***Reading and the Gifted: Developing a Program of Reading***

***With a Global Perspective***

***By Dr. Bob Seney***

**Professor Emeritus, Mississippi University for Women**

**The World Conference for Gifted and Talented Children**

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At the 2013 World Conference, our keynoter, Dr. Sally Reis, called for more discussion and investigation of the gifted/talented reader. We experienced only a limited response to this call at the 2015 Denmark Conference. We need more conversations in this critical area of meeting the unique needs of gifted readers. This session is in response to that call. We will discuss the needs of gifted readers and explore approaches to meet these needs within a global perspective. The content of this presentation is based on the presenter’s synthesis of the research of Rosenblatt, Halstead, Atwell, Gallagher, Layne, and Miller. (See Reference List) We find that many gifted students are already strong and motivated readers, and because of this, in many cultures, their reading needs are simply not being addressed. But just like any other subject, reading is not an exception and requires special guidance and instruction for the gifted. ***Depth*** and ***Complexity*** are key concepts in this approach. Through our reading instruction, we must move readers into more sophisticated reading and at a much deeper level. *This session is designed to take the theory/research on gifted readers into practice*. As time allows we will share sound classroom practices based on research and best practices and outline an approach to creating a positive reading environment. As time allows, guidance to implement these suggestions will be provided. The presenter is well known in the U.S. with his work with gifted readers. Again, as time allows, we will revisit the concept of the presenter’s 1989 Sydney World Conference presentation, which focused on the parings of American children and young adult literature with Australian children and young adult literature.

*The Goals of this session are to take Theory into Practice* by:

* Identifying the unique needs of the gifted reader;
* Discussing approaches to meet those needs;
* Sharing sound classroom practices based on research and best practices to experience reading fully;

Dr. Bob Seney, *Professor Emeritus*/Gifted Studies

Mississippi University for Women

14165 Denver West Circle, #3407

Lakewood, Colorado, US 80401

rwseney@muw.edu

**First Observation: The Research**

In reviewing the literature (with a “global” descriptor), studies can be grouped into three basic groups:

* Reading Comprehension
* Reading in a Second Language
* Concerns with Literacy.

I submit that the concerns of these studies do not reflect or address the needs of gifted learners and readers. There is some promise in the AWARD Reading Program from New Zealand with its use of children’s literature and technology, and the Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI) (Guthrie, et al. 2004) which seeks to foster reading engagement and comprehension through the teaching of reading strategies, teaching of scientific concepts and inquiry skills. However, the AWARD Program has a stated purpose of addressing phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension and CORI focuses on motivation and comprehension. As far as I can determine neither of these programs address the gifted reader.

**Second Observation: Finding the Basis for a Reading Program for the Gifted**

***The Keys to Reading Instruction and Reading Experience for the Gifted are Depth and Complexity. This is the basis of this presentation.***

* Recently, I read this summary of one teacher’s experience in teaching gifted learners:

In ***Teaching*** Gifted Learners:

* Extend learning experiences with depth and complexity;
* Provide learning experiences that are essential, meaningful, and relevant to students’ personal lives;
* Consider student demographics in order to understand culturally diverse groups and generational characteristics of millennials and how to incorporate these aspects in learning experiences;
* Become well informed of recommended best practices for gifted learners;
* Listen to curriculum concerns and suggestions from school stakeholders.

Dr. Teresa A. Johnson

***This is a good basis to use in designing reading instruction for gifted learners as well.***

* **Another Element in Designing Reading Programs for Gifted Readers:**

The thrust of the *Schoolwide Enrichment Model* (SEM) by Reis and Renzulli (2014) also provide a good basis for an approach to designing reading programs:

* Heighten Anticipation
* Stimulate Interest
* Deepen Understanding.

**Goal One: Identifying the Unique Needs of Gifted Readers**

**Who are Gifted Readers?**

Dr. Sally Reis has synthesized the various descriptions, definitions, and characteristics of gifted readers in this way:

* They read early and at an advanced level;
* They use advanced processing in reading;
* They read with enthusiasm and enjoyment;
* They demonstrate advance language skills (oral, reading, and writing);
* They display high levels of self-regulation and thus are able to independently focus on more challenging reading for a longer period of time;
* They make more efficient book selections.

[Reis, et al. 2004; Housand & Reis 2009]

[For my synthesis of characteristics of the gifted reader (which is similar to this list) based on Judith Halsted’s work (2009); please email me at rwseney@muw.edu]

**Approaches to Meeting Those Needs:**

**These characteristics suggest that gifted readers have unique reading needs:**

1. Regular reading instruction is often too easy for gifted readers and may well turn them off reading or make them “lazy” readers.
2. Basil reading programs do not meet their needs.
3. Instruction in basic word attack skills, simple comprehension, etc. is not necessary.
4. Instruction should be focused on the reader’s ability; the level of difficulty should match their ability.
5. The focus should be on developing higher level comprehension skills.
6. ***Instruction should be based on the study of literature***.[A personal interest]
7. Reading material must have appropriate challenge.
8. Reading material should “speak” to the readers’ interests.
9. Reading material from a wide variety of genres should be made available.
10. Book discussions, book conferences, and book circles have proven to be very effective with gifted readers: These strategies provide an opportunity for response and interaction with others and the text!

