

PERCEPTIONS OF
EFFECTIVE PHONICS INSTRUCTION

MASTER'S PROJECT

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DEDICATION

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

Purpose for the Study

International research in the field of reading has made great strides in the last twenty years. One area that has received a great deal of attention by researchers is the role of phonics as one of the key strategies in the process of learning to read. Phonics is a broad term used to describe the act of decoding alphabetic representations of speech known as written words. Researchers have used the latest in technology to trace and graph eye movements during the act of reading and performed auditory/speech analysis. Both laboratory and classroom analysis of instructional methods have been performed so as to discriminate the most effective teaching methods to produce good readers.

This substantial body of evidence concerning effective phonics instruction is available in journal articles, research reviews and other professional publications. Teachers, as professionals working in their field, lack time or motivation to study and put into practice the results of careful research. Few university or college courses are offered in the area of phonics instruction. Little is available in the form of updated phonics instruction inservices for teachers. Part of this dilemma is caused by what is known as the "Great Debate" between the use of phonics instruction or of whole language. One paradigm justifies using the top-down or deductive approach to reading which emphasizes "whole to part" word analysis. It relies heavily on contextual clues to derive meaning from text, and little stress is placed on phonetic word decoding. This school of thought, currently known as whole language, believes the use of phonics slows down the reading process which, in effect, results in a loss of comprehension. On the other hand, the skills-driven advocates believe that reading is a set of many independent skills which must be mastered in sequence during the process of learning to read. This paradigm is often referred to as the "part to whole" or inductive phonics approach. Actual research has

shown that reading is an integrated process which involves the intellect in using many interrelated processes. (Barr, 1985)

Research studies have conclusively confirmed the importance of the role of a complete alphabetic-phonemic system in analyzing unknown words in the complex process of learning to read. (McGuinness, 1985) The State of Ohio has passed Senate Bill 140 mandating the instruction of phonics in Ohio public schools. The writer believes that most primary elementary teachers include a limited form of phonics instruction in which phonics is taught as a separate subject such as spelling and rely heavily on workbook page independent practice. Phonics, as detailed by research, should be taught systematically emphasizing correct sound-letter recognition. Direct instruction methods should be adopted that teach decoding strategies. The scope of phonics instruction should be comprehensive, teaching all useful elements. For phonics instruction to be effective students need sufficient practice in reading meaningful text that is coordinated with the phonics program. Phonics instruction must be integrated into the total reading and writing curriculum. (Anderson et al, 1985)

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to evaluate how selected grade level groups of teachers differ in their perceptions of intensive systematic phonics instruction described by research of the last thirty years.

Assumptions

In order to carry out this study a survey was administered to twenty-four primary elementary teachers. The survey provided opportunities for the teachers to list materials used in phonics instruction. The writer assumed that the teachers would cooperate in completing the survey completely and without bias.

Limitations

One of the limitations was that only primary elementary teachers and special education teachers from one small school district were surveyed. Sample size was twenty-four primary elementary and special education teachers.

Another limitation was that a new reading and language arts program was initiated in the fall. It is possible that some teachers may not have felt as familiar using the new program as with the old.

Definition of Terms

Phonics instruction refers to the teaching of the sound-letter coding system used in understanding the printed form of our language.

Phonemic-graphemic is a term that refers the sound-letter correspondence in the alphabetic system of writing.

Primary grades refers to grades one to three in elementary school systems.

Great Debate is a term taken from the title of Chall's book , Learning to Read: THE GREAT DEBATE, first written in 1967 and revised in 1983, whereby two schools of thought represent either "whole to part" meaning driven emphasis or "part to whole" skills driven methods for learning to read.

Ohio Senate Bill 140, passed in 1989, delegates the responsibility to the State Board and Department of Education to implement the teaching of intensive systematic phonics in Ohio public schools. (Appendix A)

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Phonics: What Is It?

The last thirty years has been a time of intensive research into the nature of reading. Scientific research both in the laboratory and classroom have provided a wealth of information, sometimes conflicting, on the physical, mental, environmental and psychological aspects of reading. In 1985 the Commission on Reading, funded by the U.S. Department of Education, published a report titled Becoming A Nation of Readers which summarized the results of research studies on reading. The Commission stated that “reading is the process of constructing meaning from written texts. It is a complex skill requiring the coordination of a number of interrelated sources of information.” (Anderson et al, 1985, p. 7) They compare reading to “the performance of a symphony orchestra” where all parts function together to constitute a “smooth, integrated performance.” (p. 7)

The Commission developed a five “principles” with regard to what constitutes good skillful reading. (Anderson et al, 1985, p. 17) The following statements summarize the Commission’s views. Good reading occurs when the reader processes new information with knowledge already possessed to build a new schema or world view. A good reader quickly and automatically processes the written code of our language so that meaning can take place. A good reader uses a variety of strategies according the nature or purpose of the reading. Good reading requires motivation that reading can be informative and interesting. Reading is a developmental process which continues through life. The Commission advocates that these concepts constitute an interrelated process which mature

and develop with the reader. In good reading instruction all aspects must be integrated into a balanced whole.

Formal reading instruction usually begins in first grade. It is at this time that most children learn to identify individual words. The English language is made up of alphabetic letters which correspond to speech sounds. These letters or graphemes are assembled in regular units which approximate spoken language. The study of this language code is called phonics. The Commission states that “classroom research shows that, on the average, children who are taught phonics get off to a better start in learning to read than children who are not taught phonics.” (Anderson et al, 1985, p. 37) They conclude that, following decades of research, the issue is no longer...whether children should be taught phonics...but of just how it should be done.” (p. 37)

In his book, First Lessons: A Report on Elementary Education in America (1986), Bennett, then U.S. Secretary of Education, described the most effective early reading instruction to be an emphasis on phonics which he defines as the “relationship between letters and sounds.” (Bennett, 1986, p. 22) He notes that research has disproved the popular “look-say” whole word method that dominated American reading instruction from the 1920’s to the 1970’s.

