



Introduction

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IN THE SPRING of 1973 the University of Illinois Graduate School of Library Science had planned a three-day institute at Allerton Park on "Research in the Fields of Reading and Communication" to bring together three professional groups—librarians, research specialists, and trade publishers. Due to unavoidable circumstances, the institute had to be cancelled. The papers planned for the program, however, were prepared and now make up this issue of *Library Trends*. Three papers were not submitted, so the areas of media communication, new approaches to readability research, and new trends in content analysis are not represented as had been originally planned.

Research studies in the various fields of reading and communication have broad implications for all ages of readers and consumers of the mass media and print. Such studies have been carried on in the United States since before 1900 and have added much to our knowledge of the reading process itself, e.g., the factors that make for readability, the effects of reading and mass communication upon the consumer of print or media, and the part that interests play in the reading and communication process of children and adults. The historical and sociological impact of print in America is also of great significance today.

Publishers of books for children, youth and adults, as well as librarians working with all age groups in school, public and university libraries need to be aware of what research can tell us about library patrons, about purchases of books, and about listeners and viewers of the mass media. What people really want to read, view or listen to may vary considerably from what they are able to secure in books or through the air or screen. How we can produce better what the consumer of media needs, how we get the product to the consumer in

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our bookstores, and how we can give better service to the patron in our libraries is of great significance. Knowledge of what research tells us can help us to be more relevant in our programs of service and in producing better books and mass media.

The articles in this issue of *Library Trends* focus attention upon the implications of new research and trends in the psychology of the reading process, reading interests of children, the developmental values of reading, content analysis of children's books, adult reading studies, the adult new reader, and the implications of research for the publishing world.

The results of ongoing research about the reading process are detailed for us in the work of William R. Powell. Discussed are: (1) the psychological process of learning to read, which include the developmental stages of awareness that symbols convey a language message; (2) that the spoken language of the learner must be more mature than the level of the reading assignment; and (3) that reading is more than a coding and decoding function and is one of comprehension and assimilation if reading is to have meaning. These factors are of real import and have exciting possibilities for teachers, parents, and school librarians. Much of the material in Powell's article is not found elsewhere.

A critical evaluation of methods of research related to reading interests of children is carefully detailed by Helen M. Robinson. A comprehensive discussion of trends of research in reading interests for the preschool, the primary, and the middle grades, as well as for the junior and senior high school levels, are presented in sufficient detail to be of real value to teachers, librarians, and publishers. Research studies relating to reading interests of the middle class, of minority groups, and of children in other parts of the world also give insights of value. Paucity of studies dealing with interests *in* reading and in studies reflecting the developmental values of reading, as well as the techniques of research methodology in these areas, provides an awareness of the difficulty of doing this type of research. Bibliographical sources given should prove of value to the student in this field.

Closely related to reading interests of children is research in the area of content analysis of children's books. Tekla Bekkedal summarizes the limited amount of research that has been done in this field. She groups the studies into three subject areas, namely, stories relating to human relations as found in books; values and cultural content; and the

portrayal of specific racial and ethnic groups in books. Her own study analyzing contemporary realistic fiction for children is summarized, as well as suggestions for further research.

Newer facets of historical research analyzing the impact of ideas and beliefs on the behavior of the American colonists during the American Revolution from 1763 to 1776 is discussed by Michael H. Harris. His own research and theories relating to the communicator, the audience, the channel, and the effect of the communication pose a new approach to historical interpretation. The detailed, annotated bibliography should prove of value to the student of history.

Moving from the past to the modern scene, research studies of adult reading in the United States and Western Europe are well analyzed by Virginia H. Mathews. Similarities of the findings of studies over a twenty-five year period and implications for librarians and publishers are presented in a realistic and hard-hitting manner. References to comparative studies of market research in Europe and in the United States are discussed and the research role of the publishing field is considered. Various programs of library service to the disadvantaged adult are reported and evaluated in terms of reader needs that relate to immediate problems of life; they explain why reading can have a real impact upon people. The Mathews's article portrays a real belief in the value of reading and suggests a role that librarians, publishers, and the government should play in cooperative endeavors for further research.

Related to the Mathews's report is the analysis of recent research dealing with reading and the adult new reader by Helen Huguenor Lyman. Facts and figures relating to functional literacy and illiteracy are presented as well as the essence of the Library Materials Research Project that developed criteria for evaluating reading materials for this large segment of our population. The relation of life coping skills and reading materials is analyzed in terms of library programs, services, and staff involvement.

Use of reading research studies by trade, educational and textbook publishers and their roles in marketing research studies is explored by Carol A. Nemeyer. Costs of research proposals that have real relevance for the publishing trade are expensive and the general results are seen as of doubtful value to them. Selling books in libraries, book ordering procedures, multimedia packages of educational materials, and multilingualism as viewed by the publisher are seen in economic terms and in terms of financial risks. National Assessment, a project of the

Educational Commission of the States, concerned with the educational achievements of young Americans is discussed in terms of the value of the findings for publishers. Activities and concerns of publishers are cited and their views on the value of reading research for them is presented realistically. Trade publishers, in particular, want to be free from intentional influence from reading specialists in order to provide a refreshing variety of books, instead of providing books to fill a special need.

The inter-relationship of the educator, the librarian, and the publisher are discussed by M. Ann Heidbreder in her article dealing with the question: What research is needed in the fields of reading and communication? The fact that much of the research in the fields of reading is fragmented, is concerned with small groups, and with reading problems, limits its value for trade publishers who are more interested in areas of independent study and leisure reading. Synthesizing results of reading research that has been done is seen as a real need for educators and publishers alike so that generalizations and interpretations can be made on a sounder basis than is true at present. Accessibility studies, motivations for reading, and reader tastes are also discussed in terms of what we still need to know about a market for a particular book, who should conduct research studies, what are the cost factors analyzed. Marketing and reader information is needed by the publisher and a simple form for securing this information is given. The nature and size of the education and library markets is not fully known by publishers, yet hard data on this topic would be of mutual concern and benefit to each group. How to fund such a study is the unsolved problem.

It is hoped that these summaries and implications of research studies in a few of the fields of reading will have real value to many readers. Insights, answers, and understandings can be found through a systematic study of research findings. Many of the recent studies are reinforcing the findings of the past. At the same time newer problems are being analyzed and answers sought, with more relevant interpretations being given. Much research in this field of reading has been done; much that has been done is meaningful today, but more coordinated and cooperative projects are needed if real insights are to be gained. With coordinated research, it would be hoped that the time lag between finding the answers through research and making use of the findings would be greatly shortened for the benefit of everyone.