

AN EXPERIMENT IN THE FREE-READING PROGRAM

SEVENTH GRADE

HIGH POINT JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

HIGH POINT, NORTH CAROLINA

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A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of Education

Appalachian State Teachers College

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Margaret Ione McIntyre

June 1953

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Margaret Ione McIntyre

Approved by:

Ala M. Taylor

Chairman of Thesis Advisory Committee

Chapell Wilson

Director of Graduate School

Eunice Query

Major Professor

W. F. Smith

Minor Professor

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM AND DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

INTRODUCTION

"A long time ago, so long that I am tempted to use the time-honored beginning, 'Once upon a time,' a little boy passed behind his teacher's chair in the classroom, murmuring as he did so, 'You have taught me the most wonderful thing in the world, how to read books.'¹

The complex world in which we live today offers much to take the time and attention of us all. Parents, teachers, and librarians often feel that the enthusiasm for the radio, movies, and television leaves little time for the enjoyment of books. Yet, the demands of society point out the importance of reading in school and out-of-school activities.

Reading is the most important skill the children learn in school. It is a tool which is used in learning all other subjects. But it is not merely a tool. It is an exceedingly important way of adjusting to one's environment. It is so much a part of in-school and

¹ Anne T. Eaton, "Invincible Love of Reading," Wilson Library Bulletin, 25:158, October, 1950.

out-of-school life of a child. A pupil who has not learned to read cannot have a completely normal life.²

The reading programs in our schools should be freely adjusted to the changing needs and interests of the individual student. This may mean, then, that school library service should be greatly expanded and libraries built upon the basis of the known needs of the pupils of a particular school.

The complexity of modern civilization requires a generation that can read with increased understanding, with greater penetration and discrimination, and with more speed than ever before. If this nation is to continue as a leader in the promotion of the ideals of freedom and democracy, an intelligent, well-read citizenship is of prime importance.³

² Arthur E. Traxler, "Research in Reading in the U. S.," Journal of Educational Research, 42:481, March, 1949.

³ Earle W. Wiltse, "Responsibility of Schools in Keeping Reading Programs Abreast of the Times," Conference on Reading, Chicago University, Keeping Reading Programs Abreast of the Times, (Chicago: University of the Chicago Press, 1950), p. 13.

I. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the problem. The purpose of this study was (1) to find what books students read when they are stimulated and encouraged to read during a definite period of time; (2) to discover their preference in books when free to choose; and (3) to determine whether or not any guidance value might be found in keeping a record of books read in a free-reading program.

Importance of the study. "There are in junior high school large numbers of pupils who are in the last year of their school life, and many worth-while habits, attitudes and tastes will never be theirs, however long they live, unless they are permitted to acquire them now."⁴ This is particularly pertinent to the school in which the investigation was conducted. Many students are encouraged to enter industry at an early age. If these students continue self-education, it will be through their reading interests. Furthermore, if there ever comes a time when personal finances do not

4 Dorothy A. Bratton, "Suggested Reading Program For the Junior High School," Education, 66:177, November, 1945.

permit a television set or an automobile, perhaps we may have contributed to an enjoyable leisure time activity. In short, we want the student to read, not to supplement a particular course, not to complete requirements for a book report, and not to occupy time designed as a study period, but because he desires it.

When our students finish school, they will select and choose their own reading; therefore, while they are in school, teachers and librarians should encourage them to become independent readers. It is felt that the free-reading program lends to the development of such independence.

I would like to plead not only the intrinsic enjoyments but the social usefulness of unrequired reading. We need to beware lest we make standard among us the habit of a slave labor of the mind. It is only free minds that will keep the values of civilization fresh and growing among us. One of these values is the unrequired adventuring among books, the liberty for play of the imagination, for roving over the whole domain of time and space and humanity.⁵

⁵ Irwin Edman, "Unrequired Reading," Publishers' Weekly, 158:1853, October 21, 1950.

II. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

Free-reading. Throughout the report of this investigation, the term "free-reading" is interpreted as meaning reading chosen by the student under guidance. Reading guidance is individual guidance by the teacher and librarian according to the needs, interests, and abilities of the individual.

Required reading. Required reading is interpreted as meaning reading assigned by the teacher.

III. METHOD OF PROCEDURE

All of the available material in the Appalachian State Teachers College Library pertaining to the free-reading program was read or investigated. During the 1952-1953 school year, three seventh grade classes of the High Point Junior High School in High Point, North Carolina, kept records of free-reading done. These classes represented one hundred and three students - fifty-five boys and forty-eight girls. The age range was from twelve to fifteen years. According to tests given, the intelligence and reading ability of the group were slightly above average. The students came

from representative homes of a rather typical industrial city of the Piedmont Region with their parents employed in hosiery mills, furniture factories, department stores, offices, and other local industries.

Because of the large number of students enrolled in this school, classes were scheduled to the library. Those participating in this study came to the library ^{indep. war.} for a one hour period each week. In addition to this, the students were permitted to come in smaller groups to the library when they needed to do so.

At all times the library was an attractive reading center. To encourage and stimulate students to read widely, many devices were used. Two bulletin boards advertised books with bright colored book jackets and colorful posters which were changed regularly. Displayed with these bulletin boards were books in their jackets interestingly arranged on a table. Pictured covered books were used at intervals on the open shelves, on the card catalog, and on the vertical files. The magazines and newspapers were arranged in an inviting manner; in fact, books, magazines, news-

papers, and pamphlets were easily accessible to all. The writer frequently visited the classes of these students, taking with her books and book lists and telling the students of these books. Often she participated in the students' discussion of the books they had read. The teacher, too, was a major factor in stimulating and guiding the reading of the students.

The students were given cards; and, as they completed reading a book, they recorded the author, title, and a single statement as to whether they enjoyed the book, did not enjoy the book, or would recommend it to another student to read. These cards were filed alphabetically by the student's name and were easily accessible to all. At regular intervals the teacher and writer checked these cards, and the books read were discussed with the individual student in order to assist in further guidance. At no time was there competition in the number of books read. There were no required lists of books to be read and no required formal book report. The students were free at all times to choose their books; but at all times, there was subtle guidance on the part of both the librarian and the teacher.

