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MOTIVATION AND THE ADOLESCENT READER

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In the past decade unprecedented amounts of money and talent have been devoted to finding out why people buy products—what catches their fancy, what stimulates their interest in it, and what will make them buy it. Once these factors are categorized and tabulated, the information is used in designing packages, advertising or identifying some features of the product that will satisfy these needs and thus sell the product. This work in stimulating interest and determining the "appeal base" of a product falls under the heading of advertising or motivations.

I'm a pusher of a product, too—a product called literature. Students will never read Shakespeare if they don't learn to read and love to read. The literature for the adolescent movement, almost non-existent twenty years ago, is now of such importance that courses in it are a part of the training of English teachers, librarians, and reading specialists.

For years, educators have agonized over what appears to be a steady decline in reading ability. The annual report card on reading skills in our major cities is appalling. As usual the blame is spread around. School boards are singing songs of accountability while teachers' unions hold that the break-up of the family, working mothers and the home environment make the task of making readers out of children with deprived backgrounds impossible. Children's desire for knowledge is sometimes turned off by poor materials, poor methods, and poor appreciation of the joys of reading. Teaching through a greater emphasis on literature seems a partial answer to the problems of materials, methods and interest in reading. In the past, basic reading classes have been limited to early elementary grades and literature as such, not reading, was studied in the high school. In the elementary reading classes the main object was not to develop enjoyment of stories but rather to identify words, to group words into phrases, and grasp the meaning. The vocabulary was limited to the basic word lists and the objectives of the lesson were limited to the development of phonics. The stories were used as tools in skill teaching, and less emphasis was placed on literary quality and emotional appeal to the interest level of children. This must change.

We propose the integration of literary materials and the skill builders of basic reading will do much to improve the teaching of reading and the level of achievement. In the elementary school an emphasis on children's literature is needed equal to the emphasis on basic reading instruction. The skills on which literary reading

depends must be developed but the literary reading serves a purpose of motivation beyond those basic skills. Why should children learn and work so hard to read some of the John, Jean and Judy materials? If they are aware of the world of exciting books just waiting for them to open and read, they will work harder at unlocking the gates of adventure. Educators must take advantage of children's attention, interest, and enthusiasm for a good story. This must take place before junior-senior school.

Motivation can be categorized and compared in two ways:

- 1—Gimmicks vs. real motivations
- 2—Intrinsic vs. extrinsic

Gimmicks are activities or objects which only catch the eye and the temporary attention of the students and are not an integral part of literature but as such activities can be meaningful. A "real" motivation is an activity, question or object that really starts students thinking about a given topic. It is not just a contrivance, an eye-catcher, or a crowd pleaser. Gimmicks are limited in the degree that they can be used. Consumers do not want to be tricked into buying. Products should be sold on the strength of what they contain and what they do, and reading and literature should be initiated by some activity that leads students to think about a real situation, problem or question. No one—consumer or student—likes to be "conned" and discovery that s/he has been, makes one resentful.

Another way of categorizing and comparing motivations is by classifying them as intrinsic or extrinsic. An intrinsic motivation is an activity or object directly involved with the topic you are going to investigate. An extrinsic motivation stems from outside the subject matter area, but it is in some way analogous to it. The terms intrinsic and extrinsic also refer to their application to the state of mind of the student. Does he want to learn for the sake of the learning itself (intrinsic) or is he motivated by some outside stimulus (extrinsic)?

According to studies chronological age is more important than is mental age in determining what a child will enjoy reading. The average and the above-average thirteen-year-old will be interested in reading the same kind of books. Thus the whole attempt to accelerate the intelligent child by giving him the adult literature classics does not conform with the facts.

Preferences are determined not only by age but by acculturation and differences of sex. Because of this, there is a real difference between what the teen-age boy and teen-age girl want to read, between what the average Iowa farm teenager will choose to read and what the average child in the inner city may choose.

