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The Teaching of Reading Affords One of the Greatest Opportunities for the Development of Character in the Junior High School

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THE TEACHING OF READING AFFORDS ONE OF THE GREATEST OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHARACTER IN THE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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GENERAL OUTLINE OF THESIS

I Introduction

1 Nature of Reading

2 Efficiency in Reading

a Rate

b Comprehension

3 Development of Reading Ability in Grades below the Seventh

II Character

To use literature in developing character by

1 Selecting Material

2 Providing Activities

III Citizenship

To use literature in socializing character by

1 Broadening outlook on life

2 Stimulating certain social ideals

IV Worthy Use of Leisure

To develop permanent interest in reading by

1 Making school reading enjoyable

2 Encouraging habits of "free" and independent reading

3 Explaining what reading does to enrich living

4 Helping the pupil to build own library

V Conclusion

1 Silent Reading

2 Oral Reading

a Use of Teacher's Manual

b Use of Reading tests

c Value of such tests

THE TEACHING OF READING AFFORDS ONE OF THE GREATEST OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHARACTER IN THE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Ability to read well is the most important ability that can be developed in the elementary school. Reading, properly mastered, not only renders excellent service throughout life but it greatly reduces the time and effort required to master the other school subjects. The elementary school, then, should strive to develop in each child the ability to read well. If it does this, it has succeeded in its most important work.

Reading naturally falls into two classes, oral reading and silent reading. Skill in oral reading does not necessarily imply skill in silent reading, nor is the training that is best suited to develop this skill necessarily the best training to develop skill in silent reading.

In the past silent reading has been sadly neglected in our schools. Perhaps ninety-five percent of the reading that is done outside of the school room is silent reading, yet the school has almost entirely ignored it and

has given practically all of its time to instruction in oral reading. Oral reading should not be neglected. It is important enough to receive careful attention but at the same time we must be sure to give the child sufficient training in silent reading.

Reading material is of two general classes: material of an informational nature and material of a literary nature. One is read for facts, information or instruction. The other is read for recreation, pleasure or appreciation. It is evident that efficiency in these two classes of reading cannot be measured by the same standards. Ability to get the thought from the printed page is perhaps of equal importance for each class of material but the thought does not function in the same way. In reading of a literary nature, thought is important as a means of giving cultural or moral training. In reading of an informational nature, the thought is used to assist us in our usual vocations.

It is evident that reading of an informational nature plays an important part in the daily life of the average individual and that considerable skill in it should be attained. In the first two grades the material may consist of directions for the various school activities, or nature study and history stories may furnish suitable material.

In the higher grades the geography, history or hygiene may furnish the material for the reading lesson.

Reading of an informational nature, therefore, has as its objective the obtaining of facts, information or instruction. It is not an end in itself but it is a tool. It gives us access to the great field of printed knowledge. The factors that determine its efficiency are speed, comprehension, ability to organize and ability to remember. Each of these factors is important.

Material of a literary nature, or literature should occupy a prominent place in the school curriculum not only for its intellectual value but for its ethical and esthetic value as well. The chief aims of literature are to help the child to understand and interpret the life about him and to create ideas which will help him to right living. It also carries him into the realm of the beautiful, opening to him an unlimited field of pleasure and enjoyment.

Comprehension should, no doubt receive more emphasis than any other factor of silent or oral reading. It, more than any other factor, determines our ability to read. Rapid reading with no apprehension is of no value. It is also impossible to organize properly unless one understands the details of the material which is to be organ-

ized. Some of the factors that affect comprehension are speed, knowledge that material is to be reproduced, finding answers to questions, nature of the reading material, definite assignments and record of achievement and vocabulary.

It is a well known fact that one person may read four times as fast as another of equal intelligence and at the same time get a better understanding of what is read. Is it possible, then, for all readers to acquire a reasonable speed? What are the factors that affect it? There is plenty of evidence to show that the rate of reading can be greatly improved if it is given careful attention. The following are some of the factors that affect it: vocalization, practice in rapid reading, eye movement, short exposure exercises, pressure of a time control, recordoof achievement and vocabulary.

Lip movement and inner speech tend to decrease the rate of reading. They also interfere with the ability to grasp the thought. They can be eliminated or greatly reduced if proper emphasis is placed on the content of what is read. If the habit is firmly established, conscious effort will likely assist in breaking it.

A good device for increasing the rate of reading is to give abundant practice in rapid silent reading. Give

the child a question or a list of questions and direct him to find the answers as quickly as possible. This plan is much better than to give the pupil merely directions to read as fast as possible, as it gives him a definite objective and places emphasis upon comprehension as well as speed.

