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Round Robin

Dorothy E. Smith

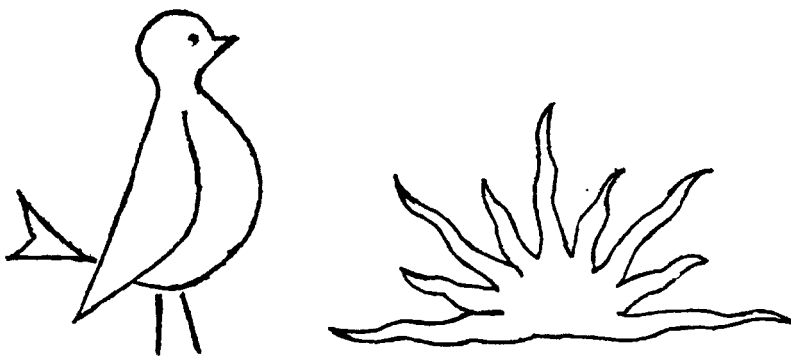
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ROUND ROBIN

Dorothy E. Smith, Editor

Dear Editor:

Here is a follow-up to the article you recently published, "Rapid Reading, Yes." I will welcome anyone's reaction to the following.

SLOW READING, NO!

Most of the aspects of modern life have speeded up. Technological expertise and human need have, in effect, greased the old time clock. Reading, however, for much of the populace appears to have stayed back. If anything, rates of speed versus amounts of print read seems to have slowed down.

There are the traditional reading flaws still operating.

Vocalization: Many readers reared on phonics, trained to read by reading aloud, read only a little faster than their ability to speak the words. For most readers, this is the 250 words-per-minute range.

Pointing: Many people use a pen or pencil or their finger to do the "Walking through the white paper." This, accordingly, slows reading speed and focuses reading on word by word patterns.

Ultra-Reverence for Print: Gutenberg-oriented man, to use the Marshall McLuhan phrase, lives and dies a life dominated by print: birth, house, marriage, diploma, test, contracts, death—all sanctified and verified by print. Conditioned this way toward printed matter, ability to discriminate between the important and the trivial is a skill most people meekly dare to venture toward. This venturing is discouraged by the educational establishment which contributes to the

myth that all reading matter is important, and thus keeps alive the print-obsequiousness-syndrome.

Aside from these traditional slow reading causes, a new phenomenon, bred by the new electronic media, has created a problem adding to the slowing of reading speeds. Conditioned by television, radio, transistors, stereo tapes and other electronic delights, reading speed in many cases stutters, stumbles, slows. Electric media have the effect of short circuiting reading for many. Thus, they refrain from reading and plug in for information and entertainment to the electric media which have the now, instant, quick pay off. The others, who still read, read in a very slow manner, conditioned by their non-print experiences.

These electric-media conditioned readers push the print closer and closer to their eyes simulating the radio transistor that stimulates their inner ear or the television set that they get close to. These slow readers curl and twist into the comfortable position they assume for the electric media, attempting to "take a bath in the print." This accelerates the slow reading problem and neglects the fact that reading is a one sense experience. The net effect is to create more reading hygiene problems and more slow reading.

It is ironic that, in an age of speed of technological expertise of electric media proliferation, reading which has provided the bedrock for progress is the symbolic and in many cases real casualty of this progress. In other words, people may be reading more but also getting less from their reading.

Thus, the popularity of rapid reading programs can be viewed as only a stop gap method to brake the decline in reading speed. The greater breakthrough to accelerate reading speed will come from an awareness of the psychological, cultural, and educational reasons for slow reading. It is in these areas that the thrust for more effective and rapid reading must take place.

References

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Very Truly Yours,
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