Recreational reading in the elementary school

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Recreational reading in the elementary school

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Abstract
A school librarian is often called upon to talk with groups of teachers and parents, as well as to present the library program to the administration, the school board, and the community. For these talks, more concrete material than, "I think . . .," is needed. The purpose of this project was to gain from wide and varied reading a background that would serve as source material in presenting recreational reading to the above-mentioned groups.

Literally volumes of material have been written on the subject of recreational reading, numerous research studies have been made, and general concern by the public has been stated. The plan was to read from many sources--research studies, textbooks, conference reports, and periodicals-- written by researchers, specialists in the reading field, administrators, and classroom teachers. From this vast wealth of writings, a selective bibliography was chosen, and the findings from these selections were organized into broad divisions that seem to tell the story of recreational reading in the elementary school.

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RECREATIONAL READING IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Submitted in Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Course in
Research
35:299
Department of Library Science

by
Doris Fistler
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C. Greve
INTRODUCTION

A true test of a student's success in reading is not the score on a standardized test but the amount and quality of the books he reads. Our schools spend so much time and money teaching children how to read but give them so little time and so few materials to read. These two statements are not new in educational thought, but they still cause one to give considerable thought to the real purpose of the reading program. Does recreational reading deserve a prominent place in the educational program?

A school librarian is often called upon to talk with groups of teachers and parents, as well as to present the library program to the administration, the school board, and the community. For these talks, more concrete material than, "I think...," is needed. The purpose of this project was to gain from wide and varied reading a background that would serve as source material in presenting recreational reading to the above-mentioned groups.

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The completed project will become *A Primer on Recreational Reading*. 
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DEFINITION OF RECREATIONAL READING

Voluntary reading, free reading, and reading for pleasure are all commonly used to refer to unassigned reading. In this paper, the term "recreational reading" will be used for discussion, but it will not be defined in one clear, concise statement. As mentioned, this type of reading is not assigned; it may or may not have literary merit.

Materials for recreational reading have no absolute grade placements; they are not read by any prescriptive method. The reader may read slowly or rapidly, he may skim, he may reread—all is dependent upon his mood and how the material appeals to him.

Recreational reading is done by a child because he chooses this as a leisure-time activity. It interests him because it satisfies his curiosity, helps him face reality, transports him beyond reality, or maybe for no other reason than as children say, "just 'cause." This reading can be done in any locale under many circumstances. It may be individual, yet it may be shared.
STATUS OF RECREATIONAL READING

Questions are being asked by educators and parents alike. Can children read? Do children and youth read less today than formerly? Are magazines, television, and movies making books obsolete? Has the quality of children's reading deteriorated?

These are difficult questions to answer. Numbers of studies have been made about the reading habits of children. More need to be made. However, statements from research can provide some understanding of the status of recreational reading among young people.

Many children can and do read for enjoyment. Others, for a number of reasons, have not gained the skill in reading that is a prerequisite to enjoying it. Still others can read but do only when they must and find books less enjoyable than other leisure-time activities. If children must be spoken of to mean all children, evidence points to the conclusion that more children are reading today than ever before and that they are reading more books.

Researchers turn to statistics about the number of books published and the number of books borrowed from the library to compare amount of reading done today with that done formerly. There has been a tremendous increase both in the number of new titles of children's books published and in the total volume of juvenile publishing. In 1925, 710 new books
and 318 new editions were published;¹ in 1950, the number had increased to 1,059;² and in 1960, to 1,725.³ The total number of copies of juvenile books produced in 1925 was 25,214,000;⁴ the total number sold in 1967 was 231 million.⁵ Random House publishers reported that in 1960 the sales on Dr. Seuss books alone passed the 2,000,000 mark.⁶

Circulation statistics from public libraries show an increase from about 138,000,000 in 1938-39⁷ to over 162,000,000 in 1950.⁸ The circulation of juvenile books in only four public libraries in Iowa--Council Bluffs, Davenport, Dubuque, and Sioux City--totaled 971,359 in 1960.⁹ With the promotion of school libraries during recent years, it seems reasonable to believe that circulation records, if available, there would show a striking gain also.

⁵Publisher's Weekly, (March 10, 1969), p. 38.
These figures show that more books are available and are being used today, but they do not answer the question about whether a larger number of children read today than formerly or about the quality of reading being done.

Frances Henne, in analyzing studies of students' reading made during the period from 1900 to the early 1940's, found no marked difference in the amount of voluntary reading during the four decades. An extensive survey of the studies since 1940 was summarized by William Gray to show that the general trend that developed before 1920 remained steady three decades later—that the percentage of children who read books voluntarily increases rapidly in the primary and middle grades and approximates 100 per cent in the junior high school. Gray further reports that data summarized during the 1920's indicated that the voluntary reading of grades six, seven, and eight averaged one to two books per month. This figure had not changed radically by the 1940's.

Like the amount of reading done, the pattern and quality of reading does not vary greatly from decade to decade. At all ages, children read more fiction and like it better. Prose is read in preference to poetry. Young readers read increasingly more difficult

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10 Frances Henne, "Preconditional Factors Affecting the Reading of Young People," Graduate Library School, University of Chicago, 1949, p. 76.

children's stories until the junior high period, when they begin to shift from the juvenile story to adult fiction. Recent studies reveal a somewhat larger proportion of non-fiction being read in the primary and intermediate grades. This is probably due to the tremendous increase in the number of informational books being published for younger children.

The approach to the quality of reading may be through the reports on favorite books. Here again, studies cited above conclude that the quality of children's choices is much the same from one decade to another. Children's preferences include some classics, good modern stories, a large number of acceptable but undistinguished titles, and some "trash."