While there are many exceptions, it is, however, generally true that the person who reads fastest understands best what is read. The slow reader has a greater tendency to let his mind wander from his subject, as is shown by his tendency to introduce extraneous matter in his reproduction.

Material that is to be reproduced is generally read more carefully than material that is read for pleasure only.

One of the surest ways to get a child to understand what he is reading is to create an interest in the subject. It is also well to use material that is of a logical and informational nature.

Organization may be considered as a phase of comprehension. Comprehension is necessary before material can be organized. It does not follow, however, that ability to comprehend the details of an article will give satisfactory power in organization. A well organized assign-

ment is a distinct aid to a pupil in studying a lesson. If much of our reading is to render real service, the main points must be determined and organized to some purpose.

The ability to organize is not easily acquired. As an aid to organization, the teacher should give the child sufficient drill in summarizing paragraphs, listing important topics, dividing story into parts and giving a brief summary of the entire lesson.

If reading of an informational nature is to be of real service it must be remembered. Ability to remember is affected by the following: importance of facts, rereading, organization, interest in subject, self testing from questions, and summarizing.

If the child realizes that certain facts are important or that they will be of service to him later, he is more likely to remember them than the facts in which he sees no present or future use.

A single reading does not ordinarily impress the facts on the child's mind sufficiently to be retained. Even if an immediate reproduction is called for, the individual does not usually retain more than from twenty to forty per cent of what is read. Much of this is rapidly forgotten unless the material is reread or additional

work is done.

Interest in the reading material insures a more vivid impression and also aids the child in remembering what he has read.

If a child will test his comprehension by means of questions or topics and reread all points that are not clearly understood, he will likely be better able to recall them at a future time.

Finally, by summarizing the material after it is read, the child will be better prepared to recall it later.

The fourth year of school work is a very important one. Text-books in arithmetic, geography, language and hygiene are now placed in the hands of the child and his success in these subjects is determined largely by his ability in reading. The material that must be read becomes more and more difficult in thought, in sentence structure and vocabulary. With all this work to be done, the subject or reading is given byt one period on the daily program. If this were all the time that could be given to reading instruction the situation would indeed be serious, but luckily the content subjects mentioned above supply much excellent material for intensive reading and by using it in this way it not only gives the

child necessary training in reading but it is also a very effective way to give the child the desired information.

The importance of reading of an informational nature, in which exact understanding is necessary or in which definite reactions are demanded, has been emphasized in the introduction.

In the fourth grade, ability to read is developed in three main ways:

Through the regular lessons in the content subjects and through assignments of reference reading in these subjects.

Through the extendive reading for pleasure and inspiration, outside of regular class work, of such literature as makes special appeal to children.

Through regular work of the reading period.

Each of these three means of increasing reading power has its particular place and function.

The extensive reading for the pure joy of it, of good literature brings the pupil in touch through the imagination, with the world beyond his experience; gives him contact with stimulating situations; inspires him to right conduct; and furnishes him with high ideals. It also develops habits of rapid reading, makes word rec-

ognition more nearly instantaneous and improves comprehension. Teachers should, in view of these facts, know the best children's books and be enthusiastic readers of them; and should see that they are placed in the school library.

The reading work of the fifth and sixth grades does not differ materially from that of the fourth grade. As the reading material becomes more varied and more difficult the teacher must direct the child's attention to the factors that need special attention. If the work is to accomplish the greatest good, both the teacher and the pupil should know definitely just what ends are being sought. Vagueness of thought as to the controlling purposes of reading is the chief cause of much of the poor work that is done in reading in the upper grades.

In those classrooms where the teachers value silent reading; where they value much reading and rapid reading, the work in reading will be a success.

"Specific training should be given each important use of reading. The content subjects lend themselves to excellent practice in work-type abilities.

"The work type material should stimulate interest, supplant information, develop judgment, and strengthen

power of organization. It should also lead to the effective use of books and a recognition of their permanent value.

"The human voice is one of the most effective instruments in life. A good speaking voice, clear enunciation and pronunciation, are assets in all walks of life. Training in good oral reading should result in the acquisition of pleasing, well modulated and easily understood voices. The ability to use the voice effectively cannot be overestimated. Good voice training is one of the crying needs of the day. Many people with great messages are unable to impart these to an audience because they lack the ability to use their voices effectively. The school then should not neglect the opportunities which oral reading affords to develop desirable speaking voices.

"All the literary types can be utilized as silent reading material. Free reading in all the types should be extended, wide in range of interest, and carefully selected for literary and life values."

