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ABSTRACT

Considering how literature for children provides more than just word recognition skills and thinking skills, this paper discusses several reasons why there should be a good children's literature curriculum in the school setting. It points out how children can experience life vicariously through good literature; how good literature can aid a child in making good choices in life; how children's literature provides avenues for relaxation and recreation; how reading children's literature can be a guidance resource; how children can become knowledgeable about different careers; how children's literature provides a springboard for creative thinking activities on the part of pupils; and how children's literature may be directly related to social studies, science, mathematics, the language arts, art, music, and physical education. It lists 10 guidelines for the teacher to assess his/her achievement in guiding optimal pupil achievement in children's literature. The paper discusses the evaluation of pupil progress in children's literature. It concludes by pointing out that pupils individually select and sequence their progress and achievement when choosing their own library books. (SC)

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# Reading and Literature for Children.

by Marlow Ediger

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## READING AND LITERATURE FOR CHILDREN

There are many reasons for emphasizing a quality literature curriculum for children. Reading instruction too frequently has centered upon word recognition skills such as using phonics, syllabication, structural analysis, context clues, picture clues, and configurational clues. It is important for pupils to possess these word recognition skills to identify unknown words. But quality literature has more to offer than word recognition skills. Also, thinking skills are stressed such as critical and creative thinking, problems solving, as well as reading to obtain facts, concepts, and generalizations. However important these thinking skills are and they are indeed important, literature for children incorporates, but goes beyond these skills (Ediger, 1997) .

### Why Childrens Literature?

There are many excellent reasons as to why there should be a good children's literature curriculum in the school setting. First, pupils may experience life vicariously. No one would wish to experience whatever life had to offer directly in all of its manifestations. There are too many negative occurrences which one definitely would prefer not to experience. These items include being robbed, fired from a job, death of a loved one, harsh climates for a long period of time, poverty, and other negative happenings. However, pupils may experience these occurrences in a vicarious way. We learn from the experience of others. One's life consists of experiences which makes possible for new ways to respond and live. There are many choices to be made and the arena of decision making increases in options as more possibilities are in the offering. Reading then provides opportunities for vicarious experiences. These vicarious experiences might limit the negative that can occur to an individual. They do provide more indirect experiences which might be used in the decision-making arenas. Thus there are things that one does not want to experience directly, but in a wholesome manner the experiences can be read about.

Second, choices are made in life involving standards to be used in

relating to others. Values are involved in decision making. These values can be dictated to children. Many times dictated values do not work. If pupils live without a set of guiding principles they may falter and fail in possessing that which gives a person criteria or standards to live by (See Leming, 1996) . Children's literature can deal with the values dimension in its many manifestations. Values are secured by learners from diverse sources and children's literature may make its numerous contributions here. Children's literature needs to meet needs of pupils from different backgrounds and cultures in the values dimension. Obtaining the interests of learners is important; otherwise pupils will not be engaged in reading about and considering various values. Pupils should reveal that core values are being achieved as they interact with pupils of different beliefs and religions. Pupils need to receive insight into the structure of values and how these may provide needed guidance in relating to others in school and in society. Learners may experience unique endeavors in learning about values such as in creative and formal dramatics, pantomime, and socio-drama. Positive values studied and acquired through children's literature need to be used. Application needs to be made of knowledge, skills, and attitudes achieved. The practical situation provides ample opportunities for pupils to use and make application of a values system.

Third, children's literature provides avenues for relaxation and recreation. I prize very highly the ability to read well. With reading, I am able to entertain myself and grow in appreciation for quality literature that has enduring values. These values have provided direction for myself and they were acquired through reading for recreation and relaxation. There certainly is a refreshing component when thinking of reading during one's leisure time. To spend even a few minutes of time in reading does help one to feel renewed with energy and purpose.

Each person needs to find ways of dealing with stress. Life can indeed be very stressful. Blessed is that person who finds ways that are effective in dealing with stress. Certainly, reading can be an approach in minimizing the stressful components of life. Children's literature may well provide that avenue. Teachers, supervisors, and parents should

make an all out effort to assist each pupil to read well so that recreational reading may become a relevant purpose.

