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Balanced Literacy Versus Basal Reading Instruction for Urban African-American, Title I Third-Grade Students

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**BALANCED LITERACY VERSUS BASAL READING INSTRUCTION
FOR URBAN AFRICAN-AMERICAN, TITLE I THIRD-GRADE STUDENTS**

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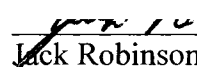
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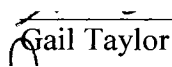
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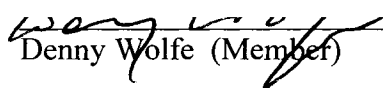
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ABSTRACT

Reading achievement in the United States is of paramount concern to the educational community and to the general public. Many students at the elementary level in particular are leaving school with inadequate skills to read strategically and to function competently in society. Specifically, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) shows that almost 70 % of all fourth-grade students do not read proficiently. As a result of these statistics, several federal and state initiatives aimed at improving early reading achievement have been instituted for kindergarten through third grade. These initiatives provide funding for research on effective literacy teaching, on high-performing high-poverty schools, on research-based reading programs, and on effective instructional methods. Further, most of these initiatives hold states accountable for establishing standards to ensure that all students will have learned to read by the time they complete third grade since the level of third-grade reading achievement has been identified as a major predictor of later school success or failure (Adams, 1994; Fletcher and Lyon, 1998).

This study compared third-grade reading achievement of urban African-American, Title I students using a basal reading series with those using a balanced literacy program to determine whether the highly structured skills-based methods advocated by *The No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) *Act* actually foster or impede reading achievement in an urban school setting.

Two hundred forty-five third-grade African-American, Title I students from an urban elementary school in southeastern Virginia served as subjects for the study. Subjects were studied as intact groups to avoid disruption in the educational setting. Participants in the control group were third-grade classes of urban African-American, Title I students who were taught reading through a basal approach in the 2000-2001 school year. Participants in the comparison group were urban African-American, Title I third graders who received instruction through a balanced reading approach during the 2002-2003 school year.

The research site was an urban elementary school that has been designated as a school-wide Title I site because of the high number of low-income students classified as at-risk for school failure. Ninety-seven percent of the students receive free lunch. The school, which has an average enrollment of 700 children in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade, is surrounded by housing projects, apartments, and single-family houses. To address the low reading performance and test scores of the third-graders, the school applied for and received a Reading Excellence Act grant in 2001 to develop reading improvement strategies. The hypothesis of this study was that urban African-American, Title I third-grade students receiving instruction through a balanced reading approach would have higher reading scores overall than students receiving instruction through a basal reading approach.

Overall reading achievement scores on the Virginia Standards of Learning Test and its subtests *understanding word analysis*, *understanding elements of literature*, and *understanding a variety of printed materials/resources* were examined using ANOVA ($p < .05$). Results showed that students performed similarly with regard to overall

reading achievement on the *Virginia Standards of Learning Reading: Research and Literature* test whether they received basal reading instruction or balanced literacy instruction. Students also performed similarly on the subtests of word study and elements of literature, but the balanced literacy group did score significantly better on the subtest of printed materials and printed resources.

This study will add to the existing body of knowledge by identifying the benefits of these approaches to urban African-American, Title I students, which will assist school districts, schools, and teachers in designing reading programs to address the instructional needs of this population. It is important to note that in Title I schools, funding is tied to adherence to NCLB mandates, which endorse skills-based approaches more closely associated with basal reading instruction than with balanced literacy.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A major goal of reading instruction in the elementary school is to create proficient, motivated readers. Yet, 10 million of the nation's students can barely read (Fletcher and Lyon, 1998). Figures from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) indicated that in 2003 nearly 37% of fourth graders could not read at the basic level according to NAEP measures. This figure varied little from the 38% in 1998. For urban school districts in large cities, that figure exceeds 50% (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). Even sadder is the fact that a child who has completed third grade without having learned to read faces an uphill battle to achieve reading success. Indeed, one study revealed that 74 % of students struggling with reading in third grade were found also to be struggling with reading in ninth grade (Fletcher and Lyon, 1998, p. 52). The academic failure that these students inevitably face leads to even more devastating consequences when they leave school. Reports indicate that 75% of the unemployed and at least 60% of the imprisoned are poor readers (Adams, 1994).

Poor reading performance among African-American children has contributed to what researchers and educators call the achievement gap, that is, the difference in academic performance indicated by standardized test scores between poor and/or African American students and White students. Research by Comer (2001) has indicated that by the end of fourth grade, African-American students are two years behind their White counterparts in reading. By eighth grade, they are three or more years behind, and by twelfth grade, they are four years behind. In fact, 2001 NAEP data revealed that, on average, when it comes to basic skills, African-American students in the twelfth grade

perform on the level of White eighth graders. From the 1970's until the late 1980's, African-American students made gains on standardized tests and, between 1970 and 1980, actually closed the achievement gap in reading (and mathematics) by 50%. However, recent NAEP (2003) data indicated that gains in reading for African-American children have since declined.

Researchers have attributed the achievement gap to many factors. Paramount among these is the lack of preparation for the school experience. Research has shown that when most poor and African-American children enter first grade, they are already a year behind their middle-class (and, in the case of African-Americans, their White) counterparts in reading readiness and other experiences that foster academic achievement (Farkas, 2002). In a September 11, 2003, interview, G. Reid Lyon, chief of the Child Development and Behavior Branch within the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) at the National Institutes of Health, noted that "by three years of age kids from poverty, disadvantaged, whatever their race or ethnicity, are already 30-40% behind [what is considered normal] in vocabulary development." The National Center for Educational Statistics (2003) showed that over a third of African-American (and Latino) students compared with a sixth of White students enter kindergarten already behind. Then, to exacerbate the problem, when school is in recess for the summer months, African-American children especially, actually regress (Allington and McGill-Franzen, 2003).

A 1997 Baltimore study by Entwisle, Alexander and Olson found that African-American children fell three months behind their middle-class White counterparts in reading performance, even though the performance of each group had been comparable

during the school year (cited in Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2003). The study also found that as a result of this “summer fallback,” African-American children, by the end of elementary school, lagged two to three years behind White middle-class children in reading proficiency. However, Farkas (2002) has disputed the “summer fallback” explanation, noting results from a study by Downey and Broh which suggested that summer fallback was a reasonable explanation for class differences in achievement, but not racial differences.

Another reason for the achievement gap, experts say, is the inferior instruction African-American and poor children receive, usually from inexperienced and/or poorly trained teachers (Farkas 2002). The situation is worse for children experiencing reading difficulty. Indeed, Allington (1999) found that in high-poverty urban schools, such children were likely to receive watered-down instruction, an insufficient block of instructional time, and little opportunity to practice reading. Other reasons for the gap include the use of discriminatory practices, such as (1) the placement of African-American children in low reading groups and in special education, (2) low teacher expectations, (3) inadequate resources, and (4) lack of home support (Farkas 2002).

Reading failure, however, does not reside exclusively among minority and low-income students. NAEP data showed also that 32% of the children of college graduates also scored below the proficient level. Viewing poor reading performance, then as a national problem, the Bush administration overhauled the Elementary and Secondary School Act of 1965, reauthorized in 1994, to create a massive federal program known as the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB). The act requires each state to develop standards and evaluation and accountability measures in the content areas of reading, mathematics,

and science. In the area of reading, NCLB specifically mandates that by 2005-2006, states test reading proficiency annually in grades three through eight. The four “guiding principles” of this sweeping reform initiative include (1) emphasis on research-based teaching methods and materials; (2) accountability measures, where funding is tied to academic achievement; (3) flexibility and local control of school programs; and (4) more options for parents to control their child’s access to a decent education. Schools that do not make Annual Yearly Progress, as defined by NCLB, will risk losing funding.

To support the first principle, NCLB includes the *Reading First* initiative, a grant program that allows states and school districts to compete for funds to improve K-3 literacy instruction, with priority given to high-poverty districts. The fifty states, the District of Columbia and the territories may apply for *Reading First* grants, which are reviewed by an expert panel. The panel then makes recommendations to the Secretary of Education. As of January 8, 2003, twenty states had received funding from *Reading First* grants (Langan & Malico, 2003).

This initiative reflects findings of the National Reading Panel report, *Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction—Reports of the Subgroups* (2000). The National Reading Panel was appointed by Congress and NICHD to review the best scientific research on reading instruction to identify effective instructional reading methods.

The *Reading First* grant initiative provides funding for programs that use evidence-based reading instructional methods for teaching reading in kindergarten through third grade. With this initiative, pre-schoolers, especially those from low-income

families, are expected to benefit from a program called *Early Reading First*. In the publication *The Facts About Reading Achievement*, the US Department of Education (2003) discussed *NCLB* grants that provide state funding to teach students “systematically and explicitly . . . five key components in reading,” namely phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.” These are the skills identified by the National Reading Panel (NRP) report as crucial to reading achievement. According to then Secretary of Education Rod Paige (2002), this statement refers to consistent and “coherent skills-based reading instruction” (p. 18). Therefore, *Reading First* endorses commercially and professionally prepared resources that are phonics based. The goal of *Reading First* specifically and of *NCLB* generally is to ensure that every child can read by third grade. In addition to research-based methods, *NCLB* allocates funds for teacher training, professional development and recruitment of promising teachers. However, in their 2002 position statement, The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) criticized *Reading First* for compiling a “short list” of resources that favor a single approach and for not permitting an adequate critique of the “limited set of methods of reading instruction” being endorsed by *Reading First*.

In spite of the controversy that *NCLB* has provoked, school districts in Virginia have proceeded to implement *NCLB* mandates based on the Standards of Learning tests already in place for grades three, five, and eight. Virginia school districts developed Standards of Learning tests for grades four, six, and seven and field tested them in the spring of 2005. Further, the test for grade three will remain cumulative while tests for grades five and eight are grade-level specific. Additional funds from the federal government to implement *Reading First* might enable Virginia’s and other school

systems to reach their goals provided that the emphases and methods supported by the *Reading First* initiative promote the reading success purported.

With emphasis on phonics instruction, *Reading First* has fanned the ongoing debate about what works in reading instruction. Contemporary approaches to reading instruction have become increasingly varied, with many teachers combining whole language, phonics, and literature-based techniques and resources. One concern is that *NCLB*'s endorsement of a phonics, or skills-based, approach to reading instruction may stifle teacher creativity and choice and prove ineffective in combating reading failure. This concern is not new.

In the early 1950's, the whole-word approach was widely used in the nation's classrooms. Commercially prepared basal readers presented this method, and nearly all of the schools used basal readers. However, as reading scores declined, the public rallied against basals, which de-emphasized phonics in favor of the whole-word, or look-say method, of reading instruction (Hoffman, Sailors, Patterson, 2002). Therefore, to satisfy the public's demand for phonics instruction, basals began to include more skills instruction, and during the 1970's and 1980's, skills instruction became a staple of the nation's reading programs. In the mid-1980's, however, a movement toward literature-based instruction gained momentum in reaction to what had become known as the basal approach to reading instruction. Advocates of a literature-based approach were inspired by whole-language concepts rooted in the philosophies of Jean Piaget, John Dewey, and Lev Vygotsky. This approach immersed children in authentic literature to free them from what whole-language advocates ridiculed as the worksheet (basal) approach.

As reading research accumulated, trends in reading instruction shifted yet again. Research conducted over a thirty-year period had shown that the explicit teaching of skills in the context of meaningful reading experiences was an effective method of teaching reading (Adams, 1994; Chall, 1967; 1983; Pressley, 2002). Therefore, in the 1990's, advocates of a balanced approach to reading instruction emerged. To accommodate the trend, basal publishers adapted once more by increasing their literature offerings and including anthologies. Presently, proponents on different sides of the reading issue continue to defend approaches that exist on a continuum from (1) highly structured and teacher-centered to (2) less structured and semi-teacher-centered to (3) loosely structured and student-centered. These approaches are manifested in the basal approach, the literature-plus basal approach, and the literature-based approach, respectively. Currently, this repertoire of approaches is being implemented in school districts across the country within a framework called balanced literacy.

Balanced literacy consists of specific components known as read-alouds, shared reading, guided reading, independent reading, modeled/shared writing, interactive writing, and independent writing (Johnson, 2002). In light of this trend, the NCLB, with its endorsement of only skills-based instruction, may actually mark a return to an instructional method that many reading professionals consider restrictive and outdated.

Statement of the Problem: Poor Reading Achievement

Reading achievement in the United States is of paramount concern to the educational community and to the general public. Many students at the elementary level in particular are leaving school with inadequate skills to read strategically and to function competently in society. Specifically, the National Assessment of Educational Progress

(NAEP) shows that almost 70 % of all fourth-grade students do not read proficiently. As a result of these statistics, several federal and state initiatives aimed at improving early reading achievement have been instituted for kindergarten through third grade. These initiatives provide funding for research on effective literacy teaching, on high-performing high-poverty schools, on research-based reading programs, and on effective instructional methods. Further, most of these initiatives hold states accountable for establishing standards to ensure that all students will have learned to read by the time they complete third grade since the level of third-grade reading achievement has been identified as a major predictor of later school success or failure (Adams, 1990; Fletcher and Lyon, 1998).

This study will compare third-grade reading achievement of urban African American, Title I students using a basal reading series with those using a balanced literacy program to determine whether the highly structured skills-based methods advocated by *The No Child Left Behind Act* actually foster or impede reading achievement in an urban school setting. It is understood, however, that no one factor alone, such as a specific approach to teaching reading, is the sole factor in determining whether a child becomes a competent reader. Research literature has vacillated about the effectiveness of various reading approaches, but many of the studies have suggested that systematic phonics instruction and explicit strategy instruction in context benefit all students. This study will add to the existing body of knowledge by identifying the benefits of these approaches to urban African-American, Title I students, which will assist school districts, schools, and teachers in designing reading programs to address the

instructional needs of this population. Further, this study will seek to confirm or refute the recommendations of NCLB.

