

IS READING ENJOYABLE OR MERELY NECESSARY?

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Over the past decade interest in the topic of attitude toward reading has been great. Doubtless teachers have always realized that students' attitudes play a role in learning to read, but lately educationalists have become more 'self-conscious' about attitude to reading. Affective goals in reading have increasingly become a planned facet of schools' curricula. Articles on attitudes related to reading have occurred quite frequently in journals, the International Reading Association has published a monograph on Attitudes and Reading (Alexander & Filler, 1976) and though "still in its infancy" (Alexander & Filler, 1976), research into the topic has picked up. Especially apparent in this regard has been the activity related to developing instruments for measuring attitudes toward reading (Dulin & Chester, 1973; Estes, Johnstone & Richards, 1975; Fiddler, 1974; Heathington, 1975; Kennedy & Halinski, 1975; Mikulecky, 1976; Rowell, 1972).

Certainly this increased attention to attitudes and reading is merited: learning to read can only be explained in terms of the interaction between cognitive and affective factors. Furthermore, a person's attitude toward reading will be related to the totality of his/her reading behaviour (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Thus, we need to know more about the role that attitudes play in learning to read and the relationship between attitudes and achievement in reading. Huck (1973) points to another important consideration:

If we teach a child to read, yet develop not the taste for reading, all of our teaching is for naught. We shall have produced a nation of "illiterate literates" -- those who know how to read but do not read. (p. 305)

For these and other reasons the study of attitudes to reading can yield valuable information for reading educators.

However, an important prerequisite must be met before information obtained through such study will, in fact, be valuable -- rather than misleading. We need to work out what we mean by attitude toward reading; we need to characterize, to conceptualize the construct itself. Estes' (1977) comment in his review of the Alexander & Filler monograph, Attitudes and Reading applies generally to the state of the art in the field of attitude toward reading:

It (the monograph) virtually ignores the theoretical construct of attitudes, what attitudes are and how they are formed, how they are differentiated from other mental constructs, and so forth. (p. 526)

One facet of research in the attitudes and reading area is the development of instruments to assess reading attitudes. As was mentioned above, many such instruments have been created in the past few years. Certainly a crucial aspect of this kind of endeavour is a carefully worked out theory of the nature of reading attitudes. Yet, as Summers (1977) states in his recent review of instruments being used to measure attitudes toward reading:

Adequate conceptualization and definition of reading attitude constructs is still a major problem in research in the field... Measurement too often predominates at the expense of conceptual frameworks. All the statistics in the world are no substitute for good, hardnosed preliminary thinking about what it is that is to be measured and how it can best be operationalized and quantified. Few existing scales are based on clear underlying concepts. (p. 152)

It should not be thought that criticisms such as these are related merely to theoretical issues which have little practical significance. As Summers implies, inadequate conceptualisation and definition of the construct 'attitude toward reading' will ultimately result in teachers' and/or researchers' obtaining a less than accurate indication of students' feelings about reading.

After noting the lack of theoretical underpinnings in reading attitude studies, Milulecky (1976) sums up the issue this way:

Without a theoretical framework, however, it is possible to make only vague interpretations about the meaning of scores. Without theory as foundation, test improvement is limited to item discrimination refinement. With a theoretical framework, a test can keep improving as it approaches a theoretically defined ideal. The theory's version of reality offers depth, meaning and a basis for using and understanding a test score. (p. 7)

For the past three years we have conducted research aimed at developing a sound framework for conceptualizing attitudes toward reading, and, concomitantly, designing appropriate instruments for measuring people's attitudes toward reading.

Conceptualising Attitude Toward Reading.

