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Survey of recent literature on the informal reading inventory

Mary Rose McMechan

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A SURVEY OF RECENT LITERATURE
ON THE INFORMAL READING INVENTORY

by
Sister Mary Rose McMechan, B.V.M.

A RESEARCH PAPER
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
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Sister Marie Clotte
(Advisor)

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Reading is a continuous growth process. To be sure a child is developing in reading growth to the limits of his ability a continuous program of appraisal and evaluation is necessary. Evaluation is an integral part of a reading program.\(^1\)

Since evaluation helps provide the information through which a teacher can help each child progress toward the fuller use of his intelligence in reading and language activities, it should be a vital concern of teachers in the elementary school.

Appraisal of the child's growth in reading is done continuously and at fixed intervals. Successful teachers devote time to the study of each child. Their constant concern is to provide instruction that is adapted to individual needs.

Ammons, in writing about the evaluation of children's reading achievement, calls attention to the fact

that the major distinction between tests and evaluation is that evaluation describes the progress of one individual toward certain objectives about which standardized information may not be available.¹ Thus, it becomes evident that the function of evaluation is to describe individual progress and to judge the performance of one child in relation to his own ability.

Evaluations based on informal means are more reliable estimates of the student's reading behavior because they are not based on the comparison of one student to any other student.²

Statement of the Problem

Standardized tests have proved inadequate because they give information about the child in terms of group achievement. The individual's performance is compared to that of his peers. By contrast, an informal reading inventory appraises the child's competence in dealing with reading materials at successive levels of difficulty, and is designed to show how the individual pupil functions in an actual reading situation.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was: (1) to review the literature concerning the informal reading


inventory, and (2) to compile information about informal reading evaluation which would assist reading specialists and teachers in assessing individual reading performance.

Definition of Terms

In discussing informal reading evaluation, certain terms are frequently used. The following definitions are those set forth by Johnson and Kress.\(^1\)

1. The individual informal reading inventory is a clinical device designed to reveal extensive information about a child's reading strengths and needs as well as to establish the levels at which he can function independently and with instruction.

2. The independent reading level is the level at which a child can function on his own and do a virtually perfect job in handling of the material.

3. The instructional reading level is the level at which the child should be and can profitably be instructed.

4. The frustration reading level is the level at which the child becomes completely unable to handle the reading material.

5. The hearing comprehension (capacity) level is

\(^1\)Marjorie Seddon Johnson and Roy A. Kress, Informal Reading Inventories (Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association, 1965), pp. 5-22.
the highest level at which the child can satisfactorily understand materials when they are read to him.

Scope and Limitations

The writer limited the review of literature, for the most part, to the last ten years. This study was mainly a descriptive one, in that it described the development, types, purposes, and administration of the informal inventory, and was not concerned with the comparison of the informal reading inventory with standardized tests. The reader who is interested in such a comparison is referred to the comparative studies undertaken by Bell, Donegan, Fluet, and Harbiger.¹

¹Bibliography, p. 82.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RECENT LITERATURE

Origin and Development

Reading problems were viewed differently in the year 1920 than they are today. The professional literature contained some discussion of types of reading errors, but the emphasis was mainly on eye movements and their effect on the speed of reading. This concern with the rate of comprehension determined the observations made by examiners in administering reading tests.¹

Standardized tests had become quite popular, but during the early twenties educators began to realize the inadequacies of these tests and moved toward a more detailed analysis of reading performance. "Two outstanding pioneers in developing diagnostic and remedial techniques during this period were William S. Gray and Arthur I. Gates."²


²Nila Banton Smith, American Reading Instruction (Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association, 1965), p. 191.
During the years 1935 to 1950 authors called attention to the fact that individual children vary in ability and emphasized the importance of adjusting reading instruction to meet individual differences. Grouping was the most frequently used means of adjusting to individual needs. Various types of ability grouping made classes more homogeneous, but a wide variety of differences was always present.

Interest in meeting individual needs, particularly those of disabled readers, was evidenced in the number of new professional books which dealt with the subjects of diagnosis and remedial reading. Among these was a book entitled, *The Prevention and Correction of Reading Difficulties* by Betts. In describing clues to behavior which might be observed during the administration of tests, he had this to say:

Oral reading tests, either formal or informal from standard readers, provide needed evidence. An experienced examiner can note use of context clues and deficiencies in word analysis as well as tendencies to reverse forms, to repeat, to omit, and to substitute. Not infrequently, children can arrive at the meaning of a silent reading selection and still evidence extremely faulty oral reading.²


No specific criteria for judging reading performance are mentioned here, but one can see that the use of instructional materials, particularly basal readers, was recognized by Betts to be valid in a test situation.

The use of informal diagnosis with basal readers was an innovation. Betts was the first to describe this technique in his discussion of 'The Informal Inventory' appearing in the first edition [1946] of his Foundations of Reading Instruction.1

Betts establishes the importance of the informal reading inventory in his opening sentence:

In a classroom or clinical situation, there is need for abbreviated and practical devices, techniques, and procedures for appraising reading performance.2

Betts emphasizes the fact that each teacher must acquire techniques for sorting out his instructional problems and must have some rational basis for evaluating these problems. He also reminds his readers that readiness must be the concern of every teacher because every teacher is a teacher of reading.3

The preparation, uses, and administration of the informal reading inventory are spoken of at great length by Betts. (The reader will find reference made to the findings of Betts as these topics are discussed in the

1Smith, American Reading Instruction, p. 302.
3Ibid..
remainder of this study.) However, since the topic at hand is the development of the informal reading inventory, it seems appropriate to state certain basic assumptions that were made in its development for classroom and clinic.

Betts lists them as follows:

1. Independent reading should be done in materials that present relatively few mechanical or comprehension difficulties for the learner.

2. Independent reading usually should be done in materials that have a lower level of readability than those used for directed reading activities where intensive reading is required.

3. Systematic instruction in reading provided through carefully directed reading activities usually should be done in materials that challenge the pupils with new learnings (e.g., vocabulary, punctuation, facts, etc.).

4. Systematic instruction in reading provided through carefully directed reading activities should be done in materials that are readable for the learner; that is, well below the level of readability at which the learner is frustrated.

5. Hearing comprehension provides an index to capacity for reading.

6. Symptoms of reading difficulty increase in direct proportion to the increase in the difficulty of the material.\(^1\)

**Kinds of Informal Inventories**

Informal reading inventories may be designed and constructed by the teacher or clinician. In this case,

selections from a basal reading series are generally used. If teachers do not have the time or experience required to construct their own informal inventories, they may decide to use inventories that have been prepared by experts in the field of reading and are commercially available.

In constructing an informal inventory the first step is to compile a list of words to be presented in isolation.

Lists of words from preprimer at least through sixth grade level should be available for this testing. In a clinical word recognition test, these lists should be samplings of common vocabulary at the various levels. For classroom use, however, the sampling is more often from the specific instructional materials. Twenty to twenty-five words appear to constitute an adequate sampling at each of the reader levels.1

What is a systematic way of selecting the words for these lists so as to derive a true random sampling?

Harris suggests the following method:

A good sample of the total vocabulary of a book can be easily selected. In a book of 145 pages, a twenty-word sample can be taken by taking one word from every seventh page. In order to make it a random, unbiased sample it is desirable to decide in advance to choose each word from a particular position on the page. For example, one twenty-word sample can be taken by choosing the third word on the second line of pages one, eight, fifteen, and so on. Equivalent samples can be chosen by starting on page two, or by taking the word from a different line. No word that appears in the predetermined position should be left out because it seems unsuitable.

1Johnson and Kress, *Informal Reading Inventories*, p. 16.
except proper names, for then the sample would no longer be a random sample. A twenty-word sample is long enough for most teacher purposes.¹

After the lists of words for the word recognition test have been prepared, passages or paragraphs for oral reading must be selected. The selection should be made from materials which represent a variety of levels, since the establishment of reading levels is one of the expected outcomes of the administration of the inventory. The progression of difficulty should be from preprimer to the highest level one will need. As the difficulty of the material increases the length of the passage increases. A reading passage at preprimer level might have as few as thirty words, whereas a selection at junior high level might consist of two hundred fifty to three hundred words.²

Most authors agree that the passages for oral reading should be chosen from a well-graded, basal series. Betts points out that one of the advantages of using basal readers is that "some attention to grading the readability of the materials has been given by the authors and publishers."³

²Johnson and Kress, Informal Reading Inventories, p. 13.
³Betts, Foundations of Reading Instruction, p. 455.
There is some controversy about whether the paragraphs selected for oral reading should be taken from materials which are new or unfamiliar. According to Zintz, "One (reader) that is new or unfamiliar is preferable."¹ Johnson and Kress believe that "they should not be materials which the child has actually encountered in his instructional program."² On the other hand, Betts is of the opinion that "a fairly satisfactory inventory of reading performance can be made with materials which the child has 'read' before."³

The passages selected for the reading inventory must be of sufficient length so that comprehension questions can be asked after the reading to check the child's understanding. Therefore, the next logical step in the construction of the inventory is the formulation of questions for the comprehension check. Sometimes a single question is asked which requires the child to retell what he read. More often though, a series of questions are prepared for comprehension appraisal.

Tentative questions should not be worked out until the selected passages have been reread and carefully analyzed. The questions "should cover grasp of vocabulary,  

¹Miles V. Zintz, Corrective Reading (Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown Company Publishers, 1972), p. 34.
²Johnson and Kress, Inventories, p. 14
³Betts, Foundations of Reading Instruction, p. 455.
acquisition of factual information, and the drawing and supporting of inferences."¹ From this sampling of questions a certain number of specific questions are chosen.

A good rule of thumb to follow is to include, in each block of five questions, two factual, two inferential, and one vocabulary question. The actual number of questions would vary directly with the length of the selection and its density of ideas.² Questions which test special abilities such as using context clues, selecting the main idea, and arranging events in sequential order, should be included where they are needed.

Certain cautions are to be observed in the preparation of the questions. It might be well to consider the recommendations made by Betts:

1. Use questions that must be answered from the reading matter rather than from experience.

2. Use questions that have only one answer, as stated in the reading matter.

3. State the question so that a parroting of the exact wording in the book is not required. A stimulating question should require the reader to reorganize his experiences.

