



Reading Materials for Adults with Limited Reading Experience*

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Few remember that to learn to read and write is one of the great victories in life.¹

Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis*

The pleasure which I derived from reading had long been a necessity, and in the *act* of reading, that marvelous collaboration between the writer's artful vision and the reader's sense of life, I had become acquainted with other possible selves—freer, more courageous and ingenuous and, during the course of the narrative at least, even wise.²

Ellison, *Shadow and Act*

MILLIONS OF ADULTS with limited reading interests, abilities and experience live in the metropolitan and rural areas of the United States. They are to be found most frequently among the poor, disadvantaged, and undereducated population. Not all adults in this population are illiterate or ill-educated, but such circumstances increase the likelihood that they will be.

What an adult reads and how much he reads are influenced by his attitudes toward reading, reading skills, interests and needs, motivations and education, and anticipated rewards. The content of the materials, its values and subjects, reading level, organization, format, and treatment are other major influences.

The purpose of this article is to report findings from the research literature about adult literacy and adult reading materials for adults with

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limited reading experience, to define the dimensions of the problem, and to identify new concepts and trends in library programs in this area of adult service. The review of the literature which follows includes research primarily from the fields of librarianship, adult education, reading, and literacy, and from evaluative studies of library adult reading improvement programs. The sociological research on disadvantaged adults contains important information pertinent to this area of library adult service. This research can be noted only briefly because of its extent. Although a significant world literacy program exists, the literature surveyed is that concerned with the United States. For the most part the research reviewed is confined to the last two decades. Implications of the findings are interpreted primarily in relation to public library service. The discussion includes first the definition of literacy, its problem and purpose, followed by a review of response and solutions by adult educational and public library agencies based on adult literacy and library studies.

Research that focuses directly on the current multifaceted problem of reading materials for adults who are in the process of becoming more mature critical readers and on the role and responsibilities of libraries in materials service is at a beginning stage. Information frequently has been gained through trial and error in experimental programs that have had limited successes and bitter failures.

What is literacy? What is illiteracy? The answers vary depending primarily on the framework within which the definition is established, the geographic location, the period in history, the United States census definition, and the literacy requirements for achievement. A quarter of a century of work by the Laubachs resulted in experience and knowledge unexampled. Their great pioneer effort reached into ninety-six countries. They pioneered the way in writing for "new literates" and prepared lessons in 274 languages. They have had, not only priority, but dominance in the field. Their knowledge has been depended upon by everyone interested in the world literacy problem.³

After World War II, leadership moved to the United Nations which operates a world literacy program through the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). UNESCO assists nations in achieving basic literacy for their population. UNESCO defines a person as literate "when he has acquired the essential knowledge and skills which enable him to engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning in his group and community, and whose attainments in reading, writing, and arithmetic

make it possible for him to continue to use those skills toward his own and the community's development."⁴

The usual grade school equivalent for judging literacy has been the completion of the fourth or fifth grade level. This standard has been used by UNESCO, the United States Bureau of the Census, and the United States Army. "Functionally illiterate adults are defined as those who have not completed the first four elementary grades or first four years of school. For practical purposes, a 'literate' person is one who, according to the Census or other qualified agency, *can* read and write at the fourth grade level, an 'illiterate' person is one who *cannot*."⁵

After half a century of development, reading is conceived as a complex activity and has been defined by Gray as having five dimensions: perception of words, a clear grasp of meaning or comprehension, thoughtful reaction, assimilation or integration, and flexible rates of reading.⁶

Based on the assumption that literacy is "a necessary commodity," Harman defines literacy as encompassing three stages: the conceptualization of literacy as a tool; literacy attainment, the learning of reading and writing skills; and the practical application of these skills in activities meaningful to the learner.⁷

Robinson on his "stairway of reading literacy" (see above, page 319) places adults who are able to read at grade levels one through four, only one step beyond complete illiteracy. They are "barely able to contend" with the adult reading materials available. They often regress to complete illiteracy because of lack of use and practice.

They move from this low level literacy to partial literacy when they are able to read at grade levels five through six, sometimes said to be the reading level of the general public. At this point they are able to read essential information for daily living and working at low levels. Rapid progress is possible where there is help for those who are capable. Regression takes place when opportunities for extensive reading are not available. And finally, complete literacy or the highest reading level is attained when one reads critically and with understanding.⁸

Another problem arises. Functional literacy when measured by grade level is not equivalent with achievement. Hilliard reports a study, done in 1962, to determine literacy levels of welfare recipients sixteen years of age and over in the Woodlawn area of the city of Chicago, Illinois. It was found that when the average achievement levels for each reported grade completed were compared, at no grade did the average achievement measure up to the reported grade. Indications were that

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not until the completion of the thirteenth grade did scores show functional literacy.