Variety is fundamental to a wellrounded course in reading. The reader must contain material covering at least the following types: literature representing both British and American authors; some of the best contempor-

ary poetry and prose as well as the literature of the past; important race stories-great epics-and world stories of adventure; patriotic literature; literature due to festival occasions; literature of seasons, nature, and out of door life; literature of humor; adventure stories; literature that portrays the romance of industry and literature suited to dramatization, providing real project material.

"The most important principle to follow in teaching any subject is the law of self activity. Self-activity means activity of the pupil in independent work. The teacher can find no other test to decide the real value of her teaching in any subject, that is so simple and definitely accurate as the question - Am I allowing my pupils for independent activity, which is the only self-activity? The answer to this question should change the ordinary methods in teaching reading in all departments."

Literature is written primarily to give the reader pleasure, recreation or appreciation of the beautiful. Its value is determined by its influence upon the reader and its ability to give pleasure. The teacher should strive to give the child a broad knowledge of the world and its people, inspiration to right conduct, pleasure, a richer vocabulary, smoothness of expression and a desire for good literature.

It also furnishes the best opportunity for the child to become acquainted with the lives and inner thoughts of the great minds that have contributed much to the welfare and happiness of mankind. He not only sees them from the stand-point of a spectator, but he, for the time being, becomes one of them, their thoughts become his thoughts and their ideals his ideals. He recreates in fancy all the incidents of the story and forms images of all the characters and places described.

"There are two views regarding the teaching of patriotism. One mentions specific virtues in civic life and then proceeds to teach the necessity of having these virtues. This teaching is done largely through biography and history. The tendency towards imitation of the lives of great men and women is the principle upon which this kind of training rests. The other view is through the self-activity of the pupils in organizations for pupil self-governing and in the supplementary reading of chosen selections which convey the highest ideals in American life. The latter process is the one that justifies the use of patriotic material in the course for reading. Such material exalts civic virtues, which are treated abstractly in the first view of patriotic training, but the teacher does not preach the necessity of following

every one of these virtues. She hopes, however, to have the pupil, through the interpretarion of literature, recognize the ideals and feel it a duty and pleasure to strive to attain such standards."

An important feature of the reading work in these grades is to see that proper reading habits become fixed. The children should be checked frequently to see that a satisfactory reading rate is developed, that thoughts are obtained and that ability to organize material is developed. Careful attention should be given to all factors that affect speed, comprehension, ability to organize, ability to reproduce and oral reading. Every effort should be made to create a desire for good literature and to develop a love for reading. The teacher should recognize the fact that there are various kinds of reading matter; that we read for various purposes, and that there are various types of reading ability."

"One reading is not likely to arouse a lasting interest; and so three readings are advised, each having a specific yet related purpose. Have one rapid reading to get conception of the piece of literature as a whole; part of the reading may be done by teacher, part by pupils in class, and part by pupils at home. A second

reading should clear away difficulties in meanings, and pupils should try to get the thought and feeling rather than the form of the selection. The third reading is for effective oral rendering of those parts of the selection which make special appeals to the pupil's imaginations and sympathies.

"To encourage the outside private reading of books, the teacher may devote a class period occasionally, once a fortnight or oftener, to an oral reading of some interesting passage chosen by the pupil. He is told that on a certain day he may have ten of fifteen minutes in which to read to the class some very interesting incident from his book; that first he must tell, very briefly, so much as the class need to know of the story and its characters to understand the passage read, and that after the reading he may, if he choose tell how the story concludes. A private rehearsal will add greatly to the exercise at first.

"Of course each child cannot be called on in this exercise very frequently-indeed, it is from the best pupils that the most gratifying results will be obtained, so far as oral reading is concerned, and also the most stimulus for the other pupils to read the book. But better based criticism can be made on this extended re-

citation than on small units of reading; the child is put on his exhibition mettle; he has practice moreover, while presenting the introduction and conclusion of his incident, in oral composition, both in details and its larger aspects of choosing and grouping; his taste in selection of good material is tested; and the other children are stimulated not only to emulation of the best, which should be recognized and generously praised, but also to read the books from which the selections are taken."

Human experience and nature experiences furnish the background for reading at a later time. Reading for appreciation is the kind of reading we shall do throughout life for recreation. Appreciation involves the pleasure tone. It is our desire to develop in our children an appreciation of good literature so that they will voluntarily employ part of their leisure time in worthwhile reading. We cannot accomplish this by imposing adult standards upon them nor by over-analysis and too detailed treatment of selections used for appreciation. The skilful teacher will be careful to watch her pupils to see whether they are enjoying lessons designed for appreciation or whether they are bored. The first requisite for the teaching of a selection for appreciation, is real appre-

ciation on the part of the teacher. The skilful teacher will supplement her class work in appreciation by suggesting lists of library books suitable for pupils at this stage, inviting an expression of the books read, and studying the tastes of those seemilgly lacking in appreciation.