Following the published report of Becoming a Nation of Readers, Adams and Osborn (1990) of the Center for the Study of Reading at the University of Illinois were requested by the U.S. Department of Education to study the relationship of phonics instruction and emergent reading. Phonics was defined as:

Instruction intended to help children to understand the fundamentally alphabetic nature of our writing system and., through that understanding, to internalize the

correspondences between frequent spelling patterns and the speech patterns--the words, syllables and phonemes--that those spellings represent. (Adams & Osborn, 1990, p. 2)

It is interesting to note here that the authors went beyond defining phonics as merely a set of phoneme-grapheme relationships but further described it as instruction. A year was spent in making an exhaustive study of literature not only on phonics instruction but also on the “nature of reading and its acquisition and mastery.” (p. 3) They reviewed research on reading by psychosocial sciences such as psychology, linguistics, computer science and anthropology. Research settings included both the more controlled laboratory and the more variable classroom situations. While the results of the many research studies were varied, there was sufficient evidence from which to draw conclusions. When the authors correlated all such research into the fundamentals of reading, they found that “systematic phonics lead to higher achievement in both word recognition and spelling, at least in the early grades, and especially for slower or economically disadvantaged students.” (p. 3)

Laboratory research has shown that good readers skillfully process with speed and little effort every letter on each line. They automatically interpret the graphemes into phonemes. Because good readers process words with such speed and ease, they can then spend more time thinking about the meaning of words, phrases and sentences that they read. According to Adams, readers can then make use of the syntax and semantic cueing systems of our language which also play an important roles in the reading process.

From the 1950's when Flesch published his controversial book, Why Johnny Can't Read, the “look-say” method of reading that advocated the whole word approach came

under attack. Research since then has clarified the debate of whether phonics should be taught, now the “issue is just how it should be done.” (Anderson et al, 1985, p. 37)

One educator and researcher has developed a systematic, intensive phonics program. Thompson, a Chapter One teacher from Swanton, Ohio, created her program, copyrighted, Logical Phonics, in 1986 after much research into effective reading instruction. In recognition of her expertise this area, she was asked to testify on the benefits of phonics instruction as the Ohio Education Committee considered a new ruling. With the help of her testimony, Ohio became one of the few states that has passed a law requiring the teaching of phonics in the elementary schools. Ohio Senate Bill 140, which passed in 1989, is known as the Phonics Rule. Thompson eventually became the phonics consultant for the Ohio Department of Education and has traveled the state giving workshops and presentations on what constitutes effective phonics instruction.

In her phonics program Thompson (1986) neatly defines phonics. By her definition phonics is “not reading” but a method of processing the alphabetic code into “corresponding uttered speech sounds.” It is a way in which readers identify individual words within meaningful print. Phonics is one of three cueing systems used when reading. The others include “structural cues (grammar and syntax), and meaning cues (semantics and pictures).” The following is a brief description of how phonics is taught in her program of instruction for emergent readers. Each letter is presented using a picture cue card that includes information on whether the letter is a vowel or consonant. The correct letter sound is introduced using a poem about the picture cue. Writing practice includes practicing the sounds while forming the letter. A literature book is read that coordinates with the letter. Five consonants are presented in a series and then a vowel. Words are

formed using that vowel with the preceding consonants. These words can be combined to make meaningful text. Every phonics component is introduced using visual, auditory and written practice.

To summarize, phonics is acknowledged to be one of several critical components in the learning to read process. It provides the student with a method of recognizing the relationship and code of our written alphabetic language in order to produce approximate sounds which can then be interpreted as our oral language. With sufficient practice the process of decoding becomes automatic, thus enabling the reader to develop fluency. To further understand the role of phonics in the reading process, the author will explore the position and history of phonics instruction within the framework of learning to read.

Learning to Read: Role of Phonics

Learning to read is not just a process that begins in first grade when a child unpacks his/her bookbag the first day and opens a book. In Chall's book, Stages of Reading Development, (1983b) she reveals her theory that reading develops in stages from early in life with growth of language, communication and early exposure to print and then continues on through early adulthood where the ability to synthesize and abstract one's own knowledge from "the truths of others." (Chall, 1983b, p.24) Her theory was influenced by cognitive developmental theories of Piaget, Wolff and Perry as well as her own "25 years of experience as a clinician diagnosing and teaching children and young people with severe reading disabilities." (Chall, 1983b, p.11) She compared her theory to that of cognitive development theories in that it followed a step by step progression where new growth is assimilated to old and maturation takes place as one passes through the stages by interacting with environment.

The earliest stage begins before a child ever enters school. Chall calls this “Stage 0 - Prereading: Birth to Age 6.” (Chall, 1983b, p. 13) Growth and development of language, understanding meanings of words, use of a language syntax and early engagement with print are all necessary and play a role in the child’s later ability to read. Chall recognized a growing concern that a child’s early years had a profound effect on later reading achievement, especially those children from low socioeconomic background. She outlined national studies of the 1960’s and 1970’s that were formulated to help these children develop the necessary reading readiness skills. New public television programs aimed at the pre-school and young school age child reflected this new trend. The positive effect that early letter-sound instruction by the television shows, such as Sesame Street and The Electric Company, had on beginning readers convinced parents and then educators that early pre-reading instruction was beneficial.

Research in the 1990’s supported Chall’s theories that not only must early training in letter/sound relationships be developed in first grade but that even those entering kindergarten must have substantial phonological awareness in order to be successful readers by the end of first grade. Swank, a speech/language pathologist at the University of Virginia, designed studies that show evidence that there is a “link between phonological awareness and reading” even in the pre-school child. (Swank, 1994, p. 62) Her investigations “suggest that the early identification of children who exhibit limited phonological awareness is important in providing early intervention for children at risk for reading problems.” (Swank, 1993, p.9) The results of the kindergarten phonological awareness study found that “measures of phonological awareness, administered at the beginning of kindergarten correlated with measures of decoding ability at the end of first

grade.” (Swank, 1993, p. 11) Her research results, if utilized in identifying children in early pre-kindergarten screening, could play an important role in providing assistance for those children who would later find first grade reading instruction difficult. With national concern over the high illiteracy rates and high school drop-out rates, efforts in increasing public awareness as to the importance of early childhood experiences with literature, rhymes and letter/sound relationships, etc. could help create training programs for parents and child caretakers. More children would then enter school with necessary early reading awareness and readiness skills that would lead to success in reading.

