CHAPTER 11

Douglas Waples (1893–1978): Crafting the Well-Read Public

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Historical Research Process

MOST READING RESEARCHERS are neither historians nor historiographers, and we are not exceptions in this regard. Yet while trying to understand the life and work of Douglas Waples (1893–1978), we learned some key lessons relevant to reading researchers everywhere, especially ones interested in history. Waples's most interesting work, for example, was thoroughly embedded within a particular historical moment that was informed by interdisciplinary impulses and especially influenced by communication studies. Perhaps for this reason, mention of Waples within the books and journals of the reading field hardly ever occurs, despite the fact that he was

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*Photo:*Courtesy of Hester Waples Achelis.

connected to important scholars of his time in philology and literacy, education and library sciences, and communication studies and sociology. Partly because of this lacuna, we struggled to locate Waples historically in a way that captures the complexity of his intellectual positioning and the reach of his legacy in relation to a field where, ironically, he is centrally relevant but has no ostensible presence.

On a practical level, this dilemma caused us difficulties in building an evidence base from which to work. Waples spent almost his entire academic career at the University of Chicago. He came to Chicago in the late 1920s and was present during the remarkable social, intellectual, and political ferment that sedimented into what is now called the Chicago School of social thought. Recruited to direct the Library School at the university, he expressed criticism of the foundational purposes and methods that constituted the fields of library science and reading research. We know from his scholarship that Waples was determined to make these disciplines more effective, sound, and socially relevant during a time of social crisis and reform. Indeed, his push to cultivate a complex culture of research from his position in the Library School led to debate that lives on today among librarians and information scientists.

When Waples embarked on his Chicago career, he was the protégé and colleague of the prominent educational theorists Werrett W. Charters and Ralph W. Tyler. The more we read back and forth across Waples's major and minor texts, the more we saw threads that connected his questions about reading within library sciences to the educational scholarship that emerged from his collaborations with Charters and Tyler. A single passion stood out across all of this work: to help practitioners understand that the interests of multiple agents and relations among multiple forces affect all learning and reading practices, and shape learning and reading outcomes. Waples viewed scientific inquiry as essential a tool for teachers, school administrators, and librarians as it was for scholars, and the ways in which he focused his energies as administrator, cross-cultural researcher, and teacher reflected this belief.

To what extent, then, were Waples's motives, institutional roles, and research agendas materially linked to the scholars of the Chicago School? Or to the reading researchers who were his contemporaries? We are still left pondering these questions because little of the primary or secondary source material we found mentions Waples's direct connection to key Chicago scholars of the period. There are also many suggestions that his second wife,

Dorothy, played a central role in his postwar scholarship, but they remain mere suggestions in the extant material we found.

Finally, we struggled in our ability to connect Waples's cultural history and social science research contributions to relevant trajectories of reading research. Is it more accurate to position Waples as the "pioneer" of scientific studies of reading processes, motivation, and text accessibility as Damon-Moore and Kaestle (1991, p. 182) do? Or does he belong more squarely in the center of analysis related to the history of print culture, as a figure whose work foreshadowed recent scholarship on the history of the book (e.g., Darnton, 1989)? Or was Waples's symbolic contextual–interactional approach to research an avatar of intellectual trajectories in the field, such as reader response theory, situated learning, and critical discourse analysis? Perhaps the most revealing lesson we take from our effort to understand the complex figure of Douglas Waples is that the origins of what is called reading research lie in all of these fields, and others. We certainly finished this project with the feeling that it is to predecessors like Waples that we should turn to make sure our work puts forward complex questions about complex practices and their effects so we avoid the disciplinary provincialism that can too easily narrow and misguide our efforts.

Personal and Professional Life

In a *Library Quarterly* tribute published after Waples's death, his former student, Bernard Berelson, captures Waples's individuality and complexity as a person and scholar in this way:

> As for Douglas Waples the person, the quality that impressed us most as students and colleagues was how untraditional, how independent he was in virtually every way. His talk was different; often hard to fathom, surprising in where it began and where it ended, seemingly beside the point but always worth waiting for, listening to, and pondering over. One felt one was overhearing an internal puzzlement being worked through aloud. (Berelson, 1979, p. 2)

Among the interesting questions posed by Kenneth Adler, at a 1953 conference on "The Mass Media of Communication" at the University of Chicago that he and Waples helped to organize were the following:

> Is there such a thing as a critical reading skill? If there is, what specifically is it that a critical reader does which the casual reader does not do? How can

> we guard against the danger that the student, in learning to reserve judgment and read critically, will come to regard the search for truth as too hopelessly complex and become cynical? ("Mass Media," 1953)

These are the kinds of questions that motivated Douglas Waples's scholarship throughout his life across disciplines as diverse as communication studies, teacher education, and library science—questions so pithy and counterintuitive that they often left audiences scratching their heads.

Much earlier, in a review of Huse's (1933) book, *The Illiteracy of the Literate: A Guide to the Art of Intelligent Reading*, Waples had praised the book's suggestion that "students can and should be taught to read with their tongues in their cheeks." He continued,

> To make the reading population more skeptical thus demands either that students read what is written by authors less clever than themselves (a dire possibility), or that the reading population be reduced to the small and courageous elite that honestly wants all the truth there is and all the shading necessary to give a fair perspective.... Apparently the human eagerness to have our legs pulled is an indispensable condition of mass writing and mass reading. (Waples, 1934, p. 343)

In connection with this claim, one aspect noted in Richardson's (1990) short biography of Waples was that the reading studies of the 1930s deliberately omitted fiction from their analyses because it was seen as too common and not related to the public improvement concerns of the time. Not until much later, when scholars such as Radway (e.g., 1991) began conducting historical research about popular fiction and group reading habits, did researchers begin to gain some understanding of the nature and functions of reading fiction during this period.

Douglas Waples was born on March 3, 1893, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA. He claimed more knowledge of his grandfather than his father. His grandfather was a federal judge during the Civil War and Reconstruction who wrote profusely to preserve his notes. His father, on the other hand, wrote almost nothing but personal letters. Although Waples described these letters as "literary masterpieces" (Waples & Waples, 1967, p. 1),

he also noted that they contained no personal content. Waples traveled with his mother, who had tuberculosis, to Colorado Springs, Colorado, USA, in 1894 and then on to Mexico City and El Paso, Mexico, where he lived until his mother died in 1898. During this time, Waples's father, who worked for a New York company, visited when his schedule permitted. After his mother died, Waples moved to Wayne, Pennsylvania, USA, to live with his father, who remarried in 1901. Over the years, Waples attended religiously oriented grammar schools, where he studied and sang in the school choirs. He also gained two sisters from his father's second marriage (Waples & Waples, 1967, p. 1).