These card records of reading provided the data for analysis as described in the following chapters. Information was found as to the quantity of reading done; the quality of that reading; sex differences in choice; variety among titles; the spread among authors; the amount of reading in the various classes of the Dewey Decimal System of Classification; the popularity of certain writers as well as certain subjects; and the quality of reading done by the group as measured by the appearance of titles read on standard, approved lists.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

It has been stated in Chapter I of this thesis that wide reading is of paramount importance in the school and out-of-school activities of a child. Schools must adjust their reading program to meet the individual needs and interests of each student. "Young people have interests which reading can serve; what is more important, reading can serve to develop interests which are essential and effective participation in a democracy."¹

Educators agree that the well-read man is one who has learned to read effectively on his own initiative. "This implies what is, perhaps, the basic purpose of most free-reading programs: to help the learner assume a constantly increasing amount of initiative in getting and using reading materials that are appropriate

¹ William S. Gray, editor, Reading in General Education (Washington: American Council on Education, 1940), p. 219.

to his interests and needs."² Stimulating the child to read, but also helping him to discriminate between materials, is the challenge for the teacher and the librarian.

Left to themselves, young people tend to read within a narrow area and in materials which afford them little real challenge. They need the guidance of sympathetic and widely read adults in identifying, extending, and intensifying their interests. Many of them have problems which they could solve if they were but aware of them. Others have latent interests which need only to be challenged. Still others know specifically what their interests are but are unaware of materials available for pursuing them. Whether the problem is to extend areas of interest in order to make life richer or to develop deep and abiding interest in a chosen field, the teacher who knows books and knows young people faces a peculiar responsibility to guide the reading of his students.³

The free-reading program, as the writer has stated, is reading selected by the student with guidance. "It will readily be granted that children need guidance, encouragement, and experience in choosing from a variety of

² Ray H. Simpson, "How to Develop a Free-Reading Program," School Review, 56:525, November, 1948.

³ Dora V. Smith, "Guiding Individual Reading," National Society for the Study of Education, Forty-seventh Yearbook, Part II, Reading in the High School and College (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), p. 180.

materials in order to grow increasingly competent in making independent selections of individually appropriate books."⁴

The teacher is of vital importance in the reading guidance program.

Her patience and friendly spirit give and gain the confidence of the children so that she learns to know their individual interests. With careful observation and professional skill, she discovers the individual needs of the child. By the use of skillful and clever motivation, she stimulates the child to work to the best of his ability.⁵

It is quite evident that the teacher, too, will profit by such a program. The satisfaction and pleasure which comes to the teacher, when by her guidance the right book and the right child have met at the right time, will bring a new understanding which will have far-reaching results.

⁴ Paul A. Witty, Reading in Modern Education (Boston: Heath, 1949), p. 117.

⁵ Lou LaBrant and Frieda M. Heller, An Evaluation of Free Reading in Grades Seven to Twelve, Inclusive, The Ohio University School (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1939), p. 116.

Every alert librarian is greatly concerned with the reading growth of her students. The librarian today is no longer a "keeper of books" concentrating her time and energy on technical processes; but rather, she concentrates her time and energy on helping the individuals who come to her library. She does this believing,

(1) that the pupil will read if his motivation is real and he becomes self-propelling, and if he has suitable materials in accord with his motives for reading and his abilities to read; (2) that reading ability is improved through reading; (3) that, through reading, information is attained and habits, attitudes, ideals, and interests are formed; and that these gains assist the individual toward making valid interpretations, wise choices, and personal adjustments.

The writer was attracted to this research problem because she has had the only really satisfying experience a library offers; namely, the privilege of seeing children develop an interest in reading and of being a vital part in providing one of the main functions of the school

6 Benjamin F. Smith, "Library Guidance in Reading," Educational Record, 31:50, January, 1950.

itself - reading instruction.

I consider reading instruction the school librarian's major function. It takes precedence over any and all techniques that constitute our library science. Our main business is promoting reading and we cannot predicate this on the assumption that our clientele is already literate and overcome with the urge to read.⁷

If students are to read freely, then they must have time in which to read. There must be time for reading which is completely and absolutely free so that the student can discover some things which the teacher has not thought of or can pick up a book or magazine simply for the fun of it. They should have ample opportunity to browse and select at random.

Not only must there be time for the student to read, but there must also be a wide and varied collection of books for him to read.

You may remember May Lamberton Becker's advice to young people concerning the reading of murder mysteries. It is not one mystery story that cheats

⁷ Louis Shores, "The School Librarian as Reading Teacher," Wilson Library Bulletin, 15:120, October, 1940.

us out of a richer, fuller experiences with books. Rather is it permitting ourselves to be so engrossed in this type of story that we turn to it to the exclusion of all others.⁸

There must be in the broad reading program a collection of books covering a wide range of subjects as well as a wide range of difficulty. Biography, offering much to young people in meeting personal problems as well as vocational information, must be included. All types of non-fiction books - drama, essays, poetry, informative prose - will meet many needs. Fiction, which makes up most of the reading, must also be abundant. If we are to broaden the areas of interest of our students, then we must have a wealth of material. "Lloyd George once said, 'When we go fishing we don't think about what we like; we think about what fish like.' Many of us in secondary schools could profit from Lloyd George's example and select our bait to suit the children who now attend our schools."⁹

⁸ Dora V. Smith, "Function of Reading in the High School," Conference on Reading, Chicago University, Recent Trends in Reading (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1940), p. 320.

⁹ Esmer Clark, "Working Together in Reading," School Library Association of California Bulletin, 20:23, March, 1949.

In the free-reading program there is no required list from which the student must read. Neither are there formal book reports made. "The reporting of books should be of the non-task variety. A mere listing of titles and authors might be sufficient."¹⁰ Often the enjoyment of reading is spoiled because of questioning concerning the book read and the necessity of long written reports.

The junior high school student enjoys participating in group activity. In the free-reading program, opportunities are provided for the students to talk with one another about their books. In this way they develop a degree of critical reading and thinking. Students soon realize that the teacher and the librarian are interested in books and enjoy them, and that they are anxious for the student to read and enjoy them, too.

¹⁰ Robert J. Cadigan, "Adjusting Reading Activities in Various School Subjects in High Schools and Colleges," Conference on Reading, Chicago University, Adjusting Reading Programs to Individuals (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944), p. 214.