Enticement is the better part of salesmanship. We can all work up a lot more enthusiasm for a job when we can see some purpose for doing it. In the active learning classroom, students share in selecting the task, and some motivation is built in. Nevertheless, a good teacher in the teacher-centered class is aware of the need to motivate and keep enthusiasm at a high pitch. The teachers' originality will help supply ideas and materials that motivate, sources are only limited by their creative talents. You the teacher do not need "things" to motivate, although sometimes they help. You need

ideas and so do students. You can create mental pictures and you can help students to develop this talent. This is the teaching of reading and literature. The things you use, the materials, are valuable additions, however. This is the subject matter of Literature for the Adolescent.

Human beings are insatiably curious about themselves. We are forever interested to learn what people are doing and what they have done in the past. We learn about people by observing them, but we are also eager to hear reports of other people's observations. "Tell me a story" is the plea not only of children but of men and women in all countries and in all ages. Story tellers in both prose and verse have answered the plea in fables, folk tales, ballads, epics, romances, down to the complex forms of the novel and short story in more recent times.

Long ago, story tellers recounted the exploits of heroes, drawing on known facts about these flesh and blood people, but also embroidering on the facts. Their stories were thus a blend of fact and fancy. In later times we have come to distinguish between these two kinds of narrative, calling one history and the other fiction. Aristotle marked the difference between the two in a distinction that we still observe: History, he said, "describes the thing that has been," history deals in particulars, unique persons and events, that will never be repeated exactly. Fiction, says Aristotle, deals with "universals", it makes statements about what a certain kind of man or woman or child "will probably or necessarily say or do." In dealing with universals, fiction resembles philosophy; but in presenting the universal through particular characters and events, it resembles history. The realm of fiction, then, lies between the realm of history and the realm of philosophy.

Before we go much further, we must ask "What is adolescents' literature?" If we limit the field to books written just for adolescents, we limit the study. Adolescent literature should not be separated from literature in general for many reasons. Too rigid a definition of what adolescents' literature is should be avoided because like all other kinds of literature it is a portrayal of life and mind in language. However, some of the logical and emotional limitations of young adulthood will rule out some of the kinds of literature. Twentieth century exposure to television has increased their awareness of once taboo subjects as sexuality, violence, death and crime. Such exposure has forced adults to reconsider the appropriate subject matter of literature for the adolescent. Charlotte Huck has defined a "children's book as a book a young person is reading, and an adult book as a book occupying the attention of an adult." (Huck, 1976, p. 5)

There are differences between children's and adolescents' literature. Literature for the adolescent must satisfy their needs and meet them on their varied levels of development as opposed to the interest, needs and level of development of adults. When comparing children's and adults' books, Jean Karl says that "outlook" is one basic difference. This outlook includes the ability to look at life with hope, a sense of wonder about the world, a sense of adventure, and a feeling that life is valuable. (Karl, 1970, p.7) Books for teens differ from books for adults in vocabulary and types

of experiences. The teenager may know something of business and the work-a-day world but he will not choose to read about certain kinds of adult activity. The content of adolescent literature is limited by experience, by exposure to wider worlds and by the understanding of such things that children have met or experienced. Such emotional and psychological responses as nostalgia, cynicism, and despair are outside the realm of most teens. In adolescents' fiction there are many stories which adults enjoy and there are some books written for adults which are taken over by teens, e.g., *Rascal* and *The Hobbit*. There will be a less complex combination of language, character, plot, and theme in adolescent fiction. The smaller range of language is a limitation but a good literary work for teenagers demonstrates an ingenuity and flexibility within that range.

Alan Howe states, "Some teachers may feel that all they need to do is set novels before their students and start them reading; others fear that "mere" enjoyment of fiction is somehow not a solid enough goal, and thus belabor their students with a mass of historical, biographical and critical background which becomes an end in itself." (Howe, *Teaching Literature to Adolescents*, p. 21)

John Dixon, reporting on discussion at the Dartmouth Seminar reminds us, it is much easier to teach literary criticism than to teach literature. The teaching of literature should be our primary job. This means that the student in junior and senior high school should be led to take account of both the work and his reaction to it. The process of reading is most successful when the student can say, "That's me!" as he reads. "That's me" has two components and our aim is to move from the Me of personal identification to the that of the work of literature. That's me may reveal a very partial and too selective attention to the work but the teacher will get nowhere in the attempt to make the work meaningful if he does not begin with the me. Though this might imply that we should teach only narratives with which students may identify directly from their own past experience, we need not conceive of the Me so narrowly. Adolescents will not necessarily respond to a book about their own world if it seems fake to them, nor will they fail to respond to books about other worlds, provided these are within their understanding (though not within their experience) and are presented so that they seem coherent and interesting (Dixon, *Growth Through Literature*, pp. 59-60)

