on competences, rethinking the time budget allocated by the student to the learning; adjusting of the curricular offer at the school level and the integrated approach (mono, pluri, trans-disciplinary)*.

At the same time, depending on the level of education the teacher targets, they need to know the *Graduate Training Profile*¹¹, which presents the desirable expectations on the graduate of each cycle of education (preschool, primary, secondary, and high school), in conformity with the cognitive development of the subject of learning, and the curricular and law provisions.

⁷ Obviously, when we deal with parts of literary works (usually, novels).

⁸ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/portfolio>

⁹ Equally, the highschool teacher should know this document, in order to have realistic and updated expectations regarding the vision on the profile of the secondary school graduate.

¹⁰ http://imake.lefo.ro/~laurentiu.bulgaru/wp/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/2.-Document_fundamentare_plan-cadru-gimnaziu_ISE.pdf

¹¹ http://www.ise.ro/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Profilul-de-formare-al-absolventului_final.pdf

With Romania being part of the European Union, it is necessary that the formal education take into account the *Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning (2006/962 / EC)*¹², including *Key Competences for Lifelong Learning - The European Reference Framework*¹³.

By proposing to identify the literary texts which can stimulate the development of the students' literary competences and the conditions allowing it, the *European Literary Framework for Teachers in Secondary Education* project¹⁴, including participants from Romania, presents the *European Framework for Literature European Teachers* and draws up national reading lists for each country in the project, but also international reading lists, for 'Europe', the results being worth noting especially by the Romanian teacher.

A second category is the **books recommended for children**¹⁵, what we call "additional reading", both within optional disciplines and in other activities (school or extra-curricular).

For example, some publishers propose the *Reading Club*, an activity that promotes the reading certain literary works, either on the basis of previous readers' preferences, or by similarity with works that enjoy a wide appreciation, or aiming a certain education of the readers' taste.

Another category is **the studies that facilitate the teaching process**. Because scientific discoveries and inventions are more and more numerous, and technology hypnotically draws attention from the subject of learning, it is necessary to identify ways to make learning contents accessible and their presentation attractive. The student should be properly motivated (medium), preferably intrinsic, stimulated to acquire more and more knowledge, skills and abilities, in a desirable way, pleasant to him and within the reach of the teacher.

Here we find works in the field of psychology, pedagogy, special teaching, various sciences, but also interdisciplinary and motivational studies¹⁶. Some of

¹² <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/RO/TXT/?uri=celex:32006H0962>

¹³ idem

¹⁴ <http://ro.literaryframework.eu/projectinfo.html>

¹⁵ Fairytales, short stories, novels (e.g.: *Billionaire Boy*, by David Walliams; works of Jules Verne, Al. Dumas, Paul Feval etc.)

¹⁶ Studies which facilitate the teaching process:

Botiș Matanie, Adina; Axente, Anca, *Disciplinarea pozitivă sau cum să disciplinezi fără să rănești*, Ed. ASCR & COGNITROM, Cluj-Napoca, 2009; Colceag, Florin; Alexandru, Florin, *Copilul tău este un geniu*, Ed. Tikaboo, București, 2016; Constantin, Theodor, *Johnny Boombă*, Ed. Adevăru Holding, Colecția Adevăru, București, 2008; Dahl, Roald, *Matilda*, [GRUPUL EDITORIAL ART](#), 2016; Faber, Adele; Mazlish, Elaine, *Comunicarea eficientă cu copiii. Acasă și la școală*, Ed. Curtea Veche, București, 2013; Gardner, Howard, *Inteligențe multiple. Noi orizonturi*, Ed. Sigma, București, 2006; Goleman, Daniel, *Inteligența emoțională*, în românește de Irina-Margareta Nistor, Ed. Curtea Veche, București, 2008; Greene, Ross W., *Cum să îmbunătățim disciplina copiilor la școală* (trad.: Roxana Cristian), Ed. Orizonturi, București, 2015; Lanteri, Linda,

them have limited applicability to a certain cultural area, others seem universally valid¹⁷. We subscribe to the *Ten books every teacher should read*¹⁸ recommendation.

The books *en vogue* in the students' world¹⁹ should also be read by the teacher, both to offer a personal example, and to properly motivate them by knowing their preferences.

