Reading readiness: Definitions and assessment circa 1950 and 1980

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Abstract
This review proposes to discover how educators defined reading readiness and what they recommended relative to the cognitive skills assessment of reading readiness in 1950 and 1980. A second purpose is to discover if standardized assessment devices reflect the definitions and recommendations. There is an ever increasing need to know what cognitive skills a child should be equipped with before learning to read. Today's society has increased pressure for academic achievement of elementary children. This pressure has resulted in early introduction of formal reading instruction in first grade and much attention to the reading readiness program in kindergarten (Hoffman & Fillmer, 1979).
READING READINESS: DEFINITIONS AND
ASSESSMENT CIRCA 1950 AND 1980

A Research Paper
Submitted to
The Department of Curriculum and Instruction
In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Education

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

by
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August 1984
This Research Paper by: Sharon Rae Erwin

Entitled: READING READINESS: DEFINITIONS AND ASSESSMENT
CIRCA 1950 AND 1980

has been approved as meeting the research paper requirement for
the Degree of Master of Arts in Education

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

While some would agree that "readiness" cannot be taught, others argue that it is not educationally sound merely to sit around and wait for it to happen. Probably the best general definition of readiness was that of Carpenter who said that "readiness is somewhere between wanting to and having to". We might amend this statement to include "and being able to. (Hillerich, 1977, p. 19)

Identifying and assessing reading readiness has concerned educators for many years. For decades, researchers, administrators, and teachers have recognized that certain levels of development and skills enable a child to be successful at beginning reading instruction. Predicting the success of young children in beginning reading is a major concern in reading readiness research (Richek, 1977-78). Considerable attention is given to the identification of reading skills which predict success in reading. As our knowledge of child development and the reading process have become more refined, our definitions of skills necessary to be ready to read have changed.

Statement of the Problem

This review proposes to discover how educators defined reading readiness and what they recommended relative to the cognitive skills assessment of reading readiness in 1950 and 1980.
A second purpose is to discover if standardized assessment devices reflect the definitions and recommendations.

There is an ever increasing need to know what cognitive skills a child should be equipped with before learning to read. Today's society has increased pressure for academic achievement of elementary children. This pressure has resulted in early introduction of formal reading instruction in first grade and much attention to the reading readiness program in kindergarten (Hoffman & Fillmer, 1979).

The 1950's era and the 1980's era were chosen to compare and contrast in this study because they represent two points in time during which much activity relative to reading readiness was occurring. The 1950s era was a period of change in how reading readiness was viewed. Educators were just beginning to reject the idea that readiness was totally maturational and hypothesize that it was based more on the child's stage of development (Hoskissan, 1977). The 1950s view of cognitive skills was compared to the 1980s view of cognitive skills in order to highlight these two eras in reading education. It is not intended as a historical study but only as a comparison of the cognitive elements of reading readiness during these two time periods. Pre-1950s researchers certainly influenced the definition of reading readiness during the 1950s. Hall (1904) stated that people develop in predetermined, hierarchial stages. During the 1930s his book played a significant role in shaping a maturational view
of readiness (Durkin, 1982). Harrison's (1939) contributions to the concept of reading readiness predated the eras highlighted in this study, but as she is cited often in the 1950's literature she certainly influenced the research direction of the 1950's investigation of reading readiness. In studying the maturational process of children, Harrison reflected that children's readiness to handle certain tasks appears within certain age limits. By establishing a preparatory period for reading instruction, she hypothesized that it is possible to stimulate the traits necessary for a child to read.

This view that general maturity depends upon hierarchical stages of development continued into the early 1950s when the concept of reading readiness became associated with particular stages of development. Consequently, these two concepts of developmental stages and maturity were generalized to assume that any child having problems with beginning reading had not yet reached the developmental stage necessary for success in reading (Hoskisson, 1977). The solution to this problem was to delay reading instruction until the child had the maturity level needed to learn to read. If a child was not mature enough to learn the reading skills, it was decided that to delay the instruction would solve the problem.

The trend was to postpone direct instruction until the child showed full readiness in all traits that preceded success in reading (Hildreth, 1950). Authorities felt that if efforts to
teach reading were premature, it could have ill effects on the personality of the child. Research findings recommended delaying instruction one-half year in first grade (Morphett & Washburn, 1931; Ring, 1940).

