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EXPANDING THE READING INTERESTS OF SECONDARY STUDENTS

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All students encounter various required reading assignments during the course of a school day in the different content areas. The adolescent's attention is also directed to hundreds of other pieces of reading matter which may not be recommended or suggested by teachers or parents. Some students at both the high school and university levels contend that they have no available time for engaging in wide reading since required reading and school activities consume most of their study and leisure-time hours.

Despite these conditions, every teacher can, and must, assume responsibility for extending the reading interests of their students in regard to the content area being studied. This article is designed to provide numerous practical suggestions for every secondary teacher in achieving the goal of wide reading for all students. To fulfill this objective the following topics are discussed: evaluating reading interests of students; building reading incentives; and making book reviews profitable and useful.

Evaluating Reading Interests of Students

The types and kinds of adolescent reading interests appear to be somewhat varied based on age, sociological and educational background, and geographic location. The research to date regarding this phase of literature has not been extensive; however, a few well designed studies have been conducted during the past twenty years. Regarding these studies, Olson and Ames comment:¹

It should be noted that the research regarding adolescent reading interests and tastes is far from complete. At times the data seem to present conflicting information, but the research techniques have been so crude that the results may reflect more technical problems than actual differences in tastes and interests. Some studies have dealt with choices of specific books, some with expressed likes for certain topics, and some with what teachers thought about their students' interests and tastes.

There have been a number of interesting studies devoted to finding data and formulating conclusions regarding reading interests of adolescents. One of the most important investigations was conducted by Norvell² in 1950 and involved more than 50,000 students and 625 teachers. Some of his findings were 1) girls liked many of the books normally chosen by boys, whereas not many boys chose books which are favorites of girls, and 2) basic book choices were fairly uniform by sex regardless of the intelligence levels of the subjects or the reading level difficulty of the books.

Questions such as the following have proved to be valuable. (Schubert, 1975)

1. If you had three wishes which might come true, what would you wish for?
2. Are you afraid of anything? If so, what?
3. What things do you worry about?
4. What bothers you?
5. What don't you like about yourself?

Questions 3, 4, 5 would be especially valuable in eliciting written responses from older students.

Values of Bibliotherapy

According to various authorities, the values of bibliotherapy include:

1. The opportunity to learn to know one's self better.
2. To aid in the understanding of human behavior.
3. To find interest outside the self.
4. To contribute to the socialization of the individual.
 - a. to reinforce socially accepted modes of behavior
 - b. to clarify and strengthen the individual's concept of his own rôle in society.

In the secondary school, the values of bibliotherapy include:

1. Teaching the apathetic the love of reading.
2. Satisfying adolescent emotional and psychological needs.
3. Throwing light on the problems of adolescent individuals.
4. Exploring the teenager's relationship with the community.
5. Leading pupils toward adult reading.

Limitations of Bibliotherapy

1. There must be a permissive environment with no pressure to show results or to report on books if bibliotherapy is to operate successfully. (Russell and Veatch).
2. A wide variety of reading materials of varying levels must be available.
3. On the psychological side, tensions and anxieties of the reader may block or distort the expected constructive identification.
4. The therapeutic process may be halted for lack of social or emotional experiences on the part of the reader.
5. The attitudes and ideas gained from books must be supported by the school and the community influences or must appeal to some felt need of the individual.
6. The use of inappropriate materials may prolong dependency and immaturity in the individual, rather than be beneficial to him. Postel warns of this result in relation to upper grade retarded individuals reading inappropriate primary materials.
7. Reading success is prerequisite to personal benefit from bibliotherapy.

Teacher Competence

According to Spache (1974) psychologists and psychiatrists differ tremendously in relation to the competence of teachers and others to

engage in bibliotherapy. Russell and Shrodes feel that teachers may proceed with caution once they have attained a wide knowledge of books, and a broad and deep understanding of children, adolescents, and also the troubled adolescent. It will be necessary for them also to have knowledge of reinforcement principles, before and after bibliotherapy.

Spache (1974) believes the question to be answered by the fact that teachers are and have been carrying on a successful form of bibliotherapy since the beginning of time.

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