



Research Related to Children's Interests and to Developmental Values of Reading

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BOTH ASPECTS of the topic to be discussed are considered very important by every writer in the field of reading. A great deal of research has been published dealing with children's reading interests, but much of it has been severely criticized, primarily because of the methods of investigation. A limited amount of research has been focused on developmental values. In this area, many researchers have recognized the limitations of techniques for investigation. In general, the topics of children's reading interests and developmental values embrace the affective aspects of reading and are subject to all of the methodological problems recognized in psychological and sociological studies of children.

In the study of reading, terms such as interest are often used differently by various investigators. Such differences frequently lead to confusion and failure in accurate communication.¹ At the outset, then, these terms are defined or described as they are used in the remainder of this paper.

Getzels has defined an interest as "a characteristic disposition, organized through experience, which impels an individual to seek out particular objects, activities, understandings, skills, or goals for attention or acquisition."² An interest *in* reading, therefore, appears to be the disposition which impels an individual to seek opportunities and sources to read. A rigorous application of this definition would eliminate almost all studies reported to date. Consequently, a definition with greater latitude must be adopted. Reading interests of

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children will be considered to be those topics and materials which children actively choose to read.

This "active" choice is in contrast to several alternatives: a positive attitude toward the topic, an individual need or drive, or the value characteristic of the topic.

A value has been described by Kluckhohn, *et al.* as "a conception, explicit or implicit, distinctive of an individual or characteristic of a group, of the *desirables* which influences the selection from available modes, means, and ends of action."³

Brooks, who did one of the first studies dealing with developmental values of reading, used this description: "The term 'developmental value' is an element in a book which serves as an instrument of communication and supplies vicariously a wealth of experiences that may aid a reader in his choice of modes of behavior. A book has developmental value in so far as it provides stimulus situations for new patterns or as it influences and reinforces desirable valuations and attitudes of the reader."⁴ Moreover, the developmental values are related to the developmental tasks of children and youth.

The Brooks's description of developmental values places major emphasis on the attributes of books, which can be determined by content analysis, and secondary emphasis on the possibility of effects on the reader. This dual emphasis is implied by an earlier statement of the same author, set forth in a different way. She said "A developmental value is related to the term 'developmental task' . . . , the former being an attribute of the book, the latter of the reader."⁵

Since another article in this issue deals with content analysis, a survey of the research related to the effects of reading on achieving developmental tasks has been emphasized in this article.

READING INTERESTS

METHODS OF INVESTIGATION

Included among the many techniques used to identify children's reading interests have been: various types of forced choice; personal interviews; written logs, diaries, and inventories; records of library books chosen; asking for children's favorites among selections read to them; asking for reasons for choices and/or most interesting episodes or characters; and tabulating each child's favorite story as he recalls it.

The forced-choice techniques have varied from asking children to choose between two alternatives, to choose among several alternatives, or to choose among categories of materials. In addition,

quantitative aspects of interest have been found by asking that a selection be classified as interesting, fairly interesting or uninteresting. In other research reports children have been asked whether they would or would not like to read about a fictitious title or brief summary of such a title. Each of these investigative techniques has distinct limitations in application and in the ways the results can be interpreted.

When children are asked to choose among two, or even several, alternatives, it is possible that those presented are all uninteresting. Thus the results may simply reflect choices among the topics of least interest, which are subsequently reported as ones of most interest. In many research reports it is impossible to determine whether other characteristics of the stories increased or reduced interest. For example, such characteristics as length of the selection, difficulty of the concepts, proportion of conversation or description, and humor or surprise have seldom been considered.

An additional problem in attempting to synthesize the research dealing with children's interests in reading is that different investigators may have defined their interest *categories* in different ways. For example, in one study domestic animals may be classified as "animals," in another the same story might be under "humor" or "adventure," and in a third, the classification could be "science." Clearly, the element of the story—animals or humor—may account for marked differences in the findings reported. Consequently, the sum of the findings from a review of the research does not yield completely valid conclusions.

Some recent studies have attempted to eliminate some of the earlier technological problems. For example, Ford and Kopyay,⁶ using a page of action pictures, asked children who could not yet read to choose which picture they would like most or least to hear about. In this study the choice was wider, but one child's interpretation of the pictures may have differed from others. The Q-sort technique⁷ forces choices but matches each topic with all others permitting a gradation of choices. The major problem with this technique lies in the prechoice of topics by the investigator.

Monson compared two techniques to determine whether there were differences in responses to the same materials.⁸ Unstructured (writing about the funniest part) was compared with structured (true-false and multiple-choice questions) responses to humor in five excerpts from children's books. Both sex and socio-economic differences were found between the two techniques.

Inventories such as the SRA Junior Inventory and the Kuder Preference Record are examples of ways children and youth are asked to react to a number of topics. Unfortunately the ranges are far from all-inclusive. My Reading Design permits teachers or experimenters to get a quick view of areas in which reading has been done. A limitation in interpreting the design is that what is read depends upon what materials are available and the ease or difficulty of obtaining them.

A thermometer rating scale used by Clarke⁹ permitted students to check various positions between "extremely sure not to read" and "extremely sure to read." Since the study concerned newspaper and magazine reading, 109 topical categories were identified and offered to pupils for rating. Such a rating scale can be constructed to chart individual, small-group, and large-group interests in an area where the breadth of topics can be identified.