Just as the purpose of learning to read is to derive meaning from printed text, the purpose of phonics is to provide access to what the printed words say so that understanding can take place. Chall explains that the early instruction of phonics is “Stage 1 or initial reading.” (Chall, 1983b, p. 15) This stage can span first and second grade and includes code instruction in which children attend closely to the printed word. “Stage 2 or fluency” (p. 15) includes learning more complex phonics and sufficient practice and rereading so that the decoding process becomes more automatic. According to Chall the attainment of fluency allows the reader to progress through the maturation process of being able to process new learning (Stage3), understand more abstract concepts (Stage 4) and finally attain a “world view” (Stage 5). (p. 23)

The understanding of the reading process and the role that phonics plays within that process has changed with the advent of new scientific studies of the brain and its function. Computer aided imaging of the brain and advanced research in human physiology, language and memory have advanced scientists understanding of our ability to communicate. The reading process can now be considered as an interrelated, connected

system in which areas of the brain serve to direct incoming visual information while coordinating access to stored memory of one's auditory vocabulary, prior experiences, and knowledge of language structure. The term "lexicon access process" is used to describe not only the space but also the time required for all of the above to take place." (Swank, 1994, p.60) Research has determined that the longer the lexicon retrieval and processing area is used to store incoming visual information as when a reader strives to decode a word the less mental memory is available to derive meaning from what was read. The purpose of phonics instruction is to teach word recognition skills so that the reader can decode accurately and quickly to the point of automaticity. Attention can then be centered on coordinating within the brain prior background experience and linguistics knowledge to interpret meaning.

Chall's (1983b) developmental stage theory of learning to read, in which the reader progresses from prereading, decoding, fluency and then application to new learning, has been reaffirmed by Swank (1994) She states that:

In early stages of reading acquisition, advances are primarily the result of increases in orthographic or decoding knowledge, whereas in the later stages, improvements stem from gains in linguistic and world knowledge. According to this view reading comprehension is made up of phonological coding abilities and listening comprehension. (Swank, 1994, p. 57)

In her research Swank advocates early phonics instruction. She reviewed studies that analyzed decoding and listening comprehension and then compared their relationship. In studying variances in reading ability, Hoover and Gough (1990) discovered that decoding and listening comprehension interactions "accounted for 73 percent of the

variance in reading comprehension in first grade, 75 percent in second grade and 85 percent in third grade and 90 percent in fourth grade.” (Hoover & Gough, 1990) This research demonstrated that decoding was of vital significance in the early grades as compared to the significance of listening comprehension in the older grades. The research supports the teaching of decoding abilities in emergent states of reading. Conclusions drawn from these studies indicate that early phonics coding instruction is an essential ingredient in the learning to read process.

These recent studies were built upon conclusions by researchers of the 1960’s and 1970’s who developed comparisons of various reading programs involved in the “Cooperative Research Study in First-Grade Reading Instruction” set up by the U.S. Dept. of Education. (Walcutt, Lamport, McCracken, 1974) Up until the 1950’s heavy emphasis in American education was on the whole-word or meaning emphasis programs. Growing dissatisfaction with this “look-say” approach led to the government-funded research to attempt to identify the most effective methods of reading instruction. Studies were labeled according to the initial emphasis of instruction. Meaning-emphasis emphasized reading for meaning with initial vocabulary being part of the child’s own speaking vocabulary. Importance was placed on visual and structural clues with little, if any, phonics included. Code-emphasis programs began instruction with the alphabet, used regular spelled words and emphasized “sounding-out” unknown words. There were also combination programs such as the linguistic approach that emphasized spelling.

One study that the authors noted was that of Bliesmer and Yarborough (1965) in which five meaning-emphasis programs which used analytic word analysis methods were compared to five code-emphasis programs in which grapheme-phoneme relationships were

taught first, followed by instruction in synthesis into whole words. All first graders took the Stanford Achievement Test at the end of the year. The results of statistical analysis of reading achievement of the two groups was favorable for the synthetic programs in twenty of twenty-five comparisons. Results of paragraph comprehension tests were also the same. In drawing conclusions from these investigations Walcutt stated that, “The programs emphasizing early intensive phonics produced readers at the end of the first grade who were clearly superior in reading ability, at least as measured by the tests used in the investigation.” (Walcutt, Lamport, McCracken, 1974, p. 390)

In the early 1960’s Chall spent three years studying beginning reading methods. She became widely renowned for her book, Learning to Read: The Great Debate, which was first published in 1967 and later revised in 1983. She evaluated reading programs that included phonics, look-say and alphabet knowledge from 1910 to 1965. Basing her conclusions upon research and classroom practice, she stated, “With qualification and some reservations, she recommended a change from a meaning-emphasis to a code-emphasis for beginning reading instruction.” (Chall, 1983a, p. 3) The impact of her book was felt by professional educators in a variety of ways. Basal reading programs began to include more phonics orientation, teacher education developed more code-emphasis methods training, standardized tests for early readers included more grapheme-phoneme analysis and researchers were encouraged to explore effective early reading instruction

Chall’s updated 1983 edition drew from an even greater depth of reading research. As did Walcutt (1974) she reviewed results from the U.S. Office of Education First Grade Cooperative Reading Studies and the later Follow Through studies. They compared reading methods in the first grade and some continued on for a grade or two. Many of the

early analysis of the studies produced conflicting reports, questioned the role of teacher effectiveness or did not group reading programs by differing methods. She reviewed later analysis by Dykstra (1968) and Guthrie and Tayler (1975) that verified that earlier, systematic, concentrated phonics instruction was an effective early teaching strategy. Follow Through studies were an extension of Head Start into the elementary grades. Various sites were used to test three teaching methods - direct, systematic phonics approach, deductive meaning approach and individualized instruction method. She summarized several different reviews that agree with the analysis of the USOE and then quoted Wisler, Burns and Iwamoto (1978) study that said:

With a few exceptions, the models assessed in the national follow through evaluation did not overcome the educational disadvantages poor children have. The most notable exception was the Direct Instruction phonics model. Though not successful everywhere, and not uniformly successful for all outcomes, that model showed the best pattern of success. (Wisler, Burns & Iwamoto, 1978)