Research Question

The focus question is, Do urban African-American, Title I students receiving instruction through a balanced reading approach have higher overall reading test scores as measured by the third grade Virginia Standards of Learning Reading Test than students being taught through a basal reading approach? Further exploration of this question will also be necessary to determine whether urban African-American, Title I students using a balanced reading approach have higher scores on individual subtests of the Virginia Standards of Learning Reading Test. Therefore, the following sub-questions will be investigated:

- (1) Do students in a balanced reading program have higher reading scores in understand(ing) the elements of literature than students in a basal reading program?
- (2) Do students in a balanced reading program have higher reading scores in understand(ing) a variety of printed materials/research materials than students in a basal reading program?
- (3) Do students in a balanced reading program have higher reading scores in use(ing) word analysis (phonetic/structural) than students in a basal reading program?
- (4) What is the relative effectiveness of these two approaches across the three areas, or is there a differential effect?

The research site, an urban Title I elementary school in Southeastern Virginia, switched from using the basal reading approach they had been using for a number of years to a balanced reading approach. Consequently, there is a unique opportunity to conduct this study in a real-world setting.

Definition of Terms

Balanced literacy/balanced reading is a student-centered approach to developing the listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities of students through specific activities, such as guided reading, as well as through exposure to quality literature and through the integration of curriculum across content areas.

Basal approach describes a highly structured teacher-centered approach to reading instruction that has become synonymous with skills-based instruction and consists of commercially prepared student resources and teachers' manuals.

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 is the name of federal legislation that expands the 1965 Elementary and Secondary School Act to promote research-based reading instruction centered on five components: fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, phonics, and phonemic awareness.

Phonics instruction is defined by the National Reading Panel as an approach to teaching reading that stresses letter-sound correspondences, spelling patterns, and the application of this knowledge to reading. Signatures focused on phonics in isolation, and the Rigby Literacy Program embedded phonics instruction in context.

Rigby Literacy is a balanced literacy program for kindergarten through third grade used by a southeastern Virginia urban elementary school.

Signatures is a basal series published by Scott Foresman and currently adopted by a southeastern Virginia school district.

Test for Higher Standards is the product of Creator Stuart Flannigan, who designed the instrument to be a pre-test measure used to assess student mastery of the Virginia Standards of Learning and to predict student performance on the Standards of Learning

Tests. This instrument is used by the southeastern Virginia elementary school and school district that serve as the research site for the current study.

Title I Schoolwide Programs According to Title I guidelines, schoolwide programs serve children deemed at-risk of school failure due to the fact that 50% of students are designated as low income based on their free and reduced lunch status.

Urban schools are designated by the Council of Great City Schools as schools located in cities with a population over 250,000 and with student enrollments over 35,000. Typically these schools comprise students from ethnic minorities and low-income homes.

Virginia Standards of Learning Tests known as SOLs were developed by Harcourt Brace in conjunction with the Virginia Department of Education to measure the level of attainment of state standards. The Reading test has three subtests:

Use Word Analysis Strategies (phonetic/structural)-test questions relate to rhyming words, beginning sounds, vowel sounds, affixes, homophones, word meaning, and syntax.

Understand a Variety of Printed Materials/Research Materials-test questions relate to author's purpose, comprehension, reference books, alphabetical order, table of contents, summary, and main idea.

Understand Elements of Literature- test questions relate to characteristics of folktales, biographies, poetry, and story elements.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

With the 1955 publication of Rudolph Flesch's national bestseller *Why Johnny Can't Read: And What You Can Do About It*, the general public became aware of a persistent debate about effective methods of teaching reading. Flesch (1955) charged that "America [was] rapidly sinking into a morass of ignorance" (p.1) because of the whole-word or look-say method of reading instruction used in basal readers in the 1950's; therefore, he advocated a return to skills-based instruction, generally regarded as teaching phonics.

While several approaches to teaching reading have been tried over the years, the skill-based approach, dating from the colonial era, has the longest history. Today, basal reading programs, which originated in the late nineteenth century, are most closely associated with the skills-based approach. These programs remain the dominant mode of reading instruction in the nation's schools. Over the past fifteen years, however, an increasing number of reading researchers and classroom teachers have been endorsing other approaches or combinations of approaches, such as whole-language, literature-based programs, and balanced literacy.

Balanced literacy instruction has gained acceptance from teachers and researchers who have found that no single method of reading instruction guarantees reading success for all children. Many of the studies that assess the effectiveness of various methods point not toward a single approach but to a variety of practices that teachers can integrate and employ as they deem appropriate. Speaking to this issue, Farstrup (1999) noted that

“multiple methods must be available to support the varying needs of individual learners” (cited in Heilman et al., 2002, p. 302).

A vast body of literature has accumulated on reading instruction. The result is that an impressive number of approaches have been identified that can help teachers create proficient life-long readers. An effective reading program is a crucial part of the elementary school program, and proficiency in reading must be a primary goal of elementary reading instruction because research has shown that children who are still struggling with reading by the end of third grade more than likely will never catch up (Adams, 1990; Fletcher & Lyon, 1998). Children who cannot read are doomed to frustration in elementary school, middle school, and high school. As adults, they then face dim employment prospects and a poor quality of life. Given the weighty, necessary, and vital responsibility of teaching children to read, teachers must be knowledgeable about effective approaches to reading instruction and proven means of implementing these approaches.

This literature review, in six sections, presents an overview of historical and contemporary approaches to teaching reading. The first section discusses reading instruction in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Sections two, three, and four focus on specific approaches: namely the skills-based approach, the whole-language approach, and the literature-based approach. The fifth section explains the balanced literacy approach, and the sixth section explores theories and practices that relate to teaching African-American Children. The Scott Foresman *Signatures* Reading Series and the Rigby Reading Program for third grade are the subjects of this study and the instructional materials used to teach reading at the research site.

Reading Instruction in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

In spite of the popularity of less structured methods of reading instruction, today's basal reading programs are the principal source of reading instruction in 75% to 90% of America's classrooms (Gunning, 2000). These reading programs evolved from the crude moralizing reading material of colonial America, which emphasized skill acquisition. The earliest reading texts were called hornbooks. Shannon (1989) described them as "paddles made of wood, with a thin layer of cow horn stretched across to protect the writing, [that] held the alphabet, a syllabary, and the Lord's Prayer on a three-by-five inch paper" (p. 4). Instructional materials also included psalters, or spelling books, with "syllables, words, and *Bible* verses" as well as the actual *Bible* (Shannon, 1989, p. 4), to which the students progressed once they had mastered the hornbook lessons. Thus, from its inception, reading instruction in America has emphasized mechanics (Robinson, Faraone, Hittleman & Unruh, 1990), or the acquisition of skills. Since the primary purpose of reading during this period was to imprint moral lessons on the memory, the methods used to promote mastery were drills, repetition, and rote memorization along with silent reading to facilitate mastery of the lessons. This spelling approach, as it was called, was primarily alphabetic (naming and forming letters). Children learned the alphabet, spelled lists of syllables and words that they memorized in preparation for reading and again memorizing the religious material that followed.

This approach was used in *The New England Primer*, the most popular colonial text (Roser & Hoffman, 1999, p. 138). Itzkoff (1986) described the instruction process this way: ". . . children would be given a number of letter/sound correspondences as illustrated in common words . . . after some drill and memorization [children would be

expected] to absorb spontaneously all the ‘rules and exceptions’ and create their own ‘dictionary’ or rules” (p. 157). Phonics (letter-sound correspondences) instruction consisted largely of teaching “consonant and vowel sounds as wholes” (Robinson et al., 1990, p. 20). From examples like “In Adams *fall* we sinned *all* (italics his)” (from the *New England Primer*), teachers assumed that readers with any ability would be able to “combine the few letter/phoneme clues with their word exemplifications and make the inductive jump into gradual fluent reading competency” (Itzkoff, 1986, p.157). Based on this same principle, the *Noah Webster Speller* (1790), which was the principal source of reading instruction after the colonial period, combined word lists and didactic reading material with pronunciation and spelling (Hoffman et al., 2002).

The forerunners of today’s basal readers appeared in the mid-nineteenth century. The reading series produced during this period usually consisted of a primer and five or more books, each at an increasing level of difficulty (Roser & Hoffman, 1999, p.138). Typical of this type of reader was William Holmes McGuffey’s *Eclectic First Reader for Young Children* in 1836, which included spelling words, pronunciation guides, reading rules, and comprehension questions (Roser & Hoffman, 1999, p.140).

As democratic ideals flourished during the nineteenth century, interest in creating a well-informed thinking electorate grew. In addition, the availability of reading material increased. At the same time, educators began to critique existing instructional practices. Robinson et al (1990), traced criticism of the spelling method back to the 1830’s when a critic named Morley, complained that, “Children . . . are taught to spell and read what they do not understand, to define without understanding the definitions, and to commit to memory the words of grammar . . . while scarcely a sentence is understood” (p. 22). As

Marilyn Adams (1990) remarked, “Phonics and comprehension had come to be seen as mutually incompatible, and highly political” (p. 22). The division of reading into competing approaches, one skills-based and the other meaning-based, probably originated during this period.

In response to this new emphasis on comprehension, reading series added material on comprehension and de-emphasized the spelling method. One of the earliest readers to depart from the spelling method was the Reverend Thomas Gallaudet’s *The Mother’s Primer* (c1835,1839), which initiated a whole-word method by which students were taught to recognize words by sight. Until this type of reader appeared, children followed this lengthy process: “learning the names of the letters and their sounds, . . . gradually combining the letters and sounds into words, . . . memorizing the rules by which the different sounds were elicited from the same letters and from different letters” (Itzkoff, 1986, p. 36).

The *Primer* departed from the spelling method in two ways. Partly pictorial, it presented sight vocabulary at the beginning, then the alphabets, and finally stories for oral reading. This reader also incorporated silent reading, referred to as “independent study” (Robinson et al, 1990, p. 24). It was not until the 1880’s however, that the whole-word method became popular. From that point, reading series began to include sight vocabulary, varied reading material, and comprehension questions.

Evolution of the Basal Reader Approach and the Basal Approach to Reading Instruction

By the early years of the twentieth century, commercial reading programs presenting the whole-word method, had become known as basals. The readers were leveled by grade so that each grade used a different reader appropriate for that grade.

Later, the term “basal” came to represent a method of reading instruction called the whole-word or look-say approach. By the 1930’s, “the drill-to-death method” (known as the spelling method) had been replaced (Beck & Juel 1992, p.110). Emphasis had shifted to the look-say or whole-word method. In practice and implementation, this method was based on several key assumptions about the best way to teach reading. These assumptions were that (1) whole words introduced first would facilitate comprehension, (2) the primary goal of reading was comprehension, (3) phonic skill was best developed if spread over a period from grade one through six, and (4) instruction in small groups based on student reading levels produced the best results (Chall, 1967).

Experiments and studies of the era gave a boost to the whole-word method, which was incorporated by commercial publishers into the basal, or grade-leveled, sequential readers. Itzkoff (1986) summarized this approach as follows: “It can fairly be said that for all the even results of look-say, its original stimulus was scientific; it was an earnest attempt to introduce modern ideas into the profession” (p. 122). The basal approach as it evolved came to be primarily a whole-word (look-say), meaning-emphasis approach.

In the early twentieth century, several additions gave basals their modern look. These were graded readers for specific grades, pre-primers to introduce primer vocabulary, at least five books for first grade, and separate books for succeeding grades (Rosser and Hoffman, 1999, p.139). Furthermore, guidebooks for teachers were included. Shannon (1989) noted that during the first quarter of the twentieth century two factors influenced the development of these guidebooks, or teachers’ manuals: first, the application of science to education and, second, the poor preparation of teachers. These two factors led to the development of instruction manuals for each grade level that

“provided specific information on appropriate instruction for each lesson, questions to test students’ comprehension of each story, and brief explanations of the science of reading instruction” (Shannon, 1989, p. 25). The idea was that scientific theories, particularly the theory of stimulus-response, should inform teaching practices. In other words, critics of reading instruction felt “that universal principles were preferable to the idiosyncratic behaviors of particular teachers . . .” (Shannon, 1989, p. 26).

Statistics from Morrow and Gambrell (2000) indicated that in 1958, one hundred percent of the public schools in America used basal reading programs and embraced the instructional methods offered in basal readers. Between 1930 to 1965, basals emphasized comprehension and employed a meaning-emphasis approach to reading instruction. Phonics lessons were included, but they were taught only after children had mastered a sufficient number of sight words (Stahl, 1998, p. 33). From the mid-1960’s to the mid-1970’s, the major changes in basal readers were the addition of more natural-sounding stories, the de-emphasis of controlled vocabulary, and the delay of phonics (Popp, 1975, cited in Stahl, 1998). At this point, basals offered a complete instructional program, including workbooks, supplementary materials, questions and answers, reproducibles, and teachers’ manuals designed to save time for teachers. Basals using the “whole word, meaning-first, phonics little-and-later approach to beginning reading instruction” (Adams 1990, p.32) dominated this decade also. Indeed, Adams (1990) cited a survey by Barton and Wilder (1964) showing that 98 percent of first-grade teachers and 92-94 percent of second- and third-grade teachers said they used basals almost on a daily basis.

