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William S. O'Bruba
Bloomsburg State College

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BIBLIOGRAPHY: SOLVING PROBLEMS THROUGH READING

William S. O'Bruba

BLOOMSBURG STATE COLLEGE, PENNSYLVANIA

Although bibliotherapy has been known and practiced since ancient times, the term itself is of more recent origin. It is generally credited to Samuel McChord Crothers in an article in *Atlantic Monthly* in 1916. Shrodes (1955) has defined bibliotherapy as "a process of dynamic interaction between the personality of the reader and imaginative literature which may engage his emotions and free them for conscious and productive use." The Association of Hospital and Institution Libraries has adopted as official the dictionary definition which reads . . . "guidance in the solution of personal problems through directed reading." Simply stated bibliotherapy is helping students to help themselves solve their problems through reading.

Dynamics of Bibliotherapy

Just how does bibliotherapy work? What mechanisms are involved?

Russell and Shrodes (1950) have suggested that bibliotherapy like psychotherapy involves three mechanisms: identification, catharsis, and insight.

Once a reader recognizes a character in a story or book with whom he can identify (depending on the readers' experiences, attitudes, values, desires, and needs), the process expands. According to Spache, the reader then experiences catharsis—an emotional sharing of feelings and motivations of the character in the book or story being read. Finally, insight takes place when the reader realizes that he can make a more satisfactory adjustment to life or can solve his difficulties by adapting or imitating the actions of the character whose problems are comparable to his own. For example: "He's like me"—"Gee, I feel the same as he does"—"I can do it just like he did it."

Bibliotherapy For Whom?

Schubert (1975) believes bibliotherapy can be used successfully with any age and grade level; "as soon as a child can read, he is amenable to bibliotherapy" . . . "it is particularly suitable for gifted children because these children are often voracious readers who may need help in their social relations. (Strang, Checovitz, Gilbert, and Scoggin, 1944.) In addition bibliotherapy is of benefit to the socially disadvantaged reader.

Bibliotherapy In The Classroom

A teacher can learn about the kinds of problems a pupil faces by the use of interest inventories, observations, interviews, and discussion.

During the recent past much speculation has arisen regarding the amount of influence that teachers, parents, and librarians have on the teenager's choice of books. The Leafe³ and Johnson⁴ studies indicate that these groups have little, if any, influence with respect to adolescents choosing certain books. An additional important conclusion drawn from these studies pointed to the principle that the peak of reading interest occurs during the high school years.

One of the most in-depth studies regarding student reading habits was compiled by Kimmel⁵ in Bellevue, Nebraska. Her study of 140 ninth grade boys yielded the following data:

1. The average number of books read per month was two.
2. Magazines, newspapers, and fiction were the three most often read types of reading material.
3. Reading to relax accounted for about one-half of all reasons stated for reading any material.
4. The leading categories for choosing books were in the areas of mystery, animal stories, war, crime, and information.

According to Olson and Ames,⁶ several conclusions appear to be valid with regard to adolescent reading interests:

A librarian's study of reading interests of high school students as determined by their choices of books checked out of the library showed that boys read more stories of adventure than anything else. General fiction was second in popularity, and animal stories was third.

Boys read more stories of strenuous adventure, sports, and hobbies than girls. Adventure may be designated as two types—grim physical and milder types. Girls prefer the milder adventure story while boys favor the story involving vigorous physical activities. Girls have a greater preference for adventure combined with love as compared to boys' preference for "straight" adventure. This rejection of love as the theme in any type of literature by boys seems to be standard as shown by findings of different studies. While boys rate other sentiments higher, girls place romantic love first.

There are many methods that can be employed by content teachers to survey the reading interests of students in their classes. Meaningful conversations can be conducted with students relating to questions dealing with such matters as book and magazine choices, amount of reading, and favorite authors. Surveys can also be undertaken which utilize the data regarding the kinds and numbers of books checked out of the school library. The use of a reading interest inventory may be one of the most helpful devices for obtaining information directly from students enrolled in a given teacher's class. The following inventory was constructed by the writer.

Reading Interest Inventory⁷

Name _____ Class _____

1. List the names of three magazines which you like to read. Put a number 1 beside the magazine which you read the most often.

2. What is the most important reason why you like the magazine which you marked in No. 1?

3. Do you read a newspaper every day? yes no

If the answer is "yes," check the three parts of the newspaper which you like the best. Put a No. 1 in front of the part of the newspaper that you usually read first. Put a No. 2 in front of the part which you read second.

- | | |
|---------------------|--|
| ___ front page news | ___ society news |
| ___ sports section | ___ editorials |
| ___ comic strips | ___ advertisements |
| ___ financial news | ___ entertainment and
movie section |

4. Name two or more books which you have read during the past several months.

5. Which of the following persons do you depend on for suggestions regarding good books to read (Place a No. 1 in front of the individual's name who influences you the most.