Josette Frank defended children's reading and explained why it appears that fewer children are reading today when she stated:

I venture to say that not only are children reading more today than they did before, but also more children are reading. There is evidence that in some ways they are reading more than their parents did in their childhood, although their reading may not follow the same patterns. They are reading differently—not only different books but many things besides books...The very quantity and diversity of reading matter now available to them including periodicals and paperbacks—good, bad, or neither—has perhaps robbed books of that aura of specialness they had for children of earlier generations.13

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As a nation, America can point to a 98 per cent literacy rate of our population. This is sound evidence that America's children have been taught how to read. However, the reading abilities and habits of the adult population after formal schooling is completed is the crucial test of how well they have been educated to read. Five decades of study into American adult reading habits led to the following general conclusions:

1. Most American adults read newspapers, about two-thirds read magazines, and about one-fourth read books with any regularity.

2. Literate American occupation groups presumed to be able and motivated show their reading to be largely instrumental, i.e. for immediate rewards and goals, and relatively meager in the extent of book reading.


General concern has grown over this problem of establishing personal or recreational reading as a lifetime activity. Conferences have been held, and papers have been written, all pointing up the fact that concentrated efforts are needed on the part of all school personnel, parents, and other influencing agencies to change the reading habits of today's masses—to develop a deeper appreciation of reading.
THE VALUE OF RECREATIONAL READING

Prior to 1940, reading was thought to be to a large extent—skills. Each grade was the place for all students to master certain skills needed for a single textbook study. The primary objective of the reading program was to teach the student how to read. Today, with the emphasis on the individual student and the developmental program, the situation is changing. Many critics point out that young people do not read to any extent and that the quality of material that is read is inferior. The purpose of the reading program then becomes two-fold—teach how to read and what to read.

Ruth Strickland stated, "The quality of an individual's reading is not determined by the degree of mechanical skill he has attained but by the quality of personal satisfaction and enrichment that he finds in the experience of reading." Others in the education field have expressed the same thought in a variety of ways. George Norvell said, "The reading habit based on a love of reading is the most important academic aim of the school, and every activity requiring reading should be appraised in the light of this aim." And John H. Fisher, Dean of


Teacher's College at Columbia University, summed up this whole idea of teaching reading, not only the how but the what, when he said, "We have not really taught him to read unless he reads because he wants to."\(^1\)

The attention now turns to the question, "What is the value of recreational reading?" In discussing reading, Frank Jennings tells what it means to read and what value is to be gained:

Reading is a two-way process between what someone writes, and what someone understands, and the sometimes awful difference between the two. It also involves what happens because of this understanding. The literary experience—for this kind of reading is that above all else—is one of the most profound, mind-shaping experiences in the life of man. It makes it possible for Plato and Christ to instruct us from thousands of years away. It joins minds and times together for the better management of our universe. It is as abstract as the idea of good. It is as precise and as practical as a door latch. It is the golden goad that makes man humane. It is this that we want our children to learn. For it is through the record that others leave to us in fact and fancy that we human beings live so richly in so short a time.\(^1\)

This scholarly statement voices what should be the ultimate objectives of reading instructors, but students have their own values which reading hold for them. Adults tend to think of their own recreational reading as "escape" reading that enables them to escape from routine and responsibilities. Children may read to escape too, but they usually say they read to satisfy curiosity, to laugh, to be surprised, or to enjoy.

\(^1\)Virginia Togler, *The Reading of Youth* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1960), vi.

Rarely does a student question whether his reading meets any developmental needs, but for the benefit of adults who work with children, Charlotte Huck outlined six real values to be derived from children's reading:

1. Enjoyment
   Children should discover the joy of reading just for fun. Reading books should be a natural part of children's lives.

2. Personal-social growth
   Evidence has been secured that voluntary reading aids in understanding self, guiding personal behavior, solving personal problems, and choice of vocation.

3. Satisfaction of the desire for information and intellectual stimulation
   Children are curious about the physical and social world in which they live. The "explosion of knowledge" makes it essential that children read well.

4. Development of appreciation of the art of writing--well-chosen phrase, rich description, and convincing characterization
   Constant exposure to fine writing will be reflected in the children's oral and written expression.

5. Acquaintance with literary heritage and basis for future literary experiences
   Children become acquainted with various forms of literature as well as the body of children's literature which forms a common background in our culture.

6. Development of a permanent reading habit
   This will be the true value. Children must read widely enough to transform a chore into true recreation.19

THE COMPETITION OF COMICS

Of all the printed matter published, probably none has received more criticism, yet wider circulation, than the comic book. Sterling North in his article, "A National Disgrace," Chicago Daily News, May 8, 1940, was one of the first writers to try to arouse the people of America to "break the comic magazine," then selling at the rate of ten million copies each month. His writing on the topic, in which he saw the child the victim of "sex-horror" serials, was widely quoted in schools and churches in all parts of the country.20

Since that time, comics have been rejected by many groups and individuals, including Fredric Werthman, whose writing Seduction of the Innocent accused comics of contributing to juvenile delinquency and asked that all comics be banned. Although Werthman was accused by, among others, Frederic Thrasher, of using comic books as a scapegoat for society's ills and of using the argumentative approach instead of scientific research, his book and the ideas he presented caused many people and organizations, including the United States government, to examine the comic book situation.21

21 Ibid., pp. 195-205.
Educators have been as concerned as sociologists about the spread of comic books, stated to total 100,000,000 copies annual publication in 1960. Not only the social aspect, but also the educational effect has been studied by various people in the field, classroom teachers as well as research specialists.

Maurice Tandler, a teacher in high school in New York City, took the stand that much of the comic book material nourishes the fallacious attitudes and stereotypes of our culture. He listed three misconceptions which comic books present to their readers: 1. Anti-intellectualism, which is presented in attacks upon scientists, often pictured as absent-minded souls, completely divorced from reality, and upon educators, depicted in series such as Archie Andrews to be sissyish or "incompetent old fogies;" 2. Materialism, the materialistic facet of our culture as personified in the Walt Disney character Scrooge McDuck; 3. Jingoism, that pictures war as a game wherein the American never loses.

