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**LUDIC READING IN ADOLESCENCE:
Prevalence, Practices and Preferences.**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study of adolescent readers who read spontaneously and voraciously to satisfy a variety of felt needs. An initial comparative study is made of the differential reading attitudes, interests, preferences and practices of ludic, moderate and reluctant readers among more than 2,200 New Zealand fourth and sixth formers. More specifically recorded are the preferences and practices of sixteen ludic readers, examined over a twelve month period.

To the adolescent ludic reader, the important element of a book is its trance potential, which accounts for the pre-ordinance of fiction over non-fiction. Vivid imagery is found to be a characteristic of ludic reading among adolescents. The genre most favoured are horror, romance, adventure and fantasy. Genre preferences were found to remain stable over a twelve-month period, particularly among male ludic readers.

Factors most strongly related to ludic reading are gender, ethnicity, family occupational status and home reading background. Less strongly related are birth order and family size.

A strong relationship exists between school academic success and ludic reading. Higher than average occupational aspirations are also related to ludic levels of reading. Habitual ludic reading is found to decrease only slightly with age in adolescence with increasing work and study commitments, accompanied by increasing economic and social independence. Adolescent ludic readers are found to have a variety of leisure pursuits, including television-viewing.

Personality and environmental influences determine quite individual differences in motivation, satisfactions, practices and preferences of ludic readers. The case study readers perceived literary quality to be inversely related to reading pleasure. Ludic readers experience a variety of emotions

while reading a book and happy endings are not found to be relevant or a necessary requisite for enjoyment. Re-reading particular books is a feature of the reading habits of this group of adolescent readers. The popular perception of the ludic reader as an introverted, passive and solitary individual is not supported in this study.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

" When I read, I can be whoever I want, when and wherever I want. I can enter unknown places and reach far beyond my imagination. I can leave the world of the familiar for a thousand other realms. When I read, I become the book."

Richard, 13 years

There is no doubt to secondary school teachers of English that the landscape of contemporary adolescent reading is a complex and undulating one. But it is not always possible for busy teachers of five different classes to know that one particular student has an insatiable appetite for fantasy, that another enjoys the consciousness-changing effect of horror fiction. It is often not possible for such teachers to make accurate appraisals of every student's reading habits and interests, for those whose reading ability shows deficits are usually of most immediate concern to educationists and it is here that most research has been focused. In fact, it is possible that many teachers put such considerable emphasis on reading skill development that they have forgotten about positively encouraging recreational reading habits. There is a view that teachers have made skills, which should be the means of reading instruction, into the end of reading instruction (O'Rourke, 1979) and nowhere is this more obvious than in the junior and intermediate forms in secondary schools. Foster (1975) amongst other reading theorists, stresses that the development of the reading habit is as important to the education of the individual as is the learning of the basic skill of de-coding. Aliteracy, the failure to practise the skill of reading, is shown to lead to functional illiteracy. The reading habit still has, therefore, important implications for educational outcomes and employment as well as for fulfilling emotional, spiritual and cognitive needs.

Few studies have been made of ludic adolescent readers, of the satisfactions they derive from reading, of what bewitches and absorbs them, or what appears to happen to them as they read. Their genre preferences, their perceptions and their practices have not been compared to those of moderate or reluctant readers.

Ludic readers are skilled readers who read rapidly, effortlessly and very often. Ludic readers expect that reading will be pleasurable. They select appropriate material for themselves with speed and ease. Reading is an integral part of life for the ludic reader. That there has been a dearth of research on avid, skilled adolescent readers is no doubt because they pose few problems for educational practitioners. Their needs, habits and interests are deserving of study however, for they are involved in a series of complex and creative consciousness-changing processes of attending, decoding, comprehending, sensing, absorbing, imagining, predicting, recalling and knowing, with apparent ease and pleasure. As Bamberger (1975) argues, reading is one of the most effective means of systematic development of language and the personality.

Spontaneous pleasure reading, which is after all what teachers of English seek for their students, is worthy of study for the very reason that teachers need to know more about what students enjoy rather than what they think they should enjoy. In a British survey of 3,000 students aged between thirteen and fifteen, Jenkinson (1940) found that there was 'a vast and seemingly unbridgeable gulf between what children choose to read in their own leisure time and what they were given to read in English lessons.' In those war years, there were fewer books written for young adults than there are today. Literary massification or popular culture did not really exist for this age group in society at that time. With a far greater range of reading material available, it is even more difficult for teachers to do more than make assumptions about what students read and enjoy. A myriad claims on their time often prevents classroom teachers and school librarians reading adolescent fiction themselves, so that it is difficult for them to do other than rely on the 'tried

