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**TEENAGERS AND YOUNG ADULTS SOCIALISATION BY
MEANS OF STUDYING MODERN LITERARY FICTION**

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Abstract

The reading culture of the society is a sum total of the reading habits of each individual. This article examines the problems of the reading culture of secondary school students in the context of their spiritual and cultural development, as well as their initial socialization. One of the critical challenges implied by those problems is the task of specifying the criteria for assessing the content of modern fiction for children, teenagers and youth. The teaching instructions methods do not refer to the problems pertaining to the special features of studying modern children's, teenager and young adult literature in secondary school and the possibility of including such works into the literature curriculum and independent reading lists. The research carried out shows the lack of development of axiological foundations for it. The authors suggest various sets for selection criteria of the literary works and the opinion of the researchers from different fields of science upon the creating of the reading lists.

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Keywords: Reading culture; socialization; management of students' reading habits; independent reading lists; modern children and youth literature; criteria for assessing the content of fiction.

1. Introduction

For the past five years, a debate has been going on in mass and social media as to why people need reading novels - those cumbersome and complicated texts - in the Internet era. Those who participate in this discussion, however, forget the main thing: the reading culture is a social and cultural phenomenon that defines any society's general intellectual and spiritual level, which is based on cognitive work. The reading habits of an individual and the cultural standards of the society are closely related. A person's attitude towards reading is heavily influenced by their social environment. Conversely, the reading culture of the society is a sum total of the reading habits of each individual.

2. Research Questions

Reading plays a tremendous role in the process of acquiring a world-view and is an important part of self-education. Reading enables a person to "complete" their inner world. In a negative environment, an ability to read and the availability of better literary works give an inspiration for personal advancement and help to overcome difficulties. There are numerous historical examples demonstrating how an individual was able to "rise from the gutter" (the lower social strata in this case), leaving the poorly educated class and moving on up to the cultured, better-off class, thanks to reading fine literature and self-education. Often, the means of such "social mobility" was a library (in a village, a school, or a town), where books that provided nourishment to develop one's intelligence and imagination could be found.

"The role of literature as a tool (or a means) of socialisation was very important in the literary-centric society. For several centuries, the socialization of a person was greatly influenced by the books they read as a child. But things have changed since. Today, the status of being a *Homo Legens* ("reading person") is not as valued as it once was, and the book texts, as a device for socialising children and teenagers, is replaced by visual media. The importance of books still stays very high in educated families, but even there it is on the decline. Here we are talking specifically about the role of literary fiction in the process of personality development." (Chudinova, 2016).

One question that is raised fairly frequently today is: is reading *literary fiction* something we really need? And if we do, then what purpose does it serve?

In an interview on the role of reading in the modern era, the famous Russian philosopher G.Pomerants described the problems and trends of the early 21st century thus:

"The speed we're advancing at destroys the unity of culture.... Stagnation is bad, of course, but the speedy advancement tears the inter-generational bonds. It is only when this pace is normal that the new things find an environmental niche, a form that corresponds to the harmony of the whole.... The current rate of development gives rise to the impudence of a young utilitarian who possesses a couple of calculating machines and is therefore convinced that he does not need to read War and Peace, that reading comics will suffice — he understands life well enough as it is. As a result of this imbalance, a technologically well-equipped but spiritually poor, barbaric population emerges....I think that the culture of contemplation must be restored. ... Any activity that gathers up and strengthens one's soul belongs to the domain of contemplation. The process of reading poetry is a form of contemplation, too. And reading good prose can strengthen one's soul.... The problems of economy and society are also the problems of philosophy, religion, and pedagogy. And modern secondary school dismisses everything pertaining to the

humanities as something unnecessary. As a consequence, we get a generation that is completely uneducated when it comes to the matters of spirituality, history — both national and international — and the great Russian literature.” (Yakovleva, 2016).

