TEENAGERS AND YOUNG ADULTS: PUTTING READING IN ITS PLACE

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Abstract: Firstly, literacy practices are situated among the other cultural practices of teenagers, on a basis of research data in sociological, psychological and didactical fields. This enables an illustration of specific features of the relations this group have with literacy. Then research results are related concerning reading practices in general and reading literature in particular. Who proposes reading to which teenagers? Which texts are proposed? Through what medium? What kind of reading strategy is implemented? Moreover, who reads? What sort of literature? With what benefits? Finally, writing is treated. In this area little research data is available, therefore an attempt is made to summarise what is known about young peoples writing practices, using the few available surveys. It should be noted that a researcher who is interested in the literacy practices of today's young people has to take into account the fact that the internet and computers are new tools which aid and encourage reading and writing, and that they create new conditions of literacy practice.

Key words: cultural practices, literacy practices, new technologies, teenagers

French résumé. [Translation Laurence Pasa].
L'auteur situe tout d'abord les pratiques de littéracie parmi les autres pratiques culturelles des adolescents, à partir de diverses enquêtes menées en sociologie, psychologie et didactique. Ces données illustrent bien le type de relations que ce groupe entretient avec la littéracie. Ensuite, des résultats de recherches relatives aux pratiques de lecture en général et à la lecture d'ouvrage littéraire en particulier sont présentés. Qui propose des lectures et à quels adolescents? Quels textes sont proposés? Comment? Quels

types de stratégies de lecture s'instaurent? Qui lit? Quel genre de littérature? Enfin, les pratiques d'écriture des jeunes sont abordées au travers des quelques données de recherches dont on dispose. L'auteur remarque qu'un chercheur intéressé par les pratiques de littéracie des jeunes doit désormais tenir compte du rôle joué par Internet et les nouvelles technologies. Ces nouveaux outils semblent en effet encourager les pratiques de lecture-écriture en créant de nouvelles conditions d'émergence de la littéracie.

Portuguese resumo. [Translatation Pauloa Feytor-Pinto]
Em primeiro lugar, as práticas de literacia são contextualizadas no âmbito de outras práticas dos adolescentes, com base em dados de investigação sociológica, psicológica e didáctica. Tal permite ilustrar aspectos específicos das relações que este grupo tem com a literacia. Em seguida, são relacionados resultados da investigação sobre práticas de leitura, em geral, e a leitura literária, em particular. Quem propõe, que leituras, a que adolescentes? Que textos são propostos? Em que suporte? Que tipo de estratégias de leitura é implementado? Além disso, quem lê? Que tipo de literatura? Com que benefícios? Por fim, trata-se da escrita. Neste domínio, há poucos dados de investigação, pelo que é feita uma tentativa de sintetizar o que se sabe acerca de práticas de escrita dos jovens, recorrendo aos poucos levantamentos disponíveis. Importa notar que o investigador que se interesse pelas práticas literácicas dos jovens de hoje deve ter em conta o facto de a internet e os computadores serem ferramentas que auxiliam e encorajam a leitura e a escrita e que originam novas condições de práticas literácicas.

Polish. [Translation Elzbieta Awramiuk].
Po pierwsze, jak wskazują wyniki prac z zakresu socjologii, psychologii i dydaktyki, umiejętność czytania i pisania należy sytuować wśród innych kulturowych działań nastolatków. To umożliwia ilustrację specyficznych cech relacji tej grupy w stosunku do czytania i pisania. Ponadto, rezultaty badań są skorelowane z praktyką czytania ogólnie, a szczególnie – z praktyką czytania literatury. Kto i jakim nastolatkom proponuje czytanie? Jakie teksty są proponowane? Przez jakie medium? Jaki rodzaj strategii jest wdrażany? Poza tym, kto czyta? Jaki rodzaj literatury? Z jakimi korzyściami? Wreszcie, podejmujemy sprawę pisania. W tej kwestii dostępnych jest znacznie mniej wyników badań, z tego względu – opierając się na kilku małych sondażach – wysiłek kierujemy na podsumowanie, co wiadomo o pisaniu młodych ludzi. Trzeba wspomnieć, że badacz, który jest zainteresowany doświadczeniami z czytaniem i pisaniem współczesnych młodych ludzi, musi wziąć pod uwagę fakt, że internet i komputer są nowymi narzędziami, które zachęcają do czytania i pisania i tworzą nowe możliwości do rozwijania umiejętności czytania i pisania.

