Recent trends in formal reading readiness and initial reading

Consolata Robles

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RECENT TRENDS IN FORMAL READING READINESS AND INITIAL READING

by

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Grateful acknowledgment is also expressed toward my community for permitting me to pursue my studies, as well as to all my friends, especially Sister Antonella, for her encouragement toward the completion of this work.
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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Today mass media, such as television, radio, newspapers, and magazines have forced our generation of post-Sputnik and space age to reassess their influence on education and curriculum. Though there has always been a recognition of the cognitive process, a growing acceptance of its importance has developed because of mass media. This influence has enhanced the potential learning environment of children. Better equipment, better materials, television, parent sensitivity, and better teaching have all contributed to school readiness of children. One facet being discussed most frequently is whether or not children should be taught to read prior to first grade.¹

The writer intended to cite opinions and research findings concerning one facet of readiness and individual differences, namely, early prereading experiences.

Anyone who has studied Bruner's book The Process of Education cannot remain the same person. He awakened interest in earlier reading by his challenging remark ... "any subject can be taught effectively

in some intellectually honest form to any child at any stage of development." With this view in mind many pressures have arisen among children and "good teachers must seek to allay these pressures--even at the risk of parental conflict."  

Traditionally in our schools, a fine line has been drawn between the actual readiness period and specific time for reading instruction. As one veteran teacher expressed it, "The children are not what they used to be, but our kindergarten programs are."  

Durkin states that educators have a tendency to put "major emphasis on age-level and grade-level as prerequisites to certain learnings, and only secondary emphasis on the many differences found among children of the same chronological age." She feels a child's readiness program should provide every opportunity to learn, carefully planned and imaginatively related to his or her experiences. Otherwise, it is impossible to say whether the shortcomings lay with the child or the opportunities offered him. The author contends that in the light of this changed society, the kindergarten should offer reading to those children who are ready. This again is suggested in an informal setting and in accordance with the child's interest. Educators must bear in mind that

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3McGee, op. cit., p. 121.


5Ibid., p. 20.
children deserve opportunities to develop both in and out of school in relation to their individual patterns of growth.\textsuperscript{6}

In the case of early reading, Durkin feels that "current thought seems to bounce back and forth between holding on to what is 'traditional' and trying to be modern."\textsuperscript{7} Education for her is too important to be considered a trend.

Few educators have expressed specific opinions for or against early reading. But many have indicated that the influence of the home is a significant factor in readiness for learning how to read. Homes that nurtured a healthy outlook for reading, and attained high educational levels, as well as parents supported by professional and managerial fathers, in particular, were conducive to good readers.

With this debate in mind the author of this research paper endeavored to analyze the recent trends in formal reading readiness and initial reading from 1955 to the present time.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this investigation was the analysis of recent trends in formal reading readiness and initial reading from 1955 to 1969.

Limitations of the Investigation

This study was limited to the findings of research and to the statements of outstanding specialists in the field of reading influenced

\textsuperscript{6}Ibid., p. 20.

\textsuperscript{7}Nancy McCormick, "The Countdown on Beginning Reading," The Reading Teacher, XX (November, 1966), p. 119.
by the judgments of sociologists, physiologists, ophthalmologists, and psychologists. Readiness tests were also considered.

**Significance**

It was the hope of this author to present an overview of the advantages, disadvantages, and methods related to the informal teaching of reading to the very young.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RESEARCH, AND OPINION LITERATURE
ON EARLY READING

Children today are sophisticated far beyond those of a generation ago. Possibly the present environment is conducive to the development of readiness for initial reading at an earlier age than we have heretofore recognized. On the other hand, there are many children who in spite of their environment are not sufficiently mature enough to begin the reading process in or before kindergarten. Certainly the opportunity to learn to read should not be withheld from those who are ready to read. 1

Most parents and educators share the desire to provide the best educational growth for their children, but the challenge lies in knowing when to whet the appetite with the reading act. Much research has been done concerning initial reading at an early age.

However, in order to face facts constructively, an evaluation of original causes of the reading issue must be considered. Perhaps the field of educational censure lies in Flesch's book Why Johnny Can't Read. His primary purpose in writing this book was to offer a practical handbook to parents with the hope of assisting them with the

reading process. A compendium of arguments against our current system in the teaching of reading without a doubt ignited the spark of reaction that led educational experts to challenge his remarks.  

**Visual Readiness**

At what point are a child's eyes physiologically ready for the task of reading? Shaw, an ophthalmologist, states that an infant can fixate with both eyes simultaneously at the age of six weeks. By six months fixation begins to be maintained in spite of obstacles. He further claims:

From a purely physical point of view most normal children can focus and accommodate at the age of 12 months. Hence, they can be taught to read at 12 months. However, many other factors besides the physical condition of the eyes must be taken into consideration, and the development of the ability to understand what is perceived. Many children do not have normal eyes.

Shaw feels that some children cannot learn to read at the ages of three, four, five, or six years. Contrary to this notion that children cannot read until they are ready, academic sights have been set much higher in the space age. Children can and do read at an early age. As Shaw points out, this concept has been amply proven by Moore and other early advocates of reading; however, this evidence does not convince Shaw.

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Heffernan poses the following thought-provoking questions:

- Are we warping children to satisfy adult demands?
- Are we actually forcing formal language and reading on the children before they are ready, thus denying children their childhood?
- Are we making best use of the child's time?
- What are the visual hazards?

Normally children five years and under are far-sighted. Reading forces attention on the near and very small symbols.

Ophthalmologists so far do not have positive evidence of the immediate effect of close work on young children. However, they do report a growing number of young children as patients, and hence a possibility of a correlation. Zike, the head of the Department of Pediatrics in Harbor General Hospital, Los Angeles, offers these thoughts in Heffernan's article:

Only about 25 per cent of the children in kindergarten have reached a neurological maturity to cope with the symbolization necessary for reading. The eye may be ready to receive the visual image, but for more than 75 per cent of the children, the neurological system has not reached the maturity needed to make connections between what they see and what they understand. There is nothing that can be done to speed up (accelerate) this readiness—only time can do this.

At least 50 per cent of the children with learning problems referred to the neurological clinic at Harbor General Hospital have had no traumas, no birth injuries or other physical deviations. Their trouble seems to come from pressures—pressure to do a task they have not the maturity to do. And of course, a greater proportion of these children are boys.

Pediatricians, psychiatrists and psychologists are saying that visual tasks as complex as those presented by reading from a book

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6 Ibid., p. 28.
7 Ibid., p. 28.
cannot be imposed on children until the neurological system is ready to support such activity. The price of each pressure in the learning situation results in mounting tension, emotional instability and an unfavorable attitude toward learning which might affect the entire school life of children.  

