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RESEARCH AND TRENDS
IN
BEGINNING READING

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by
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After World War II the American public criticized and challenged its educators and the public school system. Criticism was aimed at the teaching of reading and focalized on beginning reading instruction. Presently there are continuing pressures from rural and urban deprived areas to provide equal educational opportunities for all children. Since 1960 more attention is being paid to reading research and its recommendations. Technology and private enterprise are entering the educational scene and trying to provide assistance.

Three research studies of this decade are examined to find out the implications of each for the beginning phase of reading instruction. The second intent is to explore recent trends to see what is happening in view of this research.

The Harvard report was the work of Mary Austin, Coleman Morrison and their associates. One of the recommendations of this report is the improvement of teacher education in this country. Also it is the feeling of the authors that the criterion used for kindergarten admission and the time to begin reading need to be re-evaluated and not be based on chronological age. It is recommended that any beginning reading methods used should serve the

capability and needs of individual children.

Many educators from all parts of the country took part in the United States first-grade studies. This research was supported by a federal grant under the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965. The conclusions of this study show that a child's intelligence, his knowledge of the alphabet, and his ability in auditory and visual discrimination are the best predictors of success in beginning reading. Of all the reading methods studied no one method proved to be superior, but a combination proved best. As a result it is advocated that systematic word study skills be taught along with any program. Also the coordinators of the research suggest that future research be concerned with teacher characteristics and learning situations rather than methods of instruction.

Jeanne Chall reviewed reading research undertaken from 1910 to 1965. After analyzing and evaluating these studies she disagreed with the deductions and conclusions made by the researchers generally. She believes that the research was commonly interpreted to coincide with popular educational ideas of the period in which they were written. After visiting many classrooms and observing many reading methods, Chall feels that the emphasis in beginning instruction should be on decoding the printed word. Furthermore she urges that the strict vocabulary controls at the beginning level be relaxed. Chall advocates more research

on the content of children's books and the workbook materials that accompany the reading programs.

The emphasis in the studies is on meeting the needs of each child and providing a good program for teaching word study skills at the beginning level of instruction. Federal grants have been awarded to three universities to investigate computerized reading programs with self-directed and self-correctional materials. Many electronic devices, already in use in the classroom, are helping the teacher to provide independent work with drill and reinforcement activities. The use of paraprofessionals is relieving the teacher from non-instructional duties. Pupil-tutors and innovative ways of grouping are providing better utilization of a teacher's time and skills.

There is a need for research on how to detect potential reading failures and what course of action to take before these children reach the upper primary grades. Reading specialists are needed at the initial stage of reading to help with prevention instead of a cure. The aim should be to give a child the feeling of success in reading regardless of his rate of progress.