With this mutual interest, the students will talk about the books they have read. This, then, may be the best method of book reporting.

It is easy to see that reading guidance is a major function of the school program, and through the wide reading program much can be done for the individual student.

Too few realize the possibilities and the extent of counseling available from librarians conscious of their opportunities and ready to assume their responsibilities. Reading guidance; help with hobbies, motivation toward good citizenship including behavior, appropriate dress, principles of etiquette; vocational assistance in life-work and in selecting the appropriate college and the right program of studies; encouragement in study habits and stimulation toward and closer integration with the school work and extra-curricular activities - these are but some of the means by which the librarian aids the student.¹¹

Much can be said for the free-reading program.

The consistent increase in attention to non-narrative types and more serious reading suggested that such a free-reading experience led to reading markedly in advance of that which is frequently accepted as characteristic of the younger group in adolescents. The

¹¹ William A. Fitzgerald, "Librarians are Guidance Counselors," Catholic Library World, 21:76, December, 1949.

evidence implies that the free-reading program met to a considerable and valuable degree the needs, interests, and abilities of the members of this group. When choice was permitted and books were selected to meet individual interests and drives, reading became truly significant.¹²

Gates¹³ observed that "This free-reading is probably more important for the poor reader than for the superior reader. The poorer reader is precisely the one who is most bored by formal drill materials and who most seriously needs the assurance and satisfaction that can come from reading really interesting stories."

An English teacher in the Tolleston School, Gary, Indiana, found working with the free-reading program an enjoyable and profitable experience.

This free-reading activity was thoroughly enjoyed by the pupils. They wanted to continue it indefinitely, saying it was 'fun' and that the hour went too fast. As a result of guidance and sharing reading experiences they began to realize that books were full of information and enjoyment and that book characters had problems and experiences much like their own.¹⁴

¹² Frieda M. Heller, "Free Reading in the Junior High School," Educational Research Bulletin, 19:244, April 10, 1940.

¹³ Arthur I. Gates, "What Should We Teach in Reading?" School and Community, 37:14, January, 1951.

¹⁴ Opal French, "Guided Free Reading in the Classroom," Elementary English, 24:30, January, 1947.

Reading becomes meaningful when books are selected to meet individual interests. The free-reading program enables the student with guidance to select the books he would like to read according to his interests, needs, and abilities. "We might state the principle as give a child a weight he can lift, and he will be able to lift more; give him a weight he cannot lift, and he gets no stronger."¹⁵

¹⁵ E. W. Dolch, "Poor Readers Are Made," Education, 67:440, March, 1947.

CHAPTER III

REPORT OF FINDINGS IN BOOKS OF BIOGRAPHY AND OTHER NON-FICTION

In this chapter analysis and interpretation of the data collected for this study and a description of the method used in collecting the data will be given. Analysis will be concerned only with books of biography and other non-fiction. Where it is possible, comparison will be made with other studies.

As stated in Chapter I of this thesis, the purpose of this study was (1) to find what books students read when they are stimulated and encouraged to read during a definite period of time; (2) to discover their preference in books when free to choose; and (3) to determine whether or not any guidance value might be found in keeping a record of books read in a free-reading program.

In order to find what books students read, a card record was kept. The students were given cards; and, as they completed reading a book, they recorded the author, title, and a single statement as to whether they enjoyed the book, did not enjoy the book, or would

recommend it to another student to read. The students gladly kept a record of their free-reading, and only books read in their entirety were recorded.

From the books reported, an author card was made for each book. On this card was recorded the author, title, classification, each time read by a boy or a girl, and whether the title appeared in the Standard Catalog for High School Libraries or the Children's Catalog. Table I shows the two cards used in this study. These card records of reading provided the data for analysis as set forth in this chapter. Information was found as to the quantity of reading done; the quality of that reading; sex differences in choice; variety among titles; the spread among authors; the amount of reading in the various classes of the Dewey Decimal System of Classification; the popularity of certain writers as well as certain subjects; and the quality of reading done by the group as measured by the appearance of titles read on standard, approved lists.

The first observation made was that a great

TABLE I
CARDS USED

Name:

Author:

Title:

Enjoyed the book
Did not enjoy the book
Would recommend it to a friend

Student Card Used for Reporting Book Read

| | | |
|-----|--|----------|
| | Boylston. Sue Barton, student nurse. B | |
| 109 | | |
| B | | |
| G | | |
| 112 | | |
| B | | |
| G | | |
| 114 | | |
| B | | |
| G | | |
| | Vocational | SC CC |

Author Card Used for Checking

many books were read by the students in this group. All the students did some reading although the amount varied. The books read represented many authors, titles, and subjects. With the exception of thirty-three books, the students indicated they enjoyed the books read and would recommend them to a friend. Only a few books were read by five or more students. The card records show that no two students read exactly the same books, which indicates that the reading was individual reading.

Table II shows that a total of 2141 books were read. This is an average of 20.73 books read per student during the eight months period. Of this total number, 1253 books were read by the girls and 888 books read by the boys. The girls read fifty-nine per cent of the total number of books read. This is an average of 26.10 books read per girl during the eight months period and an average of 16.15 books read per boy during the eight months. This indicates, then, that the girls read an average of 9.95 more books than the boys.

"One of the most commonly accepted generalizations

TABLE II

BOOKS READ

| | |
|----------------------------------|------|
| Total number books read by boys | 888 |
| Total number books read by girls | 1253 |
| Total number books read | 2141 |

PER CENTAGE ON APPROVED LISTS

| | |
|-------|-----|
| Boys | 46% |
| Girls | 54% |
| Total | 53% |

is that girls do more voluntary reading than boys."¹ Zeller² found that fourteen studies agreed that girls read more than boys while in junior high school.

The writer was concerned with the quality of the reading done in this free-reading program. To establish some bases for approval of books read, the Standard Catalog for High School Libraries and the Children's Catalog were checked for each title read. Of the books read, fifty-three per cent appeared in one or both of these lists. This, then, would indicate that although there was much freedom of choice, the students read books that were considered "good" or desirable. Some of the books read were of more recent date than the lists checked, and therefore did not appear on the lists. The percentage of books read appearing in the Standard Catalog for High School Libraries and the Children's Catalog is shown in Table II.

