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# TEACHERS AS READERS: AN EXTENSION OF THE 'IMPACT OF READING' SURVEY

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True or False.

1. Teachers who are avid readers are likely to have a positive influence on the reading habits of their students.
2. Teachers who are themselves reluctant readers are not likely to lead students to a lifelong love of reading.

Most reading teachers probably would classify both of these statements as True. For many years it has been widely held that teachers who are readers, who themselves value reading as an important part of their lives, will be more successful in inspiring their students to hold reading in similar esteem. It is a most tempting, common sense idea, and there is some evidence from research to support the notion that teachers with good reading habits are more likely to lead their students to improve in reading (El Hagrasy, 1962).

Do teachers have a responsibility to help students to develop positive attitudes about reading? The idea that teachers can and should play a major role in the development of students' reading habits and interests has never been seriously questioned. In fact, most reading methods texts and many journal articles repeatedly stress this aspect of teachers' responsibilities. "Interests do not grow in a vacuum . . . the teacher's task, then, is not only to feed the interests the child already possesses but to open up new avenues of interest and opportunity" (Strickland, 1957). "Developing permanent interests in reading must be the goal of every teacher regardless of the particular subject she (sic) may be teaching" (Barbe, 1963).

Just how teachers are to become effective in shaping positive reading attitudes in their students is a continuing problem that has prompted a plentitude of suggestions. Games, puzzles, inducements, and rewards abound. Almost daily, it seems, or at least with discouraging regularity new devices and strategies appear, all calculated to titillate and maintain young readers' interest in reading.

A fundamental ingredient in any of the plans for teachers to help

students to develop positive reading attitudes, it seems to us, is the teacher's own love of reading. Appeals to teachers to assume the role of model for students' reading attitudes are common in the literature of teacher preparation. "Logic and some research indicate that teachers' reading abilities, attitudes, and habits have an influence on those same characteristics of students" (Smith, et. al., 1978). The modeling function of teachers' reading behaviors is suggested directly: "One way we can build strong positive attitudes toward reading in our students is by demonstrating that we ourselves enjoy, respect, and profit from reading" (Dulin, 1978).

Yet, despite the call for such modeling behavior, a curious gap in reading research is the dearth of investigations into the personal reading attitudes and habits of teachers. There are a few studies in this area, such as the one by El Hagrasy which was cited earlier. In general, however, the more serious and ambitious research into reading habits and attitudes seems to concentrate upon the general adult population rather than upon teachers. A recent example of this type of research is that done by the Book Industry Study Group which released a report of its investigations in October 1978 (BISG, 1978). Guthrie (1979) reviewed this research and compared it with similar studies done by Strang in 1942.

To understand the impetus for such general readership studies is not difficult. Both book sellers and reading teachers have a stake in increasing their knowledge about the reading habits of the general public. However, our point is that much more must be known about the reading attitudes and behaviors of teachers if insights are to be gained about teachers as positive models of reading behavior for their students.

However, gathering solid information about the reading behaviors of teachers presents complex investigative problems. Quantitative research, while useful, seems to fall short of what is really needed. It may be relevant to know that teachers read less than one book a month (Odland and Ilstrup, 1963), but the question of why this is so remains unanswered. Qualitative research, such as case studies and extended interviews, may provide more insight into teachers' reading predilections but it is somewhat suspect in that such research may lack generalizability.

Maring (1976), among others, has written about the shortcomings of quantitative research into reading attitudes, and he suggested a design for gathering more pertinent information which he called "Survey on the Impact of Reading" (Maring, 1976). Although Maring's survey is clearly intended for use by classroom teachers with their own students, it can be viewed as a productive point of departure for investigating the reading habits of those who teach. Because it seems important to gain insight into teachers' reading behaviors, because quantitative research alone does not produce exactly the type of information needed, and because subjective reports by themselves are difficult to generalize, one might propose a symbiotic format which uses both quantitative and

qualitative elements. By examining statistical evidence in the light of teachers' subjective comments about their reading preferences, attitudes, and habits, more useful knowledge may be obtained than if either method were used alone.

