SRA/McGraw-Hill salutes Dr. Don H. Parker, whose remarkable insight, creativity, energy, and concern have helped educators to meet the individual learning needs of millions of children over the past forty-five years.

1910 – 2000
In these pages, Dr. Don H. Parker, originator and author of the SRA Reading Laboratory series, shares with you a journey he began in 1950 with thirty-two children in a rural Florida schoolroom — a journey that by now has carried multilevel learning around the world to an estimated 100 million students in sixty-three countries.

We hope you will enjoy the author’s warm and engaging story of how an educational classic was born and grew to maturity.

Peter F. Sayeski, President
SRA/McGraw-Hill
Dear Educators,

In 1958 I wrote in the Teacher’s Handbook of the SRA Reading Laboratory kits an open letter inviting teachers everywhere to join me “Toward Further Research.”

Today the need is even greater. What do you, my readers, see in the future for the enterprise we call schooling? Do we risk schooling our children for a world that no longer exists? Are we educating for the Industrial Age when we are already living in the Post-Industrial Age and moving swiftly into the Electronic and Information Age?

Such concerns have led me to contemplate the possibilities of an electronic Reading Lab that would meet the needs of Computopia — the bright, new world envisioned by futurist Yoneji Masuda in his book, The Information Society — a world where two-way TV, the politics of teledemocracy, and the electronic newspaper are everyday commonplaces.

If an electronic generation of Reading Labs should come into being, would it meet basic human needs more or less well than today’s familiar classroom kits? From my researches into the latest electronic learning tools, I believe that any such advance would be greeted by children and school people with the same comments that I hear today when I ask, “What do you like about Reading Labs?”

From children: “You learn something ... You get to know how you’re doing ... You get to go up ... You get to do your own thing ...”

From teachers: “I get more time for each child ... It makes me more of a person ... I can see my kids are learning ...”

From administrators: “They’re dependable ... You know kids are learning — you can see it in their progress charts ... My teachers are learning the real value of individualized instruction ... It helps us show parents that we’re doing a good job ...”

Even if the Labs take a dramatic new shape in the electronic future, as I foresee that they may, they will still be meeting the same basic human needs that were met by that old tomato box full of cut-up workbook lessons more than a quarter century ago ... helping each learner to move closer to the person he or she wants to be.

Don H. Parker
Heartsong House
Carmel, California
How Did They Get Started?

Probably not the way you thought. There were no whirring computers spitting out formulas and programs. No grants of research money to prove preconceived theories — and therefore no piper to pay. I simply started flying by the seat of my pants. Like Lindbergh, I at least knew the direction I was heading.

I wanted to find out how teaching and learning could reflect what I had learned in my beginning psychology courses about the normal curve of individual differences. I wanted, somehow, to individualize instruction.

But how? One teacher for every child? Tell that to the taxpayers! No, it had to be done with one teacher and thirty or forty kids. And I kept asking myself — how?

Back in 1950 that question didn’t seem to concern many people. At a national education conference that year, attended by over a thousand school people, my question hardly came up. Certainly none of the major speakers addressed it. Only a couple of the workshops were concerned with individual differences, and these gave me no answers either. The nation’s leading educational publishers were assembled at that meeting, showing their wares, so I went from booth to booth looking for any book or any kind of learning material that would answer my question. I looked in vain. Either nobody knew or nobody cared. It looked as though I’d have to start from scratch.

In those days, with a brand-new bachelor’s degree from the University of Florida, I needed a job, any job. Not that I was a youngster. I had spent thirteen years working my way up in the Sears, Roebuck, and Company chain, learning what organization feels like. I didn’t see the inside of a college until I was thirty-six years old.
Now, in 1950, having earned my bachelor’s degree, I was attending night classes to complete my master’s in psychology, with the aim of becoming a clinical psychologist. And I had to make a living somewhere within driving distance of my classes at Gainesville.

I called around to nearby rural school systems until a superintendent told me, “Yes, we do need someone to help our children learn to read better.” I explained that I had no teaching background, but had worked for several months as a graduate student, doing psychological testing at the University of Florida’s Reading Clinic.

The superintendent invited me for an interview in the little town of Starke, twenty-five miles from the University at Gainesville. And it was in that rural Florida community that it all began.