Greek. Περίληψη. [Translation Papoulia Tzelepi]
Κατ' αρχήν, δραστηριότητες γραμματισμού, τοποθετούνται μεταξύ των πολιτισμικών πρακτικών των εφήβων, σύμφωνα με τα ερευνητικά δεδομένα από τα πεδία της κοινωνιολογίας, της ψυχολογίας και της διδακτικής. Αυτό επιτρέπει μια κατάδειξη των ειδικών χαρακτηριστικών των σχέσεων που αυτή η ομάδα έχει με το γραμματισμό. Στη συνέχεια τα αποτελέσματα των ερευνών συσχετίζονται αναφορικά με τις αναγνωστικές πρακτικές γενικά και την ανάγνωση λογοτεχνίας ειδικά. Ποιος προτείνει ανάγνωση, σε ποιους εφήβους; Ποια κείμενα προτείνονται; Μέσω τίνος μέσου; Ποια αναγνωστική στρατηγική χρησιμοποιείται; Επιπλέον, ποιος διαβάζει; Τι είδους λογοτεχνία; Με ποια οφέλη; Τέλος αναλύεται το γράψιμο.
Σε αυτή την περιοχή λίγα δεδομένα υπάρχουν, επομένως γίνεται προσπάθεια να παρουσιαστεί περιληπτικά τι είναι γνωστό για τις πρακτικές γραψίματος των νέων, με τη χρήση των επισκοπήσεων που ήδη υπάρχουν. Πρέπει να σημειωθεί ότι ο ερευνητής που ενδιαφέρεται για τις πρακτικές γραμματισμού των σημερινών νέων, πρέπει να λάβει υπόψη το γεγονός ότι το διαδίκτυο και ο υπολογιστής είναι νέα εργαλεία που ενθαρρύνουν και βοηθούν την ανάγνωση και το γράψιμο και ότι δημιουργούν νέες συνθήκες πρακτικών γραμματισμού.

German. Zusammenfassung. [Translation Irene Pieper]
Abstract: Im ersten Schritt werden Lesepraxen in den Zusammenhang anderer kultureller Praxen von Teenagern eingeordnet, und zwar auf der Basis von Forschungsergebnissen aus Soziologie, Psychologie und Didaktik. So können anschließend die spezifischen Kennzeichen dieser Gruppe in Bezug auf das Verhältnis zum Lesen beschrieben werden. Dann werden Forschungsergebnisse vorgestellt, die Lesepraxen im allgemeinen und literarische Lesepraxen im besonderen betreffen. Wer macht welchen Teenagern Lesevorschläge? Welche Texte werden vorgeschlagen? Durch welches Medium? Welche Lesestrategie wird verwandt? Wer liest? Welche Art von Literatur? Mit welchem Nutzen? Abschließend wird das

Schreiben thematisiert. In diesem Bereich liegen wenige Forschungsdaten vor. Auf der Basis der vorhandenen Studien wird zusammenfassend dargestellt, was über die Schreibpraxen von Jugendlichen ausgesagt werden kann. Ein Forscher, der sich für die literalen Praxen von gegenwärtigen Jugendlichen interessiert, hat freilich auch zu berücksichtigen, dass mit Internet und Computer neue Werkzeuge im Gebrauch sind, die das Lesen und Schreiben fördern und die neue Bedingungen für literale Praktiken schaffen.

