

## Being Bookish

I was raised in La Trinidad, a town adjacent to the city of Baguio. I grew up primarily without a television, one of the many reasons why I remember printed books as my first best friends. Back then, I didn't realize that books were simultaneously fulfilling a different but far more essential role in my development: books also became my first teachers.

Before I learned to read, I only knew books through my mother. Having her read to me helped me comprehend the importance of human speech: the significance of being able to listen and the value in being able to talk. When I finally did learn to read, having the confidence to do so out loud was my earliest training on debating and public speaking. My foundation of communication, from the most rudimentary expressions of emotion to the most complex interpretations of ideas, all stemmed from those early memories.

Learning to read printed books helped me gain many other crucial skills, such as the improvement of my spelling and penmanship, and the swift expansion of my vocabulary. This growing awareness of language resulted in my appreciation of the distinct value of each word, and my astonishment at how, when put together, words could transform an individual's experiences into an almost collective conscience. To me, this revelation made undeniable the influence of language over emotion and the power of words in spurring people into action.

It is unsurprising then that reading books also resulted in my delight of writing – what I consider to be the exploration of the abstract terrain of my own ideas and emotions, and their inclusion into the concrete territory of words on print.

Needless to say, learning to read changed everything. It equipped me with the tools I needed to better understand the world around me, and to better express the universe inside myself.

Amazingly, all this happened before I had even set foot into a school campus. I realize now that printed books instigated my learning experience earlier than formal education ever did, and developed my brain to have the capacity to learn in ways that was necessary for schooling to be possible. In other words, printed books trained my mind to be able to think and to analyze, to imagine and to create – and this is what I believe should be at the heart of education.

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College ushered in a new era of education in my life – and it came along with a brand new format of instruction: the electronic book. Prior to my university days, I had no exposure to academic e-books. Neither was I familiar with the idea of downloading readings from online sources, or accessing files from digital libraries. These formats were being praised for engaging a new generation of readers, by utilizing technology they were supposedly more familiar with. Along with these praises came the claims of e-books making learning more efficient.

I couldn't claim the same for me, however. After several failed attempts at using electronic means to study for major exams, it became clear to me that I had to be able to read a printed copy of the material I needed to learn before the information would register completely in my mind.

Initially this made me quite curious. After all, essentially both the hard copy and the soft copy of a book contained identical information; why did I seem to be processing them both differently? It took me two years to realize the different reasons why using electronic books made it more difficult for me to really learn what I was reading.

For instance, employing features in e-books such as *Find* made it easier for me to track down a word or phrase in a large volume of text, but it also made it easier for me to disregard in-depth reading or critical thinking. This almost lazy way out to studying isn't something that was beneficial for me in the long run, since it failed to maximize my potential as a student, and reduced the material meant to be studied to a mere collection of facts. Thus, e-books made it easier for me to access information, but not necessarily improved my acquisition and processing of it.

The human mind's capacity to remember information is influenced by a number of external factors that e-books cannot provide. For example, when I read a printed book, the tactile experience creates several markers that make that particular book and its contents unique to my memory. Like how the embossed title of my battered *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* is distinctly different from the plastic-coated letters of my university library's *Introduction to Genetics, 9<sup>th</sup> Edition*. This kind of detail is lost with

e-books, where everything is read from a single source – a laptop, iPad, Kindle or what not – thus making it more difficult for the mind to access external details to aid it in remembering particular information. This is probably why many studies show that the information read from electronic sources does not retain in the mind as long as those that come from printed sources.

In a more practical take on the issue, I believe that e-books cannot be relied on as the new medium for education in the Philippines because it is out of the country's capacity to educate. My recent exposure to a Quezon City public elementary school for my completion of the National Service Training Program showed me that despite the growing popularity of e-books in the higher levels of education, they are still not a viable format for the countless children across the country who cannot obtain even the print version of their text books. How could they utilize e-books – which need expensive electronic devices out of their financial capacity and require amenities such as electricity in order to work – in their studies?

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When I look back now, I realize how much being able to read books at a young age made it possible for me to move towards a better future. I can't help but compare my younger self to the children of the current generation. I think about the kids I met during my NSTP insertions and wonder if it will be harder for them to attain their inherent right to education, simply because they do not have the financial means to do so.

If I was one of them, born in a time when printed books are being considered replaceable by e-books in the pursuit of technological development; a time when cheaper methods to learning are being disposed of by people hungry for the easily accessible - would I be able to ponder and wonder as much as I do?

I think not.