It was assumed that passage of time would result in readiness. Gans (1949) believed that this maturity issue probably came about because at the time it was assumed that all children were ready for first grade at the age of 6 years, there was a high percentage of children who failed to succeed at beginning reading.

Eventually, the trend began to change. Educators hypothesized that delaying instruction and waiting for children to attain readiness for reading was ineffective (Russell & Karp, 1951). Educators began to agree that an instructional program would facilitate reading readiness. The question of what the readiness program should include evolved. At this point, it should be realized that authorities were unable to agree upon a particular set of skills essential to a reading readiness program. Nevertheless, similarities among the research findings can be derived. Skills or capacities which were relatively recurrent across the research will be addressed.

**Significance of the Study**

The purpose of this study is not to justify reading readiness as an important factor in the success of young children with beginning reading. The importance of reading readiness has been supported by numerous studies. Additionally, several researchers
have noted that to promote formal reading instruction too early, before children are ready, may produce problem readers later (Harris & Sipay, 1980; Hoffman & Fillmer, 1977; Sawyer, 1975). It is important to distinguish how educators' views of cognitive reading readiness skills have changed. Such knowledge provides a background from which teachers can make well-informed judgments about the child's readiness to read. Hoffman and Fillmer (1977) asserted that the lack of this readiness may result in a child who may not be able to handle day to day learnings and therefore will get farther and farther behind in reading class.

By reviewing studies which have investigated cognitive skills related to reading readiness, it is possible to determine which skills are considered most important in reading readiness. This research is incomplete without also investigating if these skills, identified by research, are present in reading readiness tests. The main instructional implication is for classroom teachers to evaluate readiness tests critically on the basis of whether they include these skills.

Reading readiness testing is a pertinent part of this study because many educational decisions are based on test results. Consequently, reading readiness tests should measure those cognitive skills which best predict a child's success in beginning reading. This review of past and present literature presents which skills were identified as necessary for beginning reading and which were measured.
Limitations

Reading readiness is a very broad and widely researched area of education. Many proficiencies combine to prepare a child to be ready to read. These proficiencies include the child's physical development, cognitive development, home environment, emotional development, background experiences, maturity, and intelligence. The scope of this review is limited to the cognitive skills that affect a child's readiness to read.

It is also necessary to consider that this study focused on only the mainstream thinking about cognitive reading readiness skills during the particular periods of time. During the 1950s, as well as the 1980s, much innovative research was and is conducted which does not concur with the popular viewpoints of the times. Therefore, it cannot be generalized that all views about cognitive skills are considered in this research review.

A major limitation of this study is that information was gathered solely on the basis of studies previously conducted and professional opinion as it appeared in teacher education texts. It was not the purpose of this study to draw conclusions based on actual review of readiness tests and their use in individual classrooms nor on the materials or programs used in classrooms. This study relies upon conclusions of previous research and professional opinion in these respective areas.

A final limitation is that there is no uniform, predetermined set of cognitive skills which every authority recognizes as being
necessary to read. Durkin (1982) explained that skills demanded in learning to read depend largely on the method of instruction. For example, the whole word approach requires different skills than the letter-sound approach. Even when the method is the same, the quality of instruction may make different demands of children (Durkin, 1982).

**Definition of Terms**

The terms in this study are defined as follows:

**Reading readiness:** a stage in the child's development at which he will be successful at beginning reading instruction based on learned knowledge and skills (Harris & Sipay, 1980; Hildreth, 1950).

**Cognitive skills:** thinking skills which underlie children's abilities in solving problems, developing reasoning skills, and developing concepts.

**Metalinguistic awareness:** the knowledge that children possess about the conventions of printed language and the words used to describe language. For instance, if young children entering kindergarten have had few experiences with printed materials, it is possible that they will have no concept with which to associate the meaning of "word" or "letter"(P. Cunningham, S. Moore, J. Cunningham, & D. Moore, 1983).

**Seriation:** ordering a group of objects according to increasing or decreasing size arrangement (Cannella, 1982).
Conservation: the ability to make transformations from one state to another (Hoffman & Fillmer, 1979).

