

1981

The reading habits of Mesquakie parents

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The reading habits of Mesquakie parents

Abstract

A number of texts used in the teaching of reading discuss factors related to reading readiness, achievement, and attitudes. One of the most significant factors discussed is the home or family environment. Under the broad topic of home or family environment, numerous subcategories are operating. Some of the sub-categories include the socioeconomic background of a family (Artley, 1968); the bilingual/ bicultural background of a family (Allen, 1976); the emotional and psychological state of the family (Harris & Sipay, 1975); and the behavior and attitudes about reading within the family (Karlin, 1978).

THE READING HABITS OF MESQUAKIE PARENTS

A Research Paper

Submitted to

The Department of Curriculum and Instruction

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

by

Linda Benson Tyon

July 10, 1981

This Research Paper by: Linda Benson Tyon

Entitled: The Reading Habits of Mesquakie Parents

has been approved as meeting the research paper requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts in Education.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

A number of texts used in the teaching of reading discuss factors related to reading readiness, achievement, and attitudes. One of the most significant factors discussed is the home or family environment. Under the broad topic of home or family environment, numerous sub-categories are operating. Some of the sub-categories include the socioeconomic background of a family (Artley, 1968); the bilingual/bicultural background of a family (Allen, 1976); the emotional and psychological state of the family (Harris & Sipay, 1975); and the behavior and attitudes about reading within the family (Karlin, 1978).

Reading professionals and teachers suggest to parents strategies which can assist their child in the reading process. Parents are encouraged to provide the emotional and psychological climate conducive to learning. Parents are urged to supply materials which foster or strengthen the student's interest in reading (Gibson & Levin, 1975). And finally, the parents are reminded that they can serve as models by exhibiting positive behavior or conveying positive attitudes toward reading (Grayum, 1954).

Research has demonstrated the influence of home environment on children's attitudes toward reading. The reading habits of a family are part of the home environment. Some families make reading an integral part of their lives, and to others it may have little importance. Being aware of family or parental reading habits in a particular community may provide insights into the reading habits of the children.

Research on the reading interests and habits of mainstream Americans has been extensive. However, minimal research has been conducted among adults or parents in non-mainstream communities, particularly among the Native American populations. To date, the area of reading habits among Native American adults or parent population is unresearched. The purpose of this investigation is to determine the reading habits of a non-mainstream community--the Mesquakie Indian community, located near Tama, Iowa.

Statement of the Problem

What are the reading habits of Mesquakie parents? The questions asked in this study will attempt to establish a general view of how reading enters into the daily lives of the parents surveyed. Questions that need to be answered include:

How often do they read?

What do they read?

Where do they get their reading materials?

Do they read to other family members?

Significance of the Study

According to Fox (1975), there is reason to believe that Native American students generally score less than white students on school achievement tests, especially in the area of reading. It is important for educators of Native American students to consider the factors that may be influencing the student's performance in reading.

This study will provide general information on an aspect of the home environment which is considered an influencing factor in a child's reading readiness, achievement, and attitudes.

Particularly significant is the information revealing parental strengths which can be utilized in meeting the reading needs of Native American students. In addition, any differences revealed in the reading habits of the parents may have implications in attempting to meet the reading needs of the children.

The researcher hopes this study will lead to further examination of the influence of the home environment on reading readiness, achievement, and attitudes of Native American students.

Definition of Terms

Mesquakie: a person who is recognized by the community as a tribal community member or by the criteria established by the Sac and Fox Tribal Council.

Habit: a tendency to perform a pattern of behavior.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The purpose of this investigation is to determine the reading habits of Mesquakie parents. In order to research this area, the reading habits of other adults or parents need to be examined.

American adults do read and their reading habits are diversified. Studies examining their reading habits are extensive. The review of literature will discuss the findings of these studies. The review is divided into three sections: 1) adults' reading habits; 2) parental reading habits; 3) reading habits of a non-mainstream community.

The most recent survey was conducted by Murphy (1980) among 110 adults between the ages of 18-85 who were largely professional people. Murphy found the male respondents reading for self-education and recreation, while the female respondents read mainly for recreational purposes. The mean number of books read for a six-month period was 8.2. Fiction or the novel was the most often read. Adults spent an average of two hours per day reading for pleasure and one and one-half hours per day reading for work-related purposes. Books were obtained from bookstores, loans from friends or relatives, and the library.