A scale to measure sophistication of reading interests in fiction was constructed by Zais.¹⁰ He used synopses of fictitious stories, equated for length, readability, and other variables. After the synopses had been rated as least, moderate, or most sophisticated, they were placed in triads with each one matched against all others at the respective levels of sophistication. From each triad, high school students chose the most interesting synopsis. In this way it was possible to rank the reading interests by topics at each of the three levels of sophistication.

An examination of the techniques just described shows that in all but one the investigator preselected the topics, pictures, stories, or synopses. The single study requiring children to select and write about a part of the story still limited pupils' responses to the five excerpts presented.

Three research techniques have not required advance structure. First, the Incomplete Sentence Projective Test is one in which pupils must supply their own answers. These sentences may be read orally by the experimenter to children who are unable to read or write their answers, according to Boning and Boning.¹¹ While this particular projective device provides insight into pupils' reading interests, it is contaminated by attitudes toward factors only indirectly related to reading.

A second unstructured procedure is diary records of what is read—a technique used much more widely with adults than with children. Wragg¹² had pupils keep diary records for one week, but the length of time can vary. In addition, the time of the year may alter the amount and type of reading done. Nevertheless, the accuracy of the records

depends upon the cooperation given by the subjects. Moreover, many children and youth do not have access to materials of primary interest to them. Consequently, conclusions reached from studies using this technique may only be that the topics recorded have sufficient interest that pupils *say* that these topics or materials were read. Library circulation records are subject to similar limitations.

A third unstructured, or partially structured, technique is personal conferences or interviews. This technique is time-consuming and dependent on the skill of the interviewer. Stanchfield¹³ used interviews to determine preferences for types of reading materials and to identify characteristics of reading interests. Her discussion of the questions asked and her procedures are vague and not very helpful to those who would replicate her study.

Harris¹⁴ suggested that teachers could talk with individual pupils about favorite games, television programs, aspirations, and adult expectations as a means of learning about their pupils' interests. In addition, he suggested watching daily behavior and choices of activities, and a "hobby club" period during which pupils exchange ideas about favorite activities.

PRESCHOOL AND PRIMARY

Few studies have been reported dealing with the reading interests of very young children. One reason for the limited number is that an unselected population is difficult to secure. Another more important reason for the dearth of studies is the instability of interests, which reduces the reliability of any type of technique. A third reason is that content must be read to children, and some young children do not choose to listen to stories read by a researcher.

It is plausible, but has never been demonstrated, that the beginning of children's reading interests are in the first stories read to them. Simsová¹⁵ described the progress of one child between the ages of 18 and 24 months as his interest in listening to what was read to him increased. The significance of illustrations and pictures was documented in detail. Pictures were unrelated to three-dimensional objects at first; later inaccurate relationships were frequently found, along with recognition of familiar objects. This child preferred large, realistic, colored pictures or photographs with minimal detail and with action. Eventually, the child attributed action to the pictures. At first, each picture was a separate entity and unrelated to the next one in the story. Gradually, the pictures became related and

the child was able to accept, and even prefer, pictures that were not entirely realistic.

The preferences for color and kind of drawing was investigated by Amsden,¹⁶ using children ages three, four, and five. Each of the sixty subjects was individually tested initially and retested a week later. The children were asked to select the preferred picture from pairs. Picture pairs were set up with differing numbers of colors; light to dark shades; and true-to-life, modified realistic, and fanciful drawings. In her study of the stability of choices over a week, the investigator found that 44.4 percent of the choices changed, and 55.6 percent remained the same. No significant differences in choices could be attributed to sex, socio-economic status, reading habits in the home, or alertness or activeness of the child. Illustrations with more colors were generally preferred to those with fewer colors, and light tints and dark shades were chosen over bright saturated colors. Five-year-old children chose realistic drawings in comparison to three-year-olds who preferred the modified realistic types. However, for the entire group, fanciful drawings were preferred significantly over modified realistic ones. The investigator pointed out that definitions of style and type of drawings were over-simplified and could be questioned. However, the design of her study was an improvement over earlier ones.

A comparison of the relative significance of illustrations and story content for kindergarten children was explored by Cappa.¹⁷ Based on responses of 2,500 children whose teachers read stories, then checked the major source of appeal, illustrations ranked first with story content a close second. Information, content, and humor ranked about equal but far below the first two sources.

The consensus is that children younger than age six generally enjoy stories read to them. Mason and Blanton¹⁸ reported that only nine of 180 children from 3 to 5 years of age said that they did not wish to hear a story read. The most popular category of their interests was fairy tales, which included *Mother Goose* as well as other popular tales. Mason and Blanton used the structured interview method, asking each child if he liked to hear a story, which ones he liked best, and which ones he would read if he could read. Second to fairy tales were animal stories including pets and others, such as penguins and frogs. The third in popularity, television characters, included Batman, Superman and Lassie.

The limited research dealing with preschool pupils' reading

interests is inconclusive and a fertile field for further study. Although kindergarten children seem to report more reliably than those who are younger, it is quite possible that interests are fleeting and do not stabilize until children can read by themselves. Moreover, it seems that illustrations have as much, or more, appeal than the content. Young children like repetition and ask to hear familiar stories again and again.¹⁹ Whether particular characteristics of stories, such as ease of understanding or the sounds of the words read, have appeal which leads to repeated requests for particular stories is not known. Perhaps in many instances the stories available are sufficiently limited that repetition is a necessity.

