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ABSTRACT

The interaction between the individual and his reading was analyzed according to four major points, and the contributions that reading can make to his total development were discussed. The first major point discussed was purpose for reading. It was pointed out that teachers need to help each pupil see the need for reading in terms of his own aspirations and desires for both the present and future. Second, was the individual's acceptance of responsibility for his own learning. Teachers can help students recognize the small increments of growth in reading and other subjects that prcvide the motivation for continued study. The instructional aim is to make the students independent. Third, was the development cf the thinking individual. This can only be accomplished if started in the early years. Fourth, was the necessity for self-renewal as a lifelong pursuit. The reading teacher has a fundamental role in helping individuals gain the skills that enable them to launch out in diverse directions to pursue self-renewal that will be most meaningful. References are included. (Author/CL)

READING AND THE INDIVIDUAL

BY

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Meeting with IRA members, councils, and officers this past year has been an interesting, sometimes exhausting, but always satisfying experience. The dedication of these individuals and groups is always heartwarming to see, and this concern should result in improved instruction in reading.

Just two examples will suffice. Because I was passing through the town, the Anacortes (Washington) Reading Council asked me to speak to their group. They had invited other councils in the area to come to the meeting, but the Puget Sound ferries do not regulate their schedule according to the timing of an IRA meeting. So some enterprising teachers from Port Angeles persuaded a friend with a private airplane to take them across the Strait of Juan de Fuca so they could attend.

The second example: Visualize the American Legion Hall in Minnedosa, Manitoba (Canada), a town of about 5,000 people. Approximately two hundred people from five school districts are gathered. Included in the group are the Mayor of the town, the superintendent of schools and his assistant, superintendents and principals from the districts involved, teachers, and parents. The occasion is a meeting of the Reading Council of Rolling River, at which their charter is to be presented. The whole community is represented; the enthusiasm is contagious; and one more IRA council is being launched.

These two examples have been selected, but any number of others could have been chosen--state meetings where 1,000-3,500 people have attended, local councils that draw 4-500 for a special meeting, or councils where the faithful 40 or 50 gather to meet regularly. But these two were chosen because they illustrate that the quality of IRA

is not measured only in numbers. It is measured in what happens to the individuals who participate and to the students they teach, be these Head Start pupils or doctoral candidates.

After all, it is the individual member of IRA who receives and transmits the benefits, directly or indirectly. Who is to say this individual profits more when the group is large than when it is small?

The topic for the convention and for this occasion was chosen because of my conviction of the need to focus on the individual and how reading affects him. The implications, however, are like dropping a pebble into a pond--the ripples spread ever-wider in all directions.

It is not my purpose here to delineate the methods for teaching individuals how to read, nor how a teacher can cope with individual differences in a class. Other sessions of the convention have concentrated on these aspects. The purpose here is to analyze the interaction between the individual and his reading and to recognize the contribution that reading can make to his total development. Only four points will be discussed, though admittedly there are others.

First is purpose: Reading for what? to what end? Is reading necessary in an Electronic Age where non-printed means of communication abound? Walter J. Ong, S.J., Professor of English at St. Louis University points out that communication leading to technological culture has passed through three stages: (1) where all verbal communication was oral; (2) where verbal communications was put into writing and reached its fullest development with the invention of movable alphabetic type; and (3) where verbal communication was reduced to code with the invention of the telegraph and has been refined in the modern electric computer.

Other electronic devices, like television, have brought sight and sound into a new prominence.[1]

Oral cultures had no way to preserve their records, except through bards, storytellers, or others who remembered events. With the advent of writing, individuals who wished to learn could do so independently and objectively. The Electronic Age has given a new organization to communication but, as Ong points out, this, too, has been built upon the accumulated experience with oral and printed forms. People did not stop talking when printing was invented; neither will people stop reading because computers and television have been invented. What is different is the effect on individuals who can now be in constant touch with global--and space--events as they are occurring, not hours or days later. But to understand, assimilate, and put into perspective the information and attitudes presented through these avenues requires a background the individual can probably best receive through print. So, too, will the technicians, the punch-card operators, the office staffs, the programers, the directors, and the inventors be dependent upon printed records and sources to accomplish their work. Input into computers is still dependent upon reading, and one of the products of the computer is the print-out, which also must be read. Even when computers will be sophisticated enough to process the human voice, store it, and use it as output, the printed word--and reading--will still be needed, if for nothing more than the catalog, for there will still be those who wish to compare, retrace, and be stimulated by the printed page.