Cultural Pressures

There is a cultural pressure in our society to make every child learn how to read in kindergarten or first grade. Children who suffer from a developmental lag in language maturation today are extremely vulnerable in our society. Heffernan cites a school physician in Los Angeles, who stresses the necessity for all educators to become more informed about neuromaturation. She says:

The development of the child's nervous system is closely related to his ability to perceive ideas and perform abstract tasks. Since reading is a complex neurological process, as well as a physical and social process, educators need to study carefully the complete growth pattern of each individual child to determine the type of abstract learning for which he is ready ... While a few five-year-olds may be ready for abstract learnings, all children profit greatly from an environment which is rich in many kinds of first-hand experiences. Time devoted to such a program is more profitable in later grades when learning tasks become more concentrated and abstract.

Doctors are seriously concerned about reading difficulties. Gofman, director of the Pediatric Unit in California, says that when children have difficulty in reading, parents often blame the home for exerting undue pressure. Gofman feels, as Heffernan notes, factors must be considered. She offers the following as clues for difficulties in reading:

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9Heffernan, p. 28.
unrecognized dull normal intelligence
unrecognized hearing defects
unrecognized visual defects
speech difficulties
cultural factors including language
inadequate nutrition
inadequate rest
frequent changes of school and home
chronic illness
physical handicap
maturity—physical and emotional
unrecognized seizures
emotional problems
specific disability including minimal brain damage,
mild cerebral dysfunction, defect in cerebral
integrative mechanism without signs of gross brain damage

McCormick cites a number of authors who have spoken for and
and against formal education at an early age. She quotes Gans in a re-
cent publication:

Learning to read as young as possible is one of our cultural
pressures. She feels that a new emphasis is being placed on
education—that of providing status in our present society.

Spock is quoted by McCormick for his stand against the pressure
put on children who begin to read at an earlier age until it can be
proved to be beneficial. He cited an experiment of several years ago,
in which a class of first graders was not instructed in formal reading
classes for their first year. At the end of the second grade these
youngsters did as well as those in conventional grades.

McCormick feels that a frank discussion on the early studies on
reading should give the public something to think about. She feels

10Hefferman, p. 28.

11Nancy McCormick, "The Countdown on Beginning Reading," The

12Ibid., p. 115.
possibly more can be done by slowing children down than by pushing. She observes that children coming to first grade with no previous formal reading experiences learn to read more rapidly and with greater enthusiasm. She also emphasizes the lack of total readiness when only reading is considered as the criterion for entering children in school. She especially is sympathetic toward "those who have no desire to read-or aren't even ready to read." ¹³ She adds that if pressure is applied, the child may become insecure in a world where all his peers excel him physically, socially, and emotionally. She stresses the need for the child to grow and learn at his own pace. Knowing how to read has never proved that one is knowledgeable or capable of learning. If the public feels that being able to read is the only criterion for school entrance, then McCormick feels research is needed badly to prove the point contrary. She also shows that if the advice of Hillerich is followed, then only can educators plan realistic entry into first grade. Hillerich suggests that there has been a change in method, materials, and children. He advocates a program of good teaching and awareness of individual needs. He states that in walking, we don't stress when a child learns to walk, but rather the direction in which he walks. So it is with reading, another important phase in the child's growth. When he learns to read is not nearly as important as what he reads and the basic attitude he develops towards future reading. Educators need to guide children's reading but not add undue

¹³Ibid., p. 117.
pressures. The author feels the pressures of society will envelop the child soon enough.\(^{14}\)

Perhaps by enlisting the cooperation of pediatricians in reversing this cultural pressure on children today, a change in the curriculum could be effected. In a recent article\(^{15}\) Aller incorporates some stimulating thoughts from Bruner, Hunt, Piaget, Bereiter and Engelmann, and Deutsch.

In accord with Bruner, Aller stresses "the need for each child to discover concepts and relationships for himself in his own way."\(^{16}\)

Similarly, Hunt contends that "there are optimal periods for learning specific skills, which coincide with growth. If the child doesn't learn what is appropriate to his developmental stage, chances are he may never master it.\(^{17}\)

Piaget's analysis of the emerging behavior and intelligence of children has begun to influence curriculum. He asserts that the child aged two to five must have many experiences with objects before he can be expected to move into the more abstract world of pictures, words, and symbols that will be encountered in formal education. Through

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\(^{14}\)Ibid., p. 119.


\(^{16}\)Bruner, op. cit., p. 42.

action and later, talk, the child must assimilate such operations or active experiences with definite objects.\textsuperscript{18}

**Needs of the Disadvantaged**

With a growing stress on meeting individual needs an alleviating cultural pressures, psychologists are also seeking means to care for the disadvantaged. Bereiter and Englemann maintain that because advanced learning takes place through symbols (words), the symbol system of the disadvantaged child needs to be strengthened. They argue for logical, efficient, and early presentation of experiences as well as proper language to describe them, thus aiding the slum child to catch up to the middle class before actual reading time begins.\textsuperscript{19}

Deutsch, head of New York University Institute for Developmental Studies, repeats the same thought. According to Aller, Deutsch sees learning problems complicated for the slum child, and calls for an enriched self-concept, coupled with experiences, and vocabulary before actual presentation of well-sequenced material leading to reading itself.\textsuperscript{20}

In summary these experts have said there is a great need for a new type of flexible curriculum for all young children. Youngsters


should sharpen their thinking skills by classifying objects by shape, color, size, number, use, and other characteristics which place emphasis on specific activities leading up to reading. While some schools delayed reading instructions until first grade, some schools exposed their kindergarten students to similar types of activities. Traditional schooling of young pupils includes many child-centered activities. However, they are often not of the intellectual rigor advocated by Piaget, Bruner, and others.\(^2\)

**General Trends Towards Early Reading**

For many years, as a result of the Terman studies, educators were of the opinion that early reading was an ability reserved only for the gifted and considered unusual for average or above average. Since then, research of Durkin partially succeeded in revising this opinion. Sheldon notes that Durkin located a number of pre-schoolers who had begun reading and who represented the entire range of average and slightly above average intelligence.\(^2\)

All beginning first graders were individually tested by Durkin to identify those who had learned to read prior to coming to school. Out of 5,103 children tested, 49 had some ability in reading, thus composing the experimental group. The control group comprised 201 children unable to read. The plan was to compare the reading achievements of the experimental and control groups at the close of the third grade to


determine the advantages of early reading. However, since the groups were so small, conclusive evidence could not be made concerning early readers.23

A significant factor in Durkin's report was the fact that children who read were products of homes where there was a high regard for reading, and where at least one adult or an older child took an interest in the early reading of the child.24

Her second study was conducted in New York City public schools, and included 30 children in both experimental and control groups. The purpose of this study was to delve into the reason parents gave for their children's ability to read before entering school. The results of this study indicated that varied backgrounds of pre-reading did not necessarily tend to stifle the child's reading ability or lead to problems in school.