Primary-grade pupils' reading interests, prior to the past decade, were generally listed as: animals (real and fanciful), fairy tales, children (of other lands and at home), and nature stories.²⁰ With the advent of radio and television, stars, planets, and space began to rank high with boys,²¹ as well as history and science at an older age.²² Within the past decade, investigations²³ continue to show a strong interest in animals, make-believe, and some interest in children's activities. Byers²⁴ tape recorded beginner's sharing periods, assuming that they talked about topics of primary interest. In addition to animals, these children spoke of space and astronomy, weather, and other aspects of science. Second to living things was the category of possessions, while third place went to personal experiences. Family and friends was followed by recreational activities. Marked differences were noted in the frequency of the use of these topics by boys and girls. Poetry was disliked by boys more than by girls.

To determine the elements of poetry liked by primary-grade pupils, Nelson²⁵ had children choose, from among five poems read to them daily, the one liked best. Poems were read and choices made on three successive days. The poems liked best were characterized by action, a story line, near-nonsense humor, and children's experiences. None of those preferred were mainly descriptive. The poems liked least tended to be "talky" and descriptive. Although classroom groups differed in their choices, boys and girls were quite similar in their preferences.

The responses of 32 third-grade pupils to fifty poems were tabulated by Pittman.²⁶ Four poems were read to the pupils and each one checked the poems on a four-point scale. Animal poems with a rollicking rhythm were ranked high by most pupils.

Humorous poems and those relating experiences similar to the pupils' own were ranked high. On the other hand, poems that were sentimental, didactic, subtle, or clever were not liked. Girls responded more favorably to poems than did boys.

Earlier, Bradshaw²⁷ had secured evidence from sixty first-grade pupils to support a preference for humor in poetry. These pupils voted on sixty poems that had been read to them. Unfortunately, all humorous poems except one were about animals which raises a question as to the dominant interest factor. In addition, these pupils liked poetry related to their own experiences.

Factors considered important to children's preferences are socio-economic level, age, and ability to read. Ford and Kopyay⁶ reported a comparison of the interests of upper-middle class with Negro urban children. The latter group preferred these topics: Negro heritage, children in the ghetto, history and science, children, fantasy and animals. Yet in the choices of stories taken from basal readers on the city theme versus family-friends-pets, Emans²⁸ found the latter chosen eighty times to fifty-two of the former among inner-city children.

Age appeared to change the topics of major interest in poetry, according to an early study by Huber.²⁹ Children in grades one through nine reacted to at least twelve poems. At first grade the dominant interest appeared to be in animals and play. By fourth grade, humor and nonsense had the greatest appeal, and by fifth grade heroes appeared most liked.

Reading achievement may be related to reading interests. In general, retarded readers enjoy the topics of interests to average readers. Nevertheless, according to Geeslin and Wilson,³⁰ who studied the reading choices of eight-year-old children reading at a level equivalent to ten-to-eleven-year-old pupils, girls chose the books of their age mates. However, a larger, but not significant, proportion of boys preferred titles of books of interest to older pupils.

Examination of the references mentioned so far, as well as many others, shows considerable variation of interests within groups, and often greater variation between groups. With regard to poetry, most preschool and primary pupils appear to consider humorous poems as their first choice; poems about animals tended to be the next most popular; and then poems that carry a story line related to their own experience and with action are frequently liked.

Illustrations are of major significance before children can read

and even in the early school years. Studies of the interests of children in illustrations suggest that several colors have appeal. However, the genuine appeal of illustrations has not been analyzed to offer definitive results.

It is quite possible that ethnic and socio-economic factors influence the interests of young children. Interests appear to change as pupils are older. Less effect can be attributed to reading achievement than to age. Even in the early years there are many individual differences in reading interests. Group studies only suggest the topics which about half of the pupils prefer.

MIDDLE GRADES

Early studies of children in the age range of nine to twelve years by Terman³¹ and Washburne³² revealed that the dominant reading interests were fiction. Moreover, a divergence of reading interests of boys and girls, which began as a tendency in the later primary grades, becomes prominent during these years. Virtually all children read comic books, an interest that peaks in popularity during the middle grades.³³ Furthermore, Rudman³⁴ found that expressed interests in science, mystery, adventure, and animals did not correspond to pupils' expressed needs. Indeed they frequently turned to sources other than reading, especially for information.

In one recent investigation, Schulte³⁵ included 6,538 middle-grade pupils from four major geographic areas of the United States. Based on responses to an interest inventory of fictitious titles, girls selected realistic fiction and fanciful tales while boys chose historical fiction, history, science and health. Poetry and social studies titles were selected least often by both groups. Moreover, the investigator found a decrease in the number of interests expressed from grades four to six.

In addition to preferences, Ashley³⁶ asked for dislikes among forty topics, genres of literature, and specific titles. Mysteries were most popular and reached their peak among fifth-grade girls. Next in order of choice were categories of adventure, ghost stories, comics, and science fiction. Boys disliked love stories and those primarily for girls, while girls disliked stories about war, pirates, and westerns. The greatest number of likes and dislikes appeared at grade five.

Based on individual interviews, Stanchfield¹³ found that her sample of boys at fourth, sixth, and eighth grades expressed similar

reading preferences regardless of age or reading achievement. Of the fifty categories, she found distinct interest in "outdoor life," "explorations and expeditions," "sports and games," and "science fiction."