Dutch. Samenvatting. [Translation Tanja Janssen]
In deze bijdrage worden programma's voor geletterdheid eerst gesitueerd binnen andere culturele activiteiten van teenagers, op basis van sociologische, psychologische en didactische onderzoeksgegevens. Zo kan duidelijk worden gemaakt wat het specifieke is van de relaties die teenagers met geletterdheid hebben. Vervolgens worden onderzoeksresultaten besproken met betrekking tot lezen in het algemeen, en literatuur lezen in het bijzonder. Wie stimuleert het lezen bij welke teenagers? Welke teksten worden aangeraden, op welke wijze, via welke media? Welk type leesstrategie wordt toegepast? Maar ook: wie leest welke soorten literatuur, en wat zijn de opbrengsten? Tenslotte wordt ingegaan op 'schrijven'. Op dit gebied zijn weinig onderzoeksgegevens voorhanden. Getracht wordt samen te vatten wat bekend is over het schrijven door jongeren, op basis van het schaarse vragenlijstonderzoek. Onderzoekers die geïnteresseerd zijn in geletterdheid van jongeren zullen er rekening mee moeten houden dat het internet en de computer nieuwe middelen zijn om lezen en schrijven te bevorderen.

I'd like to start with a few introductory remarks, formulated as questions. First, *what age bracket are we dealing with?* It seems to me very important to consider the definition of the terms I am employing – according to surveys and general criteria 'young people' can be described as between 12 and 18 years old, but also 15–19, and even 15–24. This flexibility in terms of definition and the increase of the upper limit are undoubtedly linked partly to the fact that, nowadays, adolescence is a state which lasts longer than previously. Basically, however, we can consider the expression 'young people' as indicating those aged 15–24. This is the group upon which I will be concentrating during the lecture – a group already marked out through the limits proposed by the organisers of this conference. While researching this paper, I have therefore selected and examined data dealing with this large age group.

Secondly: *Does the concept of adolescent literacy exist?* Having decided this question, another even more difficult one arises, namely the problem of focussing on, defining and understanding such a large and often disparate group as those who have reached the end of obligatory school attendance (16 in most countries).

What, for example, do a 17 year old sixth form student living in a residential suburb, an unemployed 18 years old living in sheltered accommodation and a trainee baker or a chef living in the centre of a big city have in common? I have been guided in my research by the notion that, at this age, we are no longer dealing with a situation of first time learning, nor obligatory learning through school. Adolescence grows longer and longer, and, according to sociologist André Galland, it has partly changed its function. We have moved from a concept of adolescence as a period of identification in which young people re-enact the path taken by their parents to one in which adolescence is a form of experimentation. Following this point of view, adolescence becomes a phase which Galland describes as functional, an interim period during which real life is suspended, a moment in which a young person can experiment, can discover and make use of a certain amount of social tools, including, of course, writing, the tool which particularly concerns us today.

This second question has given rise to the following conclusion: in order to locate, analyse and understand the behaviour of adolescents in terms of literacy, it is

necessary to analyse the contexts in which they practice their literacy, or, to repeat Galland's expression, to analyse the contexts within which they are experimenting. To be exact, the literacy practices examined must be situated within the cultural practices of adolescents and young adults. As we are no longer dealing with a group for whom school is obligatory, these practices are undertaken voluntarily. At least, this is the angle which I have chosen to adopt, approaching the situation from the point of view and position of the young people to analyse the factors which provoke their choices in terms of literacy. Research indicates several definite variables particular to this age range: gender, socio-professional situation, academic achievement. If we examine the question of literacy in terms of its status as an element of a wider adolescent, using the work of sociologists such as Jean-François Hersent or Olivier Donnat, specialists in cultural behaviour, we can identify certain patterns occurring within young people's behaviour regarding literacy.

Thirdly, *what researches have been used?* This question concerns my research about young peoples' relationships with literature and, more generally, literacy. It has been highlighted that, globally, very little research exists concerning adolescent literacy, while there has been much work devoted to early literacy.

I have worked on this topic using the following hypotheses: Developing literacy to a high level necessarily involves a relationship with writing constructed through implementation and involvement. This relationship with the written word, in terms of both reading and writing, will entail personal choices: the choice of book, or not, the spaces in which the act of reading or writing is practised, the times and the forms these acts take.