After six years of instruction in reading, it was found that those who began early reading as a group maintained their lead over other classmates with the same mental age who did not begin to read until the first grade. Durkin feels that her studies will provide some guidance in making decisions concerning early reading for those who are ready to read.25

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24 Sheldon, op. cit., pp. 164-165.

Sheldon observed that children in the Soviet Union do not begin formal instruction until the age of seven. Evidence suggests that the Soviet children by the age of eight have achieved as much as their counterparts in America. Sheldon urged that reading instruction be postponed until a later age not only because of the hygiene of vision, but the effect of symbolic confusion. He advocates a reduction of the time spent in early reading on the part of the six-year-old child. Rather, a broad unstructured program aimed at clarifying and building concepts, developing skills of listening and speech, as well as exploring the world around them should be encouraged.26

Spache contends that research has proven that it is not the age or the physical development, but rather the classroom program, its flexibility, and its provision for individual differences which cause the child to succeed or fail. However, he pointed out that early training should not be done without complete physical and psychological examinations to determine the total readiness of the child.27

Gans reported on a study made of children who did not read until two years after the normal time; McCormick notes this in her article. These children made such rapid progress that by their third year in school, they were at or beyond those taught in the conventional way.28

Micucci realizes the capability of the child to learn to read at kindergarten level, but she questions the advisability of such learning.

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28McCormick, op. cit., p. 117.
She then points out what the child should be learning in an informal situation, and among other things, reading if he so desired. She concluded by saying that children in a good informal program are as advanced as children restricted to a formal reading situation.29

For many years people have had various opinions concerning early reading. "Only recently have the avant-garde in reading instruction been bold enough to withstand the professional martyrdom of championing the cause of early reading. At first this wasn't easy.30 Witness the censure that had befallen the early runners such as Moore and Doman. But like all current trends in present-day America, the idea of beginning early reading is finally receiving a degree of social acceptability.

Doman and a team of child development specialists, physicians, brain surgeons, educators, psychologists, and reading specialists began their work with brain-injured children. When they saw how much progress was made by the brain-injured child, it became obvious that something had to be done for the well child. Thus, Doman created quite a stir by insisting that babies could be taught to read. His contention is that "it makes no difference to the brain whether it 'sees' a sight or 'hears' a sound. It can understand both equally well. All that is required is that the sounds be loud enough and clear enough for

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30"Once 'Twas Believed," Reading Newsreport, III (November, 1968), p. 27.
the ear to hear and the words big enough for the eye to see so that the
brain can interpret them." 31

Doman feels there is no need to ask, "Can very small children
learn to read?" They have answered that; they can! The question
should be, "What do we want children to read?" 32 He further states that
children's reading should be the type for enrichment and not restricted
to the reading of products, commercials, and signs. Doman stresses
that a tiny child has burning within him a boundless desire to learn.
This desire can be killed only by destroying the child completely. 33

Common Characteristics and Attitudes
Concerning Early Reading

A program of research development was conducted with a group of
pre-schoolers' concept of reading itself. After a personal interview
these opinions were released:

1. Most of the children liked to read or be read to.
2. Apparently most of them felt they already knew how to read.
3. The majority reported having someone read "at home."
4. An interesting comment revealed the trauma of parental forcing
   of reading, as well as lack of reading done in some homes. 34

The author felt that the negativism that some pre-schoolers showed
toward reading was worthy of exploration. This attitude was learned.
He stated: "One can't be expected to like doing what one doesn't know

31 Glenn Doman, How To Teach Your Baby To Read (New York: Random
32 Ibid., p. 9.
33 Ibid., p. 18.
34 George E. Mason, "Preschoolers' Concepts of Reading," The
   Reading Teacher, XXL (December, 1962), p. 132.
how to do." He also felt one of the first steps of readiness in learning to read was in establishing the fact that one didn’t already "know how." 

Sutton conducted an investigation involving 134 children of a kindergarten level under the direction of Ray and Ross. This study cited additional evidence concerning characteristics of young readers. Here again the child, usually a girl, came from a high socio-economic level, had one or more older siblings as well as parents interested in education, and in general was a conscientious, self-reliant type of a person.

**Age a Determining Factor**

In another experiment an effort was made to answer questions raised in a widespread controversy concerning reading readiness age. Working from a series of tests, both of intelligence and readiness, it was concluded that children of higher intelligence and readiness have more unfavorable attitudes about school when in a formal reading program than the slower children in the formal reading program or any of the children in the readiness program. It was learned, however, that the children in the formal reading program excelled in performance over the children in the readiness program.

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36 Ibid., p. 136.
By way of contrast, another experiment involved children who were admitted to school younger than the state age requirement. This program involved group screening, individual identification, committee selection, and continued follow-up and evaluation. The program showed favorable results in the last eight years, and the children rank well above the national norms on standardized tests. 39

Palmer feels that there should be no set time for reading but rather an emphasis on readiness. Readiness is a life-time matter. It implies vision, hearing, nutrition, good physical condition, and alert curiosity. If any of these are absent, then there is no reading readiness. He expresses the need to remember that one can have readiness for one thing and not for another. Hence, there is a necessity of begin with each individual's own readiness where it is found. 40


CHAPTER III

USES OF AUDIO-VISUAL EQUIPMENT IN EARLY READING

The Talking Typewriter: Construction and Operation

Today, with almost whirlwind speed, man develops tools and machines that allow him to span continents in a few hours, to explore the surface of the moon, and to bring about changes in his environment that stagger the imagination. In the midst of all this activity the invention of a computer has increasingly involved educators with the concept of teaching machines and computer-assisted instructions.

Following is the discussion of one of the recent developments in the area of education, namely the "Talking Typewriter" of Responsive Environments Corporation. Apparently, little research has been done in this area.

The "Talking Typewriter" as its name indicated is a device that combines the concept of the typewriter keyboard (except the keys are multi-colored) and the recorded voice, to help improve the reading and writing skills of students. A complete unit for the "Talking Typewriter" consists of a soundproof booth in which the typewriter is located. The booth is equipped with a one way mirror that allows the attendant to observe student performance without being seen by the student. An intercom system permits verbal exchanges between the pupil and the attendant. The controls for the system are located outside the booth and provide the attendant with easy access to the slide projector, voice response program card and the various dials and switches that operate the system.

Work was begun on the "Talking Typewriter" as early as 1958. Moore began his research into this learning process by teaching reading to average children. On the basis of his research, he and Kobler developed the first experimental "Talking Typewriter." Then in 1960, this machine was used experimentally in Hamden Hall Country Day School, Hamden, Connecticut. Since then, public schools in Freeport, Long Island, Chicago, and New York City, as well as private research centers, have initiated its use successfully.