Waples attended Haverford School and Haverford College near Philadelphia, earning a BA in 1914. In college, he excelled as a musician; an athlete; and a student of English, Latin, and Greek. He remembered his undergraduate years as rewarding in several ways:

> Finished Haverford about second in the class, Phi Beta Kappa; won some literary prizes, did about as well in sports as I had in school. I won the all-round in intercollegiate gymnastics and a bid to the 1914 Olympics which were never held. I had real satisfaction in the local fraternity, The Triangle Society. Spent the summers of 1914 and 1915 helping Mitch and Hans Froelicher to run a boys camp at Pocono Lake, Pa., where I met Eleanor Cary of Baltimore [a Quaker], whom I married three years later. This camp and the Quaker community of Pocono Lake Preserve were both an experience in getting along with kids and with Quakers on intimate terms. (Waples & Waples, 1967, p. 2)

After earning an MA from Haverford College, Waples taught English at the Gilman School in Baltimore, Maryland, USA, for two years. He then moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA, and earned a second MA from Harvard University. He and Eleanor, now married, traveled together to Europe on an international exchange through the first Friends Service Committee abroad program during World War I. While spending time in London during that period, Waples studied educational psychology, and when he returned to the United States in 1919, he earned a PhD in educational psychology in one year from the University of Pennsylvania. His dissertation was titled "An Approach to the Synthetic Study of Interest in Reading" (Richardson, 1990, p. 148).

Waples's first university position was at Tufts University in Boston, Massachusetts, USA. He soon moved, however, to the University of Pittsburgh in Pennsylvania, where he worked under Werrett W. Charters, a leader in curriculum theory, adult education, and educational research. Most of Waples's scholarship during the 1920s focused on the study of secondary school curriculum and administration. Among his major works in this area were *Procedures in High School Teaching* (Waples, 1924) and *The Commonwealth Teacher-Training Study* (Charters & Waples, 1929). In each text he and his coauthors were determined to stimulate readers' interest in methodological ideas, not to aid researchers so they might persist in practices of "'busy work' which [clog] graduate theses with masses of trivial data" (Waples, 1939, p. 51), but instead to inspire inquiry and methodological rigor so research might fulfill its ability to make "important contributions to theory" (p. 49).

When Charters accepted a position at the University of Chicago in 1925, he secured Waples a job as an education lecturer there as well. Because of his boundless energy and penetrating mind, Waples was soon recruited to become part of the Graduate Library School at Chicago, where he taught and conducted research until entering the U.S. Army in 1942. (He returned to the university in 1948.)

Community studies of reading, in which Waples attempted to link analytically the availability of diverse texts to particular reading publics, dominated his work during the 1930s. He became a staunch advocate of serious library research and scholarship, and he traveled abroad on a number of research trips, examining such issues as the impact on reading of the European economic downturn and "the obstacles restricting importation of foreign books in the social sciences" in Europe (Waples & Waples, 1967, p. 5). In Waples's view, librarians played a pivotal mediating role between the producers and suppliers of texts and ideas. They could and should move beyond standard research tasks, such as analyzing circulation records, to hypothesize the relation between trends and preferences among readers, their motivations for reading, demographic variables, and social trends. Waples's publications during this period included *What People Want to Read About: A Study of Group Interests and a Survey of Problems in Adult Reading* (Waples & Tyler, 1931) as well as *People and Print: Social Aspects of Reading in the Depression* (1938).

Waples's 1930s international research agenda always included Eleanor and the couple's three young daughters, Christine, Carola, and Hester (Terry), for extended travel. According to Terry, "We Waples kids were among the

most fortunate in terms of childhood experiences" (personal communication, March 27, 2006). The girls attended boarding schools in Belgium and enjoyed formative educational and cultural experiences. Carola, who was 8, 12, and 15 years old during these yearlong research expeditions, recalled a three-week bicycling tour of the European countryside with her father in 1937—"my violin on my back, and an instrument on his" (personal communication, March 9, 2006). This proved to be a defining moment for her, a symbol of her close relationship with her father.

Terry remembers her father as thoughtful, driven about his work, and serious about a host of issues that mattered to him. Yet her father's "delicious light side," noted Terry, equally defined his character (personal communication, March 27, 2006). As Carola put it, "Dad was a dreamer, a musician and artist. His head was always sort of in the clouds" (personal communication, March 9, 2006). In recounting memories of her father, Terry added,

> Occasionally we'd open the front door, responding to a knock, and find him standing on his hands, coins falling out of his pockets. We'd scramble for the coins and he'd walk into the apartment upside down as though it were the most natural thing in the world. (personal communication, March 25, 2006)

Terry also described how, well before jogging and ecology became popular, Waples jogged on city streets "snagging litter as he came to it" (personal communication, March 25, 2006).

Public-minded in his scholarly stance as well as in his everyday life, Waples had no interest in organized religion, said both Carola and Terry. As Carola put it, "Nothing was rammed down our throats" (personal communication, March 9, 2006). And according to Terry,

> He scoffed at all organizations: religious, fraternal, birthdays (hard on young kids in foreign boarding schools), Mother's Day, even Christmas, though he produced wonderful cards. They were usually poems, some written by our cat, "Lemon Catsapig Higgenscat with a long tail and a very small brain," usually praising the value of the recipient's friendship and the worthlessness of the holiday. (personal communication, March 25, 2006)

Although life abroad presented complicated logistics often exacerbated by the geopolitical climates in which the Waples found themselves, family life

seemed to fall into place, largely due to Eleanor, whom Terry portrayed as a "pragmatic and efficient" person who "kept the ship afloat, handling emergencies, finding necessary funds" (personal communication, March 27, 2006). Carola concurred, remembering that her mother also played an important role as secretary to Waples, supporting virtually all of the clerical needs of his research efforts (personal communication, March 9, 2006).

In the early 1940s, Douglas Waples shifted his attention fully to the war effort. Since his earlier European stint with the Friends Service Committee program, Waples had learned a great deal about topics such as foreign language training, learning and assessment, national intelligence, propaganda research, and international relations. His interest in reading as a sociopolitical practice resonated within the war context. As a U.S. Army major in 1942, for example, Waples found himself in Leipzig, Germany, just before it was taken over by the Russian army. He and several other officers

> went down to publishers row in that city and picked up the 10 publishers whom we considered the best compromise between the most important pre-war German publishers and those most likely to be cleared by [their] own Intelligence Branch, which had a veto on all of [their] recommendations to license. Those [they] picked were moved out of Leipzig...and across Germany by military convoy to Wiesbaden on the Rhine where they have prospered ever since. (Waples & Waples, 1967, p. 7)

Carola, who joined the Women's Army Corps in the early 1940s, noted that her father "was thrilled to be able to get some of the top German publishers, delighted to do his part in what he saw as beating the Russians" (personal communication, March 9, 2006).

