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A descriptive study of the use of audiovisual materials to motivate reading in the literature curriculum of the middle school years

Joyce Zarnik
University of Northern Iowa

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Abstract

Recent studies have shown that children spend much more time watching television than they do reading. For thousands of children in the middle school years, the reading of literature is fast becoming the lost art of the affective domain. This paper is a descriptive study of the methods employed by teachers of the middle school to take advantage of the popularity of audiovisual materials to motivate children in the reading of literature.

A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF THE USE OF
AUDIOVISUAL MATERIALS TO MOTIVATE READING
IN THE LITERATURE CURRICULUM OF THE
MIDDLE SCHOOL YEARS

A Research Paper

Submitted to

The Department of Curriculum and Instruction

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirement for the Degree

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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

by

Sr. Joyce Zarnik

July, 1982

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AUDIOVISUAL MATERIALS TO MOTIVATE READING
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Sr. Joyce Zarnik

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

Robert R. Hardman

July 20, 1982
Date Approved

Robert R. Hardman
Director of Research Paper

Mary Nan Aldridge

July 18, 1982
Date Approved

Mary Nan Aldridge
Reader of Research Paper

Date Received

Graduate Faculty Advisor

Roger A. Kueter

July 26, 1982
Date Received

Roger A. Kueter
Head, Department of
Curriculum and Instruction

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1	Introduction	1
Chapter 2	Literature Review	3
Chapter 3	Summary and Conclusions	22
	References	26

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Recent studies have shown that children spend much more time watching television than they do reading. For thousands of children in the middle school years, the reading of literature is fast becoming the lost art of the affective domain. This paper is a descriptive study of the methods employed by teachers of the middle school to take advantage of the popularity of audiovisual materials to motivate children in the reading of literature.

The study will attempt to give the rationale for 1) children's literature as a course of study, 2) the use of audiovisual materials in school, 3) audiovisual materials as a motivational device in the teaching of children's literature.

For the purpose of this investigation the term children's literature will refer to that body of writing which is meant for and geared toward the interests of the child.

The terms audiovisual, audio-visual, instructional materials, and media all mean those materials which are heard and/or seen, plus the instruments which facilitate such activities.

Motivation or to motivate as it is used in this paper

means to awaken the curiosity of the child so that a sense of purpose is stimulated or there is stimulation to become practice.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this investigation is to study the use of audiovisual media as a motivational device in the children's literature curriculum.

This chapter will explore: 1) a rationale for the teaching of children's literature and a criteria by which to evaluate that literature, 2) a rationale for the use of audiovisual materials in the classroom and a criteria by which to evaluate these materials, 3) the use of audiovisual materials in the literature program of the middle school and its impact as a motivational device.

Today there is an abundance of literature written especially for children. Books in Print now lists over 39,000 titles. (Witucke, 1979)

Charlotte Huck defines literature as an imaginative shaping of life and thought into the forms and structures of language. The realm of literature is the human condition; life with its feelings, thoughts, and insights. Literature is not to be read, it is to be experienced. (Huck, 1976)

A well written book can open a whole new world to the reader. One which can be experienced vicariously. Books are not meant to be vehicles of escape, but rather avenues

by which the reader may deepen and broaden emotional and intellectual responses.

Books are no substitute for living, but they can add immeasurably to its richness. When life is absorbing books can enhance our sense of its significance. When life is difficult, they can give a momentary relief from trouble, afford a new insight into our problems or those of others, or provide the rest and refreshment we need. Books have always been a source of information, comfort, and pleasure for people who know how to use them. This is true for children as for adults. (Sutherland, 1977, p. 4)

Pose Lamb has suggested three general goals for the children's literature curriculum: 1) to give pleasure, 2) to acquaint the readers with and help them understand the human condition, and 3) to help them become increasingly selective in their reading. (Lamb, 1977)

Helen Huus in an article dealing with the developing of taste in literature disagrees with Lamb. She contends that the cultivation of good taste in literature need not be taught. (Huus, 1962) She quoted Okerlund stating that literature

....should be offered to meet the particular needs of a particular group of readers at a particular time. The result will then be aesthetic enjoyment, and that is what literature is for. Taste, culture, and similar ends will eventually follow of themselves as by products of reading. (Okerlund, 1934, p. 492)

Perhaps DeBoer stated it most succinctly itemizing the goals for the reading of children's literature as follows:

1) provide leisure time activities, 2) expand the horizons of children in time and space, 3) provide vicar-

ious experience, 4) develop aesthetic sensitivity, and 5) help children to understand themselves and others.