The operation of the machine provides great experience. Naturally, the materials used must be prepared by teachers. Specific programming skills are not needed for the "Talking Typewriter." The visual display material is typed on a large card backed with a magnetic material or surface that will record spoken information in much the same way as a tape recorder. The voice tracks carry the voice message associated with a display. The keyboard of the "Talking Typewriter" then prepares this material for use in the system. The recorded information or message is placed on the magnetic card by simply depressing a particular key and pronouncing the sound or message corresponding to the symbol. Simple codes activate the slide projector or other response units as the student uses the machine in specified learning experiences.

The learning experience of the student is another phase to encounter. He is allowed to freely "explore" the keyboard. In this exploration the student's fingernails are painted corresponding to particular keys on the "Talking Typewriter." This device enables the

2 Ibid., p. 50.
student to learn touch typing, in addition to reading and writing
skills. In this free exploration mode, each time a key is depressed,
the recorded voice pronounces the sound associated with the letter.
Only one key can be depressed at one time, thus avoiding audio jibber­
ish. Also, the keys are automatically blocked while an audio message
is given.

From this method the student proceeds to a second mode, where
letters can be put together to form words. The keyboard is locked in
such a way that the pupil can depress only the correct key. If the
student fails to select the correct key, the machine will not accept
his response. Only the depression of the correct key will cause the
machine to move on to the next letter. To prevent a stalemate between
the student and the "Talking Typewriter," the letter will be repeated
automatically at regular intervals until the correct response is made.
Here again the color of the keys serves as a good hint.

Once the student has mastered these letters and sounds, he is
then able to combine letters on sounds which will make up words. The
student's responses are recorded, and he has a copy of the material
produced.

In this way, the "Talking Typewriter" is used to teach reading
and writing skills to students. It can also be used to improve speech
patterns and thus result in a relearning of the spoken natural lan­
guage of the student.³

³Ibid., p. 52
According to an article taken from *The Reading Newsreport*, an attempt was made to measure the relative effectiveness of the automated talking typewriter and the non-automated device. According to Steg at the Drexel Institute of Technology in Philadelphia, "Seven of the children who were unsuccessful in working with the non-automated device, were quite able to succeed in the automated situation." 4 Several of the children in the project have learned to read at a first and second grade level.

The city of Chicago is conducting its experimentation with a group ranging in age from three and a half to five years. Pupils come from families receiving public assistance from the Cook County Department of Public Aid. Most of the parents are classified as "functionally illiterate" and unable to function above the fifth grade level. Scott, director of this project, reported that the children using the typewriter have "definitely overcome the pattern of learning process stagnation usually seen in the disadvantaged child." 5

Findings in the studies show that those in the experimental group gained in intelligence rating while matched children in a control or non-participating group show a general retrogression in intelligence.

Chester, Pennsylvania, has also experimented with the "Talking Typewriter." Several types of children are working with the machines, including high school students with severe remedial problems, and

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5Ibid., p. 31.
other elementary students with I.Q.'s in the 80's. Project officials in Chester report "gains in achievement of as much as one year in four months. They also report a change in the children's attitudes . . . more motivation, more self-esteem." 6

The greatest deterrent concerning this innovation is the cost. If "Talking Typewriters" are to make a significant dent in the improvement of the teaching of reading, then financially the school system must be able to purchase these machines. Many claim that as the production increases in demand, the cost will have to come down. In the meantime the "Talking Typewriters" continue to build evidence of their usefulness in teaching reading. The children are fascinated by them, and the teachers like them, too. Pines quotes Moore's belief that the years from two to five are the most creative and intellectually active period of our lives. This is when children first acquire speech and begin to classify environment. Normally they receive no schooling at this time. And certainly, they should not be stuffed with rules and facts. Children are capable of extraordinary feats of inductive reasoning if left to themselves in a properly responsive environment. 7

This joy in discovery, according to Moore, is sadly lacking in most methods of early childhood education.

By the time a child is three, he has achieved what is probably the most complex and difficult task of his lifetime, he has learned to speak . . . Nobody has instructed him in this skill; he has had to develop it unaided. In bilingual or multilingual communities, children pick up several languages without accent at a very early age. 8

6 Ibid., p. 31.
age. There is plenty of information-processing ability in a mind that can do that. 8

Moore states: "If animals are comfortable and have free time, then they will explore." 9 Behavioral scientists have begun to recognize in human beings this same "competence drive" as a major motivation along with the drives of hunger, thirst, and sex. But often the drive is stifled.

Every year we lose hundreds of thousands of children who have the ability to learn but who do not go to college. They have made a nearly irreversible decision very early in life, long before they reach the guidance people in the last year of high school.

Modern society is evolving so dynamically that we can no longer depend on child-rearing methods which were adequate before. We have no time. We can't stand pat. We have more new problems today than we can even name, and we must turn out larger numbers of youngsters who can make fresh inductions about our world. A new kind of person is needed to handle the present rate of change. This is our chief trouble today: technological change but intransigent behavior. It's too late for us--our generation can't make it. At best, we are just the transition group, quotes Moore. 10

Now that the "Talking Typewriter" and its function have been explained at great length, Moore's philosophy and method of teaching should be considered. His major purpose is to develop a theory of problem solving and social interaction. Chall states:

He departs significantly from conventional approaches. He starts the child on learning the letters (and some heuristic sound values for some of the letters; e.g., M is mm) and then proceeds to words and sentences. A new child is first introduced to the Moore laboratory by a child guide who has already been through the program. 11

8Ibid., p. 59.
9Ibid., p. 61.
10Pines, op. cit., p. 64.
The child is allowed "to explore" the instrument and is then taken through a series of steps. In an interview that Chall had with Moore, she quotes him as saying: "I have a set method for getting a program. The program comes from the child himself until he can be turned loose on almost any written material that interests him."

Chall mentions, however, that Moore does not stick to any set program. Rather he uses conventional basal readers and general story-books, as well as graded exercises. He believes in having the children write words and sentences along with being able to read and type them. His program also contains a speaking, listening and writing from dictation sequence.

Like Bloomfield, Moore separates the process of learning to read into set stages. Acquisition of the code or alphabetic principle comes first. Later, the stress lies in interpretation, application, and appreciation. Actually, sound-letters relations are not taught directly. Instead, the child "spells out" the words when he learns them at first as a means of reinforcement and attack.