3. Purpose of the Study

Reading culture is an international phenomenon, a part of the cultural heritage of the world's nations, a phenomenon of the same scale as writing itself, literature, visual arts, music, and theatre. On one hand, reading culture is an element of the life strategy of any intellectual, on the other hand, it is an act of creation requiring a large amount of energy — expended to perceive, understand, and process any text. Accordingly, reading as a process and strategy must be taught, since without it, it is impossible for a person to get a good education and to be formed as an individual spiritually and intellectually.

One would think nobody would dispute this, but during the past ten years, the society and a part of the pedagogical community have been saying that promoting reading culture among the modern children, teenagers and young adults — much less forming their reading habits — is inadvisable, since by doing this, we limit the child's freedom of choice. Their opponents state that such activities can and should be undertaken, for a child does not know “what is good and what is bad.”

Hence, another question arises: *what do we do in this situation?* One thing is clear: the *competence of secondary school students as readers* can only be formed if children and teenagers read diverse works of literary fiction both in school (as part of school-work and extracurricular activities) and at home in a rational and consistent manner.

Ergo, such conditions need to be created in order to form and develop the reading competence of pupils. The **role of reading in the socialisation of children, teenagers and young adults** is not to be ignored as well. A book lets a child enter a huge world, one that is mysterious and beckoning, one where he or she wants to live and to become successful in, which is of great importance for the modern students.

One of the most pressing challenges for tutors, librarians, and parents is picking fiction for school and home reading. After having encountered this challenge personally, the authors of this article decided to launch the initiative “‘Better living through reading: Socialisation of teenagers and young adults by means of promoting interest in reading.’ An interdisciplinary research project’ as part of the “Projects aimed at the research and promotion of the Russian language and literature” research grants program.

The importance and topicality of this work stem from the fact that the literature teaching methodology does not pay any significant attention to the problems pertaining to the particularities of studying modern children's, teenager and young adult literature in secondary school and the possibility of including such works into the literature curriculum and independent reading lists; furthermore, the axiological foundations of such fiction are unspecified, as are, correspondingly, the forms and methods of extracurricular activities built around the later 20th and early 21st century literature as a means of promoting reading and stimulating the spiritual and ethical development of the younger generations, as well as forming a set of personal values and suggesting role models for pupils.

4. Research Methods

The authors used the comparative method to reach the best result.

5. Findings

In the academic year 2014/2015, we put forward the “List of recommended works of modern Russian and foreign literary fiction (1990’s — 21st century). For reading and studying with secondary school students aged 9 to 17 years.” Alongside this, *some criteria for assessing literature aimed at schoolchildren* were suggested (Kuteinikova, 2015).

Updated and expanded on a regular basis, the list includes literary fiction, science fiction, popular science publications, and genre fiction aimed at children, teenagers and young adults, that were published, re-published or printed for the first time in Russian in the late 20th or early 21st century.

Below are some aspects of the list that we consider essential:

- Among the items added to the list were works in Russian language, created in the tradition of Russian 19th and 20th century children’s and teenage literature.
- Also included were works which were partially or entirely written, and sometimes also published in the 20th century, but were later reprinted one to four times in the early 21st century, by virtue of their ethical, aesthetic, or cognitive worth, and their relatable nature for the modern reader.
- Naturally, the list included works created in the previous century, but not translated into Russian until recently.

The updated list with assessment criteria was published in 2016 in the *Shkolnaya Biblioteka* (‘School Library’) magazine (Kuteinikova, 2016b). that also included an article on the selection criteria for literary works by Kuteinikova (Kuteinikova, 2016a). The author established the following *selection criteria for works to be used at school and as home reading material*:

- 1) having high quality content (scientific, fictional, or social);
- 2) possessing ethical and aesthetic value, required to maintain the intergenerational ties and to contribute into the emergence of the young reader’s personality;
- 3) being appealing and relatable for modern children and teenagers;
- 4) being educationally relevant for the younger generations;
- 5) presenting opportunities to broaden one’s horizons, to develop and to acquire interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary knowledge, proficiencies and skills.

