

Let Them Read Trash! An Exploratory Study into the Engaged Reading of Non- Traditional Texts - And What This Means for Teachers

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Outline:
The Issue at Hand
Thinking about Literature and Literacy and their Uses
The Challenges
The Study
Tentative Findings
Practical Applications:
-Fostering Engagement in School
-Doing and Leveraging Inner Work in School

Why teach literature?

Please rank the following statements in order from most (1) to least (12) important. Try to avoid ties. Expect frustration. Be prepared to justify your choices.

- ___ 1. To help young people explore their own feelings about literature
- ___ 2. To help young people explore their own feelings and understandings about their personal experiences
- ___ 3. To introduce students to great literary treasures
- ___ 4. To introduce students to other cultures, especially those distant from their experience
- ___ 5. To provide a meaningful context for learning to read
- ___ 6. To develop students' aesthetic sensibilities
- ___ 7. To develop critical thinking and writing skills
- ___ 8. To learn to "read the world" from a critical perspective
- ___ 9. To discuss and come to deeper understandings of timeless themes such as love, loss, identity, heroism, etc.
- ___ 10. To create an opportunity to discuss contemporary issues
- ___ 11. To help students think for themselves, and to create their own philosophies of life and living
- ___ 12. To help students to "live through" experiences that are distant from them in time, place and experience, therefore widening and deepening their experience.
- ___ 13. Other?:

Survey:

Please indicate if you love to “read” (or watch or play) any of the following kinds of texts. If so, list some of your favorite “texts” (actual titles of games, videos, books, etc):

___ Electronic texts

___ Movies/videos:

___ Video games:

___ Favorite Internet sites/social networking sites:

___ Television shows/series:

___ Visual texts

___ Graphic novels:

___ Manga:

___ Comic books:

___ Cartoons:

___ Magazines:

___ Collectibles (e.g. Yugioh, Dragonball Z cards)

___ Literary Genres

___ Series books (e.g. *Series of Unfortunate Events*, *Harry Potter*):

___ Romances:

___ Science Fiction:

___ Horror:

___ Fantasy:

___ Historical Fiction:

___ Others:

The current and future importance of literacy

Rank the top six of the following literacy activities as the most important (1-6) to your students' future lived experience in terms of both their "inner work" (psychological and emotional development) and "outer work"(functional/employment applications, etc).

Inner work

Outer work

- | | |
|---|-----|
| ___ Personal, exploratory writing (e.g. blogging, journaling, etc.) | ___ |
| ___ Expressive writing (poetry, stories) | ___ |
| ___ Expressive reading (pursuing what is personally compelling) | ___ |
| ___ Writing arguments, definitions, classifications, descriptions | ___ |
| ___ Reading arguments, definitions, classifications, descriptions | ___ |
| ___ Composing and designing electronic artifacts (html, multimedia) | ___ |
| ___ Using electronic technologies (video games, computers) | ___ |
| ___ Problem identification- social | ___ |
| ___ Problem identification – personal | ___ |
| ___ Making sense of one's experience, finding purpose, etc. | ___ |
| ___ Making sense of the world and one's place in it | ___ |
| ___ interpersonal speech communication (conversation, presentations) | ___ |
| ___ interpersonal written communication (e.g. email, texting, twittering) | ___ |
| ___ Intrapersonal communication (ability to communicate with self) | ___ |
| ___ ability to listen and make others feel listened to | ___ |
| ___ ability to question | ___ |
| ___ search for and find information through books, search engines, etc. | ___ |
| ___ develop data and articulate new intellectual understandings | ___ |
| ___ see new patterns and connections | ___ |
| ___ other? | ___ |

Connections or patterns you see? What is the relationship of inner to outer work?

Second Semi-structured interview/ Genre-Specific questions

1. Tell me what your favorite genre is and a little bit about why you like it so much.
2. When did you first become familiar with/interested in this genre?
3. What drew you to the genre in the first place?
4. How does reading your favorite genre compare to other kinds of reading you like to do? Compare your favorite genre to a second favorite, not so favorite, a less favorite genre?
5. How does reading your favorite genre compare to other kinds of reading you don't like to do?
6. How does reading your favorite genre compare to the kinds of reading you are asked to do in school?
7. How have teachers used your favorite genre in their teaching? What was your response?
8. How could/might teachers use your favorite genre in their teaching? How would you respond to a teacher/lesson that did so?
9. How would this kind of use improve their teaching, your learning, or your experience of school?
10. How might reading your favorite genre or using it in school contribute to the learning you are supposed to do in school?
11. What are your favorite examples of texts/titles of the genre?
12. What makes these examples so special? So enjoyable? So engaging?
13. What do you do or think about before reading a text in this genre?
14. What do you know or do that helps you to read this kind of text?
15. How do you choose a text of this type?
16. How do you find out about texts of this type that you might want to experience?
17. How do you share ("appropriate") your "reading" or what you learn from your reading of this text?
18. How do you "use" or apply your reading or what you learn from your reading to your thinking, your life, or other tasks you do inside or outside of school?
19. What other people do you know who like this genre?
20. What ways are there of sharing your enjoyment or learning from this genre?
21. What artifacts/movies/toys/etc. do people collect associated with this genre?
22. How do you buy, borrow, access, keep, organize these texts?
23. How does this genre express, challenge, or shape your identity/sense of self?
24. Do you repeat your reading/playing/viewing of individual texts? Which ones? What do you get from the repeated reading?
25. How is your reading/experience similar or different from that of other people you know who enjoy this genre?
26. To what degree do you feel supported (or not) in your choice to engage with this genre (by your family, teachers, school, the culture at large, subcultures, groups, friends, et al)?
27. Are there particular authors (designers, et al) who you particularly like? Why? How do you think about or relate to these authors? How is the author like or unlike you?
28. Are there particular characters who you particularly relate to? Why? How do you relate to these characters? How are these characters like or unlike you?