[From my “Quick” Review of the Literature]

*“…a reading program for gifted and talented readers should emphasize* ***reading to learn*** *rather than* ***learning to read,*** *then program goals should be differentiated from those of beginning or struggling readers.” Patricia Wood*

**Goal Two: Approaches for Reading Instruction:**

* Obviously the basal reader with its emphasis on word attach skills, vocabulary study, comprehension drills, etc. is not appropriate;
* Consider ***three*** basic concepts:
1. Use literature to supplement or better yet ***replace*** basal texts;
2. Form discussion groups based on books:
	* + Go beyond plot and fact questions;
		+ Focus on themes and style;
		+ Use higher level questioning strategies: Think in terms of ***Depth:*** *Conceptual Thinking* (Factional, Procedural, Conceptual) combined with ***Complexity****: Creative Thinking*  (Recall, Understand, Apply, Analyze, Evaluate, Create;
		+ Follow discussion formats from programs such as the *Junior Great Books*’ Shared Inquiry Method, which focuses on interpretation;
		+ The Rubric in Youmans’ *Paideia Seminars* (2016) is a very good guide for discussion elements;
		+ Many novels have discussion guides at the end: One very good example with higher level, interpretative questions is Avi’s *The Book Without Words* (2005, Hyperion Books). The two activities are good but need to be “elevated” for gifted readers.
3. Provide instruction in the study of literature at an early age;
	* 1. Teach the *Elements of Literature*
		2. Discuss the different *Methods of Analysis*
		3. Use Rosenblatt’s *Level of Responses*
		4. Teach the *Response Analysis Approach*.
* Provide reading guidance: Students often do not know what good, appropriate, and challenging literature is best for them. In my approach, I term this as “Book Counseling” or” Book Connecting.”
* Know the reader and know books: *Then Make the Match!* ***Appropriateness and Challenge are the keys!***

***My Suggestion for Selecting Literature for Younger Readers*** *BUT always remembering that we must first read all literature and remember the interests of the students for whom we are selecting books [Basic criteria: appropriateness and challenge] is to look at Young Adult Literature. We must also recognize that some YA Lit will be inappropriate and that typically YA Lit ranges from about 6th grade through high school.*

**And Finally Our Goal for Readers:**

* ***Is to help every single reader, especially gifted readers to become skilled, passionate, habitual and critical readers.***
* Nancie Atwell calls this stance “The Personal Art of Reading.”
	+ - This involves helping readers to choose books, develop and refine their literary criteria, and carve out identities for themselves as readers.
		- The goal is that every reader is able to say: “These are my favorite authors, genres, books, and characters this year, ***and this is why***.”
		- Personal preference and choice make up the foundation for reading to become a *personal art*.
* This begins early in the life of the reader and continues through high school.
* If reading comprehension – *the making of meaning* – is your concern, then be aware that the only delivery system for reading comprehension is **reading.**
	+ Most so called strategies for reading comprehension are actually study skills [finding main ideas, supporting details, causes and effects, plot events, settings, character motivation] and research shows they don’t always transfer to reading.
	+ These skills are highly appropriate for non-fiction in which we want our readers to “carry away” information but they intrude upon ***the life of the story*** and they may hamper the love of literature.
* Nancie Atwell’s extensive research and work with readers have produced this list of “conditions” to motivate readers and to help them move into their “reading zones”:
	+ Book talks and mini-lessons;
	+ A large, diverse classroom library;
	+ Quiet, daily in-class time to read;
	+ Readers’ free choice of books, authors, and genres;
	+ Recommendations of books from friends and teachers;
	+ Comfort during in-class reading time;
	+ Students’ letters to the teacher and friends (in lieu of book reports, essays, etc.);
	+ Individuals’ conversations/conferences with the teacher about their reading;
	+ Individuals’ lists of books they want to read someday;
	+ Homework reading of at least 30 minutes every night.
* Observation*: Notice that reading as a personal art doesn’t contort or clutter the landscape with reading activities….* (Atwell, 2007: page 17)
* All of this underlies and supports my approach that we must understand our readers, understand a wide range of literature, and be familiar with appropriate literature and ***Make the Match***!

***And this should be the basis of reading instruction for the gifted!***

Another important element, which is beyond the scope of the time allotted for this presentation is creating a positive reading environment and reading culture (school-wide). For my notes on this area, please email me at rwseney@muw.edu

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