Classification: allow the child to consider the part and the whole simultaneously, and realize everything can be sorted into like groups (Hoffman & Fillmer, 1979).
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The purpose of this chapter is to review the research on cognitive skills considered necessary for reading readiness circa 1950 and 1980 and the cognitive skills included on standardized reading readiness tests of the 1950s and 1980s. The initial section of this chapter consists of the cognitive skills identified by authorities and the status of reading instruction circa 1950. Next, this chapter presents a view of recent literature concerned with the cognitive skills necessary for reading readiness of the 1980s. The chapter then focuses on discussion of cognitive readiness skills of the 1950s and 1980s. The last two sections review the cognitive skills included in standardized reading readiness tests during the 1950s and 1980s eras respectively.

Cognitive Readiness Skills of the 1950s

The research of the 1950s focused on four cognitive skills: auditory discrimination, visual discrimination, left to right directionality, and memory. Hildreth (1950) stated that these skills were necessary for a child to learn to read easily and with understanding.

Auditory Discrimination

Auditory discrimination in beginning reading instruction was considered important when instruction emphasized the sounds in words. The immature reader could not discriminate between the sounds in similar words. When a child reached maturity it meant
that the sounds could be discriminated. Language was also considered important because the child first learned to attach meaning to print by reacting through spoken language (Harrison, 1939). Experience with language was thought to eventually aid the child in his ability to discriminate words, therefore eliminating confusion when reading (Smith, 1950). Durrell and Murphy (1953) justified the need for auditory discrimination by stating that "the child who reads easily is one who notices the separate sounds in spoken words" (p. 556).

Murphy (cited in Durrell & Murphy, 1953) conducted an extensive study which involved 540 students divided into four groups. These groups were equated for mental age, learning rate, speaking vocabulary, and auditory discrimination ability. Each group received a different treatment for 10 minutes each day for six weeks. Group 1 was instructed in "ear training"; group 2 received visual discrimination instruction; group 3 received a combination of "ear training" and visual discrimination; and group 4 received instruction from the traditional reading program. "Ear training" was defined as instruction which taught children to attend to and recognize the different sounds in words. Upon completion of the 6-week study, a group reading test and an individual oral reading test were administered. The findings indicated that the experimental groups pronounced significantly more unfamiliar words during the periods than the control group. In conclusion, it was apparent that the child's ability to notice
separate sounds in words was highly important in learning to read successfully.

Durrell, Nicholson, Olson, and Gavel (1958) conducted a study which had a major impact on beginning reading instruction. This study, which involved 1,500 first grade children, concluded that the ability to identify letter names was predictive of reading success. This ability to name letters has since been cited many times as a major indicator of success in reading (Barrett, 1965; Dallmann, Rouch, Char, & DeBoer, 1982; Downing, 1975; Gavel, 1958;).

Visual Discrimination

Visual discrimination skills received much attention in both the textbook literature and in research. "Learning to read means learning to attach meanings to a series of abstract symbols made up of different combinations of twenty-six letters" (Hildreth, 1950, p. 254). The statement well defines the confusion children encountered when they had to identify and memorize similarly formed words such as "bet" and "bat". The ability to distinguish among words and visualize them in the mind so they could be automatically recognized when encountered in print called for maturity in visual discrimination.

In a study conducted on 134 pairs of children at the end of their second grade year, Harrington (1955) evaluated visual discrimination by showing children a word on a flash card and asking them to identify it from memory by circling it in a
multiple-choice situation. The split-half computed reliability was .80. Harrington concluded that visual discrimination of word elements was highly important in acquiring successful primary grade reading vocabulary. The readiness program described by Russell and Karp (1951) strongly emphasized matching shapes to develop visual discrimination.

Left-to-Right Progression

Though no research reports were cited, various authorities believed that left-to-right directionality was an important skill. Making a habit of left-to-right progression in reading activities was suggested by several authorities (Russell & Karp, 1951; Welshinger, 1948). McKee (1948) stated that children who do not efficiently read from left-to-right read slowly, omit words, and often skip lines. This was also evident in word identification skills. The child attempted to decode the word at a point other than the beginning.