Conditions of FLOW experience

- A clear Purpose, Goals and Immediate Feedback
- A Challenge that requires an appropriate level of skill and Assistance to meet the challenge (as needed to be successful)
- A sense of Control and Developing Competence
 - voice, opinion, identity staking, choice, naming growing competence
- A focus on Immediate Experience
 - current relevance, make things, do things, immediate function, fun, humor
- Importance of the Social
 - group work, peer assistance, social purpose, negotiate and share what is learned
 - relationships with authors, peers, characters, teachers
 - Social contract: get to know me, care about me, address my interests, assist me and don't give up, be passionate,

Q. What kind of curriculum meets these demands?

A. Inquiry, e.g. inquiry and design, understanding by design, science by inquiry, cognitively guided instruction, etc.

Relationships with

- Family
- Friends
- Classmates
- Authors
- Characters
- Teachers

The Social Contract

- My teacher will try to get to know me as an individual.
- My teacher will care about me.
- My teacher will address my interests in some way (either outside or inside the classroom).
- My teacher will assist me to learn and will work hard to make sure I have learned.
- *My teacher will be passionate about the subject and about teaching

Sammy - Text Specific
Genre

Favorite genre
Science fiction/fantasy

Mainly because it is a way to get away from the world – ESCAPE – somewhere where you can't be, but you can get there mentally.

Realistic fiction is something that could happen just any day – but sci-fi is not something that would randomly happen. So you get to see something special. Something from a unique angle. And study it. EDGINESS, SPECIALNESS

Differences/similarities

Sort of depends on the author or book. There is Heavy fantasy and light. No limits. Heavy sci-fi – like star wars, cloning, more science based. Similar in the ways that they are different, not about real happenings. Differences that sci-fi is science based and has science mixed into the plot.

FINELY SLICED GENRES – IMPORTANCE OF CHOICE

I like both mainly because of my dad – we would watch the old Star Wars movies together, but also we would read Harry Potter together. FAMILY – SIGNIFICANT OTHERS – ELDER PROJECT IN SCHOOL.

Sci-fi can be very bizarre and difficult to follow if you don't get the science. It's more demanding. You need to know more.

Heavy vs. light

I'll read it all – it depends on the story and the situation. It just kind of has to appeal to you and work for you. I definitely like the normal person in unusual circumstances cf. ELENA

It really depends on the students. The Twilight series is what you are talking about. Some of my friends swear by them. But I looked them over – they weren't actiony enough for me. Too internal and psychological. But everybody has their own taste.

There are different branches of fantasy – more psychological – more heavy – more action – completely out there fantasy – more realistic fantasy – different qualifications – different topics, different settings. It is hard to say that you like fantasy – there are so many different types and you have to know your type.

Fantasy, no matter how fantastical, helps me think about my real life. I mean an author has a reason to write. They are going to put messages in it. I read books written for teenagers – and if it is far removed from my life it makes it easier to use it to think with. The author has to know what they think about life and how to make that real to teenagers.

AUTHOR

I think about authors a lot. I do. It's mainly because I like to find messages in books. I think about why the author might want to write this, what would they be trying to say.

J.K. Rowling – I think I got to know her through her books. I like series because then you get to know the author over time. I find that when I write what I am writing, I just don't sit down and write for the heck of it – it takes time and effort and research and just getting background information. You really have to have a reason to write. I feel like an author puts part of themselves into a book. You have to have respect for that. If you put yourself into a book, readers are going to know and feel that through what and how you write, and your purpose for writing.

ARE THERE AUTHORS WHO REVEAL THEMSELVES THROUGH HEAVY FANTASY, ETC?

You could be a heavy fantasy fan but it might be easier for you to write realistic fiction.

It takes a person who can create a totally different world. You have to have a lot of imagination. You have to scrap and remake the whole world.

It is really attractive to me to have a person who could scrap everything and start anew. If you can create that different world and you do have the imagination to pull it off, then it is not going to be dull. You have remade everything. It is your own world. *You are essentially the god of that world.* They are already announcing something to you – that it is worth the effort to remake things. It is worth the effort to create something of your own. To work hard.

METANARRATIVE AND META COMMENTARY. INHERENT IN THE GENRE.

Like Eragon – like the Redwall stuff – with Eragon, it is kind of like growing up and finding yourself. It was also kind of about learning about the past and understand the past because he has to do a lot of that to progress. With the Redwall series, Matamayo was about the value of family. You have to be there for each other.

I thought about my life as I read – I try to find a specific character I relate to the most and watch and follow them through the book. Having a character similar to yourself and following them through problems – when problems come up you have their experience to think with and you feel more like you can handle it. It gives you that was to connect.

COLES. USING CHARACTERS TO THINK WITH. And then I always look back to after reading and think about the messages and find the different meaning and I have an ongoing sheet where I write down quotes from books that I want to remember. Stuff that stands out to me. A few lines that are inspirational or that kind of relate to my life or things I've heard about. . . . I look through it fairly often – it gets me thinking – It just kind of gets me thinking about what they mean and how they relate to each other and to me. Think about how you can put it together in your life and what it would mean in your life.