My reading and the way in which I have used research has been coloured by these presuppositions, it is therefore important to explain it. I orientated my research towards surveys, sociological studies, and works by experts in didactics which deal with behaviour that takes place out of school, laying aside work that was more rigidly didactic, examining the end of secondary school education and the didactic nature of literature.

Fourthly: A question which is at the heart of my presentation: *in what ways is literacy practised?* In today's world we cannot ignore one facet of this question: how we relate books to other media, to what JF Hersent calls "le capital informationnel"[1], in particular the internet?

In order to prepare this presentation, I have had to choose between two important ways of considering the question of adolescent literacy – on the one hand reading and its relationship with writing, on the other the place of reading as it stands in relation to other media in today's world. I decided to concentrate on the latter approach, laying aside for the moment, the written word, on of my main interests.

To begin with, therefore, I will be considering this question of differing cultural activities among people, paying particular attention to the new opportunities for communication which have become accessible to this age group, and which are commonly taken advantage of by them. I will attempt to situate reading in relation to the other cultural activities practised by young people.

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[1] *Left in French as a direct quotation.*

Secondly, I will consider what we know of research that has been carried out into the ways people read, trying to draw from the results questions and problems that may occur in schools.

Finally, I will conclude by opening up a discussion of certain points which I feel need to be examined.

1. READING – ONE OF A RANGE OF CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

1.1 What is at stake for teenage readers?

To plunge straight into this topic, and give an idea of the angle I'll be taking, I'd like to start by mentioning psychology, which I feel enables me to effectively illustrate the background to my ideas.

So, a psychological viewpoint to begin with: JM Talpin states that the character Etienne Vollard, hero of the novel 'La Petite Chartreuse' by Pierre Péju, illustrates very well the fragile, complex, unstable and fluctuating relationship reading has with (the concept of) adolescence.

In the novel, Etienne Vollard is sent to a new secondary school at 14. He is a tall, strong boy, whose distinguishing feature is that he always has a book on him. He reads during break and learns whole passages by heart. What interests us at this point is the reaction of his contemporaries, for Etienne's behaviour sparks off sadism and violence within his schoolmates: they force him to recite pages and pages, hitting him if he makes a mistake. By escaping reality through reading books, he provokes violence within those surrounding him. Probably also envy, for they feel excluded from a world which Etienne Vollard, without meaning to, shows them as precious.

Using this story, Talpin has made explicit the difficulty of defining the *relationship* between reading and adolescence.

This relationship takes many forms: there are as many differences as there are adolescents and the choice ranges from the well-behaved pupil who fits in with a conventional model of behaviour – ie who provokes abuse, such as Etienne Vollard – to the youth with problems in the home and at school who is the abuser.

However, a vital point remains in that *every* adolescent is concerned with the construction of their own identity. This process is accomplished through differentiation on at least two levels: the sexual – the difference in gender between girls and boys cannot be ignored at this age, I've already touched on it – and generational. An adolescent will define him or herself in relation to adults. A further common point is that adolescents construct their identities in relation to the adult world (which they witness). By adolescence, the relationship between the self and the book, the self and reading, is already well established and riddled with many complications – be they individual, family-related or social. The following concepts are all important within this relationship:

- The way the immediate family regards books and reading
- The state of the relationship between the adolescent and his/her family
- The way that reading and literature has been taught in school

- The adolescent's relationship with school and other cultural institutions (most obviously libraries)
- Etc.

All of these factors together enable us to understand the multifaceted nature of young people's attitude to reading. This plurality can exist within one person at the same time (which will provoke a conflict) or at different times (in their development). It is what differentiates young people from other groups.

Later I will be showing you some data which illustrate that, generally, different studies all show that we are dealing with a period in which children not only read less and less, or indeed not at all, but also change their range of cultural activities. They abandon reading in favour of other activities, or (to use an inaccurate term) because of a 'global withdrawal'. The value put on reading by the adult world (even though adults do not themselves read as they desire adolescents to) undoubtedly contributes partly to this de-valuing of reading, along with the physical restraints it imposes.