Even with all the research supporting early phonics training the promotion of meaning-emphasis programs which ignore scientific evidence continue to find strong support. In the last ten years a new type of reading program to aid the educational disadvantaged has been received with enthusiasm. It is a meaning-based approach, emphasizing a sound-to-print orientation, in which the first grade child develops as an “independent reader with an internal system for self-improvement.”(Reading Recovery 1984-1990, p. 1) The following is a brief description of the Reading Recovery Program in the United States. In 1984 the Columbus Pilot Study, in conjunction with Ohio State University, initiated the Reading Recovery Program to the United States. With that small

beginning Clay successfully transplanted her New Zealand remedial reading program. Since then Reading Recovery has spread across the United States, Canada and England. Reading Recovery provides intervention for first grade at-risk children. It provides intensive training for teachers to work one-on-one with a child identified by various diagnostic screenings as needing reading assistance. Students receive daily half-hour instruction using prescribed particular interventions formulated by Clay to allow the student to achieve reading independence and performance at or above the class average. Reading strategies include: “going back to the beginning of the sentence, using semantic and picture clues, structural analysis and finally visually scanning the letters of the word.” (Reading Recovery 1991, p.4) All reading instruction is performed within meaningful text. Direct phonics instruction is not part of teacher instruction but a student may derive phonics generalities by deduction from knowledge of prior use in print. Teachers must adhere strictly to the specific prescribed strategies and are often monitored by area teacher trainers. Students are “discontinued” when they meet or exceed reading levels in the regular classroom (Pinnell, Deford & Lyons, 1990, p. 18)

The question can be raised, “What does Reading Recovery have to do with the role of phonics in reading?” Two researchers, both from New Zealand, conducted an experimental study on the effects of phonics instruction when incorporated in actual Recovery instructional situations in the United States. They found positive effects from the introduction of phonics into the Reading Recovery instruction. Iversen and Tunmer (1993), both from Massey University in New Zealand, have published an article titled “Phonological Processing Skills and the Reading Recovery Program.” In reviewing data published by Clay in which she justifies advances of Reading Recovery students through

use of gain scores, they noted flaws in statistical comparisons of the gain scores. They also addressed the issue of possible beneficial effects of one-on-one instruction, regardless of the type of intervention used. Whereas Clay strongly adheres to the top-down meaning orientation of reading where readers are encouraged to predict words by using beginning letters, Iversen and Tunmer list fourteen research studies that argue that “skilled reading does not consist of sampling features of the text on the run, it is not a psycholinguistic guessing game and not incidentally visual.” (Iversen & Tunmer, 1993, p.113) They quote Vellutino’s (1991) summary that “skilled readers process virtually all the words they encounter in connected text and typically, all of the letters in those words.” (Vellutino, 1991) They note Perfetti’s (1985) research that “indicates that skilled readers are sufficiently fast and accurate at recognizing words in text to make reliance on contextual information unnecessary.” (Perfetti, 1985)

To answer the question of the relationship between phonics and Reading Recovery, Iversen and Tunmer devised a study to measure whether children involved in Reading Recovery instruction would learn to read more quickly if taught an awareness of the phonetic coding system. Using Reading Recovery’s initial testing procedures they identified ninety-six first grade children which were divided into three groups of thirty-two children each. The groups consisted of a standard Reading Recovery group, a modified Reading Recovery group and a standard intervention group which consisted of small group instruction in either Chapter One or a state funded intervention programs. Additional control groups of regular classroom students were chosen to match the two Reading Recovery groups. Two groups of Reading Recovery teachers received separate training sessions. One was standard Reading Recovery training techniques while the

second also included “explicit instruction in letter-phoneme patterns.” (Iversen & Tunmer, 1993, p. 117)

Results of the experiment revealed that both Reading Recovery programs “performed much better on all measures than did the children in the standard intervention group.” (p. 119) It was not possible to determine whether the effects were because of the Reading Recovery program itself or rather the one-on-one instruction as compared to small groups. Both groups of Reading Recovery students had similar scores when discontinued from the program but the most significant factor of the study was the mean number of lessons to discontinuation. The modified group had a mean of 41.75 lessons and the standard group was 57 lessons. (p.120) In summarizing the results of their experiment Iversen and Tunmer stated that “the standard Reading Recovery program was 37 percent less efficient than the modified Reading Recovery program.” (p.120) In summarizing the results of their experiment Iversen and Tunmer stated that:

This finding provides strong evidence supporting the claim that letter-to-phoneme knowledge, rather than phoneme-to-letter knowledge as claimed by Clay, is primarily responsible for driving the development of word recognition skills. (Iversen & Tunmer, 1993 p.122)

The role of phonics has been proved to be an important element in the learning to read process. A young child’s readiness for reading instruction can best be predicted by an early enriched exposure to books and letter/sound relationships. Early reading instruction builds on this prior knowledge and broadens the child’s schema to include an awareness of the code of our language. A foundation in the grapheme-phoneme relationship of our alphabet provides the reader with the ability to decode the printed

words. With continued practice the reader develops automaticity and fluidity in recognizing the written language. Several decades of research has demonstrated that reading is a developmental process which involves learning a variety of strategies. With a firm grasp of the written code, the reader can better construct the strategies to understand what is being read.

If, as research indicates, phonics is an important cueing system in the reading process, how then does a teacher most effectively teach phonics? In many typical classrooms across the country phonics is relegated to a brief blackboard demonstration of a skill and then seatwork consisting of phonics workbook pages. Research of the last several decades has become involved in discerning the most efficient, effective methods for phonics instruction.

Components of Effective Phonics Instruction

Can the instruction of phonics be made more effective and efficient than in the past? Can research pinpoint methods with the most long term positive effects? Over the last thirty years of reading research the area of phonics instruction has been studied in detail. A sufficient body of research has accumulated that certain generalizations can be made as to essential elements that make up the most effective phonics instruction methods.

