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The University of San Francisco

A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE TWO STATE-APPROVED KINDERGARTEN AND FIRST GRADE READING PROGRAMS IN CALIFORNIA

A Dissertation Presented to
The Faculty of the School of Education
Learning and Instruction Department

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

by
Elizabeth Presley
San Francisco
December 2008
This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate’s dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Learning to read is a critical skill that children are expected to master. How to teach children to read, however, is controversial. The “Reading Wars” (Chall, 1967), with proponents of phonics, skills-based instruction on one side of the war and whole language, meaning-based instruction on the other side, have been raging for years in the professional literature. In response to these two different paradigms, a centrist view has emerged recently, combining both phonics instruction and meaning-based instruction in what is called “balanced literacy” (Pressley, 2002). One of the guiding principles of the California Reading/Language Arts Framework (1999) was the importance of a balanced program.

But what is a balanced literacy program? Balanced literacy has been defined as a combination or blend of phonics and whole language instruction (Baumann, Hoffman, Moon, & Duffy-Hester, 1998; Fitzgerald, 1999; Honig, 1996), effective primary-grades literacy instruction (Metsala et al., 1997), balancing various components, teacher roles, and teaching methodologies (Strickland, 1996), and a whole-part-whole approach with a blend of teacher/student leadership (Burns, 1999). The National Reading Research Center described highly effective teachers as using both immersion in authentic literacy-related experiences and extensive explicit teaching in decoding (Metsala et al., 1997) whereas Louisa Moats, project director of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) Early Interventions Project, called balanced reading an illusion and that the worst practices of whole language are persisting in classrooms under the disguise of balanced reading, inflicting “boundless harm on young children who need to
learn to read” (Moats, 2000, p. 2). A common definition of balanced literacy and the components of a balanced literacy program are lacking. The contrasting descriptions of balanced literacy lead to differing implications for classroom practice, and thus pose a problem (Freppon & Dahl, 1998).

Balanced literacy is also defined by what it is not. It is defined as an approach, not a philosophy, built on sound research (Spiegel, 1998) but it is not an eclectic approach (Burns, 1999). The California Reading/Language Arts Framework (1999) stated that balance does not mean that all skills and standards receive equal emphasis at a given point in time. However, the National Research Council claimed the opposite: Balance “could mean splitting one’s time evenly across activities designed to practice the alphabetic principle and activities designed to support comprehension” (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998, p. viii). Cowen (2003) declared that balance is a complex issue and cannot be resolved with simple solutions, such as measuring out equal doses of phonics and whole language, as some have interpreted balance to mean. It is clear that most people do not agree what the term balanced approach means (Wren, 2001).

The components of a balanced literacy program vary from author to author as well. For instance, the California Department of Education document, Every Child a Reader (1995), declared that the components of a balanced approach to reading must have the following: (1) a strong literature, language, and comprehension program that includes a balance of oral and written language; (2) an organized, explicit skills program that includes phonemic awareness, phonics, and decoding skills to address the needs of the emergent reader; (3) diagnosis that informs teaching and assessment that ensures
accountability; and (4) a powerful early intervention program that provides individual tutoring for children at-risk of reading failure.

The report of the National Reading Panel (NRP) favored a balanced approach to reading instruction (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000). The report describes five key topics: alphabetics (including phonemic awareness and phonics instruction), fluency, comprehension, teacher education and reading instruction, computer technology and reading instruction. The NRP advocated that systematic phonics instruction should be integrated with other reading instruction to create a balanced reading program.

Balanced literacy is important for several reasons. First, public school teachers have been encouraged to use a balanced approach to literacy at both the national level (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000) and the state level (California Department of Education, 1999). Second, requests for a balanced approach to reading instruction have been made by researchers in commentaries (Ruetzel, 1998; Spiegel, 1992), in descriptions of balanced literacy (Flippo, 1998; Fowler, 1998; Honig, 1997; Johns & Elish-Piper, 1996; Metsala et al., 1997; Pressley et al., 2002; Vail, 1991; Willows, 2002) and in surveys in literacy research and practice (Cassidy & Wenrich, 1998). Third, research conducted on the efficacy of balanced literacy has produced favorable results suggesting that it is effective at promoting literacy (Baumann & Ivey, 1997; Cunningham, Hall, & Defee, 1998; Fitzgerald & Noblit, 2000; Pressley et al., 1996; Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole, 2000).

Despite the lack of consensus as to what constitutes balanced instruction, teachers are still encouraged to implement such an approach to literacy. Most teachers use
commercial reading programs adopted by their school districts (Thompson & Lehr, 2008; Winograd, 1989). Basal reading series programs are the predominant basis of reading instruction in American classrooms and the majority of classroom teachers use the basal reading programs for instruction in reading and language arts (Baumann & Heubach, 1996). Currently in California, there are only two reading series program approved by the California Department of Education (CDE): (1) *Houghton Mifflin Reading* published by Houghton Mifflin and (2) *Open Court Reading* published by SRA/McGraw-Hill. The criteria for selecting programs from publishers included alignment with English Language Arts Content Standards, program organization, assessment, universal access, instructional planning and support (CDE, 2002). The content standards are explained in the state English/Language Arts framework where the framework stresses the importance of a balanced, comprehensive program. The question remains as to the extent that these two commercial reading programs take a balanced approach. While anecdotal evidence exists about the two California reading programs (Lee, Ajayi, & Richards, 2007; Long, 2004; *Results with Open Court Reading*, 2002) there is no research that has examined the reading programs components comprehensively in terms of balanced literacy.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to critically examine the two California reading programs, kindergarten and first grade, and answer the question: To what extent do the two approved reading programs in California reflect a balanced approach to literacy? To answer this question, the study was conducted in two stages. First, an in-depth analysis of the relevant educational literature was examined to investigate how balanced literacy is defined. Second, a critical examination of the two approved reading series programs was
conducted to ascertain what phonics, whole language, or balanced approach components characterize kindergarten and first grade reading programs in California.

The methodology was content analysis. Content analysis is the systematic, objective, quantitative analysis of message characteristics (Neuendorf, 2002). Content analysis is a research method that uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text (Weber, 1990). Content analysis is primarily used to analyze text.

Significance of the Study

California is one state that adopts textbooks on a statewide basis. California has a process for evaluating and endorsing curricular materials at the state level, creating a curricular approved list. School districts must adopt curricular materials from the approved list in order to receive state instructional materials funding. As a result, California and other large adoption states, such as Texas and Florida, have considerable impact on textbooks nationally (Honig, 1991). Centralized adoption policies are influential on textbook publishers (Apple, 1991). California is a centralized adoption state and other states follow the lead of the larger adoption states. This study is important because with only two programs available for adoption for use by school districts, teachers have very few options. A wide range of instructional practices for literacy exists, from phonics to whole language to balanced instruction, and it is crucial to understand what teachers are using to teach literacy for emergent and early readers.

This study is important to the field of reading education. Clarification of the term balanced literacy is needed, as well as an identification of the components of a balanced literacy program. Is balance what one teaches (curriculum)? Is balance how one teaches (instruction)? Is balance a decision-making process? Teachers, administrators, and other
stakeholders who want to understand what is meant by a balanced reading approach will find different meanings and different practices when they look to the wide array of sources labeled balanced (Fitzgerald & Cunningham, 2002).

Theoretical Rationale

Reading is a complex, cognitive process which involves language, visual perception, word recognition, comprehension, meta-cognition, affect, and culture (Singer & Ruddell, 1985). Each of the three approaches to reading instruction, phonics, whole language, or balanced literacy, has a different theoretical framework. The Transmission Model guides phonics or skills-based instruction. The Transactional Model supports whole language instruction. The Interactive Model is the foundation for balanced literacy.

Transmission Model

In the Transmission Model, teachers assume the responsibility for transmitting information, such as the knowledge of letter sounds and symbols, to their students through explicit instruction (Cecil, 1999). The transmission is direct, explicit instruction. Phonics instruction is associated with a bottom-up approach wherein children literally start at the bottom of a hierarchy of skills and work their way up. They learn the names and shapes of the letters of the alphabet, then the consonant letters, and so on. The procedures are intended to make learning to read easier by breaking complex tasks into simpler tasks (Gunning, 2003). Reading is about the processing of letters and words.

In the Transmission Model, reading begins with an eye fixation. Researchers of eye fixation studies (Gough, 1985) have identified patterns that readers use during the reading process. For instance, the reader’s eyes focus on a point slightly indented from the beginning of the line, and they remain in that fixation for 250 milliseconds until they
sweep to the right and a new fixation will begin. This sequence will be repeated as long as reading continues. When the initial fixation is achieved, a visual pattern is reflected onto the retina. This sets in motion an intricate sequence of activity in the visual system, culminating in the formation of an icon. An icon is a direct representation of a visual stimulus that persists for a brief period after the stimulus vanishes. The lines, curves, and angles of the icon will be recognized as familiar patterns, or letters. Letter recognition is very rapid. Letters are recovered from the icon as letters and the brain organizes the information into spelling patterns, pronounce-ability, and meaningfulness. The reader then uses a character recognition device or scanner to recognize patterns in the letters, which then leads to decoding. The reader converts characters into systematic phonemes and decodes words. According to Gough (1985), the reader checks this knowledge with the librarian or lexicon from his or her primary memory capacity. Following this check, the reader then goes to Merlin, a comprehension device to check for syntactic and semantic rules. The reader proceeds to an editor or the phonological system to check for phonological rules which leads to a script and finally, the vocal system, shown in Figure 1.

The reader completes a complex series of steps in The Transmission Model. This model of reading begins with the visual system, proceeds to icon, to scanner, to character register, decoder, phonemic tape, lexicon check, primary memory, check of syntactic and semantic rules, review of phonological rules, to script, and ending with the vocal system.
The Transactional Model

The Transactional Model is associated whole language. Rather than focus on transmitting knowledge, the transactional model focuses on a collaborative effort between the teacher and students (Cecil, 1999). This child-centered model elevates children to collaborators in the quest for knowledge (Goodman, 1986). Students learn literacy through the four language modes of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The top-down approach is also analogous with whole language. Learning to read is seen a being similar to learning to speak; it is holistic and natural through immersion. Sub-skills are not taught because they fragment the process and make learning to read more abstract and difficult (Gunning, 2003). Readers use their background knowledge and knowledge of language to predict and infer the content of print (Goodman, 1986).

Transactional instruction emphasizes that getting meaning from text involves an active thinker transacting with text to construct meaning. In addition, interpretation of
text occurs as groups of children transact with each other. Finally, the teacher’s and students’ interpretations may be influenced by others in the group, which is a transactional situation (Pressley, 1994). It is logical to think of reading as flowing in one direction, from the text to the reader. The text contains the information that is transmitted to the reader; however, according to whole language theorists, reading is “actually a bidirectional transactional process, meaning the author presupposed that the reader brings a background of knowledge that can be used to interpret the text” (Norris, 1998, pp. 521-522). The more similar the reader’s knowledge is to author’s intended meaning, the more successful the communication from author to reader. The quality of literary understanding depends on what the author offers, as well as on the readers’ relevance of past experiences and present interests (Rosenblatt, 1960).

Not only is reading a two-way process involving a reader and a text at a particular time under particular circumstances, but the reader’s stance is critical as well (Rosenblatt, 1982). An efferent stance refers to when a reader is seeking information; attention focuses on what is to be carried away at the end of the reading. Efferent is the Latin word meaning to carry away. When a reader is engaged with a literary work of art, the reader reacts with personal feelings, ideas, and attitudes toward the work; thus, Rosenblatt calls this an aesthetic stance, from the Greek word meaning to sense or to perceive (p. 269). Any reading falls on the continuum between the efferent and aesthetic poles, depending on the text and the reader’s purpose for reading. These two stances are not an opposition or a dichotomy, but a continuum. The difference between the stances lies in the proportion of meaning derived from the reader (Rosenblatt, 1993).
Whole language is also associated with the constructivist model of learning where new learning is actively constructed and new knowledge builds upon the foundation of previous learning (Erickson, 1999). Vygotsky described social constructivism as a learning theory wherein teachers and older or more experienced children play an important role in learning (Wetsch & Tulviste, 1992). His best known concept is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) which is defined as the distance between a child’s actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the higher level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978).

Children can, with the help of adults or children who are more advanced, master concepts and ideas that they cannot understand on their own. This concept is often referred to as scaffolding learning (Tzuriel, 2000). As the child’s competency grows, the adult or peer reduces the amount of aid given. This model is apparent in whole language classrooms with the emphasis on transacting with text, each other, and teachers.

Educators who embrace this theory design the learning environment to allow for social interactions of the students. Teachers are guides on the side rather than the sage on the stage. These instructors provide authentic tasks that are meaningful for their students. Teachers encourage thoughtful reflection and knowledge-construction activities rather than knowledge reproduction. Learning is an active process and the concepts presented in one lesson are connected to previous learning (Stone, 1993).

In a transactional view, Goodman (1985) explains that reading is seen as receptive written language, one of four language processes in literate societies. In the productive generative processes, such as speaking and writing, a text is generated or constructed to
represent the meaning. In the receptive processes, such as listening and reading, meaning is constructed through transactions with the text and indirectly through the text with the writer. Reading and writing are unitary and psycholinguistic processes.

Readers utilize three information systems in constructing their texts and comprehending. The graphophonic system contains the orthographic, phonological, and phonic systems. The syntactic system contains the grammar of a language; largely syntax or sentence structures. The semantic system refers to meaning.

Reading involves a transaction between the published text and the reader. Reading is a cyclical psycholinguistic process. Perceptual processing depends on optical input. Syntactic processing operates on perceptual input and semantic processing depends on syntactic input (Goodman, 1985).

*The Interactive Model*

Balanced literacy is associated with an interactive model. The interactive model is based on the theoretical position that reading involves processing text and using one’s background knowledge and language ability to comprehend the text (Gunning, 2003).

The interactive model suggests that the reading process involves a complex set of interactions between a reader and a text to derive meaning (Singer & Ruddell, 1985). The interactive model incorporates four components: (1) reader environment, (2) knowledge utilization and control, (3) declarative and procedural knowledge, and (4) reader product. Reader environment includes textual, conversational, and instructional features used by the reader in constructing meaning from the text. Knowledge utilization and control refers to the processing of text and the activation of information and procedures. The reader’s affective, cognitive, and meta-cognitive states are included as well as the
reader’s interpretation of text meaning. Declarative and procedural knowledge includes the reader’s store of schema related to decoding, language and world knowledge and the procedures for using these knowledge forms. Reader product refers to the outcome of the interactions of all three components. Eight products are specified: comprehension, word recognition, oral output, written output, affective state change, cognitive state change, meta-cognitive state change, and new knowledge (Singer & Ruddell, 1985). The interactive reading instruction model is presented in Figure 2.

![Interactive reading instruction model](image)

Figure 2: *Interactive reading instruction model* (Yopp & Singer, 1985)

The model shows that the demands of the stimulus task and reader resources interact to attain a goal response that provides for feedback, but each of the components and the interaction itself are under the influence of the instructor. The instructor is crucial in this model.

The tenets of each model, Transmission Model, Transactional Model, and Interactive Model are synthesized and summarized and presented in Table 1, based on the work of Singer and Ruddell (1985).
Table 1: Reading Models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Transmission Model</th>
<th>Transactional Model</th>
<th>Interactive Model</th>
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<tr>
<td>What does the theory assume?</td>
<td>Emphasis on product</td>
<td>Emphasis on process</td>
<td>Emphasis on both product and process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the model’s structure?</td>
<td>Part-to-whole</td>
<td>Whole-to-part</td>
<td>Whole-part-whole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does the model work?</td>
<td>Students are passive recipients of knowledge</td>
<td>Students actively construct knowledge</td>
<td>Students interact with instructor and text to construct knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the models utility?</td>
<td>Behaviorist</td>
<td>Psycholinguistic</td>
<td>Comprehensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the models limitations?</td>
<td>Rote instruction; presenting smallest parts of language in isolation</td>
<td>Reading viewed as a psycholinguistic guessing game; learn to read solely through exposure and interaction with language rich environments</td>
<td>Eclectic approaches; inconsistent definitions; components not clear</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The three theoretical models were used to conceptualize the curriculum and organize coding when analyzing the reading programs. Phonics was characterized by the transmission model; whole language was associated with the transactional model; and balanced literacy was linked with the interactive model during the content analysis coding.

Background and Need

Reading instruction in the United States began in the Colonial times with a simple two-step process: Teach the code and then have the students read (Adams, 1990). Students learned the alphabet; letter sounds and progressed to simple words and syllables. Finally, students read the Bible and, after the Revolutionary War, patriotic essays, as these were primarily the only texts available at the time. The child’s interests were
irrelevant; rather, the need to inculcate the religious beliefs of the adult society were paramount (Venesky, 1987).

The meaning-first curriculum developed in the mid-1880s was led by Horace Mann, then secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education (Adams, 1990). Mann suggested that children be taught to read whole, meaningful words first rather than the alphabet. Mann also suggested that reading skills should be divided into a lower or mechanical level and a higher or meaning level (Venesky, 1987). However, Chall (1967) insisted the time period from 1890 to 1920 was characterized by elaborate, synthetic phonics in which the student practiced on sounds of isolated letters and word families.

Of all the series first published in the nineteenth century, none enjoyed the popularity or endured as long as the *McGuffey Eclectic Readers*, with an estimated 120 million copies sold (Venesky, 1987). From 1920 to 1935, phonics was seen as outdated and students learned to read with experience charts composed of children’s own stories. This method later evolved into the Language Experience Approach (LEA). From 1935 to 1955, phonics gradually came back as a reading method supplemented with picture clues, context clues, structural analysis and dictionary skills (Chall, 1967). Adams (1990) argued that phonics did not make a comeback in the United States until the publishing of the Rudolph Flesch’s book *Why Johnny Can’t Read* (1955) which advocated phonics instruction over the popular Look-Say method. During and just after World War II, readiness materials and pre-primers were inserted into the typical reading series. These changes and the addition of kindergarten books and instructional kits produced the modern reading series (Venezky, 1987). Phonics instruction was further advanced through the publishing of *Learning to Read: The Great Debate* (Chall, 1967), a federally
funded research study which concluded that phonics instruction was superior to other reading methodologies available at the time.

In New Zealand during the 1970s, the work of researchers such as Don Holdaway (1979) suggested that children can learn to read in a more naturalistic way, similarly to the way children learn to speak, by immersion in language-rich activities. The premise behind the Whole Language movement was to keep reading and writing whole rather fragmented, such as in phonics instruction (Altwerger, Edelsky, & Flores, 1987; Calkins, 1983; Church, 1994; Goodman, 1985; Newman, 1985; Routman, 1988; Stahl & Miller, 1989). Whole language was popular in the United States in the late 1970s and 1980s.

In the 1990s, research (Baumann, & Ivey, 1997; Cunningham, 1991; Freppon & Dahl, 1998; Pressley, Rankin, & Yokoi, 1996; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Spiegel, 1998; Wharton-McDonald, Rankin, Mistretta, Yokoi, & Ettenberger, 1997) suggested that children need both skills-based and meaning-based approaches to reading instruction. Currently, educators use all three methodologies: phonics, whole language, or a combination of the two in a balanced manner.

Unfortunately, balanced literacy has not been clearly defined in the literature. Specific versions of balanced instruction are described in books in which the authors cite various supportive bodies of research. Some authors “draw on the same studies and interpret the implications for classroom practice differently. Other authors draw on different or additional bodies of research and, thus, present contrasting descriptions of balanced instruction” (Freppon & Dahl, 1998, p. 240).

Spiegel (1999) defined a balanced approach as: A decision-making approach through which a teacher makes thoughtful decisions each day about the best way to help
each child become a better reader and writer. A balanced approach requires and enables a
teacher to reflect on what he or she is doing and to modify instruction daily based on the
needs of each individual learner. The modifications are drawn from a broad repertoire of
strategies and sound understanding of children, learning, and the theoretical bases of
these strategies.

Furthermore, the International Reading Association (IRA) described the following
principles of balanced instruction:

“Balance between teaching students and facilitating their learning; that is,
balancing teacher-directed explicit instruction and learner-centered discovery
learning. Balance between employing instructional approaches to reading and
open reading activity time; that is, balancing sequenced, prescribed instruction
and curriculum based on learner needs. Balance between using code and meaning
methodologies; that is, balancing isolated skill emphasis with meaning emphasis
methods. Balance between teaching intervention strategies incidentally to
individual students and teaching direct lessons based on core curriculum
standards; that is, balancing unplanned and planned instruction. Balance between
using trade books and published teaching materials; that is, balancing student- and
teacher-selected materials; Balance between using informal observations and
formal assessment; that is, balancing authentic assessment and norm-referenced
standardized tests. Balance between teaching use and awareness of language; that
is, balancing and integrating the processes of all the language arts within the
context” (Blair-Larsen & Williams, 1999, pp. 10-11).
The components of balanced literacy also vary from author to author in textbooks and supplemental books designed for teachers. A recent textbook (Tompkins, 2006) described 10 components of a balanced approach to literacy instruction: reading, phonics and other skills, strategies, vocabulary, comprehension, literature, content-area study, oral language, writing, and spelling. Coleman (2001) provided another example of the inconsistencies of the components of balanced literacy as the components are very different from Tompkins’ suggested components. Coleman included modeled reading, shared reading, guided reading, independent reading, modeled and shared writing, interactive writing, guided writing, and independent writing. Another example is evident in *Balanced Literacy Instruction: A Teacher’s Resource Book* (Au, Carroll, & Scheu, 2001) where only three components are identified: Readers’ Workshop, Writers’ Workshop, and evaluation.

Pressley (2002) suggested a multi-componential skills approach to instruction. The elements include the development of decoding skills, sight words, vocabulary development, specific comprehension skills, and reading within a socio-cultural contest. In addition, Pressley recommended extensive authentic reading and writing; use of semantic and syntactic contextual cues; self-monitoring and self-regulation; and practice in reading with fluency, speed, and accuracy.

Given this ambiguity, the strategy taken in this content analysis was a two-stage approach. First, a comprehensive definition of balanced literacy was developed from an extensive review and synthesis of the definitions in the literature. Second, the two reading programs approved by the California Department of Education, kindergarten and first grade, were coded and analyzed to determine what components characterized the reading
programs and to examine to what extent the programs contain elements of phonics, whole
language, and a balanced approach to literacy.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How is balanced literacy defined in the educational literature?
2. What phonics, whole language, or balanced approach components characterize
   kindergarten and first grade reading programs in California?
3. To what extent do the two approved reading programs in California reflect a balanced
   approach to literacy for kindergarten and first grade?

Definitions of Terms and Concepts

*Alphabets* (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000) refers to phonemic awareness instruction and phonics instruction.

*Alphabetic principle* is the assumption underlying an alphabetic writing system that each speech sound or phoneme of a language has its own distinctive graphic representation.

*Cueing systems* are three of the language systems on which readers rely for cues as they seek meaning from text: graphophonic (based on letter-sound relationships and visual knowledge); semantic (based on meaning); and syntactic (based on grammar).

*Decodable texts* are reading materials that provide an intermediate step between words in isolation and authentic literature. Such texts are designed to give students an opportunity to learn to use their understanding of phonics in the course of reading connected text. Although decodable texts may contain sight words that have been
previously taught, most words are wholly decodable on the basis of the letter-sound and spelling-sound correspondences taught and practiced in phonics lessons.

Decoding refers to a series of strategies used selectively by readers to recognize and read written words. The reader locates cues in a word that reveal enough about it to help in pronouncing it and attaching meaning to it.

Explicit instruction is the intentional design and delivery of information by the teacher to the students. It begins with the teacher’s modeling or demonstration of the skill or strategy followed by a structured and substantial opportunity for students to practice and apply newly taught skills and knowledge under the teacher’s direction and guidance, and an opportunity for feedback.

Guided Reading is when students work in small groups to read as independently as possible a text the teacher has selected for them and introduced to them. This text should be at the group’s instructional level, that is, the students will be able to read it with 90%-94% accuracy. Students learn to self-monitor their own reading behaviors and use appropriate strategies to fully decode and comprehend text.

Language Experience Approach is an approach to reading. It helps beginning learners bring their own knowledge and experience to bear in constructing meaning from the printed word. The importance of relating oral language to written language and of relating reading to writing is emphasized in the motto “Anything I can say, I can write; anything I can write, I can read.”

Mini-lesson is direct instruction on specific topics or skills. The lessons are presented briefly and succinctly on the assumption that such information will be added to the set of ideas, strategies, and skills to be drawn upon as needed.
Morpheme is a linguistic unit of relatively stable meaning that cannot be divided into smaller meaningful parts; the smallest meaningful part of a word.

Orthographic pertains to orthography the art or study of correct spelling according to established usage.

Phonemes are the smallest units of speech that distinguish one utterance or word from another in a given language.

Phonemic awareness is the insight that every spoken word is made up of a sequence of phonemes or speech sounds. This insight is essential for learning to read an alphabetic language because these elementary sounds or phonemes are represented by letters. Without phonemic awareness, phonics makes no sense; consequently, the spelling of words can be learned only by rote.

Phonics is a system of teaching reading and spelling that stresses basic symbol-relationships and their application in decoding words.

Scaffolding is the temporary support, guidance, or assistance provided to a student on a new or complex task. These interactions eventually lead to independence.

Shared Reading is a strategy in which students read a text with the help of a teacher in an effort to learn to read by reading. Shared reading is a step between reading to students and independent reading by students.

Writer’s Workshop is a format for writing that balances instruction and modeling with adequate time for composing, sharing, and publishing. A constant, sustained time for writing is set aside each day. Through modeled writing and discussion about it, students learn about the recursive nature of the writing process.
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Teaching students to read is a complex undertaking. Over the years, researchers have disagreed about how beginning reading should be taught. Five categories of research will be reviewed for this study: (a) phonics or skill-based instruction, (b) whole language or meaning-based instruction, (c) comparison studies between phonics and whole language approaches, (d) balanced literacy, and (e) basal reading programs.

Phonics

A large corpus of research focusing on phonics instruction is available in the reading literature. This review will describe the works of major contributors in the field of phonics instruction in the United States using a historical perspective.

Flesch

*Why Johnny Can’t Read* (1955) was on the best seller list for over 30 weeks and was an emotionally-charged book which proposed a phonics first approach to beginning reading, as opposed to the look-say method found in basal readers popular at the time. The book was written primarily for parents, not educators. Flesch, a graduate of Teachers College at Columbia University, described a systematic phonics system that parents could implement at home. In fact, Flesch declared that the responsibility of reading instruction must come from home because the teaching of reading is too important to be left to the educators.

Flesch insisted that American schools have done a disservice to students through ineffective reading strategies which require intense memorization of words. He compared this notion to learning Chinese symbols. With our alphabetic system, he argued, students
should sound out the letters to read. By using basal readers, he argued, “we have thrown 3,500 years of civilization out the window” (p. 5). The proponents of this method are publishing companies who earn huge profits from textbooks used in schools across America.

Flesch offered a guarantee that a child who has been taught this way can read, millions of children taught the other way cannot read. His phonics program also helped with spelling. Flesch asserted the phonics approach’s superiority over other reading methods.

Teaching one’s own child to read was an American tradition, dating back to the pioneers, according to Flesch. Furthermore, he advised parents to begin reading instruction at age five following his program outlined in the book. This is significant because, until very recently, reading instruction in the United States did not begin until age six or in the first grade. At the time, it was believed that reading readiness activities were essential prior to formal reading instruction. The program Flesch advocated is systematic and moves from the simple to the complex.

The book is filled with alarmist language, bordering on propaganda. For instance, he proclaimed “that the word method is gradually destroying democracy in this country; it returns to the upper middle class the privileges that public education was supposed to distribute evenly among the people” (p. 132). He announced that for the first time in history, parents “see their children getting less education than they got themselves” (p. 133). He asserted that “systematic phonics is the way to teach reading” (p. 121) and that all other methods are failing America’s youth.
Flesch’s impact on American reading instruction is important because of the popularity of the book and its insistence on phonics instruction. His book was re-released in the early 1980s and again was on the best seller list. Parents are obviously concerned about reading education and Flesch tapped into their fears and provided a simple solution.

*Chall*

*Learning to Read: The Great Debate* (Chall, 1967) was the result of a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York. Jeanne Chall, from Harvard Graduate School of Education, designed a study comparing different approaches to beginning reading. The purpose of the study was to investigate reading methodology of beginning reading instruction. Chall used the phrase *the great debate* to describe code emphasis or phonics approaches versus meaning emphasis approaches. The overarching research question was: Do children learn better with a beginning method that stresses meaning or with one that stresses learning the code?