While basal readers were de-emphasizing phonics instruction, Rudolph Flesch and others were calling for a return to phonics. The furor created by his book *Why*

Johnny Can't Read was so intense that Jeanne Chall (1967) undertook an ambitious three-year project, sponsored by the Carnegie Foundation, to study approaches to beginning reading instruction. Chall examined 22 reading programs by interviewing administrators and teachers and conducting classroom observations in over 300 kindergarten through third-grade classrooms serving children of varying economic classes across the United States, England, and Scotland. In addition, she read studies on beginning reading instruction to uncover what the research had revealed. Among her findings were these interesting conclusions: First, children taught using the whole-word/look-say method showed strength in comprehension of silent reading and in other factors like reading rate, fluency, motivation, and expression. Next, children who were taught phonics showed sustained strength in word recognition, particularly for new words they encountered. Chall's (1967) study also found that by the end of grade two, children who had been taught phonics surpassed the control group in comprehension, vocabulary and silent reading rate. The inescapable conclusion was that approaches using "systematic phonics resulted in significantly better word recognition, better spelling, better vocabulary, and better reading comprehension" for those grades included in the study (p. 38). That finding held true for children across the board.

Although Chall's report was criticized by whole-word/look-say enthusiasts, book publishers took note and began to "steadily add to their phonics components in elementary reading texts" (Itzkoff, 1986, p. 45). Itzkoff criticized the effect of the addition of "heavy doses" of phonics instruction in basal readers:

The child turns away from the naturalness of his/her purely linguistic modality and begins to analyze intellectually the phonics probabilities of, for instance, letter clusters. The slow, gnarled sounding-out of words not only blockades the normal development of featural analysis of language

materials simply because of the mental effort required, but also subjects the actual search for meaning of words and sentences to secondary status. (p. 127)

This new emphasis on phonics was seen as an approach that “sap[ped] the child’s cognitive efforts” (Itzkoff, 1986, p.129). Despite such criticism, some 80% to 90% of classroom teachers continued to rely on basals (Morrow and Gambrell, 2000).

In the 1990’s, test scores began to indicate gains in children’s decoding but a decline in comprehension performance. Basal publishers responded by de-emphasizing decoding, recasting skills instruction as strategy instruction, integrating strategies more meaningfully into stories, and adding features such as shared reading, contextual vocabulary, and reading comprehension strategies. Further, even though skills instruction was subordinated to children’s literature and strategy instruction, basals of the 1990’s still maintained a strong skills orientation and were “more demanding in terms of decoding than [were] the old ones” (Roser and Hoffman, 1999). In summary, Heilman, Blair, & Rupley (2002) described the basal approach at this juncture as comprehensive. It offered teachers “provisions for explicit teaching of word identification, word meanings, comprehension, study skills, and literature appreciation” (p. 303).

Basal publishers also responded to the influence of the whole-language movement of the 1980’s by incorporating authentic literature into their basal reading series. Houghton Mifflin, a major publisher, offered a ground-breaking basal series that included not only the usual publisher-sponsored, specially created stories but also a generous selection of stories by famous authors (Stahl, 1998). Although the inclusion of children’s literature into basals was hailed as a major advance and a needed accommodation, studies showed that the authentic literature included in them went largely unread in the nation’s classrooms. According to Stahl (1998), 60% of the time designated for reading

instruction was actually being devoted to worksheet practice and supplementary activities, while only 40% of the reading period was being devoted to reading actual passages. Therefore, even with their long history and with efforts of publishers to integrate research-based methods and techniques, basals continued to be controversial.

Gunderson (1997) said that basal instruction “represents a static view of reading and learning to read . . . and has been fairly consistent and rigid in form over the last half century” (p. 225). Criticism of basals has centered on a number of factors. Shannon (1989), for example, argued that the basal teachers’ manuals, not the classroom teacher, often dictated the course of reading instruction and that teachers, who should exercise both their authority and creativity in reading instruction, often deferred to the experts who wrote the basal guides. Shannon (1989) cited survey results from the 1960’s to the 1980’s illustrating what he considered a stifling reliance by teachers on basal readers and manuals.

Although basals have been criticized for encouraging prescribed teaching, the older guides that took a prescriptive, scripted approach have been replaced in modern basal series by multiple approaches from which teachers may choose (p. 113). This variety allows teachers to adapt basal materials and suggestions to the needs of their particular students. Gunning (2000) offered the following adaptation strategies for teachers who use basals:

1. Modify basal activities to include “real writing and real reading” experiences;

2. Use workbooks for practice and assessment, skipping exercises that are not useful and substitute other activities to achieve particular goals;
3. Expand and supplement reading materials;
4. Teach selected skills and strategies contextually;
5. Provide daily reading opportunities for struggling readers to read grade-level appropriate material;
6. Develop an individual literacy philosophy to guide one's reading approach and choice of materials (pp. 390-391).

With such teacher adaptations, basals can offer distinct advantages. First, because of their sequential format, they foster steady growth from emergent literacy to reading fluency. Next, they provide abundant resources for students and teachers, including structured lessons, enrichment activities, assessment tools, and other helpful features.

A few studies have been done to compare the basal approach with other methods of reading instruction. Chall, Jacobs & Baldwin (1990) found that low-income students who used basals coupled with supplementary literature and who read in their content area texts made higher than expected gains in word recognition and reading comprehension. Foorman, Francis, Fletcher, Schatschneider & Mehta (1998) compared three kinds of phonics-based reading programs: direct instruction, semi-direct instruction, and implicit instruction. They concluded that direct instruction in phonics produced greater results in word-recognition and comprehension. According to McEwan (1998), earlier studies also confirmed the importance of teaching phonics in beginning reading instruction (p. 26).

Skills-Based/Phonics Approach

Adams (1990) defined phonics as “a system of teaching reading that builds on the alphabetic principle, a system [that includes] teaching correspondences between letters or groups of letters and their pronunciations” (p. 50). Connotatively, the term “phonics” has different meanings. For some, as Steven A. Stahl (1992) wrote, it conjures up images of endless worksheets or of tests that students must pass once they have mastered specific skills. For others, phonics becomes the panacea for any and all reading deficiencies (Stahl, 1992, p. 618). Actually, the view of phonics instruction as a sequence of boring drills isolated from meaningful reading experiences is no more accurate than the view of it as a remedy for reading difficulties. Stahl’s definition of phonics as “various approaches designed to teach children about the orthographic code of the language and the relationships of spelling patterns to sound patterns” (p. 618) makes it clear that phonics instruction is not monolithic. Its procedures and materials vary. Few doubt that phonics instruction is fundamental to learning to read regardless of the reading program one employs. Initially, phonics instruction becomes a key that beginning readers use to unlock the code, to recognize, and to pronounce words. Ultimately, it sets them on the path for achievement gains in upper grades and for success later in life. Research shows that what Adams (1990) expressed is correct: “There seems to be something about a broad class of instruction known as phonics that is of general, substantive, and lasting value” (p. 49).

Since most reading professionals agree that phonics does have a place in the reading classroom, the question becomes when and how it should be taught. Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson (1985) found that phonics instruction should be completed

by second grade (cited in Stahl, 1992, p. 624). Stahl (1992) explained that phonics should be taught when the child is developmentally ready. He referred to three stages of word learning identified by Frith (1985)—the logographic, the alphabetic, and the orthographic—and suggested that at each stage children are ready to learn different skills. Specifically, at the first stage, children learn words as whole units primarily from environmental print. At the second stage, the sounding-out stage, children focus on single letters and sounds for word recognition. In the final stage, they recognize patterns and use them to identify words.

How phonics should be taught is a more touchy issue. Methods range from a highly scripted drill method called Direct Instruction, created by Siegfried Engelman in 1964, to the unstructured, incidental methods of whole language. Stahl (1992) stated that the major issue in phonics is whether to begin with letters and sounds or with analyzing whole words. That decision depends on whether a child has a sense of what print signifies. If a child has a sense of phonemic awareness (the sense that alphabets and sounds are related), phonics instruction may not be necessary. However, children with little or no exposure to print cannot be taught phonics until they are immersed in literacy experiences, Stahl (1992) explained. To learn phonics, children first “must understand that spoken words contain phonemes” (p. 621). Stahl (1992) says that phonics instruction should build on “a child’s rich concepts about how print functions,” “a foundation of phonemic awareness” through teaching sounds in the context of reading materials, a “focus on reading words, not learning rules,” and on “automatic word recognition skills” to foster comprehension (Stahl, p. 623).

Comparative studies on instructional methods in reading have been conducted since the 1960's, and they have generally supported a skills-based approach. The first study was the United States Office of Education Cooperative Research Program in First-Grade Reading Instruction. Conducted by Guy Bond and Robert Dykstra (1967) over a three-year period, the study sought to determine three things: (1) what were the most effective approaches for ensuring reading proficiency by the end of first grade, (2) what approaches benefited ill-prepared and well-prepared students, and (3) what characteristics of students, teachers, classrooms, schools, and communities affected reading and spelling achievement.

Twenty-seven studies were undertaken. Of this number, twenty-one looked at the use of the basal reader compared to other approaches. Bond and Dykstra (1967) concluded that the basal approach was effective but that the basal-plus phonics approach produced higher achievement. Twenty-five years later, the National Reading Panel Report reached a similar conclusion. It stated that "instruction in systematic phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, and comprehension strategies was important in a complete reading program" (Taylor, Peterson, Pearson, & Rodriguez, 2002).

G. Reid Lyon (1997) of the NICHD conducted a study in Houston of 285 poor children to determine the effect of basal instruction versus a whole-language approach. The study results indicated children who were taught 44 phonemes scored 10 percentage points higher than those taught through whole-language methods. In their comparison of the two approaches, Stahl and Miller (1989) found that kindergartners benefited from a whole-language approach, but first-graders who had received phonics instruction scored higher. These studies, thirty years apart, support the use of skills-based instruction.

Whole-Language Concept

The decline in basal use, though small, reflected the influence of the whole-language movement that had been gaining momentum since the 1980's. Kenneth Goodman (1989) explained the whole-language perspective as having its origins in John Dewey's child-centered philosophy, which views the learner as "strong, capable, and eager to learn" (p. 49) and in Lev Vygotsky's conception "of teachers as mediators who facilitate learners' transactions with the world" (p. 50). In the early 1900's, Dewey criticized the methods of traditional education which emphasized the curriculum and the teacher at the expense of the learner. In *The Child and the Curriculum*, Dewey (1956) describes the traditional curriculum as subjects divided into specific units of information that adults deemed useful to children for the future. In this curriculum, Dewey (1956) opined that children were regarded as "ductile and docile" (p. 8). Dewey, however, believed that for true learning to occur, the uniqueness of the child could not be ignored. Archambault (1964) agreed with Dewey's progressive view of education in which teachers would integrate the day-to-day experiences of the child into lessons for meaningful purposes. Thus, subject matter would not be isolated from the child's actual life experiences. Skills would be learned through contextual activities, not in isolation. During reading instruction, in particular, Dewey said, teachers would not cause students to focus self-consciously upon learning to read but upon activities that led to reading mastery.

Vygotsky, Dewey's Russian contemporary, viewed education as a social activity, where student interactions with teachers and classmates in instructional activities promoted higher mental development (Goodman, 1989). The varied roles of the teacher

as facilitator, mediator, supporter, and guide in interactions with the child are fundamental to the whole-language philosophy. Central also is the focus on the child, which is a key point in Dewey's and Vygotsky's philosophy of instruction. This child-centered approach also derives from Piaget (1973), who studied the cognitive development of children and found that their mental capacity grew increasingly complex as they interacted with their environment. Piaget observed that as children interact with their world, they develop their capacity to comprehend and organize situations, experiences, and objects. They form mental categories, and then place objects, experiences, and situations into these categories through a process Piaget calls assimilation. Children adapt their behavior to different circumstances, experiences in what Piaget labels accommodation. They develop further as they encounter experiences that they can neither assimilate nor accommodate. By creating new categories, or new learning, they achieve equilibrium. These processes result in learning, learning that could not be achieved without interaction with the environment.

Gunderson (1997) characterized whole language as "literacy centered" and offered a number of propositions that undergird a whole-language approach:

- (1) active learning is meaningful learning;
- (2) meaningful language is intact language;
- (3) speaking, listening, reading, writing, and watching are integrated, mutually reinforcing language activities;
- (4) the aesthetics of language are fundamental;
- (5) language is functional;

(6) the learning of content and the learning of language are inseparable;

(7) literacy learning should involve the learning of process (p. 226).

These propositions speak to the complexity of literacy, the process of literacy acquisition, and the value of language. Whole-language proponents assert that just as children learn language and the meaning of language through social interactions, they also learn to read by engaging in real activities in a print-rich literacy environment. In this environment, students can direct their own learning as teachers support, mediate, and facilitate their learning. Regarding reading instruction, supporters of whole language reject the part-to-whole, systematic approach of skills-based instruction in favor of a holistic, opportunistic approach, that Gunderson (1997) referred to as, “a network of authentic experiences in which language is developed” (p. 59). They have insisted that “learning to make sense of print in reading or writing does not require learning letter-sound relationships in isolation” (Gunderson, 1997, p.60). Therefore, whole-language advocates have rejected isolated phonics instruction that is separate from purposeful reading and writing. Further, they have rejected “the basalization of literature,” or the “superimposing of skill packages on the reading of stories” (Gunderson, 1997, p. 66).

As a result, whole-language proponents have developed innovative instructional methods and materials. A typical whole-language classroom operates on the basis of the following propositions:

- (a) whole stories are more meaningful than words or sentences
- (b) learning skills in meaningful contexts is superior to learning them in isolation

- (c) phonics and whole word material containing real language is more meaningful than material containing contrived language
- (d) writing and reading are interrelated activities
- (e) communication should be for a purpose
- (f) the love of reading and writing is significant
- (g) adult modeling is vital
- (h) good children's literature motivates students to read
- (i) meaningful learning is exploration
- (j) independent learning is important
- (k) taking risks in leaning is essential to develop independent learning
- (l) process is more important than product

While these and other whole-language concepts have been embraced by non-whole language advocates, research has shown that whole language is not the panacea that proponents would have others believe. In their study, Stahl and Miller (1989) found that the positive effects of whole language do not extend beyond kindergarten. Yet, whole-language concepts are filtering into the reading instruction in classrooms across the nation, primarily through literature-based instruction.