As I said, I had no classroom experience. But even then, stirring in my subconscious was a conflict. My courses in psychology had given me ideas about individual differences among learners; my courses in education had given me a conflicting set of practices — such as teaching reading to all students at once from a single book. The two sets of ideas didn’t mesh.

Something I must have said about this in my interview that day evidently took the superintendent’s fancy. “Well,” he said, “we certainly agree on one thing. Kids are different. Why don’t you come to work with us?”

I was so delighted, I wanted to give him a great big hug then and there. But, recovering from my surprise, I simply said, “Thank you, sir. When would you like to have me?”
CHAPTER Two

Basic Research

"Basic research is what I'm doing when I don't know what I'm doing," said rocket expert Wernher von Braun. So I guess I was doing basic research in those days. Not knowing what else to do, I set out to test everything in sight. The superintendent found a little money in his budget to buy enough reading tests for all of the 3,000-and-some students in Bradford County's ten schools.

Loading my tests in my car, I'd drive over those country back roads, administering tests to every classroom from first grade to twelfth. Of course there weren't any computers to score them, and I was just one person faced with hand-scoring some 3,000 test papers. Once again, the superintendent came through for me with a refreshingly practical and simple idea. He had one of the principals assign half a dozen or so of his brightest seniors to me. I told them they were now budding scientists, and together we got the tests scored.

Next, I plotted the test scores on a chart. To my growing amazement, the bell curve — the normal curve of individual differences — began shaping up before my eyes in every classroom. True, the curve was skewed to the left in many cases, indicating more students below the norm than above it, but there it was. The psychology textbooks were right! But now what?
Now I was finally coming in contact with real live students. I'd always arrive a little early in a classroom and wait for the teacher to find a suitable stopping place so that I could start my testing. I'd look around and see the same textbook on every student's desk. Some were following along in the book, but just as often I'd see a student staring out the window. I'd quietly move over and ask, "What's the matter this morning?"

Too often, the answer was, "I can't do it. I just can't learn it." Or else the answer was, "I did it already. There's nothing else to do!" Sometimes there was boredom, sometimes anger, in the reply.

It was that normal curve again — the living proof of it. Some students, near the center of the curve, were responding "normally" to the teacher. And enough were responding to make the teacher feel that he or she was teaching. But the others — often as many as one-half to two-thirds of the class — simply weren't getting their money's worth.

I brought this up to the superintendent. "That's just the way it is," he said with resignation. "What can be done?"

Not knowing any better, I said, "I don't think it has to be that way."

"Maybe not," he replied. "But it's been this way as long as there have been schools."

"Let me have some students to work with," I said.

He considered for a moment and then said, "Sure. Take Miss Jones's seventh graders. You'll probably find at least ten different levels of reading skill in that class."
If you can do anything with them, let me know.” I’m sure he was just trying to humor me, knowing he had nothing to lose.

Well, now what would I do with those students? My education professors had taught me the “group method” of dealing with individual differences. You know the method. Divide the room into three groups — slow, average, and bright. (But call them something inoffensive like blackbirds, redbirds, and bluebirds.) Never mind that there may be as many as ten observable reading levels in the classroom. Among these seventh graders, for example, reading levels ranged from second grade to twelfth grade. What do you do about that? Set up ten groups? And even if you could teach ten groups, what about the thirty or forty different rates of learning?

I tried to formulate my goal: to let each student start where he is and move ahead as fast and as far as his learning rate and capacity would let him. (Nowadays I’d say “him or her.”) In later years I would use that simple statement as the basis for lectures around the world on what came to be called “the multilevel philosophy.”

But at this point I still didn’t know how to put the philosophy into practice. I felt bewildered, frustrated, and angry. No wonder I saw so many boys and girls suffering damaged self-images that they might carry with them for life. Nobody had anything better to offer them — and neither did I. I felt hopeless. Maybe I’d have to quit this job and earn my living some other way. Yet there must be a way — there had to be!

I had one or two things going for me. From my father I had learned discipline and the value of hard work. From my mother, creativity and the love of beauty in art and nature. Working my way through high school as a printer’s devil on a weekly country newspaper had taught me a lot about the printed page. In the Great Depression of the ’30s, I had learned that you make do … or do without … or make it yourself! My subsequent working years had proved my capacity for bullheaded endurance. And finally, I was blessed with a strong body to see me through extended periods of work without rest. A good thing, too, for I was about to embark on six years of research involving over 6,000 students and their teachers
in Florida, North Carolina, and New York. It was a period in which I would complete my master’s degree in psychology, take my doctorate at Columbia University, and produce the first of the boxes that would become known as the SRA Reading Laboratory series. Indeed, I would be working, eating, sleeping, and living multilevel research and developing multilevel learning systems days, nights, and weekends for a total of fourteen years.