In the total sample of 680 persons, there were 6.6 percent who completed less than five years of schooling (functional illiterates according to grade placement); 19 percent who completed the fifth, sixth, or seventh grade; 16.5 percent who graduated from elementary school but went no further; 44.9 percent who started school but did not graduate; 11.6 percent who completed high school but went no further; 1.0 percent who went to college for one or more years; and two recipients who attended ungraded schools. The average educational level equaled 8.8 years.

The actual achievement levels were quite different. These achievement levels as indicated by their test scores showed that 50.7 percent of the sample had achieved less than five completed school years and thus were functionally illiterate. There were 42.2 percent who scored over 6.0 but less than the maximum of 10.0 on the test, and 6.5 percent who scored the maximum, indicating that they had completed the learning of the fundamentals of reading. The average achievement equaled a score of 5.9.

As the age of the recipients increased, the educational and achievement levels decreased. As the age at leaving school increased, the educational and achievement levels also increased. This literacy gap between educational background and reading ability, which Hilliard characterized as the blackboard curtain, showed a massive undereducated population.⁹

A similar study of the East St. Louis area resulted in similar findings. Of the recipients of public aid who were tested, 58.5 percent were unable to read at the fifth grade level, although 82.1 percent had completed the fifth grade.¹⁰ Final conclusions drawn from both studies were that undereducation is a basic cause of dependency in this automated age, and grade level cannot be used to predict socio-economic functioning level. Such functional illiteracy prevents any vocational retraining.

In the past the population of the United States was thought to be highly literate with limited reading abilities being confined to the immigrants who came to the shores of the United States. With their own cultures suppressed and submerged, they were assimilated as naturalized citizens. While they or their children learned, they supplied manpower for the many unskilled jobs. Some learned in Americanization classes, used public libraries for self-education, and moved upward and outward from the ghetto. The public schools and the public libraries

were the agencies in which the entire population would be educated. Literacy was both the result of education and the method for achieving further educational goals. Illiteracy, it was thought, was a problem only in other countries. It was assumed that the Laubachs with their far-flung literacy program, the "each one teach one" way, would bring literacy to the rest of the world.

A steady decline in illiteracy was recorded by the United States Census Bureau based on statistics of persons who could not read or write in any language.¹¹ Beginning in 1940 statistics were gathered by the Census Bureau with years of schooling used to estimate the extent of literacy or illiteracy. The 1960 census continued to collect data on years of schooling of persons twenty-five years old and over, and indicated that over 3 million persons were illiterate.

Figures from the 1970 census and the Office of Education show the number of persons unable to read and write in any language has decreased in the nation by 50 percent since the 1960 census. Southern totals dropped by only 25 percent, leaving twelve states with 950,000 completely illiterate persons. Another million are barely able to contend with written words. Like other parts of the country, especially in the northern cities, the illiterate include young and old, most of them poor. All ethnic groups are represented. They are scattered from the Rio Grande Valley to Appalachia, and from California to Maine.¹²

The proponents of the 1966 Adult Education Act established that over 23 million adult men and women in the United States had not completed eighth grade and 11 million of these had less than a sixth grade education. The Census Bureau estimates that by 1980 there will be more than 5 million persons twenty-five years and over with less than five years of schooling, and over 21 million with less than eight years. In spite of attempts to eradicate illiteracy, by 1985 there will be more than 800,000 persons twenty-five years and over with no schooling, over 3.5 million with less than five years of schooling, and over 10 million with less than eight years.¹³ Laubach, in "A Study of Communications to Adults of Limited Reading Ability," estimates the dimensions of the problem to be contained in one statistic—that 8.3 million men and women in the United States, twenty-five years of age and over, have less than a fifth grade education. The population in this age group totals approximately 100 million.¹⁴

In late 1969 when James E. Allen, Jr., was the United States Commissioner of Education, he conceived of the right to read program to solve contemporary literacy problems. Allen pointed out at the time

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that one out of every four students nationwide had significant reading deficiencies. About half the unemployed youths, ages sixteen to twenty-one were functionally illiterate. Three-quarters of the juvenile offenders in New York City were retarded two or more years in reading. Functional illiteracy raises a barrier to success that for many young adults produces the misery of a life marked by poverty, unemployment, alienation, and, in many cases, crime.

Special groups that make up this population can be identified both in urban and rural areas. Reading materials service to satisfy these groups' needs and interests are a unique contribution libraries can make. The majority of these readers come from the disadvantaged population, have low incomes, limited education, and little reading experience. These groups include the rural immigrants to the city, the migrant population, the minority ethnic groups, American Indians, ghetto youth, blacks, Chicanos and Puerto Ricans.