Paul Witty, one of the early investigators of comic book reading, reported a series of studies of children from grades four through twelve. From time to time, during a ten-year period, 1941-51, Witty and associates made studies such as the one in 1948, when Esther Anderson reported that from 686 pupils, boys and girls together ranked comics first as the type of book they liked to read.

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23 Ibid., pp. 55-56.

During the stated ten-year period, Witty found that children continued to read comic books—perhaps a little more frequently on the average in the later years than at the beginning of the period. Some tendencies in reading habits and attitudes were maintained; for example, the extreme popularity of comics in grades IV, V, and VI, with a gently falling plateau during the rest of the school years. The tendency of boys and girls to like the same comics remained steady as did the larger amount of comics reading of boys as compared with girls. In the early years of publication, the popular comic book was primarily the Superman-Batman type, but gradually a change transpired, and Witty reported in 1954 that the Dell-Disney comics were in first place.25

In an attempt to determine whether or not the reading of comics had any effect on vocabulary growth or reading comprehension. Edith Sperzel tried a six-weeks' study with control groups in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Her conclusions stated that comic books have tremendous appeal for boys and girls in the elementary school. However, the Gates tests given showed that the use of comics in school had no appreciable effect upon the growth in vocabulary or reading comprehension.26

Intelligence seems to be ruled out as a factor in excessive reading of comic books, according to the findings of Florence Heisler, because

25 Ibid.
bright, average, and dull children were all represented in both the comic and non-comic groups in her study. Reading ability and the size of the home library seemed to have no influence either. In her effort to find if children who read comic books to an excess differed from those who did not indulge in this activity, personality was the only area where a difference appeared, and this difference was not significant. Even if this difference were significant, one would have no way of telling whether the more poorly adjusted children were more likely to participate in comic book readings than others or whether the personality difference was the result of comic book reading.27

Still another point of concern to parents and educators is that of "comic books vs. story books." Vera Slover found that 50 per cent of the fourth grade children from a total of 356 boys and girls enjoy story books. She stated that if half of the children at age 9 are reading and enjoying stories, that it is very likely that their tastes will continue to improve as they grow older.28

Only a quarter of the adult population is severely critical of comics for children as determined in 3,000 interviews across the country. Parents of children of reading age and living at home, ages 6-17, are the most interested and the most articulate about comics


for children. To this group, Ruth Strang recommended that they advocate moderation rather than total abstinence for comics. She stated that most good readers preferred story books rather than comics, but that adults should recognize that comics meet the needs of certain children at certain stages of their development.

Twenty years after Strang offered that advice to American parents and educators, Clifford Waite, senior lecturer in English, Nottingham Training College, England, was writing material that is worthy of consideration in this discussion of recreational reading. He suggested being a bit more choosy among comics and to discriminate more exactly. Furthermore, he states:

I feel one cannot make generalizations like, 'Rubbish!—whole lot ought to be banned.' for several seem harmless or even beneficial to children...Clearly, the comics constitute a kind of necessary fodder to their readers. No matter what number of worthwhile books are read and enjoyed over the same period, comics form a reading background all the time. Thus they seem to fulfill some kind of psychological function in bulk, on the one hand, while catering, on the other hand, in subject matter for the specific interests of the groups which read them... and in my estimation also playing an important part in the growth or stagnation of taste. Fodder-type books, of course, play a similar part—all that easy reading on subjects like careers, horses, submarine fights, and secret passages which shares so many features with the shorter yarns in the comics, but which acquires dignity from cardboard covers, and decorated dust jackets, and sometimes from mere length.


And so the debate over comics continues. Carefully chosen comics have a place in the library, according to Anne Prentice, a faculty member of the School of Library Science in Albany, New York. She prescribes them for the non reader, the late elementary or junior high student who is reading well below grade level and for whom a book with more than a hundred pages is too much. As she sets down criteria for selection and suggests titles, she contends, "Blanket commendation of comics is as difficult to justify as is a complete acceptance of any one of the other entertainment media."32

Immediately, Prentice was attacked by Mary Beth McGuff, Children's Librarian, Enoch Pratt Free Public Library, Baltimore, who questioned that comics could fill the "reading gap" and suggested that Prentice's criteria be applied to the selection of hardcover and paperback books.33

Recognizing the power of comics, parents and educators alike will do well to accept the reading of comics and seek to supplement this reading with more worthwhile and satisfying reading experiences. That comics and cartoon-type books are of apparent importance to our public can be evidenced by the fact that the Peanuts books have staggering sales figures. The eight titles published by the end of 1968 had sold over 36 million copies.34


34 Publisher's Weekly, (March 10, 1969), p. 36.
THE PRESENCE OF TELEVISION

TV—that phenomenal communication development of the last twenty years—is persistently popular. Students in elementary schools cannot recall the days before TV; they may talk about "before and after color."

Since TV cannot be escaped in the present day, its effects warrant study. As early as 1949, Thomas Coffin reported that the average amount of time children devoted to televiewing each week was more than twenty-four hours. Since television came to American homes in 1949, it has become a major appliance, a set as essential as the stove or refrigerator, it seems. By the spring of 1950, 43 per cent of the elementary school pupils in the Chicago area reported that they had TV sets at home. In 1959, ninety-nine percent indicated they had TV at home, 31 per cent indicated two TV sets. Paul Witty, widely known for his research in television, quoted the Nielsen report, Television '65, to state, "Currently an estimated 52.6 million American households (excluding Alaska and Hawaii) are equipped with one or more television receivers.""37


Although commercial television is accepted as a normal part of children's living and occupies much of their time, it is not without criticism. Parents and teachers have been skeptical about any positive values that could result from televiewing. Some feel that children do not read because of the time spent in front of the TV set.