CHAPTER

Four

The Moment of Truth

But now here I was facing thirty-two rural seventh graders, not knowing what to do. It was necessity that started to hatch a plan in the back of my head. The school didn’t have the money to buy new workbooks for every student, but I knew a series of ten workbooks that cost only a dollar each. Each book contained forty lessons. The plan and work method of the lessons were pretty much alike across all levels.

By cutting these books up into separate lessons and putting each lesson in a folder, I could let each student complete a folder and pass it on to the next student at that level. Next day, another student could use the same folder. And if the written work were done on a separate piece of paper, the folders would always be reusable.

Being ignorant of what a teacher should do (after all, I was a psychologist), I didn’t correct the students’ work. Instead, I made keys so that they could correct their own work each day.

And of course, I had to put all that stuff in something, so I found an old tomato box. To avoid embarrassing anyone, I didn’t designate the levels by grade numbers, but instead colored a band around the edge of each folder. The students would
say, "I'm working in green" (or orange, or purple, or whatever). There were ten color-coded levels.

To give students still more responsibility for their own learning, I had each one keep a chart of his or her daily progress. When the chart showed that the student was maintaining high comprehension, vocabulary, and word-analysis scores, it was time to move up to a higher color-level.

I spent a week helping the students learn the crude system I had devised — no, we had devised. Now that I think of it, the thirty-three of us co-invented the system.

This was the approach I used over the next six years in classrooms of first graders and high school seniors alike. The kids and their teachers taught me what multilevel learning was all about. I simply put it all together in a box!

To my amazement, and that of my thirty-two seventh grade "victims," the damn thing began to work. Kids buckled down as I hadn't seen them do before. Teachers would poke their heads into my cobweb-hung room on the fourth floor of the old high school to ask, "What's going on here?" And later, "Could you help us do that?"

And after some weeks of tediously preparing materials and being trained in "the work" (which could barely be called anything more at the time), they began to find that their test and retest results were showing measurable gains, as mine had. After three months of multilevel reading instruction, some students were showing gains of a year in reading level. Some even showed a gain of three years!

At this point the University of North Carolina beckoned, and I found myself opening a reading laboratory and teacher training center there. Dean Phillips, always a man to get his money's worth (and I've never stopped thanking him for it), also assigned me the job of "state reading consultant." Naturally all my lectures and workshops were aimed at getting teachers into multilevel, individualized instruction. Soon, not only teachers but PTAs and women's groups too were helping to turn out rough, hand-hewn "reading laboratories" all over the state.
The president of the Charlotte Country Club told me, "We don't mind helping out, but don't think we're going to do this the rest of our lives. You've got to get this thing published!"

Me? Publish? That would be too good to be true, I thought. Forget it. But later, I heard the same thing from my advisor, Dr. Ruth Strang, when I was a doctoral candidate at Columbia University. "You've got a responsibility to publish these learning materials," she told me. And I had to think again.

CHAPTER

Five

My Heart Sinks ... And Soars

"I hear you got a reading box over there at the university," said an untutored but desperately earnest voice at the other end of the phone. "I want you to take my boy and put him in it." This was in 1953, when I was at the University of North Carolina.

"Your idea is interesting, but I certainly don't want my students working in a box," said a school supervisor. This was on campus at Columbia University around 1954.

"Thank you for coming in to see us. But learning is in books, not boxes, young man." This was the editor at a nationally known educational publisher in New York in 1954.

Sounds like a great idea! Why don't you bring it in and let's have a look at it," said the voice at the other end of my five-cent call from a New York phone booth.

And so, in 1955. I brought in my box to show it to Lee C. Deighton, a New York-based editor for the little-heard-of Chicago publisher, Science Research Associates.
About all that SRA had published so far were some psychological, achievement, and vocational guidance tests, plus a few education methods books. I had used some of the tests and found them to be of excellent quality. Now SRA wanted to branch out into learning materials, and they were looking for new ideas. My hopes were high.