and true' successes of past years in selecting books for class sets and library shelves. Teacher-librarians often refer to contemporary popular fiction as a form of 'literary anorexia' or 'the jungle of popular culture' and in school libraries the question could well be asked: Is perceived quality sacrificed to popular taste or is popular taste sacrificed to notions of quality? Without some knowledge of the interests of keen readers, librarians find difficulty in striking a balance between popular taste and the concept of 'quality.' Derek Longhurst, in the preface to his text Gender, Genre and Narrative Pleasure (1989), claims 'no longer is reading popular fiction generally considered to be an activity akin to a secret vice to which one should admit shamefacedly. Nor can popular narrative be adequately understood as merely narcotic and its readers as unenlightened junkies.' In this study, students identify particular popular genre and provide reasons for their appeal.

Young adult fiction is important financially - books for young people are powerful money-makers. Some publishers sell 'directly' to young people, their books rarely reaching their target audience through teachers or librarians, but through bookshelves in dairies, airports and bookshops like other mass market products such as magazines and videos.

What is it that attracts and maintains the interest, intrigue and absorption of adolescents in romance, fantasy, horror and other genre? Researchers like Janice Radway (1984) claim that literary critics cannot explain why people read particular genre just by examining the books themselves, that the readers bring assumptions and strategies to the book that give meaning to the text. Teachers and school librarians need to know which books provide emotional satisfaction for adolescents. But rather than focus on the books which are constantly viewed and reviewed, we need to know more about the reading audience and the satisfactions which books from a wide range of genre provide for them.

Ludic readers as independent, experienced and skilled readers are valid and valued subjects for research. In seeking to discover the needs and satisfactions of the inexperienced and unskilled, to lure them into the wonders of reading and therefore foster and promote the reading habit for all, we need to learn from those who are already 'hooked.' Nell (1988 p 1) reminds us:

'.....the absorbed reader of fiction, who is so often reviled as an escapist and denounced as the victim of a vice as pernicious as tipping in the morning should instead be the envy of every student and every teacher.'

This series of studies explores some of the needs which are satisfied and gratifications which are provided by ludic reading in adolescence. The identification and prevalence of ludic readers are considered, and a comparison is made of the reading practices and preferences of these readers with those who read moderately or reluctantly. The popular perception of the avid adolescent reader, established in a survey of two hundred and forty students, is examined. Detailed case study research over a twelve-month period focuses on who ludic readers are, on what they read and on why they continue to read and to be excited by reading.

Definition of Terms.

In this section, categories of student readers and a range of school reading programmes are defined.

Ludic readers: these students are avid readers who are particularly interested in, and enthusiastic about, reading, and who read often for pleasure and recreation (the term ludic derives from ludo, meaning play.) Nell (1988) reserves the term 'ludic' reader for those who read at least one book per week. Ingham (1982) uses the term 'avid' reader and Neuman (1982, 1986)

and Whitehead et al (1975) 'heavy' reader but these terms only consider the number of books read. For the purposes of this project, the ludic reader is one who states that he/she enjoys reading, reads at least 3-4 books per month, would read more if more time was available, and was reading a non-school book at the time the survey was conducted.

Moderate readers in this survey are those students who state that they enjoy reading, but who may or may not read as many as 3-4 books per month, read more if more time was available, or were reading a non-school book at the time of the survey.

Reluctant readers here are those who state that they do not enjoy reading. Many of these students are aliterate, ie. they can read, but do not. Within this category of reluctance is a group of non-readers who do not enjoy reading and who do most of their reading at school, when compelled to do so. These students cannot be termed aliterate as a group, as their ability to read has not been assessed in this study, although 6% of reluctant readers give 'difficulty' as a reason for non-enjoyment.

SSR, USSR, DEAR are all forms of a sustained silent reading programme used in many secondary schools where students select their own reading material and are provided with time to read in silence, either in English class time, or in form class time, across the school.

RIBIT is an Australian-based reading development programme used in some New Zealand intermediate and secondary schools in which students contract with the teacher of English to read a chosen number and selection of books each term, and to present a brief report or assigned activity on each book.

Book Flood is a developmental reading programme where students are provided with a large number of books from a wide range of high interest reading material, usually in the form of class libraries, and are free to read

it, without necessarily reporting or assessing it. Class time is not necessarily given for Book Flood reading.

Read Aloud is a recently introduced across-school 'shared reading' programme organised either within form class time or within subject areas, where the teacher reads aloud from a selected text, of which all students have a copy. The teacher reads for a period of approximately fifteen minutes while students follow the text and a very simple evaluation of text appeal is made at the conclusion of the reading session.