In yearly studies between 1949-1957, of approximately 2,000 pupils, their teachers, and their parents, Paul Witty noted there appeared to be a slight drop in the amount of children's reading during the first surveys. After the novelty of the new experience wore off and TV became a part of everyday living, most children reported that they read about the same amount as before TV. Some reported that they read more. Witty and other writers found that TV may cut into time spent on reading the comics but does not seem to affect more serious reading. 38

It is interesting to note that the advent of television became an item of concern in other countries, as well as the United States, and that the conclusions of their research studies are similar to those drawn by our researchers.

In England, in 1954, the Audience Research Department of the BBC suggested to the Nuffield Foundation that it should sponsor an inquiry into the impact of television on children and young people. At that time there were nearly three million television sets installed in fifteen million homes.

The Foundation's report of the extensive study involving 4500 children included the section "Effects on Reading," which showed results for two age groups—10-11 and 13-14 year olds. The main survey indicated that the heavier cuts in book reading were made by the older children (13-14 years); and in both age groups by boys and by children of average intelligence. Those who read fewest books before having television were the most affected by viewing—possibly because they were less interested in reading books they were especially inclined to give them up. There was one exception here—the children of below average intelligence, who read few books before they got television sets and continued to read few afterwards. Understandably, the more children viewed TV, the fewer books they read. Moreover, the girls and the brightest children, who were more interested in books, spent less time viewing and so were doubly protected against encroachment on their reading time.39

These findings are not surprising since there are and always have been some children who have difficulty reading the printed word. These students read only when it's necessary, and naturally they find television a welcome way to enjoy a story or to gain information without reading.

Television has opened new interests, and children turn to books to pursue these further. The response to TV programs is pointed out by

Nancy Larrick stated how children gave the answer to Rudolph Flesch's *Why Johnny Can't Read*, which was published in the same year that Davy Crockett became a TV hero. Larrick wrote:

Within a few days of the first Davy Crockett show, they turned to libraries and bookstores across the country and borrowed or bought almost every Davy Crockett book on the shelves. Library waiting lists grew while the firstcomers read everything they could get their hands on. Nothing was said about books or reading in the Davy Crockett program. Nobody told the children to read. But they knew what books they wanted.

Other TV heroes have sent children to libraries and bookstores on the double. Lassie was one example. Robin Hood was another. The television performances of *Tom Sawyer*, *The Wizard of Oz*, and *Cinderella* created an immediate book demand by the children.

Librarians report that children come to them daily with TV questions: "Do you have a book about astronauts?" This request was from a news program on television. Or: "Do you have a book about nurses and hospitals? That's what I like best on TV."

When a first grader asked for a book about radiation not long ago, his school librarian swallowed hard. "On television they keep talking about it," the child explained.

Of the youngsters questioned in a 1967 survey, about 40 per cent said that television had led them to read certain books.

Turning again to the Nuffield Foundation study in England, it should be noted that librarians in the United States undoubtedly recognize the similar trend for TV to stimulate reading in non-fiction topics. Himelweit reported:

Viewing encourages new interests and reinforces old ones. It can extend the range of children's reading in non-fiction topics: whereas

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the future viewer is disinterested in non-fiction topics, the
experienced viewer becomes unusually interested in them... There
is no evidence that television changes the broad shape of children's
reading interests in fiction. Sometimes, however, it does stimulate
the reading of books it dramatises.41

All of the unfavorable criticism of the effects of television
serves little or no purpose. Rather, as stated by a teacher, Charles
G. Speigler of New York City, "There needs to be a belief that in the
potential of TV, when properly used, to turn out, not a generation of
'vidiots,' but a most broadly-cultured, best-informed and best-read
generation of all time."42

In spite of television, publishers report a constant increase
in the sales of books, and librarians note a greater circulation in
books. With purposeful planning by parents and teachers, this adjunct
to education can become an invaluable aid in the process of learning.

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41 Hilde T. Himmelweit, A.N. Oppenheim, and Pamela Vince, Television
and the Child: An Empirical Study of the Effect of Television on the Young.

42 Charles G. Spiegler, "Johnny and the Big Eye," High Points,
THE ROLE OF THE PARENT

Much of the writing on the role of parents in children's reading development is advisory and inspirational rather than grounded on research. However, clear evidence is shown in the study of reading interests that the type of home is influential in determining the reading habits of older children, and until further studies show evidence to the contrary, parents will be considered, by educators and laymen alike, to be a most influential factor in children's recreational reading.

The findings in the reading readiness study of Millie Almy in 1949 caused her to conclude that "the exposure to reading experiences before first grade and encouragement of reading activities outside of school during the first grade appear to be valuable."^{43}

Nancy Larrick has stated that probably no part of a child's school program is more directly affected by the impact of his non-school world than his reading. How well he reads, what he reads, and how widely he reads will be influenced in part by the guidance he receives from his parents and opportunities which are provided at home. In the

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opening statement of her first edition of A Parent's Guide to Children's Reading, Larrick wrote to parents, "Consciously or unconsciously, you have influenced his reading from the first time he hears, 'This little pig went to market.' She later cautions that even after the child starts to school, it is impossible for the parent to fade out of the picture—that his influence continue whether he plans it that way or not.

Arthur Gates expressed belief in the definite relationship between success in reading and positive influence of the home. When reading is obviously enjoyed and respected by a family, the children tend to become zealous and competent readers; when reading plays little or no part in the home life, children tend to neglect it. The following statement definitely implies the need for parental involvement in reading:

One fact a remedial reading specialist soon discovers as a result of careful case studies is that a pupil whose reading is confined to the instructional periods in school is, with rare exceptions, a retarded reader. The better reading abilities and interests are developed in no small measure in wholehearted absorption in reading, to at least a moderate degree, outside the school and independent of school requirements.