Today an individual must be at an eighth grade literacy level to be considered functionally literate. Many adults lapse into illiteracy because they drop out of school or because they have no reading materials suited to their needs or reading skills. Many become disillusioned and are apathetic about continuing their reading.

The application of the amplified definition and broadened concept of functional literacy increases the total number of readers who are considered to have inadequate reading abilities. The implications for librarians as well as teachers are clear. These readers require special materials and guidance, not only in the first stage of learning and acquiring skills, but until a degree of independence is reached. The broader concept of what constitutes functional literacy is the basis for the definition of the adult new reader in the investigation currently underway at the University of Wisconsin at Madison Library School. For the purposes of this research study the adult new reader is identified as follows: he is sixteen years of age or over, his native language is English or he is learning English as a second language, his formal education has not extended beyond the eleventh grade, and his reading level is at least at the eighth grade level.

Closely allied with the concept of literacy and reading is the purpose for reading. The attainment of skill is only a first step. Gray envisions the full attainment of the reading skills and abilities as leading to greater understanding of issues, solutions to problems and development of richer lives.¹⁵ Literacy is viewed by Paulo Freire as a medium for the freedom of man.¹⁶ The common conception exists that the literacy

process is the only educational method, is the source of spiritual and aesthetic enlightenment, and is the way to job placement and security.

Postman finds a basic assumption to be that "educational practices are profoundly political" and promote "certain modes of thinking and behavior." He proceeds in his iconoclastic analysis to assert that all activity of reading teachers is rooted in political bias, "for to teach reading, or even to promote vigorously the teaching of reading, is to take a definite political position on how people should behave and on what they ought to value."¹⁷ He says that teachers promote the reading process as an essential skill. They believe that reading is neutral, prepares for vocations, opens minds to wonders, and is a pleasure. Postman believes otherwise. He thinks that reading is promoted for purposes of creating good consumers and obedient citizens, and perpetuating political and historical myths. In comparison with the electronic media, it is obsolete and reactionary, perpetuates ideas, and brainwashes minority groups. He proposes that the school ought to "be problem-centered, *and* future-centered, *and* change-centered; and, as such, would be an instrument of cultural and political radicalism."¹⁸

Much of what Postman says about reading teachers applies in many ways to librarians, and both need to find answers to the following questions: What is reading for? What motives are behind its promotion? How does it relate to helping adults achieve multi-media literacy? What are the goals to be? Should perhaps multi-media literacy be the goal sought with the aid of the new technology? Roberts in his article in this issue advocates this approach. Bloss's view of the library as a change agent reflects a similar philosophy.¹⁹ The distinction is made more and more often between being able to read and being literate. O'Neil sees the only proper literacy as that which "extend[s] a man's control over his life and environment and allow[s] him to continue to deal rationally and in words with his life and decisions."²⁰

Would many persons be better off if it were socially acceptable for large numbers not to read? Goodman suggests that "conceivably, *more people might become genuinely literate if it were understood that reading is a useful art with a proper subject matter, imagination and truth—not 'communication' of top down decisions and bad norms.*"²¹

Once the functionally illiterate adult has mastered the skills of literacy, he must develop the habit of the regular use of the printed word if the objectives of the literacy program are to be fulfilled. Bridging the gap between minimal literacy skills and the reading habit is essential

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if the adult is to obtain, from the content of printed materials, the ideas and knowledge useful in his daily life.

A major obstacle to teaching and providing reading guidance to the adult who is developing his reading skills and habits is finding appropriate and interesting materials related to the new reader's interests and needs. Publishers are only beginning to produce special materials suitable to the interests of various groups. Uncertainty exists about what is needed and the extent of that need. Teachers, reading specialists, and librarians find difficulty in selecting materials because appropriate materials have not been identified in abundance. The development of adult basic education and job-training programs has increased the need for materials. These adult readers are a heterogeneous group composed of smaller, more homogeneous groups whose orientations to daily life, to reading, and to libraries differ significantly enough to require different materials within different contexts of use.²²

The sociological and anthropological studies during the 1950s and 1960s contain significant information and concepts on poverty, the disadvantaged, and cultural deprivation. Their relation to library literacy programs and understanding of problems of materials for adults with limited reading abilities is evident in three discussions of the literature by Dalzell,²³ McCrossan,²⁴ and Stoffle.²⁵

Social scientists and social agencies have had a somewhat obsessive concern with poverty in the United States since Harrington's *Other America* resulted in national attention to the Americans who are often invisible, suffering, and ignored. Dalzell compares and contrasts the "landmark works" of the 1960s. While relating their ideas and opinions to the library's philosophy of service, she concludes that the role of the library depends on the local situation. On the whole libraries lack precedent, preparation, and materials to do the job. The most baffling problem is the dearth of materials, particularly for beginning readers.