Chall conducted structured interviews with 25 leading authorities in reading instruction, including basal readers’ authors, phonics and linguistic alphabet reformers, Language Experience Approach (LEA) proponents, and other leaders in the field. Chall gathered data on reading readiness, when to begin instruction, writing and spelling after reading, illustrations (pro-phonics advocates were against illustrations), and asked: Are students reading less well than fifty years ago? Chall concluded that reading standards have not suffered since the shift away from the phonic methods of the early 1900s. Predictably, the interviews suggested that one’s background in the field had an effect on their answers. For instance, if one worked as a basal reader writer, than one’s responses reflected a bias towards this reading methodology.
Chall cautioned readers about how easy it is to misinterpret research findings. At the time of publication, Chall asserted that “the research on beginning reading is shockingly inconclusive” (p. 88).

Chall examined experimental evidence on approaches to beginning reading and she conceded many research studies used dubious measurement standards and did not use statistical tests of significance to determine whether the various results obtained could be attributed to chance differences. The studies examined suggest that phonics is more effective than the look-say method, popular at the time. The studies are listed below (Chall, 1969):

Table 2: Comparisons of Experimental Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Prevailing Method</th>
<th>Total Studies Conducted</th>
<th>Systematic Phonics superior</th>
<th>Intrinsic phonics</th>
<th>Look-say superior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1900-1920</td>
<td>Systematic Phonics</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920-1935</td>
<td>Look-Say</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935-1955</td>
<td>Intrinsic Phonics</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955-1965</td>
<td>The Debate: Intrinsic Phonics</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chall reviewed studies from various time periods with different reading methodologies. From the results reported in each study, Chall then compared which reading methodology produced superior results. After analyzing the studies, Chall concluded that a code emphasis model tended to produce better overall reading achievement. Very few studies suggested that the look-say method produced better readers than phonics instruction. Chall’s overall conclusion was that students need systematic phonics. Her work was influential in the research community and she is still lauded as a phonics champion.
Bond and Dykstra

Influenced by Flesch’s immensely popular book *Why Johnny Can’t Read*, which was quite critical of American educational system regarding reading instruction, and the launching of Sputnik 1 in 1957, which many Americans believed proved that the Russians had demonstrated a scientific superiority to the United States, Congress passed the National Defense Education Act which provided substantial funding to improving education. The National Conference on Research in English created a committee for reading research. In 1963, the Cooperative Research branch of the U.S. Office of Education invited proposals to study reading research. Guy Bond and Robert Dykstra were selected to conduct a large-scale study synthesizing the available research. The result was the landmark study: *The Cooperative Research Program in First-grade Reading Instruction* (1967/1997).

Bond and Dykstra used a comparison-research design to examine the effectiveness of existing reading programs. The researchers also investigated how students, teachers, schools, and communities may also contribute to reading achievement of first-graders. Three research questions guided the study, which consisted of analyzing 29 coordinated studies:

1) To what extent are various pupil, teacher, class, school, and community characteristics related to pupil achievement in first grade reading and spelling?

2) Which of the many approaches to initial reading instruction produces superior reading and spelling achievement at the end of first grade?

3) Is any program uniquely effective or ineffective for pupils with high or low readiness for reading?
In examining the first research question, the researchers studied quantifiable teacher characteristics, including age, gender, degrees earned, certification, teaching experience, years teaching first grade, attitudes toward teaching, recorded absences during the study, and marital status. Student characteristics included age, gender, absentee rate, and class size. The researchers found that students, teachers, class, school, and community characteristics were only negligibly related to reading and spelling achievement. Bond and Dykstra concluded that “to improve reading instruction, it is necessary to train better teachers of reading rather than to expect a panacea in the form of materials” (p. 416).

To answer research question two about instructional approaches, Bond and Dykstra compared five types of instructional materials or methods to the basal reader approach. The basal reader of the 1960s contained controlled vocabulary, scripted teacher manual, and a classroom instructional management system designed for teaching students in three distinct reading-leveled groups (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). The five types of instructional materials examined were (a) Initial Teaching Alphabet, (b) Basal plus Phonics, (c) Language Experience Approach, (d) Linguistic, and (e) Phonic/Linguistic.

The analysis of the data suggested that classrooms using an integrated approach, which combined systematic phonics with reading for meaning and writing, did much better than classrooms using basal programs exclusively. However, Bond and Dykstra cautioned that “No one approach is so distinctly better in all situations and respects than the others that it should be considered the one best method and the one to be used exclusively” (p. 416). It is significant that Bond and Dykstra’s research suggested the advantages of using an early code-emphasis approach to reading instruction. Their
research was one of the first U.S. national research reports to show that systematic, early phonics instruction can improve spelling and comprehension (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998).

In examining research question three: Is any program uniquely effective or ineffective for pupils with high or low readiness for reading?, the researchers evaluated readiness tests given to students entering first grade, a popular practice at the time. This standardized evaluation was often used by teachers to create reading groups. The data suggested that none of the programs were uniquely effective or ineffective with regard to student readiness. Although at the time this discovery may have surprised the researchers, this finding indirectly led to a paradigm shift away from reading readiness to a new concept emergent literacy (Cowen, 2003).

The first-grade studies yielded data important to beginning reading instruction. For example, the researchers reported that “Obviously, the ability to recognize letters at the beginning of first grade was related to reading success in all of the methods and programs employed in the study” (p. 365). The data suggested that learning the letters of the alphabet produced the single most predictive relationship to future success in reading, followed by phonic/linguist treatment. The two most important predictors for beginning success in learning to read were identified in this study: knowledge of letter names and the ability to discriminate between sounds.

Ehri and Wilce

Is the first stage of learning to read printed words visual or phonetic? The main purpose of Ehri and Wilce’s (1985) study was to obtain more direct evidence regarding children’s use of visual and phonetic cues when they first begin learning to read words.
The researchers selected 30 boys and 26 girls from middle-class preschool and kindergarten classes. Nonnative speakers lacking proficiency in English were not included. The subjects were divided into three groups (a) *prereaders* who could not read any words; (b) *novice* beginning readers who could read a few words; and (c) *veteran* beginning readers who could read several words. The researchers examined the subjects’ ability to learn to read two kinds of word spellings: (1) simplified phonetic spellings whose letters corresponded to sounds in pronunciations by virtue of the fact that the names of the letters included sounds found in the pronunciations (for example, JRF for *giraffe*), and (2) visual spellings whose letters bore no correspondence to sounds but were more distinctive visually (such as, XGST for *balloon*).

The subjects were tested individually over a three-day period. The subjects completed five tasks: (a) letter name/sound knowledge, (b) Gray Oral Reading Test, (c) word identification, (d) word-learning tasks, and (e) memory for spellings. One way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were used to determine whether the three groups of subjects differed significantly on the 5 tasks. Main effects were significant in all analyses (all $ps < .01$). Post hoc pairwise comparisons using Tukey’s method revealed that veterans and novices scored equivalently and significantly higher than prereaders on the measures of age, letter name, and letter-sound knowledge. All the groups differed significantly from each other in recognizing words in context on the Gray Oral Reading Test as well as on the primer-level word identification task.

Furthermore, performances on the printed word-learning tasks were analyzed using ANOVA. The independent variables were reading group, spelling stimuli (phonetic vs. visual). The dependent measure was the number of correct word responses. Main
effects were significant for group, $F(2,45) = 25.48, p < .01$; spellings, $F(1,45) = 16.05, p < .01$; and tasks, $F(4, 180) = 6.17, p < .01$. To ascertain whether the difference in each group was significant, three matched-pair $t$ tests were conducted. The dependent measure was the number of correct responses on the first five tasks. Results were significant for all groups. Among the prereaders, more visual than phonetic spellings were learned, $t(15) = 2.87, p < .025$. In the other two groups, more phonetic than visual spellings were learned: for novices, $t(15) = 4.18, p < .01$; for veterans, $t(15) = 4.92, p < .01$ (all two-tailed tests).

The results suggested that novice and veteran beginning readers differ substantially from prereaders in the cues they attend to in learning to read words. The prereader group found visually distinctive spellings easier to learn whereas the beginning readers found phonetic spellings were easier to learn. The researchers’ interpretation of the study is that “movement into effective word reading requires a shift from visual to phonetic cue processing and that this shift is what enables children to begin reading their first words reliably” (p. 172). Ehri and Wilce suggested that movement into reading cannot be regarded as evolving naturally out of experiences with print, as many whole language advocates claim. Finally, the researchers concluded that instruction in phonetics is essential.

**Juel**

Juel conceptualized reading and writing from the Simple View model. In the Simple View model, reading ability is composed of two factors, decoding and comprehension. Writing is composed of two basic factors, spelling and ideation. Ideation is the ability to generate and organize ideas. In this model, if someone is a poor reader, then he or she must be a poor decoder, a poor listener, or both. If someone is a poor writer, then he or she must be either a poor speller, a poor generator of ideas, or both.

The study began with 129 subjects in first grade, but due to attrition, the final number of subjects who remained in study until fourth grade was 54. The children attended one large, low-socioeconomic status elementary school in Austin, Texas. The students in this study were 26% Anglo, 31% Black, and 43% Hispanic Americans. There were 31 girls and 23 boys.

Juel collected data in the following: phonemic awareness, decoding, word recognition, listening comprehension, reading comprehension, place in series (the basal text), home reading, attitude toward reading, IQ, spelling, writing, and ideas. In response to the first research question: Do the same children remain poor readers year after year? Juel’s data suggested that the probability of a child remaining a poor reader at the end of fourth grade, if the child was a poor reader at the end of first grade, was .88; the probability that a child would become a poor reader in fourth grade if he or she had at least average reading skills in first grade was .12. The evidence in this sample indicated that the poor first-grade reader almost invariably remains a poor reader by the end of fourth grade.
Do the same children remain poor writers year after year? The data for the second research question suggested that early writing skill did not predict later writing skill as well as early reading ability predicted later reading ability. The correlation between writing at the end of first grade and writing in fourth grade was $0.38, p >.01$, however, the correlation increased with each subsequent grade level. The correlation between end-of-year second grade writing and fourth grade writing was $0.53, p <.001$. The correlation between third and fourth grade writing was $0.60, p <.001$.

What skills do the poor readers lack? In answering the third research question, Juel noticed that the children who became poor readers entered first grade with little phonemic awareness. Spelling-sound knowledge was initially slow for the poor readers and they never reached the level of the average and good readers. All but two of the poor readers were at least one standard deviation below the good readers on the decoding test. Furthermore, the poor readers exhibited also poor listening comprehension.

What skills do the poor writers lack? The researcher collected a writing sample in each grade and each sample was scored using a rubric. The correlation between the writing sample in first grade and the writing sample in fourth grade was $0.83, p <.001$. At the end of fourth grade 21 subjects were still writing descriptions rather than stories. In examining the data on spelling, Juel concluded that “no poor writers who had good spelling and good ideas were found in my study” (p. 441).

What factors seem to keep poor readers from improving? A primary factor that seemed to keep the poor readers from improving was their poor decoding skill. This lack of decoding skill prevented the poor readers from being able to read as much text, both in and out of school, as the good readers. By the end of first grade, the good readers had
seen, on average, 18,681 words in their basal reading text. The poor readers had seen, on average, only 9,975 words. In fourth grade, the good readers had read, on average 178,000 words in their basal readers whereas the poor readers had read, on average, about 80,000 words. Another factor which seems to keep poor readers from improving was the amount of reading done out of school. Neither the good nor the poor readers reported reading much after school in first or second grade; however, in third and fourth grade, reading after school became frequent for the good readers. Attitude toward reading was also a contributing factor in keeping poor readers from improving. The poor readers exhibited negative attitudes towards reading.

In response to the last research question: What factors seem to keep the poor writers from improving? Juel concluded that poor readers appear to become poor writers. They lacked story ideas and were also poor spellers.

This study suggested that a student who is a poor first-grade reader will almost invariably still be a poor reader by the end of fourth grade. Juel recommended teaching decoding skills to help alleviate the problem. Juel described a vicious cycle: children who did not develop good word-recognition skill in first grade began to dislike reading and read considerably less than good readers, both in and out of school. Therefore, they lost a means to develop vocabulary, concepts, ideas, and such that is fostered by wide reading. This in turn, may contribute to the widening gap between the good and poor readers. This conclusion is echoed in the work of Stanovich (1986), where he described the widening gap in reading as students progress as the “Mathew Effect” in reading, from the Gospel according to Matthew. Stanovich elaborates on a rich-get-richer or cumulative advantage phenomenon in reading progress. He states: “The very children who are
reading well and who have good vocabularies will read more, learn more word meanings, and hence read even better. Children with inadequate vocabularies—who read slowly and without enjoyment—read less, and as a result have slower development of vocabulary knowledge, which inhibits further growth in reading ability” (p. 381).

Adams

*Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning About Print* (Adams, 1990) is a classic in reading research. Adams synthesized the beginning reading literature to achieve her goal of providing guidance in relation to how phonics instruction can be taught efficiently and effectively and how to support comprehension.

Adams analyzed the following questions: (a) What is the reading process? (b) How do the four processors integral to the reading system (context, meaning, orthographic, and phonological) work independently, interdependently, and as an integrated whole? (c) How are all the pieces that we know about literacy combined to operate in a synchronized and effective way? (d) How do we develop the depth and quality of understanding effective reading instruction to guide what we do as classroom teachers for beginning readers? Adams synthesized the research to answer these questions.

Adams’ work contributed to field of reading research in several key areas. First, Adams described a model for the reading system which includes four processors. The Orthographic Processor is responsible for perceiving the sequences of letters in the text. The Phonological Processor is responsible for mapping the letters onto their spoken equivalents. The Meaning Processor contains knowledge of word meanings. The Context
Processor is responsible for constructing an ongoing understanding of the text. All four processors work in a synchronized way as shown in Figure 3:

![Model of the reading system: Four processors](Adams, 1990 p. 158)

Adams claimed that reading depends first on visual processing or letter recognition and then the four processors work together. Effective readers use all four processors at the same time including the ability to decode words, understand the spellings, meanings, and pronunciations, as well as reading fluently in various contexts.

Another major contribution made by Adams was the importance of phonemic awareness as a precursor to reading. Phonemic awareness is the conscious knowledge that spoken language can be manipulated and this skill is necessary for children to learn how to read. Adams declared that beginning readers needed to learn the alphabetic principle early in their school careers. Children need to segment and blend phonemes orally and then progress to linking sounds to graphemes (or letters), which makes the transition to letter-sound correspondences easier. Phonemic awareness (or the lack of it) has been linked with reading achievement. Children’s levels of phonemic awareness on entering school may be the single most powerful determinant of their success or failure in learning to read (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Phonemic awareness can be taught
successfully and when combined with instruction in the alphabetic principle, reading acquisition is accelerated (Adams, 1990).

Finally, Adams’ research synthesis suggested that direct instruction in phonics in early reading acquisition is necessary. Adams recommended that instruction must focus on orthographic regularities in early reading instruction as well as practice with lots of reading texts to develop fluency. Adams’ findings concluded that reading approaches which emphasize systematic code instruction along with reading of meaningful texts result in superior reading achievement by both low-readiness and better prepared students.

*Foorman*

Preventing reading failure for at-risk children is a concern for educators. Reading instruction can make a difference for success in reading. Foorman, Francis, Fletcher, Schatschneider, and Mehta (1998) studied three reading programs for at-risk students: direct instruction in letter-sound correspondences practiced in decodable texts or direct code; less direct instruction in systematic sound-spelling patterns embedded in connected text or embedded code; and implicit instruction in the alphabetic code while reading connected text or implicit code.

The participants in this study were 285 students in first and second grades who were eligible for services under Title I funding in an urban school district. Title I refers to federal funding provided for economically disadvantaged children with low achievement. Economically disadvantaged was defined in terms of the percentage of children participating in the federal lunch program. Low achievement was defined by school district officials as scores on the district’s emergent literacy survey in the bottom quartile.
The ethnic composition was as follows: 60% African American, 20% Hispanic, and 20% White.

The researchers purposefully choose classrooms with a literature-rich environment. The instructional methods included direct code, embedded code, and implicit code. The direct code classrooms emphasized phonemic awareness, phonics and literature activities. The embedded code classrooms emphasized phonemic awareness and spelling patterns in predictable books. The implicit code classrooms emphasized a print-rich environment with whole language tenets, such as: teacher as facilitator rather than director of learning; children’s construction of meaning as central; the integration of reading, spelling, and writing into literary activities that provide a context for phonics; emphasis on classroom interaction and on response to literature; learning centers; and portfolio assessments rather than norm-referenced tests. All participating teachers were trained during a one week summer in-service followed by retraining and demonstration lessons one month into the school year. Furthermore, the research staff visited each teacher’s classroom every other week or more frequently, if needed, to monitor implementation of instruction and to provide feedback on the quality of implementation. Also, the research staff member met with teachers during planning time to discuss instructional issues and three times during the school year teachers met with other teachers from other teaching sites to share instructional strategies with one another.

The researchers used many measures in this study. The researchers collected data on teacher compliance and attitudes; student growth in vocabulary, phonological processing, and word-reading skill; end-of-year achievement and intellectual tests;
attitude-experience, such as school attendance data and measures of self-esteem and reading attitudes; and teacher evaluations.

The results of this study indicated that early instructional intervention made a difference for the development of reading skills in first- and second-grade students at risk for reading failure. Children who were in the direct code classrooms improved in word-reading skill at a significantly faster rate than children in the implicit code classrooms. In addition, 46% of the children in the implicit code research group and 44% of the embedded code research group exhibited no demonstrable growth in word reading, as opposed to only 16% in the direct code research group. The researchers attributed the performance differences due to instruction, not to behavioral or affective differences among the three groups.

The researchers also concluded that children who demonstrate problems with phonological processing also had poor reading skills. However, students who were in the direct code classrooms and received explicit instruction in the alphabetic principle had greater changes in phonological processing skills and word-reading ability. On the end-of-year achievement measure, the direct code group approached the national average on decoding (43rd percentile) and passage comprehensions (45th percentile) while the implicit group’s means were 29th percentile for decoding and 35th percentile for passage comprehension. The researchers concluded that at-risk children benefited the most from direct code instruction.

*The National Reading Panel Report*

In 1997, the U.S. Congress mandated that a national panel be convened to review and evaluate research on the effectiveness of various approaches for teaching children to
read. The Director of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) and the U.S. Secretary of Education selected 14 people to serve as a National Reading Panel (NRP).

The report from the NRP, *Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and its Implications for Reading Instruction* (2000) was divided into subtopics. The panel members analyzed research in what the panel called alphabetics (phonemic awareness and phonics instruction), fluency, comprehension, teacher education and reading instruction, and computer technology and reading instruction.

The NRP elected to develop and adopt a set of rigorous research methodological standards. The panel screened research literature and included only experimental or quasi-experimental research studies. Selection in the study was competitive and according to the panel, only a small fraction of the total reading research literature met the Panel’s standards for use in the topic analyses. The data from the studies were coded and analyzed by the panel.

For the phonics portion of the study, the NRP used the following questions to guide the study: Does phonics instruction enhance children’s success in learning to read? Is phonics instruction more effective at some grade levels than others? Is it beneficial for children who are having difficulties learning to read? Does phonics instruction improve all aspects of reading or just decoding and word-level reading skills? Are some types of phonics instruction more effective than others and for which children? Does phonics instruction have an impact on children’s spelling?
To address those questions, the NRP conducted a literature search to identify studies published since 1970 that compared phonics instruction to other forms of instruction for their impact on reading ability. Using the specific NRP research methodology criteria, the NRP included 38 studies from which 66 treatment-control group comparisons were made. Data from the studies were used in a meta-analysis, including the calculation of effect sizes.

After analyzing the research on alphabetics, the NRP found that the phonemic awareness training that is most effective is 5 to 18 hours of explicit and systematic, small-group instruction with one or two tasks of manipulating phonemes with letters, given to preschool and kindergarten children. For the phonics portion of the report, the panel members described three distinctions among phonics instructional programs. First, explicit and systematic programs were distinguished from programs providing nonsystematic phonics or no phonics at all. Second, it classified explicit and systematic phonics programs into three categories: (a) synthetic, (b) larger unit, and (c) miscellaneous. Third, the panel studied whether phonics instruction is more effective when taught one-on-one, in small groups, or to the whole class. The panel reported that explicit and systematic phonics is superior to nonsystematic or no phonics. There were no significant differences in effectiveness among the three kinds of systematic phonics instruction. Furthermore, no significant differences in effectiveness were found among one-on-one, small-group, or whole-class phonics instruction.

The panel reported that systematic phonics instruction produced significant benefits for students in kindergarten through 6th grade and for children having difficulty learning to read. Systematic synthetic phonics (teaching students explicitly to convert
letters into sounds and then blend the sounds to form recognizable words) had a positive and significant effect on disabled readers’ reading skills. This type of phonics instruction also seems to benefit both students with learning disabilities and low-achieving students who are not disabled. It was significantly more effective in improving low socioeconomic status (SES) children’s alphabetic knowledge and word reading skills than instructional approaches that were less focused on these initial reading skills. The NRP concluded that these facts and findings provide converging evidence that explicit, systematic phonics instruction is a valuable and essential part of a successful classroom reading program. Nonetheless, the report cautioned readers that phonics instruction is only one component of a total reading program. Systematic phonics instruction should be integrated with other reading instruction in phonemic awareness, fluency, and comprehension strategies.

_Stahl_

An important contribution to phonics instruction research is Stahl’s (2002) clarification of phonics terminology. Stahl categorized phonics instruction into traditional approaches and constructivist approaches; additionally, the researcher classifies different phonics instruction within each approach. This contribution is important because it is crucial to know what kind of phonics instruction the researcher is referring to in research articles.

Traditional phonics instruction includes analytic and synthetic approaches. The analytic approach begins with words the students already know and the students analyze the words into sounds. Analytic phonics uses a whole-to-part approach. Synthetic approaches begin by teaching letter-sound relationships and blending letters into words. Synthetic phonics programs use a part-to-whole approach (Ehri, 2001).
Stahl identified a method for teaching phonics that was founded in the 1920s called the Orton-Gillingham approach. In this model, the teacher directly instructs students on individual letters paired with their sounds using a visual-auditory-kinesthetic-tactile (VAKT) procedure that entails tracing the letter while saying its name and sound, blending letters together to read words and sentences, and finally reading short stories constructed to contain only taught sounds. These methods are still in use today.

Another model for phonics instruction is the Direct Instruction approach. The commercial program Distar is an example of this model which follows a behavioral analysis of decoding. Students are taught letter sounds through highly structured instruction using cues and reinforcement procedures. Decoding is broken down into component parts and each of these parts is separated into letter sounds to blending to reading words in context. Teachers follow a script with lots of student involvement. Following the lesson, students practice reading in texts which contain the taught sounds.

In meta-phonics, programs such as Project READ, reading and spelling are taught simultaneously. Precise articulation of letters sounds are introduced by the teacher. Students then move on to decode simple consonant-vowel-consonant words and progress to more complicated words. Phonics generalizations are taught in this model.

An example of using a constructivist approach to phonics instruction is in the program Making Words. Students are actively creating knowledge when teachers use a constructivist approach to education. The teacher asks students to make words using letter cards. Students manipulate letters to make different words. Words are then written on cards that are used in various sorting activities. Word Study, such as described in *Words Their Way* (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 2000) is an approach in
which students analyze words and word patterns through strategies such as sorting, where students categorize words according to their orthographic features.

Another constructivist approach to phonics is compare/contrast and analogy instruction. Students are taught to chunk words into multi-letter units when decoding an unknown word. Students are taught to make comparisons between unknown words with known words. Word Walls are frequently used in this approach with instruction on word similarities.

Finally, embedded phonics instruction is often seen in whole language classrooms. Phonics instruction is embedded in the context of teaching reading and is sensitive to the individual child’s needs. Letter-sound instruction can occur as one of the cueing systems as well as in writing instruction.

Summary

From the alarmist, Why Johnny Can’t Read to the National Reading Panel’s evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature, phonics instruction has been a driving force in American classrooms. Several large-scale, long-term studies have concluded that phonics instruction is beneficial to beginning readers, particularly at-risk students with low SES. Phonics instruction is not without its critics. The U.S. government has funded several large studies which have concluded that phonics instruction is superior to other reading methodologies. Phonics instruction has been shown to improve spelling and comprehension as well. Different approaches to phonics instruction are identified in the literature, including analogy phonics, analytic phonics, embedded phonics, phonics through spelling, and synthetic phonics.
Whole Language

Whole Language is not a reading program, per se. Whole language is often referred to as a philosophy towards literacy instruction that does not come bundled with a set of packaged materials, teacher manuals, and student workbooks (Walmsley & Adams, 1993). This section will describe definitions of whole language found in the research literature and examine major contributors to the whole language movement in chronological order.

What is Whole Language?

Whole language is a controversial approach to literacy that gained prominence in America during the late 1970s and 1980s. Although a common definition is lacking in the literature, whole language is generally viewed as a philosophical stance which leads to a literacy instructional approach focusing on whole words and whole books, rather than discrete skills and excerpts of text. It is a description of how some teachers and researchers have explored the practical applications of theoretical arguments from research in linguistics, psycholinguistics, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, child development, curriculum, and literary theory (Newman, 1985). The role of the teacher is not one of disseminating information; rather, the teacher creates demonstrations and open-ended activities. The teacher provides invitations to learn as opposed to assignments. The teacher leads from behind (Newman, 1985). Learning is social; therefore, teachers encourage discussions, sharing of knowledge and ideas while allowing students to take risks by creating a supportive emotional environment. Students are active participants in their learning (Newman, 1985). Literacy is thought to develop naturally when students are immersed in authentic literacy activities that involve listening,
speaking, reading, and writing, in contrast with unauthentic workbook drills and teacher scripted teachers’ manuals. Thus, children should never be taught to read “by breaking whole (natural) language into bite-size abstract little pieces” (Goodman, 1986, p. 7).

Spoken language is a developmental model for literacy in whole language. Spoken language develops naturally when children are surrounded by language, encouraged by caregivers, and are rewarded for approximations or attempts at language in supportive environments. Therefore, whole language advocates reasoned that literacy will also develop naturally when young children observe demonstrations, are encouraged to participate actively, and to practice independently in meaningful activities (Routman, 1988).

The core element of the whole language construct is an emphasis on whole pieces of literature and functional language as opposed to abridgments, adaptations, or segmented tests. Activities included individual students’ choice as opposed to teacher-sponsored, whole class assignments. Instruction includes integrated language experiences as opposed to direct instruction in isolated skill sequences (Jeynes & Littell, 2000).

The term whole language is confusing. Bergeron (1990) conducted a content analysis of the literature to help define whole language. Whole language has been described as being an approach, a belief, a method, a philosophy, an orientation, a theory, a theoretical orientation, a program, a curriculum, a perspective on education, and an attitude of mind. Bergeron analyzed 64 articles and no definitive conclusions were made regarding what whole language is. The techniques for implementing whole language were not very consistent either. The articles described classrooms that used literature, the writing process, sharing, invented spelling, independent reading, journals, dramatics, big
books, choral reading, charts, predictable books, learning center, and reading corners.

The articles reviewed did not describe worksheets or segmented texts as a part of a whole language classroom.

Bergeron found that the teachers’ role in whole language classrooms was consistent in the review of literature. Whole language teachers did not emphasize accuracy; rather, they interacted with students, viewed themselves as learners, modeled, and analyzed miscues in reading from their students to guide future instruction.

Bergeron’s findings suggested that the instruction in whole language classrooms included thematic units, contextual skills, child-centered activities, daily reading and writing, prediction, whole-to-part instruction and integration of language arts across the curriculum. Direct instruction, ability groups, and isolated skills were not part of whole language instruction.

The research articles recounting whole language analyzed by Bergeron used descriptors such as cooperate, affective, choice, and plan when discussing students in whole language classrooms. The assessments included “kidwatching,” student work, portfolios, and conferencing. Standardized tests were not used extensively in whole language classes.

Bergeron concluded that a common definition of the term whole language was lacking and the activities and strategies were not consistent from study to study. Furthermore, she reported that there can be no definitive conclusions about defining whole language based on the literature.