(DeBoer, 1952, pp. 32-39)

Since the literature curriculum is intended to elicit from the child a response to life and eventually, by direct or indirect means, to cultivate good taste in literary selection it would seem important to have a basic criteria by which to evaluate the books to be used in this subject area.

Huck believes that the same criteria used in the evaluation of adult literature can be applied to children's literature. These criteria follow the basic elements of all literature, namely: a well-constructed plot, authentic setting, an over-arching theme which is worth imparting to young people based upon justice and integrity, without being didactic, credible characterization, appropriate style, and an attractive format. (Huck, 1976)

Guilfoile would add two additional elements. She believes that a worthwhile book should also be true to its type, i.e. fantasy should not pose as science or historical fiction pose as biography. Secondly, quality writing should nurture those facets of human nature that are peculiarly childlike. (Guilfoile, 1966)

Obviously, the exposure of children to literature is a worthwhile, multi-faceted endeavor. One that the teacher

should find both challenging and rewarding.

Today we live in an image-conscious generation. It has been estimated that 83 per cent of our learning is through visual experience (Cobun, 1968)

Media today are not superimposed on the lives of children. It is a part of their everyday experience. By the time of graduation, the high school student will have spent 11,000 hours in school and 22,000 hours watching television. (Larrick, 1975) The average elementary school child watches approximately twenty-three hours of television a week. (Singer, 1981)

With statistics such as these media can no longer be considered a fad. Media materials and techniques in the classroom should be an integral part of the school experience. Children come to school to obtain information, to master, skills, to develop appreciations, and to have the opportunity to interact with people and their common environment in appropriate ways. (Kinder, 1973) Audiovisual materials should be among the tools for learning. They make learning less abstract and open new vistas for children, introducing and providing them with new experiences.

The age of media is here to stay. Ninety-six per cent of the homes in the United States have at least one television set. This is a larger per cent than those having indoor bathrooms. (Larrick, 1975)

One educator has gone so far as to say that the use of media can make teenagers want to know more, thereby motivating them to further study. (Lund, 1977) Another educator believes that for the student learning to read the appeals to the senses of printed material seems undramatic and uninteresting compared to the multisensory stimuli of the mass media which in turn can easily woo the student from the printed page. (Cameron, 1970)

With the decrease in the drop-out rate and the percentage increase of total population now in school the number of non-readers has increases. In the case of these non-readers there is not a substitute for an indepth exposure to media other than print. (Kroll, 1977)

David Barber-Smith and Susan Smith Reilly have found that in working with the learning disabled child reading presents a major problem to the majority of these students. For the past two years the audiovisual program at Wordsworth Academy has experienced success using media to encourage student motivation for reading. (Barber-Smith, Reilly, 1979)

Not all opinions of audiovisual media are positive. One librarian believes that most of our electronic media, while providing a kind of essential bombardment of information, tend to tune us out when it comes to new experiences; to tune us out of ourselves and away from others. She also observes that retention is considerably less from non-print

than from print. (Kroll, 1977)

One team of analysts questions whether or not television's program based on a book robs the child of the rewards of personal imagery formation acquired by the reading of that book.

Certainly it seems unlikely that one can get the same vividness and richness of imagery directly from reading that one can get from the immediacy of a television presentation. Nevertheless, the images that have been developed in the mind have been "worked at" with more intensity and are more clearly "one's own." The richness and subtlety of detail presented in reading material is also far greater than what can come through on television. Often, someone who has read a book and has developed extensive sets of images of a private nature is disappointed by the superficiality of a cinematic or television representation of the same story. (Singer, 1981, pp. 132,133)

However, other observations and research tend to show that people generally remember:

- 10 per cent of what they read
- 20 per cent of what they hear
- 30 per cent of what they see
- 50 per cent of what they hear and see
- 70 per cent of what they say
- 90 per cent of what they say as they do a thing

"These figures on the relative importance of various senses to learning and retention (developed at the University of Texas, Industrial Education Department, about 1950 by the late P. J. Phillips) are, of course, only approximations. Yet it is clear that learning and retention are interwoven with the mode of instructional communication used." (Kinder, 1973, p. 39)

There are basically two branches of audiovisual materials. One is the commercially produced material and the other the materials produced by the students as a part of the learning process.