As a first step let us examine some items from scales designed to measure attitude toward reading. Assume that the following five items comprise a reading attitude scale and that two individuals, Patricia and Sonia, respond (honestly) to these items in this manner:

	<u>Patricia</u>	<u>Sonia</u>
1. I enjoy reading	Disagree	Agree
2. Reading during spare time is fun	Disagree	Agree
3. Reading helps me form opinions	Agree	Agree
4. I can have a job that pays more if I am a good reader	Agree	Disagree
5. Reading is important for getting promotion in a job	Agree	Disagree

What can we say about Patricia's and Sonia's attitudes toward reading? What we might say -- and what we would be led to say by the system which most attitude scales employ for interpreting such answers -- is that both Patricia and Sonia have, overall, positive attitudes toward reading. Both girls answer positively on three items and negatively on two; therefore, they would, on the whole, be positively disposed toward reading. Furthermore, in quantitative terms they would be positively disposed 'to the same degree' (three agree's, two disagree's for each girl).

However, closer examination of Patricia's and Sonia's responses reveals patterns which have similarities and differences of great importance. First of all, both girls agree with item 3. "Reading helps me form opinions". On the remaining four items, however, Patricia and Sonia answer differently. Note that items 1. and 2. relate to how much a person enjoys reading. Patricia responds negatively to these items; Sonia, positively. Items 4. and 5. are focussed more on the utilitarian value of reading. Patricia agrees with these two statements; Sonia disagrees.

What seems to emerge from these responses, then, is a picture of Patricia who values reading because she believes it will get her ahead in a job but who does not enjoy reading and, on the other hand, a profile of Sonia who enjoys reading but does not value it as a means of getting ahead vocationally.

Imagine that this attitude scale consisted of 20 items instead of 5 and that the patterns manifested in the sample items persisted. The answers to the 20 items would reveal two individuals who varied significantly in their attitudes toward reading. Yet by interpreting their responses in an undifferentiated, overall fashion, they would come out quite similarly: positive on 12 items, negatively on 8 for an 'overall' positive attitude toward reading.

It is just this type of problem which clouds people's thinking about attitude toward reading and obscures a good deal of educationally important information about students. Significant implications for reading instruction and curriculum development stem from one's notions of reading attitude. Therefore, educators should seek as adequate a characterisation of attitude toward reading as possible.

For the past three years we have been working on a model for conceptualising attitude toward reading, a model which would account for individuals who vary on different dimensions of reading attitude as Patricia and Sonia do. In conducting this research we have found it valuable to draw upon the insights provided by social psychologists working in the field of attitude formation. For some time researchers in that area have argued that there are three components of any attitude: a cognitive component, an affective component and a conative component. With such a conception attitude toward reading would be described as consisting of:

- (1) a *cognitive component*, that is one's beliefs or opinions about reading,
- (2) an *affective component*, that is one's feelings about or evaluations of reading.
- (3) a *conative component*, that is one's (a) intentions to read, and (b) actual reading behaviour.

Of course, these components are not separate entities. They interact with each other in various ways as shown in the schematic representation in Figure 1.