Not only is whole language difficult to define, it is difficult to implement as well. Researchers Walmsley and Adams (1993) interviewed 71 teachers from elementary and
middle schools drawn from rural, urban, and suburban school districts, both public and private, in upstate New York. The researchers identified several issues facing teachers who embraced the whole language philosophy.

The whole language teachers reported that whole language instruction is very demanding, in fact, the researchers asserted that whole language advocates have underestimated the demanding nature of making the transition to whole language. The teachers implementing the new approach proclaimed that they felt alienated from other teachers and they noticed a polarizing effect separating teachers into educational camps representing stereotypes of traditional (such as, teacher-dominated instruction; children sitting passively in rows; doing worksheets) versus whole language (such as, child-centered, individualized instruction; authentic reading of self-selected literature; journal writing). Furthermore, many of the teachers preferred not to use the term whole language because of the negative feelings it elicited. The teachers also conveyed frustration of managing instruction, the lack of support from administrators, the incompatibility with traditional forms of assessment, and the difficulty in defining what whole language truly is and what it is not. Finally, the researchers concluded that whole language will survive, but it will not dominate American public education.

To address the misconceptions surrounding whole language, Newman and Church (1990) wrote a commentary about the myths of whole language. The researchers clarified confusion regarding teaching skills such as phonics, spelling, and grammar. Skills are taught but not as something separate from actual reading and writing. Other myths explained include the following: whole language is more than just language arts; it is applicable across the curriculum; whole language teachers do indeed teach; whole
language classrooms do have structure and evaluation; whole language is not a methodology; and finally, there is not one right way to do whole language.

Is whole language really warm and fuzzy? Susan Church (1994) commented on this misunderstanding many educators have made by oversimplifying a complex theory and practice. Church noted that many teachers were misinformed during training sessions about whole language, for instance, they were told not to teach skills at all when in fact, skills should be taught but in a meaningful way (Spiegel, 1992). Phonics can indeed be taught in whole language classrooms (Freppon & Dahl, 1991). Whole language is complex and many educators have misinterpreted this philosophy.

To tackle the confusion surrounding whole language, researchers Moorman, Blanton, and McLaughlin (1994) examined the rhetoric of whole language. They analyzed 18 peer-reviewed articles during the time period 1983-1990 and answered the following research questions: (1) What are the explicit assumptions by which the whole language movement defines itself? (2) What implicit beliefs underlying the basic assumptions are evident when the rhetoric of whole language literature is examined? In response to the first research question, three consistently recurring theoretical themes were revealed in the analysis: general definitions, learning and teaching, and the reading process and reading instruction.

The general definitions varied but consistencies were found, such as, whole language is a comprehensive philosophy, theory, perspective, and/or set of beliefs or intentions. Rather than a prescribed set of teaching strategies or methods, whole language appears to establish a set of instructional principles to guide the teacher. Another view is that whole language is a grass-roots movement that is changing curriculum. Throughout
the literature, the researchers noticed the suggestion that whole language teachers are a group of dedicated and effective teachers who seek professional emancipation. Another general description concerns the comprehensiveness of whole language. Advocates emphasize that whole language is not a supplemental, enrichment, or compensatory program.

In reference to learning and teaching, the researchers deduced that students are respected and placed at the center of the curriculum. The teacher is seen as a co-learner and guide. Finally, learning is seen as an intrinsically social event. Whole language is also seen as a political movement with an educational agenda. At the crux of the political issue is: who has the power to control classroom activity? Whole language advocates espouse that the power should be shared between the teacher and students rather than dictated from above by the district or state. This view describes curriculum as negotiated and integrated from the interests of the students.

Reading is a meaning-centered transaction between reader and author. One assumption found in the literature is that the process of learning to read and write is parallel to the process of learning to listen and speak. Also, specific skill instruction should be integrated rather than taught in isolation. Whole language represents a top-down approach to reading, as opposed to a bottom-up approach associated with a code emphasis approach to reading.

The researchers’ methodology for determining the implicit beliefs of the whole language movement was to use a method called deconstruction. The researchers gleaned from figurative language used in the articles the underlying assumptions. Whole language
is viewed in terms of polarities, such as: natural as opposed to artificial; ownership versus external control; and oppositional thinking and debate.

Finally, whole language advocates (Altwerger, Edelsky, & Flores, 1987) explained what ideas whole language is based upon. These included the following: (a) language is for making meanings, for accomplishing purposes; (b) written language is language; thus what is true for language in general is true for written language; (c) the cueing systems of language (phonology in oral, orthography in written language, morphology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics) are always simultaneously present and interacting in any instance of language in use; (d) language use always occurs in a situation; and (e) situations are critical to meaning-making.

*Goodman*

Goodman (1964) analyzed cues and miscues in reading through a linguistic approach. In this descriptive study of oral reading of one hundred first-, second-, and third-grade students from a school in an industrial suburb of Detroit, Goodman investigated reading cues and miscues. The sample was selected randomly; every other child was tested on an alphabetic list of all the children in each grade level.

Each subject was tested individually outside of the classroom. Each subject was given a word list for a story that was not used in class at his/her grade level. If he/she missed few or none of the words, he/she was given a more advanced list; contrarily, if he/she missed many words then he/she was given an easier list. The number of words which each child missed on the lists was a controlled variable.

After reading the word list, each child was asked to read the story orally from the book. The researcher noted oral reading behaviors on a worksheet of the story (with
copyright permission) as each child read. Without any advance notice, each child was then asked to retell the story with the book closed. The oral reading and retelling of the story were tape recorded.

The data gathered suggested that students could read more words in the stories than in the lists. The students read more words in context, Goodman reasoned, because of the additional cues available from the text.

The errors children made while reading were tallied and analyzed. The younger students tended to omit a word if they did not know it while the older students attempted to apply word attack skills, which Goodman defined as “cue systems within words” (p. 641). The students tended to substitute similar words for the words they did not know.

Finally, Goodman analyzed what he called regressions in reading or repeating one or more words. Virtually every regression which the students in the study made was for the purpose of correcting previous reading. This finding was significant because when a child missed a word on a list, unless he/she corrected it immediately, he/she rarely ever went back to correct the mistake. However, in reading the story, students frequently repeated words or phrases, almost always to make a correction. Goodman suggested that these self-corrections are vital for children to make meaning of the text in learning to read.

Goodman’s study suggested implications for teaching. First, introducing new words out of context before new stories are introduced to students does not appear to be necessary. Second, prompting students or correcting them when they read orally appears to be undesirable. Third, the focus on eye fixations to eliminate reading regressions is ineffective because regressions demonstrate self-correcting and learning. Last, teaching
phonics to the whole class or groups is questionable because of the variance in students’ needs. He concluded his study by stating that “we must abandon our concentration on words in teaching reading and develop a theory of reading and a methodology which puts the focus where it belongs: on language” (p. 643).

Furthering his work on analyzing miscues, Goodman (1967) provided a psycholinguistic model to reading instruction. In response to phonic-centered approaches to reading, which focus on precision, Goodman argued that miscues or reading errors are samples of a child’s reading strategies. Reading, he proposed, is a psycholinguistic guessing game.

Goodman identified three cueing systems that readers use: graphic, syntactic, and semantic. Goodman provided samples of children’s oral reading miscues and described what type of reading cue the child was using. This model contributed to reading research.

Goodman helped the whole language movement. His often-cited book for parents and teachers, *What’s Whole in Whole Language* (1986), is a guide describing the theory and various activities that support whole language instruction. In this guide, Goodman maintained that literacy evolves from authentic experiences that children engage in. He argued that young children learn to speak through natural immersion in language; therefore, young children learn to read and write through immersion in these activities. Goodman was clearly against phonics instruction, which he argued is fragmented and lacks meaning to children.

Goodman outlined the principles of whole language: Readers construct meaning during reading and use prior knowledge to make sense of texts. Readers predict, select, confirm, and self-correct as they seek to make sense of print. Comprehension is the goal
of reading and the language systems interact with each other when reading: phonic,
syntactic, and semantic cueing systems.

The learning theory that whole language is based upon is summarized below:
Language learning is easy when it’s whole, real, and relevant; when it makes sense and is
functional; when it’s encountered in the context of its use. Language is both personal and
social. It is driven from inside by the need to communicate and shaped from the outside
toward the norms of the society. Language is learned as students learn through language
and about language, all simultaneously in the context of authentic speech and literacy
events. Language development is empowering: the learner owns the process, makes the
decisions about when to use it, what for and with what results. Literacy is empowering
too, if the learner is in control with what is done with it. Language learning is learning
how to mean: how to make sense of the world in the context of how our parents, families,
and cultures make sense of it. Language development is a holistic personal-social
achievement.

Holdaway

*The Foundations of Literacy* (1979) was a huge contribution to field of whole
language literature. Don Holdaway was a teacher, writer, lecturer, and program developer
in New Zealand and Australia.

Holdaway (1979) articulated the model of spoken language and the parallels to
literacy. Infants acquire spoken language within a natural environment. Therefore, young
children should acquire other language process, such as reading and writing, in natural
settings, Holdaway reasoned. Many of the features of infant language learning can be
applied to classroom instruction. Parents use close proximity when infants are learning to
speak; therefore, teachers should use proximity and be supportive when children are learning a language task. Parents reward an infant’s approximation with positive feedback; therefore, teachers should reward approximations with language activities. Holdaway further describes a developmental model for classroom instruction which is provided below:

- The learning begins with immersion in an environment in which the skill is being used in purposeful ways. Readiness is timed by the internal “clock” of the learner.
- The environment is an emulative rather than an instructional one, providing lively examples of the skill in action, and inducing targeting activity which is persistently shaped by modeling and by reinforcement.
- Reinforcement contingencies, both intrinsic and extrinsic, approach the ideal of immediate rewards for almost every approximation regardless of the distance of the initial response from the perfect “correct” response.
- Bad approximations—those moving away from the desired response—are not reinforced.
- What aspect of the task will be practiced, at what pace, and for how long is determined largely by the learner. Practice occurs whether or not the adult is attending, and tends to continue until essential aspects of the task are under comfortable, automatic control.
- The environment is secure and supportive, providing help on call and being absolutely free from any threat associated with the learning of the task.
• Development tends to proceed continuously in an orderly sequence marked by considerable differences from individual to individual.

Another contribution to whole language that Holdaway made was the concept of Shared Reading with Big Books. Holdaway designed large-sized books that have large print in order for teachers to use as instructional tools. Students can read along with the teacher or share reading with the teacher. Shared reading is a step between reading to students and independent reading by students. It takes place in a non-threatening learning environment in which risk-taking, mistakes and approximations are seen as a normal part of learning, not signs of failure. The purpose is for students to become independent in reading texts that would otherwise be too difficult.

Calkins

Lucy McCormick Calkins was the recipient of a grant from the National Institute of Education to study writing development. Calkins conducted an in-depth case study following one child, Susie, through her day-to-day writings in school. Calkins examined Susie for two years, through her third and fourth grades in a rural school on the East Coast. Her findings were published in the book Lessons From a Child: On the Teaching and Learning of Writing (1983).

This unique study evolved into a partnership with Susie’s classroom teachers. Calkins observed lessons, analyzed samples of Susie’s writings, interviewed Susie and her teachers at various points in the study, as well as kept a journal of her reflections during the study. The focus of the study shifted early on from collecting data on how children learn to write to also including data on how teachers can facilitate learning to write in the classroom.
As Calkins followed Susie’s development over the years, the teachers also made development in their teaching of writing. For example, at the beginning of the study, the classroom teacher assigned topics for the students to write about and allotted a short time for writing. Due to the lackluster writing produced by the students, the teacher decided to let the student choose their own topics and the writing improved. This echoes a principle of whole language: student ownership of their work.

As Calkins followed Susie’s development, the teachers also made development in their teaching of writing, through conversations with Calkins, the teachers transitioned to a Writer’s Workshop model, Calkins provided anecdotal evidence that suggested that Susie’s writing developed rapidly after the teachers adopted this model. Calkins’ observations during her case study provided many whole language advocates with evidence of a successfully implemented writing program with in a whole language setting.

Newman

Newman’s (1985) contribution to the whole language movement is through her ability to translate theory into practice for teachers. Newman described findings from four areas of research and illustrated instructional implications which derive from them: oral language, first encounters with written language, the reading process, and the development of writing.

Children come to understand how oral language works by participating in conversation, by using whatever linguistic resources they have available, and in the process, build both their knowledge of the world and the semantic and syntactic forms through which meaning is expressed. The instructional implications for teachers are clear:
teachers must respond meaningfully to children’s language efforts, just as parents do. Teachers need to allow children to talk, ask questions, and comment freely about whatever is happening. Allowing opportunities for oral language development actually enables children to create the knowledge and strategies necessary for fluent reading and writing.

Newman described research about first encounters with written language which suggest that very young children learn early on about how print works. Literacy development is not seen in terms of stages but in terms of four specific language strategies: text intent, negotiability, risk-taking, and fine-tuning language with language. Young children expect written language to make sense, whether it is a book or environmental print. This is called text-intent. Children expect print to be meaningful and they are compelled to use whatever knowledge they possess to create a meaningful message. This is called negotiability. Risk-taking involves both the attitude and actions of hypothesis testing; that is, experimenting with how language works. Fine-tuning language with language suggests that what one learns from any language encounter provides input for written language and vice versa. Classroom implications from this research are allow children to explore ideas by talking with each other and allow children to write without demanding exactness.

The reading process involves readers as engaged in anticipating meaning through a process of sampling the print guided by their syntactic, semantic, and graphophonic expectations. Newman suggested that classroom teachers read to their students daily and that they provide opportunities for self-selected reading. Furthermore, Newman articulated how teachers can complete miscue analyses on their students’ oral reading
samples. Teachers should not correct miscues; rather, they should prompt the student through questioning to help the child figure out the word in order to help the child develop reading strategies.

Lastly, Newman enlightened educators on research about the development of writing. Writing development does not appear to grow from mastering a number of individual aspects of the writing process but from movement in several fronts at once. Teachers are encouraged to allow students to choose their own topics and explore and experiment with different writing styles. An overemphasis on accurate spelling, punctuation, and neat handwriting can actually produce children who value conventions of writing over meaning. Writing development needs encouragement and support, not a confining, prescriptive program.

Routman

Regie Routman’s (1988) contribution to the whole language movement was through her written account of her transition from a prescribed phonics program reading specialist to a whole language advocate. In her book Transitions: From Literature to Literacy, Routman candidly commented on her struggles and triumphs and she offered practical suggestions for teachers on how to make the transition.

Routman encouraged teachers to develop their own philosophy of reading instruction, explained how to create supportive learning environments, provided a structure for reading and writing programs, and provided meaningful evaluation criteria. Routman’s tone is supportive and encouraging, which parallels the whole language philosophy.
Routman was the first to create a visual representation of the cues to reading strategies, a graphic which is still widely used in teacher education reading methodology classes, and teacher professional development, as well as reading textbooks. Readers coordinate and utilize three major cues interactively and efficiently to make sense of print. Semantic cues refer to meaning through text and illustrations. Syntactic cues refer to knowledge of language patterns and grammatical structure. Graphophonic cues refer to letter-sound relationships and visual knowledge. The reading process, represented by the interaction of the cueing systems with meaning intersecting all three systems, is presented in Figure 4.

Figure 4: The Reading Process
Weaver

Weaver (1990) espoused that whole language philosophy can be a basis for a reform movement. However, she admitted that as the term whole language became more popular, it became more misunderstood, misapplied, and maligned. Concern about the whole language movement was articulated by Weaver because practices and instructional materials that were contrary to a whole language philosophy were promoted as such. Thus, Weaver reiterated the foundation of the philosophy, clarified misunderstandings, and explained research studies that support whole language.

One controversial proclamation that Weaver made concerns phonics instruction. Phonics instruction in patterns or rules is “not necessary! Just as we don’t teach babies and toddlers rules for putting together sounds to make words or words to make sentences, so we don’t need to teach rules for sounding out words. Most children will learn the patterns through repeated exposure, with a minimum of direct instruction” (p. 146). Weaver recommended that teachers facilitate phonics understanding through implicit methods in shared readings, writing, invented spelling, literature activities, and conferencing with the teacher. Weaver acknowledged that some children will need more intensive phonics instruction. In this case, Weaver recommended analyzing miscues and the student’s use of letter/sound knowledge and creating necessary lessons to meet any deficiencies.

Cambourne

Cambourne’s (1995) contribution to whole language was in his identification of conditions of learning as they apply to literacy teaching. Cambourne used the analogy of an infant learning to speak a language in developing these conditions. The conditions of
learning are immersion, demonstration, engagement, expectations, responsibility,
approximations, employment, and response. Immersion refers to the state of being
saturated by, enveloped in, or steeped in that which is to be learned. Demonstration refers
to the ability to observe actions and artifacts. To learn something, Cambourne argued,
one must be engaged with the demonstrations that immersion provides; that is, active
participation. Expectations are messages that significant others communicate to learners
and Cambourne advocated conveying a message of high expectations to learners.
Responsibility refers to learners making decisions about what they will engage with and
what they will ignore. Approximations are necessary in learning and viewed as
developmental steps. Employment refers to the opportunities for use and practice.
Response refers to the feedback.

Cambourne applied these conditions to literacy learning by using classroom
teachers as co-researchers. The researchers discovered that engagement was essential for
learning, more so than immersion in language and text. The researchers formulated the
following Principles of Engagement. Learners are more likely to engage deeply with
demonstrations when the following conditions are met: if they believe that they are
capable of ultimately learning or doing whatever is being demonstrated; if they believe
that learning whatever is being demonstrated has some potential value, purpose, and use
for them; if they’re free from anxiety; given by someone they like, respect, admire, trust,
and would like to emulate.

Following these principles in the classroom resulted in transformation; the process
that enables learners to own or be responsible for their learning. Cambourne’s data
showed that discussion and reflection in the classroom as well as application facilitated
transformation. Finally, evaluation is a necessary component of the teaching and learning process. To summarize Cambourne’s model of classroom literacy learning: Learning occurs when students are engaged in learning, the conditions of learning are met, and learners experience the interrelated tasks of transformation, discussion and reflection, application, and evaluation.

Krashen

Krashen (1999) addressed critics of whole language in his book *Three Arguments Against Whole Language and Why They Are Wrong*. The three arguments were (1) eye fixation studies which suggest that readers do not make predictions as they read, (2) context use which is associated with poor reading, and (3) method comparison studies which suggest that skills-based approaches to reading produce superior results.

One argument against whole language is eye fixation studies which suggest that readers examine text completely and in great detail rather than the premise that readers make predictions as they read. Eye movement studies suggest that skilled readers process virtually all of the words they encounter in connected text and typically all of the letters in these words (Vellutino, 1991). Eye movements were monitored while subjects read text selected by the researchers and comprehension questions were asked following the passage; subjects were told that they will not be able to reread the passage to answer the questions. Eye movement studies suggest that good readers focus intently on details. Krashen argued that eye-fixation studies put subjects into an unnatural setting without self-selected materials and the subjects are told beforehand that they will be asked questions about the passage. Krashen suggested that this unnatural setting interferes with making assumptions about reading in natural settings, with self-selected materials.
Secondly, critics of whole language argued that real-world context is actually irrelevant in learning to read; that context use is associated with poor reading. Krashen maintained that context is critical to reading and that making predictions from context and then confirming or disconfirming the predictions by reading further is a strategy that good readers need.

Thirdly, Krashen analyzed studies comparing whole language with other reading methodologies. Skill building methods, such as phonics, are often superior on standardized tests to whole language and thus, an argument against whole language. Krashen countered that argument by defining whole language as “providing children with comprehensible and interesting texts, and helping them understand these texts then whole language does very well in method comparison studies” (p. 39). Conversely, when whole language is not defined as real reading, it does not do well when compared to skills-based methods.

**Summary**

Whole language has its roots in psycholinguistics. Reading is a psycholinguistic guessing game (Goodman, 1967) making maximum use of contextual information to facilitate word identification and sparing use of graphophonic information. One premise of whole language is that children learn to speak without formal instruction; thus, children can learn to read and write through exposure to a literate environment and without direct instruction when children are engaged in meaningful, authentic purposes. Results of the effectiveness of whole language depend upon the measure used. Generally, students report positive attitudes toward literacy in whole language classrooms. However,
on standardized tests, traditional basal or phonics programs fare better. The whole language instructional approach is controversial.

**Comparison Studies of Phonics and Whole Language**

Both code-emphasis proponents and whole language advocates maintain the superiority of their approach to literacy. This section will examine articles comparing the effectiveness of each approach, chronologically and by author.

*Reutzel and Cooter*

Does a whole language approach to reading lead to comparable reading achievement when contrasted with traditional basal reader approaches? Reutzel and Cooter (1990) investigated this premise.

The researchers explained that, at the time of their research project, very few comparison studies had been conducted due to the resistance from whole language advocates toward traditional research design and instrumentation. Three questions guided their research: (1) Do children taught in a whole language environment with whole language strategies and routines score as well on a standardized achievement test of reading achievement at the end of first grade as children taught with a basal reader approach? (2) Do children taught in a whole language environment with whole language strategies and routines score as well on the vocabulary subtest of a standardized achievement test of reading achievement at the end of first-grade as children taught with a basal reader approach? (3) Do children taught in a whole language environment with whole language strategies and routines score as well on the comprehension subtest of a standardized achievement test of reading achievement at the end of first grade as children taught with a basal reader approach?
The sample for the study consisted of first-grade students from four classrooms located in two suburban communities in the Midwest and Rocky Mountain West. The two comparison groups consisted of 91 first-grade subjects: 53 first-grade children in two whole language classrooms and 38 first-grade children in two basal-reader classrooms. An ANOVA was performed on students’ beginning –of-year scores on the Gates-MacGinitie-R Reading Survey Test to assess initial group equality. The results of the ANOVA showed no significant difference between the two groups at the outset of the study, \( F(1,90) = 2.40, p > .05 \). The pretest composite scores became a covariate in the data analysis. The teachers in the study were experienced instructors with at least three years of classroom experience. All the teachers in the study had pursued graduate studies in reading education at regionally and nationally accredited universities.

In May, the end-of-year Gates-MacGinitie Reading Survey Test, level A was administered to the student groups. Because the researchers used an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) to analyze the data for the study, the primary assumption of homogeneity of regression for using ANCOVA was checked. The researchers obtained a significant covariate by treatment interaction effect, and the researcher rejected the assumption of parallel slopes, \( F(1,87) = 5.07, p < .05 \). The researchers found significant differences favoring the whole language classes over the basal classes on total reading scores as well as on the vocabulary and comprehension subtest scores at the conclusion of first grade. Effect sizes independent of sample size indicated a moderate magnitude of effect favoring whole language over a traditional basal reading approach, which emphasized systematic skills instruction and excerpts of stories.
The researchers admitted that the findings need to be tempered by both the size of the experimental effect and the length of the study. Considering the limitations of the study, the researchers remained cautious about advocating whole language for all children at every level and in all schools.

**Vellutino**

Vellutino (1991) reviewed research on the theoretical foundations of code-oriented versus whole language approaches to reading instruction. In particular, Vellutino focused his research on the following issues: (a) The role played by word identification in reading; (b) the weight accorded context in word identification; and (c) the respective roles played by alphabetic coding and phoneme awareness in learning to read.

According to Vellutino, the crux of the debate between code and meaning advocates is the question of whether fluency in identifying words out of context is a prerequisite for effective and efficient comprehension of what is read. Therefore, Vellutino analyzed research articles about word identification and context. He concluded that research findings favor the position taken by code-oriented theorists. Language comprehension processes become fully operative in reading only when a certain degree of fluency in word identification has been achieved. Whole language proponents favor making predictions and using context in reading. Vellutino proclaimed that the evidence is definitive against this position. His review of the research suggested that skilled readers make sparing use of context because the word identification process is highly automatic. In fact, it is the less-skilled readers who are reliant of context rather than the skilled readers, because they are much less fluent in word identification than skilled readers. He
argued that whole language theorists have greatly overestimated the role of context in reading and have underestimated the role of fluent word identification.

Another factor in the debate is whether students should be taught to use structural analysis or phonics for word identification. Whole language supporters maintained that the alphabetic principle will naturally be induced with experience in literacy activities. Vellutino’s review of the literature suggested otherwise. The research recommended the practice of incorporating activities that foster the development of both alphabetic coding and phonemic awareness as part of an instructional program. Direct instruction appeared to facilitate functional use of the alphabetic code; thus, aiding in word identification in reading.

Vellutino concluded that the reading research he reviewed advised the instruction that promoted facility in word identification is vitally important to success in reading. Also, instruction that facilitates both phonemic awareness and alphabetic coding is crucial for success in reading. Nonetheless, there appears to be nothing in the research that precludes the use of whole language type activities in teaching reading. The research does not support an either/or position in regard to the superiority of one approach over another. Vellutino concluded that “the research supports a balanced approach” (p. 442).

*Stahl, McKenna, and Pagnucco*

In 1989, Stahl and Miller conducted a meta-analysis of the effects of whole language. The analyses included the five projects conducted as part of the United States Office of Education first grade studies and 46 additional studies comparing basal reading approaches to whole language or language experience approaches. The results suggested that both approaches were approximately equal in their effects, with several exceptions.
Whole language/language experience approaches may be more effective in kindergarten than in first grade and they may produce stronger effects on measures of word recognition than on measures of reading comprehension. Whole language/language experience approaches produced weaker effects with populations labeled specifically as disadvantaged than they do with those not specifically labeled.

Stahl, McKenna, and Pagnucco (1994) updated their original research described above. The researchers conducted another meta-analysis studying the effects of whole language using studies published from 1988 to 1993. In the present study, the researchers searched educational data bases using the descriptor *whole language*. They included studies using synonyms for whole language, such as *literature based* and *process-oriented*. The researchers used two forms of analysis to examine the quantitative studies on effects of whole language: meta-analysis and vote-counting (each effect was tallied as significantly favoring the whole-language treatment, significantly favoring the traditional treatment, or finding no significant difference).

The researchers found that whole language approaches seemed to have a small positive effect on reading comprehension, but there were too few studies that measured comprehension to test whether this effect was statistically significant. There appeared to be no differences between whole language and traditional approaches on measures of attitude, orientation toward reading, and writing. Similar to Stahl and Miller’s (1989) findings, whole language approaches appeared to be significantly more effective when used in kindergarten. There appeared to be an advantage for traditional programs on measures of decoding. Traditional skills instruction seemed to have an advantage for reading achievement after kindergarten.
The researchers concluded that both approaches are necessary to meet the needs of children. Children need to learn to decode to comprehend, as well as to maintain an interest in reading and critical thinking about what is read. Therefore, the researchers recommend an eclectic approach to reading instruction.

Foorman (1995) examined research countering whole language claims. Foorman’s literature review scrutinized the idea that reading is a natural act, the role of context, instruction in the alphabetic code, conflicting paradigms, and whole language beliefs.

How natural is reading? One whole language contention is that learning to read is as natural as learning to speak a native language. Foorman disputed this claim by stating that “humans are biologically specialized to produce language and have done so for nearly one million years. Such is not the case with reading and writing. If it were, there would not be illiterate children in the world” (p. 378). Foorman claimed that reading is largely an unnatural act and children need explicit instruction in reading.

Foorman tackled the role of context in learning to read. Foorman cited many studies that challenge the importance of context effects in reading. In eye fixation studies, skilled readers process every word and usually all the letters within a word. It is the less-skilled readers who rely on context as a strategy.

Instruction in the alphabetic code is necessary. Whole language advocates sustained the belief that implicit instruction is adequate. Foorman upheld the view that explicit instruction in the alphabetic code is vital, as well as, phonological processes, reading, and spelling. Foorman argued that one reason why these research findings on the
benefits of explicit instruction in alphabetic coding are not widely recognized or accepted by whole language educators is that the paradigm of cognitive psychology from which these research findings come from, have been rejected by whole language educators as not valid.

Finally, Foorman challenged whole language belief system stating that it lacks a scientific agenda. Foorman upheld the conclusion that empirical evidence favors explicit instruction in alphabetic coding. Whole language promoters are not paying attention to the research and are not using the best methods for helping children to read.

_Freppon_

Freppon (1995) conducted a descriptive study investigating two groups of low-income, urban children who had whole language instruction during their kindergarten and first-grade years. The study focused on the general academic success of the two groups and on eight focal students’ literacy interpretations. All of the participants had been studied extensively in their previous two years in whole language primary classrooms. The students varied in literacy proficiencies but were similar in a _disposition for learning_ which included motivation and a positive sense of self. The current study investigated how children’s interpretations may change or remain stable in relation to different instruction and in relation to development in learning to read.