Kinder lists seventeen basic values of well designed and appropriately used instructional media be they professionally or locally produced: 1) concreteness, 2) enrichment, 3) dynamic interest, 4) shows inaccessible processes, materials, events, things, 5) helps us to study changes in time, speed, space, 6) allows all group members to share the common experience, 7) provides experiences varying from concrete to abstract, 8) brings in experts and multiple resources, 9) facilitates changes in attitude and behavior, 10) induces greater acquisition and longer retention of factual material, 12) stimulates interest in voluntary reading, 13) provides objectivity in the study of delicate or controversial subject matter, 14) provides direct contact with the realities of the social and physical environment, 15) available for all ages and ability groups, 16) illustrates and clarifies non-verbal symbols and images as well as various relationships, quantitative, complex, abstract, temporal and spatial, in addition to illustrating and clarifying specific details, 17) they reinforce verbal passages in non-verbal ways. (Kinder, 1973)

However, as Kinder has stated above these basic values

may result only from well designed and appropriately used instructional media. Therefore, it would be well to have some criteria by which to evaluate audiovisual materials.

Media, if appropriately used, will have a direct relationship to a specific objective and be interesting to the students. A well designed work will contain worth-while, authentic, and well expressed material. The technical quality will be satisfactory, i.e. images are clear, narration and dialog are understandable, color, motion, and special effects are authentically and creatively done. (Erickson, 1972)

Freedman would add two other criteria to the list.

1) Does it get the message across? 2) Does it make the best use of the nature of its medium? (Freedman, 1967)

As has been stated, the non-print media now plays a central, pervasive role in people's lives. A study made by Hamilton of 253 seventh grade students showed that they read one hour per day and watched television three hours per day. (Hamilton, 1976) The Gallop Education poll (1977) shows that on the average and regardless of age, United States children spend more time each weekday looking at television than they spend on homework and recreational reading combined. It seems the time has come for reading teachers to stop denying television's existence, and instead harness this popular medium to the goal of bringing together children and

books. The use of media should be considered an avenue through which print can become more attractive and more meaningful to the student. "Through audiovisual materials pupils obtain new literary experiences or experiences which supplement or reinforce their reading. Now it is possible for a child to be bombarded with an idea or a plot or an image from half a dozen different directions." (Smith, 1967, p. 54)

Many educators and librarians believe that audiovisual materials should complement rather than substitute for the book on which it is based. (Glazer, 1977) (Kroll, 1977)

As has been stated before there are basically two categories of instructional media: 1) commercially produced and 2) locally produced. The commercially produced materials largely are films, motion and 35mm, television, records, and magnetic tapes.

Defining the place of film in the curriculum, McLaren says,

a film can do things that cannot be done as easily or as effectively with any other type of instructional media. A good film is a many-dimensional experience. Like any other good device it should lead to inquiry; it should excite creativity. (McLaren, 1979, p.47)

Morton Schindel, through his observations at a story hour and conversations with librarians, became convinced that sound films made from books might be useful for story sessions involving large groups of children. (Glazer, 1979)

In the classroom film usage must be connected to curriculum support and accountability. We must remember that visual media today are not superimposed on the lives of children. They are a part of these youngsters everyday experiences. Therefore, visual media are not aids to anything. They should not be used as an escape. They are and should be ways of discovery. (McLaren, 1979)

No other medium has such unquestionable appeal for children of all ages, in all socioeconomic groups, and in all geographical settings as television, commercial and instructional. The Hamilton study of seventh grade boys and girls showed that for every 33 books the students freely chose to read, 23 of them were linked to televised programs. This study further showed that children will read when their interests are stirred. This idea of television related books can be the bridge to reading. (Hamilton, 1976)

Tie-ins to television can take one of several different forms: 1) books on which television shows are based, 2) books taken from original television stories, 3) books about celebrities or specific programs aired on television, 4) books about the ways that television programs are developed, 5) books which are about subjects treated in television programs. (Potter, 1981)

All three commercial television networks now officially recognized the television-print relationship. NBC produces

its book-based "Special Treat" series. At the end of the show the actress or actor appears to talk briefly about the book from which the show was adapted.