In 1944, Waples was assigned to head the Office of Strategic Services Publications Branch in Paris, France, where he met Dorothy Blake, an Army employee whom Waples later described as a partner of "great congeniality in work and play" (Waples & Waples, 1967, p. 6). Dorothy later became a staff member in the Army's Publications Branch. In 1945, Douglas Waples and his staff (including Dorothy) were moved to Germany, where they remained for three years, establishing a functional infrastructure for the publication of German magazines and books. Following his divorce from Eleanor during this period, Waples married Dorothy Blake in 1947, and they returned to Chicago in 1948. Throughout the remainder of their lives togeth-

er, Waples and Dorothy seem to have enjoyed a deep partnership that pervaded every aspect of their lives—intellectual, professional, and social.

On the heels of Bernard Berelson's resignation, Waples assumed the chair of the University of Chicago's Committee on Communication in 1951 and held that position until his retirement in 1958. The Committee was a program that supported graduate work and scholarship on communications theory and practice from across academic departments. Waples also conducted Fulbright research grant projects in India and Peru during the 1950s, hoping to gain understanding about the sources of high levels of illiteracy and the uneven distribution of access to reading and learning in these countries and others like them. Findings from his Fulbright investigations were published in various foundation monographs and academic books (Waples & Waples, 1967, p. 8).

As in his previous research endeavors, Waples tackled very practical problems in very practical ways while on the Fulbright fellowships. Of his work in India, for example, he wrote in a proto-postcolonial voice

> that present theories of international communication are so biased toward the value systems and public communication systems of western countries, and especially of the United States, that they are largely invalid as applied to Asian and presumably to other non-western nations and cultures. (Waples & Waples, 1967, p. 8)

He devoted himself to developing an ecologically valid theory of international communication equally applicable to nations and cultures as different as the United States, India, and Peru. Among other things, Waples argued that "the best means of telling people [in India] about birth control, agricultural improvements, government, or whatever, was through story tellers, singers and folk plays that introduced such information into the plots taken from the Indian classics" (Waples & Waples, 1967, p. 15).

In this regard, Dorothy Waples described her husband as a kind of classic anthropologist, making constant trips to visit students and colleagues in remote villages and frequently participating in various aspects of Indian culture (e.g., Muslim festivals, student riots, street fairs, family gatherings, and local swimming spots). Of one trip to visit a U.S. student in the village of Kumuwara, Dorothy Waples noted, "It meant riding [a bicycle] many miles on foot-wide dikes between the irrigation channels, over sandy patches, and around small

huts. It was often easier to walk than ride" (Waples & Waples, 1967, p. 16). Perhaps the anthropologist in Waples was always afoot because, although "he scoffed at religion and rites of any sort" as daughter Terry saw it, "his keen interest in what makes for the rites, and his curiosity about man's needs were role model material" (personal communication, March 27, 2006).

Thinking back over his 30-odd years of scholarship at the University of Chicago—including research on teaching, reading and libraries, and public communication and social problems—Waples characterized it as a "progression" in coming to understand inquiry as more a matter of imagination than statistics (Waples & Waples, 1967, p. 5). Reading across his publications, we certainly got the sense that he came to view research as an effort to understand and explain broad human issues through broad and varied analytic lenses. Indeed, he praised the University of Chicago as a place that valued the cross-fertilization of philosophical beliefs and analytical approaches—all rigorous in the "insistence on excellence while allowing the individual complete freedom in the direction and methods of research in which excellence was expected" (p. 5).

Upon his retirement in 1958, Waples and Dorothy moved to Washington Island, Wisconsin, USA, where they gardened, fished, and socialized. Waples remained an active scholar and teacher, developing and teaching courses to Washington Island teachers sponsored by the University of Chicago and the University of Wisconsin at Madison. He suffered a debilitating stroke in 1960, which resulted in paralysis and expressive aphasia. Although he did learn to walk and, to an extent, talk again, Carola noted that "the stroke was devastating and he never really fully recovered" (personal communication, March 9, 2006). Carola's daughter, Anita, knew her grandfather only during this time of his life, when only Dorothy "was able to understand him...to [me] he was a mystery." Despite this, Douglas Waples was a source of inspiration, the person who encouraged Anita and her brothers "to read the dictionary for fun" and whose influence led her to believe that "all families were tri- or bilingual" (personal communication, March 11, 2006).

Many people, students and colleagues as well as family and friends, felt the imprint of Waples on their lives. In a moving *Library Quarterly* tribute published after Waples died, renowned behavioral scientist and former Waples student Bernard Berelson (1979), confirmed this sense when he noted,

> Perhaps we can best appreciate Douglas in what he wrote about his own father on the occasion of his death: "He walked along the way, observing things curiously, as one who understands their purpose but finds no peace until he learns what each part does to make the whole. He picked up stones and turning them about would point out the precious and common ores by standards strange to us but clear to him since his own age-less youth." In memoriam, everybody is one of a kind, *sui generis*. Douglas truly was...those of us who knew him...cannot claim we always understood him—either his last paragraph or his full personhood—but none of us will ever forget him. (p. 2)

Philosophical Beliefs and Guiding Principles

The present intellectual moment in reading theory and research is in some ways a renewal of the life and work of Douglas Waples, especially the research he conducted while at the Graduate Library School of the University of Chicago. Importantly, this school was created during the emergence of the Chicago School of Sociology, an intellectual movement heavily influenced by a stunning range of scholars that included John Dewey, George Herbert Mead, Robert Park, Herbert Burgess, Herbert Blumer, William Foote Whyte, and Frederic Thrasher. Waples's most foundational and important line of research focused on why people read; what people read; and how reading affects individuals, social groups, and social institutions. He developed this research agenda largely through the study of institutions such as libraries and schools, analyses of reading pedagogies in secondary and postsecondary institutions, and analyses of situated reading practices. His work was fueled by two impulses: (1) a humanist's desire to improve society by generating widespread public interest in intellectual ideas and social advancement, and (2) a scientist's desire to improve the understanding of the formation and expansion of intellectual habits and of the role of reading in this process. As a scientist, Waples worked to identify discrete elements that were integral to reading, and, using both quantitative and qualitative analytic techniques, he decisively mapped and interrogated the relations he discovered among these elements. His theoretical and empirical work clearly paved the way for more current theories of reading, such as reader response theories, theories of motivation and engagement, situated learning theories, and critical discourse analysis.