Concurrently, it was also implied that a reading list may include:

- books that can be read by children, teenagers and young adults all by themselves, as the content and the process of reading itself brings pleasure to them — thus fulfilling the *hedonistic function of art*;
- books defined by what is called *double targeting*, i.e. the ones which “... do not consider a child as a completely independent recipient, since unlike an adult, he or she does not possess a great deal of cognitive, social, and cultural competencies” (Fedyeva, 2015, p. 104-105); accordingly, it is assumed that an act of communication cannot take place without the participation of a third party, ‘an adult intermediary’, as put by Ewers (2000). Parents, librarians, teachers, publishers, and booksellers can all be adult intermediaries. They are the

ones who pick a text for the child, and they are ultimately responsible for whether or not the communication act between the text and the child recipient will succeed.” (Fedyeva, 2015).

The issue of *fantasy*, which has been the favourite genre of schoolchildren for almost 20 years, remains highly controversial. For instance, in Russia, debates raged over the *Harry Potter* series of novels back at the height of its popularity among children — the same debates, in fact, that still rage in the country today over fantasy. If one examines the opinions on this literary franchise, it becomes evident that they are divided, if not contradictory. On one hand, there are comments to the effect that the novels are harmful, and children and teenagers should not be allowed to read them; on the other hand, some say the series is nothing but good children’s literature (Chudinova, 2016). To wit, in his book *Harry Potter in the Church: Between an Anathema and a Smile*, the famous Orthodox Christian philosopher and columnist Andrei Kuraev argued that there was nothing wrong or scary about this “fairy tale” — on the contrary, he said, if read correctly it could help parents instil Christian values in their children. According to Kuraev, “*the faces of good and evil in Harry Potter are clear and fairly traditional. Being good means staying loyal to one’s friends, caring about people, loving, making sacrifices, having a family (Harry does miss his so much). The author’s attitude towards bad things and evil characters is always very clear as well.*” (Kuraev).

In Russia, the criticism of J.K.Rowling’s series often boiled down to one thing: the critics said the novels were too focused on magic and magical abilities, that a boy who is a hero cannot be a wizard. But the series really is a fairy tale, a fantasy that is based on wizardry. Rather, the question is how these powers are used, if they are used to do evil things, whether they make people who possess them too powerful, superior to those who do not. These specific questions are developed in the novels very well, and they show that wizardry is in effect of secondary importance to the protagonists, with traditional values being the real priority. It is thus no surprise that the books are eagerly read and appreciated by many children and teens.

The complex topic of assessing the artistic value and the general quality of children’s literature has been discussed numerous times by specialists in various fields (philologists, pedagogues, literary critics, bibliologists, librarians, etc.). Defining the purpose of children’s literature, the philologist Arzamastseva argued this kind of literature first emerged as an amalgamation of literary fiction and didactic work, and is a form of art, its function being to provide aesthetic pleasure to children and help them to form their individualities (Arzamastseva, Nikolaeva, 1997).

The bibliologist Karaichentsova says the specificity of fiction meant for children has primarily to do with the age of the intended reader. The younger he or she is, the more obvious get certain features of a work which give away the fact that it are meant for children. As the reader grows up, his or her books “grow up” too, as his or her preferences evolve.

The particularities of children’s literature are:

- main characters being children;
- subject matter being suitable for readers of small age;
- a comparatively small number of pages, numerous illustrations (especially in the books for little children);
- simple language;
- lots of dialogue and action, small amount of descriptions;

- many adventures;
- happy endings (with good triumphing over evil);
- some didactic value involved (Karaichentseva, 2000).

6. Discussion

We believe all the features described above apply primarily to the books intended for children, but not those for teenagers. Different literature assessment criteria should be established for teenagers, both male and female — criteria that should be based primarily on the particularities of the socialization process in this age group.