Nor should the aesthetic value of seeing, holding, and reading a beautiful book be minimized. If individuals are to develop standards

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[1]Walter J. Ong, "Media and Culture," The University of Chicago Magazine, LXI (March/April, 1969), 25-27.

for their own taste, they need to have experience with beautiful books, not a sterile, square-box computer or pulpy paperbacks, but books designed and illustrated with artistry and good taste.

Granted that reading is likely to be available in the future, to what end shall an individual read? Not long ago a third grade class was asked by their teacher to answer the question: "Why Should I Learn to Read?" Some of their answers are enlightening:

> There are many reasons why I should read. I must be a good reader to study all my subjects at school, such as Math, Social Studies, English Literature, and Science. I must be a good reader to read instructions on how to do things. I want to be a good reader so I can enjoy reading magazines and good books for pleasure.
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> If I didn't know how to read, I couldn't read the newspapers, help my children with their school work, and when I drive (when I'm older) I couldn't read traffic and highway signs. You will not be able to go to parties because you would not know how to the read the invitations.
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> You should learn to read because when you grow up you will not know what is going on, if you cannot read the newspapers and magazines. We read because we need to know if it is the right thing, but if we do not know how to read, we would not understand other people. Also it is fun to read.
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> If I did not know how to read, I couldn't help my children. I wouldn't be able to sew a dress because I wouldn't know how to read the pattern, or I wouldn't make a cake because I couldn't read the cook book.

> When you want to get a job, you will not get one because you do not know how to read, and they will say you should have learned to read. You will try and try, but you will not get a job. So learn to read.[2]

These children can see the functional, social, vocational and recreational aspects of reading, both for the present and the future. And if they are typical, these children also spend about twenty hours a week looking at television, but still they see the need for learning to read; some of them even admit it is fun to do.

Teachers need to help pupils see the need for reading in terms of their own aspirations and desires, both for the present and for the future.

Second is the individual's acceptance of responsibility for his own learning. Some pupils come to school from environments where much is constantly done for and to them. Some children come from homes where they are cared for by adults who love them and give them support and encouragement. Even in homes where children are neglected, much may not have been demanded of them as individuals, though of course just <u>being</u> neglected demands a great deal of children. All these children come to school and whether it is in the first grade where they are expected to learn to read for themselves or whether it is in any grade above the first, many refuse to face up to the task and try to evade it in any possible way. Younger pupils sometimes get a stomachache; older ones get a headache. Some of the pupils attempt to preserve their self-images by not trying to learn, for thus they have not failed. <u>If</u> they tried, they console themselves, they could have learned; but they do not try. And so they do not learn.

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[2]Barbara Bailey, Teacher of Third Grade, Boone School, Kansas City, Missouri.

There are others who will try, reluctantly, but who need the continued support and encouragement of teachers and parents every step of the way. And then there are those who approach each new problem with confidence, anticipation, and evident enjoyment. There are more of these latter than sometimes is recognized in the preoccupation with those who need much help. Do not forget them; they, too, are individuals! These various types of learners are found at every level of education, but sensitive teachers will do their best to give the support and encouragement plus the instructional help that should result in learning.

Students must assume the responsibility for consciously concentrating, listening, applying, and remembering what they are trying to learn. Regardless of how long it takes a teacher to prepare a lesson, or how carefully she has sequenced the learning steps to fit an individual, or how adroitly she presents the materials and ideas in a lesson, no teacher can learn for the student. She may have learned a great deal from the preparation herself, but the student must do <u>his</u> learning for himself. And he may have to discipline himself when class gets dull or the teacher a little less scintillating than the television programs he is wont to see.

The acceptance of learning for oneself adds another dimension to accountability, a term which is bandied about in educational circles today. Accountability is not new, for responsible people have always been accountable when asked. Perhaps the recent interest has come about in certain areas because, for the first time, someone is asking. Teachers who are doing their jobs well have nothing to fear; in fact, they should welcome this public visibility. If schools <u>could</u> do better with the time,

the staff, facilities, and pupils they have, perhsps the fact of an accounting will give them the needed motivation to do the best they can.

However, when comparisons of this and that are being made, it is important that comparable aspects be evaluated, that factors like time spent, kinds of materials available, pupil-teacher ratio, salary level, quality of students, and direct and concomitant learnings are considered, not just scores on one or another of the standard tests.