Fifth graders' library choices over a period of five months were recorded by Meisel and Glass.³⁷ No assignments were made in class so the investigators assumed that the books withdrawn were of particular interest to the pupils. The contents of the books were classified into forty-two separate interest areas. Boys showed a strong interest in history, geography, and biography. The first three choices of girls were classified as adventure, humor, and fantasy.

The amount and type of periodical reading in the middle grades was checked by Norvell³⁸ who found that, over thirty years, interest in periodicals had decreased. Nevertheless, the average pupil in 127 classes was acquainted with ten magazines. Boys' choices tended to be more scientific, news, and boy-oriented, while girls preferred magazines written for them. Both sexes had begun to read adult magazines and checked *National Geographic* as one of their favorites. *Life* and *Reader's Digest* were also included. At this age level, the daily newspaper had greater appeal to boys than to girls.

The newspaper reading habits of 564 pupils in the middle grades, studied by Johnson,³⁹ showed no significant sex differences. The numbers of pupils who read newspapers increased from grade four to grade six. In the total group, 24 percent reported that they were regular readers, 6 percent did not read newspapers at all, and 70 percent were irregular readers. Comics were the most popular part of the newspaper, followed by front page, sports, and the television page. The sports page was less popular with girls.

Recent studies have emphasized the reading interests of minority groups. Johns⁴⁰ used a questionnaire with fifteen forced choices among excerpts from modern realistic books of children's fiction to determine the interests of inner-city pupils. The 597 subjects, which included 515 Negroes, were from large and small cities. Five choices were offered between pairs of illustrations depicting the stark, crowded conditions of the inner-city and the uncrowded, pleasant surroundings in urban and suburban areas. Accompanying each picture was a passage from the trade book describing the setting, which was read to the pupils. These subjects significantly chose stories and illustrations depicting middle-class characters. This finding contrasts with opinions often expressed about inner-city

children needing familiar illustrations with which they can identify. Another five choices offered by Johns were between a character with a positive and one with a negative self-concept. These subjects preferred characters with positive self-concepts. The last five choices offered were between descriptions of characters in positive and negative group interactions. The former were significantly more frequently chosen.

McNinch⁴¹ explored the reading preferences of both Black and white disadvantaged pupils and in the third, fourth, and fifth grades. He used three pictures relating to each of four topics to learn if there was uniformity of preference over grades and between sexes and races. Each subject chose among the twelve pictures the one he would like most to read about. Choices continued until the last picture represented the least preferred topic. Statistical analysis showed significant differences among preferences. Wild animal stories ranked first, then fairy tales, peer and community relations representing ethnic backgrounds, and finally, general peer and community relations.

Both the reading achievement level of pupils and the readability levels of books have been related to reading interests. In England, Smith and Johnson⁴² asked twelve-year-old pupils to take their respective library-withdrawal lists and identify the three they had enjoyed most. The 37 titles read by more than ten pupils and having equally spaced popularity indexes were assessed for difficulty by applying the Flesch Reading Ease Formula. The categories of fiction chosen as most popular were: fantasy, magic and supernatural; animal stories; adventure; mystery and detective stories; family stories; and school stories. A curvilinear component of regression related the reading ease to the popularity of the books.

At sixth grade, Schnayer⁴³ found that stories rated high in interest were read with greater comprehension than were those rated low in interest. It is possible, therefore, that pupils may read materials that interest them very much even though these materials are more difficult than the pupils' reading test scores suggest as appropriate.

One study of interests in poetry at this level should be noted. Avegno⁴⁴ had 1,200 subjects in forty-eight classrooms in the middle grades listen to 250 poems over a period of ten weeks. Each day five poems were read and rated by pupils on a five-point scale. In addition, each pupil wrote his reasons for liking or disliking the poems. The main characteristics listed for poems liked by pupils

were: rhyme, musical tone, animals, everyday experiences, humor, reality, and truthfulness. The most frequently recorded reason for disliking a poem was failure to understand it. Other reasons for disliking poems were: no rhyme, no story, no action, boring, babyish, silly, not true, and repetitious.

The research dealing with reading interests at the middle-grade level shows that children have a greater variety of interests than at the primary-grade level. Pupils read books about a wide range of topics, read comics, and also read magazines and newspapers. Sex differences are generally quite pronounced. Boys tend to prefer adventure and action as well as historical and scientific topics. Girls often enjoy realistic and fanciful stories, mysteries, and humor. Both boys and girls begin to read children's magazines and many favor adult magazines by the sixth grade. The newspaper is read at times by nearly three-fourths of the middle-grade pupils. Poetry is not especially liked by most of these pupils. Nevertheless, when choices are offered, they are able to determine the characteristics which interest them most and least. The few investigations reported suggest that minority groups have interests similar to all other pupils but also may have some unique interests. Finally, at the middle-grade level, it appears that pupils' comprehension is enhanced by a strong interest in what is read.

JUNIOR AND SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

At this level, studies of the past have shown a continuing trend toward individual differentiation. At the junior high school level, many studies have shown interests in: violence and adventure, love, private life, and glamour;⁴⁵ stories with historical background, animals, teen-age and career books, how-to-do-it books, biographies, science and discovery.⁴⁶ Choices among boys were adventure, games, school life, mystery, humor, animals and male characters; choices among girls were adventure without grimness, humor, animals, love, home and family life, male and female characters.⁴⁷ Moreover, girls read adult fiction earlier than boys, although 90 percent of the reading for both was fiction. Apparently the peak of book reading occurred at grades seven and eight, while magazine and newspaper reading increased thereafter.