Parents are influential, too, in the choice of reading materials. Thomas Zimmerman, in discussing the effect of comics on juvenile


delinquency, expressed the opinion that the home is the most potent and the most decisive influence of all on children's reading and attitudes and susceptibility to outside influences. Parents who do not own good books nor take the trouble to get books from the library need not blame others for their children's reading interests. By contrast, he said, "the parents who guide reading from an early age can hope to give them interests and discrimination that will see them safely past the lure of crime comics."46

A study to investigate the influence of the home literary environment on a child's independent reading attitude involved forty-eight fourth grade students and their respective homes in a mid-Wisconsin community which had the potential for a wide occupation distribution. Harlan Hansen concluded from his study that home literary environment revealed the only significant contribution to independent reading. The father's occupation and education as well as the child's I.Q. showed no significant relationship.47 Such findings should make parents aware of the need to begin a program for the provision of literary materials and stimulating experience with those materials.

The literary environment in the home was considered by May Hill Arbuthnot in her discussion of children's reading in the home. She


stated:

Even children living in luxury apartments or expensive new suburban houses may not know such homes (filled with books). They may be familiar with built-in ovens, built-in bars, and built-in television sets but not with a shelf for books, built in or not. And hundreds of thousands of children growing up in overcrowded city dwellings not only have never seen a bookshelf in a home but have never known an adult who ever owned a book. For those children there may never be any examples of reading adults in their environment.\(^48\)

A challenge for the parent to be involved in the choice of reading materials is presented by Josette Frank, who made the point that children's librarians can help only if the child comes voluntarily to the library. She assured parents that there could be no question that children must count upon guidance from them in finding the way around in the vast world of books because parents have more opportunity to observe how a child spends his leisure time.\(^49\)

It is frequently pointed out that, for the most part, parents who read are likely to have book reading children. However, some children in reading families have difficulty. Sometimes they cannot measure up because of ability or different interests or other reasons. Parents, as well as other adults, will do well to make many kinds of books available and then guide, not push, each child into his own reading.


THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER

In the evaluation of an education program, the teacher cannot escape playing a leading role. The reading program is no exception, and the recreational reading aspect is no exception. Belief in the two preceding statements is not new in education. J.H. Smart, Supt. of Public Instruction of Indiana in the Twenty-Eighth Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, demanded that teachers develop in children a love for reading. He stated:

It is not enough that our instructors teach children to read. They must cultivate in the children a taste for that which is wholesome. They must introduce their pupils to the best authors. It is not enough that the teacher point to the library...The teacher must go with the pupil to the library and show him what to get, and how to use it after he gets it... I quote from a lecture recently delivered before the teachers of Quincy by Charles Francis Adams, Jr., 'It is the fault of a system which brings a community up in the idea that a poor knowledge of the rudiments of reading, writing, and arithmetic constitutes in itself an education. Now, on the contrary, it seems to me that the true object of all your labors as real teachers, if, indeed, you are such...the great end of the common school system is something more than to teach children to read; it should if it is to accomplish its full missions, also impart to them a love of reading' 50

More recently, in 1933, Leland Jacobs, Professor of Education at Columbia University, made a very exacting statement about the role

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of the teacher in students' recreational reading. He stated positively:

If good books are truly to be enjoyed and relished, how the teacher gets the children and the books together makes the difference between a routine, ordinary, mundane matter of mere book-handling and an exhilarating, distinctive, discriminative contact with literature.51

"A teacher who is herself a non-reader is a significant factor influencing the potential reading habits of young people."52 This statement issued by the Conference on Lifetime Reading Habits summarized the thoughts of participants in the field of teaching, teacher education, libraries, publishing, and creative writing. The discussion of the Conference focused on the experiences of adolescents in the school situation which did or did not appear to lead to adult habits of continued reading. Conclusions reached by the group threw direct responsibility upon the teacher. If a teacher does not read recent publications in his own area of specialization, he is hardly likely to encourage students to read current publications. If a teacher's personal reading material goes nowhere beyond the textbook, he cannot or likely will not guide or support the student who wants to read widely. On the other hand, a teacher to whom reading is important in his own life will bring interest to his classes, at times will read aloud from interesting material, and by power of suggestion and example will entice students to further reading.


Facts that would support those statements of the Conference were revealed in a research study done by Saad Hargrasy in some New Jersey schools. By using a library skills test and a six-week-reading record for students and a questionnaire for teachers, he obtained these results. When a teacher's reading habits and library background were found to be significantly low, his class's reading and library skills were also significantly low. In the same way, where students' reading and library skills were found to be significantly high, the teacher's responses were found to be significantly high. When taken collectively, the five upper teachers were found to be associated with the five upper classes; the three lower teachers associated with the three lower classes.53

The teacher must provide not only motivation and inspiration, but also time to enjoy reading. The Harvard Report on Reading gave this general pattern for recreation reading in the schools studied. Children were permitted to select and read library books only after they had finished their work. The sequence of classroom directions in such a situation usually followed this pattern: "Do your workbook. Do your worksheet. Check your spelling. Have you finished all your work? Read a book." There is no chance for interests and tastes in reading to develop under such conditions. Only the able students will ever get a chance to read. The slower student—and these, too, need a chance to

enjoy reading--will rarely find time to read for pleasure.  

For many students, the teacher may be the only adult who leads them to books. In the discussion of his study of the influence of home literary environment on reading attitude, Harlan Hansen placed responsibility upon teachers to provide for a continuation of the best of the home literary experiences, to attempt to make up for those which have been lacking, and to better understand the problems of the reluctant reader, rather than condemn a child who has no interest in independent reading.

