
REACTION: READING HABITS AND PATTERNS OF IN-SERVICE READING TEACHERS IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SCHOOL SETTINGS

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Stanley Baker addresses an area that has long been a concern of reading specialists and teacher trainers, namely, what model of literacy do elementary classroom teachers provide for their students. Do teachers read?

In his attempt to measure reading behavior of elementary classroom teachers, Baker used a modified version of a questionnaire designed by Joseph and Polonsky and equated areas of response with Rath's valuing criteria. Unfortunately, Baker had difficulty in collecting data from his prospective one hundred twenty subjects. Only 31 percent of the sample returned completed questionnaires. Thus, from this small percentage of returns it would be difficult to generalize results to the larger population of elementary classroom teachers. One wonders why there was such a high rate of refusal to participate in the study and if, in fact, these teachers saw through the "indirectness" of the instrument and felt threatened.

A more complete description of the sample in terms of how the teachers were assigned practicum students might have explained teacher reluctance to participate in the study. Also worthy of consideration is the method by which the questionnaires were distributed. If practicum students approached supervising teachers with the Joseph and Polonsky instrument, did this bias teacher cooperation?

Disregarding the small percentage of subjects participating in data collection, one returns to the basic issue of what kind of a literacy model do teachers provide. Apparently, a high percentage of teachers do read for pleasure, meaning that they demonstrate a lifetime love of reading and as such should be modeling this behavior for students. The fact that a small percentage identified reading as a preferred leisure activity is not surprising and does concur with previous research as Baker notes. Since teachers are expected to model many attitudes and kinds of behaviors for students, should they be criticized for failing to select reading as the preferred behavior?

While a study of teacher responses to a values related reading questionnaire is interesting, it might be of more value to learn how teachers utilize reading and literature in their classrooms if we wish to theorize about the models they present and the attitudes they convey.