When Chall (1983a) began to consider and synthesize the results of accumulated research, she classified phonics programs as having certain components that proved to be effective in instruction. The first component she defined was systematic phonics instruction. Systematic phonics emphasizes early and heavy letter/sound instruction along with blending sounds together into words. Instruction begins with learning individual grapheme/phonemes and builds those into more complex associations. In comparing the

effectiveness of systematic phonics with whole word, Chall reviewed research from the early 1900's which determined that on word recognition tests "children with phonics training generally had an even greater advantage on untaught words than on taught words." (Chall, 1983a, p. 106) She stated that "this would suggest that a phonic approach has a greater transfer value" in aiding children to read new text. (p. 106)

Chall differentiated between systematic and intrinsic phonics. She described intrinsic phonics as the type used in many whole word programs where phonics is introduced later and with much less emphasis. Sounds of letters are learned from analysis of words already learned. In comparing these two approaches researchers revealed that systematic phonics was more effective in tests of oral reading, spelling and silent vocabulary and comprehension through grade three. (p. 112)

Groff (1989) further defined systematic phonics instruction as a method whereby "information...should be arranged into ascending stages of difficulty." (Groff, 1989, p. 7) He advocated tracking each child's success with a skill before teaching the next more complex skill. Groff's belief in teaching the most basic skills first followed by more complex stages was supported by the early work of Samuels (1976) on "learning hierarchies in reading." (Samuels, 1976, p.173) He mapped out the sequential steps to achieving "terminal behavior" such as decoding a new word by listing in progression each subskill necessary to achieve the desired behavior. (p. 175) He emphasized careful analysis of reading strategies into sequential segments so as to gain mastery of the objective. Systematic phonics builds on the basic letter/sound relationships to teach from the simplest to more complex strategies in order to decode words.

Another recognized component of effective phonics is that of direct instruction. In the direct instruction model students are succinctly taught basic letter/sound relationships and how to use the phonetic code whereas in an indirect method students imply phonetic relationships through reading. Chall (1983a) evaluated direct instruction as compared to indirect or analytic instruction in Follow Through studies of Becker and Gersten (1981). In this study fifth and sixth grade low income children who had completed a direct instruction phonics program in first through third grade, showed consistent higher scores on the Metropolitan Achievement Test and Wide Range Achievement Test than a comparison group. (Becker & Gersten, 1981) After Chall summarized other research studies of regular and exceptional students, she found positive correlations for direct instruction in nearly every study measurement. In hypothesizing reasons for these results, Chall proposed that direct phonics instructions included more emphasis on sound blending, better sequence of skill presentation and review. She stated that “direct phonics programs are also more deliberate in style and tends to clarify what is to be learned and how it is to be learned.” (Chall, 1983a, p. 22) Groff (1989) reaffirms this in his support for explicit, direct instruction as being “preferable because it does not presuppose what it purports to teach.” (Groff, 1989, p. 9)

Direct instruction as a teaching style is not new. Critics of direct instruction have maintained that it is a teacher dominated style and tends to stifle student critical thinking skills. Recent studies by Carnine, Grossen and Silbert (1992) have proposed that instead of stifling critical thinking direct instruction can, instead, “accelerate cognitive growth.” (Carnine, Grossen & Silbert, 1992, p. 33)

They define direct instruction as:

An intensive intervention designed to increase not only the amount of learning but also its quality by systematically developing important background knowledge and explicitly applying it and linking it to new knowledge. (Carnine, Grossen & Silbert, 1992, p. 33)

According to their research, analysis and organization of curriculum is crucial to the success of direct instruction. By providing organization of what is to be learned, bridges can be established not only to knowledge previous learned but to new situations and learning experiences. The authors believe using the technique of “problem-solution-effect schema is useful in teaching multiple perspectives.” (p. 34) Can this technique be applied to phonics instruction? In her phonics program Logical Phonics, Thompson (1986) developed cognitive strategies to be taught to students in how to analyze an unknown word. The strategies are a series of questions students ask themselves when attempting to analyze an unknown word. The questions are directly taught and practiced so that the student becomes independent in their use. The questions encourage students to use higher level cognitive abilities such as analyzing, comparing and making judgments.

(Appendix B)

Another component of effective phonics is teaching a comprehensive program which includes a full range of phonics rules and generalizations. In attempting to verbalize written words, letter sounds are blended together to make approximate pronunciations. Learning a useful array of correct pronunciations for letter combinations allows the student a wider range of strategies in decoding words. Thompson defines useful as:

Any element that is a common component in beginning high frequency vocabulary, any element that can be applied fifty percent of the time or more or is a part of a classification of phonic exceptions about which specific generalizations can be made. (Thompson, 1986)

Groff (1989) asserted that “the more phonics rules children can apply the closer they can come to the true pronunciation of a written word when they try to decode it.” (Groff, 1989, p. 10) Care must be taken, according to Adams (1990), to realize that memorizing generalizations or rules for their own sake is meaningless. Such knowledge is only useful in the context of translating the written word. (Adams, 1990, p. 272)

Phonics supporters have discussed other elements that have important effects on instruction. In Becoming a Nation of Readers, the Commission on Reading addressed the need for basal reading series that should be written to more adequately reflect the need for phonetic practice in reading connected text. In reviewing eight basal readers they realized that “there is little connection between the phonics lessons and the reading selections.” (Anderson et al, 1985, p. 46) They recommend that “a high proportion of the words in the earliest selections children read should conform to the phonics they have already been taught.” (p. 47) Effective phonics instruction is also affected by multiple factors in the teaching/learning environment. Teacher attitude, knowledge the subject and ability to use instructional methods will all affect the successful outcome of a phonics program. Other potential components include thoroughness of instruction, availability of practice and coordination of the phonics instruction within the total curriculum. Many phonics advocates include elements that appeal to all learning styles or modalities of the student whether visual, auditory, verbal or kinesthetic. In making curriculum choices teachers

who are looking for the most effective instructional elements in a phonics program should recognize the results decades of reading research. Research has proven that effective phonics instruction should include characteristics that are direct, systematic, intensive and comprehensive.