Any teacher would agree to know **the masterpieces of universal literature**²⁰, both to guide their students' reading and for their general culture. The

Dezvoltarea inteligenței emoționale a copiilor. Tehnici de a cultiva puterea lăuntrică a copiilor, trad. Mihaela-Gabriela Deniz, Curtea Veche Publishing, București, 2017; Petrea, Irina, *Și tu poți fi supernanny 1. Cum să-ți crești copilul*, Ed. Trei, 2012; Law Nolte, Dorothy; Harris, Rachel, *Copiii învață ceea ce trăiesc. Educația care insuflează valori*, Ed. Humanitas, București, 2007; Pânișoară, Ion-Ovidiu, *Profesorul de succes. 59 de principii de pedagogie practică*, Ed. Polirom, Iași, 2009 etc.

¹⁷ For example, to stimulate the student's involvement in their own education by verbal congratulation and hand shake is only allowed in countries such practice is usual. Treating the subject of formation with respect and empathy is a successful practice anywhere.

¹⁸ 1. *Why Don't Students Like School?* by Daniel Willingham; 2. *The Hidden Lives of Learners* by Graham Nuthall; 3. *Trivium 21c* by Martin Robinson; 4. *Embedded Formative Assessment* by Dylan Wiliam; 5. *Seven Myths About Education* by Daisy Christodoulou; 6. *Visible Learning and the Science of How We Learn* by John Hattie and Gregory Yates; 7. *Bringing Words to Life* by Isabel L Beck, Margaret G McKeown and Linda Kucan; 8. *Make It Stick* by Peter C Brown, Henry L Roediger and Mark A McDaniel; 9. *Urban Myths About Learning and Education* by Pedro De Bruyckere, Paul A Kirschner and Casper D Hulshof; 10. *Why Knowledge Matters* by ED Hirsch - <https://www.theguardian.com/teacher-network/2017/aug/15/ten-books-every-teacher-should-read> (accesat: 23.05.2019)

¹⁹ E.g.: Johnson, Pete, *Metode de a învinge plictiseala la școală. Ghidul lui Harvey*, trad. Sorin Petrescu, Ed. Corint Junior, București, 2013; Kinney, Jeff, *Jurnalul unui puști*, trad. Andra Matzal, Ed. Arthur, București, 2010; Renee Russell, Rachel, *Însemnările unei puștoaice. Povestiri dintr-o viață nu chiar atât de fabuloasă*, trad. Matei Sâmișăian, Ed. Arthur, București, 2019; Rowling, J. K., *Harry Potter - GRUPUL EDITORIAL ART*; Leaf, Munro, *Cum să-ți faci viața extraordinară în școala primară. O mulțime de idei grozave pentru a fi isteț, puternic și sănătos*, trad. Julia Gretschi, Ed. Corint Junior, București, 2013; Boucher, Fr., *Cartea care te face să iubești cărțile chiar dacă nu îți place să citești*, Creative Publishing, 2014; seria *Nic Năstrușnic*, by *Francesca Simon*.

²⁰ Examples are many, mainly from early literature, whose reading is still enjoyable today *One Thousand and One Nights*, *The Golden Donkey* (Apuleius), but also books known all over the world: *Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupery, *Idiotul*, *The Brothers Karamazov* by Feodor Dostoievski; *Madame Bovary*, by Gustave Flaubert; *The Complete Works* by William Shakespeare; *Quo vadis*, by Henryk Sienkiewicz, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *War and Peace* by Leo Tolstoy, *Auto da Fé (The Blinding)* by Elias Canetti, *The Human Comedy* by Honoré de Balzac, fiction works by Mircea Eliade, to which one can add contemporary works which, by popularity and sales, are close to this status (e.g.: *The Kite Runner*, 2003, by Khaled Hosseini).

fact that a book stands the test of time (by being read throughout the time), and thus acquires its mastery status, recommends it for discovering the aspects that confer its permanence, but also as a reference artistic product.

The literature required for professional development is needed especially when the professional development of the teacher takes place horizontally (accumulation of new skills and the development of existing ones), and optional, when the professional development of the teacher takes place vertically (acceding in certain hierarchical functions). The first situation, as a rule, includes **the studies that facilitate the teaching process** (discussed above), to which certain recommended materials in specific programs / training modules are being added (if the teacher aims to accumulate professional credits in this way). In the second situation, the teacher is required to read the recommended works for the position they choose to accede to, these works being predominantly legislative /normative²¹.

A teacher should also read a series of **motivational books that contribute to their well-being or emotional health**²², but also to those of the subjects of learning. The mental wear and tear given by repeated explanations on many occasions and year by year, the manifestation of empathy towards their students, as well as the continuous documentation and research, should be countered by activities that can keep an efficient teacher in the system, in proper mental health conditions, but also by their intrinsic motivation. Access to such activities can often be prohibitive, through costs, distance, scarcity, time, etc. That is why the call for such works is preferable and welcome!