Memory

Research of the 1950s also focused on memory as a prerequisite to reading. Memory span was necessary to remember word forms and complex sentences (Harrison, 1939; Hildreth, 1950). Bettis (1943) also cited memory as a significant factor in reading readiness. Children with low retention powers were recommended to be checked for possible "mental immaturity" or low mental age. Typically, low memory retention was characterized by not being able to follow directions and not retaining information from one day to
the next (Betts, 1943). These capacities were viewed as very important for comprehension. Broom, Duncan, Emig, and Stueber (1951) stated that the child needed memory to be able to recall incidents that occurred during the continuity of a story. Memory span was judged as a necessary but not sufficient condition for reading.

In summary, the 1950's research and reading methods textbooks defined reading readiness as operational skills. The absence of these skills was attributed to immaturity. Increasing attention was being given to associational factors in the reading process. The prerequisite skills of this time were beginning to reflect a developmental view of reading readiness. Authorities recommended that children did not necessarily need to be 6 years, 6 months old to learn to read and conversely, that some children would have difficulty beyond this age. Hildreth (1950) observed that new knowledge about how children learn to read allowed teachers to ask themselves if the child is ready for each new step in thinking.

Cognitive Readiness Skills of the 1980s

Recent research in reading has shown an increased interest in the cognitive development of preschool children (Rude, 1973). Although Piaget made no reference to thought development and reading in his research, many implications have been drawn recently by promoters of cognitive thought (Downing, 1975; Hoffman & Fillmer, 1979). For example, it can be inferred from Piaget's research that children need a concrete basis for perception of
reading. Piaget’s theory suggests that young children need concrete examples to be able to understand concepts. It can be predicted that a child’s perception of reading is very different from that of an adult. Vygotsky (1962) confirmed this implication in his conclusion that the child does not see the expressive and communicative purposes of written language because these concepts are abstract. In addition to reading instruction based on cognitive thought, instruction based on the concept of metalinguistic awareness has received consideration recently (P. Cunningham, S. Moore, J. Cunningham, & D. Moore, 1983). This section of the review of literature will focus on these two innovative aspects of reading education.

Piagetian Theory

Research has consistently found that three capacities in Piaget’s theory of cognitive development are required to be successful at beginning reading. These skills are seriation, conservation, and classification (Arlin, 1981; Downing, 1975; ).

Seriation is highly related to reading readiness (Cannella, 1982). This skill demonstrates that the child can understand the relationships of objects to each other (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969). This is a complex skill requiring a perceptual view of relationships and concrete visual forms and applies to reading because a child must separate spoken words into component parts. Reading also requires the ordering of words into sentences (Cannella, 1982).
An example of conservation is that a substance may change in shape but remain the same amount (Hoffman, 1979). In reading, a child must combine letters to form words, associate sound with symbol and associate symbol with sound (Cannella, 1982).

To be an efficient reader, a child must make use of all available clues. This is a function of classification skills. Cannella (1982) stated that these include symbols, sounds, and clues from the context. Also, the reader needs to be able to deal with letters and develop a letter-sound correspondence. Children need to possess the ability to associate and synthesize what they have learned.

Arlin (1981) conducted a study of 121 kindergarten children for the purpose of identifying tasks that could possibly serve as cognitive development assessments of readiness. He found that nine Piagetian related tasks combined to positively correlate with the Metropolitan Achievement Test. He also found a low correlation between individual tasks and scores. This supports his assumption that there is no one Piagetian task which is a sufficient predictor of reading readiness. Children's performance on one or two tasks tell very little about the child's readiness for basic school tasks. In his conclusions, Arlin stated that the three concepts of conservation, seriation, and classification combined appear to contribute significantly to a child's achievement as measured by a standardized test. Based on the information reviewed, cognitive development do correlates highly with reading readiness.
Metalinguistic Awareness

Clay's approach to preparing children to read focused on metalinguistic awareness and has received much acclaim (Goodman, 1981; McDonell & Osburn, 1978). Her research provided a somewhat different approach to reading readiness which is clearly operationally defined. She has found that children progress through readiness stages as they learn two different concepts about print, visual concepts and the language connection with print. Visual concepts include the following three factors: 1) print is oriented from left-to-right on a page 2) words are separated by spaces and 3) words and letters are two different representations (McDonell & Osburn, 1978).