Waples's work also seems a precursor of "history of the book" scholarship, an interdisciplinary approach designed to explore and understand the

relations among readers, reading practices, publishers, authors, and media production technologies. Of particular interest here is the fact that we found Waples's work, especially *What People Want to Read About* (Waples & Tyler, 1931) and *What Reading Does to People* (Waples, Berelson, & Bradshaw, 1940), included in almost every "history of the book" syllabus we were able to locate in Internet searches. His legacy clearly had an impact on the birth and development of this domain of inquiry.

For scholars of style, Waples's writing is particularly interesting—simple yet elegant, complex yet crystal clear, prodigious yet efficient—a kind of writing that embodies the imperatives of stylists such as E.B. White and William Strunk. Perhaps this is because he held such firm convictions about the need for reading material to be accessible and useful, which required understanding the key relationships between the distributors and consumers of texts. In fact, Waples intended librarians, educators, and publishers—the stewards of social institutions whose influence regulated text production and use—to be the primary audiences for much of his scholarly writing. He argued across his many publications that these professionals needed to gain considerable theoretical and research proficiency to fulfill their role as intermediaries, rather than just viewing their work in narrow, administrative terms. Only if they were armed both with the tools to pose important questions about reading practices and the tools to investigate relevant hypotheses would librarians, educators, and publishers be able to provide more (and better) texts to their publics. And only if their publics had access to more (and better) texts could reading exert the desired effect of promoting liberalism and democracy.

As an intellectual and cultural icon, Waples remains both admirable and enigmatic, perhaps because he embodied the paradoxical and intellectual ferment of the times. As Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2004) point out, the Chicago School of Sociology—the intellectual environment Waples inhabited—was constructed at an interdisciplinary intersection of multiple tensions—foundationalist and interpretivist epistemologies; structural, functional, and emergence theories; and descriptive and prescriptive social impulses. Not surprisingly, then, we are left with many questions about what animated Douglas Waples. Was he a behaviorist or a social constructionist? The answer seems to be that he was both. Was he a positivist or an interpretivist? The answer again seems to be that he was both. Was he a sociopolitical conservative or a sociopolitical radical? The answer yet again

seems to be "yes" and "yes." It is perhaps this "both...and" quality about his thinking and his approach to research that makes him so intriguing and so remarkably contemporary. Moreover, a careful survey of his work across time—from studies of education and teaching to studies of libraries and then studies of public communication—suggests that his work became both increasingly complex and increasingly elegant—theoretically, methodologically, and substantively—as he developed as a scholar.

Waples's work thus remains interesting methodologically and theoretically for contemporary reading researchers. Methodologically, he created multimodal research designs that combined various kinds of quantitative and qualitative strategies in ways that were as principled as they were creative. Theoretically, Waples contributed to understanding readers and reading practices within their social and cultural contexts. It is to these issues that we now turn, after a look at Waples's research on teaching.

Investigation of Teaching Practices

Waples's attitude toward science as a mode of engaged, reflective practice applicable to the study of educational issues grew from his reading of Dewey (especially *How We Think* [Dewey, 1910/1997]) as well as his work with Charters on school evaluation and the study of teaching activities as a basis for developing pedagogical theory. *Procedures in High School Teaching* (Waples, 1924), for example, is a textbook that uses a problem-based approach to involve teacher education students in dialogue and critical reflection upon teaching practice and learning theory. Each chapter of the book uses a case study/scenario method to provoke theoretically oriented discussions and closes with references to significant theoretical works relevant to the chapter's central issues. Waples used this method because he believed that the goal of teacher education should be to lead students toward the construction of principles for effective teaching based on their growing theoretical understanding and expertise.

Waples, who had honed his research abilities under the guidance of Charters and in collaboration with theorist and researcher Ralph W. Tyler, coauthored with Charters the massive volume *The Commonwealth Teacher-Training Study* (Charters & Waples, 1929). Like many studies conducted in the social efficiency era of teacher education during the 1920s, its goal was to amass and analyze the pedagogical activities and characteristics of effective

teachers to build grounded theories of learning and classroom practice. Like similar research of the time, *The Commonwealth Teacher-Training Study* exhibited "a faith in the power of science to provide a basis for building a teacher education curriculum" that became a recurring theme of the 20th century (Zeichner & Liston, 1990, p. 9).

The text's researchers collected data using teachers' self-reported checklists of teaching activities and researchers' observations of teachers' daily activities in public and experimental schools. Teachers, administrators, professors, and others were also asked to judge the "importance, difficulty of learning, and value of pre-service training" in relation to the activities enumerated in the initial surveys (p. 5). The trends and patterns that emerged from analyses of these data formed the basis for suggestions about improving teacher training. And indeed, Charters and Waples outlined ways to apply findings from their work to hypothesize about the motives underpinning the activities of the teachers with whom they worked, and provided examples and demonstrations of how readers might relate hypotheses about teachers' practices to institutional contexts and to the principles and theories that structured the field.

In this regard, the work done for *The Commonwealth Teacher-Training Study* was decidedly scientistic. It was subsequently criticized for reducing the art of teaching to lists of correct behaviors and strategies (e.g., Lagemann, 2000, p. 108). There seems to be some truth to this criticism. Indeed, had Waples turned his attention to teaching and education a decade or two later, when his theoretical and methodological acumen was more fully developed, we suspect he would have carried out his research very differently and generated quite different conclusions and recommendations.

After completing work on *The Commonwealth Teacher-Training Study*, Waples extended the range, depth, and approach of his inquiry to include studies of community reading, reading interest and motivation, and theoretical aspects of library science. Waples referred to this decade-long stage of his scholarship—the 1930s—as the "who-reads-what-and-why?" period (Waples & Waples, 1967, p. 5). More important, it was the period during which Waples presided over the newly established Graduate Library School at the University of Chicago and brought to it a "critical, academic approach" (Rayward, 1986, pp. 349–350) that revolutionized the field—apparently to the consternation of many already in the field. Waples wanted an analytical and theoretical approach to take hold in the area of librarianship, which

was overrun, in his opinion, with quantitative analyses that were difficult to use to address specific problems in specific locations.

Directly following the publication of *The Commonwealth Teacher-Training Study*, Waples wrote "Propaganda and Leisure Reading" (1930), an article published in the *Journal of Higher Education*. Its key themes reflected the problems he addressed as an educational researcher and prefigured his formative role in library science and communication studies. In the article, Waples urges educators to extend the scientific approaches that he elaborated in his earlier research on reading interests to the investigation of the "problem" of propaganda as it affected the information that college students gained about topics of great concern to them, topics not represented in the "collegiate curriculum...simply because the problems have no departmental classification; for example, sex, militarism, crime, business ethics, and personal ideals" (p. 73). How, Waples asked, could society help young people learn to critically engage the media they chose for leisure purposes if, indeed, these sources were influenced by propaganda?

