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SELLING READING

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Reading teachers hope all their students will become lifelong readers. Students who can successfully propel themselves through print and who view reading as a worthwhile activity are most likely to form this type of permanent attachment to reading. Thus, there should be two ultimate goals of all reading instruction: the evolution of both *competent* and *avid* readers.

The first of these goals is generally emphasized in most classrooms. Yet in the pursuit of competence, some well-meaning teachers may drill students on various reading skills, only to deny them the opportunities to practice these skills in a meaningful application of reading. Without sufficient practice, it is difficult for students to develop or even maintain skills taught in the classroom. To become competent readers, students must be encouraged to transfer their abilities to the ultimate goal—reading on their own. Simply put, it is difficult to become a proficient reader without lots of practice in reading.

Besides its utility in developing competent readers, practice in reading also can be valuable in the promotion of positive attitudes toward reading, a goal which may be ignored in some reading programs. Students' attitudes about reading are at least as important as their ability to read, for the value of reading lies in its use rather than its possession (Estes, 1971). For the classroom teacher, this means that students must know how to read and must also want to read before they can become lifelong readers. Fostering positive attitudes about reading should be a vital part of all reading programs. Making books available, providing time to read them, and demonstrating that reading is worthwhile are essential to the encouragement of reading as an acceptable and desirable activity.

Making Books Available

Every classroom should have a library of reading material. The library should contain at least three or four books per student, as well as other reading material of interest to students: magazines, newspapers, travel brochures, catalogs and the like. Materials should vary in topic and difficulty so that each student will be able to find something interesting and appropriate to read.

A section of the classroom devoted to reading can also encourage reading. Attractive bulletin boards and book displays can serve to advertise the joys of reading. If possible, soft furniture and carpeting can make this part of the classroom a desirable place in which to read. Thus reading can be physically appealing as well as visually attractive.

Resourceful teachers can maintain class libraries rather easily and inexpensively. Students, parents, and faculty members can be encouraged to donate old books and magazines to the library. A visit to a travel agency, airport, or car dealer can also result in interesting reading material for the classroom library, as can trips to garage sales, church bazaars, or second-hand stores.

Students should help establish and maintain the class library. In addition to giving individual students a chance to own their own books, paperback book clubs also provide dividends. These books could be added to the library. The class might select a committee to search paperback book catalogs and suggest titles for purchase. Another group of students might accompany the teacher to a book store in order to purchase books. Periodically “scavenger committees” can check want ads and other likely sources for used books. Student assistants might also serve as librarians, recording books that are checked out and keeping the library attractive. Involving students in the selection and maintenance of class library materials should encourage their interest in and acceptance of reading.

Providing Time to Read

Personal acceptance of reading and refinement of reading skills can be developed simultaneously through successful practice in reading. In 1970, Lyman Hunt described a reading technique directed toward this end. Hunt labeled his technique USSR (for *uninterrupted, sustained, silent reading*): similar techniques have been suggested by others (Oliver, 1970; McCracken, 1972; Allington, 1975). USSR was designed to provide students with a span of uninterrupted time for silent reading. The technique, if properly developed by following several well-defined steps, may supply the missing link between competence and the positive attitude so vital if students are to become lifelong readers. The following steps could be used to initiate USSR in the classroom:

1. Each student selects something to read: book, magazine, newspaper, pamphlet—whatever interests him/her. As long as material is not blatantly offensive, no comments should be made about the choice of reading material.
2. The teacher places a “Do Not Disturb” sign on the classroom door.
3. The teacher explains the technique to the students: “USSR stands for *uninterrupted, sustained, silent reading*. Each of you has something to read. When I say ‘go,’ begin to read silently at a pace that is comfortable for you. If you encounter a word that you don’t know, try to figure it out yourself or just skip it. If anyone interrupts our reading by talking or moving about, the USSR period will stop and we will return to our other work. Are there any questions? (Clarify directions, if necessary.) “Go.” These directions should be repeated each time until the teacher decides that the students understand the technique.
4. The teacher sets a kitchen timer for five minutes, a suggested length for the first USSR period. If the students are able to sustain their reading for this time, USSR should be gradually increased, perhaps in one or

two minute increments. If there are any interruptions, the USSR period stops. In that case, the next period should be of the same length.

5. No formal reporting should be required. However, the teacher may wish to ask questions like, "Did you enjoy your reading today? Is anyone reading something interesting that he or she would like to share with us?" (Hunt, 1970)
6. It is very important that everyone, including the teacher and any classroom visitors, spend the USSR period engaged in silent reading. If the time is spent in grading papers or planning, the students could easily conclude that reading is not valued by the teacher or that it is not that important. This directly counteracts the purpose of USSR.

One important objective of USSR is the promotion of positive attitudes about reading. This implies the creation of an atmosphere conducive to silent reading. Because USSR time is uninterrupted, students are encouraged to become deeply involved in their reading. However, both external and internal forces could interfere with USSR. To control external forces as much as possible, the teacher should take precautionary measures, such as placing the "Do Not Disturb" sign on the door and scheduling USSR for a period of relative quiet. (Some teachers have found that a "Testing" sign is more effective in preventing interruptions.)

Peer pressure can be used to control internal disruption. If any student disrupts USSR time, the period should be stopped and students should return to regular class work. Students will probably be disappointed if the USSR period is suspended and they may make their displeasure known to the offender(s). Because of pressure from peers not to interrupt, even normally "troublesome" students might begin to pay more attention to their reading.

Demonstrating that Reading is Worthwhile

Initiating USSR as a part of daily activities should help convince students that reading is worth school time. As USSR becomes part of their daily schedules, students should begin to realize that reading is *not* just a time filler to be used when the lesson is shorter than anticipated. Rather, students should begin to view free reading as an important, vital part of their class time.

An objection to USSR that may be heard from classroom teachers and administrators is that "The teacher isn't *teaching*; s/he is *just* sitting there reading." However, it should be remembered that the teacher's example is a powerful method of instruction. Furthermore, how often do these same teachers or administrators complain when math or science teachers "just sit there and watch" while students do math problems or science experiments? The teacher's enthusiasm for a practice or program may be a key ingredient in attitude change (Alexander and Filler, 1976). The teacher's actions should always demonstrate the belief that reading is a highly valued activity. In other words, it is very important for teachers to provide a good model for students. In some cases, the teacher may be the only adult

students can observe who demonstrates the enjoyment and usefulness of reading.

As a good model, the teacher should read while students are reading and should reach for books to find information. The teacher should also have some knowledge of materials pertaining to the interests and ability levels of his/her students. Teachers should share opinions about books they've read with their students. Interesting, innovative ways to react to books can be encouraged (Mavrogenes, 1977).

Another way to demonstrate that reading is worthwhile is to read aloud to students often. Students of any age enjoy listening to a well-read, appropriate story. Tape recorded stories can also be used, with students either listening alone or following along in a book as they listen. Mueller (1973) maintains that instruction reflects the teachers' attitude and that students are affected when the teacher shows enthusiasm or apathy toward reading.

Permanent attachments to reading will most likely develop in students who are both competent and avid readers. As they experience success in reading, students will begin to view reading as an enjoyable activity. Like most enjoyable activities, it will be continued. The more students read, the more competent they will become and the more enjoyment they will derive from reading. To sustain this cycle of competence and interest, teachers should recognize the need to develop positive attitudes about reading and the need to reinforce these attitudes by teaching the skills necessary for successful reading.

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