Fourth, reading of children's literature can be a guidance resource. Difficulties are involved when facing problems. These problems need to be identified and relevant solutions sought. Literature for children might well be a vital resource to provide assistance in counseling and guidance. Pupils face diverse kinds of problems, such as extreme shyness, aggressive behavior, hostility, negativeness, ill health, obesity, and loneliness, among others. There are books written for children which can provide assistance in dealing with these kinds of problems. Bibliotherapy as a concept stresses using library books to deal with problems faced by pupils which seem overwhelming. Teachers and guidance counselors need to be very familiar with the wealth of library books that might well assist pupils to cope with endearing problems. I have observed in classrooms whereby teachers have suggested library books to pupils which were very helpful in dealing with and even overcoming what seemed as a major problem. For example, a girl felt she was much too tall compared to others in the classroom. She did fit into the category of being tall. After reading several library books on how individuals coped with their feelings, this girl was better able to accept herself by using personal strengths possessed to achieve, grow, and develop.

Fifth, pupils can become knowledgeable about different careers that are in the offing. Career selection can indeed be a problem for many young people. Career exploration is vital for any elementary school child. The learner needs to acquire information about different careers and what is involved here when moving on to the work place as an adult.

There are numerous quality library books on careers. I well remember supervising a student teacher and cooperating teacher in a classroom in which two pupils did extensive reading from library books to develop a career manual. The career manual written and illustrated for fourth grade pupils contained explanations of what training is involved for the careers being studied. Drawings were made of individuals

involved in each career writeup. These two pupils interviewed individuals in diverse careers. Here, pupils revealed much purpose and interest in their study. Reading of library books was central to this project. These two learners were greatly interested in careers. Later on in the high school years and beyond, these same two boys found the world of work to be enjoyable and interesting. I recommend having plenty of library books out to assist pupils with reading in the vocational and work arenas.

To learn to read well, the pupil needs to read, study, and think. I have noticed effective teachers do a good job of introducing carefully selected library books to children by telling some interesting aspects of these books. Also, numerous teachers have developed excellent bulletin board displays on library books in the classroom and centralized library which capture and fascinate learner interests and provide readiness of reading. The teacher also needs to be a good story teller so that pupils perceive sequence, plot, characterization, theme, point of view, and setting. Both student teachers and cooperating teachers whom I have supervised have told me about numerous good story tellers who have come to class and engaged in the telling of stories. Story telling seemingly motivates pupils to do more reading. Sometimes, the stories told have come from a library book in school. Many pupils then wish to read this library book.

Sixth, children's literature provides a springboard for creative thinking activities on the part of pupils. After pupils have completed reading a library book, learners volunteer to do a creative dramatics activity pertaining to the subject matter. Roles are selected and learners use speaking parts spontaneously without looking at print discourse. At other times pupils individually wrote parts from a library book read. Each pupil then might have a role to play in presenting content written as play parts. Creative dramatics has no written script but may be based on contents contained in a library book whereas formal dramatics had parts written down for each role. The parts may be memorized and presented to the class and other classrooms of children. Quality presentations have been developed whereby pupils orally read or speak their part in

sequence with others in formal dramatization. Creativity knows few bounds when children's literature provides the basis for this learning opportunity.

Seventh, children's literature may be related directly to social studies, science, mathematics, the language arts, art, music, and physical education (See Templeton, 1995). There is literature written for pupils which pertains to each of these subject matter areas. In the social studies then, there are library books written on many nations on the face of the earth as well as on minority groups, and diverse cultures. In science, library books on astronomy, geology, chemistry, physics, and other areas other numerous in their offerings. In mathematics, library books are valuable on history of mathematics, uses of mathematics, and biographies of famous mathematicians. In the language arts, there are fairy tales, myths, legends, tall tales, poetry, and different novels written to meet needs of pupils. In art, music, and physical education, there are also interesting library books written. I always enjoy reading biographies of well known artists, musicians, and basketball/football/baseball stars. There are library books written to meet interest and purpose needs of pupils as well as being on the diverse reading levels of individual pupils.