In his dimly lit office on the twenty-first floor of 500 Fifth Avenue, overlooking St. Patrick’s Cathedral, Mr. Deighton listened to my explanation of the multilevel Lab (by now a cardboard carton painted blue). “I understand!” he exclaimed, adding that in all his publishing career he’d never heard a more innovative idea.

“We’ll publish ten books in ten different colors and put them in a box!” He sat back, expecting to see joy illuminating my face. Did he hear, instead, the crash of my heart hitting the floor?

“But, Mr. Deighton, sir, that wouldn’t really be multilevel,” I began to stammer.

“Sure it would,” he said. “There are your ten levels and your ten colors, and we’ll make you a nice box for them!”

He had been an editor with Harcourt Brace for twenty-five years before joining SRA, and he plainly believed (like everyone else) that learning was in books — period. I made no headway in persuading him that, in this case, books would not be the answer. I thanked him for his time, picked up my box from his desk (and my heart from the floor), and left.

There was no way I was going to tell 6,000 children and their teachers that we’d been wrong, that all those gains in reading achievement had meant nothing.

But something I had said must have stuck in Lee Deighton’s mind, because he called me a few weeks later. Not to say that he had changed his mind, however. No, he wanted to know if I had changed mine. Well, I hadn’t. Sure, I wanted to be a published author. But that wasn’t enough. Unless I could reengineer the classroom for learning, as we had in Florida and North Carolina, it just wouldn’t
do. I asked Mr. Deighton what the other twenty or thirty students in the class would do while ten students read the ten books. Well, he hadn’t thought about that. Once again we said good-bye.

But once again I heard from him. Would I bring my box back to his office for another look? What for, I wondered. But I went. Once again he assured me that he understood about multilevel. And again he talked to me about books. He had an answer now to what the other twenty or thirty students would do while the ten books were in use: “Let the school buy a couple more boxes!”

So he still didn’t understand! I was ready to leave again, in disgust, but Mr. Deighton offered to buy me lunch.

Was a Columbia graduate student, now earning his living as a school psychologist in Peekskill, going to turn down that offer? Certainly not! I might turn down a publishing contract, but not a free lunch. He took me to the dining room of the Biltmore Hotel.

Once we were seated, Mr. Deighton asked me, “Now, Don, tell me again what it is you want.”

Why, you dumb so-and-so, I wanted to say. If you haven’t got it after three meetings, you never will! I was ready to get up and stalk out, but some Great Restraining Hand held me back, and I went through it once again as if I had never seen him before.

He listened — really listened! And gradually the dawn began to break. Our lunch arrived hot and grew cold as we talked. Lee Deighton’s questions got sharper and more relevant. His growing excitement was visible. He was scribbling notes on an envelope. At last he really did understand.

“It will cost a lot more to do it your way than to do it as books,” he told me. “And SRA is a very small company. But I think it can be done.”
As for me, my heart was soaring somewhere up among the frescoes of the Biltmore Hotel dining room — a place now almost sacred to me. The room took on a glow that had nothing to do with the food or the drinks. His last words to me were, “Remember — meeting with my staff next Saturday at nine sharp!”

As I walked into the dank, dark subway tunnel under Broadway and 42nd Street, I was walking down a bright sunlit path strewn with roses. Even today, as I write these words, my eyes stream with tears, my nose runs, and great sobs of joy well up within me as I feel once again the exaltation of that moment forty-two years ago when I realized — when I believed — that multilevel learning really would reach out to more and more girls and boys. Perhaps some day it would reach a million of them! Little did I reckon that in one year after publication, I would be presented with a beribboned and glass-encased Student Record Book — the one millionth copy!

CHAPTER

Six

Pushing Toward Pub Date

Lee Deighton had been as slow as a rhinoceros to budge, but like that powerful animal, nothing stopped him once he got going. To change the metaphor, he was now a captain taking charge of a new ship — my ship — and he did so with unmistakable authority. He went to the Chicago headquarters of SRA and urged management to raise the necessary money by any means, even if it meant giving up rented space, selling furniture, and borrowing to the hilt. To the everlasting credit of Lyle Spencer, SRA’s founder and first president, he was able to share the vision of multilevel and the enthusiasm of his New York editor. Lee Deighton got the money he needed.
Now Lee Deighton and I set to writing, and a tiny staff of editors began editing. I had already worked out the formula for writing in ten different reading levels. By remarkable good fortune, Leonard Everett Fisher was employed as our artist. Early on, he developed an uncanny understanding of multilevel. At the lower levels his work had a concreteness that was easy for a less advanced learner to understand. As he progressed to higher levels, his art became more abstract, subtle, and challenging for the brighter student. Fisher's concept of multilevel art became the model for the entire series of SRA Reading Laboratory kits.