Two groups of children in the current study were previously selected randomly in kindergarten with only those children qualifying for the federally funded lunch program included in the pool. A gender-balanced group of 24 children was randomly drawn from the pool. For this study, the participants were now entering second grade and 17 children from the original study remained in the school and were chosen as the participants. The
school was in a Midwestern, urban community. The two classrooms selected for the study were a skills-based and whole language classroom. The students in the skills-based classroom were referred to as the Transition Group (transitioning from two years of whole language instruction to a skills oriented approach) and the students in the whole language class were referred to as the Continuing Group. Focal students were selected for an in-depth analysis.

The researcher collected data on pre- and post oral reading and retellings; pre- and post structured interviews with teachers, parents, and students; observations with field notes; tape recordings of focal students during class literacy activities; and samples of writing. Both quantitative and qualitative data was collected. All participating subjects made academic progress and were promoted to third grade. The Transition Group showed less progress in writing and a change in literacy interpretations that were established in first grade were noted. The students in the Transition Group became passive and very little evidence of self-initiated literacy activities was observed. The results indicated that at-risk students in the Continuing Group continued to experience general success with whole language instruction.

*Jeynes and Littell*

Jeynes and Littell (2000) conducted a meta-analysis of studies examining the effect of whole language instruction on the literacy of low SES students. The researchers synthesized the results from 14 studies comparing the effect of whole language to basal instruction on the reading achievement of kindergarten to third-grade students with low SES.
Multiple questions guided the inquiry including: (1) How does whole language compare to basal treatment in general? (2) Can whole language programs be subdivided into groups with different degrees of definitional purity? (3) How do the subgroups compare to basal treatments and to each other? (4) Are quality, duration, or year of study related to effect size in any way? (5) Are effect sizes related to types of outcome measures, especially standardized versus non-standardized tests?

The researchers divided whole language treatment into four levels based on the research. The classification “whole language pure” included studies with no abridgments, adaptations, or segmented texts; no teacher-sponsored, whole-class assignments; and no direct instruction in isolated skill sequences. The classification “whole language specific” included studies that provided insufficient evidence to be classified as pure. The classification “whole language broad” referred to studies that were labeled language experience or whole language, and the intervention seemed to be to establish a richly integrated, student-centered class, but clear evidence was found of strategies that purists might object to, such as spelling workbooks. The classification “whole language eclectic” represented combinations of whole language with more direct, teacher-sponsored instruction in reading strategies such as phonics.

The studies were coded and statistical analyses were made. The results indicated that for low-SES primary-grade students, the basal approach was superior to the whole language approach in terms of student performance on standardized tests. Whole language researchers prefer to use non-standardized measures as opposed to standardized measures. The validity and reliability of non-standardized tests can be difficult to ascertain for research synthesis studies, such as this meta-analysis.
Summary

In comparison studies, phonics instruction seems to be superior to whole language instruction on standardized tests. Nonetheless, research methodologies are a factor in the findings. In the studies reviewed, literature reviews or meta-analyses found phonics approaches better. Whole language studies used different measurements and a combination of qualitative and quantitative measures. On measures of the affective domain, such as attitude toward reading, whole language appears to be better. At-risk students appear to benefit from direct, explicit phonics instruction as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Comparison Studies Summary

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<tr>
<th>Author</th>
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<th>Outcome</th>
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<td>2000</td>
<td>Meta-analysis</td>
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Balanced Literacy

In reaction to the two extremes of reading instruction, phonics and whole language approaches, a centrist view emerged in the literature which acknowledged the benefits of both approaches to literacy; thus, the term balanced literacy was coined.

The request for a balanced approach to reading instruction was made throughout the nineties in commentaries (Ruetzel, 1998; Spiegel, 1992), in descriptions of balanced...
literacy (Fowler, 1998; Honig, 1997; Metsala et al., 1997; & Willows, 2002) and in surveys of “what’s hot and what’s not” in literacy research and practice each year (Cassidy & Wenrich, 1998). This section will review research on balanced literacy by major contributors to the field of study.

*Cunningham, Hall, and Defee*

In an initial study (1991) and a follow-up study (1998) researchers Cunningham, Hall, and Defee investigated four different reading methods to teach first graders reading without grouping students by ability. The studies were the impetus for the reading program called “The Four Blocks” (Cunningham, Hall, & Sigmon, 1999).

In the first study, the sample consisted of students in an elementary school in the southeastern United States. There were 24 participants, 12 boys and 12 girls, and included 7 children of different ethnicities and language backgrounds. One child was repeating first grade.

The assessment measures consisted of the teacher’s daily observations and the students were assessed on concepts of print, high frequency words, and a running record of oral reading fluency was taken, as well as an informal reading inventory.

The instruction was based on the premise that all children do not learn in the same way. The researchers chose to integrate the four major approaches to beginning reading instruction. These included the basal approach, the phonics approach, the literature approach, and the writing approach. In general, combination approaches to beginning reading seem to be the most effective; therefore, the researchers decided to create an instructional program that integrated all four approaches. These were called blocks and
consisted of the writing block, the basal block, the real books block, and the working with words block.

The results of this one-year study suggested that the non-ability-grouped instruction was very effective for the bottom children and did not hinder the progress of the top children. The researchers concluded that the program worked because of four causes: (1) the four blocks represented a variety of ways of approaching reading and writing; (2) adjustments were made based on observation and assessment data; (3) the children spent almost no time on traditional seatwork; and (4) all students were given the same kind of meaning-based reading and writing instruction.

In the follow-up study (Cunningham, Hall, & Dufee, 1998), the researchers updated their model of multilevel, multi-method instruction that was consequently labeled the Four Blocks. The researchers had two goals in developing a framework for beginning reading instruction. The first goal was to meet the needs of children with a wide range of literacy levels without putting them in ability groups. The second goal was to avoid the pendulum swing and find a way to combine the major approaches to reading instruction. The Four Blocks became Guided Reading, Self-Selected Reading, Writing, and Working with Words. Each block warranted 30 to 40 minutes of instructional time.

Data were collected from three different sites: the school used in the original study, a suburban school, and a rural school. The results at all three schools suggested that the balanced, multilevel instruction the students received lead to gains in reading achievement.

Longitudinal data were gathered at the school site used in the original study (1991). Throughout each school year, teachers conducted assessments by observing and
conferring with children, taking running records, and looking at writing samples. At the end of each year, the children were given the Basic Reading Inventory (BRI) by an assessment team. Instructional levels were computed using standard procedures and included measures of oral reading accuracy and comprehension. Data were collected for seven years with approximately 100-140 children in each grade. Across the seven years, the instructional level results remained consistent. At the end of first grade, 58-64% of the students read above grade level; 22-28% of the students read on grade level; and 10-17% of the students read below grade level. The researchers did not have a control group to compare the data against.

School officials at the second school site, a suburban school, were concerned about the lack of reliability of the BRI and about teacher bias, fearing that the enthusiasm of the teachers who chose to implement the model may have created artificially high scores. Therefore, they devised an experiment using cohort analysis and standardized test results. The 557 participants in Four Blocks classrooms were administered the Metropolitan Achievement Test. Each student was matched with a first grader from the previous year on the basis of his or her scores on the Cognitive Skills Assessment Battery (CSAB), a test of readiness given each year during the first week of school. The total reading mean score for the Four Blocks first graders was significantly better \( (p < .0001) \) level than that of matched students from previous years. In grade equivalent terms, the average Four Blocks first grader’s reading level was 2.0 while the students in the previous year averaged a reading level of 1.6. The district then analyzed its data by dividing both groups of student into thirds according to their CSAB scores. There was a 15-point difference in total reading scores for the lower third, a 23-point difference for
the middle third, and a 28-point difference for the upper third. The district concluded that
the students in the Four Blocks classrooms had profited, including the struggling students
and the data suggested that the model had been even more successful for students who
would traditionally have been placed in the top groups.

Finally, the researchers gathered data from a rural school district in which 84% of
the students qualified for free or reduced-price lunches. Based on low achievement test
scores, the elementary school had been placed on the list of the state’s worst schools and
had tried a variety of approaches to improve reading and math test scores. During the
1995-1996 school year, all 10 teachers (six at first grade and four at second grade) were
trained in and mandated to try the Four Blocks framework. MAT total reading scores for
all first and second graders in the school, including the three classes that did not
implement the framework, indicated that 30% of the first graders and 38% of the second
graders had total reading scores at or above the 50th percentile. Results from the
following year show that 46% of first graders and 40% of second graders were at or
above the 50th percentile on the MAT total reading. The researchers acknowledged that
the results from this school system were open to speculation since there was no pretest
data collected on the students and the jump in the number of students reading at or above
grade level may or may not be attributed to the implementation of the Four Blocks
framework. Nevertheless, officials in the school district were convinced that the
differences were real and attributable to the balanced, multilevel instruction that the
students received.
What is the nature of effective primary literacy instruction? Researchers Pressley, Rankin, and Yokoi (1996) evaluated the instructional practices of primary teachers nominated as effective in promoting literacy.

The participants in the study were selected from across the country. Fifty reading supervisors were randomly selected from the International Reading Association’s list of elementary language arts supervisors. From this list, the researchers sent a letter asking them to identify the most effective kindergarten, grade 1, and grade 2 literacy educators in their jurisdiction, with effective defined as “successful in educating large proportions of their students to be readers and writers” (p. 366). Forty-five supervisors replied. Part of the nomination procedure included identifying specific indicators and sources of information that influenced their opinions of the nominated teachers.

Of the 135 teachers nominated, 113 replied to the first-round, short questionnaire sent to them; 86 teachers replied to the second and final questionnaire, with 83 of the 86 providing usable responses. The first questionnaire was completed in the fall of 1992; the second was completed in the spring of 1993. The participants (23 kindergarten teachers, 34 first-grade teachers, and 26 second-grade teachers) came from 23 states and represented all major geographic regions of the United States. 42 participants held a bachelor’s degree and 41 also held a master’s degree. The teachers’ experience ranged from 3-35 years with a mean of 16.7 years. The schools reflected the diversity of the United States. For instance, 17% of students in the schools in which the teachers taught were African American, 9% were Mexican American, 6% were Asian American, and 7% were Native American. Students who qualified for free lunch ranged from 0% to 95%
students receiving special education services ranged from 0% to 36% (mean = 10%).

The primary goal of the study was to solicit information from the teachers about their literacy instruction. The teachers were asked to respond to a short questionnaire requesting three lists of ten practices that they believed to be essential in their literacy instruction. Each teacher generated one list for good readers, one for average readers, and one for weaker readers. The response rate to the first questionnaire was 83%.

The researchers identified 300 practices that the teachers cited in the initial questionnaire. These practices were categorized and used to develop a final questionnaire, which requested 436 responses and was 27 pages long. The teachers were informed that the survey would require approximately 45 minutes to complete and they were asked to return it within three weeks of receiving it. After three weeks had passed, the researchers sent a postcard reminder. The researchers had a 76% response rate to the final questionnaire.

The results suggested that effective teachers used many conventional teaching methods, such as modeling, practice and repetition, using a variety of groupings, as well as reporting sensitivity to students and individual student needs, and integration of literacy instruction with other curricula and activities. The responses to questions about the teaching of reading reflected a combination of traditional skills instruction taught with the context of actual reading and writing. Seventy-three per cent of the teachers reported that they used a variety of outstanding children’s literature in lessons in contrast to using basal readers: 24% of reading materials in kindergarten, 40% in grade 1, and 22% in grade 2. The teachers (86%) reported that their students wrote stories and developed
written responses to readings and most (87%) reported journal writing by their students, several times a week on average. The majority of respondents at each grade level reported teaching writing mechanics.

The teachers reported efforts to make literacy and literacy instruction motivating. On a seven-point scale, the teachers endorsed (with a mean score of 5) the following statements about their teaching practices: (a) classroom as a risk-free environment; (b) positive feedback; (c) conveying the importance of reading/writing in life; (d) setting an exciting mood for reading, adding color and humor, and so on; (e) encouraging an, “I can read, I can write” attitude; (f) accepting where the child is right now and working to improve literacy from that point; (g) conveying the goal of every lesson why the lesson is important to students; (h) encouraging students to find and read stories/books that they like as part of the literacy program; (i) encouraging students’ ownership of their reading, by having them make for themselves many decisions about to read; (j) encouraging personal interpretations of text; (k) selecting class reading materials on the basis of students’ interest; and (l) encouraging student ownership of writing (e.g., students’ selection of writing topics). These statements are reflective of a whole language philosophy.

The researchers concluded that the outstanding teachers in the study used a balanced approach to literacy. The teachers in the study depicted their classrooms as integrating features of whole language with explicit skills instruction.

In another related study, researchers (Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, & Hampston, 1998) investigated in-depth nine first-grade classrooms for teacher characteristics and student achievement related to literacy acquisition. The researchers investigated teachers
who were perceived by supervisors as outstanding in promoting their students’ literacy and teachers who were considered to be more average in their effectiveness. First grade instruction was the focus of this study.

Four suburban school districts volunteered to participate in the study. Three districts described themselves as serving primarily middle- to lower-middle-class families; one served primarily upper-middle-class families. Language Arts coordinators were asked to nominate one or more first-grade teachers in each of two categories: teachers considered to be exceptional at helping their students achieve literacy, and teachers who were perceived to be more typical or average in promoting student literacy. These teachers were not to be weak teachers; rather, teachers who represented typical literacy instruction in the district. Specific criteria for nominating the outstanding teachers were left up to the nominators. The average number of years teaching was 8.2 with a range of 2-25 years for the outstanding teachers nominated and the average number of years teaching was 12 for the typical teachers with a range of 2-25 years.

Data collection consisted of observations, interviews, and artifacts. Twice a month, from December to June of the 1994-1995 school year, the researchers observed literacy instruction in each classroom. The observers sat in unobtrusive locations and seldom interacted with students or the teacher. As the study progressed, the observers increased their interactions with the students by asking brief questions about the activities they were engaged in. Field notes were kept using three principles: language identification principle (language used by the observer or the teacher was noted), verbatim principle (the language of the teachers and students was recorded verbatim), and
the concrete principle (the researchers tried to not use abstract jargon in their field notes). Maps of each classroom were drawn as well.

Each participant was interviewed twice during the study. The interviews were recorded on audiotape and transcribed verbatim. The first interview was semi-structured and the purpose was to clarify observed practices and to explore teachers’ beliefs and purposes for the methods they used in literacy instruction. The transcriptions were coded in the identical way as the field notes. The primary purpose of the second interview was to serve as a check on the individual models of instruction that were emerging from the data.

Throughout the observations, classroom artifacts were noted, collected, and examined. These included book titles, writing journals, student writing throughout the study, posters, charts, available books, in-class and homework assignments, and student projects.

For each classroom, each researcher built a model of instruction, identifying recurring categories of instruction, such as philosophy, grouping practices, teacher expectations, and related the categories to one another. The models were presented to the teachers for consideration during the second interview. After each teacher had confirmed their model, the researchers focused on measures of achievement, such as reading levels, writing levels, and levels of engagement during observations.

The results suggested that high-achieving teachers had similar characteristics in common. The teachers used *instructional balance* of whole language activities and explicit instruction in the basic skills of reading and writing. What distinguished these teachers, however, was the deliberate integration of these two approaches in a balanced...
manner. In contrast to the high achieving group, the other teachers presented instruction that was either heavily skills based or heavily whole language or they attempted to integrate the two approaches but did so in a disjointed or inconsistent way. Another characteristic of the high-achieving teachers was *instructional density*. The teachers purposefully integrated multiple goals into a single lesson and frequently used mini-lessons during teachable moments when the opportunity presented itself. In contrast, teachers of the moderate- and –low-achieving classes rarely strayed from intended lessons which consisted of a single instructional goal. The high-achieving teachers also used extensively the process of scaffolding which is when a teacher monitors students’ learning carefully and steps in to provide assistance on an as-needed basis. The high-achieving teachers also integrated reading and writing activities and all used the writing process to assist students in becoming better writers. The teachers in this top group also had high expectations for all students. The top teachers were masterful at classroom management. The high-achievement teachers were consistently well prepared and relied on routines. In contrast, the other classrooms lost time as the teachers struggled to complete morning routines and begin instruction. The high-achieving teachers were able to manage students’ behavior and facilitate learning by minimizing disruptive behavior by providing a predictable and consistent set of expectations and consequences. Finally, the outstanding teachers had an awareness of purpose. The teachers were aware of both their practices and the goals or purposes of the practices. The teachers were clear about their intent of their literacy activities.
Baumann and Ivey

Baumann and Ivey (1997) examined the effects of a yearlong program of reading and writing strategy instruction within a literature-based classroom on second-grade students’ knowledge about reading, writing, and literature. Baumann, a professor, took a leave from his university position to teach second grade full-time on a university/school district job exchange. Ivey was a participant observer in this study during the final third of the school year.

The study was designed and conducted as a qualitative, interpretive case study. Categories were generated through the process of content analysis of specifics of the second-grade students’ literacy learning across the school year. The study was interpretive because the categories were compared to the theoretical assumptions held by the researchers prior to gathering data.

The participants were students in Baumann’s second grade class in a low-income area in Georgia. There were a total of 19 students enrolled in the class; however 13 students were enrolled for the majority of the school year and these students were selected as participants for case-study. Seven students were female and six were male; nine were African American and four were European American. Eight children were eligible for Title 1 and eight qualified for a state program for children who were developmentally delayed in language. None of the participants were identified as gifted or talented.

Numerous sources of data were collected during the school year. First, both investigators kept personal journals to record their experiences and interactions as participant observers. Second, each student was interviewed on videotape. Students were
asked to respond to both specific questions and open-ended questions. Students were also asked to read orally a self-selected book. Third, a series of videotapes of regular classroom literacy activities was made. Fourth, artifacts of students’ reading and writing were collected over the school year. Fifth, a variety of assessments was created including anecdotal records, grades and assignment checklists, progress reports, and an informal reading inventory administered three times throughout the year. The sixth data source was Baumann’s daily lesson plan book. The last data source was transcripts of interviews with parents and caregivers of children in the class, other teachers at the school, and school administrators.

Baumann attempted to create a curricular and instructional balance in the classroom. He had both teacher-initiated activities and student choice in some activities. He taught specific skills and strategies in planned, explicated teacher-initiated skills lessons, as well as, unplanned, situation-specific, informal responsive instruction.

The purpose of the study was to examine what diverse second graders learned about reading, writing, and literature through a yearlong, integrated program of literature and skills/strategy instruction. The analysis of the 13 participants revealed five major findings: (1) The students developed into readers; (2) The students became engaged with literacy; (3) The students grew in word identification ability and reading fluency; (4) The students became better at comprehending what they read; (5) The students grew in written composition proficiency. The researchers acknowledged that not all participants were reading and writing at grade level at the end of the year; yet, all participants made progress in their literacy development.
The results also suggested four ways in which the data affirmed or challenged the research. First, the study results supported the positive impact of a literature-based program on children’s knowledge and appreciation of literature. Second, the study confirmed that reading strategy instruction can be taught effectively with and through literature. Third, the researchers found no evidence of competition between skills teaching and literature usage. Finally, the researchers found that a literature/strategies environment was successful with struggling readers of diverse backgrounds. Overall, the researchers found that teaching skills within a literature-based classroom was compatible.

In another study, researchers (Baumann, Hoffman, Moon, & Duffy-Hester, 1998) surveyed elementary teachers to ascertain their beliefs, priorities, and practices involving phonics and whole language instruction. The researchers distributed surveys to 3,199 pre-kindergarten through fifth-grade public school teachers. The teachers were selected randomly from a national listing of 907,774 teachers, which was purchased from a commercial educational marketing and research firm. The survey consisted of 53 closed items (multiple choice and short fill-in blanks) and two open items (which included four questions, each followed by three to four write-on blanks). The researchers received 1,207 usable surveys. The response rate was 37.7% and the sampling margin of error was +/- 2.8%, which is a parameter that allowed for reliable generalizations from the probability sample to the population.

The results suggested that teachers generally do not assume an either-or approach to phonics and whole language; rather, the teachers provided students with a balanced, eclectic program involving both reading skill instruction and immersion in enriched literacy experiences. When asked about instructional materials, 83% reported using basal
readers supplemented by trade books. When probed about phonics instruction, 99% of the K-2 teachers indicated that phonics instruction was essential (67%) or important (32%). The researchers determined through questioning that the teachers taught phonics without workbook pages or worksheets. Phonics instruction was provided through children’s literature and usually taught in the context of stories, writing, spelling, and word families.

This study is important because the reading literature suggests a great debate about phonics and whole language without consulting teachers. When solicited about their beliefs and practices, the majority of U.S. public school elementary teachers do not assume extreme positions when it comes to reading and language arts pedagogy.

Fitzgerald and Noblit

Fitzgerald and Noblit (2000) examined what diverse first-grade students can learn about reading within a year-long balanced approach to emergent reading instruction. Fitzgerald was the full-time teacher and Noblit was a participant observer in the classroom. The researchers characterized balance as distributing weight across several important features of reading. The researchers conceptualized balanced as epistemological rather than methodological.

Fitzgerald designed the program around three principles of balance. The first principle had to do with curricular goals of the reading program. The second principle referred to instructional methods, including groupings. The third principle centered around reading materials.

The sample in this study were first-grade students in a rural area of a southeastern state. Comprehensive selection was used to choose children for inclusion in the study. Comprehensive selection refers to choosing participants to adequately represent the
classroom. A total of 30 students were over the course of the school year, with 25-27 students in the classroom at any given time. Twenty students participated in the study; thirteen were boys: three were Anglo, two were African American, and eight were Hispanic. Of the girls, three were African American, three were Hispanic, and one was Native-American Indian. Absenteeism was high, with 62% of the students missing 5-13 days of school over the course of the year. Eighty-one percent of the children were eligible for free or reduced lunch.

Fitzgerald organized the reading program around four central components: (a) word study, including using context, phonics, and structural analysis; (b) responding to good literature during or after reading or listening; (c) writing; and (d) guided and unguided reading. The teacher also attempted to balance student-initiated and teacher-guided work, as well as independent, peer, small-group work, and whole-group work.

The participant observer spent a full day in the classroom every other week throughout the school year and took field notes as well as teaching lessons in small groups. There were many data sources, including a wide variety of assessments of children’s reading, writing, and oral language; children’s work samples; documents about other academic information for the children; records on children’s behavior; records on the classroom reading program; transcriptions of the teacher’s audiotape journals, participant observer’s field notes; videotapes of reading lessons, literature response groups, and children reading with partners; and demographic information about the children and their families.

The constant-comparison method was used to analyze data. This approach involved reading field notes, journals, and other data sources; determining categories of
data; and then coding material into categories. The categories were then compared and
the data recoded as needed. Successive comparisons and recordings resulted in both the
descriptions of balanced instruction and emerging themes.

The results suggested four themes or categories that emerged which described the
students’ emergent learning about reading. The first theme was: The children began to
construct knowledge about what the researcher called local aspects of reading. This was
evidenced in student progress in phonological awareness, sight words, matching correct
letters to sounds and identifying orthographic patterns in words, word recognition
strategies, and word meaning. The second theme to emerge was: the children began to
construct global knowledge about reading; that is, they learned that reading and writing
were about understanding and communicating. The third theme identified was: the
children were developing sentiments of wanting to read, and they were learning about
giving and taking from reading (response). Finally, the fourth theme was: generative
moments signaled children’s movement toward more mature communicative
competence. The researchers conclude that a balanced program can be used successfully
in a diverse first-grade classroom.

Mulhern

Mulhern (2002) conducted dual case studies of two kindergarteners literacy
learning in Spanish in a classroom using a balanced approach to literacy. The study was
in a low-income Mexican immigrant community in Chicago. All 33 students in the class
were Mexican born or of Mexican descent and were eligible for the federal free lunch
program. The class was taught in Spanish. The researcher studied three children
representing high, average, and low developmental levels of literacy and chose two focal
children for this study. Both students were viewed by the teacher as successful literacy learners. The classroom teacher described balanced literacy as a combination of both skill-focused instruction and meaning-based activities.

Data collection and analysis occurred throughout the year and was divided in three phases. Phase one was classified as entering the field. During this time, from October to December, the researcher obtained a comprehensive picture of the life of the classroom, identified literacy contexts, and chose the focal children. The second phase, participating in children’s lives, included observing and tape recording during literacy activities each focal child one school day a week. The third phase, narrowing the focus, allowed the researcher to identify patterns and analyze changes over time. Analysis at the end of this phase consisted of constructing case records that chronologically listed the literacy events each child had experienced. The events were categorized, interactions were coded, and the researcher identified emerging patterns. Interview data were compared to the patterns that emerged. The data collected included field notes, audio-recording of literacy interactions, children’s drawing and writing artifacts, informal conversations about literacy activities with the children, and formal teacher and parent interviews.

The researcher concluded that a balanced approach is problematic. One of the students was influenced by the skill learning activities to an extent that the child was unable to write anything meaningful during open-ended opportunities. Instead, she was concerned with penmanship and wrote letter strings. Her orientation to literacy, the researcher concluded, demonstrated how a child can display literacy actions without attending to meaningful aspects of written language. Her orientation towards literacy
learning conflicted with the need to take risks to become an independent reader and writer. The other student did very well in both structured, skills-based activities as well as other literacy activities.

When analyzing assessment data, both students made progress in reading and writing. However, when viewing literacy from a social perspective, one student was driven to please the teacher with proper behavior, correct responses, and accuracy which are representative of the skills-based curriculum. Therefore, the researcher questioned the advocacy for balanced literacy.

The researcher concluded that a balanced approach to literacy is superficial and not for every student. According to the researcher, balanced literacy warrants more research.

*Taylor, Pearson, Clark, and Walpole*

Researchers (Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole, 2000) investigated school and classroom factors related to primary-grade reading achievement in schools with moderate to high numbers of students on subsidized lunch. The purpose of the study was to examine the instructional and organizational factors that might explain how and why some schools are attaining greater-than-expected primary-grade reading achievement with students at risk for failure by virtue of poverty. Instructional referred to classroom-level factors and organizational referred to school-level factors.

The participants included fourteen schools geographically dispersed throughout the country. Schools ranged from 28% to 92% poverty and included four rural, four small-town, and one suburban school, as well as five inner-city schools from three large metropolitan districts. The schools were identified by two characteristics: (a) those that
had recently implemented reform programs to improve reading achievement, and (b) those with a reputation for producing higher-than-expected results in reading with low-income populations. Rather than rely on reputation, the researchers decided to define school exemplarity empirically. They used a combination of gain scores from their own classroom reading measures and scores on whatever achievement test the district normally used. Based on this aggregate index, four schools in the study were determined to be most effective. Six additional schools were considered to be moderately effective, and four schools as least effective. Furthermore, each principal was asked to participate in the study by recruiting the teachers, responding to a survey, completing an interview and providing demographic information about the school. The teachers were asked to divide their students into thirds representing high-, average-, and low-performing readers. The researchers randomly selected students from this list of students.

Data collection consisted of fall and spring outcome measures, observations, teacher logs of instructional activities, questionnaires, interviews, and case studies. The researchers gathered quantitative and descriptive data and then constructed school variables and classroom variables. The school variables included the following: school effectiveness rating, school efforts to link to parents, and systematic, internal assessment of pupil progress. The teacher variables included home communication, student time on-task, preferred interaction style, approaches to word recognition and comprehension instruction, and a teacher accomplishment rating.

To investigate the relation between school effectiveness and classroom instruction, the researchers initially conducted a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with the school effectiveness rating serving as the independent variable and
eight teacher variables serving as outcome measures. To ensure that the researchers were focusing on potentially powerful variables, only those classroom factors that were statistically significantly related to one or more of the measures of student or teacher accomplishment were included in the MANOVA. A statistically significant MANOVA, $F (14, 108) = 2.56, p < .01$, led the researchers to conduct follow-up univariate analyses of variance (ANOVA).