Numerous writers continue to place the teacher in the role of exemplar in much the same way as the following advice:

No matter how skilled the librarian may be or how attractive the school library may be, the teacher has responsibilities that must be assumed if the use of the library is to be a part of the child's lasting education. Perhaps the most important role of the teacher is to play is that of a knowledgeable example. If we teachers do not (or cannot) use our libraries, our children will not. If we don't, they won't.


THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL LIBRARY AND LIBRARIAN

Every child needs a school library. A school library serves every child. These two statements have become public domain for those who promote libraries. However, it is unfortunate that many children are without this service. Statistics in 1958-59 show that more than 10 million pupils in school districts with 150 or more pupils were without the services of a centralized library. Roughly 93 per cent of the teachers in secondary schools were served with school libraries and librarians, but only about 25 per cent of the elementary teachers were served, with wide variations among the states. In 1965, President Johnson reported to Congress that almost 70 per cent of the public elementary schools lacked libraries, while 84 per cent lacked librarians.

In practically all discussions about the teaching of reading today, one can read that a wide variety and an abundance of reading materials for students is necessary. A. Sterl Artley, speaking at the annual State College of Iowa elementary education conference in 1966,


If America's children are to grow through reading, more, better equipped and professionally staffed school libraries are needed... Stop spinning the wheels over the question of teaching phonics and get on with the problems of financing elementary libraries...  

Appropriate reading materials must be accessible if recreational reading is to be encouraged, for children tend to read what they can easily obtain. In a study to determine where teachers can expect the greatest frequency of use of supplementary reading, William Powell declared the basic finding to be that the more immediate access to library material, the greater recreatory reading. He stated further that the implication of this finding is that if recreatory reading periods are provided and encouraged by the classroom teacher and the necessary reading materials are within and a part of the classroom environment, a wider and greater amount of pupil reading will occur.  

Powell's implication that classroom libraries are of prime importance in recreatory reading is a right view but a limited one unless that classroom library is fed from a larger collection. Fred J. Brown, Associate State Superintendent in Instructional Services for the Maryland State Department of Education, in a discussion on classroom libraries, said that the fallacy in the classroom library concept is that any

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60 Statement by A. Sterl Artley at State College of Iowa, Elementary Education Conference, September 24, 1966.

classroom can contain all the materials a teacher and his class will need for a year or a semester. 62

The caution that classroom libraries must rely upon a larger collection of materials is also stated by Robert Whitehead:

No collection should be allowed to remain static; rather titles should be allowed to move in and out of the collection as needs, interests, and topics of study change in the classrooms. A collection that is fixed fails to hold the interest of the readers. 63

Materials are needed, but materials alone are not enough—many books in a classroom are not enough; even they are limited—a library and a librarian are essential. Two studies carried on at the University of Chicago and summarized by Mary Gaver support this. Marietta Monahan found that children with a school library read more and, except for seventh grade girls, read more high-quality books than children with only classroom collections.

A more extensive survey to study the relation of the elementary school library to the reading program was in the form of a longitudinal study by Elizabeth Masterson. Three phases of the program showed the following results: 1. Before establishment of a library, children of average and superior I.Q. were reading below ability; 2. after establishment of a central collection, lower I.Q. children did worse

62 Fred J. Brown, Jr., "Instructional Materials...Use or Abuse," School Libraries, (Summer, 1968), p. 27.

than before, the middle group about the same, and the superior group better; 3. after the third phase, provision of a librarian, children of all levels of ability met or exceeded ability levels. 64

No "non-readers" were reported in a study conducted at Rutgers University. Pairs of schools representing kindergarten through sixth grade and three levels of school library provision--classroom collections only, central collections, and school libraries--were used. The school library pair of schools showed greater gain in educational achievement. "The sixth grade children with a school library included no 'non-readers,' read significantly more books in more interest areas...and fewer comic books than children of the other schools," the summary stated. 65

The program of the school library is unique in that it serves all school personnel "from the kindergartener to the administrator, from the mentally retarded to the gifted." 66 With its balanced collection of materials the library should serve two areas: curriculum enrichment and recreational reading. Because the reading material some child may discover in a science study about astronomy may well become the type of material be chooses to read during his leisure, it is difficult to divorce this curriculum enrichment from the reading for pleasure. Consequently, the school librarian becomes an educational

64Mary Virginia Gaver, "What Research Says About the Teaching of Reading and the Library," The Reading Teacher (December, 1963), pp. 184-86.

65Ibid., p. 187.

force acting upon the child directly or indirectly, as the librarian and teacher co-operate in this program.

In offering curriculum enrichment, the librarian works closely with the teacher and thus, indirectly guides the student. Teachers are often overwhelmed at all they must know to teach in the elementary schools, and good teachers work hard to keep up. Variety in library resources is essential for good teaching. The librarian knows these resources and the curriculum of the school. The teacher knows the individual needs of the students and the curriculum. Together, the librarian and teacher can be sure that Johnny, who is a slow reader, has a book in which he can read about snakes and that Jim, who reads well, can find plenty of material to satisfy his curiosity about the cobra, mentioned briefly in that common source of discussion, the textbook. From the library, the teacher can get materials and guidance in implementing a program in individualized reading, in finding materials on a given topic, or in selecting thirty good books for thirty different interests and a number of abilities.

When giving reading guidance directly to the student, the librarian holds an enviable position. Because the student doesn't need to be concerned about a grade in his library activities, he often works in a relaxed, informal manner. The library is one place where the student is not in a competitive situation. The librarian strives to know the reading ability of each child, especially the slow and accelerated readers, and he knows the books available to the reader.
GUIDING RECREATIONAL READING

The purpose of guiding recreational reading was expressed by May Hill Arbuthnot when she wrote in the preface of her last book:

Books children really love, they will cherish and reread many times. As children grow and change, try to expose them to a healthy variety of books. They are sure they know what they like, but they don't know all the kinds of books they might like if they encountered them.67

In guiding reading for children, the adults—parents, teachers, librarians—have an enormous task. Not only are there scores of individual interests and tastes, but there are also seemingly insurmountable numbers of materials. There is a vast wealth of literature from the past, and there is seemingly an even greater abundance of children's literature of today.

