

READING AND THE LIBRARY

Catholic Library World



Volume 47

February, 1976

Number 7

The New York Times reported (October 30, 1975, p. 42) that a University of Texas study reveals that there are 23 million functionally illiterate adults in the United States. The authors of this article conducted their own study of elementary school children and came up with some amazing results which form the basis for their call for media specialists' involvement in reading programs. The involvement is identified in three types: peripheral, participatory, and programatic.

Reading and the media specialist

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Reporting the results of two recent studies, which included reading skill and interest as a part of their design, remind the authors of the role played by Paul Revere in his spread of grim tidings to the colonists of Lexington and Concord. Media specialists have noted with alarm the University of Texas study which shows that there are 23 million functionally illiterate adults in the United States.¹ Motivated by this and other concerns, the state of California has developed literacy tests which can be taken by those students who wish to drop out of high school. These tests will indicate to prospective employers the reading skill level (among other skills) of the young adult.

The second study was conducted by one of the authors in the elementary schools of Indiana during the 1974-75 school year.² The study involved 2,389 second, fourth, and

fifth grade children in 32 randomly selected elementary schools in Indiana who responded to two questions which were designed to compare their interest in reading with viewing and listening to audiovisual materials. See *figure 1* for results of the study.

It becomes immediately apparent that as grade level increases, interest in reading drops off significantly but interest in audiovisual materials is maintained. What is more disturbing is that the 32 schools had a variety of media center situations (some with classroom collections; centralized collections with minimal staff; and media centers with clerks, part-time professionals, and full-time professionals), but the pattern remained essentially the same. That is, the presence of a full-time librarian in the "average" school did not prevent the rate of drop in reading interest!

After the initial shock of looking at the results of the study in *figure 1*, one wonders: What is really being measured? Are we measuring interest in books vs. audiovisual materials? Could it be that we are comparing work against play?—suggesting that audiovisual materials are still not carrying enough of the information load in these schools? Is the pressure put on reading skill in every school subject (read words—answer questions; read words—think out solutions; etc.) responsible for the declining interest in the print medium? Is the home environment of the students responsible for the decline? Is the technique of teaching the problem? In one school visited during the Indiana study (a school in the Encyclopaedia Britannica winning Duneland School Corporation),³ 89 out of 90 students surveyed said "Yes, I like to read." This school draws children from all socio-economic levels and has an open-concept media center with a full-time media specialist and a full-time clerk. Whatever is being done in that school (and of course media specialists would like some of the credit) is motivating the children to maintain an interest in reading far above their peers in "average" schools. Some researchers indicate that the home is the single greatest predictor of success in the school, and that at best, our teaching methods are a leveling influence.⁴ Certainly, we need better measures to sort out what influences are contributing to the success of the program at the Duneland School Corporation and what are determining the drop in many other schools. Intriguing challenges for the researcher!

Meanwhile, back in Lexington and Concord, media specialists cannot just ignore Revere and go back to bed—even with the possibility of defeat staring them in the face. If our methods at present are similar to the Revolutionary War rifles, let us have faith that somehow we can develop a machine gun.

Perhaps each media specialist needs to realistically face the question: What measurable impact am I having on reading skill and

reading enjoyment in my school? That question may be difficult to answer in the abstract, but more specific questions might give a clue: Is there a child (children) in this school who is a better reader because of something I've done? How many children have read books that I have suggested and returned for more? How long am I able to sustain the interest of individual children in the books I suggest? How many children have been motivated to enjoy better literature because of some activity that I promoted in the media center?

For the purpose of discussion, let us categorize the media specialist's interaction with the reading program into three levels and make a professional judgment concerning the probability of success of each type of involvement.

Peripheral Involvement

In school A the media specialist has built a quality collection of materials by careful selection from basic collection lists and from current review periodicals. Classes of children come to the media center on a regularly scheduled basis and are treated to a story time following which they select books (one to three titles depending on age) to take home for the week. Teachers come to the center and check out armloads of books to supplement whatever is going on in the classroom—perhaps setting up a reading table which is available to students whenever there is some free time. Some media specialists, anxious to make use of the audiovisual materials available, make provisions for the children to view and listen to materials during book selection time “if you've got your book checked out.” The media specialist tries, during story hour, to introduce the children to a variety of literary styles, types of children's literature, and to the artists of picture books. Children do compete to check out whatever title is being read, and if the story is particularly good, that competition lasts for several months. The program in school

A is quite independent of classroom activities. Coordination of story or reading guidance topics with classroom may occur occasionally, but are accidental or spur-of-the-moment. This type of program is judged peripheral because of its independence from the school curriculum and from the reading program.