ABC produces the "Afterschool Specials," and the "Weekend Specials," both of which are adapted from books. To alert teachers and librarians to these tie-ins they also publish a book and poster sets containing biographical materials about the authors, synopses of the stories, and lists of related books suggested by the American Library Association.

CBS promotes the "Read More About It" project. A lead performer from a specially selected program appears at the end of the broadcast to alert viewers to books related to that program. (Potter, 1981)

Now Instructional Television (ITV) is using this popular and trusted medium to lure children to the bookselves. Here in Iowa the Public Broadcasting System airs an instructional television program based on literature for every grade level from kindergarten to senior high school.

There are four common characteristics of all ITV literature shows. 1) None is intended to teach children how to read. The programs build enjoyment and lead viewers to see that reading is a desirable and worthwhile activity. 2) They introduce a variety of literary forms. 3) All of them demand classroom follow-up, if they are to be successful. 4) Books featured, with related materials, must be

accessible to youngsters. (Gough, 1979)

There are certain advantages of ITV over commercial television. One is that the programs are designed by educators. These programs draw on expertise in the content area, curriculum, and child development specialists. Generally, they undergo evaluation by teachers and children during the production stage, where changes can be made. Another advantage is that the programs provide regular book introductions over an extended period of time so that children have had quite a variety in the course of a year. A further advantage is that programs are telecast more than once thereby providing some flexibility for the teacher. Also some distributors offer off-air recordings and extended use rights to schools. This would not be done by commercial television. Finally, ITV can entice children into books by presenting exciting and entertaining excerpts, without divulging the entire plot. This is another area in which commercial television does not and perhaps can not imitate. (Gough, 1979)

Gough feels that there are two areas in literature in which ITV is especially effective: storytelling and book introductions. For the teacher who is uncomfortable with storytelling, ITV can bring skilled, professional storytellers right into the classroom. For the teacher who is comfortable with storytelling, it expands the repertoire of

offerings and gives greater variety to the reading motivation program. In the realm of book introductions, ITV can:

- 1) dramatize exciting excerpts to make the book come alive,
- 2) give viewers a personal brush with the creator-author,
- 3) use a wide variety of related arts, eg. painting, drawing, pantomime, puppetry, dance, background music, sound effects, and
- 4) capitalize on the child's affinity for cartoon-like characters. (Gough, 1979)

"The Reading Road Quiz," a new and innovative means of using ITV, motivates children to read literature from a different approach than those stated above. It is a televised game-show in which one school competes with another. All questions are based on a previously published list of fifty books recommended by a committee of librarians and teachers. Parents, teachers, librarians, administrators state that they have observed a noticeable improvement and a new enthusiasm in children's reading. One librarian stated that it is a sure way of getting some of the best children's literature read by children.

A criteria against which to evaluate these commercially produced, literature related, instructional materials would make selection easier. Glazer states eight basic questions in the evaluation of these materials. 1) Does the story lend itself readily to the media mode on which it is recorded? 2) Is the sound track a contribution or a dis-

traction? 3) Is the sound track authentic or does it sound canned? 4) Is the dialogue understandable? 5) Is the setting authentic? 6) Do the technical procedures add or detract from the story? 7) If live action is used, is the acting convincing? 8) Does it have aesthetic integrity and wholeness in itself? (Glazer, 1977)

In another source written by Glazer, she adds two more criteria to the list. First, is the material based on good literature and secondly, is it appropriate to the needs of a particular group of children? (Glazer, 1979)

As for objective research in this area there has been very little.

Research in the use of audio-visual materials in the teaching of literature is rare. Studying the effects of a film version of selected short stories on the responses of junior high-school students, Levinson (1964) reported that viewing films based on short stories, either before or after reading, improved responses of both good and poor readers. C. E. White (1968) reported that students studying American literature in experimental television classes learned as well as students studying in conventional American literature classes. (Blount, 1973, p. 1074)

As was stated earlier, the use of instructional media in the teaching of children's literature seems to take one of two forms, the commercially produced materials and the locally produced materials. Locally produced instructional media are those materials which are produced by the students in response to a piece of literature.