I'd like to draw from this swift examination of the psychological elements of adolescence the point that at ages 16–17 more so than at any other, we can only look at reading by taking it as part of a larger cultural whole, one which is created by the adolescent through other activities, and through the social relationships he/she forms through these activities. I'd also like to highlight that the role of the teacher becomes much more complex when dealing with this age group: as just stated, any value placed upon literature by adults can act. If you'll allow the slang expression, we'll have to play a tight game.

1.2 Cultural activities practised by young people

In order to accurately position reading in relation to other activities practised, I'll be using data from two sources:

- The results published in the review 'Réseaux', in an edition on 'Young People and the Screen', in 1999.
- Results published by Marie Nadeau in the chapter of a book edited by Monique Lebrun, in which is presented a survey among a quebecon population.

I've taken data which seemed to me to be useful to illustrate my points from both sources:

In the first table, I've gathered together at the top the five activities given by a majority of young people (more than 50%) aged 15–17 when asked to give 'the activities they practised every day or nearly every day outside of school time'. TV and radio came at the top of the list, entailing no big changes from the 12–14 age group. The three following activities, on the other hand, do change between the two age brackets. In particular CDs. The links between music and adolescence have always been very strong. Going to the cinema and seeing friends are the two other activities whose popularity is rising fast.

Table 1. Activities practised 'nearly every day outside of school' according to age (in percentages)

| | Age | |
	12-14 years	15-17 years
Watching TV	77	75
Listening to the radio	74	74
Listening to CDs	65	72
Going to the cinema	47	61
Seeing friends	33	54
Reading magazines	21	20
Reading a newspaper	9	18
Reading a book	24	13

Table 2. Percentage of young people who practise certain activities for 3 or 6 hours per week, according to two different studies (in percentages).
MEQ: Education Ministry of Québec; LIS: Lecture Interactive au Secondaire [Interactive reading in secondary school].

Three to six hours per week	MEQ*	LIS*
On the internet/computer		64
Watching TV	81	84
Seeing friends		65
Listening to music		50
Sport	59	55
Reading	30	29

The authors come to a conclusion which is ratified by other research on the subject, and which reinforces the psychological analyses mentioned before – that adolescence is, above all, a time of socialisation, a time for friends (88% of the 15–19 year-olds state that they have a group of friends who they see regularly, against only 52% of the population as a whole). The increase in CDs, exchanged between friends, 'ordered' from a friend who has a CD writer etc can be considered in the same way: the importance of music parallels the importance of friends.

Though using different questions, the surveys undertaken on the other side of the Atlantic by the Ministry in Québec and by the LIS give similar results. In both surveys, the TV is placed first. Friends and music come very close to each other in the LIS survey (Lecture Interactive au Secondaire/Interactive reading in secondary school).

In both series of data, reading is classed low on the list. In the tables taken from the Canadian survey, the reading is intransitive, while in the LIS survey different sorts of reading are differentiated, a distinction which enabled the 15–17 year olds to register the importance they gave to reading a newspaper.

These surveys, although general, seem to me to be important in terms of addressing the problem of the written word. If we look at the low incidence of reading within the surveys, the reduction in reading books in particular, we see that, on the one hand, there seems to be a movement away from reading during adolescence toward other activities. Is this a temporary movement? We don't really know, it's a case of 'wait and see'. On the other hand, within the concept of reading itself there seems to have been a shift from one type of text (the book) to another (the newspaper).

Among other lines of research that I'll be looking at later, we will see that these forms of analysis are in part the basis of the (psychological) research tests carried out on young people.

1.3 Young people and the internet

As I've already mentioned, reading must be situated within a larger context of cultural activities. It must also be remembered that the current generation of 15–24 year olds is the first to have had access from childhood to many different media. Being born in the 1980s with the huge amount of progress made in audiovisual terms: televisions widely available, the development of video games, computers within the home, and now mobile phone technology. I'm dealing in particular here with the importance of computing, more precisely the internet. I'll be using – yet again! – a study produced by our colleagues in Québec – a summing up of an international research project performed jointly by six countries (Quebec and five European countries: France, Spain, Italy, Belgium and Portugal) which explores the way young people approach and use the internet (Piette, Pons, & Giroux, 2002). The age group dealt with is 12–17 years.

