

## **Greater Media Consumption Needed To Improve Reading**

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In more than thirty years of university teaching; hundreds of elementary, middle, and high school visits; and numerous personal interactions with community young people, I have repeatedly noticed that few students read newspapers or news magazines. In short, most students seem ignorant of and uncaring about current affairs. This is an alarming state of affairs. A major task for schools is to educate our young people to be good citizens. Quality citizenship involves interest in and personal involvement with what is going on around us. Our political, social, economic, and professional well being depends on being aware of matters that can and will affect our personal, family, workplace, and national safety, well being, and future. Students need to be inspired and motivated to be more interested in and skilled at paying attention to current events for their own benefit. This essay advocates that teachers at all levels make use of print media channels to awaken students to current events.

TV and radio news programming do provide current updates on current event; however, only those events that are sensational, highly unusual, or of major public interest are reported. Also, such reports are superficial in that extremely limited time is devoted to any single issue. Also, most electronic news stories are rushed to air without thorough checking of facts, context, and cause. Such stories are often incomplete, frequently contain factual errors or omissions, and are routinely rushed to production. Newspapers and magazines have the luxury of greater comparative space than radio or TV news to provide more in-depth coverage. Newspaper and magazine report and feature article writers can take more time to produce better researched, better articulated, more contextualized, and more informed reports on matters of public interest.

TV and radio public affairs and talk shows do offer greater time to discussions than do news reports; however these often wind up being venting and ranting sessions by individuals who know little about events and by people with obvious and often extreme personal agendas and skewed points of perspective. Skilled critical thinkers and intellectually curious magazine and newspaper readers can choose multiple political, social, and economical perspectives giving themselves awareness, understanding, and appreciation for the spectrum of views on individual issues. This dialectic input offers readers better opportunities to be an informed consumer. There are printed news outlets ranging from extreme to

moderate conservative to middle of the road views to extreme and moderately liberal views. All these perspectives have their own biases, limitations, and agendas; therefore, reviewing several points of input benefit readers in deciding where truth lies. Such multiple reading assignments offer students valuable perspectives for research and idea credibility.

Most teachers rely on textbooks as their major – and often only – resource. Textbooks do serve useful ends; but they have serious, major drawbacks in relation to current events. Texts are quickly outdated. Texts frequently are questionably affected by politically correct interest groups that greatly influence text content that seriously limit what is presented. Newspapers and news magazines offer teachers current, multiple perspective approaches to events that can enable useful and vibrant class discussions to take place. Such magazines are available at most libraries and many have free website samples to choose from.

Assignments in social study, science, history, philosophy, civics, religion, economic, arts, and technology classes, among others lend themselves to using newspaper and magazine resources. Debates, analyses, and judgments are easy to assign based on print media reports, opinions, and perspectives. Connecting, comparing and contrasting, and differentiating among printed reports and opinions offer teachers valuable instruction strategies designed to improve students' critical thinking.<sup>1</sup> Students can be inspired to voice their own thoughts and judgments about current affairs and then be led to link these to historical events and trends and to surmise what might be in store for us in the future. Greater student involvement is almost always sought after by teachers as too many students fall silent during class discussions.<sup>2</sup> Creative and energetic use of multiple perspectives on issues can also implant the value of and the acceptance of multiple ways to see events which might liberate some students from the opinion that there is only one "correct" or acceptable view. Thus opening up to multiple avenues of thought and belief might widen issue discussion.

Active class discussion, inclusion of current events, and making studies come to personal life can inspire greater interest in subject matter which will then motivate greater willingness to read. Reading skills, it is well documented, are enhanced with continued and increased reading. Active class discussion also advances better listening by students.<sup>3</sup> Better listening can enhance student tolerance.

Employing newspapers and magazines to complement class texts can make a valuable contribution to stimulating student interest in current events; to become a more active contributing class member, and to evolve into a better, more actively involved citizen. Student attitudes are likely to improve and become sustained when current events are made an integral portion of the school day. Parents can be made more involved, even if that involvement is vicarious if students can be inspired to engage their parents in current affairs discussions at home.

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<sup>1</sup> See Ken Petress. (2004). Critical Thinking: An Extended Definition. *Education*, 124 (3): 461-466.

<sup>2</sup> See Ken Petress. (2001). The Ethics of Classroom Silence. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, 28 (2): 104-107.

<sup>3</sup> Ken Petress. (1999). Listening: A Vital Skill. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, 26 (4): 261-262.