¹ Mary Hayden Bowen Wollner, Children's Voluntary Reading as an Expression of Individuality (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1949), p. 63.

² Dale Zeller, The Relative Importance of Factors of Interest in Reading Materials for Junior High School Pupils (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1941), p. 13.

It is revealed in Table II that the girls read eight per cent more titles appearing on these lists than the boys. Monte³ points out one sex difference not mentioned in other studies: a higher per cent of books preferred by girls than of those preferred by boys is to be found on approved lists.

The books recorded as read were classified in order to determine the amount of reading in the various classes of the Dewey Decimal System of Classification. Table III shows the number of books read by the boys and the number read by the girls in each class and the total number read.

As shown in Table III, there was some reading in each subject class although only one book was reported read in the 000's and one book read in the 400's. In both cases the books were read by a boy. Woodward's Sports Page was the book read from the 000's. Hayes' Tongues of Men was read from the 400's. The subject of the books in these two classes and the small number of

³ Ibid., p. 16.

TABLE III

BOOKS READ

| <u>Classification</u> | <u>BOYS</u> | <u>GIRLS</u> | <u>TOTAL</u> |
|-----------------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|
| 000 | 1 | | 1 |
| 100 | 2 | 9 | 11 |
| 200 | 8 | 5 | 13 |
| 300 | 32 | 16 | 48 |
| 398 | 35 | 17 | 52 |
| 400 | 1 | | 1 |
| 500 | 63 | 11 | 74 |
| 600 | 53 | 12 | 65 |
| 700 | 14 | 9 | 23 |
| 800 | 4 | 4 | 8 |
| 900 | 68 | 22 | 90 |
| 910 | 13 | 6 | 19 |
| Total Non-fiction | 294 | 111 | 405 |
| Biography | 182 | 148 | 330 |
| Fiction | 412 | 994 | 1406 |
| TOTAL READ | 888 | 1253 | 2141 |

books available played a part in the limited reading done in these two classes.

The card records show that, with the exception of books of fiction, more biographies were read than any other kind of book. Fifteen per cent of the reading was biography. A total of 330 biographies were read with the boys reading fifty-five per cent of the biographies read. Table IV shows the most popular biographies listed according to reading frequency. It is interesting to note that only two books appear on both lists. Lawson's Pocahontas and Captain John Smith and Baker's Simon Bolivar were favorites with both the boys and the girls although both books had different ratings.

The second class found to be most popular, as disclosed from the card records, was the 900's, books of history and geography. Twenty-two per cent of the books of non-fiction read were in this class. The boys showed more interest by reading seventy-six per cent of the books in this classification. Table V lists the

TABLE IV

POPULAR BIOGRAPHIES

Listed According to Reading Frequency

(Titles Grouped Together Have Equal Rank)

BOYSLawson. Pocahontas and Captain John Smith.Reynolds. Custer's Last Stand.Eaton. Washington, Nation's First Hero.Baker. Simon Bolivar.Coy. Real Book About George Washington Carver.Forbes-Lindsay. Daniel Boone.Parks. Davy Crockett.Stevenson. Kit Carson.GIRLSBaker. Simon Bolivar.Lawson. Pocahontas and Captain John Smith.Wagoner. Julia Ward Howe.Wagoner. Martha Washington.Stevenson. Paul Revere.Vance. Martha, Daughter of Virginia.

TABLE V

POPULAR BOOKS OF HISTORY

Listed According to Reading Frequency

(Titles Grouped Together Have Equal Rank)

BOYSBleeker. Sea Hunters.Pratt. Monitor and the Merrimac.Scott. God is My Co-pilot.Adams. Sante Fe Trail.Bleeker. Indians of the Longhouse.Considine. Panama Canal.Cooke. Little Wolf Slayer.Neuberger. Lewis and Clark Expedition.Wilson. White Indian Boy.GIRLSBleeker. Indians of the Longhouse.Kantor. Lee and Grant at Appomattox.

favorite books read in this class. Only two books were recorded as outstandingly popular with the girls. One of these, Bleeker's Indians of the Longhouse, is found on the boys' list of favorites.

Science books proved to be third in popularity in the number of books read with the boys leading here, also. Eighteen per cent of the non-fiction books read were books of science with the boys reading eighty-five per cent. The nine popular science books read are listed in Table VI. Although the girls read in this class group, no book proved to be outstandingly prevalent.

Books of the useful arts were found to be fourth in popularity. Here, again, the boys demonstrated more interest by reading eighty-two per cent of the books read in this classification. Sixteen per cent of the non-fiction books read were books in this class. Listed in Table VII, are the favorite books read in this class. Only one book was found popular by the girls, Perkins' Fannie Farmer Junior Cook Book.

TABLE VI

POPULAR SCIENCE BOOKS

Listed According to Reading Frequency
(Titles Grouped Together Have Equal Rank)

BOYS

- Washburne. Story of the Earth.
Dickinson. Real Book About Amazing Animals.

McClung. Stripes.
Waldeck. Jamba the Elephant.
Waldeck. Lions on the Hunt.
Williamson. First Book of Bugs.
Zim. Goldfish.
Zim. Owls.
Zim. Snakes.

TABLE VII

POPULAR BOOKS OF THE USEFUL ARTS

Listed According to Reading Frequency

(Titles Grouped Together Have Equal Rank)

BOYS

- Billings. Diesel-electric 4030.
- Anderson. Thoroughbreds.
- Aviation Research Association. How Planes Fly.
- Baarslag. Coast Guard to the Rescue.
- Eadie. I Like Diving.
- Pryor. Fire Engine Book.
- Sherman. Real Book About Dogs.
- Sherman. Real Book About Horses.

GIRLS

- Perkins. Fannie Farmer Junior Cook Book.