In many ways Moore's responsive environment resembles the Montessori Method. Moore acknowledges great indebtedness to her. Both methods provide for stimulating individual needs in carefully laid out steps. Both believe in teaching the alphabet first. However, Montessori teaches the sound values of letters directly while Moore gives hints only.

\[12\text{ibid.}, \text{p. 41.}\]
In her book *Learning to Read*, Chall elicits a definition of reading. She states Moore's view by saying:

Reading was a matter of recognizing the words; meaning, appreciation, and application were part of language study. Moore says a definite distinction should be drawn between beginning and later reading. He shares these views with the linguistics proponents, and alphabet reformers. For them, beginning reading is a matter of learning to decode. Later, or mature, reading involves interpretation, application and appreciation. They believe the change from beginning to mature reading for the average child comes at the end of grade one; and at the end of second grade for the slower ones.\(^{13}\)

According to Chall, the alphabet reformers felt that children would profit earlier by using a modified alphabet since the unpredictability of English spelling makes the task of learning reading more difficult. Moore expressed the most extreme view. He stated that, "starting at six is later than necessary." Furthermore, he said many factors considered essential for success in beginning reading are really unessential. The best time to start, according to Moore, is at the age of two or three when the child is still free to explore, when learning is a "game" and when he is not upset by success or failure. The most important readiness factor for Moore is the ability to sit, speak and listen to a natural language. He is developing another procedure for the deaf.\(^{14}\)

Another factor bearing on early reading is the need for appropriate pupil-to-teacher ratio. Here Moore could be assured of success since his children are instructed individually. However, he discourages any emotional reaction on the part of his teachers (or his computer).

\(^{13}\)Ibid., p. 56.

\(^{14}\)Ibid., p. 59.
to the child's success or failure. His position or motivation varies considerably from that of other proponents. Moore contends:

The primary motivation should spring from the child's natural curiosity and desire to learn to read. The child's reward comes from his own discoveries and achievements. There is no need to entice and sugarcoat. The child wants to learn. In fact, he needs to learn as much as he needs to eat and sleep.\(^{15}\)

Chall notes that by way of contrast concerning oral and silent reading, the basal-reader and Language Experience proponents stressed silent reading. The Phonics proponents were divided. Most shared the views of the linguists; the alphabet reformers and Moore preferred oral reading. However, all agreed that silent reading would be considered the more mature and ultimate response. Moore definitely considered oral reading the major and primary response made for the beginner. Chall further states that Moore's view concerning silent reading is the following:

It should be a later development, other things being equal. We want to hook up reading with speech. If the child reads orally, you know at least he has gone over the word. If he reads silently, it is harder to test him. We can only quiz him on the content if he reads silently, and that is hard to do.\(^{16}\)

Opinions are varied concerning the major emphasis at beginning reading. Should it be on recognition or meaning of words? Moore and the Linguists feel definitely one should be stressed over the other. He also feels existing beginning materials are either "stupid, or dull, or clumsy--in fact, insipid. The reader needs more poetry, fables, and a greater intellectual challenge."\(^{17}\)

\(^{15}\)Ibid., p. 62.

\(^{16}\)Ibid., p. 64.

\(^{17}\)Ibid., p. 68.
Another point of interest is the varied opinion concerning vocabulary control. Some feel it is too rigid. Moore feels, "You have to start some place, and that is with the child's own vocabulary." 

According to Chall's book, the Linguists and Moore essentially agree on illustrations.

They felt that the pictures in most beginning books are too prominent and too colorful, that they serve no useful purpose, and that they are often distracting. However, they considered illustrations useful for picturing unknown objects. The Alphabet reformers were non-committal on this issue while the Language Experience proponents felt that illustrations were not representative of our population.

Moore favors individual instruction, but unlike other proponents who agree that each child is an individual and has different interests, he stresses the opportunity for the child to explore his environment. While Moore favors individual instruction, he is emphatically opposed to parental aid. He states, "I do my best to keep parents out of it—or more generally, 'significant others.' This is important to keep it autotelic, i.e., free of extrinsic rewards and punishments."

When asked if children are reading less well today than fifty years ago, Moore replied that he noted:

- reliable evidence is difficult to obtain, although our standards today may be lower than those held fifty years ago if we compare 'educated people' with 'educated people' . . . this may be an outcome of a larger social and cultural changes. A loss of respect for exactness and formality in all areas of modern living that may also be reflected in speech, spelling and grammar.

18 Ibid., p. 69.
19 Ibid., p. 70.
20 Ibid., p. 73.
21 Ibid., p. 74.
The acceptance of such instruments for teaching as the "Talking Typewriter" and thus their effectiveness as teaching tools, will depend upon the vision and far-sightedness of educators. It will therefore be necessary for educators to keep abreast of the latest technological developments and to make imaginative use of them especially in the case of the over-burdened teacher.
The Denver Plan

To read or not to read in kindergarten? This has been the question posed by many in recent years. Abramson states that from Denver comes solid evidence that early reading arguments are more myth than meaningful. He discusses the Denver school system which began early reading instruction in the fall of 1968 to all kindergarten children. After six years of study and research he further quotes Brzeinski, director of research services in the Denver schools: "We found that the harmful effects that always had been predicted for early reading don't occur—not when conditions are right." Abramson feels that those who are opposed to early reading will find many reasons for not supporting the idea of early reading. However, a sound program with good materials, dedicated project staff, willing teachers to work on the project, and a study group large enough to include various abilities should support early reading. One school official put it this way: "That's the beauty of it. We found that the average can benefit from early reading—not just the select few."

The Denver experiment was the first early reading study by an urban school system on a city-wide basis. Started in 1960, it embraced a group of 4,000 students of the city's 9,000 kindergartens. Others following the traditional kindergarten curriculum acted as the control group.

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22Paul Abramson, "To Read or Not to Read in Kindergarten?", The Grade Teacher, (May, June, 1968), p. 154.
23Ibid., p. 154.
Abramson quotes Brzeinski: "Traditional kindergarten programs are based on what adults think children can do. In our experiment, we were out to learn what five-year-olds really can do if they're not hampered by limitations set by adults. As it turned out, it was a lot more than anyone had expected." Kindergarteners involved in the experimental program were taught skills designed to lead them to independent reading. Harrison and McKee, two nationally known reading authorities, prepared materials to be used. Their program included identifying letters of the alphabet, unlocking words on the basis of beginning word sounds, and using context clues to determine unfamiliar words in print. Very little emphasis was placed on sight vocabulary. Abramson quotes McKee: "A child who depends on memorized words cannot develop as an independent reader. What can he do, after all, when he comes across a new word in a book, and there's no teacher around to tell him what it is? A child should read on his own as soon as possible, and it's the teacher's job to provide him with the skills he needs to do it."  

The experimental group was instructed in seven types of reading over and above the normal kindergarten curriculum which the controlled group followed. This instruction consisted of the following activities:

1. **Spoken Context** - From sentence or short paragraphs read or spoken by the teacher, (Johnny drank his ...........)

2. **Initial Consonant Sounds** - The children gained awareness of beginning consonant sounds by manipulating objects. (ball - b)

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24 Ibid., p. 154.

25 Ibid., p. 154.
3. **Forms of Letters** - They learned to recognize capital and small letters by matching and naming them in games.

4. **Context and Initial Consonant Sounds** - Context clues from sentences or paragraphs and beginning consonant sounds were used to supply the correct missing word. (Tom wants to cut a board in half. He needs a tool that begins with the same sound as sit and sat.)