McCrossan reviews research on reading of Americans in the lower socio-economic group, i.e., "culturally disadvantaged" because of non-existent or limited economic, educational, and social opportunities in comparison with the average citizen. He concludes that the research provides no conclusive answers to causal relationships between economic-social conditions of the disadvantaged and reading and library use. He found some evidence that they are less skilled readers, but that studies clearly show a large portion of our population, adults of low socio-economic status, make relatively little or no use of books and li-

braries. He concludes that the library profession needs to know more about readers who deviate from norms and reader interests, needs to provide individual reading guidance, and needs to expend great effort to achieve successful service.

In recognition of certain aspects of the problem, adult basic education and job-training programs have been developed. The programs have been oriented toward economic goals of increasing employment skills, placement in jobs, and decreasing welfare aid. Major federal legislation during the 1960s provided general basic education, vocational training, and job placement through the following acts: Manpower Development and Training Act of 1962, amended 1963 and 1965; Vocational Act of 1963; Economic Opportunity Act, 1964, Title II B and Title V; Work Experience Program, 1965; National Science Foundation Act, 1963; Area Rehabilitation Act of 1961; Higher Education Act of 1963; Library Services and Construction Act, 1964; and Adult Education Act of 1966.

The purpose of the Adult Education Act of 1966 was to develop and expand basic educational programs for adults eighteen years of age and over. Amended in 1970, it was expanded to include all adults sixteen years of age and over who were below the college level of education. Adult basic education was defined as education for adults whose inability to speak, read, or write the English language constitutes a substantial impairment of their ability to get or retain employment commensurate with their real ability.²⁶ In 1969 adult basic education programs had a total of 484,626 students. Among 442,604, 30 percent were in beginning (1-3) grade level; 36 percent, intermediate (4-6); and 34 percent, advanced (7-8).²⁷ These three groups indicate potential users of a wide range of library materials.

With the advent of two world wars and subsequent conflicts, the problem of adult reading was further highlighted when the rejection of thousands of young men because of illiteracy or limited reading abilities stimulated the special training programs for men in the armed forces.²⁸ Remedial literacy programs were instituted which were successful within limited military purposes and conditions. In 1966, the Department of Defense revised the entrance standards for the military to accept men previously disqualified. The "New Standards" program for men, known as Project One Hundred Thousand, had among various objectives those of improving literacy, and competency in reading, arithmetic, and social studies. The inadequacy of the equation of reading level with grade level was reconfirmed when the median reading

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ability by grade level was shown to be three to four grade levels below the mean level of school grades completed. Most men entering Project One Hundred Thousand upgraded their reading ability from the fourth grade to the sixth grade level. Eighty percent or more completed the course in a period of three to eight weeks.²⁹

The concept of reading readiness—that to learn to read can be used at any age—was demonstrated in World War II U.S. Army literacy programs. It no longer can be assumed that all reading abilities are ready to be tapped at the age of six. Many servicemen failed to read until a readiness program was instituted.³⁰

One of the most significant findings in much of the research reveals the importance of using meaningful subject matter in teaching the beginning adult new reader. Six major studies which are concerned with the native-born population indicate that materials for the adults have definite significant characteristics, e.g., U.S. Army studies,²⁸ Wayne County Basic Adult Education Program,³¹ Norfolk State College Project,³² Missouri Adult Vocational-Literacy Materials Development Project,³³ and the Buffalo Study of Adult City Core Illiterates.³⁴

A valuable analysis of each study and a review of other relevant investigations are presented by Brown and Newman in the article, "Research in Adult Literacy."³⁵ All the studies were in general agreement that appropriate content for the adult population is imperative. All too frequently materials are inappropriate both in vocabulary and content. Utilitarian practical interests or subject areas to which adults relate strongly, e.g., vocations, family, community, self-improvement, are necessary. Modern content, recent knowledge and concepts, and adult and vocationally oriented materials are essential.

Brown and Newman found in their Buffalo study that it was necessary and desirable to develop supplementary materials both from an interest standpoint and from the need of extending the materials horizontally for the slower members of the group. Subjects of particular interest to adult-city core illiterates included: Langston Hughes's poetry, hints on careful buying, information about better jobs, selected readings from the Bible, biographical sketches, and topics of sociological interest. Readers were not interested generally in childish fantasy, humor, and animal-type stories, nor adult stories about sports, adventure, or travel. A positive relationship seemed to exist between preference for certain book titles and reading gain. The high achieving group tended to read more sophisticated materials than the low achieving group and showed greater interest in science, travel, sociological and

utilitarian topics. The use of relevant adult materials combining good format with content which meet the expressed needs are essential.