Literature-Based Reading Instruction

Lehman (1995) pointed out that the use of children's literature to teach reading is not a new phenomenon. As early as the 1960's, this approach had its advocates, but only since the 1980's has it attracted large numbers of adherents. Lehman mentioned California's 1986 integration of literature with its language arts program and an increasing number of state "literacy/literature initiatives" in the same decade (p. 22). The

cornerstone of a literature-based reading program is children's literature, whether it consists solely of children's literature or includes authentic literature only as a supplement to a basal series. Literature-based reading instruction is grounded in a literary theory known as reader-response. As adapted by Louise Rosenblatt (1988), reader-response theory holds that a text, any written discourse, is a social construction. During the reading process, the reader interacts, or transacts, with the text on the basis of prior knowledge and established conventions. This interaction creates a new experience for the reader. Rosenblatt (1988) discusses aesthetic, or pleasure reading, and efferent, or informational reading. Readers determine which of these "stances" they will take toward the text at any point (Morrow & Gambrell, 2000, p. 565).

In literature-based programs, reading is viewed as a social activity in which readers, singly and collectively, construct meaning from connected text on the basis of their prior knowledge along with their developing literacy skills. The literature offered in literature-based programs can include trade books as well as "picture books, big books, [and] predictable books"; folklore and realistic fiction, and poetry and nonfiction such as autobiographies, biographies, and expository materials (Morrow & Gambrell, 2000, p. 566). The reasons for including literature as part of literacy instruction are that literature can motivate children; it can enable them to relate prior knowledge to classroom experience, and it can provide a means for teachers to elicit from children their prior knowledge. Finally, it can provide excellent linguistic models (Fisher, Flood & Lapp, 1999). Morrow and Gambrell (2000) cited the results of a 1995 survey by Lehman showing that 85% of elementary teachers said they read aloud daily. But that is not all

teachers in literature-based classrooms do; they also provide direct instruction of skills and reading strategies.

Doyle (1983) studied the difference in the types of literacy tasks given in literature-based and skills-based classrooms. The findings showed that literature-based classes were characterized by frequent writing of connected text, effective management of students, and activities that promoted higher-order thinking. To the contrary, skills-based classes did little writing, except for workbook activities, and were expected to memorize and recognize facts. Similarly, in a study on the effects on reading achievement, the “use of literature, and attitudes” of minority students in a literature-based program, Morrow (1992, cited in Galda et al.), found that students who participated in home- and school-based literature programs outperformed a group that used a basal workbook approach (p. 370).

In their review of the research on literature-based instruction, Morrow and Gambrell (2000) attributed the surge of interest in this approach to the influence of whole-language advocates and reader-response theorists. Paris (2001) remarked that one of the “virtues” of whole language is that it enhanced teaching: “it provided opportunities and models for teachers to create rich, authentic, child-centered, open-ended, enjoyable activities” (p. 71). As a result, Morrow and Gambrell (2000) found that more teachers abandoned basals as a principal resource for reading instruction. Feeley, Strickland & Wepnerr (1991) interviewed New Jersey teacher Mary Mulcahy, who concluded after switching from skills-based instruction to literature-based instruction, that while she saw no difference on the California Achievement Test scores of her students, she did notice that students were more excited about reading (p. 29). This anecdotal evidence supports

research that showed one of the benefits of the literature-based approach to be students' increased interest in independent reading.

To illustrate further, Eldredge and Butterfield (cited in Lehman, 1995) conducted a study with second graders to determine the effectiveness of five different approaches to reading instruction involving basals, decoding, and literature programs in five combinations. The second-graders with the literature-plus-decoding program and those with the literature-only program showed improvement above those in the traditional basal programs. Another study conducted by Baumann and Ivey (1997) had similar results. This study involved a group of second-grade beginning readers, supported by their teachers and parents, who were immersed in reading and writing experiences. Eighty percent of instructional time consisted of actual reading while twenty percent was devoted to direct instruction in skills and strategies. Along with direct instruction and explicit phonics lessons, Baumann & Ivey (1997) used methods such as reading aloud, self-selection, independent reading, writer's workshop and partnering the second-graders with fifth-graders for reading practice. An informal reading inventory indicated that not only had the children become enthusiastic about reading but they had also posted an average gain of two years in reading achievement.

Further support for the effectiveness of literature-based instruction comes from Morrow and Gambrell (2000), who cited a number of studies with results that favored a literature-based approach. National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) endorses literature-based methods such as silent reading and frequent opportunities to read and discuss what is read. Au's (2003) study of children from diverse groups found that these instructional approaches and others such as literature discussion groups and

guided reading, provided for children “the best of both worlds: motivation to use literacy in everyday life, for the purposes they set for themselves, and proficiency in the literacy skills and strategies necessary to accomplish these purposes” (p. 964).

Balanced Literacy

Balanced literacy has gained favor over the past decades as a method that produces competent and engaged readers if it is well implemented. Vacca, Vacca and Gove (2000) traced the genesis of the current balanced literacy trend to the largely political back-to-basics movement, which has pushed for a return to the kind of skills-based instruction common in the 1950’s and 1960’s. The balanced literacy approach developed as a reaction to the whole-language movement of the 1980’s, which became an easy target to blame for declines in reading achievement scores. Vacca, Vacca, & Gove (2000) characterized balanced literacy as “weaving approaches and strategies into a seamless pattern of instruction” that includes specific components: namely, reading aloud, shared reading, guided reading, independent reading, modeled/shared writing, interactive writing, and independent writing (p. 61). These components allow for the integration of reading, speaking, and writing experiences with skills and strategies to teach and motivate children to read. Duffy-Hester (1999) expanded the definition of a balanced program to include a balancing of methods, approaches, and frameworks.

Current research supports balanced literacy as an effective approach to teaching reading. Although Honig (2001) cautioned against what he called a “mushy eclecticism” (p. 12), studies and surveys have indicated that “principled eclecticism” (Stahl 1998), informed by sound research-based principles, does indeed produce competent and engaged readers. Wharton-McDonald, Pressley & Hampston (1998), for example,

studied reading instruction among a representative sample of first- and second-grade teachers who focused on decoding within the context of meaningful and varied print experiences and who emphasized comprehension and reading strategies. Their findings showed that children who were taught using a mix of direct skills instruction and rich literary experiences made significant gains in reading.

A recent study by Allington and Johnson (2002) included observations and interviews with exemplary fourth-grade teachers to determine, among other things, how they taught and what impact their teaching had on fourth-grade students who were at a critical reading stage because of high-stakes testing and other expectations. These researchers interviewed and observed thirty teachers who taught in urban or rural communities in three northeastern states, in Texas, and in California. Exemplary teachers were identified as such on the basis of several factors: recommendations by principals and others, including parents; observations; student performance on a variety of measures; and/or criteria supplied by researchers. Allington and Johnson (2002), for example, looked for “teachers who were successful in improving children’s literacy performance” (p. 188). What they discovered were consistent classroom practices: Exemplary teachers provided a literate classroom environment, connected integrated classroom activities to the real world, and employed a combination of constructivist and direct instruction methods and techniques. Consequently, a standardized reading measure indicated that their students showed “greater than expected reading growth” as measured by standardized reading measures (p. 232). However, Allington and Johnson (2002) did not consider these measures as the only or the best indicators of the students’ reading gains.

In a similar study, Pressley, Allington, Morrow, Baker, Nelson, Wharton-McDonald, Block, Tracey, Brooks, Cronin, and Woo (1998) conducted surveys, interviews, and observations with exemplary teachers to discover how they handled reading instruction. Their results confirmed those of Allington and Johnston (2002). They found that effective teachers used both explicit instruction and literary experiences to create highly proficient and motivated readers. In their observations of first-grade reading teachers, for example, Pressley et al. (1998) observed first-grade reading teachers and found that the effective teachers drew upon a repertoire of direct-skills/explicit instructional techniques as well as whole language methods when they taught reading. Baumann and Ivey (1998) conducted a nationwide survey among pre-kindergarten through fifth-grade teachers and administrators to discover the nature of reading and language arts programs. Self-reports from the 1,207 respondents indicated that 89% of them preferred a balanced reading program.

In a study of literacy teachers from preschool through fifth grade in over 600 localities, Block, Oakar, and Hurt (2002) found that “teachers during the 1990’s used multiple approaches. They embraced literature-based perspectives; combined quality children’s literature, non-fictional trade books, and basal anthologies in their curricula; [and] taught phonics in the context of children’s literature” (p. 182). Further, the balanced literacy approach has been endorsed by prominent educators and researchers like Dorothy Strickland (1997), who advocates skills instruction in the classroom but only within the context of reading good literature.

Teaching African-American Children: Theories and Practice

The now-outdated deficit model of African American achievement that dominated public policy discussions during the 1960's and 1970's generated a negative vocabulary that still exists today. In order to explain why many African American children were not reaching their educational potential as indicated by comparisons with other groups, researchers used phrases like genetically inferior, culturally disadvantaged, and culturally deprived (Hilliard, 2002).

In opposition to the negative vocabulary and the deficit theory of African American achievement, Ladson-Billings (1994) and others began looking at what was right with African American children. Ladson-Billings conducted a nearly three-year study of eight exemplary teachers in a low-income urban public school where African American children were realizing their full potential as learners in spite of the negative characterizations and underachievement of African American students as a group. To discover why these children were successful, Ladson-Billings (1994) conducted interviews with their teachers and observed their classrooms. She found also that African American children excelled in environments where their culture, including their language, was respected and affirmed, and she learned that high-performing African American children were made aware of the political and social forces that affected their communities. In other words, teachers who were committed to their students' "high academic achievement, cultural competence, and socio-political consciousness" (Ladson-Billings, p. 189) got excellent results from African American students.

Similarly, Hale (2001) outlined a model for "culturally appropriate pedagogy" (p. 112) that takes into account certain elements of African American culture, including

“behavioral vibrancy”, “intensity”, and “emphasis on emotions and feelings” that are expressed through movement, social groupings, and oral response (116-117). Hale (2001) emphasized that these elements must inform teaching strategies. For example, since African American children, especially boys, are generally more active than children from other ethnic groups, teachers must understand their need to move and build appropriate teaching strategies to exploit this need.

Strickland (2005) also identified similar school practices that facilitated success for African American children as well as others. She recommended that teachers be sensitive to children’s unique language and home environment, that they have high student expectations, that they employ varied instructional methods including direct instruction within a print-rich environment, and that they create a supportive classroom community. Strickland also recommended school outreach to interact with the students’ families and also meaningful professional development opportunities for teachers.

To summarize, culturally relevant pedagogy or culturally sensitive pedagogy assumes a positive view of the learner’s capabilities, a knowledge of and respect for the learner’s culture, and a commitment to empowering learners to serve their own communities. Culturally relevant pedagogy consists of well-designed instructional activities that provide opportunities for children to cultivate and master specific skills and to acquire and apply knowledge within the framework of their own cultural background and values.

Trumbull, Greenfield, and Quiroz (2003) have described the “culturally responsive classroom” (p. 78) which is being employed with success in the Bridging Cultures Project in Los Angeles that trains teachers of Latino students to understand the

difference between Latino culture and American culture. It is explained that Latino culture values interdependence, cooperation, and social interaction whereas American culture values independence, individualism, and competition. When these American values are rewarded in the classroom, cultural conflict occurs that can interfere with learning. In the Bridging Cultures Project teachers learn to appreciate and respect Latino Culture, to develop relationships with Latino parents, and to use culturally friendly instructional practices, such as allowing study groups among the children. Trumball, Greenfield, and Quiroz (2003) concluded that the Bridging Cultures Project concept could be applied successfully by teachers of African American children, whose culture includes elements of both individualism and collectivism. Delpit (2002) has asserted that the culture, the background, the history, and the language of African American children must be respected and integrated into classroom instruction in order for children to feel connected to the classroom.

Hollie (2005) described a language-awareness approach to instruction that has proven to be successful with African American children in a Los Angeles Elementary School. It is called the Academic English Mastery Program (AEMP), and its purpose is to improve the performance of minority students in their use of oral and written Standard English. Teachers in the program applied culturally specific instructional strategies. They used literature related to the students' culture. They showed students the differences between the home language and Standard English and used the home language as a bridge to teach the children Standard English, a practice also advocated by Smitherman (2002). Teachers in the program also understood and incorporated cultural styles of their students into teaching. They also used the students' personal vocabularies

to build their academic vocabularies. In addition, they created a setting that was culturally and visually print-rich (Hollie, 2005, p. 190). As a result of this approach, over 50% of the students in the all-African American Culture and Language Academy of Success Elementary School (CLAS) scored at or above the proficient level on the California Standards Test. The scores of these students were about the same as those of their White and Asian counterparts.

While culturally relevant pedagogy has proven to be effective, it is not the only performance model that yields successful results. Carter (2001), for example, conducted a study of 21 high-performing, high-poverty schools across the nation, and although some of the characteristics of culturally relevant pedagogy appear, that was not the emphasis. Carter found that schools that were successful in teaching African American children shared the following characteristics. They displayed

1. leadership with the freedom to be innovative, creative and flexible;
2. clearly stated goals and accountability measures that were strictly adhered to by all;
3. master teachers who focused on academic achievement and curriculum implementation;
4. regular assessment monitored by the principal;
5. discipline achieved and maintained by cultivating self-discipline through achievement;
6. effective home-school interaction and mutual support with children still taking responsibility for their own learning;
7. recognition that learning and hard work are important and ongoing.

According to a North Carolina principal in this study, his school's success in teaching African American children lay primarily in the commitment of the teachers; "Our success follows on a single principle, 'If a child can't learn the way I teach, [. . .] then I must learn to teach the way [the child] learns'" (Carter, 2001, p. 69).