In a summary of investigations up to 1956, Smith⁴⁸ found that most senior high and junior college students read one or more newspapers regularly for an average of fifteen to thirty minutes per

day. The three favorite sections were the comics, the sports page, and the front page.

More recent studies such as Clarke's,⁹ using factor analysis at ninth and eleventh grade, found newspaper interests of boys to be public affairs, science, speed and violence, teen news, and sports. Pugh⁴⁹ reported that among thirteen- and fourteen-year-old students in England, 79 percent were reading comics, 74 percent magazines and 94 percent newspapers; 20 percent had read no books or only one in the past month.

In a study of the interests of 134 eighth-grade students, Vaughan⁵⁰ asked each one to choose book titles representing twelve categories and to list their top five choices. Boys ranked mystery, science, invention, history and biography, in that order. Least liked were fairy tales, novels, and poetry. In contrast, girls preferred stories of home and school, novels, mystery, fairy tales, and history in that order. Least chosen were nature, adventure, and invention. Some differences were noted between the choices of bright and dull boys. Whereas bright boys chose adventure and invention, science and history, dull boys preferred detective stories, biography and fairy tales.

In the same study Vaughan listed fourteen magazines from which students were asked to make choices. *Sports Illustrated* was ranked high by 52 percent of boys and only 6 percent of girls. A larger proportion of dull than bright boys chose comic books. The same study reported that both boys and girls expressed great interest in the comic section of the newspaper. Boys ranked the sports section second while girls preferred news and stories. Editorials were liked least by all students.

Another study of magazine choices was done at ninth grade by Adams.⁵¹ Responses to a questionnaire asking them to list their favorite magazines yielded: teen-age magazines, comics, true romance, and magazines dealing with mechanics. The author noted that a number of his respondents listed sex and sensational magazines as choices.

An unusual approach to eliciting students' interests was used by Smith and Eno.⁵² Each of 510 students in grades seven through twelve was asked to respond to this question, "If you could have an author write a story-to-order for you, what would you have him put in it?" The responses were placed in thirteen categories and tabulated by grade and sex. Action was the choice of boys, with the

largest number of choices at grades ten and eleven. Stories of the sea appeared constantly among boys throughout the levels. There was a decline in requests for sports stories and animal stories with increased grades. At all age levels girls requested stories of romance, mystery, comedy, and about careers.

In a study of 16- to 18-year-old students, Yarlotte and Harpin^{53,54} found that girls preferred romance, historical novels, and seriously themed novels. Boys chose science fiction, and action books such as sports, adventure, crime and war.

Comparisons of reading interests made by Norvell^{55,56} show that young people, even those who are bright, dislike many of the titles considered to be classics by their English teachers, and even more in recent years than in the past. Moreover, English class is liked least compared to mathematics, science and social studies in all grades from four to twelve.

At the junior and senior high school levels, students' interests have expanded to include those of adults. Indeed, the range is so wide among the studies reported, that they defy generalizations. Rough categories for boys, which include many titles, include action, sports, crime and war, historical novels and mystery. Girls' interests lie in books about people and social relationships, romance, humor, and mystery without violence.

ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY

A recent and extensive investigation covering four class levels was done in New Zealand by Elley and Tolley.⁵⁷ A questionnaire was prepared to investigate leisure activities, the types of materials preferred, the preferences within types, the most popular authors, the best book ever read, the characteristics of a book which pleases children, and related factors. After the questionnaire was pretested and revised, it was given to about 500 children at each of four levels: Standard 2, Standard 4, Form II, and Form IV. Approximately one-third of the boys and one-half of the girls were ranked as frequent readers and reading ranked higher than television viewing. Television viewing time declined with age as reading time increased. Fiction was the first choice of all groups except Standard 2 boys, and its popularity increased with age, while that of comics decreased. Interest in poetry decreased from 15 percent at primary school to 3 percent at secondary level. Concomitantly interests in magazines and newspapers increased markedly.

Fictional interests of young girls were in animal stories, fairy tales, make-believe and humor, but changed to people and their relationships as well as love and romance by Form IV level. Major interests of boys were mystery, detection, action, and excitement. Girls may read boys' novels, but boys say that they do not read girls' books. Nonfictional interests of girls were teen-age living, fashions and beauty, and animals, while boys preferred books about war, camping, hunting and fishing, history and exploration, and outdoor sports.

The study by Elley and Tolley reveals that children in New Zealand have reading interests quite similar to children in the United States. Besides, the changes with age and school levels appear to be consistent with those found in the United States.