5. **Sounds and Forms of Letters** - The forms of letters were related to the sounds they make by grouping pictures of objects according to the beginning letters of their names, rearranging incorrectly placed picture cards in their proper groups, and so on.

6. **Context and Displayed Initial Letters** - Viewed initial letter forms were used to figure out the missing word in a sentence or a paragraph. (C + ap = cap in the sentence, "He wore a -ap.")

7. **Context and Displayed Word** - The teacher read or spoke a sentence or paragraph in which the word omitted was the only one that would make sense.

The regular reading program was similar to those programs suggested in the teacher's manuals of most basal texts.

The final results of a six-year study reported by McKee and Brzeinski (1966) have now come to the fore. They indicate a high degree of success with an experimental program in which "beginning reading" was introduced. This was followed by an "adjusted program" in Grades One through Five designed to maintain and enhance the gains made

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as a result of their kindergarten experience. With the current concern for developing better readers, this critique may cause a great deal of stir and excitement. Mood, in her critique of the Denver Plan, feels that "it is unfortunate that much of that excitement will have been generated by findings based on a weak research foundation." 27

Briefly, the findings of McKee and Brzeinski in their study conducted in Denver, Colorado, from 1960-1966, according to Mood, are as follows:

They reported that beginning reading could be taught in the kindergarten with success; that gains made in kindergarten could be maintained through Grade Five with a program using appropriate materials and an accelerated pace compared to the regular program; that gains made in reading tended to be accompanied by gains made in some other academic areas; that introducing the experimental program did not increase the incidence of certain physical or emotional disabilities; that gains made in kindergarten could not be maintained if not followed by an 'adjusted,' accelerated program; and that greater achievement was made by students who started the experimental program in the first grade than those who were in the regular programs in Grade One through Five, regardless of the nature of their kindergarten experience. The results, as impressive as they seem, however, must be considered with extreme caution. 28

Mood stresses the idea that in any experimental research, the results are only as meaningful as that research allows them to be. She feels this is an area which few teachers or school administrators are able to deal with effectively. In fact, in this critique she feels "average educators would be apt to miss McKee's and Brzeinski's violations of the most basic rules of good research design and good research


28 Ibid., p. 399.
reporting. For it must be remembered if a comparison of an experimental and control group are to take place the two groups are to be held constant, except for the variable being examined which is manipulated in the experimental group and not in the control group.

Hood further states: "In the kindergarten program of the Denver study under consideration, at least two variables were manipulated without any means of separating their effects. The two variables were: (a) the method, and (b) the materials."^30

Considering the two groups and the superior achievement of the experimental group, some wonder about the contributing factors of success. Are the results attributable to the well-planned experimental materials? "If this were not so, why would the authors confound and confuse the results of their research by using materials other than those already used by the Denver Public Schools?"^31

Still a third interpretation could be made; namely, that the results are due to a combination of method and material. Again, this is impossible to determine since the research design used does not allow the experimenters to separate the effects of the method from the effects of the materials. Finally, it should be noted that the test used to measure kindergarten achievement was also developed by McKee and Harrison. Thus, the superior performance of the children in the experimental group may have resulted from their having an appropriate "response set" because of previous learning, according to Hood.

^29 Ibid., p. 400.
^30 Ibid., p. 400.
^31 Ibid., p. 401.
Consideration should be given to the factor of random sampling in the Denver Plan. From the description available, the original selection of the group seems to have met the criteria of randomness. A loss of subjects in any longitudinal study would be expected. However, in the Denver study, a higher attrition rate was anticipated in the experimental group which therefore began the study with 1,250 subjects, compared with 750 subjects in the control group. At the conclusion of the study, these had dropped, representing a 35% loss in the experimental group and a 70% loss in the control group. The difference in attrition rates is highly significant statistically. The questions that arise are these:

1. Why was a higher attrition rate expected in the experimental groups?

2. Why was the observed attrition rate so much higher in the control group?

3. What were the relative rates of loss of subjects from year to year?

4. Was any attempt made to examine the data on subjects who dropped out to determine the possible existence of some common factors which might bias the results of the study? 32

The investigators fail to deal with these questions, leaving the research-wise reader to wonder whether the groups of subjects who completed the study could actually be considered random samples. There also exists a possibility of the "Hawthorne" effect accounting for the findings. The authors suggested that steps were taken to minimize these effects.

32 Ibid., p. 401.
According to Mood, those attempting to evaluate the Denver study which is incomplete and misleading, would find this very frustrating. She regards the material in the McKee and Brzeinski report as careless and extremely difficult to interpret. The description of children "being allowed to progress at their own speed" appears to be individualized reading. She poses several questions: "Did the children move through the series in groups? Or total classes? The list of important questions this study leaves unanswered is alarming."\(^{33}\)

In summary, the poor research design and reporting of McKee and Brzeinski study, according to Mood, exemplifies "a situation which occurs too frequently in the field of educational research. This is unfortunate, indeed, because conscientious professional educators are groping for methods to meet the challenges of modern education."\(^{34}\)

Another author, Wann, had this to say of the Denver Plan:

First, while I admire the flexibility demonstrated by researchers in their suggestions to teachers in the program, several aspects of the program call for critical examination. I am concerned at their recommendations that the pupils who could learn little, if anything should be excused. Certainly children must be free of pressures to participate beyond their ability, but to excuse them and not help them move into other carefully defined language learnings that they apparently need suggests that the program is too narrowly defined to serve the entire range of learners at the kindergarten level.\(^{35}\)

Apparently, the designers of the program assumed that all kindergarten children had enough experience in listening and talking skills...

\(^{33}\)Ibid., p. 402.

\(^{34}\)Ibid., p. 402.

to build a spoken vocabulary adequate to enable them to begin converting it into a reading vocabulary. This did not prove to be true in Denver nor realistically in other areas. 36

In conclusion, the question as to whether children should be taught to read or not to read in kindergarten still remains at an experimental stage. Research so far indicates this can be done. Educators can stimulate growth by providing opportunities which will encourage reading.