The second concept consists of the language connection with print. For children to succeed at reading, they need to understand that print can be converted to speech to provide a message. They also need to understand that pictures can be used as a clue to the message. And, lastly, they need to understand that print must make sense in oral language.

Clay (cited in Weintraub, 1968) conducted a longitudinal study on 100 New Zealand first graders in which she found that children progressed through a sequence in developing the concept of a word. First, children finger-pointed to each word as they read a sentence. This developed into reading a sentence in a slow, word-by-word fashion. At last, as their skill increased, the children were observed reading phrases with less stress on the individual
words. Clay concluded that finger-pointing and word-by-word reading strengthened the children's awareness of the one-to-one correspondence between print and oral language.

Morris (1980) investigated the assessment of beginning readers' concept of word. He provided a measure of the children's knowledge of the spoken and written word in reading. The assessment was conducted on 21 first graders at the end of the first month of school. His findings indicated that the concept of word deserved consideration when assessing skill in reading readiness. He argued that tasks dealing with the concept of word allowed children to use both their spoken and written language when identifying words in print. Also, the concept of word could be obtained in a naturalistic reading situation.

It has been suggested by several authorities in reading education that children who know about the conventions and jargon of print (including concept of word) will be more successful at reading instruction (Cunningham et al., 1983; Morris, 1980). They advocated that the best way to ensure this knowledge was to expose young children to books and provide many reading experiences in the home and school environment. The concepts discussed are important for children to know when they encounter beginning reading instruction and it cannot be assumed that every child is aware that print can be converted into speech.
Standardized Reading Readiness Tests Circa 1950

Reading readiness tests were developed to aid the teacher in understanding the degree of readiness of individual children (Gans, 1949). Readiness tests were recognized as useful, reliable and valid prediction measures which would assure success in reading (Hildreth, 1950; Sullivan & McCarthy, 1941). It was made clear throughout the literature that no one reading readiness test could claim to measure all of the important components which constituted reading readiness (Hildreth, 1950; McKee, 1948). Consequently, it was suggested that standardized testing be combined with teacher observation (McKee, 1948; Yoakam, 1955). Betts (1948) stated that readiness tests made it possible for the educator to identify strengths and weaknesses in specific skill areas and aid in developing instructional practices which would develop reading readiness sub-skills.

Obviously, there were several reading readiness tests available during this time period. There were four tests which were consistently discussed in reading textbooks and in the research. The skills presented on these tests are the focus of the remaining part of this section. The four most frequently cited standardized reading readiness tests were: The Gates Reading Readiness Test, the Lee-Clark Reading Readiness Test, the Monroe Reading Aptitude Test, and the Metropolitan Readiness Test (Downing, 1975; Hildreth, 1950; McKee, 1948; Sullivan & McCarthy, 1941; Yoakam, 1955). An analysis of these frequently cited tests
indicated 10 specific subskills were measured (see Table 1). This comparison indicated a discrepancy in what subskills were considered important for reading readiness. The skills of matching words and visual discrimination were most frequently measured. No one skill was assessed in every standardized readiness test cited.

The review of the Lee-Clark Reading Readiness Test stated that more attention was given to letter symbols and visual discrimination than to verbal items. Table One also indicates that the tests of the 1950s focused more on visual skills than on auditory skills.

In 1935, the Monroe Reading Aptitude Test was developed to measure sub-skills which the literature suggested differentiated good readers and poor readers according to Anderson (cited in Buros, 1949). The norms available for this test show that high and low scores on the total test are good predictors of success and failure in beginning reading as stated by Anderson (cited in Buros, 1949).

The Metropolitan Readiness Test consisted of seven subtests which were thought to define maturity. These subtests were entirely free from reading content according to Osburn (cited in Buros, 1945).