4. Avoid 'catch' questions. Misleading irrelevances should be avoided by asking direct questions that are clearly worded and concise.

5. Use interrogative—or imperative—type questions. Do not combine the two types in one question.

¹Johnson and Kress, Informal Reading Inventories, p. 33.

²Ibid., p. 34.
6. Adapt the questions to the learner's maturity level. Simple facts described in complex language can frustrate comprehension. Good questions challenge attention.

7. Ask sequential questions. One question should lead into another.

8. Avoid the use of questions that require simple 'yes' and 'no' responses.¹

When the three parts of the inventory—word lists, reading passages, and questions—are in readiness, the teacher may wish to reproduce them by mimeograph or spirit duplicator so that he will have a copy to use as a record form. If the child is not going to read directly from the basal reader, the teacher will need to duplicate the child's copy, also. Carter and McGinnis suggest typing or printing each reading passage on one side of a card and the comprehension questions on the other side.²

Legibility is important and must be given proper consideration. Materials to be used for testing primary levels of reading should be typed on a primary typewriter. The teacher's copy, as well as the child's, should be double or triple spaced in order to facilitate the recording

¹Betts, Foundations of Reading Instruction, p. 459.

of errors and observations. To make provision for determining the number of errors per running words, the cumulative number of words should be indicated at the end of each line of print on the teacher's copy.

The preceding paragraphs that dealt with the construction of an informal reading inventory imply that a great deal of time and proficiency is required for this test building process. Therefore, it seems likely that many teachers will decide not to construct their own inventories. Some may take advantage of the reading inventories provided by many publishers of basic readers today. Others will turn to inventories that have been prepared by Botel, McCracken, Silvaroli, Smith, or Spache.

The Botel Reading Inventory consists of three tests: Reading Placement Tests, Phonics Mastery Tests, and the Spelling Placement Test. The tests are designed to provide easy and accurate estimates of the reading ability and decoding ability of children in grades one to twelve. In the guide which accompanies the inventory, Botel states the purpose of the tests in this way:

Thus, together these tests help you determine how each pupil can move efficiently toward the fundamental goals of reading--attacking, comprehending and interpreting the written word--by:

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1 Appendix, p. 80.

2 Morton Botel, Botel Reading Inventory (Chicago: Follett Educational Corporation, 1970).
1. placing the pupil in books he can read;
2. determining the mastery of word attack skills;
3. determining his mastery of common spelling words.

All the tests that make up this inventory are power tests—there are no time limits.

The Botel Reading Placement Tests are made up of a Word Recognition Test which gives an estimate of oral reading ability, and a Word Opposites Test which gives an estimate of reading comprehension. The Word Recognition Test consists of eight graded lists of words from preprimer through fourth reader level. The Word Opposites Test consists of ten graded lists of words from the first reader through senior high level which may be read orally or silently, individually or as a group test. The Word Recognition and Word Opposites tests are available in two forms, A and B, with scoring and answer sheets that may be purchased in packages of thirty-five. Through these Reading Placement Tests the teacher can estimate the instructional, independent and frustrational levels.

The Phonics Mastery Test is divided into subtests. Level A tests mastery of single consonant sounds, consonant blends, consonant digraphs, and rhyming words. The mastery of long and short vowels and diphthongs is tested in level B.

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1Morton Botel, Revised Guide to the Botel Reading Inventory (Chicago: Follett Educational Corporation, 1970), p. 3.
Level C tests mastery of syllabication. A test of recognition of nonsense words is included to double-check the mastery of phonetic elements. This test may be used beyond third grade level for quick screening. Two forms of the Phonics Mastery Test are available plus answer sheets.

The Spelling Placement Test consists of five graded lists of twenty words each that may be dictated to children from grades one through six. Through this test a pupil's instructional level in spelling may be determined.

The Revised Guide to the Botel Reading Inventory contains complete and concise directions for the administration, scoring, and interpretation of the tests. There are tables for determining reading levels and one which shows a sample record for completing the class summary sheets which are included in the examiner's kit.

In the guide referred to above, Botel states that the words used for the primary levels in both the Word Recognition and Word Opposites tests were randomly selected from the Bucks County Graded Vocabulary Study of 1185 Common Words.¹ The words for levels four through twelve

¹Morton Botel, How to Teach Reading (Chicago: Follett Educational Corporation, 1968).
were randomly selected from the *Teacher's Word Book of 30,000 Words*. ¹

Botel undertook a study to determine the validity of the Word Recognition and Word Opposites tests in placing pupils in basal readers at instructional level. (The criterion used for determining this was 95 - 99% word recognition and 75 - 95% comprehension.) Botel presents the results of his study in a table in the examiner's guide and summarizes the results as follows:

1. The two forms of the Botel Reading Inventory are essentially equivalent, whether level or raw scores are used.

2. Botel Reading Inventory raw scores and the standardized reading test scores are almost equal in their correlation with the criterion, at the primary grade level.

3. Botel Reading Inventory scores, whether raw or level, have a higher correlation with criterion than standardized tests, at the intermediate grade level.

4. The grade equivalent mean of the standardized tests is equivalent to the Botel Reading Inventory mean level scores in all grades. ²


In giving directions for interpreting the Reading Placement Tests, Botel has an important and thought-provoking warning for all who use his tests:

Remember that the administration of these tests represents only Step One of a three-step process in placing pupils at appropriate instructional levels:

Step 1: Administering and interpreting the tests.
Step 2: Trying the book on for 'fit'.
Step 3: Continuous evaluation.¹

The Standard Reading Inventory,² developed by McCracken, measures a child's independent, instructional, and frustration levels in reading. Reading levels are given as basal reading book levels. A listening comprehension test is not a required part of the inventory, but stories and questions for evaluating listening level are provided in the examiner's manual.

There are two equivalent forms of the Standard Reading Inventory, each of which has eleven stories for oral reading, eight stories for silent reading, and eleven word lists for pronouncing words in isolation. Each word list has twenty-five words except the preprimer list which has fifteen words. These lists are printed

¹Ibid., p. 21
²Robert A. McCracken, Standard Reading Inventory (Klamath Falls, Oregon: Klamath Printing Company, 1966).
on cardboard strips which are to be inserted in a tachistoscopic device provided with the inventory.

Reading achievement is measured at preprimer through seventh reader levels in these four areas:

1. **RECOGNITION VOCABULARY**
   a. vocabulary in isolation
   b. vocabulary in context

2. **ORAL ERRORS**
   a. word recognition errors in oral reading
   b. total errors in oral reading

3. **COMPREHENSION**
   a. recall after oral reading
   b. recall after silent reading
   c. interpretation and word meaning in context after oral reading
   d. interpretation and word meaning in context after silent reading

4. **SPEED**
   a. oral speed
   b. silent speed

The examiner's manual gives very specific directions for administration, recording of errors, and evaluation of reading performance. There are also directions for using the charts and check lists that can be found in the examiner's booklet. This booklet is available for both forms of the inventory, and in addition to providing reproductions of the word lists, reading selections, and comprehension questions for recording errors and responses, it also has a general scoring sheet which

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should prove quite helpful in determining reading levels and comparing scores. McCracken asks those using his inventory to note the following in regard to evaluation standards:

The Standard Reading Inventory was validated independent of the standards for determining reading levels. It is not necessary, therefore, to use the general scoring sheet on pages two and three of the examiner's booklet. An experienced examiner may wish to use his own standards. The scoring sheet on the back cover of the examiner's booklet is provided for those examiners who wish to use their own standards for evaluation.¹

The content of McCracken's inventory is based upon three basal reading series. Content validity was obtained by:

1. Vocabulary control
   a. When possible the words used for the word lists and the vocabulary in context are words introduced in all three basal reading series at the same level.
   b. Except for story titles no words are used in the stories for primer through 32 levels which have not been introduced in two of the three basal reading series at or before the level of the story. The story titles are pronounced for the child before he reads.

2. Sentence length, content, and general style are based upon the three basal reading series.

3. The Spache Readability Formula was used to analyze the basal readers and to act as a guide in writing the stories for primer through 32 levels.

4. The Dale-Chall Formula for Predicting Readability was used to analyze the basal readers and to act as a guide in writing the stories for levels four through seven.²

¹Ibid., p. 54.
²Ibid., p. 41.
Content validity was corroborated by testing 664 children in grades one to six using the stories or word lists. Further corroboration was secured by the ratings of thirty experts in reading who made subjective evaluations of the basal levels of each story. Reliability was demonstrated by having two examiners administer Forms A and B to sixty elementary school children in grades one to six. A complete report of these studies has been prepared by McCracken for all interested readers.¹

Silvaroli is the author of a diagnostic tool, the Classroom Reading Inventory.² The complete inventory is available under one cover in a spiral book and is composed of Graded Word Lists and Graded Oral Paragraphs. A Graded Spelling Survey is also included. The inventory may be administered to children in grades two through eight. Silvaroli makes the following statement concerning the selection of children for testing:

The Classroom Inventory should be administered to only those children who need further testing in reading.


Either the results of a group reading achievement test or the teacher's knowledge of the class group reveal those children who appear to need further testing.\(^1\)

The inventory provides the examiner with information concerning the child's independent, instructional, frustration, and hearing-capacity levels and enables him to assess the child's specific word recognition and comprehension abilities.

Part one, the graded word lists, is administered for the purpose of identifying specific word recognition errors and to estimate the approximate starting level for the oral paragraphs in part two. These paragraphs assist the examiner in estimating the child's reading levels, in identifying errors made during oral reading, and in estimating the extent to which a child actually comprehends what he reads. The oral reading paragraphs were selected and evaluated by using the readability formulas of Spache, Dale-Chall, and Flesch.\(^2\)

Both the word lists and the oral paragraphs are graded for levels pre-primer through sixth and have two forms, A and B. Form B is an optional form. Silvaroli suggests that the oral paragraphs in this form be used in the following ways:

\(^1\)\textit{Ibid.}, p. XI.