Participatory Involvement

School B has a media specialist with spunk and creativity. She is the kind of person who does make some effort to know what is going on in the classroom and organizes her activities in the media center accordingly. The media specialist may also instigate activities which spill over into the classroom such as having children write their own books, or having them experiment with art techniques that picture book artists use. This media specialist has lots of gimmicks up her sleeve to demonstrate that reading is fun and to involve children in literature-related activities. Success? Impact on reading skill and interest? The answer is probably both yes and no. The media specialist in this school needs to measure whether the activities actually lead to reading and if so, how much and by whom? Is the child's enthusiasm for coming to the media center centered upon reading or upon the activities as ends in themselves? (This is not to say that activities unconnected with the reading program might not have some great contributions to make to the education of the child).

Programmatic Involvement

In school C, the media specialist uses many of the techniques of the schools A and B. The difference is that the media specialist plans for success in the reading program of the entire school. She may dig out Alice and Robert Fite's article in *School Media Quarterly*, “Media Services and Reading Skills” (Fall, 1973)⁵ and plan a program with many of their suggestions in mind. For example: *The media specialist has and develops a working knowledge of the concepts, philosophies and techniques of instruction in the skill of reading adopted and followed by the faculty and reading specialist(s) assigned to the building.*

The media specialist becomes an extension of the reading specialist through involvement in instructional programs which are directly related to the school's concepts of reading.

The media specialist lends support to the school's reading program by developing and cooperating in programs of instruction wherein the reading specialist and the media specialist teach in various teaching functions.

But with all of Fite's suggestions and others from the professional literature, the media specialist channels her creativity carefully to achieve the best results (measured by reading scores, types of reading done (qualitative), amount read, interests stimulated, number of reading guidance “clients,” number

STUDY OF STUDENT INTEREST IN READING AND AV MATERIALS

	DO YOU LIKE TO READ?			DO YOU LIKE TO LOOK AND LISTEN TO A-V MATERIALS?		
	NO	SOME-TIMES	YES	NO	SOME-TIMES	YES
2nd grade	3%	26%	71%	1%	15%	84%
4th grade	3%	42%	55%	1%	19%	80%
5th grade	3%	46%	51%	1%	21%	78%

(Chi square test significant at the .05 level)

(Chi square test not significant)

Figure 1

of children avoiding reading, number of children choosing reading among other activity options, etc.).

Concluding Thoughts

The profession has advocated for years that media specialists be in the vanguard of leading students and teachers to resources, both print and non-print, that establish the reading or user habit. To do so, however, requires careful planning, involvement, evaluation, and modifying techniques until concrete results are achieved. Today's media specialists have the advantage of numerous technologies to help in the reading effort. With the surge in publishing and quality audiovisual materials we can help students find a page of Paul Revere's doodling or ride with him through the countryside. Students may see facsimiles or pictures of the primers Paul studied like the *New England Primer* or John Cotton's *Spiritual Milk for Boston Babes*; books which taught that children were not "born to live, but born to dye". Through books and audiovisual media the whole world is opened to students, every person, every place, every time. We must redouble our efforts to see that children are not denied this heritage. □

References

1. *New York Times*, October 30, 1975, p. 42.
2. David V. Loertscher and Phyllis Land, "An Empirical Study of Media Services in Indiana Elementary Schools," *School Media Quarterly*, IV, No. 1 (Fall, 1975), 8-18.
3. "Duneland Schools Win EBE Top Media Program Award," *Hoosier School Libraries*, XII, No. 4 (May, 1973), 9.
4. Robert L. Thorndike, *Reading Comprehension Education in Fifteen Countries: An Empirical Study* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1973).
5. Alice E. Fite and Robert E. Fite, "Media Center Services and Reading Skills," *School Media Quarterly*, II, No. 1 (Fall, 1973), 19-25.

Attention, College Librarians

GRANTS-IN-AID will again be awarded by the College, University and Seminary Section of CLA to enable college librarians to attend the 1976 CLA national convention in Chicago, Illinois (April 19-22).

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4. You must have attended at least FIVE (5) CLA national conventions since 1960.
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