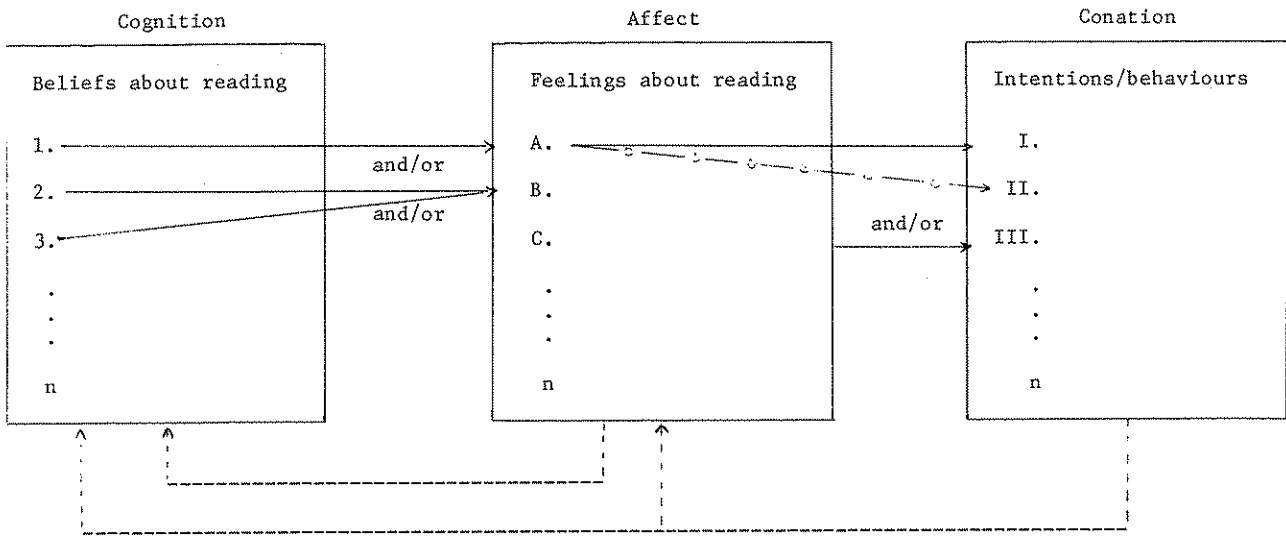
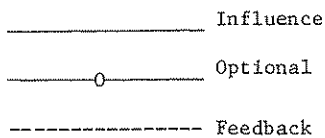


Figure 1: Schematic representation of the components of attitude toward reading.



The model depicted in Figure 1 helps explain why Patricia and Sonia can differ in significant ways in their attitudes toward reading even though they would both be classified as having positive attitudes toward reading on scales which assume attitude toward reading to be unidimensional in nature. The in's and out's of this model will not be discussed here. That topic has been treated in detail elsewhere (Teale & Lewis, 1979). It is sufficient at this point to say that the model suggests that an individual may have different beliefs about reading (1, 2, 3 ...n) and different feelings about reading (A, B, C ...n). Remember that Patricia believed that reading was important for getting what she felt was a good job, and therefore she valued reading. However, Patricia did not enjoy reading. Sonia, on the other hand, enjoyed reading but did not value it as a means of obtaining a better job. Conceptualising reading as a multidimensional rather than a unidimensional construct helps explain patterns of dispositions such as Patricia's and Sonia's.

The notions of the cognitive, affective and conative components are very useful for developing a theoretical framework for attitude toward reading. However, the question of pragmatic utility, or classroom application, should also be of paramount importance when considering attitude toward reading. Do students really hold different beliefs and feelings about reading? Do individuals really vary as our examples and hypotheses suggest?

Studies Conducted to Test the Theoretical Model of Attitude Toward Reading.

To answer questions such as the foregoing, the cognitive and affective components of attitude toward reading were closely examined in a series of studies. A survey of reading educators, teachers, primary and secondary students and instruments designed to measure attitude toward reading showed that there were three constructs which could be identified within the more general notions of beliefs and feelings about reading. (Teale & Lewis, 1978)

The first construct is exemplified by statements like "The more I read, the more I learn about myself", and "Reading helps me understand other people better". This construct is related to the cognitive component of reading attitude: it concerns the belief that reading is a means of gaining insight into self, others and/or life in general. This first construct was termed Individual Development because it seems to relate to one's intrinsic development through insight into self/others/life.

The second construct is similar to the first in that it too relates to the cognitive component of reading attitude. However, the belief in this case is that reading is related to success in school or vocational development. This construct, called Utilitarian, is reflected in statements such as "Reading helps people get higher marks in school", and "Being able to read well can help a person get a permanent job".

The third construct is affective in nature. It is represented by statements like "I enjoy reading", and "Reading is a fun way to spend spare time". This construct was labelled Enjoyment, a name which is self-explanatory.