At this point I began to develop unusually strong shoulder and arm muscles from carrying bales of paper down from the twenty-first floor office, onto the subway, and into my car. I must have lugged several hundred thousand mimeographed sheets — tryout versions of Power Builders and Rate Builders — to and from the schools for testing. And on returning home from the day's work in the schools, I spent my nights analyzing student responses and revising to bring the stories and exercises more in line with their intended levels. If something didn't work, it wasn't the students' fault — it was ours. We revised until students' success levels averaged 85 percent or better. Then we knew we had succeeded.

There was no possibility of getting into print for the New England Reading Association Conference in the fall of 1956, but we did put together a mockup. It was only a few printed pieces (in a very handsome box!), but it drew 1,837 advance orders for the projected SRA Reading Laboratory kit at $39.95. It was all but unbelievable. I had feared that we were coming forward with too little, too late, but we were Johnny-on-the-spot. As Shakespeare wrote, "There is a tide in the affairs of men which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune."

"Pub date" was February 1957. Orders began rolling in. Soon I got my first royalty check — less than a thousand dollars, but it made me feel like a millionaire. Then, one wonderful May morning, I received my doctoral diploma from Columbia. Now I felt like one of the Lord's anointed. All I needed was a job — and even that came to pass.
CHAPTER

Seven

Then Came Old Red

The director of the University of Bridgeport's four-story, 120-client-a-week reading diagnosis and improvement clinic, Dr. Stella Center, was retiring. I was recommended for the post by my doctoral advisor, Dr. Ruth Strang (whom I had begun calling "the godmother of the Reading Lab" because of her continual encouragement). These were big boots to fill. But to my amazement I was accepted and employed not as a mere instructor, assistant professor, or even associate professor, but as a full professor!

So I settled down into my comfortable new bailiwick just a few yards from beautiful Long Island Sound. I was prepared to take it somewhat easy after seven hectic years of basic research and writing, prepared simply to enjoy professoring. After all, I had a staff of thirteen psychologists and reading specialists to do the work. But taking it easy was not in the cards.

Before long, the Reading Laboratory kit that we had designed for junior high school students was beginning to be bootlegged up and down the grades. I was not too surprised to find it creeping into the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grades. But when it began filtering down into the sixth, fifth, fourth, and even third grades, I knew I was in trouble — delightful trouble.

I had fully intended that someday, at my leisure, I would produce an elementary edition of the Lab, having fun with it this time, doing it in my own good season. But suddenly it seemed as if the whole world was fired up for multilevel, and the pressure for immediate action was upon me. I could no longer enjoy my
professoring as I realized, guiltily, that my heart was no longer in the work I'd been employed to do. I began sneaking time from that work to make notes on the structure, content, and leveling of an elementary edition Reading Lab.

Lee Brown, SRA's new vice-president, had now succeeded Lee Deighton. Brown brought to multilevel precisely the qualities needed to take the next leap. He empowered me to hire four schoolteachers as part-time writer/adapter, and I, with my U. of B. secretary (Lois Anderson, a remarkable woman!), took on the job of editing. Graduate students mimeographed field-test materials, and principals and teachers in Connecticut and New York State opened their classrooms for field-testing.

For thirteen months I shuttled between my university office, the field-test schools, and a production and printing facility in New York City, still feeling guilty about the time that multilevel was stealing from my duties at the university. Dean Littlefield graciously assured me that my work would be considered in the light of the academic imperative, "publish or perish." But after a semester of what I felt was only a pretense of holding a full professorship, I asked for a half-time assignment.

No sooner had the new Elementary Edition of the SRA Reading Laboratory series come out in its bright red box ("Old Red" we later came to call it), than a new need became obvious: there had to be a separate Lab for each of the elementary grades.
CHAPTER

Eight

Scientist in Residence

One day Lee Brown said, "Don, why don’t you come to Chicago so we can work more closely together?"