Berke, whose study preceded Brown and Newman's, found a disproportionate majority of illiterate adults among the black population because of complex causes of cultural discrimination, particularly in education. He found specific goals to be an important motivator. Reading preferences indicated a strong rejection of children's stories and "Dick and Jane" types of materials.³⁶

Strong evidence was shown for the importance of using materials specially developed for adults and the limitations imposed by inappropriate materials in the 1965 research study on basic adult education programs conducted by the University of Detroit—Center for Continuing Education.

The Norfolk State College Experiment, a pioneer and pilot study in the training of hard-core unemployed, unskilled workers, is a success story with far-reaching effects. The levels of competence in basic language and number skills of the trainees fall into several categories: some had never been to school or had completed less than three grades, some had less than seven years of school, and some had high levels of schooling but low levels of competence. The upgrading of adult literacy often suffers from lack of motivation on the part of adults. Upgrading of technical skill levels of adults suffers from lack of adult literacy. These two problems were solved by the training pattern which meshed technical and general education training. The general education core consisted of the language arts, number skills, occupational information, and human relations coupled with assistance on daily family problems. The gain in reading ability for the men classified as functional illiterates was raised an average of 1.87 years. Some made gains of three years during the six months of training. "The crowning point of the Norfolk State experiment was the rising sense of dignity and worth in the men."³⁷

The importance of appropriate reading selections and reading guidance is stressed by many researchers. Certainly no area presents more significant potential for library services than this area of service to readers improving and expanding their skills and interests. The adult literacy studies in Buffalo (New York), Missouri, Wayne County (Michigan), and Cook County (Illinois), found handicaps of inappropriate materials to be insurmountable. In the earlier study of the U.S. Army literacy program, Goldberg recommended that any civilian adult literacy program have a follow-up system even if only to forward reading ma-

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materials to insure graduates with some continuous stimulation to use their newly acquired skills.³⁸ Accessibility and availability of materials coupled with plentiful opportunities for practice are essential ingredients of a complete literacy program. The evaluators of the Chicago literacy program raised other pertinent questions about the need for readily available reference and supplementary reading, the inadvisability of using children's materials, and the inaccuracy of standard reading level tests.³⁹

Materials clearly present a continuing problem to the profession. Librarians increasingly are aware of the complexities of identifying, evaluating, and interpreting materials that will satisfy adults with varied interests and in the process of developing reading skills. The problem is documented in the first study of public library service to adult illiterates which was carried out under the auspices of the American Library Association, Adult Services Division, Committee on Reading Improvement for Adults. In field trips to fifteen cities, literacy training was observed and the role of the library in relation to the training was evaluated. MacDonald found librarians participating in many ways in the various adult educational literacy programs. The lack of effective appropriate materials was the most critical need because inferior or inappropriate materials often had to be resorted to by teachers and libraries. All too frequently juvenile materials were supplied for adults. MacDonald recommended immediate action to compile bibliographies of easy reading materials and the testing and evaluating of materials.³⁹

Several reading lists for adults beginning to read were compiled in spite of many subject area gaps, poor formats, and inadequacies. O'Brien noted other deficiencies—uneven quality, lack of materials of the kind that give pleasure and satisfaction while developing reading skills, and the dependence on juvenile materials. "The Library and Adult Literacy," a special issue of the *Wilson Library Bulletin*, brought together the knowledge and experience of many experts, including accounts on current methods of instruction and types of books suitable for use. It served as a stimulus to further developments in the public library field.⁴⁰ The reading list, "Books for Adults Beginning to Read," and a supplement was published.⁴¹

It appears that, in spite of special bibliographies and various library programs, the same problem exists six years later. Librarians still express concern, alarm, and fear in trying to develop reading collections for literacy programs and adult illiterates. The need for new materials and the failure to identify a broader range of materials persist. Many collections are being developed on principles expressed by Warren, a

literacy librarian responsible for the Dallas program of assembling demonstration collections of materials and sample collections specially tailored to needs and interests of teachers and readers. She points out, "it has been necessary . . . to order materials largely on intuition, buttressed here and there with limited experience and standard lists developed by other libraries and agencies. . . . [although] we have included a variety of other-than-standard materials in our beginning demonstration collection."⁴²

Martin analyzes the Baltimore Public Library's potential for service to economically and culturally underprivileged citizens in his study based on interviews of a sample of nearly 200 householders in the population and a review of Enoch Pratt Free Library's history of adult service.⁴³ He defines the typical disadvantaged person, whether a reader or non-reader, as one who is not born into a reading family, has a limited education, and does not participate in community institutions and activities. His study data, he concludes, confirm the fact that Baltimore residents of limited cultural and educational background do not turn easily to books and libraries, although admittedly many readers break out of this statistical pattern.