In the same vein, Langer (2001) found that students in high-performing schools had identical characteristics. She conducted a five-year study of instructional practices in selected high and low-performing middle and high schools in four states to discover what accounted for the differences in achievement in English as measured by standardized tests of reading and writing. High-performing schools regardless of the student population mix, shared a common characteristic: teachers believed that all students could learn, students were taught learning strategies, and teachers worked hard to provide integrated, coherent instruction connected to the lives of the students. As for instructional strategies, collaboration was a key strategy. Students were encouraged to explore ideas together. Teachers did not teach to high-stakes tests but determined what was necessary for the students to learn and embedded those skills and concepts in their instruction. In sum, in high-performing schools, teachers and students constituted a community of learners, where learning was taken seriously, where instruction was planned, and where a supportive environment was created in which students felt free to generate and apply new knowledge and to acquire new skills.

One can conclude that whether teachers embrace culturally relevant pedagogy or other theories as a framework for instruction, it is important that teachers know how to teach and that they be committed to teaching. Similarly, there appears to be a link between culturally relevant pedagogy and balanced literacy instruction. This relationship

is a sound reason to recommend balanced literacy instruction for use with urban, African-American students. Both instructional approaches incorporate direct instruction in the context of real literature; produce higher than expected gains in achievement; integrate students' real-world and cultural experiences, and endorse cooperative groupings. While the relationship is compelling, there is no proof to substantiate this relationship, just an assertion. However, there are implications for further research.

Table 1. Comparison Contrast of Culturally Relevant Instruction and Balanced Literacy

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy focuses on	Both	Balanced Literacy Focuses on
1. socio-political awareness	1. Set high expectations and produce greater than expected achievement	1. integrated reading and writing skills with strategies
2. elements of African-American culture ✓ vibrancy, ✓ oral response ✓ feelings	2. Encourage collaborative groupings	2 a combination of approaches
3. home-school interaction	3. Facilitate real-world connections between students' language and culture	3 literature and non-fiction texts
4. home language/school language distinctions	4. deliver systematic instruction in the context of real literature	5. comprehension and strategy instruction

This literature review has presented an overview of historical and contemporary approaches to reading instruction with particular emphasis on the skills-based approach, whole-language approach, literature-based approach, and balanced literacy approach. These competing approaches to teaching reading have generated much debate. In summary, research has indicated that each approach to teaching reading offers some advantage. Whole language and literature-based methods, for example, produced highly motivated readers who showed gains in comprehension and vocabulary. Similarly, skills-based instruction, associated with most basal programs, boosted student achievement in decoding ability and word recognition. The balanced literacy approach to reading instruction produced greater than expected gains in decoding, comprehension, and reading strategies.

Main Hypothesis

Research has shown that balanced reading produces greater than expected gains in reading achievement. Culturally relevant instruction and a balanced reading approach share certain characteristics. Given these parallels, it is reasonable to expect that a balanced reading approach will produce higher reading scores than a basal reading approach since the basal reading approach does not encompass these achievement boosting similarities.

The hypothesis of this study is that urban African-American, Title I third-grade students receiving instruction through a balanced reading approach will have higher reading scores overall than students receiving instruction using a basal reading approach. It is also hypothesized that in addition to producing higher overall achievement, a balanced reading approach will yield higher scores on each of the SOL Reading subtests

because the skills measured on these subtests are interrelated. For this reason, higher scores on one subtest will reasonably suggest higher scores on all of the subtests.

Sub-Hypotheses

1. Urban African-American, Title I students in the balanced reading program will have higher reading scores in understand(ing) elements of literature than students in a basal reading program.

Because students are required to identify characteristics of certain genres on this subtest and because a balanced reading approach incorporates exploration of a variety of children's literature and poetry, a balanced approach will produce higher reading scores than a basal reading approach. A basal reading approach typically uses stories with controlled vocabulary that are not genre-specific and do not lend themselves to genre study and character study. The emphasis is on learning skills and not on literature study. Consequently, a balanced reading approach will produce higher scores in understand(ing) elements of literature than a basal approach.

2. Urban African-American, Title I students in the balanced reading program will have higher reading scores in understand(ing) a variety of printed materials/resources than students in a basal reading program.

A balanced reading program incorporates non-fiction trade books and provides strategy instruction on the features of expository text. A basal reading approach does not integrate such content-reading strategies. In a basal reading program, non-fiction content material is usually isolated from reading instruction. When students read non-fiction in a basal program, the focus of instruction is on content-specific concepts rather than on the explicit strategy instruction presented in context. Therefore, a balanced approach will

produce higher reading scores in understand(ing) a variety of printed materials/resources than a basal reading program.

3. Urban African-American, Title I students in the balanced reading program will have higher reading scores in use(ing) word analysis strategies (structural/phonetic) than students in a basal reading program.

It would be expected that a basal approach, with its skills-based emphasis, would produce greater achievement in use(ing) word analysis strategies than a balanced reading approach. However, this study predicts that a balanced reading approach will actually produce greater achievement gains than a basal reading approach because a basal reading approach typically teaches phonics/skills in isolation, while a balanced reading approach teaches phonics/skills in the context of real reading. This the way use(ing) word analysis strategies is tested on the SOL Reading Test. Therefore, because a balanced reading approach teaches use(ing) word analysis strategies in the same manner as they are tested on the Reading SOL Test, a balanced reading approach will produce greater achievement for urban African-American, Title I students.

4. With urban African-American, Title I students there will be differences in the effectiveness of a balanced reading approach and a basal reading approach across understand(ing) elements of literature, understand (ing) a variety or printed materials/resources, and use(ing) word analysis strategies because of the similarities in methodology and pedagogy in both a balanced reading approach and culturally relevant instruction.

Researchers have endorsed the use of culturally relevant instruction with African-American students and noted increased achievement as one of the benefits. A balanced reading approach, which subscribes to similar principles as culturally relevant instruction, also improves achievement. Therefore, a balanced reading approach will have a greater effect on these interrelated skills than a basal reading approach.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In this study, the researcher will investigate whether third grade students achieve higher reading results through a basal approach or a balanced approach to reading instruction. Many studies have compared the effectiveness of various basal reading programs on achievement or focused on the best way to teach first-graders to read, but these studies have not focused primarily on the reading achievement of third-grade African-American students in an urban Title I elementary school who were exposed to a basal reading approach and those who were subsequently exposed to a balanced literacy approach. This study is significant because third-grade reading achievement is a significant predictor of school success. Children in Title I schools are at higher risk for reading failure; however, research has shown that with effective reading instruction, children at-risk for reading failure do experience success. It is important to note that in Title I schools, funding is tied to adherence to NCLB mandates, which endorse skills-based approaches more closely associated with basal reading instruction rather than balanced literacy. Therefore, this study, which is especially timely, will seek to determine if both methods are equally effective, or if one is more effective than the other in an urban Title I school. The participants, instrumentation, procedures, and research design will be discussed in this chapter.

The Subjects

Two hundred forty-five third-grade African-American, Title I students from an urban elementary school in southeastern Virginia served as subjects for the study. Subjects were studied as intact groups to avoid disruption in the educational setting. Participants in the control group were third-grade classes of urban African-American, Title I students who were taught reading through a basal approach in the 2000-2001 school year. Participants in the comparison group were urban African-American, Title I third graders who received instruction through a balanced reading approach during the 2002-2003 school year.

The research site was an urban elementary school that has been designated as a school-wide Title I site because of the high number of low-income students classified as at-risk for school failure. Ninety-seven percent of the students receive free lunch. The school, which has an average enrollment of 700 children in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade, is surrounded by housing projects, apartments, and single-family houses. The children have very few books in their homes and spend little time reading outside of school. The state reading test scores of these children reflect the difficulty that the school is facing. To address the low reading performance and test scores of the third-graders, the school applied for and received a Reading Excellence Act grant in 2001 to develop reading improvement strategies.

The study sample consisted of 245 urban African-American, Title I third-grade students. The first group was enrolled in third grade during the 2000-2001 school year, and the second group was enrolled in third grade during the 2002-2003 school year.

There were 55 males and 74 females in group one, and 49 males and 66 females in group two.

These students are part of a school district with 36,745 students in five high schools, nine middle schools, and thirty-five elementary schools, eighteen of which have school-wide Title I programs. The student population of the district is approximately 29% Caucasian, 66% African American, and 5% other.

Table 2. Schoolwide Demographic Comparisons

	Control Group Basal Reading Instruction 2000-2001	Experimental Group Balanced Literacy Instruction 2002-2003
Percentage of students receiving free/reduced lunch	97	96
Percentage of African-American students	98.7	98.7
Average Daily Attendance Percentages	96.3	96.4

*Percentages are approximate.

Data Collection

A written request was sent to the Department of Research, Testing, and Statistics (RTS) for approval to conduct research in the school district. RTS then informed the principal and district personnel. The letter described the purpose and procedures of the study. Test data was collected at the building level.

Data on the reading achievement of urban African-American, Title I third graders in this southeastern Virginia urban elementary school was gathered to conduct this study. Pre-test data from the Test for Higher Standards (TFHS), which was administered to third graders in Fall 2000 and Fall 2002, was compiled along with post-test data from the reading section of the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) Test for Spring 2001 and

Spring 2003. This research study compared the effects of a basal reading approach and a balanced reading approach on the reading achievement of third-grade students in an urban elementary school in southeastern Virginia.

The Instruments

The TFHS and the SOL tests in English measure achievement in word analysis, research and study skills, and understanding fiction, non-fiction, and poetry. These categories are scored individually and then combined to yield an overall reading achievement score. The un-timed tests consist of multiple-choice items. The TFHS was developed for several reasons: to measure student achievement on Virginia Standards of Learning, to serve as a diagnostic tool to drive instruction, and to predict performance on SOL tests. Similarly, SOL tests were designed to measure student learning on state standards, to assess proficiency, and to establish a common baseline for performance expectations. The TFHS and the SOL tests were validated, field tested by experts in the field, and accepted for use across the state.

According to the October 2000 *Technical Report*, the 1998 SOL tests were administered in grades 3, 5, 8, and 11. Validity was determined by examining whether schools that performed well on the Literacy Passport and Stanford 9 tests performed as well on similar SOL tests. It was found that school standing and student scores were consistent (p. 25).

The SOLs were developed by Harcourt Brace in conjunction with the Virginia Department of Education. Field testing occurred in Spring 1999. Students taking the SOLs receive a raw score that is then converted to a scaled score. To pass, students must earn at least 400 out of a possible 600. Depending on their score, children are ranked as

below proficient (under 400), proficient (400-499) or advanced proficient (500-600). School districts send the tests to the state, and they are scored by Harcourt Brace. The schools receive detailed summary sheets once the data are disaggregated and a raw score is yielded.

The Test for Higher Standards (TFHS), developed by Stuart Flannigan and David Mott, is used mainly to drive instruction by highlighting strengths as well as areas of growth on state standards. Each grade level has its own test. In 2000, the following reliability data were gathered. In reading, the TFHS was estimated to have reliability of .87 as compared to the .89 reliability of the SOLs.

Content validity was established by a curriculum review of 20 Virginia school districts and by alignment with the Virginia Department of Education SOL Teacher Resource Guide. The TFHS was also found to have predictive validity because in 31 schools, reading scores correlated .91 with SOL pass rates according to the Validity and Reliability statement of the TFHS by David Mott (2001).

Research Design

A quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test design will be executed for comparison groups. A pre-test will be used to establish compatibility. The subjects comprise intact groups, and random assignment to a treatment will not be possible. ANOVA will be used to determine whether or not the instructional approach is effective across subjects, whether there are group differences in overall reading achievement, or whether reading achievement in individual sub areas improved more than the others. An alpha level of .05 will be used for significance.

The Research Site

The school being used in this study received a Reading Excellence grant to address the low reading performance of third-graders on state tests. Project RISE (Reading Instruction Supporting Excellence), the name given to the grant, was implemented in grades K-3 to boost the state reading test scores by 33% by the end of the 2002-2003 school year. *Rigby Literacy* was the balanced literacy series purchased with the grant. According to the SOL Virginia School Performance Report Card, the school's pass rate in third grade English was 39%; the district pass rate was 64%, and the state pass rate was 84%. The school received a rating of "Provisionally Accredited/Needs Improvement," which means that the school "has scores that do not meet state benchmarks in one or more areas . . ." State benchmarks specify the percentage of students who must pass for a school to be accredited. The benchmarks are 66% in English, 65% in mathematics, 66% in science, and 50% in history.

For the 2002-03 school year, the third grade English scores rose to 49% and when combined with the fifth-grade scores, the school earned a ranking of "Provisionally Accredited." By NCLB standards, the school also made Annual Yearly Progress (AYP).

Raising third-grade reading scores presented a greater challenge for the 2003-2004 school year because third grade must be accredited on its own in each subject, independent of fifth grade, and because the passing score for reading was raised from 70% to 75% meaning that 75% of third-grade students must pass with a standard score of 400.

Instructional Materials and Approaches

The teachers used the Signatures basal series, the adopted textbook of the district. No standardization existed in classroom use despite the fact that the school district had its own Reading Initiative in place to ensure that all third-graders would be reading on level at the end of third grade. As a result, the uninterrupted 2 ½ hour Communication Skills Block was more clearly delineated in 2000 by outlining the required components and suggested pacing of the block. This mandate was in place for both the control and experimental groups.

To address the deficiencies at this school, the Rigby Literacy Program was adopted to foster systematic, research-based, balanced reading instruction in phonics, phonemic awareness, word analysis, and vocabulary through shared reading and guided reading. According to the Rigby Literacy Implementation Guide, Rigby consists of the following components: shared reading (Big Books), guided reading (leveled, take-home, and chapter books), word works (phonics rhyme chart, teacher cards, word works magazines), Wonder Writers (strategy cards, teacher's writing resource, strategy card teacher notes), and Assessment (assessment and evaluation forms, benchmark tools, phonics assessment tests).