I'll be quick over this aspect, as it's not the principal point of this paper, although, as we have seen, the notion of reading cannot really be examined without reference to new developments within society. I will be dwelling, obviously, upon the elements of the research which I feel will contribute specially to a consideration of the actions of reading and writing.

I want to highlight three main conclusions, all of which illustrate the same point – that is: it would be wrong to assume that this posits the internet as the cause of the dip in reading that I mentioned before. The way young people view and use the internet is itself subject to the influences they consider important: the need to socialise and have contact with their peers, on one hand, and the space they establish between school-life and extra-curricular life on the other.

First: The enjoyment gained from surfing the net does not replace enjoyment of other media, such as the TV, cinema or reading. The internet does not displace other media, it complements them. This conclusion tallies with the results of another study which took place in France, coordinated by the CLEMI (Centre de Liaison de

l'Enseignement et des Moyens d'Information), which dealt with the ways the internet influenced the actions of young people aged 12–18. The conclusion was that the internet only had a small amount of influence on the cultural activities of young people; reading 'for pleasure' was the activity which was the least influenced, across all ages and both genders – 14% claimed to read less than before, 76% as much, and 9% more. The conclusion was that 'young people seem to want to continue reading what they enjoy' (Bevort & Bréda, 2001).

Secondly, an idea which is interesting in terms of what we are examining – and which complements the results I just mentioned – for young people, *communication* is the most important tool which the internet offers. Email and chat rooms are used essentially to keep in touch with parents and friends. Furthermore, t he internet is not always used alone, either – many adolescents claimed to go on the net regularly with friends. This reinforces the importance for this age group of socialisation and communication with peers. From this point of view, the internet is a valuable tool which is added to others.

Thirdly, we can see the same split between the world of school and home in terms of internet use which I posited regarding writing (Barré-De-Miniac, Cros, & Ruiz, 1993). According to the national survey, most young people first encounter and learn to use the internet at school. However, the authors conclude that internet at home and at school are two very different concepts – a conclusion similar to that which we have drawn concerning reading. At home access to the internet is free, and the user can do what he wishes. At school, both access and activities are restricted – the user may only go on the net at certain times, and activities such as games or chat rooms are banned. Two completely different types of usage**.**

So – a quick and basic illustration of the background to our topic – at the age in which we're interested, reading can entail many consequences, sometimes difficult, such as those affecting P. Péju's hero. Reading is a solitary activity, and as such comes a long way after other cultural activities which privilege social contact and communication, especially within a peer group. A fact, which questions the role and the responsibility of schools, but must inspire them to take an interest in the ways in which young people use writing outside of the school context. I'm arguing here for close and detailed research into this extra-curricular writing.

2. RELATIONSHIPS WITH READING – FROM RESEARCH FINDINGS TO QUESTIONS FOR SCHOOLS

Here I'll be examining the ways in which examination of the attitudes to reading, as well as the activity itself – both in and out of school - can enrich our understanding of education in the mother tongue.

Research into the way we read and differing attitudes to reading is developing, and the results are beginning to be made available to teachers, educators, librarians etc.

For this presentation I have selected several pieces of data and several studies which I found especially useful to consider in terms of their pedagogic and didactic findings. What do we know about the way young people read?

2.1 Reading is becoming less and less popular.

To begin with a piece of data about which there is a general consensus of opinion: young people read a lot, but not as much as their elders at the same age. But precisely what does 'reading a lot' mean? Table 3 is taken from 'Cultural Activities of the French' (surveys which examine those aged 15 and older). It shows the percentage of 'good readers', defined as those who read more than 2 books a month, so more than 24 per year, for each year examined. The statistics show a steady drop in these readers after 1973 which spans all ages, but in particular young people. In 1973, adolescents are well above the national average; afterwards, they come closer and closer to it each year. In 1997 the figures, 15–24 age group. They fall to 13%, and therefore symbolically fall below the national average: 14% / 13%.