\(^2\)\textit{Ibid.}
1. As an additional set of paragraphs for post testing.
2. As a set of silent paragraphs for older children who might reject oral reading.
3. As a set of silent paragraphs used with Form A.
4. As a set of paragraphs for assessing the child's hearing capacity level.¹

Inventory records and summary sheets have been provided for use with each form. These may be duplicated by the examiner since the publisher has given permission to reproduce them.

Part three of the inventory consists of a spelling survey whose purpose is to provide additional data on the child's ability to integrate and express letter-form, letter-sound skills. Seven lists of words are provided for testing levels one through seven. This test may be administered to a group of children and has only one form.

Silvaroli, in his introductory remarks, states that his inventory "has been designed for elementary classroom teachers who have not had prior experience with individual diagnostic reading measures."² He also designed the inventory in such a way that test administration time is kept to a minimum because the time required for the administration of informal inventories has discouraged teachers from using them. Silvaroli modified test procedures so that only untimed responses to words in isolation are

¹Ibid., p. 35.
²Ibid., p. V.
required and only five comprehension questions follow each oral reading selection. He sets forth his rationale with these words:

These modifications tend to reduce the overall effectiveness of individual informal testing in reading. However, this quick inventory should enable the classroom teacher to realistically assess the reading performance of many children in her classroom.¹

Nila Banton Smith also recognized the need that teachers and clinicians have for functional testing to determine a child's reading placement. Her functional reading inventories are contained in two handbooks: Graded Selections for Informal Reading Diagnosis, Grades 1-3 and Graded Selections for Informal Reading Diagnosis, Grades 4-6.²

Smith's handbooks contain sample selections from a basal series of readers. There are two selections for each reading level: one chosen from the beginning of the reader and the other, a more difficult selection, taken from the latter part of the same book. Each selection is followed by a set of literal comprehension questions, a set of interpretation questions, and a list of words that appear in the reading selection and are grouped according to phonetic elements for the purpose of diagnosing

¹Ibid., p. X.

word recognition errors. The words in these lists are not to be read in isolation, but are to be checked by the examiner if the child mispronounces them during the oral reading of the selection. Smith is strong in her belief that the child must show his ability to recognize words in context:

The most reliable test of a child's word recognition ability is a functional test in which he has an opportunity to pronounce words embedded in printed sentences and use word-attack procedures in 'figuring out' unrecognized words as he meets such words while actually reading the printed page.¹

Smith and the reading instructors who collaborated with her "found that a functional inventory making use of graded textbooks is the most effective means of determining a pupil's instructional level."²

The Diagnostic Reading Scales³ are a series of integrated tests comprised of Word Recognition Lists, Reading Passages, and Phonics Tests. They were developed by Spache for the purpose of providing standardized evaluations of oral and silent reading skills and of auditory comprehension. An examiner's manual, an examiner's record booklet, and a spiral-bound pupil's booklet make up the actual test materials.

¹Ibid., p. XI.
²Ibid., p. VI.
³George D. Spache, Diagnostic Reading Scales (Del Monte Research Park, Monterey, California: California Test Bureau/A Division of McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1963).
The first unit of the test battery consists of three word recognition lists: list 1 for non-readers or first grade pupils; list 2 for second and third grade pupils; and list 3 for fourth to sixth grade pupils. Each list is standardized and graduated in difficulty. These lists are administered for the purpose of estimating the instructional level of reading, to reveal the pupil's methods of word attack, and to evaluate the pupil's sight-word vocabulary.

There are twenty-two reading passages consisting of four for each primary grade and two for each grade from fourth to eighth. These selections are graded in difficulty from low first grade to high eighth grade. In describing the reading passages, Spache calls attention to the following:

The Diagnostic Reading Scales stress comprehension of facts and inferences contained within the Reading selections, rather than memorization. The questions relating to each Reading passage sample the student's ability to interpret the feelings and actions of characters, draw conclusions and inferences, and recognize stated facts in paraphrase, as well as to recall specific details.¹

The administration of the reading passages yields three reading levels: instructional, independent, and potential (auditory comprehension).

The purpose of the six phonics tests is to provide a detailed analysis of the pupil's phonic knowledge and word-attack methods.

Each of the six supplementary Phonics Tests is devised to measure a specific phonic skill: (1) consonant sounds, (2) vowel sounds, (3) consonant blends, (4) common syllables, (5) blends, and (6) letter sounds. While emphasis is placed on mastery in these skills, a crude scale is presented for those who wish to relate performance to grade levels. Tests 1 through 5 are to be read by the pupil; Test 6 is oral, and does not appear in the pupil's test booklet.  

The examiner's record booklet lists a series of letters whose sounds the examiner is to make in isolation for pupil identification.

The record booklet referred to above is quite complete and includes a word analysis checklist, a checklist of reading difficulties, and a summary record blank. After the battery of tests is scored, the booklet may be placed in the child's cumulative folder.

Spache conducted numerous studies and careful test construction over a period of eight years to establish the validity of the Diagnostic Reading Scales. The most significant data concerning validity are reported as follows:

Reading materials used in the Diagnostic Reading Scales were selected with careful consideration of the type and range of reading actually employed at each grade level. Each selection for the primary grades was first evaluated by the Spache formula; selections

1Ibid..
for the higher grade levels were based on the Dale-Chall formula. Both formulas are founded on an analysis of the vocabulary and sentence length of classroom reading materials.

The words for the Word Recognition Lists were chosen by using Flanagan's table of point biserial r's from the upper and lower twenty-seven per cent groups for each of the three word lists. The words for each list were selected on the basis both of appropriate difficulty and adequate discrimination.

At each reading level, selections from the Diagnostic Reading Scales were measured against passages from established diagnostic reading tests. Each time that a pupil read a selection from the Scales, he was also given a parallel selection from a similar test; a comparison of reading performance on the new test and on another reading test was therefore possible for each passage read by every pupil. The comparisons with other tests were continued until each proposed selection had demonstrated its validity, or had been replaced by a more valid passage. Similar comparisons were made between the selections at each of the eleven reading levels, to ensure the highest possible degree of correspondence between the two passages at each level.¹

Spache provides six tables in the examiner's manual which give the reliability and validity coefficients and compare his test with other measures of reading performance.²

The inventories developed by Botel, McCracken, Silvaroli, Smith, and Spache were designed to aid reading teachers in the proper placement of pupils in text books. When one of these inventories is given to determine a pupil's

¹Ibid., p. 8.
²Ibid., pp. 7-13.
instructional level, how much confidence can be placed in the results? Botel, Bradley, and Kashuba believe a more appropriate question to ask is, "Which reading test and readability measure provide the best estimate of match between pupil and book for the purpose of instruction?" They undertook a study to answer this question of proper placement in a book.

The fundamental purpose of this study was to develop a design for determining the validity of informal reading inventories. It has already been seen that this problem cannot be divorced from the question of readability measures. Indeed, the main assumption of this design is that measures of reading level and readability should be used to validate each other. The Spache readability formula was used to determine the readability of primary reading materials and the Dale-Chall formula to determine the readability of intermediate and upper grade materials. The pupils tested were given the Botel Reading Inventory, the Standard Reading Inventory, and the Diagnostic Reading Scales.

The performance of pupils on the three reading tests was correlated with their performance on the criterion estimated by the readability measures. The obtained correlations were consistently high, ranging from .77 to .94. In terms of correlation, the best estimate of test-criterion correspondence was obtained by using the Word Opposites Test of the Botel Reading Inventory with the Spache, Dale-Chall estimate of the criterion. In fact, the Botel Word Opposites Test consistently correlated higher than the other reading tests with the criterion, as estimated by all readability measures.


2Ibid., p. 86.
The means for the Standard Reading Inventory and the Botel Reading Inventory were virtually of the same magnitude; while the mean for the Diagnostic Reading Scales was approximately one grade level higher than the other two tests. The standard deviations for all three tests closely approximated each other.

The reading test intercorrelations (i.e., test compared with test) revealed that all three tests probably measured the same thing. The Diagnostic Reading Scales and Standard Reading Inventory measured oral and silent reading performance on graded, paragraph material; while the Botel Reading Inventory measured oral and silent reading performance on graded isolated words. The results of this study showed that the Diagnostic Reading Scales and Standard Reading Inventory were highly correlated with each other (.88), while they were correlated with the Botel Reading Inventory to a lesser extent (.73 and .74, respectively).¹

Test findings showed that there is no one specific level of readability for a given book, nor one single reading level for a given pupil. The results of the study also indicated the lack of any perfect combination of test and readability measure. The matched test findings are shown in ten tables prepared by Botel, Bradley, and Kashuba.²

Another significant study was that made by McCracken and Mullen to determine if data from the Standard Reading Inventory, the Botel Reading Inventory, and the Stanford Achievement Test would support the concepts of independent, instructional, and frustration level of reading. These tests were administered to 147 pupils in grades one through six. The results were as follows:

¹Ibid., pp. 91-93.
²Ibid., pp. 91-99.
The significant differences in mean achievement for succeeding grade levels on the SRI and the Botel Inventory are what would be expected when measuring an area of developmental growth. These differences and the increasingly higher mean scores achieved by each grade level confirm the validity of both tests and the validity of informal testings.

• • • A comparison of the mean levels of achievement of the Stanford Achievement Tests and the instructional levels of the SRI and the Botel Inventory gives strong evidence of concurrent validity.

• • • All the correlations between the SRI and the Botel Inventory are significant (p< 0.01), and, considering the size of the groups, give strong evidence that these two measures, developed independently to measure the same skill, do indeed measure the same skill or skills. The correlations support the concept that instructional level can be measured and can be measured reliably.

• • • We interpret the results of the sign test as indicating that pronouncing words presented in isolation is the most sensitive single subtest of the SRI for determining the instructional level, and speed of oral reading as the second most sensitive test. No standards have been developed for using either subtest singly to determine instructional level.¹

None of the data in the study affirmed the validity of the concept of instructional level or the standards for determining instructional levels. Neither did they affirm or deny that pupils instructed at their instructional levels will learn to read. However, the data did affirm that something called instructional level can be measured validly.