The Great Debate: Whole Word vs. Phonics Decoding

The Great Debate, as recognized in educational literature, is a matter of two paradigms of thought concerning the most effective approach to early, emergent reading instruction. The two approaches that have received a great deal of attention are the whole language meaning-emphasis program and systematic phonics instruction. The issue of debate is not just an intellectual comparison of research data but also contains a factor of emotional righteousness, attack and counterattack of armed camps that continues to the present day.

The Great Debate of the last thirty years did not start in a vacuum. It is necessary to understand, at least briefly, the history of reading instruction in order to be able to see the present conflict in proper perspective. According to Samuels (1976), the debate goes back at least one hundred years and involves European as well as American teaching methods. Up to about 1870 the alphabetic method of reading instruction was practiced both here and in Europe. This method involved teaching a strict hierarchy of letter names first, nonsense syllables next, short words and finally sentences.

In 1840 Bumstead criticized both the extensive drill of letter names and the use of spelling before oral reading, which, he believed, interrupted comprehension. To replace the alphabetic method the whole word instruction was advocated. By the 1870's whole word became the dominant method of reading instruction. In Europe a Prussian educator,

Friedrich Gedike, developed a philosophy of “naturalness” where the whole book became the logical place for reading instruction and then proceeding to the parts. This outlook was developed across Europe. (Samuels, 1976, p. 161)

The whole word approach was the accepted popular method of reading instruction until a public challenge was made by Flesch’s book, Why Can’t Johnny Read and What You Can Do About It., published in 1955. While Flesch was the most vocal, other educators, especially those investigating developmental theories of learning and scientific processes of the reading act, had been making serious statements advocating the inclusion of systematic phonics instruction. As described earlier in this project Chall’s book, Learning to Read: The Great Debate of 1967 and the later revised edition in 1983, described in detail the many investigations and research both in laboratories and classrooms that seemed to undermine the whole word proponents’ assumption that theirs was the most effective reading instruction. The results of exhaustive studies and investigations revealed that early direct, systematic phonics instruction had positive effects on reading abilities even in long range follow-ups. Thus began the current debate between proponents of early phonics instruction for emergent readers and the whole language approach which advocates immersion in meaningful literature with little or no skills emphasis.

Subscribers to the whole word approach have gone to great lengths to criticize the phonics-skills approach. Over the past thirty years critics of early phonics instruction such as Douglas, Goodman and Smith have published their own studies and theories of meaning based instruction. Douglas not only advocated a natural approach to reading but proposed that the most efficient way to promote literacy was to stop using direct

instruction of reading skills. He felt that teaching skills had the opposite effect of learning to read. He compared the natural development of language by speaking and listening to the manner in which children would develop the ability to read. (Samuels, 1976, p. 166)

In the early 1970's Goodman made frequent attacks on phonics instruction. In one of his more adversarial statements, he said that, "fractionating language for instructional purposes into words and word parts destroys its essential nature," (Goodman, 1970) He was concerned that "excessive phonics induces short circuits in reading...as well as being unnecessary...to the reading process. In fact in a proficient reader any kind of going from print to oral language to meaning is an extremely ineffective and inefficient strategy." (Goodman, 1972)

Smith was another adversary of phonics instruction. He proposed that "the only way to facilitate their learning to read is make reading easy for them -- not forcing a child to read for words when he is, or should be, reading for meaning..." He compared his theory of learning to read by reading with "the skill of riding a bicycle comes with riding a bicycle." (Smith, 1973)

Samuels took issue with Douglas's comparison of reading acquisition with that of learning language. He proposed the theory that a child learns language by listening to speech, that speech development is sequential in nature and that all languages have phonetic and grammatical components. While language is universal to humans, reading is not. He also drew from psychomotor research into the nature of learning tasks to counter Goodman's arguments against teaching subskills. He used several examples of task learning to explain that the learning of skill, such as bicycle riding or down-hill skiing, is intrinsically a learning of a small series of prerequisite skills before the more complex skill

can be mastered. He then used evidence from reading research to “illustrate the point that subskill mastery is necessary prior to achieving skill in reading.” (Samuels, 1976, p.170) LeBerge and Samuels (1974) developed a “model of perceptual learning that is a hierarchical model and shows the sequence and progression of learning from distinctive features, to letters, to letter clusters, and on to words.” (LeBerge & Samuels, 1974, p. 170) Shankweiler and Liberman (1972), in a study of the correlation between reading isolated words and reading text found that “reading of connected text tends to be only as good or poor as reading of individual words.” (Shankweiler & Liberman, 1972 ,p.298)

While many saw the debate as an either or proposition, Samuels viewed the controversy of ““whole” or “part” dichotomy’ rather as a question of what “size of the unit with which to begin instruction.” (Samuels, 1976, p.162) and what order in which to proceed. He also saw the debate as a focus on the role of the teacher. One dichotomy (whole to part) focuses on the teacher as a “trouble shooter” where skills are taught to the student only when a problem is encountered, whereas the other (part to whole) places the role of the teacher as a director who determines the skills needed and controls the sequence of instruction. (p.164)

Some current phonics opponents show a definite negative bias against phonics instruction and even associate an advocacy for phonics instruction as a politically conservative statement. Weaver, in addressing the 1991 annual International Reading Association meeting, selected as her topic, “The Hidden Agenda of Intensive, Systematic and Extensive Phonics.” She stated that there is a “phonics conspiracy among Far Right elements” and speculated that there is a “hidden curriculum.” presented implicitly through choices of content, school policies and evaluations. Her “model” of these assumptions

would consist of instruction where emphasis is placed upon mastering skills and facts, teachers as “expert technicians” and students as “passive recipients of knowledge.” (Weaver, 1991, p.4) She feels that under this system “both teachers and students are devalued and disempowered.” It would reflect the “top down” control system that “appeals to businessmen and politicians.” (p.4)

In assessing these instructional practices she stated that there would be a bias against the disadvantaged, non-mainstreamed students in that they would make up the majority of the lower reading groups where there would be greater emphasis on intensive phonics instruction, less exposure to quality literature and a maintenance in a “less challenging education.” She concludes that such “stultifying instruction prevents these students from achieving their potential as readers.” (p.8) She sees “heavy phonics instruction as a tool for widening rather than closing the literacy gap,....and a tool for reinforcing and perpetuating current socio-economic inequalities.” (p.9)

The challenge to phonics instruction by vocal whole language proponents has not gone unanswered. Groff wrote a book, Preventing Reading Failure: An Examination of the Myths of Reading Instruction, (1987) to alert educators and the public to assumptions made in the name of educational practices that he considered had no basis in the light of educational research. He was especially concerned about the education of teachers themselves as most adopt the prevailing educational theory of the time without question simply because it is promoted by teacher educators. He believes that “nothing retards pupils’ acquisition of reading ability as much as ineffectual teacher efforts.” (Groff, 1987, p.viii) Thirteen chapters each attack a prevailing reading “myth,” many of which concern phonics instruction.