The follow-up ANOVA on home communication was statistically significant, $F (2, 65) = 5.25, p < .01$. Tukey post hoc tests revealed that the teachers in the most effective schools communicated more with parents/caretakers than teachers in the moderately effective or least effective schools. The univariate ANOVA revealed no statistically significant school effectiveness effect for the student time on-task rating, $F (2, 67) = .82, > .05$. The ANOVA on time in small-group instruction revealed a statistically significant effect for school effectiveness, $F (2, 60) = 9.63, p < .001$. Tukey post hoc tests revealed that students of teachers in the most effective schools spent more time daily in small-group instruction than students of teachers in the moderately effective schools or the least effective schools. The ANOVA on time spent in independent reading was statistically significant, $F (2, 60) = 4.24, p < .05$. Tukey post hoc tests revealed that students in the most effective schools and moderately effective schools spent more time in independent reading than students in the least effective schools. The ANOVAs on preferred interaction styles by school effectiveness were not statistically significant.

In addition, the researchers were able to apply nonparametric analyses to two additional reading-specific teaching domains: word recognition and comprehension instruction. Chi-square tests revealed that in comparison to the moderately effective
schools and least effective schools, more grade 1 and 2 teachers in the most effective schools were frequently observed coaching the use of word recognition strategies as children were reading in order to teach them word recognition. There were no differences in the number of teachers in grades 1 and 2 who provided explicit phonics instruction across the three types of schools. The researchers noted a trend in the most effective schools for grade 1 and 2 teachers to combine (a) explicit phonic instruction in isolation with (b) coaching students to use a range of strategies to figure out unknown words when they encounter them in everyday reading. In contrast, the teachers in the moderately effective schools primarily provided explicit phonics instruction, with only a few adding the coaching component. In the least effective schools, teachers primarily provided explicit phonics instruction, with about half adding practice on sight words. Chi-square tests revealed that more teachers in the most effective schools were frequently observed asking higher-level questions about stories students had read than teachers in moderately effective or least effective schools.

In summary, the findings suggested that time spent in small-group instruction characterized the most accomplished teachers. The most accomplished teachers exhibited a preference for coaching over telling or recitation, whereas the least accomplished teachers engaged more commonly in telling. The data suggested that it is what teachers do to promote application of phonics knowledge during the reading of connected text that matters most. The majority of teachers in grades 1 and 2 across all schools taught phonics explicitly and in isolation. What distinguished the most accomplished teachers and the majority of teachers in the most effective schools from their peers were their use of coaching to help students learn how to apply word recognition strategies to real reading.
Finally, the data suggested that more of the most accomplished teachers and teachers in the most effective schools frequently encouraged higher-level response to text than less accomplished teachers or teachers in the moderately and least effective schools.

Although the researchers did not set out to examine the degree to which teachers engaged in balanced reading instruction, they did acknowledge that the most accomplished teachers and/or the teachers in the most effective schools exhibited more balanced instruction than their peers. The best teachers in this study said that “they would do whatever it took to meet the wide array of individual student needs they encountered every day in their classrooms” (p. 158).

**Summary of Balanced Literacy**

The research on balanced literacy is overwhelmingly positive. Approaching reading instruction with a variety of reading strategies appears to work for most students. The studies reviewed included data from rural, small town, suburban, and urban areas, as well as a range of ethnicities and socioeconomic status schools and the results were mostly in favor of balanced literacy. In addition, a multitude of research methodologies were used to determine the effectiveness of the balanced literacy and the research findings suggest that it is an effective approach to literacy acquisition in the primary grades.

**Basal Reading Programs**

Basal reading programs have been used in American schools since the last decade of the eighteenth century (Venezky, 1987) and basal readers dominate reading instruction most classrooms across the country (Farr, Tulley, & Powell, 1987). This section will review literature pertaining to the evaluation and selection of basal reading programs; the
use and influence of basal reading materials in American elementary schools; and
criticisms of commercial reading programs.

*Evaluation and Selection of Basal Reading Programs*

Basal reading series programs determine the content and structure of reading
instruction in elementary classrooms. Thus, the selection of a basal reading program is
the equivalent of selecting the reading curriculum. Basal reading textbooks are present in
more than 90% of all elementary classrooms (Farr, Tulley, & Powell, 1987) and their
importance cannot be minimized. Considering the importance of the basal reading series
program on reading instruction, it is discouraging that so little is known about the process
of selecting materials.

The textbook adoption procedure is to divide the 50 states into two distinct
groups: (1) 22 adoption states that maintain some form of centralized, state-level
textbook evaluation and selection process, and (2) 28 open or non-adoption states in
which local school districts evaluate and select textbooks with little or no state control or
intervention (Farr, Tulley, & Powell, 1987). In the adoption states, statutes require state
authorities or commissions to review all submitted textbooks in each subject area and to
approve a list from which school districts must choose. The adoption states have an
influence on textbook publishers. In large adoption states, such as California, Texas, and
Florida, the publishers coordinate revisions or updates of basal series with the adoption
cycles of these large states (Farr & Tulley, 1989). Publishing companies attend closely to
the adoption criteria, guidelines, and cycles of these states.

How are textbooks selected? The textbook adoption committee makes decisions
about which reading textbooks to be selected in both adoption and non-adoption states.
The committees are usually composed of teachers, administrators, and often, parents. Researchers Farr, Tulley, and Powell (1987) investigated the textbook adoption process and found that committee members review the textbooks using predetermined criteria, usually in the form of a checklist or rating sheet. One of the most important common features that the researchers uncovered is the brief amount of time that districts assign to the selection process. The predominant review technique was the flip test, during which the pages of the student’s reading text are quickly examined for their general appearance including color, white space and size of type, variety of selections, and variety of illustrations. The representatives of from each publishing company are usually invited to make a formal presentation of their textbook programs to the adoption committee or to the entire school district faculty.

The researchers also noted a trend in the adoption process, the all-teacher vote. In this case, all of the teachers in a school district are asked to vote for the program they believe should be adopted, even though a school district committee has carefully examined all textbooks. The researchers concluded that the more people involved in the final decision, the less commitment individuals tend to feel to review the textbooks carefully. Most committee members seemed to develop the feeling that the committee review was superfluous, since the final adoption decision was based on the teachers’ vote. Furthermore, the researchers found that in most all-teacher vote adoptions, very few teachers had carefully examined each of the texts that were available for adoption.

Wong (1991) examined public and professional participation in the Texas state-level textbook selection process. Texas is the single largest purchaser of secondary-level school books in the nation. Only those books that are approved through the annual
centralized adoption may be purchased by local school districts with state funds. The influence on textbook production cannot be ignored. As Apple (1985) explained “the political and ideological climate of these primarily southern states often determines the content and form of the purchased curriculum throughout the rest of the nation” (p. 156).

The state textbook selection committee in Texas consists of classroom teachers, principals, superintendents, and curriculum specialists. Wong interviewed a sample of 29 committee members who served between 1966 and 1986. Wong also took field notes at public hearings and meetings of the textbook committee in 1985 and 1986.

During the adoption cycle, citizens and interest groups can submit written comments and speak at hearings before the state’s textbook committee. Wong’s research suggested that public comments and concerns had little impact on the selection process. The committee members believed that they had a responsibility to listen to the public, but they did not expect public comments to play an important function in the selection process.

What criteria did the selection committee use in selecting materials? Wong’s findings suggested that the physical pedagogical features of a text influenced the committee members. These included readability, versatility, organization, length of chapters, vocabulary skills, presentation of graphs, timelines and charts, introductory outlines, and finally, end-of-chapter questions. The textbook selection committee tended to stress graphics and instructional features over content.

*The Use and Influence of Basal Reading Materials in American Elementary Schools*

The proliferation of basal reading series programs in American classrooms has led to what researcher Shannon (1983) called an over-reliance on the use of commercial
reading materials. Shannon created a model to explain possible contributing factors to teachers’ dependency on commercial reading programs. The model was then tested in one school district.

The model contains three tenets. First, reading programs are organized according to the principles of formal rationality; that is, they operate as bureaucracies. Second, rationalized reading programs are predicated on reification of reading instruction; reification is the treatment of an abstraction as a concrete object or an immutable procedure (Shannon, 1987). In this context, teachers treat reading instruction as the strict application of commercial materials rather than engaging in many of the possible ways to teach reading. Third, the combination of rationalization and reification forces the alienation of teachers from their reading instruction; they are separated and accept their separation from the control of the content, method, and pace of their instruction. In this study, reading instruction was understood as an exchange between commercial materials that have the power to teach and students who can absorb that instruction rather than collaboration among author, teacher, and student.

The test of the model occurred in one school district. Shannon’s model suggested that both objective and subjective factors contribute to teachers’ over reliance on commercial materials. To measure the objective factors, Shannon conducted a comparison of the perceptions of teachers, reading teachers, and administrators; the interactions among personnel were observed informally over a one year period; and an examination was made of the school district’s printed explanations of their reading program. Survey instruments were used to gather data on subjective factors. The survey instruments were designed to test four subjective hypotheses: (1) Teachers are not
involved with their reading instruction; (2) Teachers believe the commercial materials can teach a student to read; (3) Teachers believe that the materials embody scientific truth; and (4) Teachers think they are fulfilling administrative expectations when they use the materials.

Eighty-two percent of the questionnaires were completed and returned (445 teachers, 23 reading teachers, and 18 administrators). The teachers had completed few college reading courses (M = 1.54), most (66%) were strongly confident in their abilities to teach reading. Reading teachers had completed more reading course (M = 5.70), but were less confident in teachers’ ability (52% strongly confident) to teach reading. The administrators averaged 1.89 reading courses and 61% of them were strongly confident in teachers’ ability to teach reading. Despite each group’s strong confidence in teachers’ ability to teach reading teachers (66%), reading teachers (65%), and administrators (78%) thought most instructional decisions should be made outside individual classrooms. Teachers (47%) and reading teachers (48%) were split concerning direct administrative intervention into classroom reading instruction; administrators (94%) were strongly in favor of such action.

The survey also contained open-ended questions: (a) Why do you use commercial materials? and (b) How do you use commercial materials? In response to the first question, seventy percent of the teachers emphasized that they used materials because of administrators’ expectations. The majority of administrators (56%) explained that teachers use commercial materials because the materials can teach reading. Shannon compared the results from the interviews and found that they corroborated the findings from the questionnaires.
The investigation of objective factors was an attempt to describe the reading program accurately using a composite of the survey results, observations of meetings between faculty and administrators, and examination of the district’s printed description of the program. The researcher gathered data on the line of command which participants would consult in order to bring about change in the district reading program. The district’s personnel were organized hierarchically (Figure 5).

![Organizational Chart](image)

**Figure 5:** *Organization of personnel for decision-making about reading programs* (Shannon, 1987).

From this figure, it is clear that classroom teachers, who use the program daily, were removed from the decision-making process. According to all personnel interviewed, teachers were expected to use the commercial materials and they did use them. In response to the questionnaire item, “If I decided to teach reading without the basal workbooks and worksheets, it would be acceptable to the administration,” 93% of the
classroom teachers strongly disagreed with the statement. Furthermore, teachers’ most frequent response to the question “why do you use the commercial materials?” was “because I want to keep my job” (p. 78).

The study confirmed Shannon’s model. The survey, observation, and published documents provided evidence that the reading program was an attempt to implement the principles of formal rationality. The organization of personnel and the reading coordinator’s role description clearly outlined a hierarchy of authority. A separation was made between the planning and implementation of reading instruction. Standard procedures, another principle of formal rationality, were observed in the district. For instance, administrators found reading instruction without commercial workbooks and worksheets unacceptable. Finally, the commercial materials supplied the only recognized goals, methods, and test used during formal instruction, and a periodic review of students’ scores was used to ensure that students progressed through the materials.

Evidence for Shannon’s second tenet of his theory, reification, was found in the responses from the administrators. They treated reading instruction as the systematic application of one set of commercial materials and attempted to exclude all other forms of instruction. For these administrators, the materials defined reading instruction; they supplied the content for teaching reading; and they decided whether or not a student could read. Most of the administrators wanted the teachers to follow the materials “like a Bible” (p. 81) to ensure that they provided continuous and standard instruction for the mobile student population. The administrators strongly agreed that the materials embody scientific truth and that the materials can teach reading. Reading teachers with more
reading courses were less likely to accept the scientific validity of commercial materials. Most teachers thought the materials could teach reading.

The third tenet of Shannon’s model involved teacher alienation from their instruction. The organization of the program to deliver standard instruction separated teachers from the control of their reading instruction. Most decisions usually associated with reading instruction were made at a higher level of authority and were beyond teachers’ control. Even the pace at which teachers guided their students through the materials was influenced by administrators and the periodic review of test results. Teachers’ reification of reading instruction and their agreement that the materials can teach reading suggest some recognition of their alienation from their instruction. Eighty-one percent disagreed with this item: No one can teach reading in the same way I do.

Shannon’s model proposed to explain teachers’ over reliance on commercial materials during reading instruction and the data suggested that his model was accurate. The study of rationalization, reification, and alienation from objective and subjective perspectives provided insight into an important topic.

Researchers (Juel & Roper/Schneider, 1985) investigated the role of various word features and basal text factors in the developing word recognition skills of first-grade students. The study was guided by the following research questions: (1) To what degree do basal text characteristics such as the regularity of letter-sound relations or the number of times the words are repeated influence word identification and word identification strategies? (2) To what degree do early word identification strategies involve knowledge of such word features as versatile letter combinations or letter-sound relations? (3) How do word identification strategies change over the course of the first-grade school year?
The sample consisted of 93 participants: 61 Anglo Americans and 32 others, most of whom were Mexican American. There were an equal number of male and female students. The children were non-readers upon entering first grade, as determined by teacher and experimenter screening on reading word lists and informal reading inventories. All students were fluent English speakers, scored about the 40th percentile on the total Metropolitan Readiness Test, and were placed in the middle reading group within their classrooms. The students came from eleven classrooms in three schools. School 1 was in the middle to upper middle class neighborhood. School 2 was in the middle to lower middle class neighborhood. School 3 was in the lower to middle SES area.

In September, three measures were given to the students: The Metropolitan Reading Readiness Test, graded word lists, and informal reading inventories. In late November and early December, the students were tested on their ability to pronounce correctly the words identified by the respective basal publishers as core vocabulary. The children were individually given the Bryant Test of Basic Decoding Skills which consists of a list of 50 nonsense, common rule governed words which assess growth in and application of letter-sound knowledge. In February, the children were tested on the publisher designated core primer words and the Bryant Test for the second time. In April, the school district administered the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. In addition, the children were once again tested on the Bryant Test. In May, they were tested on all the core words and a list of approximately 200 unfamiliar basal words. Additionally, in order to give the children an opportunity to use context cues as an aid in word recognition, the children
were tested throughout the year on their ability to read core vocabulary as it appeared in actual stories from their basal readers.

Two principle multiple regression analyses were performed to analyze the data. All factors and interactions were entered into a regression analysis as predictors. Then each factor was deleted from the regression equation and the drop in variance accounted for after the deletion was interpreted as unique to the omitted factor. The significance of the unique contribution of each factor was then determined by the Homogeneity of Group Regressions Test. After each regression run, the missing factor was reinserted in the equation and a different one removed for the next run. Through this systematic removal and reinsertion regression technique, an estimate of the independent contribution of correlated factors can be achieved.

One form of regression analysis focused on subject characteristics, such as Readiness scores, Bryant scores, and classroom and their relation to basal test performance. The unit of analysis was the subject and the dependent measure was correctness of basal word pronunciations. The other form of analysis focused on word and text characteristics and their relation to basal test performance. In these analyses, the unit of analysis was the word and the dependent measure was once again correctness of basal word pronunciation.

The results suggested that children who developed strong letter-sound correspondence knowledge in first grade performed better on all reading tests. Two factors were shown to influence growth in letter-sound correspondence knowledge: (1) the initial use of text with regular decodable words and (2) the Metropolitan Readiness Test. The researchers cautioned that the results of this study do not constitute advocacy of
any specific approach to beginning reading instruction. However, the results suggested that selection of text used very early in first grade may determine the strategies and cues children learn to use. Further, the results suggested that when there is a match between method of instruction, such as synthetic phonics, and the decidability of words in initial reading texts, a more consistent and successful use of a letter-sound correspondence strategy will result than when there is a mismatch. Results of this study suggested that the types of words that appear in beginning reading texts may well exert a more powerful influence in shaping children’s word identification strategies than the method of reading instruction.

Are there alternatives in reading textbooks? Researchers (Hiebert, Martin, & Menon, 2005) posed this question during an examination of beginning reading programs. The first-grade components of three textbook programs: mainstream basal, combined phonics and literature, and phonics emphasis, were compared for cognitive load and linguistic content. The researchers examined literature anthologies, decodable texts, and leveled texts from each series.

Cognitive load was defined as the amount of new linguistic information beginning readers can handle while comprehending the text’s message. Linguistic content refers to the number of monosyllabic, simple vowel words. Three levels of three components of a program—literature anthologies, decodable texts, and leveled texts—were compared.

The researchers analyzed all of the words within each level of a program component using a computer program called HyperCard. The program provides data on the cognitive load features of number of total words, unique words, and repetitions of
unique words. It also provides data on the linguistic content of unique words and decodable vowel pattern words.

Each of the three programs analyzed was characterized by a distinct perspective on reading acquisition. The mainstream basal program was characterized by uniformity. The texts differed across levels in length, the features of cognitive load and linguistic content did not differ. The combined phonics and literature program was characterized by scaffolding and differentiation early in the program, but becoming more demanding by the middle of the year. The scaffolding of linguistic content at the beginning of the program was not uniform across components. The phonics program provided differentiated components across the levels of the entire program. This extended to low numbers of unique words in the texts.

The researchers concluded that yes, there are different options available to teachers. All three programs examined provided literature, decodable texts, and little book components, but the programs vary in the emphasis given to each component. The cognitive load and linguistic content of almost all components in all programs were high.

What do classroom teachers use to teach reading? The use and influence of basal readers for reading instruction was present in a study about teachers’ dependency on basal readers. Researchers (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 1993) conducted a qualitative study based on interviews of eight elementary teachers concerning their beliefs, perceptions, and feelings about reading instruction and the role of basal readers in reading instruction, and their beliefs about the needs fulfilled for students, teachers, parents, and school administrators through classroom reading instruction.
The participants all taught in rural schools in a rural mid-Atlantic state. Eight teachers with between 1 and 23 years teaching experience constituted the sample. The teachers taught in three counties, in three different school districts, and each county used a different basal reading program. The schools that the teachers taught in were small, consisting of 60-130 low SES students. Each teacher was the only teacher at a given grade in each school. Supplemental instructional materials were not contained in the school libraries but were in a county materials center, 25 miles from some of the schools in one county. The researchers acknowledged that they knew most teachers in these counties used basal reading programs partly because alternative materials were difficult to acquire.

Data were collected during the last month of the school year and immediately following the end of the school year. Both researchers conducted and audio taped a semi-structured, open-ended interview. The interviews were transcribed and journal entry notes were attached at the end of each transcript. The researchers categorized data into themes.

The results indicated a conflict between teachers’ beliefs and their reported methods of teaching reading. Although teachers believed that basal instruction was not the best way to teach reading, they continued to rely heavily on the basal. The results also indicated that teachers felt that basal reading instruction fulfilled primarily lower-level security needs, such as skills instruction, grouping, and pacing. Higher-level needs, such as self-actualization, knowing and understanding the world, obtaining pleasure from learning, and creativity were rarely met by basal instruction. Teachers reported than non-basal instruction satisfied needs associated with enjoyment, creativity, and alleviating pressure to cover a certain amount of material.
Why do teachers use basal readers if they do not believe that they provide the best instruction for their students? The researchers explained that the conflict between teachers’ negative beliefs and feelings about basal reading instruction and their heavy reliance on basal readers, a reading methodology that they do not believe to be in the best interest of their students, could be a result of cognitive dissonance; their actions do not match their beliefs. Another possible explanation for teachers’ reliance on basal readers could be explained by exchange theory. Exchange theory suggests that people will make efforts to maximize the rewards and minimize the cost in any position or relationship. In this situation, the rewards of non-basal activities (such as enjoyment) were not as valuable to the teachers as the rewards of basal instruction (such as satisfying the security needs of peers, administrators, and parents, thereby obtaining acceptance and approval from these groups). A third possible explanation for the conflict between teachers’ beliefs and actions could be pressure to follow the basal from administrators and parents, accountability, and lack of teacher confidence, knowledge, and power. A fourth possible explanation for relying on basal readers could be the problem of professional uncertainty in education; that is, the teachers were continuously given the message to follow the basal program from others in spite of their own observations about the lack of efficacy of basal reading instruction. The researchers concluded that the results of this study imply that these teachers were dependent on basal readers for instruction.

Criticism of Commercial Reading Programs

During the first half of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, basal reading programs became restrictive in terms of features, such as controlled vocabulary, and expansive in terms of components, such as adding workbooks, teacher guides, and tests (Hoffman et al., 1998).
By the 1950s, most of the basal programs were similar in content and in pedagogy (Chall, 1967). Basal readers were challenged in the late 1950s and early 1960s and publishers changed the basal readers in response to criticism. For instance, the emphasis on sight-word teaching and vocabulary control was replaced by an increased attention to specific skills instruction which emphasized phonics in combination with sight-word teaching (Hoffman et al., 1998). The homogeneity of the characters, including gender stereotypes, racial and ethnic bias and blatant omissions, was replaced with literature that attempted to reflect diversity of life styles and roles (Baumann, 1992). Durkin’s (1987) research on comprehension influenced basal reader publishers to improve the quality and quantity of comprehension questions during instruction. By the 1980s, the basal readers focused on skills-based instruction. Advocates for holistic, language-based strategies as opposed to skills-based instruction combined with literature-based stories criticized the basal reading series (California State Department of Education, 1987). In response, publishers added more literature and less focus on isolated skills. Publishing is a business and publishers pay close attention to what sells (Winograd, 1989). Basal reader critics have served an important role by pointing out ways in which education policy, curriculum, and instructional practices might be improved (Baumann, 1992).

One argument against using basal reader programs is the deskilling of teachers. “One of the great ironies in the development of the modern basal reading series is that as teachers received more and more pre-service and in-service training in teaching reading, the authors of reading texts assumed that teachers knew less and less and expanded the teacher’s manual and textbook instructions accordingly” (Venezky, 1987, p. 252). According to the deskilling argument, by using basal reading programs, teachers
surrender control of, or responsibility for, curricular and instructional decisions in reading to the materials, thus, doing away with their previously learned and acquired teaching skills (Baumann, 1996).

As a foundation for teacher deskillling, Apple (1982) cited the turn-of-the-century notion of scientific management in industry which explains that labor activities can be analyzed so that the most efficient actions and procedures can be identified and then taught in a discrete manner to workers. Apple argued that workers then become deskillled; similarly, teachers become deskillled when they use commercial programs. He stated that “skills that teachers used to need, that were deemed essential to the craft of working with children—such as curriculum deliberation and planning, designing teaching and curricular strategies for specific groups and individuals based on intimate knowledge of these people—are no longer as necessary” (p. 146).

Shannon (1983, 1987; Shannon & Goodman, 1994) also argued that commercial reading materials deskill teachers. His argument has three parts: First, when school personnel reify reading instruction, teachers and administrators lose sight of the fact that reading instruction is a human process. Second, their reification of the scientific study of the reading process as the commercial materials means that their knowledge of reading and instruction is frozen in a single technological form. Third, school personnel’s reification of science requires that they define their work in terms of efficiency of delivery and students’ gains in test scores.

Baumann (1992) examined the research on the deskillling argument and concluded that flaws in the reasoning underlying deskillling were present and insufficient data to support the argument were noted. He concluded that the empirical data used to argue for
deskilling were limited, mixed in findings, and not generalizable. He was critical of the examples of basal materials used to argue for deskilling, as they were dated and not representative of current materials or practices. Baumann challenged the basal readers’ critics by asserting that “Basal materials do not teach any more than the trade books or maps and globes do; teachers teach, not the instructional tools” (p. 397).

Do basal readers deskill teachers? Researchers Baumann and Heubach (1996) investigated this argument. A survey was created to inquire educators about their use of basal reading programs. It included descriptive items, Likert items, and open-ended items. The surveys were distributed by mail using a list purchased from the International Reading Association (IRA). The mailing list consisted of a computer-generated geographically stratified random sample of 1,000 IRA members in the United States who had identified elementary reading instruction as the focus of their professional responsibility. A total of 563 surveys were returned, resulting in a 56.3% response rate. Responses were proportional to the overall sample.

The results suggested that basal readers do not deskill teachers. The findings suggested that most teachers are discriminating consumers who view basal readers as just one instructional tool available to them as they plan literacy lessons. However, with current implementation of reading/literacy coaching in many Open Court schools, teachers are being now held to strict pacing schedules and testing mandates. In fact, 77% of the respondents considered themselves to be eclectics who drew from multiple methods and materials. Ninety-four percent viewed the basal manual as a source of teaching ideas rather than a prescribed set of directions.
The researchers acknowledged limitations of the respondents, however. Self-report data provided only one method for evaluating attitudes and behaviors. The sample was limited to members of one professional organization who are knowledgeable, experienced literacy educators. Nonetheless, the researchers concluded that their survey data provided counterevidence to the argument that basal materials control teachers or usurp their decision-making skills. The researchers suggested that basal materials may actually empower teachers by providing them instructional suggestions to draw from, adapt, or extend.

How do teachers implement guided reading in the early grades when they only have a basal reader? Guided reading is a research-based strategy that is an important best practice associated with literacy instruction. Guided reading is a teaching approach used with all readers, struggling or independent, that has three fundamental purposes: to meet the varying instructional needs of all the students in the classroom, to teach students to read increasingly difficult texts with understanding and fluency, and to construct meaning while using problem-solving strategies (Iaquinta, 2006). Guided reading groups are made based on assessments. Once students’ needs are identified, groups are formed by placing children who have similar needs and text-processing strategies into homogeneous groups of approximately 5 to 8 children. Teachers select a text that matches the students’ reading needs. One of the key requirements of effective instruction is to have access to a large number of texts at a variety of levels. This requirement is critical since children demonstrate a wide range of reading needs during lessons. The little books are crucial to guided reading; yet, many school districts do not provide these supplementary materials. Many teachers often express frustration with the need to provide large numbers of leveled
little books in classrooms where they do not have ready access to the quantities and
varieties of leveled titles needed (Fawson & Reutzel, 2000). It is possible to adapt basal
reading programs to provide guided reading by leveling basal reading texts using gradient
criteria.

What are future directions for reading instruction? Researchers Martinez and
McGee (2000) analyzed textbooks published in the 1960s and 1970s and concluded that
during this period, teachers taught skills first, then literature. Literature was considered a
*part* of the reading program, not *the* reading program. During the Whole Language
movement during the 1980s and into the 1990s, many teachers did not rely on basal
readers; rather, many teachers used literature to teach reading. Presently, a balance
between basal readers and literature appears to be the trend.

The increasing diversity of the population of the United States is a trend that the
authors see affecting literature; that is, parents and teachers will increasingly demand
materials that reflect the diversity of their children’s experiences. Another trend in
literacy is that readers must be able to deal with all types of texts, including online texts.
With more children having access to home computers and more schools providing
Internet access in classrooms, online resources are likely to become an authentic literacy
material.

The authors declared that a more fully developed theoretical rationale for why
reading instruction *requires* literature must be developed. The authors suggested that
“only literature provides the multiple layers of meaning necessary for acquiring the
strategies, stances, and ways of deep thinking that we are coming to define as literacy” (p.
167).
It is the researchers desire to have basal textbook publishers change the contents of anthologies of the future by finding ways of making complete works of authentic literature the cornerstone of readers.

Summary of Literature Review

This literature review provided evidence that there is more than one way to teach beginning reading. First, the research on phonics suggested that systematic phonics instruction produces benefits for students in kindergarten through third grade and for students having difficulty learning to read. Students who were taught phonics systematically were better able to decode and spell, and they showed improvement in their ability to comprehend text. Systematic synthetic phonics instruction was more effective in improving low socioeconomic children’s alphabetic knowledge and word reading skills than instructional approaches that were less focused on these initial reading skills. Phonics instruction has been used widely over a long period of time with positive results and a variety of systematic phonics programs have proven effective with children of different ages, abilities, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Second, whole language approaches have contributed to the field of reading by emphasizing the interrelationship of four modes of language: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Rather than breaking the reading process into parts, the whole language philosophy sought to keep language experiences whole, authentic, and meaningful to students. The teachers’ role changed in whole language classrooms from sage on the stage to a guide on the side. Whole language classrooms focused on the psycholinguistic approach to the reading process using cueing system
Third, in response to these two different approaches, a centrist view emerged which involved combining both phonics instruction and meaning based instruction in a balanced literacy program. The research using this approach suggested positive results for the students in improving reading, writing, and other literacy tasks. Various definitions of balanced literacy exist, therefore, this study needed to be done to clarify the definition of balanced literacy and to identify the components of a balanced literacy program.