Purposes of the Informal Reading Inventory

The informal reading inventory is a detailed study of the child's whole performance in the reading area and of the language and thinking functions related to reading. The careful administration of the inventory should yield specific kinds of information and accomplish certain specific purposes. Johnson and Kress state that the chief purposes are to determine levels of reading, to determine strengths and weaknesses, to help the learner become aware of his achievement, and to evaluate progress periodically.¹

The IRI will provide the teacher with information about levels of reading appropriate for his instructional work in the class, the level at which he might most enjoy free reading, and a level of understanding of ideas in written context, even when it is too difficult for him to read for himself. These levels are called: (1) independent; (2) instructional; and (3) capacity levels.

The independent level of reading is the highest level at which the child can read fluently and with personal satisfaction without help.²

This level should be the concern of the child, his teacher, his parents, and the librarian since they are involved in the selection of materials for his independent reading. Collateral reading which the child does for social studies and science as well as the recreational reading which he

¹Johnson and Kress, Informal Reading Inventories, pp. 4-5.

does for his own personal enjoyment should be done at this level. Reading with full understanding and freedom from mechanical difficulties, the child has "opportunity to apply the abilities he has acquired, to learn through his own efforts, and to increase the rate and flexibility of his reading." 1

"One of the most significant tasks of the reading teacher or any teacher, for that matter, is the proper placement of pupils in their texts." 2 Therefore, it is important to determine the instructional level of reading, or the level at which systematic instruction should be initiated. In order to profit from instruction the child should encounter no more difficulty than can reasonably be overcome through good teaching. Instructional materials are those which are difficult enough to be challenging, but easy enough to be handled independently with explanation from the teacher. Through guided work at the instructional level the child has the opportunity to build new reading abilities.

At what reading level is the individual thwarted or baffled by the language (i.e., vocabulary, structure, sentence length) of the reading material? This will be designated the level of frustration in reading. 3

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1Johnson and Kress, Informal Reading Inventories, p. 7.
3Betts, Foundations of Reading Instruction, p. 439.
Any difficulties encountered at this level cause confusion, frustration, and tension in the reading situation. If the teacher knows the child's frustration level, he will be guided in the selection of materials and will know which ones to avoid using for instructional purposes.

"The capacity level for reading is the highest level at which the child can understand the ideas and concepts in informational material that is read to him."¹ The capacity, or hearing comprehension level as it is sometimes called, serves as an index to the child's present capacity for reading achievement and gives an indication of the level at which he should be reading.

All instructional activities involving listening should take into account each child's hearing comprehension level. Whether materials are being read to the class or spoken, there can be no real profit to an individual if they are beyond his hearing comprehension level. He may simply tune out when he finds himself failing to understand.²

Ideally, the child should understand material that is read to him as well as what he reads himself. Reading teachers should strive for the equivalence of each child's instructional and capacity levels.

Evaluation of an individual's competence in dealing with reading materials at successive levels of difficulty

²Johnson and Kress, Informal Reading Inventories, p. 11.
is only one purpose for administering an informal reading inventory. Teachers and clinicians have also found the IRI to be of great assistance to them in analyzing reading skills to determine specific strengths and weaknesses. Informal inventories yield specific information concerning instructional needs.

The child's strengths and weaknesses are revealed by observing his performance during the administration of the inventory. Poor oral reading might be characterized by substitutions, omissions, repetitions, and insertions of letters or words. Errors such as these would reveal the need for instruction in certain vowels, consonants, blends, digraphs, or the need to acquire a more adequate sight vocabulary. If silent reading is part of the particular inventory being administered, the examiner could watch for head movements, lip movements, subvocalization, finger pointing, and a low rate of reading. Comprehension checks reveal the child's ability to select main ideas, recall details, make inferences, and understand vocabulary. Some reading inventories contain a phonics or spelling test that results in specific information concerning a child's word attack skills. Knowledge gained through the analysis of specific reading skills enables the teacher to instruct the child in certain areas to provide adequate readiness for learning.
Betts maintains that the appraisal of reading performance should be double-edged:

First, it should reveal learner needs to the teacher; second, it should help the learner to become aware of his own needs for guidance or instruction. The learner should be literate regarding his level of reading achievement, his specific needs, and his goals of learning.¹

Thus it becomes evident that an important purpose of the informal reading inventory is to make the learner aware of his level of achievement and his specific strengths and weaknesses. Without adequate learner awareness, reading instruction becomes exceedingly difficult. As the child learns about his ability to perform in reading and becomes aware of his weaknesses, he may be filled with the desire to exclaim: 'This makes sense. This is the first time I have known what I am trying to do.'²

The final purpose to be accomplished by an informal inventory is to evaluate reading progress periodically.

Repeated inventories at periodic intervals should make it possible to determine changes in levels and in the handling of individual skills and abilities. In this way a true measure of the child's growth can be obtained.³ Fruitful instruction should be based on an understanding of the child's progress and needs. The informal reading inventory serves as a means to appraise both achievement

¹Betts, Foundations of Reading Instruction, p. 438, 464.
²Ibid., p. 464.
³Johnson and Kress, Informal Reading Inventories, p. 5.
and specific needs in one operation and provides the child with another reading experience. Therefore, it furnishes valuable information without loss of instructional time so that the teacher may estimate progress and provide for individual differences. "Regardless of the methodology used in teaching reading, the teacher must, if he is effective, have accurate and current information about each pupil's level of reading achievement."¹

During the school year the teacher can use an informal reading inventory to assist him in the movement of a child from one instructional group to another, in the evaluation of the mastery of skills taught, in the placement of newly registered students in reading groups, and in the completion of records of children being transferred to another school. In so many words, the informal reading inventory provides for continuous evaluation of reading progress. Ammons, in listing the characteristics of evaluation, says that it is a continuous process and advises educators in these words:

If our interest is progress and not some sort of terminal behavior, or the acquisition of certain behaviors within a specified period of time, then we must collect evidence on student progress continuously. Only then are we sufficiently aware of the nature and direction of progress to be in a position to alter instructional

¹Dean Kelly, "Using an Informal Reading Inventory to Place Children in Instructional Materials," in Reading Difficulties: Diagnosis, Correction, and Remediation, ed. by William K. Durr (Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association, 1970), p. 111.
strategies and environment so that progress for any
individual student may be optimum for him.¹

Administration of an Informal Reading Inventory

The general procedure for the administration of an
informal reading inventory is usually based on the prin-
ciples governing a directed reading activity. Betts
maintains that these principles should be observed for
two reasons:

... reading performance reflects previous in-
structional procedures which may have contributed to
the learner's reading problem, and the validity of
the inventory is enhanced by basing observations on
performance in recommended first-teaching and remedial-
teaching situations.²

Tinker, in speaking of reading appraisal, reaffirms Betts'
opinion when he says that "any appraisal should be made in
situations that closely approximate actual reading condi-
tions."³

The total process of the administration of an
individual inventory of reading ability has been des-
cribed by a number of reading experts as a detailed proce-
dure requiring certain specific steps to be followed.
Strang has effectively summarized them in this way:

1. Have a brief talk with student in a friendly,
interested way.

Should It Be Done?" p. 4.
²Betts, Foundations of Reading Instruction, p. 457.
³Miles A. Tinker, Bases for Effective Reading (Min-
2. Give short tests of oral vocabulary, ability to pronounce printed words, and auditory perception.

3. Use reading paragraphs as follows:
   a. Give pupil first paragraph card.
   b. Ask him to read it orally.
   c. Record errors as he reads.
   d. Ask comprehension questions; write answers as he gives them.
   e. To obtain supplementary information, ask child to read paragraph silently, then orally again. Record changes in comprehension and increase or decrease in errors.
   f. Continue with next paragraphs until frustration level is reached.
   g. Read aloud to the student other paragraphs beginning at his frustration level; ask comprehension questions.
   h. Record on form for each paragraph the number and percentage of errors in word recognition and comprehension. Summarize results on checklist, profile, or description of student's specific abilities.

4. Administer a timed silent reading test using similar paragraphs. The teacher may select from the procedures suggested as many as are appropriate to the situation. . . .

A more concise way to name the parts of an informal reading inventory might be to list them as follows: (1) establishment of rapport; (2) administration of the reading inventory; (3) administration of the listening inventory; (4) scoring the test; (5) summarization of data. These are essential if a thorough and competent job of administration is to be effected.

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If the testing situation is to be a learning situation for both the examiner and child, then a mutual working relationship must be established. The examiner can establish rapport by showing tolerance and sincerity, and by creating a psychological atmosphere that enables the child to share his attitudes and feelings.

The easiest way to establish rapport with the child is to explain to him exactly what it is that you are doing and why determining his instructional level of reading is so important. If the child is interested, discuss with him the changing sizes of print in more difficult books, the amount of reading on a page, and the decrease in the use of pictures. The child must not be made to feel that the test is a 'threat' to his status, and if he is the type of child who continually asks for reassurance (Am I doin' good?), the teacher needs to be completely reassuring.¹

The examiner tries to elicit the child's best effort and attempts to explain the examining techniques to be used in the administration of the inventory. At this time, there is also an opportunity to appraise the child's oral language facility in various ways:

As they engage in informal conversation, he can pick up any actual defects in speech, appraise the degree of spontaneity in informal situations, determine the child's ability to respond to specific questions, and get some measure of the maturity level of the child's vocabulary, sentence structure, and pronunciation. Likewise, there will be some reflection of the child's ability to concentrate on oral language activities and to respond appropriately. While all of this is going on,

a great deal can also be learned about the child's attitude toward himself and the reading process. All of this material is significant in the total evaluation of his strengths and weaknesses in the reading area.¹

Once rapport has been established, the examiner will need to estimate the starting level of the reading inventory. An isolated word recognition test is satisfactory for accomplishing this purpose. This may consist of graded word lists, randomly selected words from different levels, or words selected from basal readers. The examiner should begin with words that are one and one-half to two levels below the child's actual grade placement and continue testing until the child is no longer able to function adequately. While observing the child in word recognition exercises, the examiner should notice the following errors:

1. Failure to pronounce the word. The child simply stops, unable to go on until assisted in the word pronunciation. Five seconds is generally recognized as ample time to pronounce a given word.