We will cite another approach to assessing the role of children's literature, containing the easily recognizable criteria for assessing the "quality" of children's books. The Swedish Academy for Children's Books defined the role of a children's book in its FAQ titled: "The Eighteen Whys About the Purpose of Children's Books." (Kuraev). Using this as basis, Chudinova summarized all the distinguishing features of a great children's book that can be regarded as criteria for assessing it.

A book (according to the Swedish Academy for Children's Books):

- must be written in a lucid, interesting style, in a good, grammatically correct language, so that the reader could expand his or her vocabulary;
- promotes thinking and critical reasoning, allows the reader to broaden his or her horizons;
- encourages imagination by providing vivid, convincing portrayals;
- enriches the reader's emotions, teaches ethics, helps children to develop empathy and tolerance, inspires them to be kinder to others;
- prepares the readers for the adult life by giving some behaviour models for difficult situations;
- encourages self-actualization and self-analysis;
- teaches understanding other cultures and other people;
- helps to understand other generations, uniting them;
- familiarizes the readers to their cultural heritage;
- has some merit as a work of art;
- has merit for people of other cultures (Chudinova, 2016, p.482).

The team of the bibliographic guidance department of Russia's State Children's Library are currently undertaking a major effort of picking the best children's literature works in the constant flow of new publications ; their picks are displayed at the library's website - specifically, in its well-known guidance section *Bibliogid* ('Library Guide') - and also prepare a quarterly annotated advisory catalog entitled *To Children and about Children: the Publishing Houses of Today's Russia* (The Russian State Children's Library. 2016). After having analyzed the methods of the library's specialists, Shprygova (2015) established the following selection criteria for children's literature:

- the age of the intended reader;
- the freshness of the work and its current edition;
- the execution: illustrations, the quality of the edition;
- the books by laureates of various children's literature awards;
- the reception of the work by readers (Notable Books for a Global Society, 2015).

However, we believe these criteria are insufficient, and many things remain unclear. The readers' opinions may vary, and the best literary works are not always awarded. The experts at the State Children's Library aim to find the best children's literature works in the massive and often also quite blurred 'stream of books'. Faced with this demanding challenge, the experts of the library often rely on their considerable personal experience. But a part of the criteria are simply not specified or described by them, thus remaining 'behind the scenes.'

More and more children's literature works are being actively published and translated from various languages in many countries. The range of books read by children is expanding rapidly. Currently, specialists in various fields are engaged into reviewing and selecting works for children, including publishers, literary critics, teachers and librarians. Often this work is undertaken as part of the shortlisting process that precedes various literary awards.

To cite examples of this children's literature selection work, we will provide several foreign sources. Literature selection is a topic that has recently been of much concern to foreign librarians who communicate with the younger generation of readers. It is worth mentioning that there are various librarian awards that exist abroad. For instance, in the United States, librarians have established an array of criteria used to pick the best books, and their authors (as well as graphic designers and/or publishers) are awarded with special prizes of the American Library Association (ALA) (Notable Books for a Global Society, 2015).

The member associations of the ALA – like the Association for Library Service to Children (The Association for Library Service to Children, 2017) and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA Book, 2016) include various special committees that are engaged in this work. These committees specifically study published works and pick the books to be nominated for awards. The selection process involves the committees employing the established criteria to select books worthy of various prizes, including Batchelder, Caldecott, Newbery, Wilder awards and others. The Batchelder Award, established back in the 20th century, is given to an American publisher for the best children's book translated from a language other than English (The American Library Association (ALA), 2016). The Wilder Medal honors an author or illustrator whose books, published in the United States, have made, over a period of years, a substantial and lasting contribution to literature for children. The Newbery Medal honors an American author of the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children for a book published by an American company in English within the previous year. Interestingly, the selection process is constantly evolving, and the ALA's librarians create new nominations and develop new criteria to assess the variety of literary works published in that country for children and young adults. Since the United States is a country of emigrants, numerous awards designed to support and promote young adult literature on different cultures have emerged there. These are novels and other works selected by groups of librarians from the committees using certain criteria. There are criteria not just for the awards, but also for assessing the works that become part of libraries. The ALA published recommendations and established the selection criteria for works that represent the cultural diversity of young readers (Naidoo, 2011). Correspondingly, awards and prizes for Latin American (Belpré) and African American (The Coretta Scott King Book Awards, 2016) authors, as well as authors who write books about people with disabilities have been founded, along with many others. The Young Adult Library Services Association created an award for books that help young adults to find their place in the