Table 3. Proficient readers (in percentages). Definition of proficient readers: two books per month or more

	1973	1981	1989	1997
National Average	22	19	17	14
Age 15-19	35	26	20	-
Age 20-24	29	26	17	13
Age 25-39	23	22	18	-
Age 40-59	17	15	11	-
Age 60 +	15	13	15	-

Source: Surveys in Cultural Activities of the French.
The results refer to those aged 15 and over. Donnat, O. (1998).

Two things in particular interest me in the table comparing different age groups, and these ideas inspired me to use it here:

The only time the figures are static and unchanging is in the age range 60 plus – a result which can be viewed as indicating that cultural habits do not alter, in particular when acquired young and when practised for a long time. Without wanting to predict the future, it is highly that the cultural habits of young people aged between 20 and 24 today will be retained throughout their lives.

The drop affects other age ranges, not only young people – a fact which confirms that stated above. It is also true of 25–59 year olds, in other words, people who could easily be parents of or teachers of these young people who read so much less. People who want them to read more and who are often nostalgic for a time when young people read a lot. This may sound controversial – but I want to highlight above all that behind this pressure upon adolescents to read more is often found pressure and tension linked to academic achievement, which we know to be measured through ability in terms of reading. But crucially: is it not the case that two sorts of reading have been conglated here; the concepts of the book and literature?

I won't take this much further at this stage – I'm sure the discussion will give us an opportunity to come back to this issue. The main question that I'd like to put at (at the risk of being even more controversial!) is – if we need to read in order to do better at school, isn't the point that we need to be aware of what we are doing with the books, of how we read, of the mental skills we use to read them, rather than just multiplying the number of books read? And, to take this question further, can these skills only be gained through reading books? Can we acquire them using other materials?

2.2 Reading is an activity which evolves with age

Not only does the amount people read drop from one generation to the next (as we've just seen), but it also drops as young people grow older. The research carried out by Christian Baudelot, Marie Cartier and Christine Détrez (1999) looks at a group of young people over four years, from the age of 14–18[2], and shows that over time more and more young people do not read anything other than the texts set in school (in four years the number rises from 14% to 25%). I don't infer grounds for criticism from this result, rather more a question in terms of didactics that has been posed – while 'obligatory' reading is taking place in schools, what are its objectives? Aside from giving cultural grounding – a perfectly admissible aim – do we also develop attitudes towards the concept of reading, and more general skills such as comprehension, ability to find perspective and analyse critically, ability to resume, to construct an argument, ability and desire to question, etc? – all skills which could be used with different media, in fields other than literature.

If the answer to this question is yes, then we have nothing to reproach ourselves with. If it's no, we need to ask ourselves some questions.

Documentary research, for example, within texts or on the internet, would require all the skills I have just evoked. Many studies show, however, that young people rarely question or doubt the accuracy and fallibility of the internet sites they consult. Obviously these skills imply a very high level of literacy (the ability to research, to analyse a given document, to identify and use sources) – we are dealing with the tools needed to be able to use the written word in a society which is changing fast, one in which the 'capital informationnel', to re-use JF Hersent's expression, is very large. As I have stressed, the current generation of 15–24 year olds is the first to experience such diverse forms of written expression. We ourselves are relatively unprepared, and yet it is our job to prepare young people to deal with them.

2.3 Girls and boys – what is their chosen reading matter?

Now we come to my third and final collection of data concerning reading – I'd like to explore in particular the differences between what girls and boys choose to read as these differences crop up frequently in surveys. However, things are not this sim-

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[2] Collège and Lycée don't exist in England – there is one school, Secondary School, for ages 11–18.

ple, as we will see when considering writing – as soon as we begin to try and define precisely, to evaluate different 'genres' set against different levels of academic achievement, things become simultaneously more complex *and* easier to understand. Once more, it is the choices made by the school that are challenged.

I'll be using work by Christine Détrez here, who has closely analysed the results of the survey I've just been talking about (Détrez, in O Donnat and P Tolila, 2003). She compared the progression of the girls' answers with that of the boys over the four years between age 14 and age 18.

First, she found that overall it was the same for all adolescents, boys and girls, insomuch as they all read less books the older they got, and therefore the further through secondary school they progressed.