2. Hesitation. Although waiting a second or two, the child finally pronounces the word properly.

3. Mispronunciation. Distorting vowel or consonant sounds or accent. The child makes an inaccurate guess at the pronunciation of the word, e.g., cutch for catch.

4. Substitution. The child replaces the correct word with another word, e.g., sit for sat.

¹Johnson and Kress, Informal Reading Inventories, p. 15.
5. Word and letter reversal. The child completely distorts the word by reversing the order of letters, e.g., was for saw, or he reverses the letter itself, e.g., big for dig.

6. Letter order confusion. The child does not necessarily reverse the word but he confuses the order of the letters in the word, e.g. pincicknig for picnicking.¹

Responses should be recorded immediately in order to have a complete and accurate record of performance. Any delay in recording errors may result in confusion and mistakes in scoring. The examiner must have a definite, well-learned system of marking that is meaningful to him.

A wise procedure for starting the reading inventory is to begin at least one level lower than that at which the child first encountered difficulty in the word recognition test.²

Once the starting level has been determined, the examiner provides readiness for reading the selection which includes establishing a purpose for reading. The procedure to be followed at each level is basically the same and is summarized by McCracken as follows:

1. The child is asked to read both orally and silently from a graded series of books, usually a basal reading series. The child begins at a level which is easy and the testing proceeds upward until the material is too difficult for him to read. Usually one selection is read orally and one silently at each book level.

¹Robert M. Wilson, Diagnostic and Remedial Reading for Classroom and Clinic (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co., 1967), p. 69.

²Johnson and Kress, Informal Reading Inventories, p. 19.
2. As the child reads orally, the manner in which he reads is recorded. Almost any deviation from completely fluent reading is counted as an oral reading error.

3. After reading each selection, the child's comprehension is checked by having the child retell the story, by asking the child questions, or both.¹

When frustration level has been reached, the examiner immediately discontinues the reading inventory. It is "usually begun at the next level following the one at which frustration was reached."² The examiner appraises hearing comprehension or reading capacity by reading to the child and checking his comprehension of the passages listened to by factual and inferential questions.

If the evaluations made during the word recognition test, reading inventory, and listening inventory are to be effective and worthwhile, the examiner must record his observations carefully and score the pupil's performance accurately. Betts gives a number of points to be considered in recording observations of reading performance:

First, some type of permanent record should be made of the observations. A busy teacher or clinician cannot be expected to keep in mind all the necessary details about the reading needs of each individual in a class or clinic. Second, a simplified form should be devised which will reduce to a minimum the amount of

¹Robert A. McCracken, "The Informal Reading Inventory as a Means of Improving Instruction," in The Evaluation of Children's Reading Achievement, ed. by Thomas C. Barrett (Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association, 1967), pp. 80, 82.

²Johnson and Kress, Informal Reading Inventories, p. 21.
of note-taking required during the testing. Recording observations should be done as unobtrusively as possible. An excessive amount of note-taking may become a barrier to rapport. Third, the recording of the responses should be sufficiently descriptive to have high diagnostic value. For example, a low rate of reading may be occasioned by inadequate control over word-recognition skills, by general slow reaction time, by a lack of versatility in adjusting reading rate to the purpose of reading, and so on. Fourth, the recording form should include some means for very briefly indicating the examiner's estimates of basal level, instructional level, frustration level, and capacity level.

Recent writers in the field of reading often suggest using a tape recorder during an informal reading inventory.

A tape recorder can be used so that oral reading can be recorded and later analyzed and reviewed. The University of Chicago Reading Clinic records oral reading on discs which are filed in each student's folder. This technique is particularly useful because recordings may be played at a later time to check progress and to make comparisons.

Zintz believes that the tape recorder is useful not only because it can be replayed when the inventory is completed, but also because the examiner can give more concentrated attention to the child's oral reading during the inventory.

1Betts, Foundations of Reading Instruction, pp. 469, 470.


3Zintz, Corrective Reading, p. 34.
Dechant also favors the use of a tape recorder to aid informal diagnosis. In the event that a recording cannot be made, he suggests placing a transparency over the teacher's copy of the child's book to check errors for later analysis.¹

According to Betts there are two widely used means of recording the results of an informal reading inventory:

... first, a diagnostic chart for checking positive findings (i.e., observed difficulties); second, a special reproduction of the test selection for recording responses. Diagnostic charts are arranged for recording individual findings in either an individual--or group--test situation. Reproduced test selections are, of course, designed for recording individual findings. Each of these devices for recording the findings is used in a number of forms.²

The diagnostic chart is a list of various types of reading behavior that may be checked by the teacher in accord with the response made by the pupil. Reproduced test selections are duplicate copies for marking the exact words or letters that were omitted, reversed, inserted, etc. The examiner needs a systematic method of marking these errors. A definite well-learned system that involves the use of a code or shorthand meaningful to the examiner, will enhance the consistency and accuracy of recording.

¹Emerald Dechant, Diagnosis and Remediation of Reading Difficulty (West Nyack, N.Y.: Parker Publishing Co., Inc., 1968), p. 34.

²Betts, Foundations of Reading Instruction, p. 470.
Classification of errors is helpful in determining a child's specific strengths and weaknesses. However, in determining instructional reading level, the number of errors made is the important consideration. To make error counting objective and precise, McCracken gives the examiner six rules to use:

1. Count only one error at any one place in the reading. Many times a student will make more than one type of error at one point in the story. For example, a student may omit a difficult word, reread (repetition) and mispronounce the omitted word, reread again (another repetition) and pronounce the word correctly. All of this would be counted as one error.

2. Count as one error if a student corrects an error, with or without repeating other words.

3. Count as one error the omission of more than one word of consecutive print.

4. Count as one error the addition of two or more words consecutively.

5. Count as one error if the child makes a second error caused by his forcing grammatical agreement. For example, a child who substitutes he for they will probably add an s to the verb, reading he wants for they want. The same thing happens when a male proper name is read as female. Later, the pronoun he is sometimes read as she, or him, as her.

6. Count as one error the mispronouncing of a proper name or difficult word if the word appears more than once in a 100 to 150 word selection and is mispronounced two or more times. For example, students will sometimes read Bill as Billy consistently. Count as one error if a proper name has two or more words in it and both are mispronounced. Count errors on simple words each time they occur. For example, if a is substituted for the three times, count three errors.  

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1 McCracken, "The Informal Reading Inventory as a Means of Improving Instruction," p. 86.
McCracken found that the error pattern seemed related to the level of difficulty rather than the type of difficulty and suggests that diagnostic analysis of error is valid only within the instructional range.¹

The examiner needs certain criteria or standards to be used in judging and determining the child's particular reading levels. If the criteria are too low, the child's performance may be judged adequate for a certain level which actually will prove frustrating for him. Standards used in judging achievement levels must be kept high in order to prevent this from happening.

In determining a student's independent reading level, the examiner must keep in mind that at this level the child should read with fluency, accuracy, and comprehension, functioning entirely on his own.

Materials, in order to be considered to be at an independent level, should be read with ninety-nine percent accuracy in terms of word recognition. This does not mean merely final recognition of the words in the selection. Rather, this means that even in a situation of oral reading at sight, the child should be able to handle the material accurately, making not more than one error of even a minor nature in one hundred running words. In terms of comprehension, the score should be no lower than ninety percent. Whether the reading has been done silently or orally at sight, the child should be able to respond with the same degree of accuracy to questions testing factual recall, ability to interpret and infer, and should have the comprehension ability required for full understanding of the material.

¹Ibid.
He should be able to respond adequately to humor, for instance, or to follow any sequence of events involved in the material. In addition, the child should be able to make adequate applications of information and ideas to other situations.¹

At this level the child reads rhythmically in a conversational tone, is completely free from tension, and does an almost perfect job of handling the reading material.

The instructional reading level is the level at which the child can profit from and needs instruction from a teacher. Therefore, he should encounter no more difficulty than can be reasonably overcome through good instruction. Criteria for evaluating reading performance at the instructional level include:

1. A minimum comprehension score of at least seventy-five per cent, based on both factual and inferential questions.

2. Accurate pronunciation of ninety-five per cent of the running words.

3. Ability to anticipate meaning.

4. Freedom from tension in the reading situation.

5. Freedom from finger pointing.

6. Freedom from head movement.


8. Silent reading to locate specific information characterized by:
   A. A rate of comprehension substantially higher than that for oral reading.
   B. Ability to use sight word techniques (e.g. context clues, picture clues, configuration clues,

rhythm clues) and/or word-analysis techniques (e.g. phonics and syllabication) for visual recognition of 'new' reading words (i.e., words understood when heard or used orally but not previously encountered in reading), depending on the level of reading achievement.

C. Absence of vocalization.
D. Ability to identify mechanical (e.g. word-recognition) or comprehension (e.g., meaning) difficulties requiring outside assistance. (For example, the pupil should be aware of the need for help from the teacher or of the need for turning to a glossary or dictionary.)

9. Oral reading performance, preceded by silent reading characterized by:
   A. Rhythm, i.e., proper phrasing.
   B. Accurate interpretation of punctuation.
   C. Use of conversational tone.
   D. A reasonably wide eye-voice span.

How will the examiner determine the level of frustration? It is the point at which the individual is inadequate in dealing with the reading materials. Harris has found that frustration is evidenced in the quality of the reading:

Fluency tends to break down and hesitations, repetitions, and word-by-word reading are common. Signs of emotional tension or distress can be found in the child's color, breathing, facial expression, voice, and so on. He makes mistakes not only on unknown words but also on some words that he usually recognizes without difficulty. If not helped he becomes blocked and has trouble continuing; when allowed to stop he shows relief. Comprehension generally ranges from fair to poor, although bright children sometimes can understand quite well selections through which they stumble with great difficulty. Most children begin to show signs of frustration when word recognition errors rise above five per cent. When the child is highly motivated or the selection is very

1Betts, *Foundations of Reading Instruction*, p. 449.
interesting, some children can cope with material of five to ten per cent difficulty without getting upset. Material of higher than ten per cent difficulty is nearly always frustrating.¹

The specific criterion for reading comprehension at frustration level is fifty per cent or less. Failure to meet the standards set up for the instructional level of reading is indicative of frustration.