Mikulecky's (1979) telephone survey of 284 adults reported that females read for relaxation and enjoyment while the male respondents read in response to job-related matters. Total reading time per day was 158 minutes. Stores were the primary source of books; subscriptions and bookclubs were mentioned as the second source of books.

An extensive survey by Yankelovich, Skelly, and White (1978) on the reading and book purchasing habits of 1,450 adults reported their typical

reader read eight hours per week and within a six-month period read eight books. Substantial numbers of readers acquired their books by borrowing or trading with friends or relatives.

The reading habits of adolescents, college students, and adults were reported by Anders and Cardell (1977). Their adult sample visited the library at least three times a week, and read 312 newspapers, 32.4 news magazines, 21 fiction and 15 non-fiction books per year.

Adult reading habits are often reported in surveys involving library use by the population of a particular town or city. Holmes (1978) interviewed 100 adults in Orem, Utah and reported the number of books read in a six-month period ranged from 0-75. The mean number of books read was 9.958 and the median was 3.969. The main purpose for reading was recreational. The most frequent source of books was the bookstore. Males indicated they read religious books and females reported reading fiction.

The Gallup Organization, Inc. (1976), in examining the role of libraries, conducted at-home interviews with a national sample of 1,561 adults. Their main reason for reading their last book was for their own enjoyment. Nearly half of the respondents read six or more books in the past year. Newspaper reading was the most frequently mentioned kind of reading. Sixty-six percent read a newspaper every day. Books were obtained most often by borrowing from a friend.

Murphy (1973) reported the average person read for almost two hours in a typical day. Most of the time is spent reading newspapers, magazines, books, and job-related materials with newspaper reading as the

most frequent type of reading. General interest magazines most popular were Reader's Digest, Life, and Look. Murphy reported high socioeconomic persons read more than those with lower status. Murphy's study included 5,096 individuals.

An earlier study, different from other surveys in that it included an in-depth interview with some of the respondents, by Ennis (1965) of National Opinion Research Center revealed 55 percent of all its book readers read less than six books in a six-month period.

In analyzing the results of these studies, it is important to keep in mind differences among researchers in their definitions of the average reader, the typical reader, the book reader, the non-book reader, the library user, etc. Definitions as to what constitutes reading may also vary.

The studies examining the reading habits of parents were few. Parental reading habits were briefly discussed by O'Rourke (1979). His study suggested that parents viewed reading as a leisure activity. Thirty-nine percent of the parents obtained their books from the library and 47 percent often made book purchases for themselves. No other quantifiable measures of parental reading habits were given.

Lamme (1977) reported that low-income parents in her study exhibited a variety of reading habits. The parents read aloud to children, or listened to the child read. The parents made up stories to tell their children. Library card ownership was low. Children in the study indicated they saw a family member read, with the newspaper being widely read. Mothers appear to do most of the reading.

The last section of the review is reporting the reading habits of a non-mainstream community. Justin (1974) found 38 percent of the Chicanos read a newspaper every day. Forty-six percent read a magazine about once or twice a week and 19 percent reported reading a book frequently. The study was conducted among Mexican-American high school seniors.

Based on the studies reported, some generalizations can be made about the reading habits of adults:

Adults read primarily for recreational purposes.

An average of eight books were read in a six-month period.

Newspapers, magazines, and books were widely read, especially the newspaper.

Adults read an average of two hours per day.

Fiction is widely read.

Friends, bookstores, and stores were frequent sources of books.

The characteristics outlined provided a basis of comparison from which to view the reading habits of the Mesquakie parents interviewed.

CHAPTER III

PROCEDURES

Sources of Data

The investigator chose to examine the reading habits of the parents of junior high school students. Thirty-two parents were identified and received questionnaires. They were selected and cross-checked from two lists: 1) official 1980-81 school roster of the South Tama County School District listing names of Native American students, parents, and home addresses; 2) student list compiled through the auspices of the Indian Education Committee. Only parents listed or identified as Mesquakie were included in the survey. A total of 30 questionnaires were returned. The investigator was unable to contact one parent and one parent failed to return the questionnaire.

In order to understand why the Mesquakies are a non-mainstream population, a brief description of the community is necessary.

The Iowa roots of the Mesquakie people began in the mid-1800s. Their presence in Iowa has been characterized by little contact with their white neighbors. Currently, there are 650 residents on the Mesquakie Settlement. The 1980-81 school roster lists 250 students. The enrollment is distributed among the schools within the South Tama School District. Some of the lower elementary students attend Sac and Fox (Mesquakie) Day School located on the Settlement.