Secondly, neither gender was worried about appearing like a good or bad reader to the researchers**.** The symbolic importance of the reader diminishes in terms of identity construction. Détrez claims that this importance is probably diluted by other models of identification and points of reference such as the cinema or music – we saw this earlier in the tables I displayed. It is also likely that the academic pressure imposed, particularly at Sixth Form level (16–18), which asserts a knowledge-based model of reading to replace ordinary textual reception, may be responsible.

 Thirdly, to reinforce these analyses, Christine Détrez studied the determining factor in the choices of reading made for each of the four years, using gender and academic position (judged by punctuality or otherwise) as criteria. During the first year (14–15), this factor is gender – girls and boys read different texts. During the second, this difference, although present, becomes less marked. During the third year, age 16–17, the year during which the literature paper for the baccalauréat is taken in France, the biggest difference is due not to gender but to academic position – those on time and those that are late. During the fourth year, once the literature paper is over, gender returns to the forefront. This clearly demonstrates the power of the academic system over the way books are read. The same type of analysis has been carried out on choices of magazine, and shows, year after year, the huge role that gender plays in the reading choices of young people.

What do we learn from this? I believe that these analyses should lead us to look beyond the simple opposition of 'free' reading outside of school, and 'controlled' reading within it – this is my personal interpretation, which I posit for discussion. This should be done firstly because we can see that the control of the school is at best shaky – once the baccalauréat has been taken, the weight of instilled social stereotypes in terms of gender differences regains the ascendancy – this is what explains the change between the third and fourth years of the study. It also explains the differences in choices of books and magazines. However, it must not be forgotten that there is also restriction and prescription in the world outside of school. Here, the restrictions, which are social, are perhaps less overt, but present nonetheless.

3. CONCLUSION: POSSIBLE WAYS FORWARD

Rather than delivering a traditional conclusion, I'd like to finish by opening up a discussion of several questions and issues which I've tried to evoke in the course of this presentation.

First, I think it would be useful to examine and question the reasons that the school educational system wants to encourage reading. It's a fact that is never questioned that we should all love to read, and its tacitly understood that this refers to "good" literature, the classics. The insistence on this point is supported by a merging of reading and literature.

Secondly, does a solution which links academic objectives and methods and reading for pleasure exists? I'm really asking here whether academic literary work, such as that taught in secondary schools, comprising literary commentaries, technical studies of texts – in short, academic reading – is an exercise which encourages reading for pleasure. Looking at the evidence we have, it would seem not: there is a difference between academically studying a text and reading it for enjoyment ... a difference, if not a direct opposition. Academic reading cannot be linked to "practising" literature as an art, in short, creative writing. We know that experiencing a form of art (painting, dance, and why not creative writing) can function as a foundation for enthusiasm and enjoyment for this art form, even if this enthusiasm does not in the end lead to long term practice.

Thirdly, the issue of the respective roles of school and other places as regards developing skills in reading and, more precisely in terms of my previous point developing the desire to read. Having researched the findings of many experiments carried out by libraries in order to attract young people (which I don't, unfortunately, have the time to look at in detail here), I came to the conclusion that the gap is widening between the world of school, and the world of cultural activities, and that this widening is taking place in two main areas:

Firstly, at school, an academic, intellectual training is given, out of school, reading for pleasure occurs. I've repeated this often, but I feel that it's crucial.

Secondly, schools concentrate largely on using books, while libraries – I'm referring here to libraries which are experimenting with approaches to attract young people – offer a whole range of materials: books are seen alongside electronic resources (for example, the creation of a 'cyberzone' – imitating the atmosphere of a cyber café – within a library in Los Angeles) – not to mention multimedia – CDs, DVDs, etc.

Behind these three questions lies the same basic theme: How can we define the changing position of the book and literature in an age when electronics and computer technology is literally mushrooming and our young people are at the forefront of this revolution? How do we define the physical place given to reading – where is it practised? But also what is its symbolic place, what social value is given to it? It is these two elements that gave rise to this paper's title: Putting reading in its place.

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