Finally, the research on basal reading programs suggested that most teachers use basal readers for their primary reading instruction. The vast majority of school systems, schools, classrooms, and teachers remain largely dependent upon basal reader programs for providing early reading instruction. Since the research suggested that a balanced approach to literacy is beneficial to students and the fact the most teachers use basal reader programs, it is crucial to analyze the two approved series for the state of California to examine to what extent these programs are representing a balanced approach to literacy.

This research study integrated variables from the literature review. First, the researcher examined the various definitions and components of balanced literacy. Second, the researcher analyzed the two approved reading series programs for components of phonics, whole language, and balanced literacy. Third, the researcher compared and contrasted the two reading series programs and to ascertain to what extent program represents a balanced approach to literacy.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this study was divided into two stages to answer the three research questions. Stage one addressed the first research question and stage two addressed the second and third research questions. Chapter three consists of: (a) an overview of the study; (b) a description of the research design; and (c) a description of stages one and two of the methodology.

Overview

The study analyzed how balanced literacy is defined in the educational literature. Additionally, the study assessed what phonics, whole language, or balanced approach to literacy components characterize kindergarten and first grade reading programs in California. Finally, the study explored to what extent the two approved reading programs in California, *Houghton Mifflin Reading* and *Open Court Reading* reflect a balanced approach to literacy for kindergarten and first grade.

The study was conducted in two stages. The first stage addressed the first research question using a content analysis of published research articles. The purpose of the first stage was twofold; first, to analyze how the term *balanced literacy* is defined in the literature, and second, to identify the components of a balanced literacy from the research literature.

Thirty four articles were read, three times each, using a researcher-made code sheet describing research variables from the literature, allowing for a more intensive analysis of each piece collected and providing an opportunity to search back through those articles to settle any discrepancies found between checklist forms. The definition of
balanced literacy was transcribed verbatim from the articles, and then a checklist was used to measure how frequently elements of balanced literacy were mentioned. The research variables in this section included three broad categories: equal weighting, method of classroom program, and reading knowledge. Within each category, variables were identified. In the category equal weighting, the variables included (a) curriculum; (b) components; and (c) instruction. For method of classroom program, the variables were (d) grouping; (e) time; and (f) assessment. Reading knowledge variables integrated (g) local knowledge; (h) global knowledge; and (i) affective knowledge about reading.

The second stage of the study addressed two research questions through an examination of the current approved basal reading series used in public schools throughout California. One purpose of stage two of the study was to ascertain what phonics, whole language, or balanced literacy approach components characterize kindergarten and first grade reading programs in California. Another purpose of stage two was to measure to what extend the two approved reading programs in California reflect a balanced approach to literacy for kindergarten and first grade.

To this end, the researcher examined all of the teacher editions for Houghton-Mifflin Reading and Open Court Reading, kindergarten and first grade. The typical school year is 180 days long; thus, the researcher examined one years’ worth of lessons for a total of 720 lessons. A researcher-created checklist was designed (Appendix C). The three major approaches to reading were categorized into phonics, whole language, or balanced literacy. Within each approach, eight components were identified that are representative of the approach. Frequencies of each component were tallied and percentages computed.
Research Approach

The research approach used in this study was content analysis. Content analysis has been defined as a systematic, replicable technique for compressing many words of text into fewer content categories based on explicit rules of coding (Krippendorff, 1980). Content analysis is a research tool for making inferences from text.

One characteristic that differentiates content analysis from other types of analyses is the attempt to meet the standards of the scientific method. This includes attention to objectivity and intersubjectivity, using an *a priori* (“before the fact”) design, reliability, validity, generalizability, replicability, and hypothesis testing (Neuendorf, 2002).

Objectivity is achieved through a description that avoids the biases of the investigator. Intersubjectivity refers to striving for consistency among inquiries. An *a priori* design includes all decisions on variables, measurement, and coding rules before the observation begins. Reliability is the extent to which a measuring procedure yields the same results on repeated trials. Validity refers to accurately measuring what one purports to be measuring. Generalizability of findings is the extent to which the findings may be applied to other cases. Replication of a study is a safeguard against over generalizing the findings of a particular study. Replication involves repeating a study with different cases or in a different context to see if similar results are obtained each time.

Content analysis, as a research method, is similar to descriptive research. In a content analysis, an attempt is made to measure variables as they naturally occur; that is, no manipulation of independent variables is made. Random sampling of the units of data collection is typical, thus, making the findings generalizable to a larger population.

The process of content analysis research is systematic. Neuendorf (2002) outlines
the procedures for a content analysis. First, the researcher identifies relevant theories, determines what content will be examined, and provides a rationale for why the content is selected. Research questions or hypotheses are formulated. The researcher then identifies and defines variables that will be used in the study. Measures are decided upon which match the conceptualization of the study to insure internal validity. At this point, the researcher decides what unit of data collection will be used and develops an a priori coding scheme describing all measures. The next step is for the researcher to create a codebook and a coding form. Next, the researcher decides on a population and what sampling procedures will be used to characterize the population. Coders are trained and a pilot test is made. The codebook or coding form is revised, if needed. Following any revisions, at least two coders are used to code the data independently. Lastly, the researcher tabulates the data and reports the findings.

Stage One and Two Content Analyses

Stage One

The term balanced literacy is not agreed upon by researchers, authors, or educators. The components of a balanced literacy approach also vary widely. Therefore, the purpose of stage one was to clarify the definition of the term balanced literacy and to identify components of a balanced literacy program.

Selection of research articles. It was decided to base the analysis on professional journals to provide a distinct focus from which the analysis could develop. Therefore, the first stage of the study used published educational research articles to ascertain a definition of balanced literacy. An electronic search was conducted in two databases, ERIC and Psych Info. A list of terms derived from various literature articles was used to
locate all articles indexed by these terms: balanced literacy, balanced reading, balanced instruction, blended instruction, and phonics and whole language. This initial list was augmented by articles from personal files, reference lists, and citations to prior work. The initial list contained 55 articles.

Journals were specifically chosen for consistency in the resources to be analyzed. In analyzing resources of the same genre, such as journal articles, the consistency of style, format, purpose, and length could more easily be retained. Additionally, research focusing on English Language Learners, opinion papers, commentaries, reference materials guides, speeches or meeting papers, and ERIC documents were eliminated.

Pilot study. A random sample of 10 articles was chosen to be coded by the researcher and a trained second reader, an experienced elementary school teacher with a Master’s degree in Education and over 30 years teaching young children. The articles were read and definitions of balance and implications for classroom practice were recorded. It become evident, however, that the quality of the articles varied considerably from opinion pieces and papers presented at conferences to research studies published in peer-reviewed publications. The inconsistency in the article types created variations in the definitions and implications for classroom practice. Therefore, based on the pilot study, the database search was narrowed to include more stringent criteria. A second search was conducted in ERIC and Psych Info. The following criteria were applied to screen studies for the analysis:
• Appear in a refereed journal. Peer review insures that the quality of the studies will meet research standards in the field.

• Be published after 1985, when alternatives to the debate between phonics and whole language began to be published.

• Focus on the teaching of reading in English and be published in English.

• Involve classroom teaching. Short-term laboratory studies and studies that involve teaching of very limited time frame, such as tutoring, were excluded.

• Include regular education students, not special education students.

• Focus on early elementary kindergarten through third grade students.

Abstracts of the studies located in the electronic search were reviewed to identify articles appearing to meet the criteria for inclusion in the analysis.

In the revised ERIC database search, the term balanced literacy yielded 297 articles. When the search was further limited to the years 1985-2006 and publication type journal articles, 100 articles were identified. Of this list, 41 articles matched the criteria for inclusion. The researcher then input the term balanced reading with the following thesaurus descriptors: beginning reading, elementary education, emergent literacy, and reading instruction. Two additional articles were added to the list. The term balanced instruction with the thesaurus descriptors beginning reading, early reading, reading instruction, reading research, and teaching methods yielded 53 articles; no new articles were added to the list since they did not meet the criteria. The search using the term balanced approach, with thesaurus descriptors beginning reading, early reading, emergent literature, reading instruction, and reading research, yielded 27 articles, with no new articles added to the list. The term blended instruction, with thesaurus descriptors
elementary education, emergent literature, literature education, reading, and reading instruction, yielded two articles which were previously identified in the list. Finally, a search using the terms phonics and whole language, with thesaurus descriptors early childhood education, early reading, elementary education, literacy, and reading instruction, yielded nine articles with no new articles meeting the criteria. Forty three articles were selected from the ERIC search.

In the database Psych Info, the search was limited to full-text, peer review journal articles in the childhood (birth-12 years) age group. The keyword balanced literacy resulted in three articles, which were in the corpus from the ERIC search. The keyword balanced reading yielded one article, which did not meet the selection criteria. The keywords balanced instruction and balanced approach both resulted in no articles. Blended instruction as a keyword resulted in one article which did not meet the criteria. Finally the keywords phonics and whole language resulted in nine articles, one already identified in the corpus, seven that did not meet the criteria and one article that did meet the criteria. Thus, the search of Psych Info added one article to the corpus.

Furthermore, the pilot study revealed flaws in data gathering. The researchers were analyzing articles for two criteria: definitions of balanced literacy and implications for classroom practice. The decision was made to create a codebook (Appendix A) with specific characteristics on a coding form (Appendix B) for clarity and specificity.

From the 55 articles from the first search and 44 articles from the second search, 66 were eliminated. The final corpus contained 34 research articles for analysis. From the list, the articles were read and coded by the primary researcher and the second coder from
the pilot test, who read all of the articles. An 88% agreement was determined based data gathered on the coding sheets. Discrepancies were discussed until a consensus was made.

*Instrumentation.* The researcher created a codebook (Appendix A) and a coding form (Appendix B) for the content analysis in stage one of the study, clarification of the term and identifying components of *balanced literacy.* The educational literature was the basis for the coding categories. As each article was read, categories were coded on the coding form. The coding categories were gleaned from the literature and are presented in Table 4. In the first stage of the study, three common categories of balanced literacy were evident. First, in most discussions of balance there is a focus on equal weighting. Second, there is usually a focus on the method of the classroom program. Third, the kind of reading knowledge children should attain from the methods that the authors of the program agree are most important (Fitzgerald, 1999). Using these three broad categories, the researcher further identified variables within each category.

In the first category, equal weighting, the researcher identified curriculum, components, and instruction for further exploration. Curriculum is related to the author’s philosophical outlook on the acquisition of reading and writing. A literature based curriculum focus on creating meaning for the reader and a skills-based curriculum focuses on strategic word identification processes. Components include both reading and writing activities. Reading components are guided reading, shared reading, self-selected reading, discussion groups or literature circles, and direct phonics instruction. Writing components are writing, word wall activities, and shared writing. Other literacy activities are listed in learning centers, word study, spelling, read aloud, choral reading comprehension, phonemic awareness, mini-lessons, or vocabulary. Instruction refers to
Table 4

*Coding Variables and Measures*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Measure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Equal Weighting</td>
<td><strong>Curriculum</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1=literature-based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2=skills-based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3=combination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4=not stated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Components</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1=guided reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2=shared reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3=self-selected reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4=discussion groups/literature circles</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5=phonics instruction</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6=writing</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7=word wall activities</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8=shared writing</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9=learning centers</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10=word study</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11=spelling</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12=read aloud</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13=choral reading</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14=comprehension</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15=phonemic awareness</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16=mini-lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17=vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18=not stated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Instruction</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1=teacher initiated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2=instruction responsive to students’ needs or interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3=combination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4=not stated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4 (continued)

_Coding Variables and Measures_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Measure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Method</strong></td>
<td><strong>Grouping</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1=whole class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2=small group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3=homogeneous ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4=heterogeneous ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5=partner reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6=individual reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7=one-on-one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8=not stated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1=general</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2=listed per component</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3=equal time allotted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4=not stated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assessment</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1=general</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2=diagnose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3=inform instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4=measure progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5=not stated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reading Knowledge</strong></td>
<td><strong>Local Knowledge</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1=stated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2=not stated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Global Knowledge</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1=stated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2=not stated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Affective Knowledge</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1=implied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2=not implied</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
teacher initiated instruction, instruction that is responsive to students’ needs and interests, or a combination.

The second category, the method of conducting the program, examined the organization and structure of the description of the balanced literacy program in the classroom. Student groupings were noted, such as whole class, small group, homogenous achievement-level or heterogeneous achievement-level groupings, partner reading, individual reading, one-on-one instruction. Time was identified as a research variable. General refers to a mention of time in a non-specific manner. Time also refers to amount of minutes allotted per component, equal time per component, or no mention of dividing up the language arts section of the day. Finally, the purposes of assessment was noted as generally mentioned, diagnose, to inform instruction, measure progress, or not stated.

The third category, type of reading knowledge was inferred from the research. The goals of learning are local knowledge, global knowledge, or affective knowledge or a combination. Local knowledge about reading includes areas such as phonological awareness, a sight word repertoire, knowledge of sound-symbol relationships, knowledge of basic orthographic patterns, a variety of word identification strategies (how to use phonics, how to use context), and word meanings. Global knowledge includes areas such as understanding, interpretation, response to reading and strategies to enable comprehension. Affective knowledge includes feelings, positive attitude, motivation, and the desire to read.
**Coding.** For stage one, a researcher-constructed code form was used to record definitions of balanced literacy and components of balanced literacy. The coding variables and measures came from the educational research literature. The researcher and the second coder used this form as a checklist while reading each research article. The code form included an area for the author’s stated definition, if given, which was transcribed verbatim. Definitions of balanced literacy were organized thematically. The themes were (a) combination approach; (b) teaching methodologies; and (c) teacher as decision maker.

The code form was also divided into three variables gleaned from the literature: equal weighting, method, and reading knowledge. Within each variable, specific components or attributes were identified. A frequency count for each measure was made and percentages were computed. The components of a balanced literacy program were then identified.

**Data analysis.** Definitions of balanced literacy were recorded and grouped thematically. Frequencies were examined for missing data, errors, and outliers. A percent agreement was computed from coding sheets for bother researchers for inter-rater reliability. Frequency counts and percentages were computed. An analysis of the articles was conducted with each coding category. Once the analysis was made, a definition of balanced literacy was created and components were identified.

**Stage Two**

Stage two investigated what phonics, whole language, and balanced literacy approach components characterize kindergarten and first grade reading programs in
California. It also measured to what extent the two approved reading programs reflect a balanced approach to literacy for kindergarten and first grade.

**Selection of the unit of analysis.** The unit of analysis for the second stage of the study was the 720 lessons identified from the two California Department of Education approved reading programs: (1) *Houghton Mifflin Reading*, published by Houghton Mifflin, and (2) *Open Court Reading* published by SRA/McGraw-Hill. These two reading programs, kindergarten and first grade, were used for analysis. Both programs include 180 days worth of lessons corresponding to the typical 180 days in a school year.

*Houghton-Mifflin Reading* (2003) provides a 64 page document describing a research-based framework for the program for grades K-8. The framework cites research and serves as a rationale for inclusion of the following elements in the reading program: foundations for learning to read; decoding skills; fluency; texts for reading instruction; developing reading comprehension; writing, spelling, and grammar; motivation, independent reading and writing, and home connections.

*Houghton-Mifflin Reading* emphasizes the California state standards in every lesson with a recommended pacing chart that address grade-level standards. Some content standards in other subjects, such as, History-Social Science, Science, and Mathematics standards are also met for cross-curricular planning. Both kindergarten and first grade have 10 teacher’s editions with multiple additional handbooks available for purchase.

An abundance of literature resources are available for purchase including big books, fiction and non-fiction, poetry, leveled books for small-group reading including decodable books, easy books, and on-level and challenge books. Books for multiple
levels of students are recommended in a bibliography found in each edition. Technology resources are listed, but not included in the program.

Each teacher’s edition revolves around themes and a theme overview is offered at the beginning of each edition. Lessons are divided into three segments with suggested time limits for each section. The first part of each lesson is called Learning to Read with lessons in phonemic awareness, phonics, high-frequency words, and comprehension skills and strategies. Word Work includes alphabet activities for kindergarten and spelling and vocabulary lessons for first grade. The last part of each lesson is called Writing and Language with kindergarteners focusing on oral language development, shared, interactive, and independent writing, and listening skills. First grade works on writing, grammar, usage, mechanics, and listening, speaking, and viewing. Both grade levels then have recommended learning centers to attend while the teacher conducts small-group reading instruction using leveled books.

According to the Program Overview in *Open Court Reading* (2002), the program provides research-based instruction, strong authorship, a systematic, explicit instructional plan, literature with a purpose, and differentiated instruction for meeting students’ individual needs. The Program Overview displays endorsements from academic research and field testing, as well as claiming to be the most thoroughly researched program available. “For nearly 40 years, *Open Court* has monitored and learned from the research that experts in the field of reading have conducted, incorporating these important findings into the programs” (p. vi). The program authors include 13 academic professionals in the field of education.
The instructional plan for kindergarten and first grade includes lessons which begin with skills to help with preparing to read, such as sounds and letters, phonemic awareness, phonics and fluency, and word knowledge. The second part of every lesson teaches specific comprehension skills and strategies in conjunction with literature. The third part of every lesson includes systematic and explicit development of language arts skills, such as spelling, vocabulary, writing process strategies, writer’s craft, English language conventions, grammar, usage, and mechanics, listening, speaking, penmanship, and basic computer skills. Open Court provides an assessment section which contains program assessments, unit assessments, and diagnostic assessments.

Open Court provides literature to accompany the program. The literature is organized into unit themes. At the kindergarten level, there are 8 units; the first grade level has 10 units of study. Big books are used in kindergarten and the beginning of first grade with student anthologies replacing big books in the seventh unit. Each literature selection in the big books and anthologies was selected with the following goals: A unique perspective to encourage student inquiry; a variety of literature from different genres; reading practice; excellent examples of writing; classic and contemporary literature; and author styles of writing to helps students develop a cultural literacy.

The program components of Open Court include teacher support, including teacher editions, online support, a training video collection, and professional development guides. Kindergarten and first grade components include big books and little big books, story time selections, student anthologies, black line masters and workbooks, science/social studies connection learning centers, decodable texts, assessment black line masters and workbooks, first reader and second readers, phonics
packages, language arts handbook, practice books, and additional supplemental literature. Technology includes alphabet book activities, decodable book activities, spelling, writing, audiocassette or CD listening libraries, sound/spelling card stories audiocassette or CD, lesson models video collection, online bibliography, online teacher support, and leap into phonics. An additional component of Open Court is the support for teachers using the program. Teachers and administrators are offered in-service training, on-site follow-up, weekend seminars, online training, summer institutes, professional development guides, and a collection of training videos. A Professional Development Plan is included in the program.

Instrumentation. The researcher created a new coding form (Appendix C) for the second stage of the program. The researcher examined each lesson from the teacher’s edition with the coding sheet and recorded the frequency of each component.

The coding form includes three approaches to reading: phonics, whole language, and balanced literacy. Within each approach to reading, the researcher identified eight components associated with each approach. The components came from three sources: the literature review, the articles used in stage one, and general knowledge of each approach. The components for a phonics approach were phonics skills, vocabulary, spelling, decodable texts, phonemic awareness, alphabet activities, penmanship, and formal assessment. The components for whole language included the writing process, print awareness, teacher read alouds, informal assessment, poetry, cross curricular connections, big books, and drama. The components for a balanced literacy approach included reading strategies, differentiated instruction, flexible groupings, guided/leveled
reading, time management, word bank/building, assessment to inform instruction, and multiple genres.

The emphasis in a skills-based, transmission model, phonics program is on the product. Language is broken into parts, such as letters and words. Skills are taught directly in sequence. The teacher makes curricular decisions. In traditional phonics programs, reading groups are based on ability and are inflexible. Students read basal texts with controlled vocabulary which are decodable. Discussion questions are generated from the teacher or the basal teacher’s edition. Children are expected to memorize sight words. Writing topics are chosen by the teacher or the reading series. Worksheets are used for reinforcement of skills. Workbooks are used for responses to the basal text. Correct spelling is expected. Growth is measured quantitatively.

The emphasis in a meaning-based, transactional model, whole language classroom is on process. Language is kept whole in connected text. Phonics is taught incidentally, if at all. Reading strategies are modeled by the teacher in context. Real literature is used; often no basal text is used. Students can learn comprehension skills through discussion groups, such as literature study groups. Predictable books and big books are used for teaching imbedded phonics instruction, concepts about print, and for shared reading. Children are allowed to choose recreational reading materials, as well as paired reading. Writing topics are chosen by children, often in a Writers’ Workshop format. Journals are used for responses to literature. Discussion questions often come from the students. Drama, poetry, and songs are used for enjoyment. Children are encouraged to use inventive spelling. Growth is measure by informal observable assessments.
The emphasis in a balanced, comprehensive approach is on process and product, using a whole-part-whole model. Skills and strategies are modeled alone and in context. Skills are taught based on the needs of the students, as per assessments. Decodable tests are used for phonics instruction; predictable texts are used to teach comprehension. Quality literature is read to the students to enhance listening comprehension. Student selected reading is allowed. Shared and guided reading models are used with phonics instruction as needed. Spelling is emphasized as a key to phonics. Word walls, word building, word sorting, and the like are utilized. Writing is often taught in mini-lessons through Writers’ Workshop and the Language Experience Approach. Drama, poetry, and songs are used for phonemic awareness and enjoyment. Journals are used for personal writing and for responses to literature. Experimentation with invented spelling is permitted but correct spelling is also taught. Reading groups are flexible and teachers use a variety of grouping patterns, such as small groups, paired reading, independent reading. Assessment is based on both informal and formal measures.

Coding. For stage two, a researcher-constructed code form was used to record frequencies of components explicitly stated and inferred from the descriptions of the activities from the teachers’ editions. The researcher collected data from 720 lessons; 180 lessons for kindergarten and first grade in both reading series programs. Both programs include 180 days worth of lessons corresponding to the typical 180 days in a school year. Each lesson could be coded for multiple components. Within a lesson, components could be identified multiple times; thus the percentages often exceeded 100%. In all cases, a higher percentage indicated more use of that component.
Data analysis. A descriptive analysis of the data was used. First, the researcher compared data on the components to determine what phonics, whole language, and balanced literacy approach components characterize kindergarten and first grade programs. The data analysis was conducted on each grade level separately. Then, the researcher contrasted the data for similarities and differences between the two reading programs. Finally, the researcher analyzed the data to measure to what extent the two reading programs reflect a balanced approach to literacy for kindergarten and first grade. The discussion of the results was segregated by grade level.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Chapter four is organized into two main sections, the analysis data from stage one and stage two data collection. Stage one data analysis addressed the study’s first research question and stage two data analysis results addressed research questions two and three.

Stage One

There were two major analyses done in stage one. The first was a thematic analysis of the definitions of the research articles and the second was program components. The first stage of the study corresponds to the study’s first research question: (1) How is balanced literacy defined in the educational literature? A thematic analysis of the literature is presented. The analysis was conducted on a sample of 34 research articles.

The term balance can be operationalized or defined in many significantly different ways. Therefore, the meaning of balance can vary tremendously. A common definition of balanced literacy is missing in the literature. Of the 34 articles read in this analysis, seven articles had no definition for balanced literacy; sixteen articles offered definitions reflecting a combination approach, usually phonics skill instruction with whole language approaches; six articles defined a balanced approach to literacy through a description of the components of the program or teaching method; and six articles defined balanced literacy using an approach with the teacher as the decision-maker. The various definitions are presented thematically.

Though 82% of the articles contained a stated definition for balanced literacy, almost one-fifth did not. This may be a result of the authors’ misconceptions that the
meaning of balanced literacy is universally understood. It is apparent from the analysis of
the literature that not only is there an inconsistency in the way balanced literacy is
defined, but there may also be a misconception on the part of educators regarding the
existence of these inconsistencies.

Despite the fact that the term eclectic was not on the coding form, the repeated
mentioning of the term in various articles warranted discussion. An eclectic approach
incorporated the positives of both phonics and whole language. High-quality literacy
instruction was determined when teachers were allowed to decide how to manage the
instruction (Pressley, Rankin, & Yokoi, 1996). An eclectic approach was recommended
from the research comparing phonics with whole language (Stahl, McKenna, &
Pagnucco, 1989). Successful literacy implementations of classroom components required
appropriate use of time, routines, and management. It is the teacher, not the materials,
which made a difference in literacy acquisition.

Thematic Analysis

The definitions of balance were organized thematically. Definitions were
categorized as reflecting a combination approach, describing a teaching methodology, or
advocating the teacher as the decision maker.

Combination Approach

The combination approach reflects definitions that include balancing curricula or
instructional practices, usually phonics skills with whole language tenets, such as
literature and comprehension. Researchers Fitzgerald and Cunningham (2002) outline
three commonalities in definitions of balance in the literature: First, there is usually a
focus on equal weighting of something. Second, when authors talk about their balanced
programs, they tend to talk about teaching method. The third commonality is an inferable shared perspective about which aspects of a student’s reading processes are most important.

The combination approach includes equal weighting of elements. Early childhood educator Quintero (2005) described the weighting as a curricular focus: “The current buzzword for literacy and for the method that is an entire curricular focus is balanced literacy. What is it? It is a combination of many previous methods introduced under the category whole language, plus some direct instruction methods such as phonics” (p. 29).

Further definitions ranged from simple, “excellent literacy instruction balances skills instruction . . . and holistic literacy opportunities” (Pressley et al., 2002, p. 1) and “balancing skills instruction and holistic reading and writing” (Pressley et al., 2001, p. 36) to more complex definitions, such as “balanced instruction involved more than just combining literature use and the teaching of skills. Rather, the balance was multi-dimensional and involved two equilibrium, a curricular balance between a literature-based focus and a skills/strategies focus and an instructional balance between teacher-initiated instruction and instruction responsive to students” (Ivey, Baumann, & Jarrard, 2000, p. 293).

In a review of the literature research article (Freppon & Dahl, 1998), a variety of definitions were presented by different researchers and authors. Three California Department of Education documents were reviewed with the recommendation for a balanced reading program that “provides separate, explicit skill instruction and language-rich literature instruction” (p. 241). Researcher Weaver stated that “a balanced reading program focuses on using skills like phonemic awareness and phonics knowledge in the
service of strategies for constructing meaning from text” (p. 245). Whereas Pressley’s “interpretation of balanced instruction includes systematic, explicit instruction and practice focused on decoding and comprehension” (p. 244). Finally, the author Tompkins “adopted the term balance as the best one to describe her theoretical stance on integrating the language arts with a focus on children’s literature” (p. 243), including literature as a means to teach skills.

Student success is cited as a motivation for using a balanced approach. For instance, in designing a research project using balanced literacy, Donat (2006) reiterated the National Research Council’s position on balanced literacy: “To enhance the impact of reading instruction, we need a balanced, comprehensive approach that can address the individualized needs of children while accelerating achievement . . . reading programs in the early grades should offer a balance of elements, including reading for meaning and experiences with high-quality literature; intense, intentional, and systematic instruction in phonics; and ample opportunities to read and write” (p. 306). Another definition stated “Research strongly indicates that students will be the most successful if a balanced approach is used, teaching phonics in a systematic fashion within the context of real stories” (Curry & Zyskowski, 1999, p. 3).

A school librarian (Grenawalt, 2004) defined balance in her article as “the pairing of reading skills instruction with reading management programs that require students to spend time reading and practicing these skills is at the heart of a balanced literacy program” (p. 13). The combination approach is echoed in another author’s definition: “Popularly know as ‘balanced literacy,’ this compromise position combines instruction in
skills with language-based, meaning-centered activities, relative to the instructional purpose and, just as importantly, appropriate to the activity” (Cooper, 2005, p. 236).

In summary, definitions including weighting describe highly effective teachers as using “both immersion in authentic literacy-related experiences and extensive explicit teaching through modeling, explanation, and mini-lesson re-explanations, especially with respect to decoding and other skills” (Wharton-McDonald et al., 1997, p. 519).

Teaching Methodologies

Rather than explicitly stating a definition of balance, 6 of the 34 articles reviewed described program components or a teaching methodology and the reader inferred the definition from the descriptions. These articles described curricula, components, instruction, grouping of students, time spent on each component, and assessment. The purpose of these articles was to explain how to conduct a balanced literacy approach in the classroom. These articles described programs which advocated balance in grouping, balance in text types, and balance in activities. The intended audience appeared to be teachers and administrators who would be interested in the practical applications of the approach and who would need a framework or model.