Success in mastering something new makes an important contribution to the development of the individual's self-concept, how he views himself. Does he see himself as achieving, or does he see himself as constantly failing? Many students are defeated before they start, and because of this attitude do fail. They do not put forth the effort they could. Notice the difference between winning and losing teams that are well-matched for skill, then see the differences when a sudden break turns the tide and, once again, the laggers have the possibility of winning. Some children feel they have no chance to win and thus are defeated before they start. Certainly school is one place where they should have an even chance. What they do with it is their responsibility, and as they see small increments of success, this serves as motivation for still another small increment, until the students become convinced that they <u>can</u> learn.

Resiliency and perseverence are characteristics of achievers, and some underachievers need to cultivate these traits if they are to succeed. Teachers must help students recognize the small increments of growth in reading and other subjects that will provide the motivation for continued study, so that pupils can ultimately ferret out what they need and want

to know from the printed page by themselves. To make the pupils independent is a major instructional aim, though some teachers, like mothers, hesitate to "let go."

Third is the development of the thinking individual. This point emphasizes that man is a rational animal, but it also recognizes his right to be different. Wayne C. Booth, Dean of the College of the University of Chicago, points out that "the man who cannot think for himself, going beyond what other men have learned or thought, is still enslaved to other men's ideas."[3] Too often in our society, the man on the street waits to see what the popular trend will be--what the pollsters, news analysts, and other tastemakers tell him he is thinking--before he pledges his thoughts, money, or efforts to a cause or an idea. If a democratic society is to remain truly democratic, each individual must do his own thinking for himself and not be swayed by the last person he has heard or read or seen. If what Robert M. Hutchins says is true that "the use of television in the United States in the 1960's, can be put in its proper light by supposing that Gutenberg's great invention had been directed almost entirely to the publication of comic books,"[4] not much thinking is likely to result from being glued to the video screen.

Independence of thought must be based upon a background of information, much of which can be acquired only by reading, upon the ability to sift and weigh data, upon the ability to judge relevance and internal consistency, and upon the ability to accept, evaluate, and integrate new data when it

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[3]Wayne C. Booth, (ed.) The Knowledge Most Worth Having. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 22.

[4]Robert M. Hutchins, The Learning Society. (New York: The New American Library, 1969), p. 157.

appears. Where would the sciences be, or what kinds of automobiles would people be driving, or where would ancient history be without the discoveries of modern day? Booth recognizes the role that critical thinking assumes, for he identifies as the most important mark of a truly educated man "the habitual effort to ask the right critical questions and to apply rigorous tests to our hunches."[5]

Beyond the educated man, however, is the society of which he is a part. Will he analyze the problems of his day--and there are problems a-plenty: over population, poverty, war and pestilence; the fate of public education in America; the economic and educational needs in under-developed countries; and the making of a healthful, beautiful environment for all to enjoy in their pleisure time that looms in the offing. Will the individual analyze or will he blindly follow, caught up in mob psychology, and go his way complaining? Or will he try through constructive channels to alleviate some of the difficulties in his own area, in his own small way? The problems remain the same, but the attitude of optimism or pessimism can make a difference. Perhaps it is time to do a turn-about and move forward optimistically rather than wallow longer in self-pity and pessimism. This is more in keeping with the American tradition than a defeatist attitude. "Andre Maurois once said of Americans, 'In a word, they are optimists,' and the judgment still holds good, according to John W. Gardner, who goes on to say that "The capacity of our people to believe stubbornly and irrepressibly that this is a world worth saving, and that intelligence and energy and good will might save it, is one of the most endearing and bracing of American

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[5]Wayne C. Booth (ed.) The Knowledge Most Worth Having. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 23.

traits."[6]

Nor does this mean that there is only one channel, one way to achieve progress or individual self-fulfillment. Diversity has always been possible in an open-ended society, and Western civilization from Aristotle to the Renaissance man, to Margaret Mead, has been built upon the contributions of diverse elements in the society. John Rader Platt, a professor of physics, maintains that

> ...Progress would be faster and life more interesting if we pursued more diverse goals--goals of excellence to be sure, but goals of our own, different from what everybody else is pursuing--and if we tolerated and encouraged the same sort of individuality in others. I want life to be various. I want to see around me not only apple trees but pear trees, not only fruit trees but slow-growing oaks and evergreen pines and rosebushes and bitter but salubrious herbs and casual danedelions and good old spread-out grass. Let us be different, and enjoy the differences![7]

Educators have long been aware of individual differences, though not necessarily liking the non-conformity, which is another evidence of differences. Recently the term "divergent thinking," has come into the educational vocabulary, and the results of the research by Jacob Getzels and Philip Jackson has pointed out that there are aspects of creativity (or diversity) that bear little relation to intelligence as formerly measured.[8] What is the individual's goal in life, for himself and his

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[6]Walter J. Ong, S.J. "Media and Culture," The University of Chicago Magazine, LXI (March/April, 1969), p. 114.