Criteria for judging the adequacy of hearing comprehension are similar to those used in determining instructional level.

Briefly, the hearing comprehension level is that reader level at which a child is able to hear and adequately comprehend seventy-five per cent of the ideas in a selection. The questions used to evaluate his comprehension of the material should represent a balance among factual, inferential, and vocabulary-type questions. The responses of the child should be equivalent in level to the language used by the writer. In addition, the child should be able to provide additional information regarding the topics being considered from his experience background.

A corrective reader would then be a child whose ability to deal with language on an oral basis would exceed his ability to read. Specifically, his hearing comprehension would significantly exceed his instructional reading level.²

¹Harris, How to Increase Reading Ability, p. 160.

The difference between the instructional level of reading and the capacity level represents the extent of reading retardation.

Now that specific criteria for judging performance at the various reading levels have been discussed, it seems appropriate to make some general observations concerning the standards for scoring the IRI. McCracken gives some rules that may be applied at each level:

1. To rate a child's reading as independent, EVERY test score must rate as independent level. If seven scores rate as independent and one rates as instructional, the performance is rated as instructional. This classification means that the child is almost, but not quite, at the cutting point for independence.

2. If ONE test score rates as frustration, the child's reading is rated as frustration regardless of the quality of the other scores.

3. If one-half or more of the scores fall under the questionable half of instructional level, the performance is rated as frustration level.

4. If a child makes a better score when reading from a higher book level, the higher score is accepted as valid and the lower score is disregarded. For example, if after silent reading a child comprehends ninety-five per cent of the material read at sixth reader level, but only sixty per cent at the fourth or fifth reader level, one would have to conclude that the sixty per cent score was invalid.1

In determining reading levels, the teacher should understand

1McCracken, "The Informal Reading Inventory as a Means of Improving Instruction," p. 83.
that there is not a clear line of separation between instructional and frustration level.

The teacher will do well to choose the lower of two possible reader levels when there is a question about which is appropriate for a given individual. It is preferable to let him have more practice at an easier level and strengthen his abilities and skills than to move him into material too difficult and stop his progress. ¹

If a teacher is inexperienced in administering an informal reading inventory, her subjective judgments tend to rate the child too high and place him at an instructional level that is actually one of frustration for him. The reader of this paper may wish to examine a chart which demonstrates and explains reading levels from both the teacher's and pupil's viewpoints. ² McCracken thinks of informal reading testing as "trying on a book for size" and presents this idea in the form of a diagram. ³

One of the problems in determining independent, instructional, and capacity levels is the variability that exists in the criteria or standards used for evaluating a student's achievement at these levels. Standards for acceptable performance seem to have been handed down from study to study and text to text, but these criteria

²Betts, Foundations of Reading Instruction, p. 448.
³McCracken, "The Informal Reading Inventory as a Means of Improving Instruction," pp. 89, 91.
have gone unchallenged. Some authorities in the field of reading express their reservations and advise caution, while others propose conflicting criteria for the identification of reading levels.

The present use of the informal inventory, as effective as it is, does not justify the continuance of error in its criteria, nor the discouragement of research to increase its effectiveness. As a matter of fact there is a dearth of research supporting any system of criteria for interpreting informal reading inventories. A wealth of opinion and intuition does exist regarding criterion levels for evaluating reading by this technique, but there is little valid research data to support these suppositions.¹

Powell believes that the criteria were incorrectly formulated by Betts and Kilgallon, a student of Betts, when they were originally set up in the reading clinic at Pennsylvania State College. However, it might be well to remember that the criteria have been applied for over twenty-five years by reading teachers and clinicians, and as Beldin reminds us, "have been fairly well validated through use."²

McCracken, in the development of the Standard Reading Inventory in 1963, employed the criteria recommended by Betts. In 1964, Sipay found that children receiving a word recognition score of 90 - 95% (Betts criteria) were


less suitably placed in instructional materials than those receiving a score of 96 - 99%. ¹

Powell undertook his study in 1969 because he believed the criteria set up by Betts needed a complete appraisal and that the ninety-five per cent word recognition standard was too high for the majority of children in grades one through six. In reporting the results of his research, Powell states:

The data clearly indicate that pupils in grades one and two could tolerate on the average an 85% word recognition score and still maintain 70% comprehension . . . pupils in grades three through six could tolerate on the average a 91% to 94% word recognition score while maintaining 70% comprehension. . . .

Further, the data suggest that the younger child can tolerate more word-recognition error and maintain an acceptable comprehension level than youngsters in grades three through six. Whether this difference is due to the complexity of the language used for reading between these two groups, the difference in the depths of concepts presented in the reading materials at the upper levels, both language and concepts, or other factors not immediately discernible can only be verified through further research.²

A year later, after giving the matter further consideration, Powell made the following statement:

My earlier investigation, resulting in new criteria, implied that the change in the word recognition error


ratio was due to age/grade of the child. While the maturity of the reader certainly would be a factor in such a shift of error ratio, I now believe that the important factor is not the age/grade relationship but the difficulty level of the passage.¹

Different criteria advocated by reading experts are in existence at the present time and propose to yield the same results when applied to the evaluation of reading levels. It does not seem advisable to discuss all of these opinions here. The reader, instead, is referred to a table prepared by Powell and Dunkfeld which summarizes the criteria for the instructional reading level recommended by selected experts in the reading field and illustrates the discrepancies between them.² It is clearly evident that this problem concerning criteria for judging reading levels, particularly the instructional level, must be attacked through further research and study,

So many unsolved problems after so many years! We will not get the answers we need until we have agreement on criteria, sources of test materials, which word-perception errors are to be counted, and most importantly, studies of instructional programs based on specific criteria and evaluation of reading performance.³


²Powell and Colin G. Dunkfeld, "Validity of the IRI Reading Levels," Elementary English, XLVIII (October, 1971), 639.

A great deal has been said concerning the scoring of an informal reading inventory and the criteria to be used in determining reading levels. Equally important is the summarizing of data gathered during informal testing. Symptoms must be analyzed and associated to appropriate skill areas. The significance of error must be determined. All information acquired during testing should be organized in terms of practical adjustments to be made in instructional approaches.

The examiner needs a method for summarizing his diagnostic findings. Much diagnostic information is often lost through the lack of recording techniques. For the purpose of relating test findings to one another, it is helpful to record all essential information on one page. Most commercially prepared inventories have a recapitulation record on the front page of the test booklet. A sample of such a record can be found in Informal Reading Inventories by Johnson and Kress.\(^1\) Wilson has designed a summary sheet which he believes is more valuable and less burdensome for the classroom teacher. He speaks of its value in these words:

\(^1\)Johnson and Kress, Informal Reading Inventories, p. 40.
The summary sheet provides basic information at a glance. In short, it illustrates how far the child is reading below grade level and how far he is reading below his potential. The teacher then indicates the remedial skill areas in which he has identified specifically needed classroom adjustment. And, finally, he notes symptoms requiring referral along with the date that the referral was made. The teacher maintains accompanying information on the child in a folder with this form stapled on the inside cover.¹

Zintz has also prepared a chart for teachers to use in summarizing the results of an informal reading inventory.²

It is not sufficient to have a method for summarizing diagnostic findings. The teacher should also be able to perceive a pattern of symptoms as she examines the child's performance and reads over the summary. Dechant recommends that the teacher ask himself four questions as he works with the symptomatology:

1. Did the pupil make the same error on both easy and difficult material or were his errors chiefly the result of having to read material which for him was on a frustration level? . . .

2. Were his slowness in reading and his constant need to regress while reading the result of poor reading skill or simply of his desire to read carefully? . . .

3. Was the pupil's performance reliable or was it poorer than usual because he was nervous, upset, or distracted during the testing situations?

4. Was the pupil's poor reading performance basically in the area of comprehension skills, word-identification

¹Wilson, Diagnostic and Remedial Reading for Classroom and Clinic, pp. 78-79.

skills, rate skills, oral reading, or a combination of these?\textsuperscript{1}

If the teacher has clearly identified the pattern of symptoms and related it to the appropriate skill or skill areas, then he will be prepared to plan a reading program to correct the child's deficiencies.

\underline{Limitations of the Informal Reading Inventory}

Even though the informal reading inventory represents a most effective instrument for evaluating a reader's performance, it has several decided limitations. Some of these are the proficiency of the examiner, the dispositions of the child, the suitability of materials, the fluctuation of an individual's reading levels, and the dispute over oral reading errors.

The severest limitation of the informal reading inventory is the proficiency of the teacher or clinician who administers it. Certain pedagogical and psychological techniques are indispensable for all examiners.

Some will tell the child almost every word on which he hesitates, even while testing to discover his word attack and word recognition abilities. Others watch sternly, letting the child struggle by himself, without offering any encouragement or assistance. But the teacher with common sense will try to elicit the child's best effort, compare the child's performance to

\textsuperscript{1}Dechant, \textit{Diagnosis and Remediation of Reading Disability}, p. 47.
determine weaknesses, and using his own experience and the group's average performance as guides, try to make judgments and plans.¹

It is clearly evident that the results and value of an IRI are dependent on the competence of the teacher to make judgments as the child reads and also later when scoring and summarizing the data obtained during the testing period. Much depends upon the skill of the examiner in determining the reading level, and upon his sensitivity in interpreting the findings.

The usefulness of the information obtained by informal procedures depends on the experience of the observer, the number of observations made, the degree to which the sample of observations is unbiased, and the relevance of the information to the understanding of the case. . . .