If a reading assignment could be given to the adults who guide children's reading, one required selection could well be Mary Alexander's "Must Children Read in Packs?" The conspiracy she sees is best described in her own words:

Lady librarians, teachers, and children seem to be in a conspiracy—or perhaps I should say two conspiracies, because the adults conspire one way and the children another. The adults conspire to improve the children's 'reading habits,' increase their vocabularies (but slowly, slowly) and introduce them to the best (and safest) writers

at 'their level.' This is all to promote 'a love of books' with never anything shocking, frightening, or even terribly exciting. The children conspire to read books which are all on one subject, or all by one author, preferably in a series, or which someone else has read and approved. Also many children want to be, as they say, 'really scared'—which wish sends them on a search for weird book adventures in wild and frightful places.

The children's conspiracy makes more sense because children know that reading should be fun, that it is fun to read about something you already know a lot about, and that you can read quite difficult material if you are really interested. It is fun to read the books of an author you have tested, and if you are reading a series book, you don't have to break in the characters through those first dull pages.

This is not to say that children do not need guidance in reading, however, but it is a warning to be careful about criticism. "Appreciation for good literature," states Josette Frank, "will grow only at its own pace. We can lead a child to a book, perhaps, but we cannot make him understand or enjoy what he reads. He will do that only when he has matured enough in many other ways besides his reading skill."69

A child should not be criticized if his personal reading material seems too simple. Even if he is in sixth grade, he may read independently at a second or third grade level. Adults choose books for leisure reading that are easy and interesting to read. They cannot relax with material that is too difficult; neither can children.

The same caution may be applied to choice of subject and format of material. The interests and moods of the child may cause his reading

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68Mary Alexander, "Must Children Read in Packs?" Publisher's Weekly, (February 20, 1967), p. 120.

to be rather irregular in quality of content. On this point, Frank said:

No book can be good for everyone. It is not important for the child to know why he reads at all or why he wants certain books at certain times...children's selections may be for the moment guided by a special purpose, perhaps unknown to themselves, and that this purpose deserves our respect and consideration.70

As to format, Sara Fenwick accuses that we have been guilty of putting a premium upon the reading of the book as opposed to reading equally good periodicals, when we should be teaching children to use magazines effectively.71 Everything is in the child's world—comics, adult magazines, newspapers, books—and he needs guidance in the selection of these. Again, Fenwick explains:

The important principle to be recognized here is that a range of difficulty as well as subject and form should be available for recreation choices, since different factors in the reader's environment as well as in his physical and emotional development may be operating at different times. A rich collection of recreational reading materials will span all interests, developmental, environmental, and curriculum oriented. There is no one type of reading matter or subject field that can be identified as more useful than others for reading that is essentially recreational, nor is there any particular merit to be attached to the reading of one type of material as compared to another. That any child's reading should include experience with many kinds of literature is recognized, but does not mean that at any one time there is any more value in reading imaginative writing than informational. In other words, recreational reading is not synonymous with fiction.72

The techniques of reading guidance vary from individual to individual and from group to group. Robert Thorndike advises that no

70Ibid., p. 34.


72Ibid., p.38.
generalization about the reading interests of groups will take the place of a knowledge of the pattern of each individual. Any group trends in interest development should serve merely as a framework for thought about the individual child. For example, between ages 10 to 15, the most conspicuous differences in interest are those between boys and girls. Boys like science, invention, sports, and violent adventure. Girls tend to read stories of home life, romance, and feminine school adventures. This knowledge gives a general idea of interests, but Susie, age 12, is definitely in science. She, as an individual, must have her interests considered if reading is to become a real part in her life. There is no better means of effectively guiding reading for children than by knowing the child, his abilities and interests, by observing his growth, by supplying him with a variety of materials, and by giving him a chance to read.

Reading guidance is limited only by one's own imagination and one's knowledge of the child and of the materials. Various authors include excellent suggestions for reading guidance in their books on children's literature. The following suggestions are made primarily for reading teachers, but many of them could be adapted for parents and other adults:

**Reading aloud.** An effective way to introduce new books or new types of books or to enjoy books with children is by reading aloud. Listening to stories is one of the important ways in which children acquire a rich vocabulary before they can read extensively on their own. Reading aloud give status to good books and can widen reading interests. Shared reading can give to the child literature which he could otherwise not grasp until he is several years older. Books that are read aloud generally should be those which are of the best quality that children do not read for themselves. An exception to this would be made in introducing new books for children's reading. In this case, two or three chapters or some exciting part could be read to arouse interest. A variety of books broadens the reading world of students.  

**Class silent reading.** Robert McCracken prescribes this method of obtaining readers who read willingly and use reading as a part of their lives. He uses the experience of Lyman Hunt, Director of the Reading Center, University of Vermont, to suggest sustained silent reading. The goal is students who voluntarily sustain themselves in a single book for thirty to fifty minutes. This is achieved by a simple edict. The teacher says to his class, "You must select one book, magazine, or newspaper and you must read for ten minutes without interruption. You cannot change books, so choose wisely. You cannot

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talk because that may prevent others from sustaining themselves. You cannot ask me for help because I am going to be reading." When everyone has a book the teacher sets a timer and says, "No one may do anything except read silently until the bell rings." The ten-minute start quickly grows into fifteen, then twenty, then forty minutes of sustained silent reading. McCracken has promoted this method from kindergarten through college and contends, "Students will know that teachers believe reading is important when we give time for practicing reading every school day so that every student student has a time to read silently...and a majority of students will become hooked on the habit of reading for a lifetime, rather than becoming literate adults who rarely use a book again after graduation." 75

**Bulletin Boards and Displays.** Bulletin boards can call attention to new books or present books on a certain subject. Book jackets are colorful but soon lose their effectiveness if they are simply pinned to the board in an uninteresting fashion. Rather they should be presented as a theme—either seasonal or topical. Children like creativity; strive to capture their interest with captions, art figures, colors, and different arrangements.