Each school needs to have ample library books in the offering which encourage reading and reflection on content read. Reading across the curriculum is an excellent concept to stress in the curriculum. One of the finest science units I observed as university supervisors of student teachers and cooperating teachers stressed the title, "Our Changing Environment." Here, pupils read library books on that unit title instead of the basal science textbook. It was amazing how pupils contributed in the discussion pertaining to content read on volcanoes, hurricanes, tornadoes, wind and water erosion, as well as other natural disasters in the world of science. Pupils individually in their reading of library book content were able to relate ideas to the ongoing interaction and discussions. I wholeheartedly recommend teachers giving this procedure a try in unit teaching. Using a variety of approaches in teaching is challenging and brings in the new to pupils.

**Pupils with teacher assistance need to understand and attach meaning to concepts such as setting of the story, characterization, plot, point of view, theme, irony of the situation, as well as satire. These literary concepts are used by novelists and writers in the world of literature (Ediger, 1988)..**

#### **Teacher Self Evaluation in the Literature Curriculum**

**The teacher needs to be a good evaluator of the self in determining pupil achievement. I would suggest the following as guidelines for the teacher to assess his/her achievement in guiding optimal pupil achievement in children's literature:**

**1. the teacher should be an avid reader of literature, be it for children or for adults. Pupils need to realize that the teacher does much reading and does not operate on the principle that children alone are to do the reading of diverse topics in literature.**

**2. There needs to be a literature program that is planned with an appropriate scope and sequence. A planned literature curriculum stresses that pupils read many library books on diverse topics and on unique individual levels of reading. The plan should include literature being emphasized across the different subject matter areas. Each unit of study taught should be integrated with library book content coming from different academic disciplines as well as from the vocational arenas. The literature curriculum should have its own objectives, carefully chosen, for pupil attainment.**

**3. The teacher needs to be fascinated with literature and indicate these interests to pupils. Here, the teacher may tell pupils about what he/she has read as it relates to what is being taught. In sharing time, the teacher might also indicate enthusiasm for reading in general. I believe enthusiasm to be very contagious. Pupil enthusiasm for reading is motivating and stimulating to do further reading. A literate society is needed. Literacy can be stressed in any curriculum area (Ediger, 1997).**

**4. Pupils need to find pleasure in reading. Using leisure time wisely has been a goal of education for a long time. Wise use of leisure time is important. I would suggest that teachers work in the direction**

whereby reading literature becomes recreational as well as utility in emphasis. I take books with me as I pursue business endeavors in town. Sometimes, such as in a supermarket line, I take out of my coat pocket a library book which is then read silently as I wait for my turn at the cash register. Pupils, too, need to love reading in its diverse manifestations.

5. there needs to be rational balance between scheduled literature sessions as well as pupils reading during free time. I believe pupils need to be given ample time to read during spare time in school. Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) may also be emphasized. Here, everyone in school reads at a given time. Pupils then see models in reading to emulate. They may also notice how people of all ages become interested in reading library books and other kinds of reading materials. I have observed SSR being stressed with student teacher and cooperating teacher guidance. I believe it is one answer to problems in encouraging learner interest in reading. In SSR, pupils individually select a library book to read. The learner, not the teacher, does the choosing of which books to read sequentially.

6. ample time needs to be given for free reading in the classroom. Pupils do tend to enjoy reading when there is time for this activity. The free reading time may emphasize pupils choosing a library book relating to an ongoing unit of study. Thus the free reading time relates directly to what is being studied in different curriculum areas. The learner may also choose a library book to read which is recreation in nature. With free time, pupils realize the values placed upon reading by the teacher and by the school. In most cases I have observed in supervising teachers in the public schools, pupils do read and not waste time in and during free reading. The teacher may need to work with pupils who have difficulties in settling down to read sequential library books.