Instinctively I drew back. Become an organization man again? Relive those years with Sears, Roebuck? No, thank you! I made it known that I didn’t ever again want to be a nine-to-five man. But there was something I wanted. I wanted a place to work on multilevel — a place that would include a forty-foot wall where I could spread out the whole panorama of reading skills from start to finish, so I could structure them to fit into twelve years of schooling. And I wanted a budget for writers and editors and production and printing, plus a group of educators to take the whole series of multilevel learning systems that we would build and introduce them to teachers throughout this country and around the world.

These were extravagant desires, to be sure. But I was to find out that one could not think too big for this man, Lee Brown. He told me that I would be coming to Chicago as SRA’s "scientist in residence," and I got not only my forty-foot wall but everything else I asked for, including a huge office, two secretaries, and an editorial staff that burgeoned from one editor — the inimitable and delightful Dolores Betler — to twenty-eight editors and three teams of outside writers. What’s more, when I would bring Lee Brown what I thought was a problem with a choice of solutions, he wouldn’t ask how much each solution would cost. He’d ask which would move us forward faster. And if I explained that each had advantages and each would add speed and quality to our work, he would come back with, “Then let’s do both!” And that’s how we got out three complete SRA Reading Laboratory kits, one each for Grades 4, 5, and 6, in two years.
The six tumultuous years between 1958, when I left my University of Bridgeport post, and 1964, when I took up a new life in Big Sur, California, were the most exciting in my career. Not only had I micro-leveled “Old Red” into three separate Labs that were now beginning to spread around the world, but I had also produced logical upward extensions of the series reaching up to college level. Meanwhile, multilevel attracted coauthors in other curriculum areas.

CHAPTER

Nine

Serendipity or Magic?

After the long years of going it alone, just when I needed help in extending multilevel up, down, and sideways, help seemed to pop up out of nowhere. Was it serendipity or magic? I never knew.

When I saw that individualized reading instruction needed to be extended downward through the primary grades and even Kindergarten, one of the SRA staff associates said, “There’s a reading specialist up in New England you ought to talk with.” And thus I met Genevieve Scannell, who had just the experience and creativity to join in coauthoring the SRA Reading Laboratory kits for Kindergarten through Grade 3, incorporating an ingenious set of multilevel word games she had developed.

Another piece of good fortune came when I took down from the library shelf a book called The Origins of Words. My excitement grew as I read the author’s stories of how words entered the language and the importance of selecting the right word to express oneself. Here was a man who could certainly help me provide upper-grade students with more intensive vocabulary development. But
would such an eminent philologist as Dr. Joseph T. Shipley, Professor Emeritus, Columbia University, have the time or the interest to become involved with the problems of secondary school students? He would, and he did. And as my coauthor on the Vocabulab® Program, he became my great and good friend — not only a scholar and a gentleman of the old school, but a man with ideas as fresh as tomorrow.

Spelling was an area crying out for attention. But where to begin? Somewhat earlier I had received an almost-angry letter from a young seventh-grade teacher on Long Island who said he could outdo the published Reading Labs with his own handmade materials and save a lot of money, too. Now he wrote to say that he had nearly gone crazy trying to put his own version together, and his results hadn’t been as good as he’d expected. But along the way, he had discovered a whole new approach to spelling. Would I help him multilevel it? Frederick Walker became my coauthor on the SRA Spelling Word Power Laboratory® kits. Later he would receive his doctorate for his scholarly treatment of spelling problems.

A benevolent universe provided Dr. Donald W. Stotler, Supervisor of Science for the public schools of Portland, Oregon, at just the right time. With his cosmic view of what science education ought to be, and a leadership personality that attracted talented colleagues, he assembled three teams of writers to produce the SRA Learnings in Science kits. These were structured in a totally different manner from my other multilevel learning systems so that, as Don Stotler put it, “Children could, indeed, work like scientists.”

A happy spin-off of this exciting adventure in science was that one of the more talented writers, Dr. William H. Fryback, joined me somewhat later to coauthor the M3X Synchroteach Programs, a series of cassette tapes to help teachers and students become oriented to the use of the Labs.

The international language of our planet, once French, has now become English. And the Reading Laboratory kits, written in English, have been sought out by educators around the world to help learners master the language. However, there
have also been *Labs* in other languages. These have not been translations; rather, they are versions developed within the culture of the language so as to be true to the spirit of the people who would use them.