- | | |
|---------------------|-------------------|
| ___ Parents | ___ Church Pastor |
| ___ English teacher | ___ Classmates |
| ___ Other teachers | ___ Librarian |

6. Why do you read a book which has not been assigned by a teacher? Place a check beside the most important reason.

- | | |
|---|---|
| ___ to gather information
for a report or talk | ___ because I think it
will be different
and exciting |
| ___ to relax | |

7. Check the kind of movies you like best.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> western | <input type="checkbox"/> love stories |
| <input type="checkbox"/> war stories | <input type="checkbox"/> sad pictures |
| <input type="checkbox"/> cartoons | <input type="checkbox"/> adventures |
| <input type="checkbox"/> murder thrillers | <input type="checkbox"/> travel pictures |

8. The following is a list of books which are available in our library. As a personal choice, check the names of three of the books which you would like to read most. Remember: these are not assigned – you should choose them because you think you might like to read them.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Heroes of World War II | <input type="checkbox"/> Heroes of Science |
| <input type="checkbox"/> America's Preacher:
Billy Graham | <input type="checkbox"/> Exploring Amazon Jungles |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dick Jones, Fullback | <input type="checkbox"/> The Vanishing Ghost |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Upward to the Stars | <input type="checkbox"/> The Best of Shakespeare |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Famous Bank Robberies | <input type="checkbox"/> How to Repair Dune Buggies |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A Night of Horror | <input type="checkbox"/> Smith of the State Police |
| <input type="checkbox"/> How to Take Good Pictures | <input type="checkbox"/> 1001 Things You Can Make |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The Road to Peace | <input type="checkbox"/> How to Study Effectively |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bob Gibson's Own Story | <input type="checkbox"/> Improve Your Personality |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Wild Animals and Their
Habits | <input type="checkbox"/> The Drug Menace |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Take Care of Your Heart | <input type="checkbox"/> The Making of a President |

9. In three or four sentences, tell why you chose the three books which you checked in No. 8.

10. List the names of three or four of your favorite TV shows.

The results of this inventory can be studied carefully and the data employed in the selection of materials and techniques which will stimulate interest in reading for information and enjoyment in all content areas. Additional responses may be elicited through oral discussions and interviews.

Building Reading Incentives

Wide reading will occur on the part of many students if sufficient motivation is provided by innovative teachers. The fear of making an unsatisfactory grade on a test is *not* a sufficient reason for all students to read. Some of them don't worry about their grades. They need to develop other reasons for wanting to read assignments, books, articles, and magazines.

Most high school students want to achieve—few, if any, really want to fail. If a teacher makes the decision that a learner apparently wants to fail, a careful study must be made relating to the conditions which caused this attitude to exist. Social acceptance is a decided motivation for reading on the part of many learners. Marksheffel⁸ makes the following observation:

The desire to learn to read is prevalent among most children who enter school. They want to learn to read because learning to read is the socially accepted expectation. Children's parents, relatives, and friends expect youngsters to read, and when children demonstrate that they can pronounce written words and get meaning from them, they are rewarded for their achievement. The reward may vary from a pat on the head or an approving smile to loving praise from mother or a dime from Uncle John. Regardless of the kind of reward, the important factor is that a reward has been given. The reader has achieved success. His achievement has been noted. His self-esteem has been elevated.

Every teacher should have a system of rewards whereby all students can feel a measure of success in their reading efforts. Favorable remarks (both written and oral) should be extended for those reading skills which a given learner *does* demonstrate. As additional lessons aid the development of deficient skills, learners should draw the conclusion that reading *can* be a rewarding, successful and pleasurable experience. In other words, *success breeds success*. It is important for all teachers to demonstrate to students that they are slowly but surely improving their levels of reading achievement.

If students are to be motivated to read they *must* be given reading assignments which are at the instructional reading levels of the affected learners. (The instructional level is that reading level where the student can pronounce correctly at least 95 percent of the words and comprehend at least 75% of the material when it is read silently.) All reading tasks must be capable of being accomplished. Too many students are discouraged about the reading process because they are asked to read materials which are too difficult for them. In other words, no one can be motivated to do anything if he or she cannot cope with the responsibility.

Many adolescents are motivated to read if they are given *time* to read materials of *their* choice. Sometimes students are placed in a class environment where all reading materials are required during a limited period of time. There should be an occasional period of time devoted to unin-

errupted sustained silent reading of materials which are freely chosen. Despite the feelings of some teachers, adolescents will read materials even though they are *not* required.

There are many commercial reading materials available which are especially motivating for many students. Included in this list would be *Venture* (Follett); *Action* (Scott, Foresman); *Contemporary Reading Series* (Educational Activities, Inc.); *Impact* (Prentice-Hall, Inc.); *Reluctant Reader Libraries* (Scholastic); *Scope* (Scholastic); and *Young Adventure Series* (Bowmar). These and related materials should be displayed attractively and “advertised” for the students.

Making Book Reviews Profitable and Useful

One of the important by-products of the expansion of reading interests is that of sharing reading experiences with other students. In a few instances, students are asked to write a book report of specified length. Unfortunately this approach may actually have the opposite effect of causing students to dislike reading since a book report is required. There are many innovative alternatives to the traditional book report. Some of these are:

1. Submission of a brief report not to exceed 250 words which would consist of an overview of the story and the reader’s reaction to the selection.
2. A panel discussion of the highlights of a book by a group of students who describe various phases of the volume such as the characters, most exciting episode, climax, outcome, and reaction by each member.
3. Preparation of a “teaser” report of perhaps 100 words for the school paper.
4. Oral reading of certain passages from the book which the reviewer feels is exciting and important.
5. Preparation of a video-tape by several class members, at which time various persons give two to three minute reviews of books. The video-tape could be used in several literature classes to build interest in book reading. The project could also be a display during open house of American Education Week.
6. Construction of a bulletin board display where various scenes of books may be depicted. Other “selling” techniques, such as one word sentences, may be included on the bulletin board or in the school paper.
7. Construction of a news story depicting one incident from a book as it might appear in a local paper. Ask the students to choose the most exciting incident.
8. Preparation of a tape recording which would include a brief summary of a book along with appropriate sound effects. The tape could be played for various classes.⁹

Summary

Many secondary teachers are concerned about expanding the reading

interests of their students. There are numerous ways of discovering these interests through the use of interest inventories and other techniques which have been discussed. Different strategies may be employed to motivate students to read. There are several strategies available to teachers for encouraging adolescents to share information regarding stories and books which have been read.

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