There are several reasons for this suggested procedure. First, there is an obvious advantage in time, cost, and effort, if reliable information about the impact of reading on teachers' thoughts and actions can be obtained by a survey method. Second, comparative information may be obtained about teachers' perceptions of the impact of reading at different stages of their careers. Third, the format may be easily modified to permit other questions to be added as more and differing information is required. Finally, by the very act of responding to a survey on the impact of reading on their lives, teachers may be encouraged to further self-reflection about the relationship of reading to their personal value systems.

#### *Description of the Study*

The study was undertaken to investigate the reading habits and self-perceptions of teachers in various stages of their careers. The intent was to couple reflective information of the sort given with an earlier "impact of reading" survey (Maring, 1976) with other quantifiable measures.

#### *Subjects*

The subjects were 22 pre-service teachers, 26 graduate students in reading, and 26 experienced classroom teachers. All the subjects were drawn from a population in or near a large Midwestern city.

#### *Materials*

The survey form was comprised of a force-choice segment and an open-ended response section. The forced-choice component gathered information at:

1. Number of books read yearly
2. Frequency of library use
3. Self-evaluation of reading ability
5. Imaging behaviors

The open-ended response section probed:

1. Types of books read
2. Ways in which reading impacted on thought
3. Ways in which reading impacted on actions
4. General observations on reading

#### *Data Analysis and Discussion*

The data were subjected to several forms of analysis, both statistical and anecdotal. The former attempted to find significant differences among the three groups of subjects on the quantifiable variables; the latter was analyzed to attempt to explain any variances discovered as well as to elaborate on any measures that showed quantitatively insignificant differences which might be qualitatively different.

Analyses of variance among the groups along the dimensions of the first five variables (number of books read, frequency of library use, enjoyment of reading, perceived reading ability and imaging) pointed out similarities among the groups. An analysis of sheer quantity of books read (Group X number) indicated a large difference among the groups (see Table 1). There appeared to be an inverse relationship between the level of experience and the quantity of reading with the pre-service teachers reading three times as many books as the practicing classroom teachers and almost twice as many as the graduate students in reading.

TABLE 1

Analysis of Variance				
Number of books read per year X group				
Source	DF	SS	MS	F
Between	2	9600.4249	4800.2124	10.2857
Among	71	33134.7238	466.6863	
Total	73	42735.1486		
p	.0001			

An initial supposition might be that involvement in college courses would necessitate the greater amount of reading done by the pre-service teachers. However, analysis of the most recent books read by all the subjects indicated that, in this group's reading material, fiction outnumbered instructional type reading 4-1. 50% of the practicing teachers read 5 or fewer books per year while 90% of the pre-service teachers and 80% of the graduate students in reading read more than 5 books per year.

Anecdotal comments of the classroom teachers suggested that the real reason for their limited reading was time. An overwhelming comment was that the exigencies of teaching and everyday life made them unable to read as much as they would like. An interesting side analysis (Group X library use) revealed that the groups were significantly different in the frequency of library use (see table 2), the pre-service

TABLE 2

Analysis of Variance				
Frequency of Library Use X Group				
Source	DF	SS	MS	F
Between	2	9.0425	4.5213	4.4130
Among	71	72.7413	1.0245	
Total	73	81.7838		
p	.01			

teachers being rare users of these public facilities. Anecdotal expansions noted that they preferred to buy books, especially mass market paperbacks, another indication that the reading they were doing was done for pleasure rather than for school requirements.

The majority of all groups considered themselves better than average readers and rated their enjoyment of reading as greater than average (see tables 3 & 4). Similarly, the subjects rated themselves as high imagers.