One impetus for Waples to pose this question was an attempt by authorities "to restrict the supply of reading-matter within certain social and political limits" (1930, p. 74). This occurred, he claimed, because many people assumed that popular media emphasized aberrant behaviors, giving them acceptability and moral credence, and thus damaging young people who responded to such media based on the immediate interest they fostered, not the ideas represented or the potential truth value they held. Waples went on to argue that this assumption could stand only if it could be proven that a positive correlation existed among readers and the attitudes they might form as a result of consumption. His analysis suggested that the outrage of college authorities should not lead them to limit student access to controversial material. The ideas embodied in such material already permeated the lives of college students, and popular media could be used to encourage students to consider risqué ideas from multiple perspectives. In this regard, Waples urged colleges to become more active in providing diverse materials about issues not addressed through the formal curriculum:

> Commercialized exploitation of half-truths contains its own antidote when all half-truths are exploited. Hence efforts by authorities of the college to provide all the interesting material available on such issues are perhaps more effective than efforts to teach the whole truth by means of abstract

> principles, when either method is applied separately. In the ideal solution, of course, the two are combined. (p. 77)

As Waples's interdisciplinary interests grew, he focused his attention on the need for solid scientific investigation and triangulation of reading problems to reflect the perspective embodied by the emergent theory of communication that interested him. That is, he argued that reading is a situated social practice that must be studied from the perspectives of institutions (initially schools, and later libraries, publishing houses, and political institutions); individuals and groups; and textual-ideological representations of information, ideas, and attitudes. His interest in the reading practices of the public was motivated by a desire to influence what libraries and other venues acquired and made available to their readers. One key goal underlying all of Waples's work was the production of an ever-increasing reading public. Another was to promote reading materials that led to socially desirable effects, which seems to have meant effects that promote a well-organized democratic society that is cooperative, enterprising, and socially just. The better library personnel understood their readers' interests and predilections, he claimed, the more successful they could be at stocking libraries with materials that would be read and would cultivate a particular kind of democratic reading public.

Research on Reading Practices

Perhaps the theory and research of Douglas Waples most likely to interest the community of reading scholars is his research on the nature, functions, and effects of people's reading practices. This work is contained in many of his many publications and is particularly well developed in the books *What People Want to Read About: A Study of Group Interests and a Survey of Problems in Adult Reading* (Waples & Tyler, 1931), *People and Print* (Waples, 1938), and *What Reading Does to People: A Summary of Evidence on the Social Effects of Reading and a Statement of Problems for Research* (Waples et al., 1940). This work embodied the Chicago School's productive tension between more modernist (positivist) and more interpretivist (ethnographic) approaches to social science. Indeed, Waples was a near classic functionalist, fundamentally concerned with the ways in which social institutions satisfy the biological and social needs of their members so social order and stability may prevail. He was also a consummate empirical scientist who conducted a remarkable number

and array of empirical studies that often combined meticulous archival analysis, large-scale sociological surveys, face-to-face interviews, and case studies. In this regard, Margaret Monroe (1986) claimed in her brief biography of Waples that he was "a brilliant conceptualizer and skilled practitioner in research design" (p. 848) because of the ways he portrayed reading as social history while simultaneously constructing a treatise on methodology. Monroe notes that Waples "has not had his equal in the area of adult reading studies" (p. 848).

In 1931, Waples and Tyler published *What People Want to Read About*, precisely to explain the complexity of reading practices and their effects. Previous research, such as Edward Lee Thorndike's *Adult Learning* study (Thorndike, Bregman, Tilton, & Woodyard, 1928), had provided "evidence that adults can learn" (Waples & Tyler, 1931, p. 7), while William S. Gray and Ruth Munroe's collection, *The Reading Interests and Habits of Adults* (1929), had demonstrated that "adults read much trash" (p. 7). (For more information on Thorndike and Gray, see chapters 5 and 13, this volume, respectively.) Posing the question, "How far do differences in reading interest[s] affect group understanding and adjustment?" (Waples & Tyler, 1931, p. 147), the authors set out to explore how the findings of this earlier research could be expanded to discover more about "the character of adult reading," specifically the effects of adults' desires to learn more through reading (p. 7). If it were viewed as positive that more and more people read for a greater variety of purposes, and if reading were understood to influence "popular attitudes toward pressing social problems" (p. 1), then knowing what readers were interested in reading about was crucial for promoting the particular books that publishers and purveyors believed would best cultivate particular social effects such as creating an educated, democratic citizenry. In this regard, Waples and Tyler contended that "reading for adults is a public utility. Whether or not citizens have easy access to authentic material on social and personal problems is perhaps no less momentous than whether or not we have schools for children" (Waples & Tyler, 1931, p. 2).

Waples and Tyler realized it would be an enormous challenge to capture the diversity of interest in the reading public. They sought instead to capture group patterns, using the group rather than the individual as the central unit of analysis. Instead of relying upon circulation records and other secondary sources, they used survey methods to sample the population. Focusing on group data enabled them to look at patterns of reading about particular top-

ics and subjects that appealed to definable groups of readers. They claimed group data were more reliable than individual data and better able to point toward feasible solutions to problems such as the lack of readable nonfiction on serious topics for "individuals beyond the pale of the 'cultured'" (Waples & Tyler, 1931, p. 65). The researchers found, for example, that the subject of "international attitudes and problems" appealed to all groups of readers, yet "readable and authentic material...is scarcely available to 'uncultured' groups except in a few general magazines" (p. 71). They continued,

> Unless such groups are informed on such topics, it is not likely that their congressional representatives will behave more intelligently. Nor is it likely that readable books will be written, published, sold, and placed in public libraries for such readers until both author and publisher can be assured of their interest in advance. (p. 71)

To promote research with broader utility and great acuity, Waples advanced a range of approaches. "Quantitative and qualitative analyses are mutually complementary, interdependent, and logically inseparable" in certain fields, he claimed, and library research was one of them (Waples, 1939, p. 52). Readers' interests and motivations, he argued, could not be inferred solely from circulation records, which ignored a range of data that could equally influence readers' tastes, such as the availability of particular sources. "Most reading," Waples argued, "like most conversation, probably occupies a region halfway between the extremes of any scale of values—halfway between useful and useless, altruistic and selfish, intelligent and stupid, artistic and careless, wholesome and morbid" (p. 92). Only sophisticated research techniques informed by a thorough understanding of the scientific method and an awareness of what counts as quality evidence were likely to capture the nuances embedded in any question posed as a reading research problem.