world (Edwards Award), science fiction works, etc. Specialists even compile reading lists for young adults who do not like to read ('Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adult Readers'). Such lists, annotated and published yearly, are then distributed among librarians working in schools and specializing in children's and young adult literature, teachers, tutors, parents, as well as children, teenagers and young adults themselves.

The global children's literature that becomes more and more accessible to young readers across borders provides the inherent challenge in the form of a necessity to pick the books, faced by many teachers and librarians. In 1995, the International Reading Association launched the "Notable Books for a Global Society" (NBGS) project, creating a special committee of experts in order to select the books fit for a "global community." (Notable Books for a Global Society, 2015).

Inspiring the teachers participating in the project was the idea of using books to enlighten children, to prepare them for living in a globalized world. The team behind the project believed that, if we were to solve the problems of the 21st century, it was crucial to recognize and respect the differences among all races, cultures, religions, and sexual orientations. Each year, the International Reading Association selects twenty five outstanding books published in the United States in the previous year. Below is a list of the primary criteria used by the members of the committee to select the best works in various genres of fiction, non-fiction (including popular science and educational literature), and poetry.

The criteria:

- Accuracy and authenticity of the people depicted in terms of physical characteristics, social and economic status, intellectual and problem-solving abilities, and displays of leadership and cooperation
- Richness of detail concerning the group or groups depicted
- An approach that honours and celebrates diversity as well as the common bonds of humanity
- In-depth treatment of issues
- Inclusion of members of a "minority" group for purposes other than tokenism or fulfilment of any type of "quota"
- Depiction of substantive and authentic interaction among characters within and across groups
- Thought-provoking content that invites reflection, critical analysis, and response
- Uniqueness of language or style
- High quality as determined by evaluation in terms of generally accepted criteria for the genre
- Appealing format
- Enduring quality. (Chudinova, 2016, p. 483-484).

7. Conclusion

We believe many of these book content criteria are suitable for picking the books that would ensure the socialization of a teen reader in the modern world and are based on the established norms and values of the modern society. A part of these criteria can undoubtedly be used today to assess the content of teenage literature, though, admittedly, some of them are up for discussion.

With regard to the above mentioned, the authors of this article would like to propose the following questions for consideration:

1. Which selection criteria for literary works intended for children, teenagers and young adults exist today? Have they changed in the 21st century and if so, what kind of changes they experienced?

2. How do we take *the hedonistic function of art* into account during the selection process? What is more important: the pleasure the book will provide to a young reader or the educational aspect of the work and the ideas it represents? How can we combine the practical and the hedonistic roles of art when searching for literature that will be offered to a largely unprepared reader?

3. Which Russian books must be read by a modern Russian school student?

4. Which foreign books of the mid-to-late 20th century and the 21st century should be offered as reading material to a modern school student?

The reading culture of each new generation is different from such culture of those who came before it, and the things that modern teenagers and young adults find interesting are not always perceived this way by parents, teachers and librarians. We believe the crux of the matter is to get school students to read anything at all in their free time, to take interest into any book — this way they will have a chance to get into literature that is more serious and intricate. However, everyone who “directs” — i.e. influences what children and teenagers read to any extent will do well to remember the advice of the French author and teacher Daniel Pennac. Mr.Pennac says parents often abuse their rights, while teenagers also possess some rights that need to be respected. One of these is the right to “read whatever turns up”, up to and including primitive popular fiction (or “pulp”). (Pennac, 2005, p.153). We would also like to note that the transition from primitive fiction to high-quality literature of great artistic value mostly depends on who will be there and will help a child to find its way in it.

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