INTERESTS IN READING

The competition of other media for the leisure time of children and youth raises the question of interest in reading at different ages, compared to interest in other activities. A number of studies have been made of the television viewing and reading habits of children and youth. An annual report was made by Witty and his associates^{58,59} from 1949 to 1965. It was based on replies to about 2,000 questionnaires from elementary and secondary students, along with interviews, "logs," and responses from parents and teachers. By 1967, reports showed that the amount of televieing had increased from an average of twelve hours per week among second-graders to twenty-four hours per week among sixth-graders, then decreased to an average of twelve hours per week in senior high school. Radio listening was reported to average four hours per week in second and third grades, eight hours in grades four to six, ten hours in grades seven and eight, and twelve hours in high school. In contrast, the amount of reading was no more than one hour daily, or one-third of the average time given to television. While 40 percent of the subjects said that television had led them to read certain books, few were recent. The time-honored favorites, except for Disney books, were generally listed. Only about 15 per cent of subjects said that radio had led them to read books and 30 percent stated that movies had stimulated their reading of certain books.

Among the more recent reports was one by Long and Henderson⁶⁰ who arranged for fifth-grade pupils to keep diary records of the use of their time for two weeks. Boys and girls

reported the following activities in this order of frequency: sleep, television viewing, free play, organized activities, homework, reading, and chores. About one-third of the subjects reported no reading during the two weeks. Whereas the average time spent viewing television was 15.1 hours per week, the average time spent in reading was 1.5 hours per week, a ratio of more than ten to one. Apparently other interests superseded interest in reading.

According to Desjardins,⁶¹ high school students secured their news firstly from television, secondly from radio, and thirdly from newspapers. The amount of time spent in reading was surpassed, by far, by the time spent viewing television.

Based on the research available, it seems that children and youth use media other than reading far more widely than they use reading. In addition, results suggest that children who read quite inadequately have less interest in reading than do others. For the most part, studies of average and superior readers have shown that children and youth who use one or more media widely also tend to spend more time reading, and it may be assumed that they are interested in reading as well as in other media.

SUMMARY

In her review of the research dealing with children's interests and story preferences, Zimet⁶² reported a change in the preferences of young children from the 1920s to the early 1950s. The research during the last decade shows little change. Zimet noted conflict in the findings depending upon the methods of investigation used and the population sample. The same comment is appropriate today. The recent studies have begun to sample different populations, but continue to use self-report procedures of varying types. The evaluation instruments continue to need refinement.

Sex differences in reading interests appear in the early primary grades and become increasingly prominent through the elementary and secondary school. Moreover, individual differences are so marked that group studies are of little value in helping teachers meet the needs of a particular class. Individual interests may be related to many factors, only a few of which have been explored. In addition to age, sex, reading achievement, intelligence, and socio-economic level, other factors needing further study are the amount and type of materials read to children at home and at school, the proximity and availability of materials, and the values placed on reading.

DEVELOPMENTAL VALUES OF READING

Throughout history, reading has been valued, but for differing purposes. Smith⁶³ found evidence that the contents of children's books has reflected the values of society in the United States since the hornbook was imported from England during the latter part of the seventeenth century. The changing content of children's readers throughout the years add support to the notion that reading was believed to have an important influence on children's developing attitudes and behaviors.

In the first half of this century, the child development movement placed increased emphasis on the personal development of the child, both as an individual and as a member of society. Moreover, schools were increasingly charged with the responsibility of meeting the needs of all children. Getzels explored the schools' role in relation to values and wrote: "Growing up successfully involves the acquisition of a satisfactory set of values to live by and attaining a stable self-identity. This cannot be left to chance or to time alone; it takes some doing on the child's part and on society's part . . . The child learns, on the one hand, to suppress or to modify certain of his drives. He learns, on the other hand, to acquire certain culturally adaptive attitudes and values. Indeed, one of the functions of the school is to help him do just this."⁶⁴ Getzels believes that the basic mechanism for internalizing values is identification. Among the models with which a child might identify were fictional characters. Consequently, when the reading interests of boys during the junior and senior high school years are in stories with vigorous action such as are found in comic books, it is possible that boys are identifying with the leading characters. At least it is possible to hypothesize that reading is serving as a substitute for desires, impulses, and needs which the reader is unable to act out. Similar hypotheses can be stated relative to the interests of adolescent girls in stories of romance.

One of the most widely accepted lists of developmental tasks was proposed by Havighurst.⁶⁵ Developmental tasks were considered to be personal and social needs at successive age levels which must be met to help the child become a happy, well-adjusted member of society.

RESEARCH TECHNIQUES

The most common investigative procedure has been content

analysis. Aspects of content most frequently examined are illustrations, themes, settings, characters, and the way the author treats the value he wishes to depict (directly or indirectly). Content analysis of children's readers or books are often done by inspection. More careful studies have relied on a jury of competent persons or have developed an instrument in which greater confidence can be placed.⁶⁶

The importance of recognizing that the material offers an opportunity to identify with a character or solve a problem cannot be underestimated. Nevertheless, what children themselves learn from a given selection may be an individual matter, depending upon their needs and problems at any given time.

Dependable techniques for determining the effects of reading upon children are not well developed at present. In part the problem lies in the multiplicity of factors that may impinge on behavior or attitude change. The family, school, peers, and other mass media may have a strong or weak impact during a particular experiment. Indeed, pupils may be unaware of their particular needs, or if they are aware, verbalizing needs may or may not be accomplished.

Reading a single selection may have little impact on the child while cumulative effects from reading many selections may have greater impact upon the child. The literature is replete with individual testimony concerning the values of particular books to individuals, either immediately after reading or as recalled by older students and adults. Moreover, in discussions of what has been read, pupils may voice alternative solutions to a problem or mention a change in attitude, but subsequent behavior may be unaffected.