CHAPTER IV

READING READINESS TESTS: THEIR VALIDITY AS PREDICTORS OF SUCCESS IN EARLY READING

Importance of Early Success in Reading

The teaching of reading has always been the main concern of most primary programs. Because each first-grade entrant is unique unto himself, the teacher is presented with a mosaic of personality problems and individual differences.\(^1\) In order to meet the various problems and differences the keystone for a preventive program is provided by the reading readiness program. How well a child learns to read in the primary grades affects much of his future school achievement. Frederick emphasizes this thought by stating: "I believe that reading is living: not a substitute for what we usually call real experience . . . but a part of life itself. On a purely arithmetical basis, reading forms a larger part of our living, in terms of our lifetime investment of time and effort, than most of us realize."\(^2\)

The reading act is a highly rewarding but complex process. The child who is learning to read may experience a great deal of anxiety, and the effects of failure can indeed be catastrophic. This inability

\(^1\)Emmett Albert Betts, Foundations of Reading Instruction (Boston: American Book Company, 1954), p. 112.

to achieve in school may cause feelings of inadequacy and a negative self-concept, which may lead to even lower levels of achievement and possible serious emotional problems. 3

Necessity of Readiness

Many of the difficulties that beset children are due to a lack of readiness for reading or school in general when they enter first grade. But how does one go about assessing a child’s readiness to read? Clearly, many factors influence readiness. Research reporters have not definitely established a compilation of specific factors, yet the following factors are in agreement:

1. Intelligence Factor - This is perhaps the most important single factor in readiness. Most authors contend that the lower the I.Q. (other factors being equal), the slower the child will learn. On the other hand, the higher the I.Q., the more rapidly the learning process becomes. Deutsch, in his book The Disadvantaged Child, emphasizes this greatly and stresses the need to foster environment for children which can facilitate intellectual development. 4

2. Physical Fitness - Obviously, children in good physical condition have already achieved a degree of readiness. Therefore, health often dictates the individual’s whole outlook on life. Another facet in the life of physical fitness is sex differences in readiness. It is a known fact that girls tend to reach maturity sooner than boys and
often excel them in reading. Betts makes the following observations regarding sex differences:

1. There is some evidence to the effect that girls are promoted on lower standards of achievement than boys are.

2. Girls use reading activities for recreation more often than boys do.

3. There is a need for more reading materials to challenge the interests of boys.5

3. **Social and Emotional Factors** - One of the chief goals of education is social adjustment; hence, one of the primary factors to be considered in readiness for reading is social adjustment. Betts states: "Desirable adjustment is reflected in self-confidence, persistence, ability to concentrate attention on the task at hand, desirable school attitudes and general emotional stability."6

4. **Experiential Background** - This factor of background of experience is a potent factor in reading at all levels. Betts states that in a study conducted by Hilliard and Troxell concerning background experiences (all factors being equal), children with rich backgrounds are more strongly equipped to attack the reading process than those who have had meager backgrounds of experiences: "Research has discovered that one of the greatest difficulties encountered in reading is due to a lack of understanding of words and ideas."7

5. **Listening Comprehension** - Accurate auditory discrimination contributes to good speech habits, awareness of speech sounds and

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5Betts, op. cit., p. 137.

6Ibid., p. 117.

7Ibid., p. 126.
facility of language usage for communication. Tinker states that listening comprehension is better or equal to reading comprehension. Smith emphasizes this by stating: "The child learns to listen before he learns to speak. In fact, it is through listening that speech is learned. Some authorities attribute reading disabilities in many cases to poor listening ability."  

Group Tests: Strengths and Weaknesses  

Obviously, many factors influence readiness for any given child in a practical situation. Problems immediately arise when attempts are made to assess reading readiness such as environmental factors and the time element. Educators are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of the former and their effect upon readiness. Because of the time element it is not possible to evaluate all first grade-entrants on all factors that influence readiness. Thus, the teacher is forced to rely on group test measures.  

Group tests are less time-consuming and require less specialized training, but they, too, pose problems. Group testing with preschool children or beginning first grade is difficult and should be restricted to a small group of ten or fewer depending on the type of test. Children of this age group have difficulty concentrating on a test or any other activity for more than fifteen or twenty minutes in one sitting.

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Most important of all, many preschool tests, group or individualized, are not adequate in reliability and validity.\textsuperscript{10}

Despite the problems and limitations, Panther conducted a study to investigate the validity of various tests predicting reading readiness of first graders. The tests were chosen for their ease in administering, wide usage and brevity. Another purpose of the study was to demonstrate the possibility of using few short tests to develop readiness norms upon entrance in a specific school. Details will be discussed in a further study. Suffice it to say Panther suggests that an assessment of reading readiness of entering first graders is of value only to the extent that the results are used to help each child function in a successful beginning in school. A combination of test scores to assess readiness should not be rejected, but Panther's study did not support the use of more than a single score.\textsuperscript{11}

\textbf{The Content of Readiness Tests}

One would presume to find a high degree of agreement in the content of the most commonly used standardized readiness tests. An examination of eight tests, however did not fulfill this expectation. With two exceptions there was little agreement among the tests in terms of content. Barrett indicates that investigations have been concerned with identifying factors that have both been indicative of reading readiness and predictively related to first grade reading achievement. He further states that one factor that apparently possesses both these

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{10}Panther, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 45
\item \textsuperscript{11}Ibid., p. 45
\end{itemize}
characteristics is visual discrimination in general and the specific factor of visual discrimination of words. However, from this point there is an ever lessening agreement in the components. Surprisingly, the general factor of auditory discrimination was not included on some readiness tests. In fact, three of them failed to include a single subtest that could be classified in this area. The following tables include an analysis of the content of readiness tests (Table 1) with specific attention on Table 2 to the content of eight commonly used readiness tests.

Three specific factors appear to deserve careful attention. The first such factor is visual discrimination and experiences with the printed materials. Barrett provides the results of investigations conducted by Smith, Wilson, and Gavel supporting their positions that reading readiness tasks require visual discriminations of letters and thus serve as the best predictors on first-grade reading achievement. Gavel underscores this same idea by correlating test results in relation to significant findings performed on tests administered in


13 Barrett, op. cit., p. 276-282.

14 Wila Banton Smith, "Matching Ability as a Factor in First-Grade Reading," Journal of Educational Psychology, XIX (Nov. 1928), pp. 560-571.

15 Frank T. Wilson, "Early Achievement in Reading," Elementary School Journal, XXXII (April, 1942), pp. 609-615.

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September--February and later on in June. On the other hand, Barrett points out that a study by Gates, Bond and Russell,\textsuperscript{17} and Gates\textsuperscript{18} indicate visual discrimination of words as the most valuable predictor of first grade reading achievement when compared to other visual discrimination tasks. However, Barrett concluded that it was not entirely clear which type of visual discrimination task provided the most adequate basis for predicting achievement, but felt other factors which were not included in his study merited investigation.\textsuperscript{19} (e.g. language facility, auditory discrimination story sense and sex.)

Auditory discrimination of beginning sounds in words is another specific factor which appears to possess useful diagnostic and predictive qualities.