Martin further concludes that librarians should give first priority to the identification and analysis of reading materials for the disadvantaged since librarians are society's experts in reading materials. He recommends a strong program with an "opportunity library" of special materials, informational kits, and library centers. Reading programs are currently handicapped by the sparsity of suitable reading materials, the emphasis in libraries on materials of a middle class nature, and the lack of materials which combine simplicity of reading level with maturity of content.⁴³

Regardless of how the disadvantaged population is characterized, numerous studies have established that either totally or in part it is a most important segment of the population for which a library service program is required. Service to this neglected area and these persons is a key recommendation in Martin's 1969 study of the Chicago Public Library.⁴⁴ This study constitutes the major survey of every aspect of public library service to the large urban community. The research design and data collection included an unusually wide range of approaches—interviews with users and staff, extensive field work and observation, study of records of all kinds, and investigation of every aspect of the functioning library.

Martin emphasizes again and again the neglect of adults in the

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ghetto areas. The less educated among the black and white population and the young and the old must be considered. Ethnic groups are large. At the time of the study the Spanish-speaking group comprised 4 percent of the population. It is projected that the black population by 1984 will constitute 50 percent of the city, if present trends continue.⁴⁴

He concludes that materials need to be easily accessible and flexible, that it is necessary "to mobilize and intensify service" with special resources such as a center of learning materials, specialists on the staff, special publications, vans with special informational materials, and publications of utilitarian value. He further recommends a "republication office" to take resources where simplified presentations are lacking and prepare them in leaflet, folder, or pamphlet form for use in the ghetto areas.⁴⁵

Changes in society and technological advances create new demands on individuals. New social awareness, findings in sociological and reading studies, programs in adult basic education and job training, and the impetus given by support available from federal and state funds have combined to influence library service in the last decade. The response in library practice, particularly in public and school libraries, has been the creation of new programs and the extension of services for adults improving their reading skills and using reading materials. Libraries have provided three types of service: (1) the provision of materials and guidance in their use is primary; (2) a few engage in teaching or tutoring programs for illiterates; (3) and others extend or initiate services to institutions and groups, as well as individuals. Programs have flourished and disappeared. Some are absorbed into regular service and readapted. From Brooklyn to Los Angeles, Kalamazoo to Corpus Christi, in Rochester, Buffalo, St. Louis, Dallas, Northport, Oakland, Baltimore, and Philadelphia, special programs exist. A few of the major programs have had a research or evaluative component.

The Fader experiment with young men in institutional and school settings, through the fusion of program development and research evaluation in questions of teaching literacy in public schools, brought new ideas and changes. Fader's saturation and diffusion concepts succeeded where the rigid educational system failed. The focus on creating a learning situation with relevant reading throughout the curricula; with the use of newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, paperbacks; with the freedom of choice; and with access to guidance, resulted in young men reading at a level of literacy previously unapproached. Fader proved that modification of attitude toward reading and writing would lead to

changes in performance and to greater skill. He let books speak for themselves and showed that content in print media can be meaningful in the lives of young men.⁴⁶

Hiatt, in his study based on interviews with adults of eighth grade education or less at two urban branch libraries, found an important factor in the use of the public library by readers of limited education to be the continued adaptation of the materials which make the collection an integral part of services. Collections must be kept up to date and constantly matched to the needs of their changing neighborhoods. Collections must be selected with close attention to content in relation to new trends, new interests, readable books for adult students, individual selections to meet individual needs and interests, and special foreign-language materials.⁴⁷

The Reading Improvement Program, initiated at the Brooklyn Public Library in 1955 as an experimental research program, was designed to discover whether a free program to improve the reading ability of adults might be effectively carried on in a library setting with the collaboration of a local college.⁴⁸ This goal was demonstrated successfully and a manual was developed to assist librarians in carrying on the program.

The Reading Improvement Program became primarily a group developmental reading course for college graduates who were good readers mainly interested in improving reading speed and comprehension. Remedial reading groups were few because only a few of the applicants were at second or fourth grade level. Gradually more and more functional illiterates, defined as persons reading at less than the sixth grade level, were given more time individually and in groups.⁴⁹

Keller, who worked in the Reading Improvement Program from the beginning, is convinced that counseling and guidance are inseparable from remedial teaching. His accumulated knowledge about materials and readers' problems constitutes a unique contribution. He uses, in particular, workbooks, dictionaries, series of remedial readers simplified classics, Science Research Associates materials and the Initial Teaching Alphabet system. The resources of the library collection are drawn upon constantly. Keller concludes that the volume of reading is important because it exposes the reader to an endless repetition of hundreds of words, gives him practice, arouses enjoyment and appreciation of reading. He believes that nothing helps overcome the regression common to poor readers better than this type of extended reading.⁵⁰

Brooklyn's unique program, extending over a period of more than

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fifteen years with a dedicated and experienced readers' adviser, has tested an administrative pattern, and philosophy and methods of teaching applicable to more advanced readers. Its goal of demonstrating the possibility that libraries throughout the country might initiate reading improvement programs, with college or university assistance, has not resulted in other programs. It is also unclear whether the findings based chiefly on reading improvement of the more advanced reader group are common to the remedial reading group.