The writer has observed that fairy tales and books of folklore are popular with this age group. It was interesting to note that these books were fifth in popularity with thirteen per cent of the non-fiction read being folklore books. Again, the boys led by reading sixty-seven per cent of the books of folklore read. Table VIII lists the favorite books of folklore. Two books, receiving different ratings, appear on both lists. Shapiro's Steamboat Bill and Rounds' Ol' Paul are favorites with boys and girls. ✓ ✓

Books read in the social sciences followed close behind the books of folklore in reading frequency. Twelve per cent of the non-fiction books read were in this class group. Only five per cent of the non-fiction read were books of the fine arts. Few books of poetry were recorded; but of those recorded, the boys and the girls read the same amount. Heller⁴ found little reading of poetry, but in this area of reading the girls

⁴ Frieda M. Heller, "Free Reading in the Junior High School," Educational Research Bulletin, 19:221, April 10, 1940.

TABLE VIII

POPULAR BOOKS OF FOLKLORE

Listed According to Reading Frequency

(Titles Grouped Together Have Equal Rank)

BOYS

- Shapiro. How Ole Stormalong Captured Mocha Dick.
- Felton. John Henry and His Hammer.
- Felton. Pecos Bill, Texas Cowpuncher.
- Peck. Pecos Bill and Lightning.
- Rounds. Ol' Paul.
- Shapiro. John Henry and the Double Jointed Steam Drill.
- Shapiro. Steamboat Bill.
- Writer's Program. Legends of the Mighty Sioux.

GIRLS

- Shapiro. Steamboat Bill.
- Boggs. Three Golden Oranges.
- Emrick. Child's Book of Folklore.
- Rounds. Ol' Paul.
- Undset. True and Untrue.

surpassed the boys. Heller⁵ found that more books of travel were read by boys than by girls, and also more books of biography. This was found to be true in this study although there was not a great deal of reading of travel books.

Table III shows that the boys' interest was greater than the girls' in reading books of biography and non-fiction. Books classified in the 100's was the one exception in the non-fiction. Personality books found in this class were read by the girls and this made the difference. Of the books of biography and other non-fiction read, the boys read sixty-four per cent. Table IX gives the percentage read in the various classes and the percentage of each class of non-fiction read.

The seven most popular books are given in Table X. Listed in Table XI are the ten most popular authors.

Can any guidance value be found in keeping a record of books read in a free-reading program? To the writer, there is no question that a record of reading can have

5 Loc. cit.

TABLE IX

PERCENTAGES READ IN VARIOUS CLASSES OF NON-FICTION

| | <u>BOYS</u> | <u>GIRLS</u> |
|--------------------------|-------------|--------------|
| Biography | 55% | 45% |
| History | 76% | 24% |
| Science | 85% | 15% |
| Useful Arts | 82% | 18% |
| Folklore | 67% | 33% |
| Social Sciences | 67% | 33% |
| Fine Arts and Recreation | 61% | 39% |
| Travel | 68% | 32% |
| Religion | 61% | 39% |
| Philosophy | 18% | 82% |

PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL NON-FICTION READ

| | |
|-------------|-----|
| 000 and 400 | 1% |
| 100 | 3% |
| 200 | 3% |
| 300 | 12% |
| 398 | 13% |
| 500 | 18% |
| 600 | 16% |
| 700 | 5% |
| 800 | 2% |
| 900 | 22% |
| 910 | 5% |

TABLE X

MOST POPULAR BOOKS

Listed According to Popularity

BOYS

- Lawson. Pocahontas and Captain John Smith.
 Bleeker. Sea Hunters.
 Eaton. Washington, Nation's First Hero.
 Orton. Mystery of the Secret Drawer.
 Reynolds. Custer's Last Stand.
 Shapiro. How Ole Stormalong Captured Mocha Dick.
 Wellman. Haunts of Drowning Creek.

GIRLS

- Orton. Mystery of the Secret Drawer.
 Boylston. Sue Barton, Superintendent of Nurses.
 Boylston. Sue Barton, Student Nurse.
 Travers. Mary Poppins.
 Alcott. Under the Lilacs.
 Canfield. Understood Betsy.
 Dee. And Never Been Kissed.

TABLE XI

TEN MOST POPULAR AUTHORS

Listed According to Popularity

Helen Dore Boylston

Robert Lawson

Helen Fuller Orton

Betty Cavanna

John Roberts Tunis

Augusta Stevenson

Elizabeth Janet Gray

Janet Lambert

Jean Brown Wagoner

Walter Farley

definite guidance value for an individual pupil. The card records kept indicate that all students, the enthusiastic reader and the slow reader, need help with their reading and guidance in their selection of books.

The records kept can be used by the librarian, teacher, or counselor who has the time and the insight to utilize them. All can profit from the card records. When attempting to guide in a free-reading program, a knowledge of the books read will give the teacher and the librarian a positive approach.

The reading of Students A, B, and C indicates the value of keeping a card record of books read. Student A read Mystery of the Secret Drawer; Mystery of the Winding Stairs; Mystery of the Old Place; Bitsy Finds a Clue; Mystery at Laughing Water; Mystery in Blue; Ann's Surprising Summer; Understood Betsy; Sybil Ludington's Ride; Girls Book of Verse; My Room is My Hobby; Land of the English People; Mistress of the White House; and The First Woman Doctor. The first six books read by Student A were mysteries. Note at this point the librarian guided Student A to reading books other than mysteries.

Student B, after six weeks of school, had read only Crowell's Six Good Friends and Anderson's Bobcat. The librarian and the teacher worked with this student. At the conclusion of this study, Student B had read Johnny Texas, Sea Star, Real Book About Horses; Wild, Wild West; Pony Express; Will Rogers, the Boy Roper; Paul Revere, Minute Man.

Student C read Our Fighting Jets; Rockets, Jets, Guided Missiles, and Space Travel; Real Book About Airplanes; Aviation Cadet; Rockets and Jets; Boys' Life of the Wright Brothers; Kingdom of Flying Men; Teen-Age Aviation Stories; The Mudhen; The Black Buccaneer; Scouts of Stonewall; Black Tanker; Jim Bridger; and George Westinghouse, Fabulous Inventor. Note Student C read non-fiction books about aviation. The teacher and the librarian led this student to biography and fiction books of the same subject, and then to other books.

Opportunities for guidance in the free-reading program are equally good for the enthusiastic reader, the average reader, and the slow reader. The student's reading can be directed without interfering with his

free choice of books.