**Studies on Specific Readiness Tests**

Gates.--One of the more widely used paper-and-pencil tests of readiness is the Gates Reading Readiness Test. Standardized in 1942, this test is comprised of five sub-tests: Picture Directions, Word Matching, Word Card Matching, Rhyming, Letters and Numbers. The scores on these sub-tests are combined to yield a total readiness score. According to the author of the test, the average coefficient of correlation between the results on this test and results on standardized


\textsuperscript{19}Barrett, *op. cit.*, p. 276.
reading test is about .76. Silberberg and others conducted a study on this test. In this study the Gates Readiness Test was correlated with the Bond-Clymer-Hoyt Developmental Reading Test--Lower Primary Level. The latter was given at the end of the first grade. The correlation coefficient between the results appeared to be approximately .76. Silberberg made an interesting observation, namely, that the Gates' sub-test on Letters and Numbers alone was nearly as efficient as all of the five sub-tests scores used in predicting the end of the first grade reading scores. This result is not entirely unexpected since in this section the child orally reads capital letters, lower-case letters, and numbers. In theory, this is closer in content to the actual reading process. Silberberg further states that for a quick test, only the Letters and Numbers sub-test need to be administered and probably without significant loss of information. While the preceding raises questions concerning the usefulness of administering the other four sub-tests consideration of the standard error will in turn raise serious questions about the predictive validity of even the Letters and Numbers sub-test.

Lee-Clark.--A study by Panther reveals that there is a high correlation between the Lee-Clark Reading Readiness Test when given at the beginning of first grade and actual reading achievement. Panther

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21 Ibid., p. 214.

22 Ibid., p. 217.
discusses the results of a variety of tests and the correlation between the results of each, and concludes that the possibility of using a combination of test scores to assess reading readiness should not be rejected. However, his study did not support the use of more than one test score. 23

Dobson and Hopkins also studied the reliability and predictive validity of the Lee-Clark Readiness Test. Predictive validities of the test in this study were determined sequentially depending upon grade level. Multiple criteria of teachers' rankings and individual reading tests were factors checked on for grades one through four, together with group reading, vocabulary and comprehension tests for grades three and four. 24

The validity coefficients were moderate to low (as compared to "high" in the study above) decreasing generally with each successive grade. This would indicate that score difference on the readiness test at the beginning of grade one means little in terms of lasting individual differences. 25

Metropolitan and Harrison-Stroud.--Bagford conducted an investi-


cerning the later success in reading and its relationship with reading readiness scores. The correlation was derived from the use of the Metropolitan Readiness Tests and the Harrison-Stroud Reading Readiness


25Ibid., pp. 279-280.
Profile and was correlated in a longitudinal study with the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (grades four, five and six.) Within the limitations of the study the data seem to warrant the following conclusions:

1. Reading readiness test scores are significantly related to later success in reading. Students who score well on reading readiness tests in kindergarten and first grade tend to score well on reading achievement tests in grades four, five, and six.

2. Reading readiness test scores are as related to later success in reading as they are with early success. The data suggest that the relationships between readiness tests scores and measures of early success in reading do not decrease significantly as children progress through school.²⁶

Bagford further stated that he feels predictive correlation is to be considered insufficient for individual prediction, but points out another usage of readiness tests by stating:

Although correlations between reading readiness test scores and measures of early reading success have not typically been high enough to predict individual reading success, there have been relationships which were useful for either prediction or indications of instructional needs.²⁷

Karlin conducted a study to re-examine the desirability of the practice of using readiness tests almost exclusively to measure a child's readiness and concluded that it was "virtually impossible to predict from a readiness test score how well any child in the sample will do on the reading test."²⁸


²⁷Ibid., p. 328.

The finding of his study clearly indicate a need for better understanding of what present reading-readiness test measure, as well as, a need for developing instruments which schools can use to evaluate the readiness levels that have been achieved by their pupils. Additional research may produce readiness tests which are more useful than existing ones for the purpose of prediction.29

Elbert concurs with his opinion that measurements of readiness should not be condemned on the basis of "few" negative evaluations of their usefulness. Rather, the negative findings should challenge the reading experts to produce measurement devices which will improve the extent of the child's readiness.30

29Ibid., p. 322.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY

Since the National First Grade Study was launched in 1964, the emphasis in reading research has centered on beginning reading instruction programs. "Current emphasis is on preventing reading failure rather than correction of reading difficulty."¹ Stress is being put on programs for improving prereading skills as a beginning reading program. Educators have increasingly become aware of the lack of readiness in children who come to school with inadequate language backgrounds. Today's curriculum requires greater speaking, listening and understanding abilities than the schools of thirty years ago. With the new demands in science, math, linguistic approaches and the changing ways of living, both socially and economically both the student and the teacher must keep abreast of the times. How well the child survives depends on his background and readiness as well as on the skill of his teacher.²

Throughout the world, there appears to be an increasing interest in methods by which reading is taught. The press reflects this concern

¹Walter J. McHugh, "Language and Reading Readiness," Do You Read Me? Different Approaches to Reading Instruction, (California: Bay Region Instructional Television For Education, 1968), p. 185.

²Ibid.
by frequently reporting on various programs. King compares one system of teaching early reading to another system which delays the reading act until the child is older as in Russia, Sweden and Denmark and concludes that the question is not can it be taught but rather when should it be taught. She feels that young children need to be protected from two extremes in the teaching of reading: an excessive pressure to learn to read which ignores the child's level of development, and a lack of knowledge or sensitivity for the "right" moment to begin in order to prevent wasted time. She further states that the total reading program should not be organized so rigidly as to delay children who have either already learned how to read or to deny the opportunity to those who are ready upon entrance. By the same token, children requiring specific needs, physically, or due to a lack of readiness must be allowed to progress at their own learning rates. This preparation should be viewed as a prevention of reading problems. She stresses the need for initial experiences in learning to read to be rewarding and enjoyable for the child.3

DeHart expresses the same thought by stating that our society demands that children learn to read, whether it be at the age of three or ten. She believes that before the child learns to read the following skills should first be developed: gross and fine motor control, eye-hand coordination, directionality, ability to perceive a figure in space, ability to organize a temporal-spatial relationship, ability to

differentiate characteristics of letters and classify common characteristics of words, ability to understand concepts presented in a book, a well developed auditory discrimination and a general ability to focus attention upon the task at hand. DeHart finds much complexity and interrelatedness in these skills.  

Hillman believes that there is a great need for all kindergarten parents to express to their children enthusiasm for all learning experiences in kindergarten, instead of placing emphasis on reading. 

Eggener on the other hand, discourages early reading at an early age. She emphatically states that some of the disadvantages of teaching reading early can quickly intensify emotional pressures and destroy the favorable self-image of children who haven't acquired the skill of reading. It could also impair their chance for future learning and worse yet, destroy a life-long love of reading. 

Although educators generally agree that reading instruction should not begin before children are ready, they do not completely agree as to the best method of fostering readiness. A few believe that readiness for reading is an individual matter which will result from maturation. Many more however, are of the opinion that the prereading period should be planned to teach specific skills. Evidence is

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accumulating that readiness for reading can be promoted by the implementation of a good prereading program. Through research, a beginning has been made in identifying certain skills which will facilitate learning to read and other factors which are of little value.

In conclusion the author presented an overview of the advantages and disadvantages, and methods related to the teaching of informal reading to the very young. It was hoped that the present paper would encourage others to attempt a similar study.7

7King, op. cit., p. 552.
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