

## **Research Report: *Why Teachers Need to Be Readers* by Penny Britton Kolloff, Ph.D.**

### **Content**

Penny Kolloff's survey of pre-service undergraduate and practicing teachers reveals little appreciation for the enjoyment of reading by those entering the teaching field or current practitioners and implies a serious impediment to the adequate teaching of reading.

### **Context**

A review of related research reveals that as competition for leisure activities has increased in the past two decades, recreational reading has declined among adults and youths. The decline of reading skills has been compounded by the "dumbing down" of literature used in schools that has sacrificed intellectual engagement and growth for project-related, "age appropriate" materials. Reader interest shapes curricular choices rather than the study of character, theme, moral, style, and other essential literary elements. Teachers who do not enjoy reading and have not read extensively themselves are limited in their ability to select appropriate books for students at various ability and interest levels and to model the value of reading as a lifelong learning tool. Conversely, teachers who have an extensive knowledge of literature are able to select a variety of books related to a theme or topic that will both engage and instruct students at a variety of ability levels in a classroom, more successfully meeting the needs of all students to practice and increase their reading skills and knowledge base.

### **Methodology and Results**

Kolloff asked several questions related to leisure reading habits of 246 undergraduate and 163 graduate students enrolled in education classes since 1995 to gather data on current recreational reading habits and childhood reading experience. Undergraduate responses indicated that 42 percent were currently not reading for pleasure or read only magazines and newspapers. It had been at least six months since 17 percent had read a book for pleasure, and 19 percent did not identify when their last recreational reading experience occurred. Judy Blume and Dr. Seuss were identified as favorite childhood authors, with 13 percent failing to identify a favorite childhood author and 10 percent failing to identify a favorite childhood book. Of graduate education students, 28 percent reported not currently reading for pleasure. Of language arts teachers at the elementary and secondary level, 25 percent did not recall when they had last read recreationally, or reported that it had been longer than six months. Inspirational or self-help books and popular fiction were the two predominant categories of current reading reported by graduate students. In the past few years, Harry Potter books frequently appeared in both undergraduate and graduate education student reading responses. Surveys of freshmen with a variety of intended majors revealed 39 percent were not currently reading for pleasure, leading to speculation that their educational experiences had not created a habit of recreational reading.

These responses indicate a need for teaching an appreciation of reading and nurturing recreational reading habits among pre-service and practicing teachers. Practice reading aloud, as well as the development of book clubs or exemplary literature exposure, may increase education students' engagement with books, aside from required assigned readings. The recruitment into education of talented students who possess a love of reading is also suggested.

### **Significance**

This study underscores the limited recreational reading habits of pre-service and practicing teachers and points out possible negative effects of reluctant readers as classroom teachers where a depth of literary knowledge is essential for appropriate material selection and the modeling of a love of reading and good reading habits. Gifted students are particularly limited by teachers who do not embrace reading for pleasure. Encouragement of recreational reading habits in undergraduate and graduate education students, using a variety of techniques, is recommended by the author.

### **Source**

Kolloff, P. B. (2002). Why teachers need to be readers. *Gifted Child Today* 25(2), 50-54, 64.