Implementation of the program was facilitated by a literacy coach in weekly staff development, where teachers were trained to use the features of the program and to format their lesson plans to correspond to the components of the program. In addition, teachers documented results of quarterly running records and guided reading level on students' literacy portfolios and shared samples of student work. As a result of the Rigby

Literacy Program's use with the experimental group in 2002-2003, teachers now take running records, incorporate literacy centers, and use leveled books.

The Signatures basal by Harcourt Brace includes Re-teach Lessons, Daily Language Practice, Reader Response Cards, Project Cards, Integrated Curriculum cards, Writing Models, Additional Reading, School-Home Connections, Handwriting Models, Graphic Organizers, Videocassettes, Integrated Technology Components, and Assessments (skills assessment, holistic reading assessment, and integrated performance assessment).

There were few guidelines from the district regarding the use of the Signatures series when it was used in 2000-2001 with the control group. Teachers were allowed wide discretion in selecting the components of the program they wished to use. Consequently, instruction varied by teacher and by school. The components most widely used and available were skills-based assessments and student workbooks.

A comparison of the implementation of both instructional approaches revealed differences in focus, program components, teacher training, lesson formats, and monitoring. For example, Signatures, with its many skills-based worksheets, sought to develop skills in phonics and reading, while Rigby delivered balanced reading instruction through systematic phonics instruction, guided reading and shared reading.

The daily components varied as well. Rigby's use of leveled readers provided for greater differentiation of instruction. Therefore, students received guided reading instruction from a book written on their instructional reading level. With Signatures, however, all students used the same basal reader and had only a few variations in follow-up activities. Teachers received weekly training in both programs, but with Rigby, a

trained literacy coach provided demonstration lessons and course-like training designed specifically for Rigby's program features. There was no systematic, comprehensive staff development plan used with the Signatures training.

Most of the instructional time with Rigby was spent on real reading and in small groups with the teacher to allow for greater interaction. Instruction with *Signatures* tended to be whole class and/or independent, with a major focus on seatwork and worksheets.

Finally, in terms of monitoring, Rigby had built in monitoring tools like running records, rubrics, and observation guides that were reviewed and discussed with the literacy coach weekly. The strict implementation of Rigby, spelled out in the implementation timeline, was required as a condition of the grant received by the school to increase poor reading achievement.

The Signatures implementation was not monitored closely. Quarterly portfolios were spot-checked periodically or not at all by the grade-level chair. The portfolios were not checked for their quality or for training purposes, but rather to verify that they were completed. Teachers were not required to reflect on student progress. Ultimately, the percentage of students passing the Reading SOL test was 40% when Signatures was used, but that percentage rose to 49% when Rigby was used. A condensed summary of the implementation of each instructional approach as described above can be found in Table 3 immediately following this section.

Table 3. Implementation of Instructional Approaches

	Signatures Implementation <i>Basal Reading Instruction</i> 2000-2001	Rigby Implementation <i>Balanced Literacy Instruction</i> 2002-2003
Purpose	To develop: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reading skills ▪ Phonics skills 	To deliver: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Balanced reading instruction ▪ Systematic phonics instruction ▪ Guided Reading ▪ Shared Reading
Components	Daily Language Practice Skills Instruction Guided Reading Comprehension Questions Worksheet Assessment	Shared Reading →Big Books Guided Reading →Leveled Books Word Works →Phonics Rhymes Wonder Writer →Strategy Cards Assessment →Phonics
Teacher Training	Weekly staff development on various topics related to English/Language Arts (not specific to text features/ usually delivered by 1 person) One-time training during series adoption	5 Literacy Coaches provided weekly systematic staff development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ developing lesson format ▪ using the program's features ▪ monitoring running records ▪ demonstration lessons
Lesson Format	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Proofreading Sentences (whole group) ▪ Guided Reading (3 small groups/ 3 x per week) ▪ Workbook Pages (seatwork) ▪ Silent Reading (seatwork) <p>More time was spent on skills instruction</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Guided Reading (3 small groups daily) ▪ Shared Reading (whole group) ▪ Embedded Phonics, Writing, and Strategy Instruction (whole group, small group, individualized) <p>More time was spent on real reading.</p>
Monitoring	Reading Portfolio (quarterly) Spot-checked periodically by grade chair	Reading Portfolio (quarterly) Running Records (3 per quarter) Observations Monitored quarterly by Literacy Coach
% of students passing English SOL Test	40 %	49 %

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Scores from the May 2001 and May 2003 administrations of the Virginia Standards of Learning third-grade English test battery were subjected to an analysis of variance (ANOVA) for the purpose of testing the hypothesis. This ex post facto study compared the SOL reading test scores of urban African-American, Title I third grade students using a basal reading approach in 2000-2001 with those of urban African-American, Title I third grade students using a balanced literacy reading approach during the 2002-2003 school year.

Major Hypothesis

The major hypothesis as stated in Chapter 2 is that urban African-American, Title I third-grade students receiving instruction through a balanced literacy reading approach will have higher overall reading scores on the Virginia Standards of Learning Test than students receiving instruction using a basal reading approach. Urban African American, Title I third-grade students being taught through a basal approach to reading instruction at a southeastern Virginia urban elementary school performed poorly on state reading assessments.

Sub-hypotheses

Due to the complexity of the major hypothesis, several sub-hypotheses were generated. Treatment of the sub-hypotheses follows.

Sub-hypothesis #1

Sub-hypothesis #1, as stated in Chapter 2 says, urban African-American, Title I third-grade students in a balanced literacy program will have higher scaled reading scores in *understand(ing) elements of literature* than students in a basal reading program.

In its null form, sub-hypothesis #1 states: There will be no difference between the *understand elements of literature* scores of urban African-American, Title I third-grade students taught using a balanced literacy approach and a basal reading approach.

Sub-hypothesis #2

Sub-hypothesis #2, as stated in Chapter 2 says, Urban African-American, Title I third-grade students in a balanced literacy program will have higher reading scores in *understand(ing) a variety of printed materials/resource materials* than students in a basal reading program.

In its null form, sub-hypothesis #2 states: There will be no difference between the *understand a variety of printed materials/resource materials* of urban African-American, Title I third-grade students taught using a balanced literacy approach and a basal reading approach.

Sub-hypothesis #3

Sub-hypothesis # 3, as stated in Chapter 2 says, Urban African-American, Title I third-grade students in a balanced literacy program will have higher reading scores in *use(ing) word analysis strategies* than students in a basal reading program.

In its null form, sub-hypothesis #3 states: There will be no difference between the scores in *use(ing) word analysis strategies* of urban African-American, Title I third-grade students taught using a balanced literacy approach and a basal reading approach.

Sub-hypothesis #4

Sub-hypothesis # 4, as stated in Chapter 2, says that with urban African-American, Title I students, there will be differences in the effectiveness of a balanced reading approach and a basal reading approach across understand(ing) elements of literature, understand (ing) a variety or printed materials/resources, and use(ing) word analysis strategies because of the similarities in methodology and pedagogy in both a balanced reading approach and culturally relevant instruction.

In its null form, sub-hypothesis #4 states: There will be no differences in the effectiveness of a balanced literacy approach and a basal reading approach for urban African-American, Title I third-grade students across understand(ing) elements of literature, understand (ing) a variety or printed materials/resources, and use(ing) word analysis strategies despite the similarities in methodology and pedagogy in both a balanced reading approach and culturally relevant instruction.

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was run to determine whether type of instruction (basal reading instruction and balanced literacy reading instruction) has an effect on the four dependent variables (scores on the Virginia Standards of Learning Reading Test and its subparts). An alpha level of .05 was used for all statistical tests. The results follow.

The results for the ANOVA indicate that there is no difference in the performance of urban African-American, Title I third-grade students on the understand(ing) elements

of literature subtest, $F(2, 243) = 2.076$, $p = .15$ for the experimental balanced literacy group ($M = 32.41$, $SD = 9.614$) and the comparison basal reading group ($M = 30.53$, $SD = 10.682$). Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted.

Table 4. Summary of ANOVA of Elements of Literature

GROUP	N	MEAN	SD	F- value	P
1	116	32.41	9.614		
				2.076	.151
2	129	30.53	10.682		

Note: Group – Experimental (1) Control (2)

The results for the ANOVA indicate that there is a statistically significant difference in the performance of urban African-American, Title I third-grade students on the understand(ing) a variety of printed materials/resource materials subtest, $F(2, 243) = 4.763$, $p = .03$ for the experimental balanced literacy group ($M = 32.15$, $SD = 7.270$) and the comparison basal reading group ($M = 30.53$, $SD = 5.942$). Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. The balanced literacy group performed significantly better than the basal reading group.

Table 5. Summary of ANOVA of Variety of Printed Materials

GROUP	N	MEAN	SD	F- value	P
1	116	32.15	7.270		
				4.763	.030
2	129	30.30	5.942		

Note: Group – Experimental (1) Control (2)

The results for the ANOVA indicate that there is no difference in the performance of urban African-American, Title I third-grade students on the understand(ing) word analysis subtest, $F(2, 243) = .529$, $p = .468$ for the experimental balanced literacy group ($M = 31.83$, $SD = 6.396$) and the comparison basal reading group ($M = 31.19$, $SD = 7.308$). Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted.

Table 6. Summary of ANOVA of Word Analysis

GROUP	N	MEAN	SD	F- value	P
1	116	31.83	6.396		
				.529	.468
2	129	31.19	7.308		

Note: Group – Experimental (1) Control (2)

The results for the ANOVA indicated that there is no difference in the performance of urban African-American Title-I third-grade students on the understand(ing) word analysis subtest, $F(2, 243) = 2.945$, $p = .087$ for the experimental balanced literacy group ($M = 30.94$, $SD = 4.579$) and the comparison basal reading group ($M = 29.94$, $SD = 4.768$). Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted.

Table 7. Summary of ANOVA of Reading/Literature and Research

GROUP	N	MEAN	SD	F- value	P
1	116	30.94	4.579		
				2.945	.087
2	129	29.94	4.768		

Note: Group – Experimental (1) Control (2)

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

The results showed that for two subtests there was no significant difference at the .05 level in the reading scores of urban African-American, Title I third graders using a basal approach and urban African-American, Title I third graders using a balanced literacy reading approach. For example, on the subtests understanding word analysis and understanding elements of literature, students performed similarly regardless of approach. The balanced literary groups did outperform the basal reading group on the understanding a variety of printed materials subtest. However, significant performance on one subtest was not enough to impact the overall subtest scores in reading/language arts. Ultimately, there was no difference between the two groups on overall reading achievement; however, the significance of the variety of printed materials subtest for the balanced literacy group has far reaching implications for school districts, as this subtest encompasses the bulk of core reading skills.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Summary

Reading achievement in the United States is of paramount concern to the educational community and to the general public. Many students at the elementary level in particular are leaving school with inadequate skills to read strategically and to function competently in life. Specifically, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) shows that almost 70 % of all fourth-grade students do not read proficiently. As a result of these statistics, several federal and state initiatives aimed at improving early reading achievement have been instituted in kindergarten through third grade. These initiatives provide funding for research on effective literacy teaching, on high-performing high-poverty schools, on research-based reading programs, and on effective instructional methods. Further, most of these initiatives hold states accountable for establishing standards to ensure that all students will have learned to read by the time they complete third grade since the level of third-grade reading achievement has been identified as a major predictor of later school success or failure (Adams, 1990; Fletcher and Lyon, 1998).

This study compared the third-grade reading achievement of urban African American, Title I students using a basal reading series with those using a balanced literacy program to determine whether the highly structured skills-based methods advocated by *The No Child Left Behind Act* actually foster or impede reading achievement in an urban school setting. It is understood, however, that no one factor alone, such as a specific approach to teaching reading, is the sole factor in determining

whether a child becomes a competent reader. Research literature has vacillated about the effectiveness of various reading approaches, but many of the studies have suggested that systematic phonics instruction and explicit strategy instruction in context benefit all students. This study will add to the existing body of knowledge by identifying the benefits of these approaches to urban African-American, Title I students, and therefore, assisting school districts, schools, and teachers in designing reading programs to address the instructional needs of this population.

Basal Reading Instruction

By the early years of the twentieth century, commercial reading programs presenting the whole-word method, had become known as basals. The readers were leveled by grade so that each grade used a different reader appropriate for that grade. Later, the term “basal” came to represent a method of reading instruction called the whole-word or look-say approach. In practice and implementation, this method was based on several key assumptions about the best way to teach reading. These assumptions were (1) that whole words introduced first would facilitate comprehension, (2) that the primary goal of reading was comprehension, (3) that phonic skill was best developed if spread over a period from grade one through six, and (4) that instruction in small groups based on student reading levels produced the best results (Chall, 1967).

Statistics from Morrow and Gambrell (2000) indicated that in 1958, one hundred percent of the public schools in America used basal reading programs and embraced the instructional methods offered in basal readers. From 1930 to 1965, basals emphasized comprehension and employed a meaning-emphasis approach to reading instruction. Phonics lessons were included, but they were taught only after children had mastered a

sufficient number of sight words (Stahl, 1998, p. 33). From the mid-1960's to the mid-1970's, the major changes in basal readers were the addition of more natural-sounding stories, the de-emphasis of controlled vocabulary, and the delay of phonics (Popp, 1975, cited in Stahl, 1998). At this time, basals offered a complete instructional program, including workbooks, supplementary materials, questions and answers, reproducibles, and teachers' manuals designed to save time for teachers. However, basals using the "whole word, meaning-first, phonics little-and-later approach to beginning reading instruction" (Adams 1994, p. 32) dominated this decade also. Indeed, Adams (1994) cited a survey by Barton and Wilder (1964) showing that 98 percent of first-grade teachers and 92-94 percent of second- and third-grade teachers said they used basals almost on a daily basis.

Because basals were criticized for encouraging prescribed teaching, the prescriptive, scripted approach of older basals was replaced in modern basal series by multiple approaches from which teachers may choose (p. 113). This variety allows teachers to adapt basal materials to the needs of their particular students.