Waples's community reading studies culminated in 1937 with the publication of *Research Memorandum on Social Aspects of Reading in the Depression* (1937/1972; reprinted in 1938 as *People and Print: Social Aspects of Reading in the Depression*), commissioned by the Social Science Research Council as part of a series of investigations concerning changes to social organization and social life in the 1930s. As in previous texts, Waples stressed the need for synthesis in reading research, in part because he felt an emphasis on synthesis would force researchers to make explicit the assumptions that led them to form particular research questions. The proliferation of studies attached

to other aspects of communication, such as radio and film, also made a synthetic approach desirable, both to account for a fuller range of sources and media available to the public and to make researchers more attentive to the warrants for their claims about reading behaviors and practices. In Waples's estimation, trying to separate the forces of supply from issues of demand often resulted in the "serious misinterpretation of reading behavior" (Waples, 1938, p. 4). For a useful "sociology of reading" to develop, one capable of speaking to a problem, such as the tendency for some groups in some places to access political journals while others stuck to light fiction, information about two key assumptions was required: (1) that people's attitudes toward social issues were reflected in their reading behaviors and (2) that people whose attitudes sociologists wanted to know about "read enough to reveal their attitudes" (p. 201). Scholars now take for granted the multidimensional nature of reading problems, which always involve readers, texts, and contexts, but in the 1930s the idea was revolutionary.

Waples drew upon an enormous range of sources in *People and Print*—census data, market analyses in printing and text distribution, community reading surveys and other research reports on libraries and reading or text circulation activity, and master's and doctoral theses. The report documents and analyzes trends. For example, during the early years of the U.S. Great Depression some readers in particular places tended to prefer rental libraries and bookstores to public libraries because public libraries restricted their offerings mainly to more serious literature. This trend did not seem to hold, however, in middle class areas, where people turned to public libraries, apparently finding reading material that suited their tastes. Based on his extensive cross-indexing of sources, Waples drew tentative conclusions such as these throughout the text. He claimed that no clear pattern existed between the production and consumption of reading matter, not because relations were nonexistent but because different factors and events influenced patterns of production–publication–consumption differently for different groups. Again, specifying relations with precision mattered to Waples more than making grand claims that lacked validity. To move in this direction required collaboration with experts in other scholarly fields and an ability to conduct research on fundamental problems as a core practice of librarianship, a view that lives on today (Pollicino, 1999; Rayward, 1986; Svenonius & McGarry, 2001).

Waples's decade-long program of research on the reading practices of many social groups across gender, class, and occupational lines produced a

theory of the nature, functions, and effects of reading that was fundamentally a theory of communication. This theory posited reading as communication having at least four key dimensions (or relevant units of analysis), each of which affects the others in constitutive ways. These four dimensions are (1) production, (2) distribution, (3) content, and (4) readers' predispositions and dispositions. We now examine each of these in terms of Waples's research.

Production. According to Waples, the amount and character of what is published each year go a long way toward explaining what various agencies have available to distribute. Significant changes in the books, magazines, newspapers, pamphlets, and so on have a radiating influence first on the shelves of distribution centers, such as libraries and stores, and then on readers. Forces influencing publication trends include gross population characteristics, changing educational levels of the reading public, changing age distributions of populations, reading competencies of the general public and various subgroups, the political climate of the nation and its regions, economic conditions, publishing costs, findings from market analyses, lobbying by special interest groups, technological innovations for producing printed texts, ideologies of publication houses, tastes of various social groups, popular trends or investments (e.g., fitness, self-help, and the creation of wealth), politics and competitiveness among publishers, and changing global relations. Because the kinds and amounts of texts published are largely driven by potential sales, socially and culturally privileged groups almost always have desirable reading materials in abundance, while socially and culturally marginalized groups almost always lack reading materials that they find interesting and thus desirable.

Distribution. Waples noted that the accessibility of reading materials is the single most important factor in determining what people read. To ensure their viability, then, systems of distribution (e.g., bookstores and libraries) attempt strategically to supply relevant publications to the various social groups they serve based on the kinds of reading effects such groups tend to desire: textbooks to students for their instrumental effects, women's magazines to housewives for their prestige and respite effects (note the sexism implicit in this claim), campaign literature to voters for their instrumental and reinforcement effects, specialized technical magazines to the various trades for their instrumental effects, belles-lettres to cultural aficionados for

their aesthetic and respite effects, and newspapers to everyone for a wide variety of effects. Only a small subset of the total publications produced is available within any particular venue. Moreover, distribution agencies can be sites of, and for, surveillance and didacticism: "Whatever we know about the social effects of reading may be used to magnify the socially desirable effects, through the manipulation of the factor most readily controlled, namely the agencies of distribution" and "the effects of given kinds of reading may be traced back to the agencies which distribute the publications read" (Waples et al., 1940, p. 53). In addition, differences between people's desired versus actual reading practices may be traced to differences in accessibility of various kinds of reading materials, and differences in accessibility may be traced to specific patterns of distribution. Finally, just as with production, more desirable kinds of texts are almost always more available to mainstream cultural groups compared to nonmainstream ones.

Content. One key finding from Waples's many studies was that the single most important factor responsible for the social effects of reading was the content of publications read. Drawing on this finding, Waples insisted on conducting careful analyses of the thematic and rhetorical composition of texts because such analyses could help predict the ways that different texts were likely to attract and affect readers. Importantly, these were not content analyses per se but psychological and social analyses of transactions between readers and texts. The analyses were guided by two key questions (note that, as was characteristic of the time, male pronouns were used to refer to all readers independent of sex/gender): (1) "Who is the reader, and what does he do and want and get?" and (2) "What and how does the publication contribute to his wants? When the second question is answered in terms of the first, the resulting description of content will show the part it plays in whatever effects are inferred or observed" (Waples et al., 1940, p. 64). Even more fine-grained content analyses may be conducted if guided by questions derived from Waples's effects research:

> In a particular reading situation does a publication tend to relieve or intensify anxieties [the reader] may have about himself? Does it flatter or reproach 'his kind of people?' With what types of persons does it encourage him to identify? What goals are mentioned as desirable or undesirable, and what methods are proposed or opposed for attaining those goals? What popular symbols are approved or condemned?" (p. 65)

Using such questions, researchers can determine the precise ways in which content activates certain predispositions that tend to produce certain effects. Central factors in this process include the general style of texts, text coherence, and the rhetorical devices used by authors to persuade audiences. Interestingly, Waples's work showed that the topics or subjects of texts were far less responsible for social effects on readers than more stylistic and rhetorical factors. They reveal what the text is about, but not what it is likely to do to a reader.