Teachers report that looking at literature as the

raw material for a class-produced multimedia presentation has been an imaginatively dynamic experience for the young people the their classes. (Cameron, 1970)

Piaget says

....knowledge is derived from action....To know an object is to act upon and to transform it....To know is therefore to assimilate reality into structures of tranformation, and these are the structures that intelligence constructs as a direct extension of our actions. (Piaget, 1970, pp. 28-29)

Children learn more about books if they have an opportunity to interpret them in ways that are meaningful to them. To act upon the book is to know it and to make it a memorable experience. (Huck, 1976)

Audiovisual production as a response to literature has many values. 1) In production children are able to demonstrate their ability to comprehend and interpret the written word. Visual interpretation through hand drawings and color lifts. Selection of background music to set the mood demonstrates an understanding of the theme and their empathy with the main character. 2) Production is an effective way of developing an understanding and appreciation of the basic elements of literature, i.e., plot, setting, characterization, theme, and style all take on clarity and meaning when students attempt to communicate them to others through production. 3) Production helps students develop the ability to symbolize an idea or conceop in such a way that it is clearly communicated. 4) Production provides training in selecting main

topics, sub-topics, key words, and major ideas because most books are too long to produce fully. 5) Production provides training in organization and logical sequence of ideas. 6) Production allows students to extend thought processes through the process of substituting one visual for another to express the same idea. 7) The visualizing and verbalizing of an author's work allows every child an opportunity to find his or her forte. There is something to do for everyone. (Polette, 1975)

This student activity need not be a sophisticated or complex endeavor. A small production center stocked with paper, pencils, colors, magazines, write-on filmstrips and transparencies, 2x2 slide mounts, tape recorder and blank tapes, laminating film, and on occasion a camera is adequate for most elementary and middle school classrooms.

Here are two examples of the audiovisual-literature production idea in action. The first is a fifth grade class at St. Ann's Elementary School in St. Louis, Mo. They produced a **sound-on-slide show** of Madeline E'Engle's Wrinkle In Time. The steps of the project are simple to follow. 1) Everyone read and discussed the book. 2) They then listened to the "Newbery Award Recording" of the book. 3) Dividing into groups, each accepted responsibility for the visual interpretation of one part of the story. As a result there was much discussion of the book, many decisions made, and

all individual talents used. (Polette, 1975)

Another media project used poetry as a raw material for the production of a motion picture. The "raw script" of the poem must be structured in terms of the visual. This structuring sharpens the imagination and students are forced to think about the visual and dramatic details of the poem. This technique may also be used as a stimulating way of looking at a scene from a short story, play, or novel. A further dimension is added when a tape recorded sound track is made. (Cameron, 1970)

The selection, interpretation, and communication of an author's work through audiovisual production can be a valuable learning activity.

Perhaps an old Chinese proverb put it best:

I hear, and I forget
I see, and I remember
I do, and I understand.

Obviously, there are many good reasons for using instructional media in the children's literature curriculum, but will it motivate students to read?

Barber-Smith and Reilly in their article on the subject state that if students discover that they can improve their reading, even slightly, through participation in media productions, they may feel more motivated to read in other instances. If students experience some success in an academic area that was previously frustrating and discouraging,

they are likely to feel an increase of self-esteem. This increase often translates into greater efforts in the classroom, both academically and socially. (Barber-Smith, 1977)

One educator who has used production in the literature class says, "....'tuned-out' children can be 'turned on' with media used to best advantage....when it serves as a catalyst to return children willingly to the world of print." (Thomas, 1978)

Huck points out that commercial television's versions of Mary Norton's The Borrowers, Laura Ingalls Wilder's The Little House on the Prairie, Betsy Byars' The 18th Emergency, and many others have caused children to seek out these books. (Huck, 1976)

Ask any children's librarian which books rarely gather dust on the shelves, and one answer invariably will be "books that are television related." (Gough, 1979)

In an informal survey of the children's librarians in the Cedar-Falls, Waterloo area and Creston, Iowa, the question was asked,

Do you see any television and/or motion picture influence on the book selection at the library?