One of the outstanding necessities for a free-reading program is a wide and varied book collection. Here a student's interests and needs can be met. It might be a poem, a folktale, the construction of a model airplane, or an exciting book of fiction that would meet his needs. Biography has much to offer young people. A record of books read would be of great value in meeting these needs.

Reading guidance is individual guidance. Individual guidance helps students to pursue subjects of special interest to themselves. At all times their interests, needs, and abilities are kept in mind. A card record of books read is of vital importance.

With subtle guidance at all times, students may develop an appreciation and a habit of reading that will be lasting. More desirable results, then, can be obtained by a knowledge of what a student has read. The evidence implies that the free-reading program met to a considerable and valuable degree the needs, interests, and abilities of the members of this group.

SUMMARY

The findings from the study of the card records kept of books read during an eight months period of one hundred and three seventh grade students were analyzed and interpreted in this chapter. The findings were limited to books of biography and non-fiction.

The card records indicated that a large number of books were read. All the students did some reading although the amount varied.

The books represented many authors, titles, and subjects.

The students became acquainted with different kinds of books.

The reading was an individual matter.

Biography was the second most popular kind of book. In books of non-fiction, the most popular were books of history, science, useful arts, and folklore. Tables listed the favorite books of these popular classes, percentage read by the boys and girls in each class, and the

percentage read in each class of non-fiction.

With the exception of thirty-three books, the students indicated they enjoyed the books read and would recommend them to a friend.

Of the total number of books read, the girls read eighteen per cent more than the boys. The fact the girls read more than the boys is in agreement with findings of other studies.

More interest was manifested by the boys in the reading of books of biography and non-fiction. Of these books, they read sixty-four per cent.

Fifty-three per cent of the books read appeared in the Standard Catalog for High School Libraries and the Children's Catalog. This indicates that the reading was desirable reading.

It was pointed out that definite guidance value can be found by keeping a card record of books read. These will be beneficial not only to the librarian, but also to the teacher and counselor. A student's reading can be directed without interfering with his choice of books and thereby develop in the student an appreciation and a habit of reading that will be lasting.

CHAPTER IV

REPORT OF FINDINGS IN BOOKS OF FICTION

It is the aim of this chapter to analyze and interpret the data collected in this study concerning books of fiction. Where it is possible, comparisons will be made with other studies.

As stated in Chapter I of this thesis, the purpose of this study was (1) to find what books students read when they are stimulated and encouraged to read during a definite period of time; (2) to discover their preferences in books when free to choose, and (3) to determine whether guidance value might be found in keeping a record of books read in a free-reading program.

From the card records kept, it was shown that the reading was predominantly fiction. Of the total books read, sixty-six per cent was fiction. Table III shows that a total of 1406 books of fiction was read. The girls read seventy per cent of these books, reading forty per cent more fiction than the boys.

The fact that the girls read more books of fiction than the boys is in agreement with findings of other studies.

Without exception, studies of the voluntary reading of children have revealed a greater interest in the reading of fiction than of any other type of material. Center and Persons, Cleary, Grumette, Jennings, Johnson, and La Brant and Heller have all found that the greater part of the voluntary reading of junior and senior high school children is fiction.¹

The names of the fiction books found to be favorites with the boys and with the girls are listed in Tables XII and XIII respectively, listing them according to reading frequency. Those titles grouped together have equal rank.

It is interesting to note that only one book appears on both lists. Robert Lawson's McWhinney's Jaunt was popular with both the boys and the girls.

An investigation of studies of favorite books or books most often read at the junior high and high school levels reveals very few titles that appear in the top ten in any great proportion of the studies. In nine studies made between 1930

¹ Marie Rankin, Children's Interest in Library Books of Fiction (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1949), p. 7.

and 1940, Tom Sawyer appears among the ten books most often read in eight of the nine lists, Little Women in eight, Treasure Island in six, Huckleberry Finn in six, and The Call of the Wild in five. All other popular titles appeared in only one or two lists.²

From the data contained in this study, Tom Sawyer and Treasure Island appear on the lists of favorite books. Alcott is represented by Under the Lilacs. This shows that the students read some of the books of fiction that have survived through the years, but that much of their reading was in short-lived fiction.

The records indicated that the students had definite interests and these interests changed as the school year progressed. Certain subject areas of books of fiction appeared, therefore, to be more popular than others. With the help of the Standard Catalog for High School Libraries and the Children's Catalog, the books of fiction were classified according to the subject of the book. There was a great deal of overlapping in this. Table XIV was set up according to the writer's best classification of these books. Here we find the

² Ibid., p. 13.

TABLE XII

BOYS' FAVORITE BOOKS OF FICTION

Listed According to Reading Frequency

(Titles Grouped Together Have Equal Rank)

Orton. Mystery of the Secret Drawer.Wellman. Haunts of Drowning Creek.Bronson. Hooker's Holiday.Clemens. Tom Sawyer.Du Bois. Peter Graves.Edmonds. Matchlock Gun.Hoff. Johnny Texas.Allen. Silver Wolf.McCloskey. Lentil.Benet. Devil and Daniel
Webster.Mason. Middle Sister.Blough. Monkey with a Notion.Meador. T-model Tommy.Cedar. Ethan, the Shepherd
Boy.Rechnitzer. Jinks of
Jayson Valley.Edmonds. Tom Whipple.Robertson. Missing
Brother.Henry. Justin Morgan Had A
Horse.Rounds. Blind Colt.Lawson. McWhinney's Jaunt.Stevenson. Treasure
Island.Warren. Ride, Cowboy, Ride.

TABLE XIII

GIRLS' FAVORITE BOOKS OF FICTION

Listed According to Reading Frequency

(Titles Grouped Together Have Equal Rank)

Boylston. Sue Barton, Superintendent of Nurses.Boylston. Sue Barton, Student Nurse.Dee. And Never Been Kissed.Orton. Mystery of the Secret Drawer.Canfield. Understood Betsy.Alcott. Under the Lilacs.Allen. Lone Star Tomboy.Cavanna. Spring Comes Riding.Cavanna. Spurs for Susanna.Lawson. McWhinney's Jaunt.Travers. Mary Poppins.Bechdolt. Mystery at Hurricane Hill.Boylston. Sue Barton, Rural Nurse.Cavanna. Going on Sixteen.Scott. Ivanhoe.Tunis. Champion's Choice.

five leading areas to be animal stories, mysteries, girls' stories, vocational, and historical stories. Notable differences were shown in the reading interests of the boys and girls. Table XV indicates the percentage read by the boys and by the girls in these leading fiction areas.