"Whatever class discussion occurs must never be in the form of recitation designed to test whether pupils have studied the assignment it should never be the giving of predigested information by the teacher. It must be a sharing of real experience. In so far as we meet this condition, we achieve the end of all teaching literature. So when a class of city children pool into the common fund their experiences on a farm, with diagrams and graphic comparisons, so as to see the pictures and feel the whole of the experience in Snowbound, we have a genuine literary experience and very real enjoyment. That is the end and purpose of our work."

"The approach to literature for real experience and enjoyment must never be analytical and critical; it must alwaus be co-operative, creative; it must be the reader's attempt to put together out of his own past experience, those pictures and sounds and odors the writer presents. Very rarely has class-room literature teaching centered on this aim. Unless it does teachers will continue to develop distaste for genuine literature.

"To realize and live again an author's experiences is a difficult feat, and we need to help not hinder. It is particularly necessary for this purpose to postpone for some time the heavier literature which we have forced down several grades below where it belongs."

"Where necessary, the teacher may introduce pupils briefly to the time or mood or author of the story.

"The teacher, as a leader of the group, may spend five minutes in a brief, objective test of whether pupils understand what they have read, and as much time as necessary in discussing the answers and allowing as correct all that pupils can support sensibly by reference to the book.

"Above, all, by stimulating discussion, he will help give reality to the living experience the writer presented and make it so far as possible a colorful, vivid pageant of experience; he will then direct attention to the central idea a theme of the whole which gives it artistic unity. By such means he can contribute to literature as a means of fuller living, and get, as fine by-products, a genuine appreciation of literature and a growing, because unforced, criticism of life and conduct on the part of his pupils."

How readily children, especially those who have good imaginations, imitate their heroes is well known. A good story is worth a dozen good precepts. While it is not

always the case that to know right is to do right, it is undeniable that right knowing is necessary to right doing, and that just views tend to make right actions. To come to know good literature is to see truly and fairly; to get beyond the outside of one's personal point of view, and to see things as they are to all men. Such an attitude cannot fail to increase respect for the rights of others. The one whose mind is softened by pity and guided by reason is likely to be considerate of others.

Nowa-days every school has or is accumulating some sort of library. But at the same time private ownership of books should be encouraged; nothing can quite take its place. In the words of Dr. Reyer:

"Every youth should have his or her own library, which jowever, small should be select. To seal some knowledge of their content with the delightful sense of ownership helps to preserve the apparatus of culture, keeps green early memories, or make one of the best of tangible mementoes of parental care and love."

In the past, oral reading has been given much more time and attention in the reading period then its importance seems to demand. Still, when we listen to the average oral reading lesson, we are immediately impressed with the fact that the schools are not producing good oral

readers. Why is this true? Is it not possible that in our efforts to assist the child we have placed too much emphasis upon word analysis and word recognition and have failed to teach him to look for thought in his reading? Has not the word rather than the sentence been taken as the reading unit?

A clear understanding of thought is the most essential element in oral reading. Without such an understanding there can be no true oral reading. It must be distinctly understood that the mere calling of words is not reading and should never be permitted. The more completely the child puts himself in the place of the character he is representing and gets the spirit of the selection, the better will his oral reading be.

Instant recognition of the printed words and a clear understanding of their meanings are necessary elements of any reading.

Oral reading to be effective, requires good expression. Good expression can come only after the pupil has a clear understanding of the thought and feeling that are to be expressed. Oral reading should not be too rapid. Every word should be pronounced clearly and distinctly.

It is well recognized that supplementary readers and reading material are very helpful in teaching the child

to read. Many schools now have, in the library, much good reading material. Many schools also have sets of supplementary readers that can be used by the class in recitation. There seems to be little uniformity as to just how the supplementary readers or sets are to be used. Some teachers take up the adopted text and use it continually until it is completed, then a supplementary reader is taken up in the same manner and so on until the close of the year. Others use the text until the lessons become difficult, then they work with the supplementary readers up to about the same place in the book. They then take up the text again for some time. Still others, and we believe that this is the best plan, make daily use of both the text and supplementary readers. The plan is to use the text as a basis for word study and to enlarge the pupil's reading vocabulary, also to use it for the study period in silent reading. By using the text daily in this way new words are constantly added to the child's reading vocabulary and the difficulty of the material increases as the child gains strength to handle it. By this plan the supplementary readers are used to fix the word forms that have been presented in the text and also to give practice in reading simple interesting material.