7. pupils should read for both enjoyment and for information (Templeton, 1997). Both can stress assisting pupils to do well in the affective dimension. Pupils then should develop wholesome attitudes toward reading. If pupils learn to dislike reading, the chances are they will not develop the necessary literacy qualities so necessary for the twenty-first century. When I was in the public school years attending

from 1934-1946, an illiterate person was one who could not read or write, period. I gather now that the business world wants higher achievement than the eighth grade level in reading achievement. And yet, the eighth grade level of reading achievement is quite high. I believe that most individuals read well if they understand what was read from an eighth grade reader. Eighth grade readers contain content such as Charles Dicken's A Christmas Carol, Robert Louis Stevenson's Treasure Island, and Edgar Allen Poe's The Gold Bug, among others. More critics of education should pick up an eighth grade reader to notice how complex some of the reading selections are. Many would discover that an individual reading on the eight grade level can read and comprehend many kinds of recreational and vocational writings. Of course, teachers need to work in the direction of having pupils achieve as much as possible in reading and in all curriculum areas. Reading across the curriculum is important!

8. there is considerable debate, among educators in the teaching of reading, between reading narrative versus expository materials. Previously, much stress has been placed upon pupils reading narrative materials such as fictional and story content which has a definite sequence or order of events. Presently, many reading specialists are recommending pupils reading more of expository content. Expository content emphasizes informational books that pupils should read. The information is more reality based as compared to narrative accounts. Expository reading materials cut across diverse curriculum areas. For example, pupils may read library books on volcanoes, earthquakes, as well as wind/water erosion when studying a unit on "The Changing Surface of the Earth." Information read may relate directly to the unit in science being taught presently. These same topics may provide content for reading in SSR or an individualized reading program. Perhaps, a rational balance should be in the offing between narrative and expository reading materials.

9. the teacher should read orally to pupils each day of the school week and year. Books chosen for reading aloud to pupils should develop interest, enjoyment, and motivation in that the latter develop an

**inward desire to read. The teacher needs to face pupils and have good audience contact while reading aloud. Voice inflection with proper stress, pitch, and juncture need to be in the offing when the teacher reads orally to pupils. Pupils might then desire to do more reading on their own. Both narrative and expository books should be read to elementary age pupils. Recently, there have been educators who recommend that secondary school teachers read aloud salient facets from textbook content to pupils so that comprehension is possible. Not all secondary school pupils are able to comprehend subject matter read from their basal textbooks.**

**10. library books should be ample in number to provide for individual differences in the classroom. Pupils are at different levels of achievement in reading and therefore the teacher needs to be certain that gifted/talented, average achievers, and slow readers have access to reading materials that are understandable and comprehensible. Accessibility is a key concept to emphasize when having pupils check out reading materials. Pupils should not feel frustrated in reading by having rigid requirements for checking out different library books.**

**It is very important for library books to reflect the different interests, tastes, and abilities of pupils in the classroom. Each pupil should be able to locate sequential library books to read which are of appeal, feeling, and provide for the different reading achievement levels of pupils in class. Library books should be shown to and briefly discussed with pupils so that there is a desire to read. The teacher needs to make certain that pupils realize that there is a library book to read for each and every pupil. No pupil is left out from being able to choose and read a library book. There are large illustrations with a small amount of print in numerous library books for those who face problems in reading well. For others, there is more print discourse in library books to provide for those who read at a higher level. There should also be library books to read for the talented and gifted. Provision for individual differences is a must.**

**It is important for the teacher to reveal to pupils his/her love for reading. The attitudes and feelings possessed by teachers toward**

reading are generally indicated non-verbally to pupils. The teacher needs to be certain that the message sent to children is that quality attitudes and values pertaining to reading in its diverse manifestations is in evidence. Teacher enthusiasm for children's literature is a must!