Discrepancy among sub-skills measured in tests prompted a study of 400 children by Sullivan and McCarthy (1941) which compared the readiness factors measured by five frequently used reading readiness tests. The tests were the Gates Reading
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subskill</th>
<th>Metropolitan</th>
<th>Monroe</th>
<th>Gates</th>
<th>Lee-Clark</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Following directions</td>
<td></td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Matching words*</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>Visual discrimination</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>Rhyming*</td>
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<td>Picture vocabulary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Numbers*</td>
<td>X</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual-motor coordination*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
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</table>

*Subskills which appeared on 1950s and 1980s tests.
Readiness Test, the Metropolitan Readiness Test, the Monroe Reading Aptitude Test, the Lee-Clark Reading Readiness Test, and the Van Wagenen Reading Readiness Test. This investigation was conducted for the purpose of identifying which tests measured the most readiness subskills. The study concluded that of the tests compared, the Monroe Reading Aptitude Test measured the most subskills. Visual discrimination was the sub-skill most unanimously measured and therefore considered an important factor in reading readiness by all test constructors.

It was felt that there were limitations which suggested that standardized tests needed to be supplemented by observation. McKee (1948) stated that teachers should observe children's behavior during test administration in order to note their use of left-to-right directionality. Also, none of the standardized readiness tests were able to measure the children's desire to learn or their interest in reading. Hildreth (1950) stated that the need for standardized assessment prevented the use of more subjective type items which may have been more valuable in determining a child's reading readiness. For example, she stated that it might be worthwhile to measure a child's ability to listen to part of a story and supply an ending.

Standardized Reading Readiness Tests Circa 1980

Research findings indicated that certain skills are necessary for a child to be ready for beginning reading instruction. The concept of reading readiness was a significant factor in
determining when instruction would begin (Rude, 1973). Calfee and Venezky (1969) stated that an ideal educational program met the needs of individual children at their level of competence and guided them to the desired goals in learning. Tests served as an essential component in this program as tools of evaluation and as ongoing appraisal of instructional outcomes.

Because readiness tests have existed for many years, it seems logical that there should be a high degree of agreement in the content of commonly used readiness tests. Analysis of reading readiness subtests indicated this was not the case. The skills measured by readiness tests were not always agreed upon by test publishers. There was much inconsistency about what skills these authorities consider most necessary (Rude, 1973). Visual discrimination and letter recognition seem to be the only consistent exceptions to this statement (Barrett, 1970). And even then, there is a difference in the degree to which visual discrimination is broken down into specific skills and how letter recognition is assessed. Hence the question arises: what skills are consistently measured and do these coincide with what research supports as skills necessary for reading readiness (Rude, 1973).

Readiness tests typically consisted of a collection of subtests, each equated with a particular subskill (Calfee & Venezky, 1969). Factor analysis of these subtests reveals overlaps of specific skills measured (Telegdy, 1975).
The goal of most reading readiness tests is that they be predictive of success in formal reading instruction and reading achievement. It is generally accepted that reading readiness tests have good predictive validity for measuring groups of children but are inappropriate for individual instruction (Morris, 1980).

The most popular current reading readiness test batteries include: the Metropolitan Readiness Test, the Murphy-Durrell Reading Readiness Analysis, the Clymer-Barrett Prereading Battery, the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test-Readiness Skills, and the Harrison-Stroud Reading Readiness Profiles (Barrett, 1970; Dallmann et al., 1982; Rude 1973). These tests constitute the most adequately constructed and standardized readiness tests available.

In an analysis of five major reading readiness batteries, Rude (1973) found 12 specific subskill categories exist (see Table 2). Seven of the 12 subskills were measured in only one readiness test. This comparison of tests supported the previously mentioned statement that there is ambiguity in what authors consider as necessary skills predictive of reading achievement.

Dykstra (1972) stated the Metropolitan Readiness Test ranked highly among reading readiness tests and could be considered a useful tool. Singer (1972) contrarily stated that the MRT assumed past learning was the best predictor of present performance and this also was the best predictor of future achievement. Whereas the Murphy-Durrell Reading Readiness Analysis presented a more accurate prediction of a child's ability.
Table 2

The Subskill Content of Five Standardized Readiness Tests of the 1980s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subskill</th>
<th>Metropolitan</th>
<th>Murphy-Durrell</th>
<th>Glymer-Barrett</th>
<th>Gates-MacGinitie</th>
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<td>X</td>
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<td>Rhyming words*</td>
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<td>Learning rate</td>
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<td>Auditory discrimination*</td>
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<td>Auditory blending</td>
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<td>Word recognition</td>
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*Subskills which appeared on 1950s and 1980s tests.
Other Readiness Skills Assessed

Beyond what is indicated in Table 2, there are some additional differences which exist in the individual tests. The following four tests consist of these differences: The Murphy Durrell Reading Readiness Analysis, the Clymer-Barrett Prereading Battery, the Gates-Macginitie Reading Test-Readiness Skills and the Harrison Stroud Reading Readiness Profiles.