The members of the community are bilingual, speaking both English and the Mesquakie language. A number of older tribal members may understand English but speak only their native language. Some of the younger children may understand Mesquakie but speak only English.

The community places great emphasis on the preservation of culture and language. Oral traditions are a very important part of the culture.

The language is a written language, utilizing sixteen letters of the English alphabet. The letters are combined to form syllables, each sound in a word is represented by a syllable. Few written materials are available for general use and distribution. Some historical documents exist. Recently, the Indian Education Committee compiled written instructional materials to be used for elementary school age children in a summer enrichment program at the Sac and Fox Day School.

The Mesquakie community is a bilingual/bicultural community with a history of oral traditions. In this respect it differs from many communities in this country.

Method of Gathering Data

In order to determine the reading habits of the parents, it was decided the most practical way to arrive at the responses would be through the use of a questionnaire.

A review of literature indicated that the questionnaire is an appropriate instrument to obtain information on the reading habits of a sample population. A telephone survey was ruled out because a majority of the parents did not have a telephone. A mail survey was not considered because of the low return rate associated with mail surveys. The total number of eligible participants was low. A mail survey would result in a small number of responses from which to make the analysis. A personal interview was not considered because the investigator decided the subjects would be less willing to participate if a personal interview

was essential. Therefore, the questionnaire was hand-delivered and collected the same day or the following day. If the parent was not at home the investigator returned at a later time.

The investigator explained the nature of the study to the participants and a cover letter was included with each questionnaire.

Description of Data-Gathering Instrument

A twenty-four question questionnaire with essentially closed questions was developed to determine the parent's reading habits. The response system was either a yes-no response or a multiple-choice check system. Four questions were open-ended. Questions 1-19 were designed to elicit responses directed at getting information about their reading habits. Questions 20-22 dealt with areas of interest to the researcher. Questions 23 and 24 were demographic. A copy of the questionnaire and letter of introduction are in the Appendices.

The responses were tallied on sheets and reported in percentages.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Results of the most important reasons for reading are reported in Table 1. Of the parents surveyed, 60.9 percent reported recreation or pleasure as the most important reason for reading. Self-education was listed by 21.7 percent of the parents as their most important reason for reading, while work or career-related and school-related reasons totaled 8.7 percent each.

As shown in Table 2, the Mesquakie parent reads an average of 4.3 hours per week for recreational purposes. For work-related matters, he or she reads 2.5 hours per week, and for school-related matters .87 hours per week.

Table 3 shows that 100 percent of the respondents indicated they read a newspaper, with the local papers being the most widely read. Forty-seven percent of the respondents subscribed to a newspaper, with a third of that group subscribing to the Des Moines Register. Seventy percent reported as always reading a newspaper.

With regard to magazines, 97 percent of the respondents read magazines. News magazines were the most widely read, followed by entertainment magazines; health-related magazines were also popular. Forty-three percent of the respondents subscribed to a magazine. Reader's Digest was the most frequently listed magazine subscription.

Eighty-seven percent of the parents indicated that they read books. The number of books read in a six-month period ranged from 0-48. The mean number of books read in the past six months was 6.63; the median

Table 1

Most Important Reason for Reading

| Category | Percentage of Parent Responses |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. Recreational/pleasure | 60.9 |
| 2. Self-education | 21.7 |
| 3. Work or career-related | 8.7 |
| 4. School-related | 8.7 |

Table 2

Weekly Average Reading Time in a Particular Category

| Category | Amount of Time (Hours) |
|-------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Recreation | 4.3 |
| 2. Work-related | 2.5 |
| 3. School-related | .87 |

Table 3

Materials Read by the Respondents

| Types of Material | Percentages of Readers |
|-------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Newspapers | 100 |
| 2. Magazines | 97 |
| 3. Books | 87 |

was 2.83 and the mode was three. Table 4 shows types of books read frequently. Fiction or the novel was the most frequent response for the type of book read. Hobbies, general reference, health and adventure comprised the second group of books frequently mentioned. Some of the book titles listed included best sellers and books pertaining to Native American history or issues. As shown in Table 5, books were generally obtained from a friend or relative. The library was not fully utilized and no one acquired books from a book club.