The Reading Center Program at the Cleveland (Ohio) Public Library served the disadvantaged population and specifically the functionally illiterate or limited reader in the Cleveland community. Three reading centers assisted 500 Clevelanders to read better and provided materials for the board of education's adult basic education classes. In the experimental library program, adults were tutored by a special library staff. Barenfeld, director of the project, in his review of it emphasizes the fact that "the functional illiterate—or, if you prefer, the limited, disadvantaged, reluctant, semi-literate, poor, or nonreader—represents no one level of attainment or nonattainment but a whole spectrum of abilities and disabilities."⁵¹ The Cleveland Public Library evaluated and tested materials and published bibliographies. Although the teaching of adults was successful, this part of the program was not continued.

In Baltimore the Enoch Pratt Free Library, in continuing its traditional patterns of service but modifying to meet other needs, built a library service component into the community action program of Baltimore. This allowed the library to reach into the most deprived areas of the city, to integrate service with community branches, and later to integrate similar service into a new reorganization plan. Paperback racks and library room collections were placed throughout the neighborhood centers. The library's most successful efforts in working with adults have been in practical ways. Easy reading materials, largely job and skill oriented, are used in cooperation with the city's adult basic education program. Books and reading must be relevant to immediate concerns. Black literature and black authors were popular.⁵²

The Neighborhood Center Program of the New Haven Public Library is based on the premise that the library has a unique service in diffusion of knowledge through materials, personnel, and methods. The experimental demonstration project explored new ways of bringing books and other media of communication to bear upon individual and community needs for increased skills in communication and life enrich-

ment. There is no trace of paternalism or doing good which is discernable in some other reports. It includes no philosophy of lifting up the masses.⁵³

The function and purpose defined for the library will be carried out and reflected in the kind of multi-media materials assembled. Bloss, director at New Haven, conceives of the library as a change agent, a community cultural center, as well as data bank and literature depository. Such an idea is powerful enough to change the type of collections traditionally found in libraries. This philosophy of community librarianship requires a belief in diffusion of knowledge and in the power of ideas. Bloss asks who is disadvantaged and suggests that possibly it is the librarians and the libraries that are disadvantaged because they fail to know what is in the communication collection.⁵⁴

Purpose and practice at New Haven have proved successful in one critical area, that is, demonstration and extended services have been continued with local support. People understand that "the centers in New Haven are not branch libraries with programs for the disadvantaged added on as something extra, but are centers for people to pursue their own interests in a reasonably free and open setting with some help from library personnel."⁵⁵

The public library programs for the disadvantaged in New York State at Buffalo, Rochester, and Syracuse are major sources for information and insights on materials for persons in the ghetto areas of cities. Clift, in his study of these programs, reports many facts about materials. The titles of the Buffalo and Erie County *Blacklists* indicate areas of interest to blacks: the origin of the Negro, mother Africa, black slavery, contributions of black people, roots of blackness in America, black power and black nationalism, plays and poems, novels and short stories. Clift recommends larger collections of paperbacks and magazines. Materials should reflect local interests and needs in subject areas on economic and vocational improvement, consumer education, health, family life, black heritage, community resources information, and foreign languages.⁵⁶

The difficulty of measuring accurately readability levels of materials and reaching achievement levels of readers has become evident. The problem becomes paramount and demands solutions as soon as further research can find the answer. A lack of reliability and validity of the present measures or formulas is recognized. Although rejected by some, at the same time widespread use is made of the formulas. A complete summary of readability research and its implications is Klare's *The Measurement of Readability*.⁵⁷

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Criteria for evaluation of reading materials are a major problem. Several attempts have been made to develop criteria both for instructional and supplementary reading materials. Otto and Ford developed a "yes or no" checklist of fifty items concerning the materials, e.g., materials have adult appearance, are programmed, present citizenship or civic responsibility content, have attractive layout design.⁵⁸

Barnes and Hendrickson established criteria for the evaluation of materials for use with individuals learning to read. Some of the criteria included: publishers' use level, standardized readability formula place, classification in terms of basic or supplementary use, format and content appeal, and special features. They found that the materials were being used in basic education programs at three levels to which they arbitrarily assigned approximate grade levels: initial instruction (grade one through three); expansion of reading skills (grades four through six); and broad development of reading skills (grades seven and over). They concluded that there is no one ideal material. Instructional materials with a high degree of adult interest are available at the same time there is great need for materials produced by teachers to fit individual needs.⁵⁹