The Murphy Durrell Reading Readiness Analysis was made up of three group measures designed to test abilities described as essential to success in beginning reading (Stafford 1978). The Learning Rate test assesses the child's ability to "learn" meaningful sight words then recall them after a period of time has passed. However, it is possible that this subtest assesses what children knew prior to testing (Stafford, 1978).

According to Farr (1972), the most useful aspect of the Clymer-Barrett Prereading Battery was the "Prereading Rating Scale" which rated ability to follow story sequence, ability to follow directions, and develop basic language abilities. When comparing the Clymer-Barrett Prereading Battery to other tests, Farr's review concluded that the test is actually no better, nor any worse than other reading readiness measures. The predictive validity was also comparable to other instruments.

Of the tests discussed in this review, the Gates MacGinitie Reading Test-Readiness Skills was the only test that had an auditory discrimination and auditory blending subtest. This
The subtest was designed to measure the child's ability to join the parts of a word, presented orally, into a whole word (Rude, 1973). The "Using Context and Auditory Clues" subtest was the unique component of the Harrison Stroud Reading Readiness Profiles. This subtest asked the child to select a correct response based on an understanding of grapheme-phoneme relationships.

In a study consisting of 353 public school children, Bilka (1972) attempted to ascertain if reading achievement could be predicted by certain standardized reading readiness tests. She found the Murphy-Durrell Reading Readiness Analysis to be the stronger measure of reading achievement and the Metropolitan Readiness Test to be the second best predictive instrument.

The relevance of the subskills on a selected reading readiness test depends on the type of initial prereading program the child encountered (Farr, 1972). Although techniques employed by each battery in measuring these subskills differed, the abilities the subtests measure are similar. The more closely the factors resemble the actual reading act, the higher the relationship between the reading readiness tests and reading achievement will be.
CHAPTER III
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the information presented in the previous sections of this paper. Another purpose is to draw conclusions about research findings related to the cognitive skills necessary for reading readiness and to suggest implications for future research in the area of reading readiness.

Reading readiness is a rather broad topic for research and has consisted of many conflicting interpretations of the skills necessary for acquisition in the eras of 1950 and 1980. It is hoped that by comparing cognitive skills of two different time periods, it can be seen that reading readiness views are everchanging and based on continuing research into how children learn. Discrepancies may continue to exist about what cognitive skills are necessary for children to learn. Authorities in reading education emphasize different skills based on their differing theories of learning and reading. Perhaps new ideas for research direction can be developed which will aid in constructing standardized reading readiness tests which will more accurately measure those cognitive skills necessary for reading readiness.

Discussions and Conclusions

It has been suggested in this review that cognitive reading readiness skills of the 1980s vary greatly from those skills considered necessary in the 1950s. This research analysis demonstrates that cognitive reading readiness skills of the 1950s
were essentially operational and measurable. For example, it was considered necessary for a child to be able to discriminate sounds and letters of the alphabet. Besides auditory and visual discrimination, other prerequisite skills were left to right directionality, memory and language abilities (Hildreth, 1950). If any of these skills were difficult for children when they entered school, they were considered immature. Immaturity was often described as the cause of young children's failure to do well at reading instruction. Readiness was what was supposed to become evident when a child had spent another year at home (Oak-Bruce, 1948). Research findings indicated that children who spent a considerable amount of time in prereading activities did not necessarily catch up with others later on in the year. Thus it was becoming apparent that it was not beneficial to extend reading readiness activities farther into the school year and wait for a child to mature. McCracken (1952) concluded that it was time to revise the views of reading readiness.