Parent interactions with family members are shown in Table 6. Reading aloud to family members was reported by 48 percent of the parents. Children were most frequently mentioned as being read to by the parents. Spouses were second.

Sixty-six percent of the respondents told stories to family members. Traditional Mesquakie stories were the most common form of story told.

The majority of the respondents were females with 70 percent. Forty-seven percent of the respondents were between the ages of 41-50. Thirty percent were between the ages of 36-40.

Table 4
Types of Books Read Frequently

| Type of Book | No. | Percentage of Parent Responses |
|---------------------------------|-----|--------------------------------|
| FICTION/NOVEL | 10 | 35.7 |
| ADVENTURE | 7 | 25 |
| HEALTH | 7 | 25 |
| HOBBIES, DO-IT-YOURSELF MANUALS | 7 | 25 |
| GENERAL REFERENCE | 7 | 25 |
| MYSTERY/DETECTIVE | 6 | 21.4 |
| BUSINESS/FINANCIAL | 5 | 17.8 |
| HISTORY | 5 | 17.8 |
| HOMEMAKING OR COOKING | 5 | 17.8 |
| ROMANCE | 4 | 14.2 |
| BIOGRAPHY/AUTOBIOGRAPHY | 3 | 10.7 |
| SCIENCE FICTION | 3 | 10.7 |
| WESTERNS | 3 | 10.7 |
| HUMOR | 2 | 7.1 |
| SCIENCE | 0 | 0 |
| SEX AND/OR MARRIAGE | 0 | 0 |

Table 5

Source of Books

| Source | Percentage |
|-----------------------------------|------------|
| 1. Loan from a Friend or Relative | 50 |
| 2. Grocery Store or Drugstore | 42.3 |
| 3. Discount or Department Store | 30.7 |
| 4. Bookstore | 26.9 |
| 5. Other | 23.0 |
| 6. Tama-Toledo Public Library | 7.6 |
| 7. Book Club | 0 |

Table 6

Parent Interactions with Family Members

| Type of Interaction | Percentage of Parents Engaging in the Interaction |
|---|---|
| 1. Reading Aloud to Family Member | 48 |
| 2. Traditional Story-Telling to Family Members | 66 |

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY

Discussion

The review of literature reported the average or typical subject as a reading person or one who reads. Based on the results of the survey, the Mesquakie parents can also be considered a reading population.

The typical reader surveyed primarily read for recreational purposes. The Mesquakie parent also read for recreational purposes. The Mesquakie respondents were predominantly female and their main reason for reading was recreational. It would be interesting to find out if the men in this population list job-related matters as their main reason for reading.

It is difficult to compare average reading times because surveys are not consistent with the time period being measured. Yankelovich's (1978) typical book reader read eight hours per week. Murphy's average person read for two hours. The Mesquakie parent reads an average of four hours per week for recreation and two and one-half hours per week for work-related matters.

Newspaper readership was high between the average reader and the parent. Magazine readership was evident among those surveyed in America and the parents surveyed.

The mean number of books read in the past six months in Murphy's (1980) survey was 9.958. While Yankelovich's typical reader read eight books in a six-month period, the Mesquakie parent read 6.63 books

in a six-month period. Most readers tend to borrow from a friend or relative, as did the Mesquakie parents.

In terms of interaction with family members, it is interesting to note that more parents are apt to tell stories to family members, rather than reading aloud to them. Furthermore, the stories told by the parents were mainly traditional Mesquakie stories. This information suggests that story-telling may still be a part of the parents' daily lives. More investigation is needed to substantiate this observation.

Some practical implications can be drawn from the results of this study. Realizing the prominence of the newspaper and magazine in the home, the teacher might consider either source as an instructional tool in working with some of the readers from this community. Also, since the results of the survey suggest story-telling is still a part of the culture, teachers can consider utilizing parent or student developed stories in a language experience approach.

Limitations

The researcher is confronted by a serious question. Did her survey reveal how reading fits into the daily lives of this non-mainstream group? In order to obtain this type of picture, a much more in-depth process is needed, either through a more detailed questionnaire or a personal interview. Another question confronts the researcher. Did the questionnaire allow the respondents to reveal any non-mainstreaming reading habits which would differ from the typical American population? Is this non-mainstream population any different than any other populations in its reading habits?

The researcher suggests that if the reading habits of a non-mainstream population are to be examined, the consultation of a sociologist, anthropologist, or a linguist is advised, especially if the Native American group in question has reading materials available in its own native language. Perhaps individuals in these fields can assist in the development of a data-gathering instrument which will reveal a more accurate picture of the reading habits of a non-mainstream population.