In a study conducted in 1978 self-report scales were constructed to measure each of the three factors -- separately, of course. Students in years 4, 6, 8, 10 and 12 responded to the scales, and reliability and validity studies were conducted. The scales were refined in 1979 and tested again by administering them to a sample of 1332 students at the same year levels. The two studies have shown the scales to be quite reliable and valid instruments for measuring students' attitudes toward reading (Teale & Lewis, 1978; Lewis & Teale, 1979a, 1979b). Indices of reliability included internal consistency and stability coefficients. The validity of the scales was supported by factor analytical data and a peer group rating procedure. Thus, we feel confident that the information obtained about primary and secondary school students' attitudes toward reading is of value.

Results and Implications of the Studies.

Although there are additional analyses yet to be performed for the 1979 data, the studies to date have revealed several interesting findings. First, people do appear to have different beliefs about reading ("Reading is important for getting high grades in school", "Reading helps me sort out the meaning of life", "Reading won't get you far in our society", etc.) and these beliefs are important bases for affective feelings about reading. There also appear to be different aspects to the affective component of attitude toward reading. Clearly Enjoyment is one dimension of this component. However, it seems that an affect which might be termed Valuing also exists. One's valuing of reading would be related to

beliefs about the perceived relationships between reading and success in school, reading and vocational success and reading and insight into self/others/life.

It was found that between 10% and 32% of the secondary school students surveyed and between 3% and 15% of primary school students responded positively on one of the three scales (Individual Development, Utilitarian and Enjoyment) and negatively on another, with a standard deviation difference between scores. For example, 5% of year 4, 14% of year 6, 10% of year 8 and 14% of year 12 students did not find reading enjoyable (negative on Enjoyment) but did see it as a valuable way of achieving vocational goals and success in schools (positive on Utilitarian). Findings such as these support the distinction drawn between the cognitive and affective components of attitude toward reading outlined in the model presented in Figure 1. One of the latest findings to emerge from our studies relates to this issue. The means and standard deviation of the three different scales at year levels, 4, 6, 8, 10 and 12 are presented in Table 1. In each case the scales had 10 items and a possible range of -20 to +20.

Table 1: Scale Properties by Grade Level.

Grade Level	N	SCALE								
		Individual Development			Utilitarian			Enjoyment		
		\bar{X}			\bar{X}			\bar{X}		
4	327	8.12	6.19	.67	9.87	5.96	.65	8.38	7.47	.81
6	435	5.87	7.30	.79	11.49	5.39	.65	6.65	8.43	.88
8	238	1.87	7.21	.77	8.02	6.56	.75	3.21	9.71	.91
10	179	1.24	7.01	.81	7.25	5.84	.72	2.41	9.94	.93
12	153	1.82	6.58	.78	7.49	5.37	.71	0.01	9.29	.92

The samples from which these data were collected were not selected to be representative; therefore no generalisations to populations of students can be made on the basis of the absolute mean values of the scales at each grade level. Secondly, comparisons of different scale means are difficult to interpret as differences may be due to properties of the scales and not the students. For example, some scales may have more positively worded items that are less extreme and therefore easier to agree (or strongly agree) with than other scales.

With the above reservations in mind about the validity of inferences drawn from the data in Table 1, it is valuable to consider the three sets of mean scores simultaneously. Since the same students at each grade level responded to all three scales a comparative trend analysis is valid. The most striking observation relates to the different trends for the Enjoyment scale and the Utilitarian scale. Clearly students' enjoyment of reading has undergone a dramatic decline when compared to their belief in the value of reading as a tool for enhancing success at school or work. Although a representative sample was not sought, some degree of confidence can be placed in the generalizability of the findings by virtue of the apparent typical nature of the schools sampled to a large proportion of Melbourne metropolitan schools. To the extent that one can place confidence in the representativeness

of the samples the findings indicate that not only do Enjoyment of reading and belief in Individual development through reading decline comparatively to the Utilitarian belief but that they decline in absolute terms. The most striking decline occurs for Enjoyment. Not only does this attitude decrease with increasing grade level but the mean value of the grade 12 students is approximately zero, indicating a neutral response on average. More work certainly needs to be done to see the extent to which these results are representative of how students in our schools think and feel about reading. It would be interesting to follow up these results with either a longitudinal study or a representative sampling technique to see if the sharp declines in the Individual Development and Enjoyment scales found in the sample are indicative of the changes students go through in the attitudes toward reading during their years in school. If the downward trends in Enjoyment and Individual Development and the relative steadiness of the Utilitarian scale are real and not merely a factor of sampling, an investigation of the reasons for these trends would certainly be warranted and enlightening and have significant implications for reading instruction and curriculum development.