The research of the 1980s focuses on the cognitive development of children and their metalinguistic awareness. A child's cognitive development plays a major role in beginning reading, understanding concepts, and skill development (Cannella, 1982). Current research demonstrates that conservation, seriation, and classification skills contribute to a child's success in reading. Hoffman and Fillmer (1979) also support the
position that children need concrete experiences to develop these abilities.

A child's ability to conceptualize the conventions and jargon of printed language, or metalinguistic awareness, is also discussed as a prerequisite skill for reading readiness. This assumption is just beginning to receive more attention in reading readiness research (Morris, 1980). Awareness of print requires that a child be familiar with abstractions such as the meanings of "word" and "letter". It was suggested that the best way to ensure this knowledge is to provide children with a print-rich environment.

Cognitive skills assessed in standardized reading readiness tests circa 1950 and 1980 were also considered in this review. In comparing skills assessed within these eras, there does not seem to be a great difference in what skills are measured. Visual discrimination skills are emphasized during both eras. Subtests measuring rhyming words, word matching, and sound blending were also commonalities. Although there seems to be at least some match between cognitive skills considered necessary by research and those measured by standardized tests in the 1950s, this is definitely not the case in the 1980s. There seems to be some discrepancy in what research proposes and what practice provides. Standardized tests are deficient in measuring what research declares as necessary prerequisite skills in beginning reading (Morris, 1980).
Since an entire section of this research paper consists of a discussion of standardized reading readiness tests, it is appropriate to cite three observations Barrett (1970) made concerning the possible use of reading readiness tests as predictors of reading achievement. First, tests should be selected with specific instructional situations in mind since current batteries include different skills. Second, not all readiness factors are measurable with paper and pencil tests. Third, teachers should analyze their programs to determine whether skills and abilities measured appear to be important to success in beginning reading.

Others also supported these observations. Durkin (1982) considered that a better assessment of reading readiness, as opposed to the traditional methods, would be to observe learning opportunities of children within the instructional situation. A reading readiness test should be selected on the basis of the instructional program that is implemented. To illustrate analyzing programs, if instruction focused on phonics, the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test-Readiness Skills would be appropriate because it is the only test cited in this review which measures auditory discrimination and auditory blending (Rude, 1973).

Conclusions

Based on the research presented in this review, three overall conclusions can be drawn that relate to the changing status of
cognitive reading readiness skills and assessment using standardized reading readiness tests.

First, it can be concluded that teachers should consider the skills which are emphasized in their readiness program when selecting a standardized readiness test. Each readiness test measures a selected number of skills and it is possible that skills included within a readiness program may not be included on a chosen readiness test. A second conclusion which can be drawn is that with the focus of reading readiness skills in the 1980s on Piagetian-related skills and metalinguistic awareness, these skills need to be represented in standardized reading readiness tests. This review did not find that any of the popular standardized reading readiness tests assessed the skills of seriation, classification, conservation, or the child's concept of a word. And, finally, a conclusion can be drawn that reading readiness tests have not changed much through the years, contrary to the change in skills identified by research.

**Implications for Future Research**

There are four implications for future research of the cognitive skills involved in reading readiness. The first implication is, when considering subskills measured by standardized reading readiness tests, there needs to be clarification of whether these assessments actually measure the stated subskills. This possibility was not discussed in this study. Secondly, research is needed to analyze the reading
readiness programs implemented circa 1950 and 1980. Knowledge of cognitive skills used in classroom instruction can be compared to the cognitive and linguistic skills identified by research findings. The third implication is that instructional materials need to be studied to analyze if skills emphasized in these materials reflect the predominant theories about necessary cognitive reading readiness skills. The last implication for future research is that there needs to be a standardized assessment procedure for measuring Piagetian tasks and metalinguistic awareness.

In conclusion, it has been the purpose of this paper to review the cognitive reading readiness skills circa 1950 and 1980 and to assess which skills were/are measured on standardized reading readiness tests. It was found that skills considered necessary for a child to be ready to read have changed considerably over the years. What may be a more significant finding is that skills measured on standardized reading readiness tests have changed very little over the same period of time. It is hoped that through this review some insight has been gained into what constitutes cognitive reading readiness skills. Educators and test authors need to recognize that the skills measured in current standardized tests are not measuring what research indicates to be the cognitive skills predictive of a child's readiness to read.
Bibliography