Researchers and authors also defined *balance* through descriptions of specific program components or teaching methodologies. In order to develop a balanced approach to beginning literacy instruction, Cunningham (1991) “developed a model which includes all four competing beginning reading approaches [writing, working with words, basal readers, and self-selected reading], giving approximately equal time to each” (p. 580). This definition was later described as a framework or “a model of multilevel, multimethod instruction” (Cunningham, Hall, & Defee, 1998, p. 652) which is also called
the Four Blocks, with basal readers replaced with guided reading. Whereas Cunningham was specific in her definitions, others are more general, such as this description of a reading program: “We provided a balanced program by combining activities taken from several reading approaches” (Hedrick & Pearish, 1999, p. 725).

Balanced literacy is sometimes referred to as a framework. For instance, “The framework outlines a lanced literacy program that immerses children in using written language. Several contexts in the framework support reading: 1) selected books are read aloud to children; 2) small group reading instruction is provided through guided reading; 3) time is provided for children to read independently, and 4) development of early reading strategies is supported through shared reading” (Button & Johnson, 1997, p. 262).

Administrators Stein and D’Amico (2002) developed a balanced literacy program based on the concept of “reading to [teacher reading aloud to class], reading with [shared reading], and reading by [independent reading]” the students. Writing and word study activities were later added to the program components.

Balance in grouping, balance in using text types, balance between cognition and affect, and balance between reading and writing are all components in Rasinski and Padak’s (2004) definition. “A balanced program is more than the simple conglomeration of disparate approaches to literacy instruction—in a truly balanced system, one element influences other parts of curriculum, and that inter-relationship of parts needs to be considered” (p. 92).

*Teacher as Decision Maker*

Lastly, balance was defined using the teacher as the primary decision maker—not a prescribed basal reading series. Through assessments, the teacher ascertains the needs
and interests of the students and develops lessons to accommodate the students. All aspects of literacy, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing are developed through appropriate teacher design rather than on equal amounts of time allotted per component. *How* the teacher instructs is as important as *what* the teacher teaches in this definition. Respect for teachers’ professional judgment and skillful implementation of the knowledge base of literacy development is repeated throughout these definitions. The teacher makes the decisions in the classroom independent of commercial materials.

The teacher as the decision maker is a common theme in several definitions of *balance*. Researchers (Baumann et al., 1998) surveyed teachers throughout America and their research suggested that “teacher’s design reading and language arts programs that provide children with a multifaceted, balanced instructional diet that includes an artful blend of direct instruction in phonics and other reading and writing stances along with a rich assortment of literature, oral language, and written language experiences and activities” (p. 646). Further, a balanced approach to literacy development “is a decision-making approach through which the teacher makes thoughtful choices each day about the best way to help each child become a better reader and writer” (Spiegel, 1998).

Commercial reading programs have included the term *balance* without offering a common definition. A healthy skepticism toward the purchase and acceptance of these materials is advocated by teacher educators (Hibbert & Iannacci, 2005). In response to prepackaged programs claiming to represent balanced literacy, they offer this view: “For us, balance is not about marketing or about the equal representation of select instructional components. Rather, it is far more comprehensive in its commitment to ensuring that all aspects of reading, writing, listening, viewing, and speaking receive appropriate rather
than equal emphasis within a literacy program” (p. 719). They emphasize the teacher as the professional decision maker. This belief is echoed by researcher Iaquinta (2006): “In a truly balanced literacy program, how you teach is as important as what you teach.

Skillful teachers use their knowledge of literacy development and literacy processes to decide where to go next, independently of the commercial materials they use” (p. 417).

Respect for the decision making of teachers is evident in this definition: “Individual teachers need to use their own professional judgment about the appropriate balance in the classroom every day” (Shellard, 2001, p. 5).

The definition that researchers (Heydon, Kibbert, & Iannacci, 2004) espouse is more comprehensive in scope. The underlying theme is teacher decision making.

“The version of balanced literacy that we espouse

- is fostered through reflective consideration, understanding, and use of whole-to-part, part-to-whole instruction;

- is a commitment to ensuring that all aspects of reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing, and representing receive context-appropriate emphasis within a language and literacy program;

- is about teachers discriminating among a variety of resources within the situation at hand, rather than relying on programs and products to manage literacy;

- expands perspectives of language and literacy education from an emphasis on method to include the range of sociocultural and political
factors that affect teachers’ classroom actions and student achievement; and

- cautions educators about the slipperiness of subjectivities, power relations, and the inability of an abstract theory or practice to adequately control, predict, or defined the needs of a classroom of students and as such insists that all theory and practice be situated within the relationship between teacher, student, time, and place” (p. 313).

**Program Components**

In order to identify the components of a balanced literacy program, the researchers used coding sheets while reading the articles. The frequencies and percentages of the balanced literacy elements equal weighting, method of classroom program, and reading knowledge are presented in Table 5. The measures included curriculum, components, instruction, grouping, time, assessment, local knowledge about reading, global knowledge about reading, and affective knowledge about reading.

The researcher conducted frequency counts and computed percentages of measures of three variables: equal weighting, method, and reading knowledge. Measures of curriculum, instruction, time, local knowledge, global knowledge, and affective knowledge, were mutually exclusive and each article received a single coding. Measures components, grouping, and assessment, categories were not mutually exclusive; therefore, coding sums are greater than 34.

A combination of literature-based and skills-based programs was the prevalent curriculum mentioned in the articles. The most frequently mentioned components; phonics instruction 79%, writing 74% and self-selected reading 71% suggested a pattern
Table 5  

*Number and Percentage (%) for Elements of Balanced Literacy for 34 Articles*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Number of Articles</th>
<th>% of Articles</th>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>vocabulary</td>
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<td>word study</td>
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Table 5 (continued)

*Number and Percentage (%) for Elements of Balanced Literacy for 34 Articles*

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Variable</th>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Number of Articles</th>
<th>% of Articles</th>
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<td><strong>Method</strong></td>
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<td>diagnose</td>
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<td><strong>Local Knowledge</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Global Knowledge</strong></td>
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<td>stated</td>
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<td><strong>Affective Knowledge</strong></td>
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</table>
for instruction: decoding skills coupled with practice of these skills in writing and reading.

Although phonics instruction was the most frequently mentioned reading methodology, little consistency in alternative methods of reading instruction was evident from the data. Self-selected reading was described most frequently, followed by shared reading, guided reading, and discussion groups/literature circles. Spelling and comprehension strategies were described in about half of the articles. The following components were described in 33% or less of the articles: vocabulary instruction, teacher reading aloud to students, learning centers, choral reading, phonemic awareness, mini-lessons, word study, shared writing, and word wall activities. Again, this provides evidence for inconsistencies in defining what balanced literacy is and what it looks like in the classroom.

The majority of the articles (53%) described instruction as a combination of teacher-initiated and instruction that is responsive to students’ needs or interests. This is significant because some basal reading programs have pacing guides and to implement the program effectively, it is critical to follow the pacing guides regardless of the students’ needs or interests (Lee, Ajayi, & Richards, 2007, Pease-Alvarez & Samway, 2008). A disconnect exists between the research literature and the basal reading series recommendations.

A myriad of grouping options was mentioned in the literature, such as individual reading (56%), small group instruction (53%) and one-on-one instruction (48%). Individualized instruction is often mentioned in the articles; however, it is not a model for grouping in the basal reading series programs analyzed. In this analysis, heterogeneous
ability grouping was represented in only 15% of the articles and homogeneous ability grouping was double that figure, mentioned in 30% of the articles. Guided reading proponents often suggest grouping students with similar needs, which may account for the percentage. Equal time allotted to each component is mentioned only in 9% of the articles in this analysis. Most of the articles (30%), did not mention time as a factor at all. This finding is consistent with a perspective that is against rigid “egg-timer pedagogy” (Hibbert, 2005, p. 721).

Assessment was another measure analyzed. Assessment was mentioned in 76% of the articles. The most frequently cited purpose of assessment was to measure progress and inform instruction, which suggested accountability.

Reading knowledge was an inferred perspective on the most important reading processes. Local reading knowledge refers to phonological awareness, sight words, phonics, orthography, word identification strategies, and vocabulary. Nearly all of the articles (98%) describe local reading as a goal of reading instruction. Global knowledge refers to understanding, interpretation, response to literature, and strategies to enable comprehension. Global knowledge was inferred from 95% of the research articles. Affective knowledge refers to feelings, positive attitude, motivation and desire to read. Affective knowledge as a reading outcome was inferred from 79% of the articles. The significance of these percentages suggested that most authors of balanced literacy articles value reading knowledge, regardless of equal weighting or method. The ultimate purpose of learning to read is to understand the text and to enjoy reading.

From the content analysis of the professional literature, a definition for balanced literacy emerged. The definition that follows is a synthesis of the literature: Balanced
literacy is a comprehensive approach that is an interface of skills-based and meaning-based instruction. All aspects of language development, including reading, listening, speaking, and writing receive appropriate rather than equal emphasis. The teacher chooses from numerous instructional strategies using both immersion in authentic literacy-related experiences and explicit teaching. Reading knowledge is the primary goal of literacy instruction.

The elements of a balanced literacy program were found in at least 50% of the analyzed articles. The curriculum is a combination of literature-based and skills-based philosophies. The components include shared reading, self-selected reading, phonics instruction, writing, and comprehension instruction. The instruction is a combination of teacher-initiated instruction and instruction that is responsive to students’ needs or interests. Small grouping and individual reading are the preferred methods for grouping students based on assessment. The outcome of literacy instruction is for students to gain reading knowledge in specifics of the reading task, comprehension of the texts, and enjoyment in reading.

The analysis of research articles resulted in recommendations for classroom implementation. Teachers should integrate a combination of traditional skills instruction within the context of actual reading and writing (Pressley et al., 1996). Teachers should aim for a balance in using explicit basic skills instruction with whole language activities (Baumann, Hoffman, Moon, & Duffy-Hester, 1998). Teachers should provide experiences with high-quality literature (Donat, 2006). Teachers should plan instruction that is responsive to student needs and interests (Ivey, Baumann, & Jarrod, 2000). Finally, teachers should use their knowledge of literacy to make decisions about
instruction (Iaquinta, 2006; Spiegel, 1998) and use their professional judgment about balance in the classroom (Shellard, 2001).

Summary of Stage One

Stage one consisted of analyzing 34 articles to ascertain definitions of the term balance and to identify program components of a balanced approach to literacy. Definitions varied widely and a common definition was not found. The analysis of definitions resulted in three broad categories for balanced literacy: a combination approach, teaching methodologies, and teacher as decision-maker. Elements of a balanced literacy program were also inconsistent. The analysis of the articles led to a research finding: confusion remains over the term balanced literacy.

Stage Two

Stage two consisted of analyzing the two state-approved reading series program in California. The second stage of the study corresponds to the study’s second and third research questions: (2) What phonics, whole language, or balanced approach components characterize kindergarten and first grade reading programs in California, and (3) To what extent do the two approved reading programs in California reflect a balanced approach to literacy for kindergarten and first grade?

Phonics, whole language, and balanced literacy approaches were selected for analysis. Within each approach to reading, the researcher identified eight components associated with each approach. The components came from three sources: the literature review, the articles used in stage one, and general knowledge of each approach. The number and percentage of lessons is presented in Table 6 for kindergarten and Table 7 for first grade.
Table 6

*Number and Percentage of Lessons in the Two Kindergarten Reading Programs Having the Indicated Reading Components*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Houghton-Mifflin Reading</th>
<th>Open Court Reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phonics</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonics Skills</td>
<td>456</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonemic Awareness</td>
<td>269</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alphabet Activities</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decodable Texts</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penmanship</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal Assessment</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spelling</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Whole Language</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big Books</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Print Awareness</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal Assessment</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Process</td>
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<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross Curricular</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Read Alouds</td>
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<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poetry</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drama</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Balanced Literacy</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiated Instruction</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible Groupings</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Management</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guided/Leveled Reading</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Strategies</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assess. Inform Instruction</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word Bank/Building</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Genres</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7

Number and Percentage of Lessons in the Two First Grade Reading Programs Having the Indicated Reading Components

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Houghton-Mifflin Reading 1st Grade</th>
<th>Open Court Reading 1st Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phonics</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonics Skills</td>
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<td>206</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>146</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spelling</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>115</td>
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<tr>
<td>Decodable Texts</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonemic Awareness</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>77</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alphabet Activities</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penmanship</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal Assessment</td>
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<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Whole Language</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Process</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Print Awareness</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Read Alouds</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal Assessment</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poetry</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross Curricular</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big Books</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drama</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Balanced Literacy</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Strategies</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiated Instruction</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible Groupings</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guided/Leveled Reading</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Management</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word Bank/Building</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assess. Inform Instruction</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Genres</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The components for a phonics approach were phonics skills, vocabulary, spelling, decodable texts, phonemic awareness, alphabet activities, penmanship, and formal assessment. Components for whole language included the writing process, print awareness, teacher read alouds, informal assessment, poetry, cross curricular connections, big books, and drama. The components for a balanced literacy approach included reading strategies, differentiated instruction, flexible groupings, guided/leveled reading, time management, word bank/building, assessment to inform instruction, and multiple genres.

Houghton-Mifflin also provides phonics elements for both kindergarten and first grade. Lessons are provided in phonemic awareness, alphabet activities, and phonics. Practice workbooks, a phonics center in the classroom, decodable books, and a phonics library are recommended to accompany the lessons. Students are expected to memorize high frequency words and word lists. Lessons in penmanship, grammar, mechanics, and vocabulary are designed to meet the California state standards. Writing topics come from the teacher’s editions. Formal assessments are packaged with the program.

Evidence of whole language components in Houghton-Mifflin includes some high-quality literature selections for reading aloud to students. A print-rich classroom is encouraged and suggestions are given to help students recognize environmental print. Listening to language is recommended with rhymes, songs, and finger plays, in addition to poetry that is written on posters for shared reading. The teacher’s editions explain how to implement learning centers into the classroom to aid in classroom management during guided reading groups and for links to content areas. Houghton-Mifflin recommends a book center, writing center, listening center, dramatic play center, art center, and science center. These are not provided with the program and the teacher must collect necessary
materials to implement the learning centers. Teaching thematically with links across the
curriculum through literature is provided in the library of books that accompany a series
adoption, such as math, social studies, science, music, and art. The themes for
kindergarten are: Look at Us; Colors All Around; We’re a Family; Let’s Count: Sunshine
and Raindrops; Wheels Go Around; Down on the Farm; Spring is Here; and A World of
Animals. The first grade themes are: All Together Now; Surprise; Let’s Look Around;
Family and Friends; Home Sweet Home; Animal Adventures; We Can Work It Out; Our
Earth; Special Friends; and We Can Do It! Other components usually associated with
whole language include big books, journals and activities for literature response,
comprehension questions, and informal assessments.

Balanced literacy elements are unmistakable in Houghton-Mifflin. A balance of
literature from classics and award-winning books for teacher read alouds, content-area
selections, decodable texts, and leveled books for guided reading supplement the
program. Sample schedules with time frames are included, but are not mandatory to use
to achieve success with the program. A pacing guide is suggested with the caveat to base
instruction on the needs of the students. Teacher-led small reading groups with texts at
the appropriate level are similar to guided reading. Various reading strategies are
presented: monitor/clarify, phonics, questioning, and summarizing. Shared writing,
interactive writing, and independent writing are discussed in the teacher’s editions. A
word pattern board is similar to word walls and the building words component is similar
to activities found in Words Their Way and the Four Blocks model. Differentiated
instruction is encouraged and additional resources are provided for the teacher for extra
support, English language learners, challenge activities, and classroom management ideas. One form of assessment is leveled reading passages.

The Open Court program, both kindergarten and first grade, offers many characteristics commonly associated with a phonics-based approach. These include alphabet cards and sound cards, student oral reading aloud for accuracy, pre-decodable and decodable books, word banks and high-frequency word cards, direct instruction, lessons on English language conventions, word analysis, vocabulary, grammar, usage, mechanics and penmanship. Comprehension questions are listed in each teacher’s edition and teacher led discussions are used to facilitate understanding. The lesson format is consistent in each grade level: (1) sounds and letters, such as phonemic awareness, letter recognition, and phonics; (2) reading and responding with shared reading, theme connections, writing, and speaking; and (3) language arts work on English language conventions. Student workbooks are plentiful. A multitude of assessments are provided in the program including formative and summative unit assessments.

Open Court offers a few suggestions for teachers that are typically associated with a whole language approach. Big books are used for shared reading and teaching print awareness. The teacher’s editions offer suggestions for room arrangement, including a reading area or classroom library, listening area, and a writing area. Open Court presents lessons on the writing process, writer’s craft mini-lessons, writing journals, writing portfolios, and writing seminars or conferencing with the teacher, as well as story crafting lessons. Informal assessments, such as teacher’s observation logs, are explained in the teacher’s editions. A theme is incorporated into each teacher’s edition. Themes are associated with whole language; usually themes are based on student interests, though.
Kindergarten themes include School; Shadows; Finding Friends; The Wind; Stick to it; Red, White and Blue; Teamwork; and By the Sea. The first grade themes are Let’s Read!; Animals; Things That Go; Our Neighborhood at Work; Weather; Journeys; Keep Trying; Games; Being Afraid; and Homes. Open Court provides theme connections to other curricular areas, such as science, social studies, fine arts, math, dramatization, and movement in a limited way. High-quality literature for teachers to read aloud to their students is a part of this structured program.

Balance literacy elements are evident in Open Court. Higher-level reading comprehension strategies are described in each edition such as, author’s purpose; categorizing; cause and effect; classifying; comparing and contrasting; drawing conclusions; main ideas and details; making inferences; sequencing, asking questions; clarifying, confirming predictions; making connections, monitoring and clarifying; reality and fantasy; summarizing; and visualizing. The writing traits of audience, elaboration, focus, ideas or content, organization, and word choice are taught in this program. Differentiated instruction is provided during workshop time. Students can self-select reading materials or finish projects while the teacher works one-on-one with students or in small groups, assesses, or conducts writing conferences. Materials are provided to meet the needs of a variety of levels in the classroom: worksheets for re-teaching or challenging students, intervention ideas, and strategies for English language learners. During the reading roundtable, students share with each other information gathered from their independent reading or partner reading. Estimated times are provided for each part of a lesson.
What phonics, whole language, and balanced literacy components characterized kindergarten and first grade reading programs in California? To answer the second research question, the researcher identified eight components typically associated with phonics, whole language, and balanced approach to reading. The components came from three sources: the research articles in the literature review and the research articles selected for stage one of the study, in addition to general knowledge of teaching practices associated with each approach. Phonics instruction includes phonemic awareness, alphabet activities, phonics skills, decodable texts, spelling, vocabulary, penmanship, and formal assessments. Whole language elements include big books, print awareness, drama, poetry, process writing, teacher read alouds of high-quality literature, cross-curricular connections, and informal assessment. Balanced literacy is associated with differentiated instruction, guided or leveled reading, word study activities, flexible groupings, a variety of reading strategies, multiple genres, time management, and assessments to guide instruction.

Both programs include 180 days worth of lessons corresponding to the typical 180 teaching days per the typical school year. An examination of 180 lessons per grade level and per reading program was conducted for a total of 720 lessons. The units of analysis were anything in each lesson that referred to the eight components explicitly, for example spelling, or implicitly, such as phonics skills, were inferences were made from the descriptions of the activities and lesson components. Frequencies for each component were coded. For example, a reading lesson may require one decodable text and in the same day, a follow-up independent reading of a different decodable text was recommended; thus, the number of items or lessons available for use exceeded the 180
day limit imposed by the researcher. More assessments, for example, are available for
different purposes, different levels, and for different needs. Because each lesson could be
coded for multiple components, the percentages could exceed 100%. In all cases, a higher
percentage indicated more use of that component.

Kindergarten

Similarities between *Houghton-Mifflin Reading* and *Open court Reading* for
kindergarten components are evident. Both Houghton-Mifflin (HM) and Open Court
(OC) provide multiple lessons in phonemic awareness development (HM 149%, OC
97%); alphabet activities (HM 745, OC 167%); phonics skills (HM 253%, OC 101%);
and vocabulary (HM 1095, OC 84%). Based on the data, both programs could be
considered phonics-based. Differences between the two programs are observable spelling
instruction, with Houghton-Mifflin providing no lessons and Open Court providing 50
lessons.

Whole language components that are similar in both programs include big book
lessons (HM 189%, OC 111%); print awareness (HM 74%, OC 138%); writing process
(HM 53%, OC 77%); and informal assessment including portfolio samples (HM 65%,
OC 96%). Neither program offers many lessons in drama, poetry, teacher read alouds, or
cross curricular links. Neither program can be classified as reflecting a whole language
approach to literacy.

In analyzing the balanced literacy components, similarities between both reading
programs are noticeable. Both programs provide daily opportunities for differentiated
instruction, flexible groupings, and time management suggestions. Leveled books are
incorporated in the Houghton-Mifflin program and are available for purchase with Open
In comparing the two programs, Houghton-Mifflin provides 165 lessons in guided or leveled reading (92%) whereas Open Court offers 146 lessons for meeting individual needs (81%). Differences between the programs are in lessons for word banks or word building (HM 67%, OC 21%); providing multiple genres of literature (HM 39%, OC 16%), and providing diagnostic assessments to inform instruction (HM 69%, OC 17%). Based on the data, both programs could be considered balanced literacy approaches.

First Grade

In comparing similarities between the Houghton-Mifflin and Open Court, both first grade teacher’s guides offer ample opportunities to teach phonics skills: phonemic awareness (HM 77%, OC 82%); phonics (HM 206%, OC 575%); decodable texts (HM 87%, OC 119%); spelling (HM 115%, OC 268%); and vocabulary (HM 146% OC 177%). Percentages over 100 include multiple parts of lesson, opportunities for extra practice, or reviewing previously taught concepts in addition to the new concept. The unusually high percentage for phonics instruction in Open Court (575%) includes daily spelling/sound cards. Explicit phonics skills lessons are 106 or 59% of the total school year. Although both programs contain many elements of a phonics-based program, Open Court provides more skills-based lessons than Houghton-Mifflin, including double the alphabet activities (HM 52%, OC 109%) and more formal assessments (HM 11%, OC 78%).

In terms of whole language components, both programs provide plenty of lessons in process writing (HM 107%, OC 102%). Houghton-Mifflin offers more lessons in print awareness (HM 95%, OC 33%) and Open Court includes more informal assessments (HM 23%, OC 177%). Neither program provides many lessons on drama, poetry, teacher
read alouds, or cross-curricular connections, nor would either program be considered a whole language approach.

In analyzing the balanced literacy components, it is evident that both programs provide daily opportunities for teachers to differentiate the instruction to meet the needs of students and both programs provide daily time management schedules. Both programs offer daily guided or leveled reading and daily word building activities versus Open Court’s 62%. A variety of reading strategies are presented in both programs (HM 164%, OC 58%); yet, Open Court relies heavily on phonics and decoding as a primary reading strategy. Diagnostic assessments to inform instruction are offered in Houghton-Mifflin (91%) more frequently than Open Court (38%).

When analyzing the data for frequencies over 50%, it is clear that both programs contain many components of a phonics-based approach including phonemic awareness, alphabet activities, phonics skills, decodable texts, spelling, and vocabulary. Open Court suggests more formal assessments than Houghton-Mifflin. Teacher read alouds are not suggested very often in either program (HM 44%, OC 37%). Reading aloud to students has a profound effect on literacy development and demonstrates reading strategies (connections, questioning, imagery) and fluency (Giorgis & Johnson, 2005). In examining the data on balanced literacy components, it is evident that both programs provide numerous frequencies over 50% including differentiated instruction, word study activities, and teaching a variety of reading strategies. Nonetheless, Houghton Mifflin provides more elements of a balanced approach than Open Court, including guided or leveled reading, flexible groupings, and assessments to inform instruction.
To what extent do the two approved reading programs in California reflect a balanced approach to literacy for kindergarten and first grade? The third research question was examined using the three themes which emerged from the literature analysis of definitions and the variables used in the first stage of the study.

Balanced literacy is most often defined as a combination approach, referring to implementing both phonics instruction and whole language tenets. The analysis of the two reading series coincides with this view. Both programs offer teacher-directed, explicit instruction in phonics and other skills. Both programs offer some of authentic literature in which to teach reading and augment the program, although Houghton-Mifflin offers more literature for reading aloud, small books for guided reading, and a classroom library in addition to decodable texts.

Balanced literacy is also defined by its teaching methodologies. Both reading series programs provide a variety of instructional methodologies (direct instruction combined with small group and individualized instruction) which provide a framework for the reading block. Both offer a multitude of lessons to differentiate the instruction for remedial, English language learners, and challenge students. Nonetheless, Houghton-Mifflin provides more differentiating during reading groups, both in structure and in providing leveled books to match reading levels. Both programs suggest times allotted per component and pacing guides; however, Houghton-Mifflin acknowledges the different needs of students and the pacing guide is more of a suggestion.

The third theme, teacher as decision-maker, is where differences between the two programs are evident. Open Court adheres to a strict pacing guide, with daily lessons and reading selections that must be followed. Houghton-Mifflin suggests a pacing guide, but
allows the teacher to decide how quickly to teach each unit. Reading materials for students are also different, with Open Court maximizing decodable books and Houghton-Mifflin offering leveled books to meet the needs of all students.

Teachers’ decision making is at the core of teaching. Classroom leaning contexts require teachers to make judgment calls about the curriculum, students’ behavior, classroom management, and student learning in order to respond appropriately to students’ learning needs, interests, and priorities (Lee, Ajayi, & Richards, 2007).

Instruction in both programs was largely teacher-initiated with time for instruction that is responsive to students’ needs provided daily in Houghton-Mifflin’s center time and Open Court’s workshop time, with students working in essentially learning centers. A variety of grouping options is suggested in both programs with a main lesson conducted daily in whole class format; small groups for reading instruction; partner and individual reading for practice; and individual one-on-one time, as needed, during center time. Both programs offer time suggestions for each component on a daily basis. Both programs provide formal, informal, and diagnostic assessments with Open Court providing more of all types of assessments for the teacher to use. In terms of reading knowledge, both programs focus on local knowledge and global knowledge. Affective knowledge is implied in both programs, but the stories and activities in Houghton-Mifflin are more engaging.

Overall, *Houghton-Mifflin Reading* and *Open Court Reading* reflect a balanced literacy approach for kindergarten. For first grade, *Houghton-Mifflin Reading* reflects a balanced approach and *Open Court Reading* reflects a phonics approach.
Summary of Stage Two

Stage two began with an analysis of the two approved reading programs in California, *Houghton-Mifflin Reading* and *Open Court Reading*. Three approaches to reading were analyzed: phonics, whole language, and balanced literacy. Each approach was characterized by eight components typically associated with the approach. Kindergarten and first grade teacher editions were examined for 180 days worth of lessons for a total of 720 lessons.

In comparing both programs, it is evident that both programs provide components from all three approaches: phonics, whole language, and balanced literacy. The phonics components that characterize kindergarten and first grade reading programs in California include phonics skills, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, alphabet activities, and decodable texts. The whole language components that are found in both programs include big books, print awareness, teacher read alouds, and writing process lessons. The balanced literacy components include differentiated instruction, flexible groupings, time management, guided/leveled reading, reading strategies, word bank/building, and assessment to inform instruction.

In contrasting the data for both programs, it is clear that both programs for both grade levels are more similar than different. Thus, another research finding was established: the programs *Houghton-Mifflin Reading* and *Open Court Reading* are more similar than different.

Finally, the researcher ascertained to what extent the two approved reading programs reflect a balanced approach to literacy for kindergarten and first grade. Based on the data, *Houghton-Mifflin Reading* and *Open Court Reading* reflect a balanced
literacy approach for kindergarten. For first grade, *Houghton-Mifflin Reading* reflects a balanced approach and *Open Court Reading* reflects a phonics approach. Another finding was made: *Open Court Reading* reflects a balanced approach to literacy for kindergarten, in contrast to public opinion.
CHAPTER FIVE
SUMMARY, LIMITATIONS, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

Chapter five summarizes the overall findings of the study and discusses possible explanations for and limitations of the study findings. Research and practical implications are discussed. Finally, recommendations for future research are presented.