The Library Materials Research Project at the University of Wisconsin at Madison Library School on materials for adult new readers has developed a materials analysis criteria checklist. It includes five major areas necessary to critical analysis of materials for the adult new reader:

1. bibliographic items, i.e., author, publisher, format, type of literature;
2. content analysis, i.e., roles, subject areas, and attitudes and values found in the material;
3. measurement of readability, i.e., typography, printing surfaces, special features, learning aids, language, and measurement of readability by formula;
4. appeal to readers; and
5. a quantitative evaluation, i.e., a numerical rating scale.

Publishing trends show a shift from the general reader interests to special interests. The tastemakers are no longer confined to the major and semi-major publishing firms. Special groups, particularly ethnic ones, are influencing the change. Established firms, possibly overly concerned with profits and consolidation and fearful or unknowing of new subject interests, have lost leadership.⁶⁰

A new freedom and unprecedented technological developments have made it possible for groups, even individuals, to publish easily.

Local and underground publishers are publishing books, leaflets, and newspapers. Small specialized publishing houses are emerging which represent the black population, Chicanos, and American Indians. The approaches and policies of these publishers, as well as their first publications, give hope that the desperate need for authentic ethnic materials will be met. They promise to change a situation in which they feel their cultures are misrepresented, where misinformation is customary, and where peoples are degraded. Trade publishers and librarians also are finding new authors and identifying interests that lead them to new publishing ventures.⁶¹

These wider sources of materials and potential readers will furnish new materials and bring new users to library programs. Librarians in turn must find new criteria for analysis and evaluation of materials. Racism, biases, and misconceptions are perpetuated in many books. Librarians contribute to this situation through ignorance, insensitivity, and imposition of personal values. All writings must be scrutinized to assure that library collections have authentic material, and all librarians must analyze materials in detail to give honest appraisals and informed objective reading guidance.

Ironically the focus on literacy is at a time when many social scientists, librarians, and educators think that in a time of multi-electronic communication, reading belongs to another age. Supporters of reading are thought by some critics to be engaged in political activity scarcely worthy of political morality. Others look to the decade of the 1970s as one in which complete literacy will be achieved through the nationwide right to read program.

Attempts to raise the standards of literacy are complicated as the concept of literacy broadens. What does illiteracy mean? What is the purpose of reading? How can literacy enable persons to control their own self-development and gain educational and personal satisfaction?

No one in the library field seems as yet to have solved the problem of accurately appraising reading levels in materials or of matching the print material to that of readers' abilities, skills, and interests. There is recognition that literacy requires more highly developed skills, abilities, and measurement, than schooling or intuition provides. A growing literature of research and evaluation related to reading and use of materials is found in the fields of reading, linguistics, literacy, social sciences, and librarianship.

A growing segment of librarians are for the first time aware of their responsibility to persons with limited reading abilities. No longer does

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certainty exist that libraries are simply for those who come in to read or borrow print materials. At the same time there exists a continuation of historical concern that public libraries serve young people and adults with less advantages. Recognition of the need for reading materials to meet interests and needs of a population defined in a variety of ways as disadvantaged, deprived, functionally illiterate, dropouts, non-readers, and unreached will hopefully lead to improved service.

In general, changes in materials service seem to be in large urban libraries with histories of serving and reaching new groups in the community. The efforts of socially conscious, dedicated librarians have played a particularly strong role. A trend to coordinate library materials service with other programs in adult education and job training frequently results in dependency on the cooperating agencies' programs.

Certain themes run throughout the studies and social consciousness of researchers—the failure of school systems; the technological changes that eradicate skills and jobs; the direct relation between poverty, welfare, and illiteracy; the urgent need for the appropriate materials essential to effective library service; and the major problem of setting the issue within the proper perspective in a society where electronic communication is pervasive.

Although little is truly different or revolutionary, the response to everyday pressures and change has resulted in willingness to extend materials service, to find new sources of materials, to create materials, and to bring them to readers. Only an intensive effort by librarians throughout the next decade can even begin to solve the problem of reading materials for adults of limited reading abilities.

Librarians must ask for evidence of the value of materials. Are they what they purport to be? Will libraries stock the unknown, the revolutionary, the different, the ethnic materials, the materials to span the range of reading interests at all reading levels? The philosophical commitments, the assumptions and concepts librarians accept will determine the nature of their reading collections. The future promises to libraries and librarians the opportunity of enabling adults to become mature independent users of print in a way that truly satisfies their interests and needs.

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