Readers' predispositions and dispositions. Waples claimed that "readers' predispositions represent the least understood and probably the most important of the four major factors to which in combination we ascribe the social effects of reading" (Waples et al., 1940, p. 100). And perhaps his most pioneering and most important work was done in this domain. The predispositions that Waples found most influential on the social effects of reading may be grouped in four basic categories: (1) demographic traits such as age, gender, income, education, occupation, social loyalties, political inclinations, and current affinity groups; (2) psychosocial traits such as attitudes, beliefs, opinions, moral sensibilities, and sympathies relative to the subjects read about; (3) instrumental factors such as motives, expectations, and goals for reading; and (4) environmental factors such as the physical and emotional conditions of the reading moment. These various predispositions affect both the publications readers select and the interpretations they carry away from them. Importantly, and particularly nettlesome for research, readers' predispositions vary across reading contexts and change over time.

Finally, Waples did not stop at cataloguing the characteristics of text production, text distribution, text content, and reader characteristics. Instead, basing his conclusions on findings from many carefully conducted studies in many different social contexts, he theorized the precise ways in which these four dimensions come together to account for the amounts and kinds of reading readers do, as well as the personal, social, and political effects of their reading practices.

Waples also went on to insist that understanding the nature and effects of reading always requires attention to all four dimensions and that not doing so would lead scholars to serious misunderstandings that would have dire consequences in applied activities. In this regard, he criticized Adler's (1940) *How to Read a Book: The Art of Getting a Liberal Education* for its hopeless

normativism and reductionism as well as its lack of empirical validation. He also attacked Mark Twain's (1883) "fulminations" in *Life on the Mississippi* about the effects of reading the works of Sir Walter Scott both because Twain imposed his own personal tastes and dispositions onto other readers and because he seemed to assume that text content or author's intention can account for the meanings readers will take from texts. All of these tendencies, Waples argued, perpetuate misguided folk theories rooted in popular assumptions by reducing effects to single (and usually assumed) factors, rather than attending to the complex set of social structures and processes (and the relations between and among them) that contribute to the production of complex and multiple effects. The only antidote to problems of bias and reductionism and the only way to understand the complexity of social effects of reading, according to Waples, was well-designed, scientifically rigorous, and meticulously conducted empirical research.

Indeed, his own theoretically grounded and meticulously crafted multimodal research designs seem to fit the bill, and based on findings generated by these designs Waples was able to posit several important and overlapping social effects of reading. These include (a) instrumental effects or increased knowledge that can be put into practice; (b) prestige effects, including the mitigation of low self-esteem or the affirmation of group identity; (c) reinforcement effects, or having one's attitudes validated or converted; (d) aesthetic effects, or feeling pleasure and gaining insight from literary icons such as poets, essayists, and novelists; and (e) respite effects, or escape from worldly tensions. Waples went on to map the ways in which certain kinds of texts (e.g., instruction manuals, novels, political pamphlets, and comic strips) tend to produce certain kinds of effects in relatively systematic ways (Waples, 1938; Waples et al., 1940).

In sum, although a certain elitism may be detected in Waples's work, he was a spirited intellectual maverick who produced a unique body of work over four decades, from the late 1910s through the 1950s. Within communication studies, Waples's intellectual legacy lives on in research agenda as varied as the nature and effects of library holdings, organization, and access (e.g., Svenonius & McGarry, 2001); the role of the mass media in social change (e.g., Shah, 2003); and how to reimagine and reinvigorate research and practice in library and information sciences in an electronic age (e.g., Pollicino, 1999).

The broad sweep of his research, robust both theoretically and methodologically, symbolizes much about Waples himself, a person variously de-

scribed as "independent in virtually every way" (Berelson, quoted in Richardson, 1990, p. 148) yet fundamentally concerned "to make common sense more common" (Waples, 1931, p. 32). Contemporary reading researchers might find in Waples both a cutting intellectual figure and a model for pragmatic, interdisciplinary research practice.

Contributions to the Field of Reading

Douglas Waples outlined with great precision the importance of posing useful questions about reading and the public good. He was thorough in his approach to population sampling and data collection. In his empirical studies, Waples sought to demonstrate how individual reading habits intersect with group interests and relate to material forces, and to do this he considered multiple sources of data from an array of analytic approaches. Although the tone of this work comes across as more patient than pedantic, reading Waples's writing often does require a willingness to entertain ideas from several disciplinary perspectives, while keeping track of the complex and often counterintuitive articulations he and his coauthors make between theories and data—lots of data.

Although many of his colleagues praised the wide scope and rigor of Waples's scholarship, some found his exhaustive approach plainly exhausting, even forbidding. In a more laudatory tone, C. Wright Mills wrote of *What Reading Does to People* (Waples et al., 1940) that the "level of methodological awareness which the volume achieves, along with its systematic carefulness, should make [it] a model for future work" (Mills, 1942, p. 154). Yet Waples's Chicago School colleague, Robert Park, found his *People and Print* (1938) "extraordinarily and unnecessarily hard to read," an ironic finding "considering that this is a volume dealing with books and readers" (Park, 1938, p. 291). Some, like William S. Gray, celebrated the "wide and practical application" of Waples's research (Gray, 1932, p. 113). Others saw, at least in some of his work, the heart and sensibility of a cataloguer, a taxonomist who produced analyses that were "bloodless and utterly depersonalized...cold and unsympathetic...[and] appreciative of nothing but minute facts" (Thompson, quoted in Richardson, 1990, p. 150). In relation to a book he wrote with Ralph W. Tyler, *What People Want to Read About* (Waples & Tyler, 1931), still others offered a more balanced view, claiming "the investigators...apply their measuring instruments with courtesy, sensitivity, and

with a respect for literary values. Measures and calculators that they are, they never lose sight of the personal and cultural nature of the situation with which they are dealing" (Harap, cited in Richardson, 1990, p. 150).

Across the academic landscape and against the internal disagreements that so often characterize schools of thought, Waples pressed forward, bringing what we view as a Chicago School approach to research about international concerns, public opinion and communications, the production of knowledge, the nature and functions of libraries, and how research institutions affect scholarship around the world. In short, he located himself in "reading" writ large and brought an iconoclastic and challenging vision to the field. Waples helped construct a vocabulary about how reading figures into people's roles and their participation in a democracy that remains vital and stimulating today. As controversial or difficult as his research might have been for some to understand or appreciate, it was in the service of this quite comprehensive and complex set of concerns about the roles of reading in public life that Waples came to sharpen his interdisciplinary vision and deepen his passion for scientific analysis.