These are the responses:

Definitely! Kids ask anytime something is on television. Judy Blume was just interviewed on television and this caused a big rush for her books. (Waterloo)

You bet! Television influences children to come into libraries. It motivates reading. Books

that are promoted by television like the educational program Cover to Cover on ITV are in big demand. (Cedar-Falls)

Yes, they (the children) like what they see on television and come down to see if we have the book. (Evansdale)

Kids love them! They eat them (TV-tie ins) up! When Nancy Drew and The Hardy Boys were on television we couldn't keep them on the shelf. If I know ahead of time that such and such a book is going to be on television or that such and such an author is going to be interviewed I make sure that I either go out and get the book or if I have it I make sure I know where it is on the shelf. (Creston)

A study done by Busch of 595 second through twelfth graders in Virginia showed that 89 per cent had watched at least one program on commercial television that caused them to read a book. (Busch, 1978)

As has been seen media has demonstrated its power to motivate reading. Teacher success will depend on the extent to which s/he becomes acquainted with each child's interests and needs, on his or her ability to use all the motivational devices at his or her disposal, and then how well s/he is able to steer and encourage the child toward books in that child's interest area using instructional media as one of the means of accomplishing this goal.

Chapter 3

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this paper was to ascertain whether teachers were using audiovisual materials and if so how were they using them to motivate reading in the children's literature curriculum of the middle school years. In order to accomplish this investigation a computer search of the literature was done with the result that only two articles published since 1974 could be found that dealt with the subject in question.

This lead to the inquiry of whether media and books could be or should be merged to facilitate the motivation of children to read literature. To answer this question it first became necessary to develop a rationale for the teaching of children's literature and the use of audiovisual materials in the classroom, and then to determine if audiovisual materials do indeed motivate children to read.

The results of the study are clear. There is ample evidence in favor of teaching children's literature. The authors cited stated that the benefits of literature as a developer of the affective side of the child, as a source of needed vicarious experience, and as a provider of much

insight and information could not be better fulfilled by any other medium.

With respect to the use of audiovisual materials as part of the instructional design, the literature shows that children react very favorably to this familiar source of information. Clearly, this is the age of visual consciousness.

Then how are teachers of literature using the power of media to motivate children to read? Here is the area of little information. One point, however, seems clear: audiovisual presentations of books are to be a tool of motivation not a substitute for the actual reading itself. The use of media must bring the child back to the source of that media —the book.

How is this objective being accomplished? There seems to be two general modes of action. One is the use of television, commercial and/or instructional. A major difference here is that in instructional television the program is always based on a recognized piece of literature written for children. In commercial television this may be but is not necessarily true. For example in the group of programs based on already existing books there are such titles as: The Little House on the Prairie, Eric, The Hardy Boys, Nancy Drew, etc. Examples of the latter group would be: Mork and Mindy, Hawai-Five-O, David Cassidy, The Partridge Family, Star Trek and others. According to the literature and a

survey of local librarians both of these types of programming have been successful with respect to the goal of motivating children to read.

The second method of using media to motivate reading is that of producing a multi-sensory presentation based on a literary source. Here media are not only a motivator but also an instructor of literary elements. Children, through the creation of a visual program, come to grips with plot, theme, setting, and characterization. They are given the opportunity to use the tools of comprehension, interpretation, and sequencing. They may come to a deeper understanding of and hence an empathy with the main character which will elicit an emotional and/or intellectual response. Such is the goal of the literature class and here media can help to bring about the realization of that goal.

Then why is there so little material published on the subject of using audiovisual materials to motivate the reading of literature. The review of literature shows clearly that this should be done.

One possible explanation is that in researching the affective domain there are too many factors to consider in order to maintain validity. Further research in this area with respect to the motivation of reading through multi-sensory means needs to be investigated.

In the case of TV tie-ins there is some concern that in using them we may be contributing to a decline in the

quality of reading materials, and at the same time we may be encouraging an increasing dependence on television in the schools and at home? (Neuman, 1980) These issues have yet to be explored in the research literature. It too would be a subject for research.

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