**Making Authors Real People.** Students tend not to think of the author as a living person, nor should they always be conscious of the

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writer. However, some books can be introduced by interesting the child in the "life" of the book. These are merely examples; each teacher will want to collect his own special bits of interest.

1. Helen Bannerman, living in India with her husband, produced the story of *Little Black Sambo* for her children in England.

2. *The Five Chinese Brothers* was first told by Claire Bishop when she told it to French children in Paris. She decided to write it down when she found the boys and girls in New York City liked it too.

3. During World War I, Hugh Lofting created *Dr. Dolittle* and his crew of animals. When his children back home received a letter from Dad, they could look forward to more of the adventures of the now famous *Doctor*.

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BOOK REPORTS AND RECREATIONAL READING

Students often ask for thin books because book reports have to be written, and they often inquire, "Why do teachers make us write book reports on every book we read?" There is considerable criticism of the use of formal written and oral book reports because the interest in recreational reading may be destroyed by requiring too much reacting and reporting. The emphasis on analysis of every book stifles the child's imagination and kills his interest in reading. We, as adults, would not enjoy a novel if we knew someone was going to give us a comprehension test after we were through reading it. Children feel the same way.

This writer did an extensive study of curriculum guides on file in the Curriculum Laboratory, University of Northern Iowa, for the purpose of determining what type of book reporting schools around the country were requiring from elementary school students. This study, during the summer of 1969, showed a wide range of reports required, both in number and type.

Curriculum guides show diverse thinking on record keeping. One school requires that a record be kept by each pupil of the books he has read during the school year. At the close of the school year, the card is to be inserted in the pupil's cumulative record folder. Another

77Reading Manual-Fourth through Eighth Grade. (Little Lake City School District, Santa Fe Springs, California, 1963).
school eliminates the use of group charts, where each child's record is exposed for others to admire, compare, or criticize. Records of library reading here is to be only on an individual basis.78

To attempt to reach an agreement on whether written book reports encourage or inhibit independent reading and whether or not they help a child to extend his interests and reading skills, educators in the Upper Dublin School District, Fort Washington, Pennsylvania, studied classroom practices. It seemed evident from experience that book reports do not necessarily encourage wide reading, and they advised that READING IS MORE IMPORTANT than writing reports. However, they also felt that book report writing should be taught as a purposeful activity. Children should be taught how to write a good book report, but they should have a valid reason for doing it. Some reasons might be to publish in a class or school newspaper, to post on a bulletin board, or to learn how to write a report.79

Traditional book reports on a standard report form can become very dull unless the teacher plans with the students to improve the quality and method of reporting. Above all, the teacher should keep in mind that the "old-fashioned" method of telling the entire story by each youngster is not necessary. When the book report form is used,

78Developmental Reading Instruction, Reading Service Bulletin, Kindergarten through Grade Six, Part Two. (Kansas City, Missouri: Public School, 1966).

it should be short and designed in such a way that the pupil will give his unique response to a book. Many of the report forms studied by this writer were much too detailed. One should not expect either that a pupil use the same type of report form for a book of fiction that he does for a book of nonfiction or biography.

Recognizing that there may be value in a pupil's learning to record and appraise his reading and at the same time recognizing the need to motivate wide reading, concern remains as to which type of reporting activity is best. The answer, of course, is that there probably is no best way. Jeannette Veatch states, "When reading is good, sharing cannot be prevented. Word of mouth is acknowledged, even by Madison Avenue, to be the most potent advertising medium of all. Children learn about good books by hearing other talk about their favorites." 80

There probably is no best type of reporting activity for all students—this statement bears repeating. Some students may need progress measures to encourage them to continue to the end of a book. Others may need a simple activity that employs his artistic talent. Dramatics and music have a part in reading and reporting too. Paul Witty declared that as pupils share their experiences with books, the teacher may observe and evaluate the effects of books upon them. The

children's response to characters and events as well as their tendency to note details and their ability to communicate their ideas will be readily apparent. 81

What is the purpose of the book review or report? If it is to check on the amount of reading done by a student and to stimulate the reading of this student and others, adults must be sure the book reports assigned are not serving only the first purpose.

CONCLUSIONS

After studying the research reports and views of authorities on reading, as they are presented in the text, this writer presents the following summarization, including the need for further research:

1. Children do read for their own enjoyment—some read many books, some fewer; some read good quality material, some not so good.

2. Most children need motivation and guidance from adults over a long period of time to develop their reading interests and habits, which are formed in early childhood and strengthened and extended as the child matures.

3. Comics and television offer strong competition for books. However, they are here to stay. The challenge to adults is to help children develop the attitude that all media of communication should be used selectively and intelligently for informational and recreational purposes.

4. Parents, teachers, and librarians together, by example and guidance, have the responsibility of giving children experiences in reading that will help them develop an attitude that reading is a pleasurable activity.

5. Every elementary school needs a school library and a school librarian, one who has a sound knowledge of the elementary school program, as well as library techniques.

6. More research studies need to be made:
   a. A nation-wide study of the actual amount of book-reading that occurs among all types of pupils and at various grade levels.
   b. A study of whether the effects of meanings gained through reading change the thinking, attitudes, and behavior would help determine the personal and social value of reading.
   c. Methods of stimulating reading interests have not been thoroughly investigated.
   d. More studies are needed which give specific data about the influence of parents and teachers on reading for pleasure.
   e. Further investigations are needed to determine the contribution of the school library program to the reading achievement for permanent interest of students in the elementary school.
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