Lessons for the Future

Among other things, Waples's work clearly demonstrates the key role played by motivation in reading practice. He posited several key motives based on his research on the social effects of reading that are outlined earlier in this chapter. Perhaps his most important finding about readers' predispositions from across a wide range of studies is that reading is primarily interest driven. While not a surprising conclusion, one has to wonder why this empirically derived social fact has taken so long to take hold in the reading field and why it is seldom used in decisions about reading materials within school literacy activities. Instead, these materials have typically been driven by assumptions about what is "good for" children based on one ideological regime or another (e.g., cultural literacy or whole language).

The second most important factor in determining why people read is the instrumental value of reading materials: Can people do anything with what they learn from reading? The accessibility of the content of reading materials is another key factor in whether people read on a regular basis or not. The prestige associated with reading particular kinds of texts contributes to regular reading practices as well: Do people like me do this? Readers are

also motivated by a need for personal or social security. They seek validation for their behaviors, family situations, social status, occupational location, and so on. Many popular magazines and self-help books constitute responses to this motive. The extent to which reading affords escape or respite is another key motive that accounts for habitual reading. Reading allows people to explore possible selves and possible worlds (Bruner, 1987) and to experience the sublime or "the pleasurable experience in representation of that which would be painful or terrifying in reality" (Mirzoeff, 1999, p. 16). Finally, Waples insisted that motives almost never operate in isolation but that any reading practice almost always involves multiple motives—some more dominant, others less dominant. Parenthetically, this basic model of reading motives is very similar to Jakobson's (1960) famous model of language functions. More important, Waples's perspective on the nature and functions of motivation and engagement in reading is remarkably similar to much of the best theory and research on this topic being produced today (e.g., Guthrie & Cox, 2001; Guthrie, Wigfield, & Perencevich, 2004).

Perhaps less obvious, but equally significant, for the reading field is the way in which Waples embodied a particular view of intellectual work and research practice in every aspect of his professional life. His intensity seemed to strike some colleagues as a bit overwhelming, as he seemed to be animated by a kind of joy in the limitless possibilities that good science could bring to understanding social problems. But he never stopped at the level of naming the problems. Instead, he moved around, crossing disciplinary boundaries and cultural borders, trying to solve the problems that motivated his work. In addition, although he directed his work to practitioners, he did not prescribe solutions (except perhaps in his early studies of pedagogy). Instead, he encouraged practitioners to locate in their own domains the theoretical resources that would help them specify the key dimensions of problems they faced. This is indeed the same spirit that currently animates action research among teachers (e.g., Hollingsworth, 1994) and the so-called "teacher as reflective practitioner" movement (e.g., Schön, 1990).

What has been so striking to us as we have explored Waples's work is what Rayward (1986) refers to as Waples's "simple, extraordinarily generous conception of science" and research (p. 358). Reading and its role in the formation of attitudes and democratic behavior was fundamentally a social issue to Waples. And solving social problems, he argued, demanded not sophisticated techniques and derivative analyses but heightened awareness of the

assumptions and biases that shape how a researcher poses a question, the ability to pose an important question, a feel for how to develop useful hypotheses to investigate it, a sense of what evidence might be useful or not, and a capacity to study how relations among elements and data might signal both key points of controversy and potential solutions. To do all this requires a critical frame of analysis and a commitment to look beyond the reaches of one's own field, where insularity and parochial tendencies impede progress and imagination. Legislative mandates about the need for and value of high-stakes testing notwithstanding, Waples's sentiments and impulses echo in various ways throughout the field of reading today under banners such as balanced approaches to teaching reading, situated learning, critical discourse analysis, and critical literacy and multiliteracies curricula.

Waples and his "internal puzzelement[s]" (Berelson, 1979, p. 2) were always grounded in external social realities, which he regularly pointed out and elaborated in his writing. Laced throughout the body of Waples's work are definitive statements about how research, and intellectual work more generally, ought to be conducted in relation to public interests. In this regard, his reading research is relevant to reading researchers and historians today, and his curriculum development work is relevant to curriculum theorists and historians.

Waples was also associated with the burgeoning mass communications field, key figures of which left a controversial legacy because they aligned themselves with pre-war and wartime governmental and foundation sponsors who studied reading habits, print cultures, and production and distribution processes to influence the messages encountered and negotiated by the public (Simpson, 1994). Waples himself pursued a number of military and intelligence assignments before, during, and after World War II, including war information, antisubversion, and "black propaganda" duties (Waples & Waples, 1967, pp. 5–6). The general thrust of all these research agendas—the necessary alignment of social scientific research and public interests and needs—is particularly relevant to reading researchers today as we struggle to have greater political impact on public agendas that affect the nature and scope of our work, as well as school curricula and classroom practice.

Although we have not fleshed out fully all angles of the Douglas Waples story, it is in the context of the sheer breadth of his projects and interests that we have come to appreciate Waples's influence on our thinking about literacy. His shift to library studies as an expansion of thought on the construction of reading via public institutions, his work to establish an

interdisciplinary communications field, his collaboration with scholars and bureaucrats internationally to bring attention to issues of access to ideas as a fundamental democratic value—all of these endeavors constituted Waples's "reading" research. That he refused to restrict his research on any particular problem to one theoretical frame or another or to one methodological approach or another is perhaps the key strength of his legacy. He was a public intellectual who galvanized the public imagination and catalyzed social commentary—dialogue in the public sphere. Because the figure of the public intellectual seems difficult to sustain today, acknowledging Waples as an important predecessor of reading research and reminding ourselves of his legacy seem especially significant as we imagine and work toward a future we deem both possible and desirable (e.g., Goodman, Shannon, Goodman, & Rapoport, 2004; Willensky, 2005).

Reflection Questions

1. In an era marked by the privileging of standards-based programs and high-stakes testing, what might be gained by reimagining reading research in the expansive and multidimensional ways suggested by Waples's communication studies and his information and library sciences perspectives?
2. How might Waples's approach to reading research expand contemporary educators' and researchers' understanding of the relations among cognitive, cultural, and social dimensions of reading engagement and motivation?
3. In what ways does Waples's research about people and print (Waples, 1938) suggest the roles that schools might or should play in cultivating children's critical reading of the many media forms they encounter every day?
4. How might the teacher-research movement be "read" as an outgrowth of the work of Waples and other scholars concerned both with the value of evidence for informing practice and with making knowledge useful and relevant in and to people's lives?
5. In what important ways do oral histories and written histories complement each other as one attempts to reconstruct the life of a scholar, teacher, and public servant as dynamic and complex as Douglas Waples?

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