The girls read historical fiction, stories of family life, frontier and pioneer life, and mysteries; but as the year progressed, they looked for romance and sentiment in their reading. Some interest was evident in the reading of "boys'" books by the girls. Contrarily, the boys showed little interest in a "girls'" book. Heller³ found this to be true, also.

The boys' reading interests were revealed in their selection of animal stories, adventure stories, and mysteries. A modern trend to read science fiction was not as prominent in this study as might be expected. The book collection might be a contributing factor.

³ Frieda M. Heller, "Free Reading in the Junior High School," Educational Research Bulletin, 19:221, April 10, 1940.

TABLE XIV

TEN POPULAR AREAS OF FICTION READ

| | | |
|---------------------------|--------|-----|
| Animals | | 221 |
| | Dogs | 55 |
| | Horses | 122 |
| Mystery | | 204 |
| Girls | | 160 |
| Vocational | | 145 |
| Historical | | 120 |
| Sports | | 79 |
| Family life | | 63 |
| Adventure | | 50 |
| Humorous | | 48 |
| Frontier and pioneer life | | 41 |

TABLE XV

PER CENT OF THE FIVE POPULAR AREAS OF FICTION READ

ANIMALS

| | |
|-------|-----|
| Boys | 43% |
| Girls | 57% |

MYSTERIES

| | |
|-------|-----|
| Boys | 23% |
| Girls | 72% |

GIRLS' STORIES

| | |
|-------|-----|
| Boys | 4% |
| Girls | 96% |

VOCATIONAL

| | |
|-------|-----|
| Boys | 6% |
| Girls | 94% |

HISTORICAL

| | |
|-------|-----|
| Boys | 30% |
| Girls | 70% |

Both the boys and the girls signified a great deal of interest in sports stories. The boys read fifty-three per cent of the sport stories with the girls reading forty-seven per cent.

Interest in frontier and pioneer life stories was outstanding. Fifty-six per cent of these were read by the girls and forty-four per cent by the boys.

Analysis of the data shows that animal stories was the most popular area of books of fiction. Table XV indicates that the girls read fifty-seven per cent of the animal stories. Malchow⁴ found that love of animals has a significant influence on the reading of junior high school boys but that its standing is much less high with girls. The findings in this study differ with Malchow's. One finds that Bronson's Hooker's Holiday and Spurs for Suzanna by Cavanna were the popular animal stories with the boys and girls respectively.

⁴ Marie Rankin, Children's Interests in Library Books of Fiction (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1949), p. 9.

The love of mystery was an especially strong interest area with the girls. This area was second in popularity. The girls read seventy-two per cent of the mysteries recorded read. Wellman's Haunts of Drowning Creek was found to be the favorite mystery with the boys. Mystery of the Secret Drawer by Helen Fuller Orton was the favorite with the girls.

With the girls reading more fiction than the boys, one finds that girls' stories ranked third in popularity. Little interest was showed by the boys in the girls' books. The most popular book with the girls was And Never Been Kissed by Sylvia Dee.

Table XIV points out that vocational fiction was the fourth most popular area of fiction. The girls, again, took the lead in this area reading ninety-four per cent of vocational stories. Sue Barton, Superintendent of Nurses by Helen Dore Boylston was the most popular vocational book. Sue Barton, Student Nurse by the same author ranked a close second. Stephen Warren Meader's T-Model Tommy was slightly popular with the boys.

Historical fiction ranked fifth in popularity. The boys displayed some interest here, but the girls were more enthusiastic, reading seventy per cent of these books. Popular in this area for both boys and girls was Edmonds' Matchlock Gun.

One notices in Table XIV that there was much interest in frontier and pioneer life stories. Some of these books might have been classified as historical fiction. Because of this overlapping, historical fiction might have had a higher popularity rank.

The findings in this study show that the reading of the boys and girls was predominantly fiction. It was also found that certain interest areas were more popular than others with the interests of the boys and girls differing. The wide variety of books, encompassing all levels of difficulty as is found in the free-reading program, tends to meet the many interests of the boys and girls.

Of notable importance is the guidance value

found in books of fiction. Card records of book read are of utmost importance here, especially since this is the area where the students choose to read most.

TABLE XVI

MOST POPULAR BOOK

FIVE LEADING INTEREST AREAS OF FICTION

ANIMALS

Boys: Bronson. Hooker's Holiday.
 Girls: Allen. Lone Star Tomboy.
 Cavama. Spurs for Susanna.

MYSTERIES

Boys: Orton. Mystery of the Secret Drawer.
 Girls: Orton. Mystery of the Secret Drawer.

GIRLS

Girls: Dee. And Never Been Kissed.

VOCATIONAL

Boys: Meader. T-model Tommy.
 Girls: Boylston. Sue Barton, Superintendent of
 Nurses.

HISTORICAL

Boys: Edmonds. Matchlock Gun.
 Girls: Edmonds. Matchlock Gun.

SUMMARY

The findings from the study of the card records kept of fiction books read during an eight months period of one hundred and three seventh grade students were analyzed and interpreted in this chapter.

It was found that the reading of both boys and girls was predominantly fiction.

The girls read forty per cent more books of fiction than the boys.

The two most popular books for the boys, according to reading frequency, were Orton's Mystery of the Secret Drawer and Wellman's Haunts of Drowning Creek.

Sue Barton, Superintendent of Nurses by Boylston was the most popular book for the girls.

Only Lawson's McWhinney's Jaunt was on the list of both the boys and girls favorite books.

Some reading was done in the books of fiction that have survived through the years, but much of the reading was done in short-lived fiction.

Girls' and boys' interests in fiction differ.

The card records indicated that there were many interest areas in the books of fiction. Table XIV gave the ten popular areas of fiction read with Table XV giving the percentage read by the boys and by the girls in the five leading interest areas.

The girls read historical fiction, stories of family life, frontier and pioneer life, animal stories, and mysteries; but as the year progressed, they looked for romance and sentiment in their reading.

Some interest was evident in the reading of "boys'" books by the girls, but the boys showed little interest in "girls'" books.

