

REACTION: USING SPORTS TO STIMULATE CRITICAL THINKING

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The Greeks believed you could not separate educating the mind and the body. While they emphasized physical games and contests and maintaining healthy bodies, they especially stressed reading and other forms of education. No doubt, if this ancient empire were confronted with educating today's youth to read, they would choose print related to the student's interests to promote critical thinking and reading skills. Gentile advocates the development of thinking and reading skills instruction in the respective content areas through the use of sports materials. The contention is to capitalize on the students' interests and actual experiences. Any teacher/administrator who has taught school is cognizant of the majority of students' interests in sports, physical education, and health classes. Using materials related to their interests is another way of working with their affective and cognitive strengths to alleviate weaknesses in the cognitive development of initial thinking and reading skills.

It is logical that when students read and think about material in which they are both knowledgeable and interested, they are more capable of operating at different levels of comprehension. Teaching and practice in the development of thinking and reading skills using such models as the Barrett and Bloom taxonomies in conjunction with high interest sports materials could very well carry over to advancing these skills in other content area disciplines.

Stauffer (1969) defined reading as a thinking process and Smith & Dechant (1961) define reading as experience brought to the printed page. These operational definitions of reading lend credence to the author's attempt to ameliorate the teaching of critical thinking and reading skills based on students' primary interest areas. From the psychological principles of learning we need to practice teaching the unknown based on the known. Therefore, as teachers we can develop students' higher intellectual thinking processes by having them interact with their peers and teachers on topics in which they are involved.

Issue could be taken with the author on one specific manner of how "sports and reading instruction in the disciplines go hand-in-hand . . .". It is interpreted by the reviewer that his list of comparisons are meant to be of a positive nature. Therefore, the term aggressiveness might be deleted in that his point on assertiveness should make the probable desired comparison.

Many of today's sports commentators are very articulate. A large number are former athlete/celebrities in the respective sports. The vast proportion of students interested in sports and famous athletes can identify, thereby accepting and emulating, the excellent language facilitation modeled by these television and radio announcers. Most of us learn by modeling after others. Students listening to the vocabulary and analytical abilities of these reporters can adapt their language and thinking skills in other disciplines.

The author has provided several suggested activities which teachers can easily implement in their own classrooms. Some of these include vocabulary (which is the root of reading comprehension and thinking) exercises. Another fringe benefit of using these suggested activities is the growth of the students' self image through having had these profitable vicarious experiences that can affect their social and academic efforts.

Gentile could very well have included with his recommendation of materials containing sports content, the suggestion of actually placing these materials in the classroom libraries for accessibility purposes. Additionally, mention might have been made of sustained silent free reading programs that could further enhance one's knowledge on a favorite topic while promoting the reading

habit, vocabulary growth, and laying the background for what the author calls stimulating critical thinking and reading.

Not only can sports material profit and stimulate the students, but teachers who are aware of sports information and terminology find themselves better received by their students because of this common bond. Students accept teachers as more human and are likely to better appreciate their instructional expertise. This form of communication leads to a more conducive atmosphere for learning and instructional purposes.

In summary, this reviewer has observed that teachers either do not, or are not given the freedom to capitalize on students' reading interests by choosing commercial materials or an array of informally collected materials to be used for instructional purposes. Gentile provides good rationale for utilizing sports related materials and themes to build and stimulate critical thinking. One would find it difficult to argue against applying students' high-priority interests to the initial efforts of increasing or facilitating critical thinking and reading skills to be transferred to other disciplines.

REFERENCES

- Smith, Henry P. & Dechant, Emerald V. *Psychology in Teaching Reading*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1961.
- Stauffer, Russell, G. *Teaching Reading as a Thinking Process*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1969.