The information acquired by informal approaches . . . must be interpreted and used with caution. Many misjudgments are made if the personal biases of the diagnostician are allowed to influence the judgments he makes.²

The reader should note that Bond and Tinker refer to the experience of the observer or examiner. An informal reading inventory requires some training and experience to administer and interpret. Belden, Utsey, and Wallen realized the need that teachers have for such training and inservice experience:


The search for a technique which would meet the foregoing demands led to the development of a series of instructional films and printed materials described as the Informal Reading Inventory Instructional Process. The printed materials and films are programmed in such a manner that students learn the essential elements of administering an informal reading inventory in a simulated teacher-pupil conference.¹

There is a forty-minute film of a child reading five selections of increasing difficulty which is to be used for the inservice, practice sessions. There is also a film which may be used to test the proficiency of the teachers at the end of the training period. Audio-tapes, overhead transparencies, and instructional booklets are used to supplement the films.

An expanded model of the Informal Reading Inventory Instructional Process was selected for the Berea, Ohio, Inservice Education Experiment. This experiment was undertaken to obtain objective data to determine the effects of an inservice program designed to provide classroom teachers with a knowledge of an informal inventory and the ability to administer one.

The findings in this experiment indicate that the adapted model of the Informal Reading Inventory Instructional Process appears to provide an inservice education vehicle that may assist teachers in becoming more aware of the instructional reading levels of pupils in their classrooms in order to assign them materials

appropriate for their instructional levels if the inservice experience is scheduled before they make instructional decisions regarding pupil's reading materials.¹

Readers who are interested in obtaining tapes of oral reading for use in teacher-training programs may wish to secure those recommended by Spache.²

When an informal inventory is made by a competent examiner, it sometimes happens that tension and frustrations do not appear at all or are not intense. Nevertheless, even when excellent rapport has been established, the disposition of the child remains a limiting factor in the administration of an IRI. Some children are carefree, confident, and friendly with a background of average or above-average success in school. Others are tense, insecure, or shy, and are threatened by any learning or testing situation.

Many children, particularly those with reading disability, find the mechanics of reading aloud so absorbing or trying that they are unable to attend to content... If the teacher is to reduce the child's negative behavior, she must be aware not only of the mechanical aspects of his reading, but also of how he feels, how he tries to cope with the subject, and what interactions are taking place.³

Formalities of testing should be reduced to a minimum by an examiner who is conscious of the importance of being

¹Kelly, "Using an Informal Reading Inventory to Place Children in Instructional Materials," p. 116.

²Spache, Reading in the Elementary School, p. 342.

sympathetic with the child's feelings and putting him at ease in the testing situation.

An informal reading inventory is not only limited by the examiner and the student being tested, but also by the suitability of the materials used for the inventory. If the materials are equal in readability to that of instructional materials it enhances the validity of the inventory. As regards reliability studies, Betts states that the findings are much more consistent from one series of materials to another and from one examiner to another at the lower-grade levels than at the upper-grade levels. He believes that findings may be expected to vary for several reasons:

First, the variation in the content of basal instructional materials contributes to varied reading performance by the same individual. . . . Second, the content, vocabulary, and language structure may vary significantly from one series of basal readers to another. Basal readers vary considerably in the number of different words and in the number of running words. Third, the criteria for estimation of achievement levels and techniques employed for the inventory may contribute to inconsistency between the findings of one examiner and those of another. . . . Fourth, the length of the selection used may be a factor in reliability. Within certain limits, the reliability is enhanced as the length of the selection used for testing at each level is increased. . . . Fifth, the part of the book from which the test selection is taken may be a factor in explaining inconsistencies between the gross findings of two examiners. Of course, it makes a difference whether the reading is done in the first part or the last part of a book. Sixth, the rapport established in the inventory situation may influence the results. . . .

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1 Betts, Foundations of Reading Instruction, pp. 476-77.
A serious limitation is the scarcity of high-interest materials available for testing older children who are retarded readers. Therefore, at times the availability of suitable reading materials may limit the usefulness of an inventory.

The main purpose of an informal reading inventory is to determine a child's reading level. For some time now, teachers have attempted to measure reading level exactly. Today, however, some reading experts believe that exact measurement is not possible.

There is no such thing as an exact reading level for any child. Each child actually has many reading levels, depending upon a variety of factors. Even these various reading levels fluctuate from time to time.¹

This fluctuation of an individual's reading level places a real limitation on the use and value of an informal reading inventory.

The examiner must take into consideration that there are many factors which influence a child's reading level. Some of these are: the interest the child has in the materials to be read, familiarity with the materials, the situation in which he must read, his physical condition, and his innate mental ability.

The application of predetermined criteria to informal reading performance fails to take into account important personality differences among learners. Motivational considerations suggest the importance of flexibility in estimating reading levels.

Achievement motivation leads to consistently improved performance only on tasks that are perceived as challenging; that is, those which offer a moderate probability of success. It seems reasonable to suppose that materials yielding a given error ratio would appear challenging to certain learners and highly threatening to others, depending upon past experiences of success and failure in reading.¹

Therefore, it is evident that Brittain believes in flexibility of interpretation because of the motivational characteristics of the student.

Powell maintains that a child's motivations and interests play an important part in estimating a child's independent reading level. He states:

> My impression is that the independent reading level is not static (it 'floats'). It may not always be located above or below the instructional reading level. The leverage to the reader is the interest value of the ideas and concepts. The greater the interest, the higher the passage difficulty can be for the independent reading level of a particular pupil. Conceivably, interest could cause this level to be quite variable, and it may be equal to or above the instructional level in specific types of materials. It is possible that for brief, transitory high-intensity periods, the interest value could project the independent reading level into the usual frustration zone...²


Interest, motivation, and purpose for reading also play an important part in the accuracy of comprehension that children demonstrate in reading.

Now it can be stated axiomatically that for any given individual reader there are at least four levels of reading comprehension operative at any one time. This is to point out that there is limited meaning in saying that a given reader is reading at a certain grade level unless we define the reader's purpose for reading and the degree of efficiency of comprehension required by a particular reading task.¹

The wealth of information provided by the informal reading inventory demands flexibility of interpretation. Examiners should remember that a reading level score is only an indication of what the child is actually achieving. The need is not so much for a definite reading level for each child, but for an approximation of reading level in each of a variety of situations and in each of a variety of reading skills.

Those who are involved in the task of administering an informal reading inventory are not only concerned with the determination of reading levels. They are also involved in the recording and judging of oral reading errors because the IRI is an oral reading test.

¹Sinclair S. Wall, "Reading Comprehension Level: What Does It Mean?" Reading Improvement, III (Summer, 1966), 76.
Oral reading tests as diagnostic tools are plagued by several limitations. In the first place, there is considerable disagreement about what an oral reading error is. . . . Is it an error when a child repeats words to correct oral reading mistakes? Is it an error when a child stops to use word attack skills on words not known at sight?¹

Making judgments concerning a child's oral reading errors is a difficult task. Recording errors is not a simple matter either. Most teachers and clinicians who are learning to perform this task require considerable practice and training to achieve a fair degree of accuracy.

There is some disagreement in the professional literature regarding the enumeration and counting of oral reading errors. Reading experts are not in agreement as to which errors are important enough to be counted. McCracken believes there are certain considerations to be made in determining what to count:

The error counting should be objective so that examiners can agree, and the error counting should be easy enough to learn so that lengthy or highly specialized training or skill is not necessary. . . .

It was found one could get reliable counting of errors if one eliminated hesitations as an error category. Hesitations were not scored reliably; classroom teachers could not agree whether the hesitations had occurred.²

Spache shows that he is of the same opinion as McCracken when he addresses these words of caution to those preparing

¹Wilson, Diagnostic and Remedial Reading for Classroom and Clinic, p. 84.

²McCracken, "The Informal Reading Inventory as a Means of Improving Instruction," p. 85.
to administer an informal inventory: "Do not attempt to record hesitations, phrasing, word stress, or the child's observation of punctuation."¹

Teachers should also be aware of the fact that children of various ages make different kinds of errors. The errors which beginning readers make change qualitatively as they become more proficient readers.

The type of errors that significantly affect a reader's tolerance level are not uniform from level to level. That is to say that the types of significant errors between an average second grader and an average sixth grader are different, and should be. . . . Therefore, certain types of miscues in the reading of a passage of second grade difficulty might not be scored as errors at that level but might be used for determining error ratios at the fourth grade difficulty level, and vice versa.²

Since the maturity and proficiency of the reader is an important factor in the shift of error ratio, the same quantitative ratio cannot be applied uniformly at all grade levels.

Having considered the limitations of an informal reading inventory, it is evident that the usefulness of informal procedures is dependent upon examiner proficiency, pupil readiness, and the use of suitable materials. Careful

¹Spache, Reading in the Elementary School, p. 337.
²Powell, "The Validity of the Instructional Reading Level," p. 129.
observations, unbiased judgments, and relevant information should enhance the value of informal testing and assist the examiner in overcoming its limitations.

Advantages of the Informal Reading Inventory

The advantages of an informal reading inventory for the appraisal of reading performance far outweigh the limitations. Some of these advantages are low cost, direct and rapid administration, readability of materials, learner and teacher awareness, and opportunity for observation.

The first three advantages named above accrue from the fact that graded classroom materials are generally used for the administration of an informal inventory. This eliminates the expense of purchasing reading tests, waiting for the principal to approve test requisitions, locating test manuals for scoring and interpreting, and making readability checks on the reading materials to be used.

The selections used for the inventory are taken from the instructional materials; hence, reading performance with a number of types of materials can be appraised. Furthermore, size of type, length of line, vocabulary, and kindred factors in readability are under constant control...

Recently authors and publishers have given increasing attention to the graded readability of materials. As more information is obtained on factors of readability they undoubtedly will be recognized in instructional materials. The use of graded instructional materials facilitates the systematic appraisal of reading needs.¹

¹Betts, Foundations of Reading Instruction, p. 478.
The informal reading inventory is not only inexpensive and available for direct and immediate use. It also lends itself to relatively rapid administration.

An experienced teacher usually can administer the inventory in fifteen to twenty minutes. It is likely that during the first few weeks of school, a part of the reading period may be used for testing. The teacher may arrange independent activities for the other pupils while she works directly with one pupil in giving the inventory.¹

Some teachers utilize their free periods while the class is at recess, gym, library, or art to administer informal inventories to individual pupils.