While basal readers were de-emphasizing phonics instruction, Rudolph Flesch and others were calling for a return to phonics. The furor created by his book *Why Johnny Can't Read* (1955) was so intense that Jeanne Chall (1967) undertook an ambitious three-year project, sponsored by the Carnegie Foundation, to study approaches to beginning reading instruction. Chall examined 22 reading programs by interviewing administrators and teachers and conducting classroom observations in over 300 kindergarten through third-grade classrooms serving children of varying economic classes across the United States, England, and Scotland. In addition, she read studies on

beginning reading instruction to uncover what the research had revealed. Among her findings were these interesting conclusions: First, children taught using the whole-word/look-say method showed strength in comprehension of silent reading and in other factors like reading rate, fluency, motivation, and expression. Next, children who were taught phonics showed sustained strength in word recognition, particularly for new words they encountered. Chall's (1967) study also found that by the end of grade two, children who had been taught phonics surpassed the control group in comprehension, vocabulary and silent reading rate. The inescapable conclusion was that approaches using "systematic phonics resulted in significantly better word recognition, better spelling, better vocabulary, and better reading comprehension" for those grades included in the study (p. 38). That finding held true for children across the board. Thus, multiple approaches to reading instruction invariably include some type of phonics instruction.

Balanced Literacy

Balanced literacy has gained favor over the past decades as a method that produces competent and engaged readers if it is well implemented. Vacca, Vacca and Gove (2000) traced the genesis of the current balanced literacy trend to the largely political back-to-basics movement, which has pushed for a return to the kind of skills-based instruction common in the 1950's and 1960's. The balanced literacy approach developed as a reaction to the whole-language movement of the 1980's, which became an easy target to blame for declines in reading achievement scores. Vacca, Vacca, & Gove (2000) characterized balanced literacy as "weaving approaches and strategies into a seamless pattern of instruction" that includes specific components: namely, reading aloud, shared reading, guided reading, independent reading, modeled/shared writing,

interactive writing, and independent writing (p. 61). These components allow for the integration of reading, speaking, and writing experiences with skills and strategies to teach and motivate children to read. Duffy-Hester (1999) expanded the definition of a balanced program to include a balancing of methods, approaches, and frameworks.

Current research supports balanced literacy as an effective approach to teaching reading. Wharton-McDonald, Pressley & Hampston (1998), for example, studied reading instruction among a representative sample of first- and second-grade teachers who focused on decoding within the context of meaningful and varied print experiences and who emphasized comprehension and reading strategies. Their findings showed that children who were taught using a mix of direct skills instruction and rich literary experiences made significant gains in reading.

Further, the balanced literacy approach has been endorsed by prominent educators and researchers like Dorothy Strickland (1997), who advocates skills instruction in the classroom but only within the context of reading good literature.

Teaching African-American Children

The now-outdated deficit model of African-American achievement that dominated public policy discussions during the 1960's and 1970's generated a negative vocabulary that still exists today. In order to explain why many African-American children were not reaching their educational potential as indicated by comparisons with other groups, researchers used phrases like genetically inferior, culturally disadvantaged, and culturally deprived (Hilliard, 2002).

In opposition to the negative vocabulary and the deficit theory of African American achievement, Ladson-Billings (1994) and others began looking at what was

right with African-American children. Ladson-Billings conducted a nearly three-year study of eight exemplary teachers in a low-income urban public school where African American children were realizing their full potential as learners in spite of the negative characterizations and underachievement of African American students as a group. Teachers who were committed to their students' "high academic achievement, cultural competence, and socio-political consciousness" (Ladson-Billings, p. 189) got excellent results from African American students.

Summarily, culturally relevant pedagogy or culturally sensitive pedagogy assumes a positive view of the learner's capabilities, a knowledge of and respect for the learner's culture, and a commitment to empowering learners to serve their own communities. Culturally relevant pedagogy consists of well-designed instructional activities that provide opportunities for children to cultivate and master specific skills and to acquire and apply knowledge within the framework of their own cultural background and values.

The literature examined for this study included an overview of historical and contemporary approaches to reading instruction with particular emphasis on the skills-based approach, whole-language approach, literature-based approach, and balanced literacy approach since these competing approaches to teaching reading have generated much debate. In summary, research has indicated that each approach to teaching reading offers some advantage. Whole language and literature-based methods, for example, produced highly motivated readers who showed gains in comprehension and vocabulary. Similarly, skills-based instruction, associated with most basal programs, boosted student achievement in decoding ability and word recognition. The balanced literacy approach to

reading instruction produced greater than expected gains in decoding, comprehension, and reading strategies.

The hypothesis of this study was that urban African-American, Title I third-grade students receiving instruction through a balanced reading approach would have higher reading scores overall than students receiving instruction using a basal reading approach. Urban African American, Title I third-grade students were taught through a basal approach to reading instruction at a southeastern Virginia urban elementary school. In an effort to improve reading achievement, the reading curriculum was changed from a basal approach to a balanced reading approach. The change stemmed from the implementation of a Reading Excellence Act Grant that the school was awarded to help it meet state benchmarks. The Reading Excellence Act targeted primary students at risk of reading failure in hopes of teaching every child to read by third grade. It provided for professional development, tutoring, and family literacy by utilizing best practices in reading research. As such, materials were sought that would provide an effective alternative to basal reading programs. Comprehensive, balanced approaches like Rigby Literacy were chosen as instructional alternatives because of their ability to differentiate instruction and provide leveled readers to match students' instructional levels.

Many studies have compared the effectiveness of various basal reading programs on achievement or focused on the best way to teach first-graders to read, but these studies have not focused primarily on the reading achievement of third-grade African-American students in an urban Title I elementary school who were exposed to a basal reading approach and those who were subsequently exposed to a balanced literacy approach. This study is significant because third-grade reading achievement is a significant

predictor of school success (Adams, 1990; Fletcher and Lyon, 1998). Children in Title I schools are at higher risk for reading failure; however, research has shown that with effective reading instruction, children at risk for reading failure do experience success. It is important to note that in Title I schools, funding is tied to adherence to NCLB mandates, which endorse skills-based approaches more closely associated with basal reading instruction rather than balanced literacy. Therefore, this timely study sought to determine if both methods are equally effective or if one method is more effective than the other in an urban Title I school.

Subjects

Two hundred forty-five third-grade African-American, Title I students from an urban elementary school in southeastern Virginia served as subjects for the study. Subjects were studied as intact groups to avoid disruption in the educational setting. Participants in the control group were third-grade classes of urban African-American, Title I students who were taught reading through a basal approach in the 2000-2001 school year. Participants in the comparison group were urban African-American, Title I third graders who received instruction through a balanced reading approach during the 2002-2003 school year.

The research site was an urban elementary school that has been designated as a school-wide Title I site because of the high number of low-income students classified as at-risk for school failure. Ninety-seven percent of the students receive free lunch. The school, with an average enrollment of 700 children in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade, is surrounded by housing projects, apartments, and single-family houses. To address the low reading performance and test scores of the third-graders, the school

applied for and received a Reading Excellence Act grant in 2001 to develop reading improvement strategies.

Results of the Study

The study showed that students receiving balanced literacy instruction and basal reading instruction achieved at similar levels with regard to their understanding of elements of literature, word analysis, and overall reading /literature and research scores. The balanced literacy group scored significantly better on only one subtest, understanding printed materials and resource materials, though balanced literacy was expected to achieve higher overall reading achievement.

Though the balanced literacy group did not score significantly better on the overall reading score, it is important to note that the understanding a variety of printed materials subtest encompasses the majority of the reading skills that Marzano (2001) describes as having the greatest effect for enhancing reading achievement. These skills include identifying similarities and differences, summarizing and note taking, using non-linguistic representations, and creating advanced organizers (Marzano, 2001). This finding suggests that balanced literacy may foster strategic reading and higher level thinking, thus producing more competent readers.

The results of this study show that a balanced literacy approach works as well as a basal reading approach. This approach also takes less time, incorporates more skills, and spans more disciplines because it allows for curricular integration. While basal instruction emphasized phonics, balanced literacy covered phonics in addition to a variety of other skills, and produced scores that were similar to the basal program that focused primarily on phonics and little else.

Recommendations

The results of the study indicate that the approaches are at least equally effective with regard to overall reading achievement as measured by the Virginia Standards of Learning third-grade English test. Therefore, those instructional strategies that the research site used across both approaches can be recommended.

Based on the findings of this study and the practices of the research site, recommendations can be made about professional development and training for teachers, instructional strategies that enhance reading instruction, closing the achievement gap, and providing support programs for students.

Professional Development for Teachers Related to Culturally Relevant Teaching

Culturally relevant instruction is very necessary to the academic success of urban African-American children because research has shown that when their culture and experiences are valued, learning becomes purposeful (Delpit, 2002). Curriculum should be enhanced with Afrocentric and multicultural study so that students view the curriculum as relevant and gain a sense of pride about the contributions of minorities. Because of its emphasis on exposure to variety, authenticity, and student interest, a balanced literacy approach is better suited for culturally relevant instruction than the basal reading approach's passages that focus on controlled vocabulary. A balanced literacy approach encompasses a variety of literary genres and embraces authentic literature making it more likely for students to be exposed to culturally relevant materials.

Another way to train these teachers is through literature study. For example, at the research site, a strategic review of literature on best practices was led by an exemplary

teacher to expose teachers to current research on African-American learners and allow them to reflect on their instructional approaches that either fostered or impeded the success of African-American learners.

Instructional Strategies to Enhance Reading Instruction and Close the Achievement Gap:
Books on Tape and Reading Programs

The research site provided targeted remediation during after-school programs, encouraged home reading programs, and used data to plan and monitor instruction as a way to close their achievement gap.

Reading was reinforced by creating a home/school reading program, instituting after-school enrichment programs, integrating powerful literacy characteristics, linking writing to literature study, and using books on tape to build fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary.

Research has shown that the more students read, the better readers they become because a balanced literacy approach provides more opportunities for students to engage in reading for sustained periods of time. Exposure to a variety of printed materials builds background and fosters reading achievement. In balanced literacy programs, wide reading is encouraged, and children are taught to self-select books on their levels. In basal reading programs, reading selections feature controlled vocabulary and excerpts from books, but there is little emphasis on wide reading or self-selection of books. Many urban African-American children lack access to high-quality children's literature in the home; therefore, programs that encourage children to read at home are beneficial. When these programs provide books on tape, the benefits increase because recorded books level

the playing field for struggling readers who typically have problems with decoding, fluency, and comprehension and often do not have help at home.

Having recorded books in the home also increases access to high-quality children's literature that is experienced by many urban minority children. Balanced literacy approaches incorporate take-home books for students to use as practice and use sound recordings to provide models of fluent reading for students so that when homework packs with books and audiotapes are checked out for home use, students can engage in independent reading and in repeated readings. A 2003 research report from Recorded Books Incorporated in conjunction with the Boston Public schools noted that recorded books improved reading scores by 32%, improved vocabulary, and increased the amount of time children spent reading by 77%.

Books on tape were also used in the classroom setting. Children read and listened, thereby simulating lap reading, which is lacking in many urban environments. Other benefits included learning new vocabulary, increasing fluency, boosting comprehension, and encouraging children to read longer books and to read for longer periods of time.

After-School Programs

After-school programs provided remediation and enrichment and enhanced reading achievement. Remediation offered intense small-group instruction that targeted specific skill areas and test-taking strategies. Along with remediation, enrichment programs such as literature groups, cultural arts activities, and mathematics/science clubs provided access to community resources and created opportunities for higher-level thinking and the development of a broader knowledge background. Consequently,

students became stronger readers. Such tutoring programs were an essential component of the comprehensive balanced literacy program implemented at the research site under its Reading Excellence Act Grant.

Essential Daily Instructional Components

Balanced literacy instruction has proven to be a very effective strategy for African American learners. The consistency and structure of the routines and components give students repeated exposure to reading and writing and instruction in phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension, which research supports. Based on my findings from the practices implemented at the research site, the balanced literacy block should consist of a daily uninterrupted block of time.

According to the best practices document produced by this southeastern Virginia school district, students should have guided reading daily in a small group of four to six students because small-group direct instruction increases mastery. Shared reading should incorporate a variety of materials as they are critical in building background. Non-fiction reading material must be incorporated so that children are exposed to the features of expository text. Such exposure enables critical thinking, provides springboards for writing, and facilitates wide reading.

Word study lessons are also critical to reading, writing, spelling, and usage. Other recommendations include using work stations that incorporate kinesthetic, auditory, and visual materials to reinforce content and provide practice. Recorded books, board games, computer-assisted instruction, file folder activities, and authentic process/product also engage learners in rigorous learning and are provided for in a

balanced literacy approach because of its focus on explicit strategy instruction within the context of actual reading.

Another tutoring strategy found in a balanced approach is “double-dosing,” which allows children who need remediation to benefit from participating in two reading groups instead of one during the school day. Using retired teachers and content specialists to work with these children in guided groups provides maximum exposure to curriculum and a chance to see the curriculum presented in a different format. In other words, re-teaching, flexible grouping, monitoring data, and giving frequent assessments are crucial to improving the reading achievement of urban African-American, Title-I students.

To prepare for the variety of printed materials test, instruction in these areas focused on author’s purpose, summarizing, note-taking, making inferences and predictions, identifying cause and effect, analyzing problems and solutions, and drawing comparisons and contrasts. These are important skills that require students to engage in wide reading and employ content reading strategies. Balanced literacy encompasses all of these skills by exposing students to a variety of genres and providing explicit strategy instruction in context, so that students are able to transfer and apply these skills in reading tasks and retain the strategies in the upper grades.