As the supplementary reader is simpler then the text

and is used for more extensive reading it will be covered much faster then the basal reader. Much of the material for supplementary reading can be taken from the content subjects or from magazines.

Every teacher, while at liberty to use her own methods in teaching reading, should, by all means, secure a copy of the teacher's manual for the reader she is using. In it she will find information, suggestions and directions that will be of great value to her in preparing her work for the daily recitation.

Judicious use should be made of standardized and informal tests for the purpose of determining typical errors and of ascertaining adequate remedial measure. The systematic use of speed and comprehension tests prevents good habits from lapsing and bad habits from forming. Informal tests may be given frequently, but standardized tests should be given at the beginning and close of the session to measure reading ability of pupils of selected and unselected groups. Interpretation of these tests requires tact and breadth of vision for many significant abilities cannot be measured by such tests.

Both informal and standardized tests can be used to distinct advantage in every classroom. The teacher who records the number of words read per minute by each pupil in a class has a much more accurate basis for drawing con-

clusions about rates of reading than the teacher who proceeds without recording these facts. The teacher who records the number and kinds of errors made by each pupil in reading paragraphs of equal length can determine with great accuracy the sort of help which the class as a whole and the individual pupils need. Furthermore, facts of the kind just described present a picture of the accomplishments and limitations of a class in clear convincing terms. It also reveals many facts about the reading of the pupils which mught pass unnoticed during the progress of a recitation.

Informal tests are organized by the classroom teacher for the purpose of securing accurate records concerning the accomplishment of pupils. They are to supplement the standardized tests and do not take their place. Frequent use of such tests will make teaching more definite.

To measure the rate of oral reading choose one or more selections read early in the year. Make no previous assignment. The pupils should read as many ordinary reading lesson without suspecting that any record is being kept. Have ample material so that no two pupils read the same paragraph. Use a watch with a second hand. When a pupil begins reading, note the exact second. When exactly sixty seconds have passed, check the work read. Let him con-

tinue without interruption to the end of the paragraph. If a pupil hesitates over a difficult word, pronounce it for him. Write the names of pupils on the margin. At your earliest convenience, count the words read by each pupil. Arrange the results from lowest to highest and place on the blackboard. Some pupils may be too rapid, others too slow. Keep the record on file for comparison. Such tests may be made several times during the session.

In silent reading select an exercise that has not been previously studied. It may be from the reader or any other text-book, just so that each pupil has a copy. Direct the pupils to turn to the page preceeding the one on which the exercise begins. Tell them that they will be expected to read and answer questions about the exercise; that all begin at the same time, read for three minutes and stop at a signal. See that pupils understand what they are expected to do. When the second hand of your watch reaches fifty-seven seconds, direct the pupils to turn the page and begin reading. Stop them when three minutes have elapsed and have each pupil mark the last word read. Count and report the number of lines read. Immediately place on the blackboard two or three questions, previously prepared, bearing on the leading topics in the exercise. Give five or ten minutes for all

to write the answers to these questions. Take up the papers and grade them, using the percentage scale. You now have two results: speed and comprehension. Arrange both in order of rank and place on the blackboard, directing the attention of the class to the grade average, or median, and records of each pupil. Keep their records for comparison with similar tests to be given later.

These tests are of great value. Knowing the situation is the first step in effective teaching of reading. They reveal individual and class weaknesses; great variations in ability; progress in rate and comprehension. They are most frequently given under normal class-room conditions. Teachers develop interest in objective measurement. They are led to base their judgment upon facts rather then opinion. Pupils are stimulated to greater activity. Motives become more definite. The giving, scoring, tabulating and interpreting of such tests there take comparatively little time and effort.

Standardized tests have a distinct advantage over informal tests in that they are better organized, are a more refined measure and have standards which indicate what should be accomplished. They should be given near the beginning of the term and once or twice more during the year. Informal tests can be given as often as the teacher desires.

The habits and skills which children should possess by the time they leave the eighth grade are: mastery of the machenics of reading; ability to read thought in the printed page; efficient habits in oral and silent reading; extensive and varied reading experiences; andestablished literary habit and the appreciation and love of good literature.

Scientific research and daily class-room experience tend to the following conclusions:

Reading is a distinct social necessity.

Each phrase of reading is valuable and should be utilized as life needs demand.

Silent reading leads to the acquisition of a wide range of human experience and inculcates habits of study.

Oral reading is a means of sharing thoughts with others, interpreting literary content, and of improving speech habits and voice quality.

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