Informal reading tests that have been devised or constructed by the teachers themselves often are adapted to the problems of a specific population. Nevertheless, the gathering or selection of suitable materials for such locally-constructed instruments is a time-consuming task. For this reason, some teachers order commercially-prepared inventories even though the initial cost of purchasing them entails greater expense than using classroom materials.

One of the important advantages of an informal reading inventory is that the learner becomes aware of his reading achievement and specific needs as the inventory is made. Learner awareness fosters intelligent cooperation.

between teacher and student, and is often the means of
enlisting greater interest and effort on the part of the
child.

An informal inventory is an excellent means of
developing learner awareness of his reading needs.
Much of this outcome is dependent upon the teacher's
tagitude... the teacher must appreciate the
desirability and even the necessity of assisting the
pupil in the identification of his level of achieve­
ment and specific needs and in becoming aware of small
increments of achievement.¹

The inventory results in satisfaction for the student
when it presents evidence that he is mastering the various
skills in reading or when it reassures him that the teacher
is aware of his weaknesses or needs and is willing to
assist him in any way possible.

Since the situation in which informal testing takes
place closely approximates actual classroom conditions,
and the techniques employed are similar to those used in
directed reading activities, the teacher is provided with
an excellent means of evaluating pupil achievement and speci­
fic needs.

Because the use of an IRI embodies most of the ele­
ments of the instructional environment, this process
offers potential beyond the important task of making a
match between children and suitable materials. There
is the opportunity for teachers to gain diagnostic in­
sights, from the simple indication of level to the complex
evaluation of reading behavior.²

¹Betts, Foundations of Reading Instruction, p. 478.
²Powell, "The Validity of the Instructional Reading
Level," p. 122.
The way in which the child reads orally gives the teacher information about his approach to reading, his word recognition skills, and the quality of his comprehension. During oral reading the teacher can follow the child's reading word-by-word and phrase-by-phrase, so that his errors are clearly in evidence. In this way the teacher is actually using informal diagnosis to determine the pupil's strengths and weaknesses.

Informal testing procedures are valuable for continuing the diagnosis which is barely started by group standardized tests. Group tests fail to supply an adequate sampling of the skills the teacher is concerned about, and therefore fail to supply diagnostic information.

While administering the individual reading test, the teacher can observe the student more closely than in standardized reading situations. His chance remarks, his facial expressions, bodily positions, and expressive movements often give clues to his attitudes toward himself and toward reading. His casual conversation may give insight into his early reading experiences and interests and his present family relationships.  

Informal techniques of diagnosis are useful supplements to standardized tests. By informal means the teacher can explore further any leads as to the nature of a reading disability that has come to light during standardized testing. Many teachers and clinicians combine formal testing and informal diagnosis in their efforts to help students who may be experiencing difficulties in reading.

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with informal inventories of reading skills, abilities, interests, and attitudes in order to arrive at optimal understanding of a child's difficulty.

Informal reading inventories provide the teacher with the opportunity to observe the child in order to determine his reading needs and the reasons they have developed.

Observation is the key to making the most of all informal inventories for it enables the teacher to capitalize on momentary insight. It provides an opportunity to identify and interpret specific aspects of behavior for the purposes of making inferences about the student, his reading, and the factors affecting his achievement.¹

Informal inventories can serve as a means of appraising interests, persistence, ability to concentrate, and attitudes toward reading. They can provide information concerning breadth and depth of mental content, fluency of oral expression and proficiency of vision and hearing. Informal observation of a child's behavior in reading situations furnishes the perceptive examiner with many clues as to the nature of his specific needs and problems.

¹Dorothy J. McGinnis, "Making the Most of Informal Inventories," in Reading Diagnosis and Evaluation, ed. by Dorothy L. DeBoer (Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association, 1970), p. 95.
The real value of the informal reading inventory (IRI) lies not so much in its identification of the instructional reading level—and, by interpolation, the independent and frustration levels—rather, its real value is that it affords the possibility of evaluating reading behavior in depth. Furthermore, it has the potential for training prospective teachers about reading behavior, a potential unequaled by other types of learning opportunities. For purposes of training teachers, the process becomes the product.

The strength of the IRI is not as a test instrument but as a strategy for studying the behavior of the learner in a reading situation and as a basis for instant diagnosis in the teaching environment.¹

¹Powell, "The Validity of the Instructional Reading Level," p. 121.
CHAPTER III

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to review the literature concerning the informal inventory and to compile information about informal reading evaluation which would assist reading specialists and teachers in assessing individual reading performance. This study described the development, types, purposes, and administration of the informal reading inventory, and also its limitations and advantages.

The informal reading inventory is a detailed study of the child's whole performance in the reading area and of the language and thinking functions related to reading. The IRI is a clinical device designed to reveal the child's strengths and weaknesses as well as to determine his independent, instructional, frustration, and capacity levels.

Informal reading inventories may be designed or constructed by the teacher or clinician. In this case, a basal reading series is generally used for the selection of reading passages and compilation of word lists.
If teachers do not have the time and proficiency required to construct their own inventories, they may purchase inventories that have been developed by experts in the field of reading such as Botel, McCracken, Silvaroli, Smith and Spache. The inventories prepared by these experts are representative, reliable, and are commercially available.

The careful administration of an informal reading inventory will yield specific kinds of information and accomplish certain specific purposes. The chief purposes are: to determine levels of reading; to reveal strengths and weaknesses; to make the learner aware of his achievement; and to evaluate progress periodically.

The general procedure for administering the informal reading inventory is usually based on the principles governing a directed reading activity and requires the following of certain specific steps. In sequential order these steps are: establishment of rapport; administration of the reading inventory; administration of the listening inventory; scoring the inventory; summarization of data.

The informal reading inventory represents a most effective instrument for evaluating a reader's performance. Nevertheless, it has several very real limitations. Some of these are the proficiency of the examiner, the disposition of the child being tested, the suitability of
the materials used, the fluctuation of an individual's reading levels, and the disagreement regarding the enumeration and counting of oral reading errors.

The advantages of an informal reading inventory for the individual appraisal of reading performance far outweigh the limitations. Due to the fact that graded classroom materials are generally used in the administration of the inventory, an IRI is inexpensive, available for direct and immediate use, and has definite readability. The informal reading inventory provides the teacher with an excellent means of evaluating a pupil's reading achievement and specific needs, and at the same time makes the learner aware of his progress. By informal means the teacher can continue the diagnosis which is barely started by group standardized tests and can observe the child's behavior in a situation which approximates actual classroom conditions. Informal reading inventories can serve as a means of appraising interests, persistence, ability to concentrate, and attitude toward reading. They provide the teacher with the possibility of evaluating reading behavior in depth.

In reading, the problems and issues in evaluation closely parallel those in instruction, because evaluation is an integral part of the instructional process. In a good instructional system, it is difficult to
determine where instruction leaves off and evaluation begins. Both teacher and pupil are constantly monitoring the effects of their efforts.¹

Evaluations based on informal reading inventories reveal the child's competence in dealing with reading materials at successive levels of difficulty, and show how he functions in an actual reading situation. These evaluations can become a vital part of the instructional process as the learner becomes aware of his ability to perform in reading and the teacher provides instruction at his reading level and in accord with his specific needs as revealed by the informal reading inventory.

In the past teachers have utilized tests mainly for the purpose of determining a pupil's success or failure in school. Today there is a need for teachers to use tests primarily to plan strategies which will help the child develop reading skills. Teachers must be alert so that they will recognize the numerous occasions during a school day which permit informal checking or testing of various skills.

A teacher gives an informal reading inventory each time she asks a child to read an assignment, each time she asks a child to write, each time she sends a child to the library, each time she discusses with a child the book he has read, each time she talks to a child. Teachers give informal reading inventories everytime they discuss with children what they did over the weekend, every time they take a class on a field trip, every

¹A. N. Hieronymus, "Evaluation and Reading: Perspective '72," The Reading Teacher, XXVI (December, 1972), 264.
time they work with a group of children, every time they teach a lesson. An informal reading inventory is not a single thing; it is many things. An informal reading inventory is a teacher's way of observing or reacting toward what she sees.

A teacher teaches; she conducts activities or allows children to conduct activities. Each activity becomes an informal inventory if the teacher perceives it as an inventory. An inventory is taking stock, enumerating, looking at shelves to see what is there and what is missing. The teacher conducts an inventory of each child if she pays enough attention to each child's responses to be able to tabulate, to count, to evaluate his responses, to decide what is there and what is missing. From a child's responses in almost any situation the teacher can make reasonable deductions about a child's reading or his reading readiness, if she does not define reading narrowly as the skill of pronouncing words orally.  

Teachers today need to recognize and use opportunities for having children demonstrate skills in functional classroom situations whenever these opportunities arise. Emphasis should be placed on informal testing which can be done regularly in the classroom and can be used to capitalize quickly and effectively on many classroom situations, thus contributing to the continuous, on-going diagnosis needed for skillful teaching.

Diagnosis goes beyond the simple identification of the reading level of a student. It involves 1) measuring the difference between a student's level of performance and his potential ability, 2) separating and measuring the various processes that make up his reading behavior, and 3) determining causes for his reading disability, insofar as they are relevant. The process involves

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1 Robert A. McCracken, "Informal Reading Inventories: Diagnosis Within the Teacher," *The Reading Teacher*, XXVI (December, 1972); 273.
understanding the student in his own terms so that the prescription leading out of diagnosis can build on his strengths to overcome his weaknesses.¹

What diagnostic tool could the reading teacher or clinician have that would be more effective in carrying out this process than the informal reading inventory? The proficient use of an IRI will not only establish the child's instructional reading level. It will enable the teacher to compare performance with potential, to evaluate all facets of the reading act, and to become aware of the child's specific needs and his attitudes toward reading. Diagnosis by informal means should not be reserved for students with reading disabilities, but through early assessment may be the means of preventing reading failures.

The informal reading inventory can equip teachers to perform a diagnostically-oriented job of instruction. By putting diagnosis back into the classroom, the goal of the '70's--every child a reader--will cease to be an unattainable dream for some and become a reality for all.

¹Carl B. Smith, Treating Reading Disabilities: The Specialist's Role (Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association, 1969), p. 15.
APPENDIX
APPENDIX

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