If pupils are to read library books for followup conferences, the teacher needs to be well informed about the contents of each book, if at all possible. I have observed student teachers and cooperating teachers whom I supervised in the public schools have an excellent knowledge of literature for children. One teacher, in particular, used individualized reading in the curriculum. She felt that if follow up conferences with pupils were to be successful after the learner has completed reading a library book, the teacher needs to be well versed on the contents of each book read by children in the classroom. This teacher had a good file of four by six inch cards in which key ideas were printed about each library book in the classroom. Her thinking was if pupils were to have quality conferences, the teacher needs to be well versed in organizing content of the book, completed by the pupil, and discussed in a literary setting. I agree wholeheartedly. Teachers who have good knowledge of individual library books tend to enjoy reading and they do read much children's literature. Some of these teachers should teach a class in children's literature on a university campus. So often, I hear negative comments from university students on the quality of the children's literature course. An elementary teacher may be able to do a better job of preparing future teachers for the literature curriculum. One of my cooperating teachers mentioned one time that our student teachers did not read well orally to pupils during the student teaching program. In my Teaching of Language Arts class, I immediately added a requirement for the course in that students were to read a section from a children's library books using appropriate criteria. These criteria included having eye contact with pupils when reading aloud, showing the illustrations inside the library book to pupils as the related oral reading activity proceeds, observing pupils to notice engagement with the subject matter as it is being read, and pronouncing words clearly and accurately when reading orally. I like feedback from cooperating teachers in public

**schools who have suggestions to give to improve the curriculum.**

### **Evaluating Pupil Progress in Children's Literature**

**One of the first things that a teacher needs to do in the classroom is to observe individual pupils reading library books. Pupils must read continuously if they are to become proficient in reading. Reading content in the basal reader and other materials of print discourse requires skill, knowledge, and quality attitudes. With practice in reading diversity of materials, the pupil certainly will increase abilities to read. The pupil needs to develop a positive attitude toward reading. There are numerous ways of doing this. One way is to have pupils listen to the teacher read orally with appropriate stress, pitch, and juncture, as well as using good audience contact. By observing learners, the teacher may notice how well pupils like what is being read. Feedback from pupils here is important. Another way is for the teacher to show pupils newly arrived library books and have pupils hypothesize as to what the contents might be. The teacher then should observe which of these books pupils chose to read on their very own. I recommend that pupils in a small group take turns reading a library book among themselves. One pupil may start to read aloud, followed by others. A creative teacher finds ways of getting pupils interested in reading along with developing positive attitudes toward reading. Developing an appreciation for reading children's literature is an important goal for pupil's to attain.**

**Reading widely on diverse subject matter areas is salient for learners. Pupils individually need to experience ideas and content on diverse topics. It might be alright for pupils to read on a single topic initially to develop a desire in learning to read, but the content read needs to be broadened so that learners will find themselves more fully in a job or in life outside the work place. Thus, each pupil should find his niche in life to the best possible. A quality resource may be exploration through literature written for children. There are books written on different vocations for pupils, as well as those that assist pupils to achieve selected values, and the ability to solve problems. This is continuous and ongoing throughout life. Reading on a variety of topics**

then is important for pupils. Hopefully, the enjoyment ingredient will be there in processes involving reading.

When supervising student teachers and cooperating teachers, I have asked pupils very informally why they chose a certain book to read. I believe purpose for reading is very important. Most of us do things due to purpose being involved. Pupils have answered with giving purposes such as the following;

1. I like to read about dinosaurs.
2. I enjoy reading about famous people in history, but I do like to read also about people of other lands.
3. I choose books about farming first, maybe its because my grandparent still live on the farm.
4. My favorite library books are those that emphasize fishing and fish. My father and I go fishing very frequently in summer.
5. I read on almost any topic since I enjoy reading.

There are many purposes involved in reading. Pupil purpose is important when he/she chooses library books to read. Pupils who have narrow interests in reading as reading skills permit should be encouraged to select a wider variety of topics when choosing library books to read. A broadly educated child should be in the offing so that he/she has more options available for decision making. However, the teacher should never minimize pupils individually reading for sheer enjoyment. Pupils may need assistance to make sense out of what is being read.