One prevailing argument that he discussed is the idea that an overemphasis of phonics instruction will retard comprehension. Critics claim that phonics is too abstract and replete with artificial rules. Children become too involved in sounding out words and neglect comprehension. The critics say that intensive phonics instruction overemphasizes decoding and destroys understanding the natural flow of language. Some research already addressed in this project has provided evidence that teaching decoding skills early results in better comprehension over time. As children learn and practice the relationship between grapheme-phoneme association, they become able to decode automatically, thus more attention can be focused on meaning.

Another point of contention he debated is the criticism that the English language is so unpredictable that the rules of phonics are not reliable enough to be effective. In the 1960's Clymer developed his well known 75 percent standard for utility of phonics rules. (Groff, 1987, p.16) According to this theory phonics rules that could not be applied to accurate pronunciation of at least fifteen out of twenty words were not useful enough to be effectively taught. Many text book authors and phonics opponents use Clymer's theory in their arguments against phonics instruction. Groff initiated his own study to prove that even approximate pronunciations are useful because students can then use contextual information to change approximate to accurate pronunciations. He read a paragraph to second grade students using phonetically regular pronunciations for irregularly spelled words that did not follow phonetic rules, for example "give" using the long /I/ sound. Students were able to infer the correct pronunciation for 92.6 percent of the words. He concluded that instead of a few phonic rules being taught as many as possible should be

included so that readers have many resources from which to achieve independence. (Groff, 1987, p.22)

Groff also warned of the assumptions of the “assisted reading” or “reading by immersion” instructional method. In this theory the child and the teacher repeat the same phrase or sentence many times until the child “learns” or recognizes the text well enough to be able to use contextual clues to supply missing words. The child is seen as going through various stages by developing problem solving skills instead of learning a hierarchy of skills. Phonics instruction is not taught directly but the child may imply phonics generalities by experience with text. Groff viewed assisted reading as another type of the look-say method but where the child makes the determining choices of direction instead of the teacher. He stated that there is no evidence that this method is superior to any other and that the high reliance on context clues is not supported by research. Children use contextual clues as “a crutch to compensate for their word recognition deficiencies.” (Groff, 1987, p.48)

Groff explored reasons for the persistence of the great debate, even in the face of mounting evidence on the effectiveness of early systematic phonics instruction when included in a reading program. He blames tradition as one cause for the continuance of reading programs for which there is little research support. Maintaining the same programs and methods over the years is easier than developing new strategies and procedures. He suggests that professors of education will strongly support their particular long standing views rather than face the embarrassment of admitting that new research invalidates their particular paradigm. Groff claims that the great debate is also fueled by the “unwillingness of reading professionals to accept, or in any way respond

favorably, to negative analyses of their work made by critics who are not members of the reading establishment “in” group.” (Groff, 1987, p.155)

Since Flesch’s book (1955) Why Johnny Still Can’t Read Groff lists thirteen books published advocating intensive phonics instruction and warning of the consequences of an illiterate population. In writing the preface to Groff’s 1987 book, Bateman quoted statistics from the National Commission on Excellence in Education report in 1983, A Nation at Risk, which describes in detail the need for reform. Statistics quoted reveal that “on 19 academic tests administered internationally, American students never scored first or second, and they were last on seven tests when compared to other industrialized nations,” “approximately 23 million American adults, 13 percent of all 17 year olds, and up to 40 percent of all minority youth are functionally illiterate by the simplest test” and “one fourth of recent Navy recruits cannot read the minimum needed to understand written safety instructions.”(Groff, 1987, p.v)

In defense of phonics instruction Brunner (1993) wrote an article, “Reduced Recidivism and Increased Employment Opportunity Through Research-Based Reading Instruction,” based on research for the U.S. Department of Justice. The study was developed because of the “evidence for the link between academic failure, juvenile delinquency and reading failure. Research revealed that reading failure is most likely a cause, not just a correlate, for the frustration that can and does result in delinquent behavior.” (Brunner, 1993, p. 2) Brunner charges that these young people have not been explicitly taught to translate oral language into written words and the reverse. They have not had sufficient practice to be able to apply phonetic decoding skills to the point of automaticity

Within the population of juvenile delinquents the rate of reading incompetence is extremely high. Based upon his research Brunner states, “On average, incarcerated juvenile offenders are severely crippled readers, making the match between what these youngsters want and what employers need difficult to bring about.” (Brunner, 1993, p.5) In Project READ a survey of 2,670 juvenile offenders reported that the “average student tested at a fourth grade level and thirty-eight percent scored below the fourth grade level.” (p.5)

Two research projects have found that the use of “intensive systematic phonics instruction that has proven effective with children is indeed equally effective with older students.” (p.48) For example in Norfolk, Va. a program called Sing, Spell, Read and Write (SSRW) was used with prisoners for a hour a day for six weeks and resulted in an increase of two grade levels reading ability. (p.48) Brunner makes the case that inmates making progress in reading can more effectively train for an increasing complex job market. Job satisfaction reduces the rate of recidivism.

Brunner believes that much of the problem of reading failure can be prevented by educating teachers themselves in research proven methods of effective systematic phonics instruction. He lists recommendations for correctional institutions, public schools and departments of teacher education to provide training in effective phonics, provide incentives to implement programs and bonuses for those producing higher reading success. . He cites the works of Adams, Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning about Print, (1990), and Groff, Preventing Reading Failure, (1987), in an impassioned plea for effective phonics instruction in the early primary grades so as to prevent the nation’s high rate of reading failure.