Caveats

African-American children do not need instruction that merely teaches the test and fails to explore the breadth of the curriculum. Since high-stakes tests focus on factual knowledge and basic skills, reading instruction focused solely on the content of the test fails to consider the critical knowledge that students need. Such a focus means that children spend much of the time on seat work, having little opportunity for

discussion and interdisciplinary studies. Similarly, scripted approaches inhibit differentiation of instruction and stifle teacher creativity. Balanced literacy, however, differentiates instruction based on students' individual reading levels, tailors instruction to students' interest, thus allowing for greater teacher flexibility.

Although African-American children need experienced teachers, they often get inexperienced ones who lack fully-developed management strategies, instructional strategies, and familiarity with African-American culture. A cultural mismatch too often results in higher discipline rates and lower student achievement. African-American children also need administrators who will advocate for children and monitor suspensions, retentions, and referrals to special education.

Finally, avoiding one-size-fits all approaches, panacea programs, and oversimplification of the challenges urban learners face is crucial to successful teaching. Urban African-American students can and will be successful with culturally responsive teaching and balanced literacy instruction from exemplary teachers.

Implications for Further Research

The current study was conducted with urban African-American third-grade students in the same Title I school. Further research related to specific issues affecting the urban learner could be pursued. For example, summer setback, which has been identified as one of the reasons for underachievement of African-American students in reading, continues to require attention and creative solutions. Therefore, researchers might explore whether balanced literacy, because of its emphasis on home reading, decreases the summer regression that African-American students experience.

Research has shown that when school is in recess for the summer months, African-American children especially, actually regress (Allington and McGill-Franzen, 2003). A 1997 Baltimore study by Entwisle, Alexander and Olson found that African-American children fell three months behind their middle-class White counterparts in reading performance, even though the performance of each group had been comparable during the school year (cited in Allington, et al., 2003). The study also found that as a result of this “summer fallback,” African-American children, by the end of elementary school, lagged two to three years behind White middle-class children in reading proficiency. According to Allington, in an informal conversation with the researcher in March of 2006, this is an intriguing research issue. He hypothesized that children who receive balanced literacy instruction will be better able to select books suitable to their interest and reading ability than students who receive basal reading instruction because students receiving basal reading instruction tend to select books that are too difficult for them, causing frustration.

Another question to be investigated is whether there is a cumulative effect of instructional approach for students exposed to a balanced literacy approach versus those exposed to a basal reading approach. Though comparison studies have been done, they have not examined the long-term effects of achievement gains. To illustrate further, Lehman (1995) described a 1986 study by Eldredge and Butterfield conducted with second graders to determine the effectiveness of five different approaches to reading instruction involving basals, decoding, and literature programs in five combinations. The second-graders with the literature-plus-decoding program and those with the literature-

only program showed improvement above those in the traditional basal programs. A follow-up study could determine whether the improvement noted was maintained.

Next, research is needed to determine whether culturally relevant instruction improves reading achievement of African-American students. Recent studies indicate that this approach shows promise. Trumball, Greenfield, and Quiroz (2003) have described the “culturally responsive classroom” (p. 78) which is being employed with success in the Bridging Cultures Project in Los Angeles. Latino students distinguish cultural values in Latino and American culture and learn to adapt. This project trains teachers of Latino students to understand the difference between Latino culture and American culture and to anticipate possible cultural differences that may interfere with learning. Trumball, Greenfield, and Quiroz (2003) concluded that the Bridging Cultures Project concept could be applied successfully by teachers of African American children, whose culture includes elements of both individualism and collectivism. Similarly, Hollie (2005) described a language-awareness approach to instruction that has proven to be successful with African American children in a Los Angeles Elementary School. In the Academic English Mastery Program (AEMP), teachers use culturally relevant literature to explain to students the differences between their home language and Standard English. They then used the students’ home language as a bridge to teach them, a practice also advocated by Smitherman (2002). Studies to determine the effectiveness of such programs could validate culturally relevant instruction as a useful tool for boosting achievement among African-American students. Research about these questions could add to the body of existing knowledge and further the findings of the current study.

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JULIE PERKINS

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EDUCATION

- Doctor of Philosophy, Urban Services-Urban Education, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, Virginia 2006
- Master of Arts in Teaching, Early Childhood Education, Norfolk State University, Norfolk, Virginia, 1994
- Teacher Certification, Nursery/Kindergarten-Fourth Grade, Norfolk State University, 1993
- Bachelor of Arts, Psychology, Hampton University, Hampton, Virginia, 1991

**TEACHER
LICENSURE**

- Postgraduate Professional License (Virginia) Exp. June 30, 2009
 Endorsements:
 Early Childhood NK-4; Elementary Grades 3-6
 Administration/Supervision K-12
 Reading Specialist

**PROFESSIONAL/
WORK EXPERIENCE**

- Assistant Principal, Larchmont Elementary School, Norfolk, Virginia (July 2005-present)
- Assistant Principal, Jacox Elementary School, Norfolk, Virginia (July 2002- June 2005)
 and *Norfolk Public Schools/Greater Norfolk Corporation Leadership Academy Participant*
 Additional Responsibilities:
 *Chair Child Study
 *Organize and Prepare Budgets for After-school Remediation/Acceleration Programs, Summer School, and Title I Extended Day and Saturday Academies
 *Manage Discipline
 *Conduct Staff Development (Perkins Pre-Writing Matrix©) at various schools
- Communication Skills Specialist, Young Park Elementary School for Continuous Learning, Norfolk, Virginia (July 2001-June 2002)
- Teacher, Young Park Elementary School for Continuous Learning, Norfolk, Virginia (August 1999- June 2001)
 Fifth Grade (August 2000-June 2001)/Grade Level Chairperson
 Second Grade (August 1999 –September 1999); Fourth Grade (October 1999); Third Grade (November 1999-June 2000)
- Acting Assistant Principal, Young Park Elementary School, Norfolk, Virginia, January 1999

- University Supervisor of Student Teachers, Professional Development Schools, Old Dominion University, 1997-1998
- Teacher, Bowling Park Elementary School, Norfolk, Virginia, 1994-1997
Fifth/Sixth Grade, Multi-Age, All-Male Class
Fourth Grade, All-Male Class; Third Grade, All-Male Class
Additional Responsibilities:
Served as Sixth-Grade Department Chair, School Testing Coordinator, Member of the Site-Based Management Team, and CoZi Site-Visit Team
- Student Teacher, Bowling Park Elementary School, 1993
Pre-Kindergarten (High-Scope Curriculum)
Second/Third Grade, All-Female Combination Class
- Student Assistant to the University Chaplain, 1990, Hampton University
Assisted with planning for Hampton Ministers' Conference, Christmas Child Project, and office operations

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

- Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc
- Virginia State Reading Association
- National Association of Elementary School Principals

COMMUNITY SERVICE

- Virginia State Association of the Improved Benevolent, Protective Order of Elks of the World:
Organized Career Day and Job Skills Fair
Assisted with Marketing, Press, and Public Relations

REFERENCES

- Dr. Herman D. Clark, Jr., Assistant Superintendent (retired)
Department of School Governance
Norfolk Public Schools
- Dr. C. Fred Bateman, Executive Director
National Association of Urban Superintendents
- Dr. Mona W. Thornton, Chair
Department of Early Childhood Education
Norfolk State University
- Dr. Laguna Foster, Principal
Young Park Elementary School

Norfolk Public Schools

AWARDS

- Recipient of Mini-Grant, Modifying Four Blocks for the Uppergrades: A Brown Bag Lunch Series, Norfolk Public Schools, Communication Skills Department Teachers as Reflective Practitioners Grant, 2002
- Holmes Scholar
Darden College of Education, Old Dominion University, 1997-1998
- Recipient of Mini-Grant, Career Education Awareness Grant Proposal
Norfolk Public Schools, 1996
- Nominee from Bowling Park Elementary School, Sallie Mae National First-Class Teacher Program for Outstanding New Teacher of the Year, 1994-1995

Hampton University

- President's Eminent Scholars Award
- Lettie B. Whitehead Scholarship
- Kentucky Fried Chicken Scholarship
- Dean's List

Norfolk State University

- Dean's List
- Graduate Fellowship

Professional Highlights

Past Affiliations

Norfolk Association of Classroom Teachers (Corresponding Secretary)
 Norfolk Reading Council
 Bowling Park Elementary School P.T.A.
 Young Park Elementary School P.T.A.
 Jacox Elementary School P. T. A.

Professional Development Activities

New Teacher Orientation
 Managing the Writing Workshop in the Primary Grades (Elementary In-service)
 Writing Mini-Lessons and HBJ (Elementary In-service)
 Lesson Plans and Evaluations (Expanded Workshop Sessions for New Teachers)
 Interdisciplinary Curriculum Planning (Expanded Workshop Sessions for New Teachers)
 Building Partnerships with Parents (Expanded Workshop Sessions for New Teachers)
 Conflict Mediation In-service
 Calculator Workshop
 EAN Legal Advocacy Workshop
 EAN Instructional Conference
 Your Modem and Virginia Pen In-service
 Using Color Coding to Teach the Writing Process (3-5 Elementary In-service Program)
 Reader's Workshop: A Child-friendly Approach to Reading Instruction (3-5 Elementary In-service)
 Portfolios: A Tool for Instruction (3-5 Elementary In-service Program)
 Anticipation Guides, Social Studies Texts, and Children's Literature (3-5 Elementary In-service Program)
 Effective Strategies for Teaching Egyptian History and Culture (3-5 Elementary In-service Program)
 Planning Ahead for 1997, The New 4th and 5th Grade SOL's (3-5 Elementary In-service Program)
 Building An Outstanding 4th Grade Program (Bureau of Education and Research)
 Secondary English/Social Studies In-service
 Reading to Learn Part I of VIII-Secondary "Pre-Reading Strategies"
 English Department Chair Meetings for Middle School (Comm. Skills Department)
 Addison Wesley Destinations in Science
 Guided Reading Inservice (Communication Skills Department)
 Consistency Management and Cooperative Discipline In-Services (Freiberg Model)
 Literature Circles (2001)
 Guided Reading Training(Pacific Learning Model 2001)
 Running Record Training (Marie Clay Model 2001)
 NPS Title I Instructional Conference (2001-2004)
 Administrator's Convocation (2002-2005)
 Data-Driven Decision Making (2003)

NPS Special Education Training (2004-2005)

Conferences and Educational Travel

Center for Creative Leadership (Greensboro, NC)
 National Association of Elementary School Principals (Anaheim, CA/San Francisco, CA/San Antonio, TX)
 National Conference on Urban Education (Atlanta, GA/Phoenix, AZ)
 Project S.T.A.R.S. (Williamsburg, VA)
 National Council for the Social Studies (Washington, D.C.)
 Virginia Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (Williamsburg, VA)
 Holmes Partnership Conferences (Orlando, FL and Boston, MA)
 I.B.P.O. Elks of the World Centennial Convention (Las Vegas, NV)
 Houston Independent School District
 Superintendent Dr. Rod Paige
 Magnet Coordinator Marcy Cann
 Key Middle School (Math and Foreign Language Magnet Center)
 Patterson Elementary School (Children's Literature Magnet Center)
 The Rice School (K-8 School/University Partnership)
 National Alliance of Black School Educators (Los Angeles, CA/Dallas, TX)
 Virginia State Reading Conference (Virginia Beach, VA)
 Virginia Association of Federal Program Administrators (Roanoke, VA)
 Brain-Based Research and Differentiated Instruction (Virginia Beach, VA)

Shadowing Experiences

Dr. Terry Dozier, Special Assistant to the Secretary, U.S. Department of Education
 Mr. Laguna Foster, Principal, Young Park Elementary School, Norfolk, VA

Doctoral and Other Relevant Coursework

The Urban Child and the Family
 School Community Relations
 High-Risk Intervention Strategies
 The Urban System
 Issues in Urban Educational Leadership
 History and Philosophy of American School Reform
 Public School Finance
 Qualitative Research Design
 Quantitative Research Design
 Staff Development
 Principals Orientation and Leadership Seminar
 Advanced Educational Statistics I and II
 Methods of Program Evaluation
 Advanced Seminar in Educational Leadership
 Public School Law
 Human Resource Management
 Student Personnel Services
 Dissertation Seminar

Computer Applications for Educational Administrators and Supervisors
 Introduction to Urban Studies
 Urban Trends/Issues-Research Perspectives
 Survey of Reading Instruction
 Content Area Reading
 Organization and Supervision of Reading Programs
 Practicum in Reading
 Language Development and Reading
 Literature for Children and Young Adults
 Methods and Materials for Reading Specialists
 Diagnosis and Remediation of Reading Difficulties
 Language Arts Methods

Presentations

Virginia State Reading Association

Balanced Literacy versus Basal Reading Instruction for Urban African-American, Title I Third Grade Students (March 2006)

Julie Perkins, Dr. Gail Singleton-Taylor

Holmes Scholars Session/Holmes Partnership Conference (Boston, Massachusetts)

Professional Development Schools (PDS): Our Process & Our Progress (January 1999)

Julie Perkins, Wanda Lastrapes, and Sueanne McKinney

Student Teaching Seminars Conducted as University Supervisor:

- *Technology: Software, Centers, and Ways to Integrate Instruction
- *Parent Involvement: Programs Offered by Schools and Social Services
- *Assessment: Reading & Writing Portfolios, Authentic Assessment, and Flexible
- *Groupings; Professional Development: Organizations, Conferences, and Workshops
- *Professional Portfolio Development
- * Strategies for Using Math Manipulatives

Perkins Pre-Writing Matrix

Young Park Elementary School (2001)
 Ingleside Elementary School (2003)
 Chesterfield Elementary School (2003)
 Campostella Elementary School (2004)
 Poplar Halls Elementary School (2004)
 Jacox Elementary School (2004)
 Larchmont Elementary School (2005)
 Oceanair Elementary School (2005)
 NPS All-Staff Day (2005)

Norfolk State University Student Teacher Orientation

Professional Portfolio Development/Beginning Teacher Expectations (each semester)