From skills developed in more formal reading programs, the child should be able to identify unknown words, especially in the use of context clues and initial consonant sounds. Then too, there are times when words need to be pronounced directly to the reader. Hopefully, there will be a short time elapse for the child to determine what the unknown word is. Independent readers is an important goal for the teacher to stress. This includes word recognition skills that are developed as well as meanings attached to content read. An ultimate goal should be for pupils to reflect upon what has been read. Analyzing

content in terms of reality versus fantasy, accurate from inaccurate ideas, and cognitive versus the feeling dimension needs emphasis in the literature curriculum. Hopefully, pupils will become more creative in interpretation of content read. There are numerous interpretations that can be made of content read. Then too, learners should be able to bring to bear relevant solutions to personal and social problems faced. Attaching meaning to subject matter is so very important. What is written by an author may have an agenda or personal bias and the reader needs to interpret to perceive understanding of the ideas presented in print discourse. Certainly, the pupil should be able to make use of and apply what has been learned. Use and applications can be made in ongoing social studies, science, mathematics, and English units taught.

Metacognition is important for pupils to engage in. With metacognition, the pupil monitors his/her achievement in comprehension as the reading activity progresses. The child then does not read words only, but the words read mean something and it is up to the learner to bring forth meanings as abilities and progress indicate. Organization of content read is important such as sequence, main ideas, subordinate ideas, and details. Thus, in metacognition, the pupil monitors or evaluates on a personal basis if comprehension is occurring, and main ideas are clarified from subordinate ideas. It is important for all people who read to be able to clarify with self check the progress that is being made in reading comprehension. There are pupils and undergraduate students in universities who believe that if they have 'read' the content that is all there is to reading. In other words, merely pronouncing the words and then ipso facto they have understood content read is a grave misinterpretation of what reading is all about. Reading is a process that involves understanding and applying what has been read. There are many criteria then that teachers should use to appraise the quality of pupils' reading children's literature.

### Conclusion

I would like to relate my own personal experiences here pertaining to the children's literature curriculum. As a pupil in the public schools, I

enjoyed reading library books more so that reading the basals. I truly feel that progress was made in reading due to my selection of library books to read. Now, I read university level basals voluntarily, without course credit, on many topics such as history, religion, anthropology, sociology, biology, and my favorite area of preparation on the doctorate level which is education. Reading of library books seemingly helped to provide foundational skills in elementary school reading and basic subject matter for sequential study and use in ensuing years. But certainly basal textbooks also made their contributions toward my love for reading. As indicated, I do read basal textbooks in my own free time with no external rewards. Intrinsic motivation works well in these situations.

I grew up in a very conservative General Mennonite home and community. My father tended to not like if I read library books when I should be doing farm chores and field work. I think that "six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work" -- one of the Ten Commandments from Exodus 20 -- was being emphasized here. I believe this helped me to truly enjoy reading when planning my own schedule as time went on.

My mother had a devastating stroke when I was in the fifth grade. This left her helpless and in a vegetative state for 22 years, before her death. She was never able to speak coherently nor use her right hand side to walk and move the arm/fingers. This situation, I believe, tended to make me somewhat introspective with a strong feeling for happenings to people. I would classify myself as an existentialist in terms of philosophy. People do have their anxieties, problems of many kinds, and choices that need to be made. I clearly remember when mother had the devastating stroke and I wondered what would happen to me, a fifth grader. These can be awesome feelings (Ediger, 1995). I believe that children's literature should reflect the existentialist position, in part. I believe too that reading literature can provide a guidance resource to accept life with all of its dimensions and whatever it has to offer.

We as teachers can assist learners to achieve in an optimal manner in reading achievement, be it in a formal or informal approaches in teaching and learning. When pupils are taught in formal

reading, such as in the use of basal textbooks, they should be assisted individually and in groups to provide for continual progress and achievement. When choosing library books, pupils individually select and sequence their very own progress and achievement.

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