TABLE 3

How much do you enjoy reading?  
(Percentage response)

	Teachers		
	Pre-service	Graduate	Practicing
Much more than most people	31.8%	34.6%	19.2%
More than most people	27.3%	34.6%	30.8%
As much as most people	22.7%	23.1%	19.2%
Less than most people	13.6%	7.7%	19.2%
Much less than most people	4.5%	0%	11.5%

TABLE 4

How well do you read?  
(Percentage response)

	Teachers		
	Pre-service	Graduate	Practicing
Much better than most people	13.6%	30.8%	11.5%
Better than most people	36.4%	42.3%	34.6%
As well as most people	45.5%	26.9%	42.3%
Less well than most people	4.5%	0%	3.8%
Much less well than most people	0%	0%	7.7%

The open-ended surveys gave very real insights not only into quantitative differences but to qualitative ones as well. While the most current reading of the pre-service teachers was fiction, the graduate and practicing teachers listed more books of a "how-to" nature (*How to Sell Your Crafts*), books on psychology of self-actualization (*I'm O.K., You're O.K.*), and books on religion/philosophy (*Walden, The Bible*). The informal tabulations suggest the function of reading changes from reading for pleasure to reading as food for reflection and activity.

Examination of the anecdotal comments on change of life and thought support these notions. An overall outcome was that the subjects

rarely differentiated between books impacting on thought and those impacting on action. Books that changed thoughts were usually listed as the same as those which changed actions with little appended notes that “when I think differently I act differently.” It might be hypothesized that the types of books listed as significant could reflect on sheer quantity of reading as the more experienced teachers commonly listed as important books those that could be reread or read slowly, such as the Bible.

A final overview of this attempt to extend the “impact of reading survey from students to classroom teachers suggests that such an endeavor can prove useful in several dimensions. First, the “questionnaire plus forced-choice” format provided information on teachers as reading models. Both pre-service and in-service teachers revealed very positive attitudes toward reading and toward themselves as readers. Their book-use habits gave credence to the belief that people do, indeed, read for many purposes and that the role of reading in life changes. A significant negative outcome, however, would seem to be the reduction of reading that takes place, if teachers’ self-evaluations are correct, because of the demands of the profession. Perhaps such an outcome speaks most strongly for the inclusion of a Sustained Silent Reading period in the school day as advantageous not only for the students but for the teachers. Such a curricular addition would help the teachers retain their own “reading stamina” and acts as guides and models at the same time.

A second dimension of information relates to the format of the survey. The combination of direct questions and self-reflective essays provided two different sorts of data which allowed a cross-checking mode of interpretation. To date, a good balance and range of questions has not been determined. On the forced-choice segment, the amount of reading and list of recent reading proved useful as did the self-perception questions. On the open-ended section, it was most interesting to note that very few of the respondents differentiated between books that changed thoughts and those that changed actions, noting the same books in both categories. Many of the subjects stated that the same books that changed thoughts also changed actions. Cross-cultural inquiries might raise interesting questions about reading for reflection as opposed to reading for action; in this survey, however, the two questions were not discriminating. Useful and pertinent items might best be developed in concert with those polled and should be a major focus for extending this line of inquiry.

Indeed, the final, and perhaps most informative outcome is related to the survey process as a learning and self-exploration tool. Many of the subjects noted, in conversation and on the final open-ended response sheet, that being asked to reflect about reading made them think about reading in new and productive ways. Although conditioned to talking to their students about their (the students’) reading, teachers very rarely thought about themselves as readers. Such reflection, they noted, made

them consider the place of reading in their own lives, their reading habits and their functions as reading models for their students. Many of the teachers felt that the introspective process would favorably affect all these categories of their reading behavior.

Perhaps, then, the most important impact of an “impact of reading” survey is to reorient teachers to a primary goal of reading instruction, the communication of the love of books and the enjoyable habit of lifelong reading to their students. For,

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Example is stronger than precept, and imitation is the most immediate form of learning. Words have no meaning other than the action they produce. And in our schools words are activated by what teachers believe. From every standpoint, then, it is important that teachers, the unacknowledged legislators of the world, shall believe in the right things. For unless they do, their words and conduct, no matter how noble the sentiments they are supposed to express, will be recognized for the counterfeit coin they are.

(Montagu, 1951, p. 107)

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