The boys read mainly in the animal, adventure, mystery, and historical areas.

Table XVI lists the most popular book in the five leading interest areas of fiction as recorded by the boys and by the girls.

Card records of fiction books read are of utmost importance, especially since this is the area where the students choose to read most.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Because of the complexity of today's world, and because of the current enthusiasm for sports, movies, and television, it is often felt that there is little time left for the enjoyment of books. Society still recognizes the importance of reading and demands that stress be put on reading in school and out-of-school activities.

The reading programs in our schools should be freely adjusted to the changing needs and interests of the individual student. This may mean, then, that school library service should be greatly expanded and libraries built on the basis of the known needs of the pupils of a particular school.

A free-reading program, a program in which a student freely chooses the book he would like to read with individual guidance by the teacher and the librarian according to the needs, interests, and abilities of the student, will accomplish desirable results to a satisfactory degree. The program challenges

the student to read, not to supplement a particular course, not to complete requirements for a book report, and not to occupy time designed as a study period, but because he desires it. Under subtle guidance at all times, students will develop an appreciation and habit of reading that will be lasting.

In this program there is time for reading which is completely and absolutely free so that the student can discover some things which the teacher has not thought of or can pick up a book or magazine simply for the fun of it. Ample opportunity is provided to browse and select at random. A broad and varied book collection with a wide range of difficulty must be provided.

There is no required list from which the student must read. Neither is there a formal book report. Opportunities are provided for the students to talk with one another about their books.

Reading becomes meaningful when books are selected to meet individual interests. The free-reading program enables the student with guidance to select the books he

would like to read according to his interests, needs, and abilities.

The purpose of this study was (1) to find what books students read when they are stimulated and encouraged to read during a definite period of time; (2) to discover their preference in books when free to choose; and (3) to determine whether or not any guidance value might be found in keeping a record of books read in a free-reading program.

This study was an experiment with one hundred and three seventh graders of the High Point Junior High School in High Point, North Carolina, during the 1952-1953 school year. There were fifty-five boys and forty-eight girls with an age range from twelve to fifteen years. According to tests given the intelligence and reading ability of the group were slightly above average. The students came from representative homes of a rather typical industrial city of the Piedmont Region with their parents employed in hosiery mills, furniture factories, department stores, offices, and other local industries.

Classes in this school were scheduled to the library. Those participating in this study came to the library for a one hour period each week, and in smaller groups when they needed to do so.

At all times the library was an attractive reading center. To encourage and stimulate students to read widely, many devices were used. The writer frequently visited the classes of these students, taking with her books and book lists and telling the students of these books. Often she participated in the students' discussion of the books they had read. The teacher, too, was a major factor in stimulating and guiding the reading of the students.

The students were given cards; and, as they completed reading a book, they recorded the author, title, and a single statement as to whether they enjoyed the book, did not enjoy the book, or would recommend it to another student to read. These cards were filed alphabetically by the students' name and were easily accessible to all. At regular intervals the teacher and writer checked these cards, and the

books read were discussed with the individual student in order to assist in further guidance. At no time was there competition in the number of books read. There were no required lists of books to be read and no required formal book report. The students were free at all times to choose their books; but at all times, there was subtle guidance on the part of both the librarian and the teacher.

These card records of reading done provided the data for analysis as described in the foregoing chapters. Information was found as to the quantity of reading done; the quality of that reading; sex differences in choice; variety among titles; the spread among authors; the amount of reading in the various classes of the Dewey Decimal System of Classification; the popularity of certain writers as well as certain subjects; and the quality of reading done by the group as measured by the appearance of titles read on standard, approved lists.

CONCLUSIONS

From the analysis of this study, it was concluded:

1. that the free-reading program met to a satisfactory degree the needs, interests, and abilities of the group.
2. that card records of reading have definite guidance value for the teacher, librarian, and counselor.
3. that a student's reading can be directed without interfering with his choice of books.
4. that a large number of books were read.
5. that all students did some reading although the amount varied.
6. that the books read represented many authors, titles, and subjects.
7. that the reading was based on interests and needs.
8. that the reading was predominantly fiction.

9. that biography was the second most popular type of book read.

10. that the books of history, science, useful arts, and folklore were the most popular books in non-fiction.

11. that, with the exception of thirty-three books, the students enjoyed the books read and would recommend them to a friend.

12. that of the total number of books read, the girls read eighteen per cent more books than the boys.

13. that of the total number of books of non-fiction read, the boys read sixty-three per cent.

14. that sixty-six per cent of the reading was fiction.

15. that the girls read forty per cent more books of fiction than the boys.

16. that there was read an average of 20.78 books per student.

17. that the girls read an average of 26.10 books.
18. that the boys read an average of 16.15 books.
19. that fifty-three per cent of the books read were found on the approved lists checked.
20. that the girls' and boys' interests in fiction differ.
21. that among the books read Robert Lawson's Pocahontas and Captain John Smith was the most popular book for the boys.
22. that among the books read Helen Orton's Mystery of the Secret Drawer was the most popular book for the girls.
23. that only Robert Lawson's McWhinney's Jaunt was found on the list of favorites named by boys and girls.
24. that there was some reading of fiction books that have survived through the years, but much of the reading was in short-lived fiction.
25. that the girls read historical fiction, stories of family life, frontier and pioneer life, animal stories, mysteries, romances, and vocational stories.

26. that the boys read in the animal, adventure, historical, and mystery areas.

27. that some interest was evident in the reading of "boys'" books by the girls, but that the boys showed little interest in "girls'" books.

28. that the group participating in this study enjoyed their reading and the keeping of records of their books read.

29. that the teachers participating in this study were enthusiastic at all times and enjoyed, too, working in this free-reading program.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. that card records of books read be kept for this same group during their second year in junior high school and during their years in senior high school.
2. that these records be available for the librarian, teacher, and counselor for guidance purposes.
3. that much thought be given to the interests and needs of the students when building the book collection.
4. that the library be an attractive reading center conducive to a free-reading program.
5. that the reporting of books be of the non-task variety.
6. that students be led to read more non-fiction books.

7. that non-participating teachers be familiarized with the study.

8. that a free-reading program be launched as a school wide venture.

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