Conclusions

A descriptive survey was conducted to determine the reading habits of 30 Mesquakie parents of junior high school students. The following conclusions can be made about the reading habits of the parents:

Reading is a part of their daily lives.

The average junior high school parent reads newspapers, magazines, and books.

Fiction is the most frequent type of book read.

Parents continue to tell stories to family members, particularly traditional Mesquakie stories.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

June , 1981

Dear Parent or Guardian:

As part of my coursework at the University of Northern Iowa, I am doing a survey on the parental reading habits of junior high school students.

It is hoped that the information obtained in this survey will reveal community strengths which can be considered in meeting the reading needs of Native American students.

Individual answers will be kept confidential. If there are any questions about this survey, please contact me at 484-5998. Results of this survey will be available upon request.

I will be collecting your questionnaire on _____,
June _____, 1981.

Thank you,

Linda Benson Tyon
Route 2, Box 59A
Tama, IA 52339

Appendix B

A SURVEY OF THE READING HABITS OF MESQUAKIE PARENTS

1. What is your main reason for reading ? Place (1) beside the most important, (2) next in importance, etc.
 - recreation or pleasure
 - work or career related
 - school related
 - self education
 - other (specify) _____

2. In an average week, how much time do you spend reading ? Please give average hours per week for each category.
 - recreation
 - work
 - school
 - other (specify) _____

3. Do you read a newspaper ?
 - yes no

4. If your answer is yes, please check which paper or papers you read.

| | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Des Moines Register | <input type="checkbox"/> Toledo Chronicle |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cedar Rapids Gazette | <input type="checkbox"/> Tribal Newsletter |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Waterloo Courier | <input type="checkbox"/> Other Tribal newspapers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Marshalltown Republican | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify) _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tama News Herald | |

5. Do you subscribe to a newspaper ?
 - yes no

6. If yes, please list the paper or papers you subscribe to.

7. How often do you read newspapers ?
 - always usually seldom never

8. Do you read magazines ?
yes no
9. If you answer is yes, please check which types of magazines you read.
- | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> news | <input type="checkbox"/> fashion |
| <input type="checkbox"/> entertainment(movies, music, etc.) | <input type="checkbox"/> health |
| <input type="checkbox"/> sports/recreation | <input type="checkbox"/> romance |
| <input type="checkbox"/> family, child care, marriage | <input type="checkbox"/> hobby |
| <input type="checkbox"/> auto & mechanics | <input type="checkbox"/> home/garden |
10. How often do you read magazines ?
always usually seldom never
11. Do you subscribe to any magazines ?
yes no
12. If yes, please list magazine or magazines you subscribe to .

13. Do you read books ?
yes no
14. How many books did you read in the past six months ?

15. What types of books have you read in the past six months ? Please check as many as apply.
- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> hobbies, do-it-yourself manuals | <input type="checkbox"/> romance |
| <input type="checkbox"/> home-making or cooking | <input type="checkbox"/> health |
| <input type="checkbox"/> mystery/detective | <input type="checkbox"/> humor |
| <input type="checkbox"/> science fiction | <input type="checkbox"/> westerns |
| <input type="checkbox"/> general reference | <input type="checkbox"/> history |
| <input type="checkbox"/> sex and/or marriage | <input type="checkbox"/> adventure |
| <input type="checkbox"/> biography/autobiography | <input type="checkbox"/> science |
| <input type="checkbox"/> business/financial | <input type="checkbox"/> fiction or novel(best seller) |

16. Please indicate the title of the last book you read.

17. Remembering the books you read in the last six months, where did you get the books ? Check as many as apply.

loan from a friend or relative bookstore
 grocery store/drugstore book club
 discount store/department store other (specify)
 Tama or Toledo Public Library _____

18. Do you read aloud to family members ?

yes no

19. If yes, who do you read to ?

spouse children parents grandparents
 others (specify) _____

20. Do you tell stories to any family members ?

yes no

21. What kind of stories do you tell ?

Traditional Mesquakie stories
 own original stories
 stories taken from books

22. Do you read any materials written in the Mesquakie language ?

articles
 letters, documents
 other (specify) _____

23. Are you

Male Female

24. Your age, as of your last birthday.

25-30 36-40 51-65
 31-35 41-50 66 or older