The concepts and the model outlined above certainly require additional clarification. Investigations aimed at accomplishing this objective are currently in progress and will be discussed shortly. Nevertheless, the results found to date have, in several respects, important implications for education and educational research.

Certainly curriculum concerns are pertinently related to this issue. Since there is persuasive evidence that attitude toward reading is best conceived as a multi-dimensional construct, it would be valuable to rethink the affective objectives of a curriculum in terms of the different components of reading attitude discussed here. Typically one of the goals of any school curriculum has been fostering in each student a positive attitude toward reading. Now it is time to ask, "in what respect a positive attitude toward reading?" Should the curriculum be stressing valuing reading as a utilitarian device, as a means of individual development and/or the enjoyment of reading? Looking at the issue from another angle, what types of attitudes toward reading is the curriculum currently promoting? These are questions which must be answered at the community or individual school level. However, when considering the affective areas of the curriculum, rather than focussing only on the idea of an attitude toward reading, attention to the different aspects of reading attitude would enable teachers to evaluate more precisely just what effects the curriculum has on this area of concern.

Also, strategies and instruments for assessing attitudes toward reading need to be examined in light of the notions outlined above. Summers (1977), Alexander & Filler (1976) and Zirkel & Greene (1976) discuss at length numerous ways of measuring attitude toward reading, all of which fall roughly into three categories: (1) direct observation of student behaviour, (2) use of (verbal) self-report instruments, and (3) projective techniques. Regardless of which method is used, the various dimensions of attitude toward reading should always be taken into account. Thus, if a teacher is using observation to gain information about Alicia's attitude toward reading, the teacher may discover that Alicia reads a good deal and conclude that she has a positive attitude toward reading. But what if all of that reading was done only for 'Utilitarian' purposes and none was done for Enjoyment? Surely, structuring

observations of behaviour on a multidimensional notion of attitude toward reading will provide more revealing information about the affective domain.

So too, should self-report instruments, or attitude scales, take into account the various dimensions of attitude toward reading. If a scale does not sample adequately from the different beliefs/attitudes toward reading and report results for each separately, it may well be providing an incomplete or misleading view of people's attitudes toward reading. Therefore, it is recommended that scales like those used in the study above be employed because they measure separately each of the dimensions of attitude toward reading.

Finally, this theory of attitude toward reading raises interesting questions for educational research. Alexander & Filler (1976) note conflicting results in research investigating the relations between attitudes toward reading and achievement in reading. It may be that the conflicting results are due to the confounding of the different aspects of attitude toward reading. Perhaps each construct in the cognitive and affective components of attitude toward reading is related in a particular way to achievement in reading. Further research in this area would help characterize the relations between attitudes and achievement in reading. Also, the question of developmental patterns in children's attitudes toward reading arises. Are there shifts in attitudes toward reading that occur as children proceed through formal schooling? If so, are these shifts linked to curriculum? To sociological factors?

As mentioned above, although the theoretical model presented here has considerable empirical evidence to support it, further explication and refinement are required. The three constructs analysed in the investigation were, in large part, defined in terms of pragmatic utility. Because of this fact separate beliefs about reading have been combined in both the Utilitarian and Individual Development constructs. Furthermore, affective evaluations are present to some degree in each of these two scales. In research now being conducted, we have endeavoured to measure each underlying belief and each affect toward reading separately. Empirical analyses of each component will demonstrate which, if any, can be combined for the purposes of the model. Such studies should help refine the theoretical framework and give a clearer indication of the types of scales necessary for measuring the cognitive and affective components of attitude toward reading.

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