Summary of the Study

There is no argument that children need to learn how to read. The problem is how to teach reading to emergent and beginning readers. Over the years, experts have debated about the best approach to teach reading with proponents for phonics or skill-based instruction on one side and advocates for whole language or meaning-based instruction on the other side. Recently, a centrist view has emerged in the literature calling for a balance between approaches. The question remains, though, what is a balanced approach? This study examined the current research literature to determine a comprehensive definition of balanced literacy.

Reading methodology is not the only debate; a variety of reading models also exist. The transmission model is associated with phonics instruction. In this model, teachers assume the responsibility of directly transmitting information, such as the knowledge of letter sounds and symbols, to their students through explicit instruction and systematic teaching of the code that is the foundation of the English alphabet. The transactional model is aligned with whole language and includes integrating the four language modes of reading, writing, listening, and speaking across all the curricular areas. Transactional instruction emphasizes that getting meaning from text involves an active thinker transacting with text to construct meaning. The Interactive Model is
associated with balanced literacy. The interactive model is based on the theoretical position that reading involves processing text and using one’s background knowledge and language ability to comprehend the text.

Phonics or skills-based instruction is a traditional approach to teach beginning reading. Research suggests that phonics instruction can benefit students in kindergarten through third grade who experience difficulty with learning to read. Phonics instruction can produce positive results for students of different ages, abilities, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Phonics instruction is not universally lauded as the only way to teach reading; however, critics of this approach note the monotony, the fragmentation of language, memorization of abstract rules and exceptions, and the reliance on teacher’s manuals and supplementary materials to successfully implement this approach.

The whole language approach to literacy acquisition emphasizes the interrelationship of the four modes of language: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Whole language advocates believe in meaningful, authentic activities to facilitate reading and writing tasks. The classroom teacher includes high-quality literature and does not rely on teacher’s manuals, workbooks, or worksheets. Whole language has been controversial as well. Critics note the lack of structure in this approach, inconsistencies in instruction, the unnaturalness of reading and writing, and the lack of empirical data to support this approach.

In response to these two different approaches, researchers, teachers, and other stakeholders called for a balanced approach that combines the best from phonics instruction and the best from whole language. Various definitions of balanced literacy are
described in the literature in addition to an inconclusive list of components of a balanced literacy program are presented in the research literature.

The philosophy of individual teachers’ beliefs about literacy acquisition is often not important because most teachers rely on basal readers for reading instruction. Basal reading programs are the core of classroom reading instruction. Since California is a centralized adoption state and school districts must adopt curricular material from the approved list in order to receive state instructional materials funding, this study examined the two approved reading series available for compatibility with a balanced literacy approach.

The purpose of this study was to clarify the term balanced literacy and to provide a comprehensive list of components based on the research literature. The study then assessed what phonics, whole language, and balanced literacy components characterized the programs kindergarten and first grade reading programs used in California. Finally, this study analyzed to what extent the two approved reading programs in California reflect a balanced approach to literacy for kindergarten and first grade.

The study was divided into two stages. In stage one, 34 articles were selected for inclusion in the study based on criteria limitations. Electronic searches of two educational databases were used to generate a list of articles. The articles gathered for analysis extended from 1991 to 2006 and were from refereed journals. Abstracts of the studies located in the electronic search were reviewed to identify articles appearing to meet the criteria for inclusion in the analysis.

Once the initial articles were identified, a pilot test was completed using a researcher-designed code form and a trained second reader. The pilot test revealed flaws
in the coding form and in the initial set of articles. The researcher applied more stringent criteria for inclusion and recreated the coding form. The final corpus contained 34 articles. Each article was read at least three times each using a revised code form. To insure reliability, a second coder was trained and also read the articles. A thematic analysis of definitions was created and frequency counts of elements of balanced literacy were computed.

Stage two consisted of an examination of the two approved reading programs in California. Each program’s kindergarten and first grade teacher editions were examined. A typical school year is comprised of 180 school days; thus, 180 lessons for each grade level were examined for a total of 720 lessons. Eight components for each approach were identified by the researcher. For a phonics approach, the researcher coded phonemic awareness, alphabet activities, phonics skills, decodable texts, spelling, vocabulary, penmanship, and formal assessment. The components for a whole language approach included big books, print awareness, drama, poetry, writing process, teacher read alouds, cross-curricular connections, and informal assessment. A balanced literacy approach components were differentiated instruction, guided or leveled reading, word bank/word building activities, flexible groupings, reading strategies, time management, multiple genres, and assessment used to inform assessment. The units of analysis were anything in the lesson that referred to eight components either explicitly or through inference based on the description of the activity. A total number for each component was tallied and percentages computed for of both reading programs.

Finally, the study explored to what extent the two approved reading programs in California reflect a balanced approach to literacy for kindergarten and first grade. This
was achieved through using the themes that emerged from the analysis of literature in stage one and the examination of the two reading programs in stage two.

The study resulted in four findings. Disparate definitions about the term *balance* in the educational literature continue; the programs are more similar than different; *Open Court* reflects a balanced approach to literacy; and the research literature suggestions for classroom applications and the basal series recommendations are not connected.

Definitions of *balance* were diverse. The definitions were organized thematically: (a) combination approach; (b) teaching methodologies; and (c) teacher as decision maker. Most articles defined *balance* as a combination of phonics skill instruction with whole language activities. Some articles defined a balanced approach through the description of specific teaching methodologies or reading programs. Finally, a few articles defined balanced literacy as relying on teachers’ professional judgment to decide how to teach reading and writing skills.

The analysis of 720 lessons revealed that both programs are more similar than different, both in structure and content. Both programs offer a plethora of phonics lessons, very few whole language activities, and many components of balanced literacy.

Although *Open Court* is often associated with a phonics approach, the findings of this study suggest that the program reflects a balanced approach. The suggestions for implementation of the program, the structure of the classroom, and the groupings for instruction parallel a balanced approach to literacy.

The inferred classroom applications from the research articles are not consistent with the basal reading series recommendations. Five suggestions from the literature were found to be in contradiction with the programs. First, researchers suggest an integration
of traditional skills instruction within the context of actual reading and writing tasks. Both programs provide a multitude of phonics lessons and the lessons are taught in isolation—not using authentic reading and writing tasks. Second, researchers suggest a balance of whole language activities and explicit skills instruction. Neither program offers many whole language activities. Third, researchers recommend providing high-quality literature. Both programs had less than 50% of lessons, for both grade levels, in teacher read alouds, poetry, drama, or providing multiple genres. Fourth, researchers suggest that instruction should be responsive to student needs and interests. Although both programs offer suggestions for high, average, and low readers; neither program allows for student interests. Fifth, researchers suggest that the teacher, not the materials, teach students to read. The professional judgment of the teacher is lacking in both programs, with the daily lessons, time management guidelines, and pacing guides. Although Houghton-Mifflin Reading does allow for flexibility regarding the time management guidelines, overall, it is a program designed to manage instruction.

Limitations

This study has limitations in the following areas: (a) limitations related to the sampling design, (b) limitations related to research methodology, and (c) limitations related to the validity and reliability.

In the first stage of the study, sampling limitations occurred due to limitations placed on the genre studied, inclusion criteria, and access to articles. A purposefully selected sample of research articles was examined.

In order to obtain a more concise view of the term balanced literacy, it was decided to base research analysis on professional journals. This choice was made to
provide a distinct focus from which the analysis could develop. Books, websites, videos, and other media were excluded from the study, as were opinion papers, commentaries, reference materials, speeches, meeting papers, and ERIC documents. Thus, the results of the stage one do not reflect necessarily the full range of possible materials from the larger population of publications, which could be a sampling error.

The consistency of resources analyzed was also considered in the procedural development for the research analysis. In analyzing resources of the same genre, the consistency of style, format, purpose, and length could more easily be maintained.

Inclusion criteria limited the number of articles used for analysis. The databases used for the searches were limited to ERIC and Psych Info. Abstracts of the studies located in the electronic search were reviewed to identify articles appearing to meet the criteria for inclusion in the analysis.

Articles needed to appear in a refereed journal. Peer review served to insure that the quality of the studies met research standards in the field. Dates of publication, 1985-2006, served as a further limitation. The research articles needed to focus on the teaching of reading in English and be published in English. Further, the research needed to involve classroom teaching. Short-term laboratory studies and studies that involve teaching of very limited time frame, such as tutoring, were excluded. The students in the studies were limited to regular education students, not special education students. Lastly, the focus of the research needed to be on early elementary students, kindergarten through third grade.

The database searches occurred in the Gleeson Library at the University of San Francisco and Shields Library at the University of California, Davis. The sample was limited to articles accessible from the libraries. Four articles were located via inter-library
loan. A further sampling limitation was the occurrence of authors appearing in the
database searches multiple times, either as a primary author or secondary author.
Researchers Baumann, Cunningham, Fitzgerald, and Wharton-McDonald appear twice
and Pressley appears three times on the final list of articles used for analysis.

The second stage of the study was limited to analysis of programs approved by
the California Department of Education for use in the public schools: *Houghton Mifflin
Reading* published by Houghton Mifflin, and *Open Court Reading* published by
SRA/McGraw-Hill. The materials were located at the library at California State
University, Sacramento.

Methodological limitations are evident in three areas: instrumentation, bias, and
researcher expectancies. Acknowledgement of these limitations may contribute to the
interpretation of the findings.

A researcher-constructed coding form was designed for stage one and stage two
of the research study. Though no single checklist can be inclusive of each characteristic
that all educators attribute to balanced literacy, these coding forms encompassed the
primary attributes found in the literature analyzed during this study.

This study examined research articles and basal reading series program. A more
comprehensive view of balanced literacy could be made by observing teachers in the
classroom to ascertain the extent to which definitions of balanced literacy are actually
used as well as which components are implemented. A triangulation of data would create
a more complete definition of what balanced literacy is and how it is interpreted in the
classroom setting.
Another methodological limitation is bias. The potential for bias was apparent in the mono-method chosen for analyzing the research articles in stage one and in using only a checklist in stage two. Multiple measures, such as observations of classroom teachers professing to use a balanced approach, in addition to the literature analysis and analysis of the basal reading materials would have aided in lowering the potential for bias. Unintentionally evaluation bias may have been perceptible by both the researcher and the research assistant. These potential biases were mitigated to the extent possible through a pilot study, training, and computation of inter-rater reliability, and consistency in protocol for examining materials.

Inadvertent researcher expectancies are also a limitation. Previous experiences with classroom teaching, use of basal reading materials, and reading methodologies may have contributed to unintended expectancies in both stages of the study.

Construct validity refers to the degree to which inferences can legitimately be made from the operationalizations or definitions in the study to the theoretical constructs on which those definitions were based (Trochim, 1985). Both stages of this study included researcher-developed coding forms and construct validity was not conducted; thus, the study was limited by measurement error in the coding forms.

Reliability refers to the quality of measurement and the consistency of the measures. To reduce measurement error, the researcher conducted a pilot test in stage one of the study. Inter-rater reliability was used to assess the degree to which different raters gave consistent estimates of the same phenomenon. After training a second coder thoroughly, an 88% agreement was established and differences were resolved through discussions.
Discussion of Findings

The discussion is organized by four major findings: (a) confusion remains over the term *balanced literacy*; (b) the programs *Houghton-Mifflin Reading* and *Open Court Reading* are more similar than different; (c) contrary to public perception, *Open Court Reading* reflects a balanced approach to literacy; and (d) a disconnect exists between the research literature and the basal reading series recommendations.

*Terminology Confusion*

Definitions for balanced literacy have been as diverse as the articles in which they are contained. No definitive conclusions can be made even regarding what balanced literacy is, though the majority (76%) described the curriculum of balanced literacy as a blend of literature-based and skills-based approaches, more commonly referred to whole language and phonics. The combination approach includes balancing curricula or instructional practices, often referred to as an equal weighting of elements. This approach is sometimes referred to as a compromise, suggesting that each philosophy (skills-based or holistic) has merits and faults. The review of the literature suggested that some children do learn to read with phonics and some children do learn literacy tasks in whole language classrooms and conversely, some children do not. Thus, a compromise was made; borrowing the best practices from each approach. However, this research suggests that confusion still exists over the term *balanced literacy*.

Little consistency was found in the descriptions of the components of a balanced literacy program. Only phonics instruction, writing, self-selected reading, comprehension, and shared reading appeared in more than half of the analyzed articles.
Grouping students for instruction, time, and assessment were not consistent from article to article.

*Similarities*

The analysis of two approved reading programs in California, *Houghton-Mifflin Reading* and *Open Court Reading*, revealed that the two programs are more similar than different. The similarities extend to lesson components, format, and organization of the reading program. *Open Court Reading* has long been associated with a phonics approach (Lee, Ajayi, & Richards, 2007).

For both kindergarten and first grade, both programs offer a significant number of lessons featuring phonics components, very few whole language components, and many components of a balanced program. The demand for more phonics and balance (California Department of Education, 1999) was met through both programs. Both programs provide explicit instructional lessons in phonics approach components, such as phonics skills, vocabulary, spelling, decodable texts, phonemic awareness, and alphabet activities. Other than lessons on using the writing process, neither program suggested components associated with whole language. Further, both programs provide opportunities to utilize strategies associated with a balanced literacy approach, such as teaching a variety of reading strategies, differentiated instruction, flexible groupings, and time management.

The format of the teachers’ editions does not differ much from one program to the next. Although *Open Court Reading* is often characterized as a scripted program, this was not the case in this study. Both programs provide multiple teachers’ editions with lessons presented in a weekly format. Suggestions for differentiating instruction to meet the
needs of all students are given, as well as leveled books to match students with their reading abilities. Rather than relying solely on phonics as a reading strategy, both programs provide lessons on other reading strategies, such as using context to read an unknown word.

The organization of the reading instruction varied little from program to program. Both programs emphasized the importance of classroom organization of time, grouping of students, and the physical environment. Each lesson plan component came with recommendations for the amount of time the teacher should spend on each section of the lesson. Differentiated instruction is evident through groupings of students, such as high, average, or low. Students not in direct instruction with the teacher would be working in learning centers around the classroom. The characteristics of a balanced literacy approach are evident in both programs.

Neither basal reading approach provided much in terms of a whole language approach to literacy. Whole-language advocates often report that whole language and skills approaches cannot exist together because they are in contradiction and the results of this study confirm that observation. Whole language does not imply that classrooms will be identical environments with compulsory activities and strategies are used (Bergeron, 1990); however, if these two programs are implemented as suggested, identical or at least very similar classrooms would be observed.

Open Court Reading and a Balanced Approach

Open Court is associated with a phonics approach (Lee, Ajayi, & Richards, 2007; Long, 2004). Contrary to public perception, this study revealed that Open Court also contains many elements of a balanced approach to literacy, especially at the kindergarten
level. At the kindergarten level, the program provides an abundance of lessons in the phonics components analyzed in this study (phonics skills, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, and alphabet activities) but the program provides more lessons in balanced literacy components (differentiated instruction, flexible groupings, time management, leveled reading, and reading strategies).

Although the first grade program does indeed contain more phonics components, it also provides a significant number of lessons in balanced literacy. In addition, the format of the teachers’ manual and the suggested organizational structure of the reading program in the classroom reflect a balanced approach to literacy.

**Disconnect Between Research Literature and Basal Readers Recommendations**

The research literature suggestions for classroom applications are different from the basal reading series recommendations. Five implications from the literature were found to be in contradiction with the programs or absent from the programs.

The research literature on balanced literacy suggested that classroom teachers integrate a combination of traditional skills instruction with context of actual reading and writing tasks (Pressley et al., 1996). Both basal reading programs provide ample opportunities for traditional skills instruction, however, without the benefit of authentic reading and writing tasks. Stories are selected by the publishers, not the teacher. Students are given writing prompts and workbooks, again in contrast to suggestions by researchers.

Researchers (Wharton-McDonald et al., 1997) suggested that teachers should use an instructional balance of whole language activities and explicit basic skills instruction. Neither program offers many whole language activities. Further, researchers (Baumann,
Hoffman, Moon, & Duffy-Hester, 1998) surveyed public school teachers and found that teachers generally do not assume an either-or approach to phonics and whole language; rather, the teachers provided students with a balanced program involving both reading skill instruction and immersion in enriched literacy experiences. Both programs reviewed in this study are lacking in enriched literacy experiences.

The National Research Council’s (Donat, 2006) position on balanced literacy includes reading for meaning and experiences with high-quality literature. Both basal readers studied are weak in providing high-quality literature, either for teacher read alouds or in exposing students to multiple genres of literature.

Instruction that is responsive to student needs and interests (Ivey, Baumann, & Jarrard, 2000) is lacking in either program. The publishers claim that student needs can be met through the use of leveled books (high, average, or low). Student interests, though, are not addressed in either program. Students use the basal reading series books, which contain stories selected by the publishers. A variety of books at various levels, genres, and subjects would help to engage reluctant readers.

A balanced approach to literacy is a decision-making approach (Spiegel, 1998) wherein the teacher makes thoughtful choices each day regarding how to help each child become a more accomplished reader and writer. Both basal reading series have made the decisions for the teacher. Daily lessons and pacing guides are included regardless of each individual class’s needs, interests, or developmental level. The teacher is not the decision maker in implementing either program, in contrast to researchers’ recommendations. For instance, a researcher stated: “Skillful teachers use their knowledge of literacy development and literacy processes to decide where to go next, independently of the
commercial materials they use” (Iaquinta, 2006, p. 417). Professional judgment about the appropriate balance in the classroom (Shellard, 2001) is made by the teacher. Decision making is missing these two programs.

Researchers (Hibbert & Iannacci, 2005) suggested that teachers have skepticism toward commercial reading programs claiming to represent balanced literacy. Balance is about teachers “discriminating among a variety of resources within the situation at hand, rather than relying on programs and products to manage literacy” (p. 313).

Implications of Findings

Research Implications

The inconsistencies found in the review of literature suggested that a common definition is needed of balance. If educators are to accept the concept of balanced literacy, instructional changes are necessary. These changes require the support of professionals, both in and out of the classroom, as well as proponents on both sides of the reading wars. Many whole language advocates report that whole language and skills approaches cannot exist together because they are in contradiction (Bergeron, 1990) and many skills-based supporters believe that phonics is the only way to teach reading and a balanced approach is not possible (Moats, 2000). Further research into balanced literacy is needed based on this study and others (Mulhern, 2002).

Directions for future research could include the following: What constitutes an instructional reading program? Is it text characteristics, such as word counts, cognitive load, or linguistic components (Hiebert et al., 2005)? Is it possible to design an instructionally sound program while maintaining engaging storylines or informational content? A number of commercial reading programs have satisfied the requirement for a
strong research base, yet there appears to be limited evidence that any of them produce a conclusive and consistent effect on overall reading achievement (Manzo, 2004).

Components to beginning reading programs appear to have been added in response to mandates of policymakers and perceptions of the desires of consumers rather than on the basis of coherent theoretical perspectives on children need to learn to become successful readers and how they acquire this information. Beginning reading texts need to be revisited from the vantage point of the processes and content of successful beginning reading acquisition. Could a basal reading series program be designed to emphasize phonics knowledge and simple high-frequency words, combined with high-quality literature and leveled books for reading?

Practical Implications

In an interview with reading researchers (Freppon & Dahl, 1998), reading expert Allington posed the question: “Who controls the decisions about what is balanced instruction and what isn’t? Is it the state, the district, or the teacher” (p. 246)? These questions are timely as California continues to be a centralized adoption state. Schools and districts are requiring teachers to utilize commercial reading curricula and adhere to pacing and testing schedules designed to enforce their implementation of these curricula. For example, recently researchers conducted a study in a low-income area in the Bay Area (Pease-Alvarez & Samway, 2008). School wide efforts to enforce a mandated reading program resulted in a pedagogical environment that jeopardized the literacy learning opportunities available to students. Teachers reported feeling undermined and disrespected with the implementation of mandated basal reading series. The educational research on balanced literacy suggested that teachers should be the ultimate decision
maker; yet, teachers in the Bay Area study stopped focusing on the needs and interest of children because most of their instruction was decided for them by the teaching manual. The teachers felt enormous pressure to comply if they were to keep their jobs.

Why use a balanced approach to literacy at all? There are no absolutes when one deals with learning and children (Flippo, 1998). Children do not all learn in the same way and consequently, approaches with particular emphases are apt to result in some children learning to read and others not (Cunningham, Hall, & Defee, 1998). The premise behind a balanced approach is to meet the needs of most children because such approaches are not restricted to one way of developing literacy (Spiegel, 1998). There is no single combination of instructional techniques that works best for every child in every classroom (Shellard, 2001). A balanced approach acknowledges the inherent differences of students and provides an alternative for teachers.
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* Indicates articles used for analysis


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APPENDIX A

Codebook for Stage 1

**Article ID:** Fill in the article’s identification number, as indicated on the article identification list.

**Coder ID:** Indicate the number of the individual who coded that sheet.

**Stated Definition:** Indicate the stated definition in the article verbatim.

**EQUAL WEIGHTING** refers to a focus on equal weighting of something.

a) Curriculum
   1) Literature-based refers to using literature to teach reading as opposed to controlled vocabulary texts, decodable texts, or basal readers. It is associated with whole language.
   2) Skills-based refers to a structured reading program, usually phonics-based, where the task of reading is reduced to skills that build upon previously learned skills.
   3) Combination of literature-based and skills-based refers to using both approaches to teach reading.
   4) Not stated

b) Components
   1) Guided reading is when students work in small groups to read as independently as possible a text the teacher has selected and introduced to them. This text should be at the group’s instructional level, that is, the students will be able to read the text with 90% to 94% accuracy. Students learn to self-monitor their own reading behaviors and use appropriate strategies to fully decode and comprehend the text.
   2) Shared reading is a strategy in which students read a text with the help of a teacher in an effort to learn to read by reading. Shared reading is a step between reading to students and independent reading by students. It takes place in a non-threatening learning environment in which risk-taking, mistakes, and approximations are seen as a normal part of learning, not signs of failure. The purpose is for students to become independent in reading texts that would otherwise be too difficult.
   3) Self-selected reading is when students choose their own reading material to read; sometimes called Sustained Silent Reading (SSR), Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) time, or Independent Reading.
   4) Literature Circles is an instructional strategy where students read a piece of literature and meet as a group to discuss it. The discussions are open-ended and focus on binging the literature and reader together.
   5) Phonics instruction is a system of teaching reading and spelling that stresses basic symbol-sound relationships and their application in decoding words.
6) Journal writing is a place for children to write regularly to record life events of their choosing or, for very beginning writers, to complete sentence stems offered by the teacher. At the beginning reader stage, journals are often accompanied by illustrations and are rarely corrected.

7) Writers’ Workshop is a stable, predictable format for writing that balances instruction and modeling with adequate time for composing, sharing, and publishing. A constant, sustained time for writing is set aside each day. Through modeled writing and discussion about it, students learn about the recursive nature of the writing process.

8) Word Wall is a wall or other surface in the classroom where words students are learning or have mastered are posted. Word walls may be used to accomplish different goals. Strategies for remembering words, their spellings, and their meanings are discussed as words are added to the wall.

9) Morning message or shared writing refers to when children observe as the teacher writes a meaningful morning message addressed to all the children on the board about a specific event that is planned for the day, or an interesting question. It is used as an instructional tool for discussing skills children are learning, such as conventions of writing or phonic elements.

10) Learning centers or stations (literature response activities, technology, music, dramatic play, seatwork, word work, other ____________). Learning centers refer to a location within the classroom in which children are presented with instructional materials, specific directions, clearly defined objectives, and/or provisions for self-evaluation.

11) Other
12) Not stated

c) Instruction

1) Teacher initiated instruction refers to direct instruction; teacher control of the learning environment through structured, systematic lessons, goal setting, choice of activities, and feedback.

2) Instruction responsive to students’ needs or interest refers to the teacher planning instruction that pinpoints the needs or interests of this particular group of students.

3) Combination of both
4) Not stated

1) METHOD

a) Grouping

1) Whole class

2) Homogeneous ability grouping refers to grouping students based on similar abilities or needs.

3) Heterogeneous ability grouping refers to mixed-ability grouping.

4) Partner reading is also called dyad reading, which is a paired reading activity in which students alternately read aloud or listens and summarize what their partner has read.

5) Individual reading is reading independently and is usually silent reading.

6) Not stated
b) Time
   1) Amount of time allotted per component refers to any mention in the article about how much time is devoted to each component.
   2) Equal amount of time per component refers to any mention in the article about equal time devoted to each component.
   3) Not stated

c) Classroom Arrangement
   1) Structure refers to classroom arrangement during reading time. Are the students working in work books at their seats while the teacher is conducting reading groups? Are the students working in learning centers while the teacher is conducting reading groups?
   2) Reading materials refers to books and other print materials that are available to the students/
   3) Other
   4) Not stated

d) Assessment
   1) Diagnose refers to the purpose of assessment; in this case, to diagnose reading problems.
   2) Inform instruction refers to the purpose of assessment; in this case, the teacher will use the assessment to data to plan instruction to meet the students’ needs.
   3) Measure progress refers to the purpose of assessment; in this case, to measure progress, or lack of progress, over time.
   4) Not stated

2) READING KNOWLEDGE
a) Local Knowledge:
   Phonological awareness is the study of the sound system of language; including phonemic awareness which is the ability to attend to sounds in the context of a word independent of the meaning of the word. Sight word repertoire is words that are recognized by the reader immediately, without having to resort to decoding. Knowledge of sound-symbol relationships or phonics is the association of speech sounds with printed symbols. Knowledge of basic orthographic patterns is the understanding of the writing system of a language, specifically the correct sequence of letters, characters, or symbols. Variety of word identification strategies including graphophonics (based on letter-sound relationships); syntactic (based on grammar or structure); semantic (based on meaning); and pragmatic. Word meanings refers to vocabulary.

b) Global Knowledge:
   understanding; interpretation; response to reading; strategies to enable comprehension

c) Affective Knowledge:
   feelings; positive attitude; motivation; desire to read
APPENDIX B

Coding Form for Stage 1

*Article ID* ____________    *Coder ID* ____________

Stated Definition:

3) **EQUAL WEIGHTING**
   a) Curriculum
      1) Literature based
      2) Skills-based
      3) Combination of literature based and skills based
      4) Not stated
   b) Components
      1) Guided reading
      2) Shared reading
      3) Self-selected reading
      4) Literature Circles
      5) Phonics instruction
      6) Journal writing
      7) Writers’ Workshop
      8) Word Wall activities
      9) Morning message or shared writing
      10) Learning centers or stations (literature response activities, technology, music, dramatic play, seatwork, word work, other ____________)
      11) Other
      12) Not stated
   c) Instruction
      1) Teacher initiated instruction
      2) Instruction responsive to students’ needs or interest
      3) Combination of both
      4) Not stated
4) METHOD
   a) Grouping
      1) Whole class
      2) Homogeneous ability grouping
      3) Heterogeneous ability grouping
      4) Partner reading
      5) Individual reading
      6) Not stated
   b) Time
      1) Amount of time allotted per component
      2) Equal amount of time per component
      3) Not stated
   c) Classroom Arrangement
      1) Structure: Learning Centers
      2) Reading materials
      3) Other
      4) Not stated
   d) Assessment
      1) Diagnose
      2) Inform instruction
      3) Measure progress
      4) Not stated

5) READING KNOWLEDGE
   a) Local Knowledge: phonological awareness, sight word repertoire,
      knowledge of sound-symbol relationships, knowledge of basic
      orthographic patterns, variety of word identification strategies,
      word meanings

   b) Global Knowledge:
      understanding, interpretation, response to reading, strategies to enable
      comprehension

   b) Affective Knowledge:
      Feelings, positive attitude, motivation, desire to read
APPENDIX C

Code Sheet for Stage 2

Reading Series: Houghton-Mifflin/Open Court  Grade: Kindergarten/First Grade

**Phonics**
- Phonemic Awareness
- Alphabet Activities
- Phonics Skills
- Decodable Texts
- Spelling
- Vocabulary
- Penmanship
- Formal Assessment

**Whole Language**
- Big Books
- Print Awareness
- Drama
- Poetry
- Writing Process
- Teacher Read Alouds
- Cross Curricula
- Informal Assessment

**Balanced Literacy**
- Differentiated Instruction
- Guided/Leveled Reading
- Word Banks/Word Building
- Flexible Groupings
- Variety of Reading Materials
- Time Management
- Multiple Genres
- Assessments to Inform Instruction