[7]John R. Platt. "Diversity," in Wayne C. Booth, (ed.) op. cit., p. 109.

[8]Ibid., p. 130.

children in this society? Should not individuals have the chance to develop skills they do not possess, to develop different ways of solving their problems, to do something badly, perhaps? Do the goals of education, as education for living in a society, need redefinition? Are individuals learning how to conserve their health, to live in clean, comfortable, attractive homes and cities, to utilize their mental power to achieve satisfaction from knowing in addition to using, to live in harmony with their fellow men--or at least to live and let live? These are the important questions to ask--and answer.

Teachers need to see their day-by-day lessons that accumulate to 180 days a year, twelve or thirteen years to high school graduation, as building blocks toward these larger goals. Little children, and older ones, too, can start by picking paper off the floor, not writing on walls, and not throwing candy wrappers on the playground! The larger goals can only be accomplished if a start is made.

Fourth is the necessity for self-renewal as a life-long pursuit. The learning individual is curious, open-minded, and thoughtful. He can accept new ways of doing and new ways of thinking. To be a perpetual learner requires an objective view of self, as Socrates knew so well, enough self-confidence and courage to be willing to fail (or at least to look foolish in the pursuit), motivation from within rather than from external sources, and enough energy, drive, and enthusiasm to see the project through, even when the going gets tough. Individuals who have accepted the responsibility for their own learning, who have learned to think critically, who have learned to function independently and creatively, must take the last step and commit themselves to a larger goal beyond

themselves. For unless they do, the individual may survive but the society will collapse.

Pioneers in any field, whether exploration, mountain climbing, botany, women's rights, or space, exemplify the self-renewing characteristics. Without the confidence, perseverence, and commitment to an ideal, they would never have succeeded. Societies have become solidified and structured with customs and traditions that hinder their self-renewal. The basic problem in many societies today, including our own, is not the development of technology, but the development of an organization that makes adequate provision for human beings to use the technology to find a meaningful life. When this has been achieved, then the individual will know who he is, from whence he came, and if not where he is going, at least he knows the way he is headed.

But the answer may be disappointing for those who now believe that once his physical needs are met, when he finally lives in the comfort and style to which he aspires, the answer has been found. Already the affluent society has given at least a segment of the society the material comforts they demand. They, then, should be supremely happy. But is the answer in the acquisition of <u>things</u>? It may not be too long before all segments of the society will have the physical comforts they need and wish, what then? How will their leisure time be used? Is a perpetual beach-boat-recreation-animal kind of existence enough? History has shown that societies die when the ideal for which they were originated has been achieved or when some vigorous, energetic group, committed to an ideal of their own, overran the apathetic populace.

The only prevention lies in the possibility of continual self-renewal, not only of individuals but of the society. For as individuals who are members of the society continue to renew themselves, so has the society a chance to renew itself. Self-renewal is needed not only in body but in mind and spirit. Already evidences of self-renewal are seen in the back-to-school movement of housewives whose children are at last in school, in the increasing night-school attendance of young employees, and in the large number of informal groups through neighborhoods, clubs, and private agencies that entice adults to continue their learning. Some of them do need to learn how to do a second or third job, for theirs have disappeared in the wave of automation. But for many others, this new interest in learning has no vocational aim at all, but is merely a means of self-renewal that brings a satisfaction not to be achieved in any other way.

Teachers of reading have a fundamental role to play in helping individuals--and ultimately the society--to gain the skills that will enable them to launch out in many diverse directions as each pursues the self-renewal that will give his life meaning and make it all worthwhile. Such a teacher is described by Werner Heisenberg when he says:

> ...Classroom lessons generally allow the different landscapes of the world of the mind to pass by our eyes without quite letting us become at home in them. According to the teacher's abilities they illuminate these landscapes more or less brightly and we remember the pictures for a shorter or a longer time. However, very occasionally, an object that has thus come into our field of view will suddenly begin to shine in its own light--first, dimly and vaguely, then ever more brightly, until finally it will glow through

> our entire mind, spill over to other subjects, and eventually become an important part of our own life.[9]

Such brightness the teachers of reading can help achieve.

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[9]Werner Heisenberg, "A Scientist's Case for the Classics," Harper's Magazine, (May, 1958), p. 27.

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