We know that we read different kinds of things for different purposes and in different manners. Donald Hall (*Four Kinds of Reading* p. 2) made distinction among these kinds of reading. The first is reading for information, the kind of reading we do when we read a newspaper, a set of directions or most textbooks. We read quickly, paying attention only to the facts we need to gather, ignoring the language in which they are presented, the rhythm of the sentence or the play of metaphor.

The second kind of reading, reading literature, is an altogether different activity. Hall states, "We hear the sound of words and perceive the rhythms of sentences as we read; we also register a tract of feeling through metaphors and associations of words. This kind of reading goes through the ear—though the eye takes in the

print and decodes it into sound—to the throat and to the understanding and it can never be quick. It is slow and sensual and a deep pleasure." Evelyn Woods has never experienced this. This is what we hope to unfold to our students.

The third kind of reading, intellectual reading, is too often substituted for the second in the reading of literature. Hall reminds us that, "Intellectual reading is reading in order to reduce images to abstractions." It is slow and much time must be spent with the eyes turned away from the page, reflecting on the text. To read literature this way is to turn it into something it is not.

The fourth kind of reading has been called narcotic reading. Everyone engages in narcotic reading occasionally, and perhaps most consistently in adolescence when great readers are born. This is what we as teachers of literature for the adolescent want to encourage—reading addicts. Teachers can take advantage of this tendency, both in the books they select for students to read and in the way they approach those books, in order to first develop a love for reading and then gradually lead students toward the more demanding reading. In both types of reading the students' imaginations are involved. We want reading to become an experience rather than a chore: In one case, the addicted reader escapes into another world; in the other, the literary reader develops new insights into his own world. But these insights should come as a result of the experience itself rather than as the end product of intellectual reading. Too often we are tempted to teach literature through intellectual reading alone—to wean students from the Hardy Boys in order to prepare them to discuss determinism versus free will in Carmier's After First Death. Carmier's novel does raise abstract philosophical issues, but it also tells an exciting and compelling story about a young man who is a living being. Carmier infuses the novel with ironies and a sense of impending doom, slowly drawing the reader into the full horror of the situation.

The adult critic of literature for the adolescent soon discovers there are vast numbers of books coming off the presses each year with qualitative differences from excellence to mediocrity by any selected criteria. We propose that there are evaluation criteria which adults can use to judge the varied offering of adolescents' literature.

The usual way of analyzing fiction is to consider its components—character, plot, setting, theme, point of view, and style. In a way this is a process of fragmentation, quite different from the wholeness of impression we receive when we read, but analysis of a story into its elements allows us to see why one book may be of greater literary value than another. The chief purpose of a course in literature for the adolescent is to help English teachers, librarians and reading teachers to apply these principles. Despite their great diversity, English teachers, librarians, and reading teachers love literature; and no one thinks that he has learned all there is to know about it. But as undergraduate English majors, most took courses in Shakespeare and in the great Victorian and American writers. However, it is unlikely that many became familiar with the writers of junior novels. A course in The Literature of Adolescence will not provide teachers with a detailed plan for teaching

such a course in the high school, nor will it lay out objectives and procedures. The course should provide class members with exposure to the large numbers and types of literature for the teenager, literary standards for the evaluation and analysis of new materials, and specific suggestions for approaching a number of junior novels as literary works.

There is a great deal of interesting, quality literature which can teach without pressure or preaching. We should be aware of the possible danger of making literature too much of a learning medium, which could turn teens off to all literature for fun. When the teacher uses literature with great care, students will reap many benefits. Dry facts are soon forgotten; attitudes, feelings, and general concepts can remain forever.

The goal or major objective in teaching high school English is the development of Literature for Life. Teachers can never teach all the great literature to their classes but they can open to students a world almost limitless because of great literature of the past, the present, and that not yet written. Through Literature for the Adolescent we hope teens will become hooked on books.

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