The serious limitations of the research techniques related to values of reading, which are present in other aspects of the sociology of reading, may account for the limited number of studies in this area. Moreover, the values obtained from reading are akin to the effects of reading a particular selection, or the cumulative effects of several selections. Research dealing with the conditions under which adult attitudes are modified by reading has increased markedly in recent years. However, adult studies have been eliminated from the remainder of this report.

One of the early studies of college students has important implications for research techniques. Waples, *et al.*,⁶⁷ identified five categories for determining the effects of reading. Three of them

have direct implications for this paper: *instrumental*—the use of information to assist in the solution of a personal or practical problem; *reinforcement*—stimulating views already accepted; and *prestige*—identification with a prestige group to increase self-esteem.

Prior to considering the values of reading it is useful to explore some of the developmental tasks which have been considered in research dealing with reading. In general the values have included personal, social, and to a lesser extent, occupational.

The developmental tasks at various age levels were set forth most clearly by Havighurst.⁶⁵ McGuire⁶⁸ used these tasks to devise developmental values to be found in children's books and then she identified books containing the values she considered useful in helping children to accomplish developmental tasks. Daniel,⁶⁹ Donze,⁷⁰ and Worley⁷¹ investigated five tasks: (1) dependence-independence, (2) conscience and morality, (3) pattern of affection, (4) psycho-social-sex role, and (5) relating with social groups. These studies are essentially content analyses of various materials. Depending upon the care with which the instruments to identify values were developed and implemented, the studies make different contributions to understanding the values. However, they do not focus on the effects of reading, but only on the values in the materials available for children who read them. Daniels, for example, identified a total of 387 developmental situations in the forty-five basal reader stories that he analyzed. Of these, he found that the majority could be classified as dependence-independence and psycho-social-sex roles. In each study, the investigators have assumed that the reader would identify the same values as reported, and that the reader would be affected by them; otherwise, analysis of content would not be important.

Frequently mentioned and studied is the task of understanding one's self and developing a positive self-concept, both as an individual and as a successful reader. Ten moral and spiritual values were identified by Walker.⁷² Seven social values were explored by Chambers.⁶⁶ Interpersonal relations as they changed in juvenile trade books was the focus of Homze's study.⁷³ These three studies dealt with content analysis.

Moral and ethical values in Newbery Medal Award books from 1922 through 1966 were rated on a continuum for intensity by Lowry.⁷⁴

Bibliotherapy is based on the premise that reading is a factor in promoting mental and emotional health, both to solve personal problems and to achieve developmental tasks. The emphasis in this research has been on individual problems of all types, usually of more than expected severity.

RESEARCH

Few people would disagree with "conventional wisdom" concerning the values of reading in changing pupils' attitudes and behavior. Most of the literature includes opinions concerning the effects of reading on children's subsequent behavior. The few investigations available are reviewed in this section of the paper.

Teachers have been asked to recall the effects of their childhood reading. Russell⁷⁵ found that the teachers he studied recalled 15 different effects. One of the common effects was identification with characters. Earlier, Lind⁷⁶ had found that college students recalled reading as an organizing influence on personality.

A psychoanalytic study of young children and books led Peller⁷⁷ to state that a child's daydream can be nurtured by encountering it in stories. As a rule a single scene or a character carries great emotional significance. Such childhood concerns as loss of mother, reversal of roles, and hero tales often have animal counterparts as static characters in stories. Because these tales avoid two major dichotomies of male versus female and young versus old, children can focus on the remainder of the story with safety. Thus the stories read to children or read early by them may have a strong influence on "ideal self" or "ego ideal" of the child and he may live much of his life under the spell of the story.

Worley⁷¹ attempted to determine whether children are aware of developmental task situations in stories and to establish pupils' reactions to them. He asked an adult jury of seven to select situations in two basal readers appropriate to his fifth- and sixth-grade subjects. Twelve stories were identified and presented to 1,500 pupils, each of whom was asked to describe something in the story he liked. The stories were ranked according to their occurrence in subjects' written descriptions and according to the presence of developmental tasks in the materials. A coefficient of correlation between the two ranks at fifth grade was .81; at sixth grade it was .84. The results suggest that middle-grade children describe task situations and are interested in stories in proportion to the tasks present in them.

If attitude toward ethnic groups is considered to be one of the aspects of social adjustment, the study by Fisher⁷⁸ of the use of reading and discussion to change attitudes is pertinent. He used fifteen fifth-grade classes from different socio-economic levels as subjects. Two classes from each level were assigned to each of three treatments. One group read the six selections about American Indians; a second group read, then carried on discussions; and a third group neither read nor discussed the issues. A constructed attitude scale was administered to all three groups before and after the reading assignments. The attitudes of the two groups that read the selections changed significantly while that of the control group did not; and the reading-and-discussion group changed more than the group that only read the selections. Whether the attitude change was temporary or sustained, and whether the change helped in actual adjustment to this minority group was not established.

To help eighth-grade students overcome their ethnocentric orientations and become sensitive to other cultural groups and their values, Taba⁷⁹ used fiction plus an open-ended discussion of each story. A diagnosis of the pupils' problems and concerns was made from their diaries and other writings. Books were chosen to reflect the same or similar problems where the context and experiences were different. The discussion included analysis of fictional characters' problems and behavior and a comparison with those of the reader. Special emphasis was placed on the solution of the problem in the selection and alternative solutions. At the end of a year, Taba reported that this technique had extended sensitivity to human values, and that the discussions had affected the life of the peer group. The means of arriving at these conclusions have been questioned, yet there are indications of the developmental values of reading plus discussion.