These projects led to contacts with educators around the world who have immeasurably enriched my life and my understanding by sensitizing me to the ways that other people feel, think, and interpret their experience in words. Among these colleagues were René Serge Larouch, coauthor of the French-language *Laboratoire de Lecture*; Dr. James Dinnan, coauthor of the Spanish-language *Laboratorio de Lectura*; and Dr. Madhuri Shah and Kallolini P. Hazarat of Bombay, coauthors of *MLS Reading Laboratory I*, both of whom have given unstintingly of their time and resources to improve the lot of millions on the great subcontinent of India. Another cherished colleague from abroad is Luis Abiva, head of Abiva Publishing House, which imports the *Reading Laboratory* series to the Philippines and prints the *Student Record Books* to accompany them.

I could go on and on naming valued colleagues, but the list would grow too long. Many are the heartwarming memories as I look back and recall our close friendships and our work together. I remember, too, the times when in the heat of creativity our relationships would seem to degenerate into a shouting match, each holding out vigorously for what he or she felt was “best for the kids.” At length we would find ground for agreement, and the tensions would be relieved. One cannot know the exaltation of these moments of creativity and comradeship without experiencing them. They have surely been among the peak experiences in my life.
CHAPTER Ten

Have Box, Will Travel

At age 54, I decided I had done my stint as scientist in residence at SRA Chicago, and I headed for California where I'd bought five rolling acres and a lovely old Monterey colonial home a thousand feet above the sea. From there I could see the whales play and watch the mountain ranges down the coast turn from green to orange to purple to silver and then to the soft blackness of starlit night — my own multilevel show every day! Now I could do what I'd longed to do ever since my boyhood days on a beautiful big lake in Florida: simply enjoy nature in the fullness of time, my own good time. But that was not to last for long.

Soon after their publication, the Labs began finding their way abroad as teachers from other countries came to the United States to sample our schooling methods. Often a teacher would return home with a Lab under his or her arm, introducing children of diverse cultures to the new experience of multilevel learning. Many have sent me their test and retest results, and I am happy to report that learners are learners the world around. What also happened was that invitations to lecture and to conduct workshops began to come in from all six continents. They came from universities, school systems, educational conference groups, and others.

I never went out as a salesman, but always as a lecturer on the multilevel philosophy. That philosophy says, in a nutshell, that we must provide a schooling situation in which each individual learner can start where he or she is, experience a degree of success, and move ahead as fast and as far as the individual’s learning rate and capacity will permit.

There was no need for me to act as a salesman. By now, there were hundreds of SRA Staff Associates around the world, each of whom could do a much better
selling job than I. But I did become known as the man with an idea in a box. "Have box, will travel," was my motto. And I've been traveling ever since, logging somewhat over three times the distance to the moon.

So far, my work has taken me to thirty-five countries: Canada, England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, Venezuela, Colombia, Mexico, Sweden, France, Spain, Italy, Greece, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya, Tunisia, India, Nepal, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, New Guinea, Fiji, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, and the People's Republic of China.

All together, something over one hundred million students in sixty-three countries have experienced joy, challenge, and improved self-image by building their reading and thinking skills with multilevel learning laboratories. The schoolhouse may be a thatched, mud-floored hut in Africa or a shack on stilts in New Guinea with crocodiles crawling beneath. (I was careful to stay in the middle of the rickety walkway to that classroom!) But however diverse the settings, progress from orange to purple means as much to Sanya in India as it does to Sally in Indiana.
If we are to meet the challenge of this Information Age, each individual in our society must be able to find and develop his peak functional, or usable, intelligence. We can no longer afford to let a student with X learning capacity operate at less than X level of achievement. Our way of life as a nation among nations depends on how well we succeed in increasing the achievement of each individual.

With the emergence of the use of computers as a learning tool, it is essential that students have a solid reading foundation in place as they learn new, technology-based skills. Learning from the printed page continues to provide the base from which new skills can be added and enhanced.

The incidence of automation is no less a reason for developing the functional, usable intelligence of each individual citizen. Machines which are daily eliminating the routine, repetitive jobs of scores of less skilled workers throughout the nation are, at the same time, demanding more workers who can function at higher levels. While the need for relatively unskilled workers diminishes, the demand for skilled workers and technicians increases.

As never before, education must help each individual — the slow, the average, and the superior — to find and to learn to use his highest level of intellectual development. The SRA Reading Laboratory is devoted to helping educators with this task.