In the immediate vicinity of the above category, there is **the loisir (leisure) literature and what we enjoy/induce our delight**²³ consisting of magazines (of any kind), mundane news, hagiographies, daily tips; fiction²⁴ or other works. What we like / enjoy differs from individual to individual, reading being a way of consuming / receiving an artistic product from the cheapest (sometimes even free²⁵), easier to achieve (at your own pace, at individually decided time intervals,

²¹ For example: to know the *opis of documents of the school manager*, the laws which regulate their activity etc.

²² Dyer, Wayne W., *Există o soluție spirituală pentru orice problemă*, trad. Dana Dobre, Ed. Act și Politon, București, 2016; Duhigg, Charles, *Puterea obișnuinței. De ce facem ceea ce facem în viața si în afaceri*, trad. Dan Craciun, Ed. Publica, București, 2016; Newberg, Andrew; Waldman, Mark Robert, *Cuvintele îți modelează creierul. 12 strategii de conversație menite să dea încredere, să aplaneze conflictele și să consolideze intimitatea*, trad. Ioana Schiau, Ed. Curtea Veche, București, 2016; Seligman, Martin, *Optimismul se învață*, Ed. Humanitas, București, 2004

²³ Barthes, Roland, *Plăcerea textului*, in Romanian by Marian Papahagi, Ed. Echinoc, Cluj-Napoca, 1994

²⁴ For example, works of i Osho, Paulo Coelho, Dan Brown etc.

²⁵ By borrowing books from public or virtual libraries, or from acquaintances, by reading free *pdf*, free gifts or promotional books etc.

in various positions, etc.), and generally with positive consequences²⁶, compared to other types of cultural consumption, requiring a certain physical training, travel, high costs²⁷ etc.

Conclusions.

The bibliography a teacher should read is comprehensive, constantly dynamic and open. It is updated as the pace of discoveries and inventions, the changes of vision on the educational ideal, but also according to the evolution of art and individual preferences. Moreover, a series of legislative and methodological norms vector this reading.

We consider that at least the categories identified and exemplified in this article constitute a lasting reference for the teacher's reading delimited by *Loisir (Leisure) and Necessity*.

Beyond the literature I referred to in this study, even following the reading the novel *Matilda*, by Roald Dahl, we appreciate that the eponymous film based on this book (1996, directed by Danny DeVito) presents an achievement worth knowing by any (future) teacher, because, by visual and audible channels, and the exceptional distribution, it leads to much more lasting impressions than the individual representations of the reader (formed by reading). It joins other similar achievements, which will be the subject of a future study.

References

- Barthes, R. (1994). *Plăcerea textului*, în românește de Marian Papahagi. Cluj-Napoca: Ed. Echinox
- <http://jssisdubai.com/Document/Uploaded/Matilda.pdf> (accessed: 19.03.2020)
- <https://open.buffer.com/reading-fiction/> (accessed: 23.05.2019)
- http://www.ise.ro/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Profilul-de-formare-al-absolventului_final.pdf (accessed: 13.03.2020)
- <http://ro.literaryframework.eu/>; (accessed: 19.03.2020)
- <http://ro.literaryframework.eu/literaryframework.html> (accessed: 19.03.2020)
- <http://ro.literaryframework.eu/projectinfo.html>
- <https://www.coe.int/en/web/portfolio> (accessed: 19.03.2020)
- <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/RO/TXT/?uri=celex:32006H0962> (accessed: 19.03.2020)
- <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/RO/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM:c11090> (accessed: 13.03.2020)
- <http://ro.literaryframework.eu/Matrix/show/lower/level1/didactics.html> (accessed: 19.03.2020)

²⁶ We take into account the act of reading from a print, which is not a substitute for other vital activities!

²⁷ For example, attending a show implies a series of expenses further than the mere cost of the ticket.

<http://ro.literaryframework.eu/Matrix/show/lower/level2/didactics.html> (accessed: 19.03.2020)

<http://ro.literaryframework.eu/Matrix/show/lower/level3/didactics.html> (accessed: 19.03.2020)

<http://ro.literaryframework.eu/Matrix/show/lower/level4/didactics.html> (accessed: 19.03.2020)

http://imake.lefo.ro/~laurentiu.bulgaru/wp/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/2.-Document_fundamentare_plan-cadru-gimnaziu_ISE.pdf (accessed: 19.03.2020)

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/language-policy/home>