At the high school level, Mechel⁸⁰ reported many examples of positive identifications with characters in novels on family life based on vividness of students' memories. However, he reported that identifications were repressed sometimes when the character exhibited "unaccepted" personality traits.

An extensive study was made in 1945 and replicated in 1968 by Lorang.⁸¹ Questionnaires were used with 2,308 students in the first study and with 3,216 in the second. She asked students to identify books and magazines that they considered to have had a good or bad effect on them. The number of books mentioned per student

increased 1,400 percent and the number of magazines 288 percent from the first to the second study. The books and magazines listed by students were sent to a panel of adult judges who rated as many as 31 percent unfit for these students to read. Lorang reported a positive correlation between the kind of book and kind of effect. The responses showed that 86 percent said that books had aroused their emotions; 53 percent had tried to imitate a character; and 42 percent did something because they had read about it in a book. After analyzing all of the data, Lorang concluded that a good book or magazine usually had a good effect and that a bad one had a bad effect. This qualitative statement was supported by direct quotations from students.

Squire⁸² chose four short stories designed to aid personal development, then studied the responses of fourteen- to sixteen-year-old students. At least two types of student self-involvement were identified although individual differences in responses to the same story were clearly evident. By far the greatest number of the 14,000 responses, however, were classified as interpretation and literary or prescriptive judgments.

Among the expressed developmental concerns of adolescents are problems dealing with physical development, personal appearance, self-confidence, and an acceptable set of values. These concerns have been identified in various studies, including some on reading interests. Rudman,³⁴ Johnson and Shores,⁸³ and Shores⁸⁴ developed multidimensional models to obtain information on reading interests. In each study, subjects were asked what they read about and what their informational interests were. Rudman found that pupils in grades four through eight wanted to find out about ethics, values, religion, personal problems, and relations with peers. Johnson and Shores used subjects in junior high school while Shores obtained data from a questionnaire submitted to high school students. The subjects in both studies stated that they wanted information about personal and social adjustment, vocational choices, and moral and ethical values. The findings of these three studies revealed marked differences between the stated reading interests and the informational needs of subjects in their sample populations.

Several interpretations of the foregoing findings may be suggested. One possibility is that reading alone is not sufficient for young people to solve the problems they face as they mature. It is also possible that the selections students can locate do not answer

their questions adequately. Perhaps the tasks that students face are so demanding that they need abundant sources of information about possible solutions. Perhaps reading must be supplemented by other forms of communication when problems of vital concern to young people are encountered. A major research problem is to determine which of the foregoing hypotheses account for the differences expressed by students between what they claim as their interests and as their needs for information.

Bibliotherapy, according to Cianciolo,⁸⁵ requires at least three steps: identification, catharsis, and insight. These steps are not accomplished by just reading a good book. Instead, the teacher or therapist must guide discussion to be sure that the reader understands the characters and their behavior, to help the reader see consequences of behavior, and to assist the reader in seeing and choosing among alternatives. She gathered data through the use of focused interviews, story projective techniques, and by using sociometric techniques. She found that books alone did not effect change but they might contribute to change. Moreover, she discovered that different socio-economic and cultural groups responded to different values in selections. Finally, she concluded that responses depended upon current needs of the child which effected his receptivity.

In the classroom, Bone⁸⁶ found bibliotherapy had few immediate effects. He felt that it was worthwhile only when topics chosen were appropriate to all children or when personal attention could be given to a particular child's unique problems. He pointed out that changes in behavior often did not occur immediately, but that latent changes could result from bibliotherapy.

Matters⁸⁷ used individual and group bibliotherapy, written compositions, a problem box, sociometric devices, books written by pupils, and the Bloomer Identification Figure Test. The subjects were members of a sixth-grade class in which books were used to help pupils face and solve problems as they arose between January and June of a school year. Another sixth-grade class served as a control group. The problems children had were reported to revolve around developmental tasks and basic needs. Children's oral and written statements about the books they had read and written and the Bloomer test supported the hypothesis that bibliotherapy had been effective. However, no changes were found on the California Test of Personality. The conclusion was reached that books with high

interest helped children most. Among the problems identified were those with classmates, which the author expected this class to handle better because of vicarious experiences in books.

SUMMARY

Research dealing with developmental values of reading is sparse. The studies reported here are only marginally related to the central effects of reading. Teachers and librarians continue to operate on the logic and conventional wisdom of these values of reading, but empirical evidence neither supports nor refutes the basic values. Valiant attempts are being made to develop techniques which will permit some valid conclusions, but to date results are far from comprehensive or conclusive.

One promising approach to determining whether the values children see in a given selection match those seen by experienced adults and by the authors was reported by Carmichael.⁸⁸ Although only eight fifth- and sixth-grade pupils and four experts in children's literature were used for four social values, it would be possible to apply the technique more widely. The innovation in technique was translation of adult value statements into language understandable to the children, after which the tentative agreements became remarkably high.

If the pupils' perceptions of values in selections can be assured, techniques must be devised to determine not only changes in children's stated attitudes, but behavioral changes which follow reading. Otherwise the true effects of literature on the developing child may continue to be based on speculation.

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