Will the debate continue to rage on? Is there no common ground upon which these two paradigms can find conciliation? There are those educators which have struck a balance between the two philosophies in their instructional methods. They have developed their own instructional styles which include both effective phonics instruction along with literature based reading programs. They are just beginning to make their voices heard.

In an article, "Helping Readers At Risk: Beyond Whole Language, Whole Word, and Phonics," Johns (1991) takes issue with the current debate between phonics and whole language as being a power struggle of "claims and counterclaims." (Johns, 1991, p. 60) He advocates that "teachers seek a middleground...where they will remain committed to their primary mission: developing literacy among their students, especially at-risk readers." (p. 61) By coordinating reading skills and students' interests he supports an integrated approach to reading which will "empower at-risk readers - steps that take us beyond rhetoric and fads." (p. 66)

The Riggs Institute of the University of Oregon has developed a method which has attempted to synthesize both approaches to reading instruction. In a recent article, "Phonic - Spelling - Whole Language: How We Put Them Together for the Best of Both Words," McCulloch (1994) described how the integrated method was implemented in an inner city, minority population school. Within fourteen months the program increased class reading average percentiles by 65.6 percent for grades 3 to 8 and attained ending percentiles of 87 and 96 for first and second grades. (McCulloch, 1994, p. 55) The method included using the "Orton" method of direct explicit phonics instruction to decode words, encoding words to encourage correct spelling and literature based reading. In the early 1930's Orton developed a method of phonics instruction using seventy phonograms

to use in teaching decoding and spelling to dyslexic children. Teachers were instructed in the method by using reading, writing and spelling along with a variety of materials.

McCulloch stated that “teaching skills and a phonics base for spelling with whole language can be the answer we’re all seeking. They need not remain mutually exclusive ideas.”

(McCulloch, 1994, p. 64)

Thompson (1986) also supported an integrated approach when she summarized the issue of the phonics versus whole language debate. She concurs that “the controversy between whole language and phonics ignores the needs of the child.” (Thompson, 1986) She used Chall’s (1983b) theory of developmental stages of reading in defense of using predictable texts and whole word method for the earliest stages emergent reading, followed by explicit, direct phonics instruction in the next stage as the need for graphic cues develops in the young reader. In discussing phonics as one of the three major cueing methods for reading, she stated that “it’s time to replace controversy with effective teaching of all the cueing systems needed for the development of true independent literacy.” (Thompson, 1986)

As teachers strive to attain the ultimate goal that every child will become a fluent, mature reader, there is still much to be accomplished. Research has led the way in studying the critical issues of what reading instruction should consist of. The necessity for effective, systematic phonic instruction has been established. What remains to be done is the wide range dissemination of what research recommends and how it can be implemented. Teachers themselves need further education into the most effective methods for phonics instruction and how to efficiently implement this instruction within the literature based reading program so that each complements and supports the other.

CHAPTER III

PROCEDURE

Subjects

Subjects included twenty-four primary classroom and special education elementary teachers with a variety of years teaching experience, education and teaching styles. Teachers' years of experience ranged from a first year teacher of second grade to a teacher with over thirty five years experience teaching first and second grades. Teachers' education also ranged from a recent college graduate to master's degree plus additional credit hours. Teaching styles also varied from traditional reading instruction using the basal reader and phonics workbooks to complete whole language instruction using trade books and process writing. Following the State of Ohio law in this elementary school all primary teachers teach phonics to some degree using a variety of methods and materials. No uniform code has been established or mandated by the district for the teaching of phonics. The teachers all teach in the same building. Seven teachers teach first grade, six teach second grade, seven teach third grade and four are special education/Chapter One. The author experienced full cooperation in completing the study.

Setting

School. The elementary school in this study is large with approximately 920 students, however, it was the sole elementary building in the small school district. The elementary building is adjoined to the middle school with common use of the library, cafeteria and gymnasium. The superintendent offices are also located in the building. The elementary school consists of grades kindergarten to fifth grade. A full range of special education services are included, such as resource classrooms for those students with learning disabilities and developmentally handicapped, Chapter One remedial reading classes and Reading Recovery intervention for first graders. There are also classes for the

gifted as well as art, health and music education classes. The majority of the students are Caucasian.

Community. The community is centered around a small village in semirural midwestern Ohio. A major Ohio city is located within commuting distance. Several smaller communities are linked into the school district and open enrollment is underway with an adjoining district. The majority of workers commute to other towns or cities for employment. The average income is low compared to suburban areas. There is a relatively high number of students enrolled in the reduced or free lunch program.

Data Collection

Construction of the Data Collecting Instrument. The survey was constructed as a questionnaire. (Appendix C) The first page gathered background information and provided a space to list preferred phonics teaching materials. Background questions included degrees attained, years in education, grade taught and phonics education background. A space was included for the teachers to write a list of materials, books and resources used in teaching phonics.

The second page requested teachers to analyze their methods of instruction in teaching phonics. The questions were answered by choosing an array of responses including always, usually, sometimes, seldom and never. Each question asked if a specific phonics component was included that corresponded with the major tenets of effective phonics instruction. The major tenets included (a) use of a systematic, logical sequential manner, (b) use of direct instruction method, (c) instruction of higher order cognitive strategies for decoding, (d) comprehensive instruction of all useful phonic components, (e) review until automaticity, (f) use of meaningful related texts, (g) use of methods and materials to adapt to different learning styles such as visual components, grapheme/phoneme correspondence with correct pronunciation of letter sounds and (h) integration of phonics across the reading and writing curriculum.

Administration of the Data Collecting Instrument. The majority of teachers attended a weekend regrouping session at Houston Woods State Park in August, 1994. During that time period the author of this master's project issued invitations to teachers to complete the survey. After completing the survey, teachers were given an information sheet on the 10 Reasons to Teach Effective, Comprehensive Phonics, a Questioning Strategy to aid in decoding unknown words and a Digraph wall chart all constructed by Thompson, author of Logical Phonics (1986). The school district had purchased the phonics program the previous year. Teachers not attending the weekend session were surveyed later during the school year. All teachers completed the survey. All respondents remained anonymous. Many offered later comments on their own instruction or lack thereof in the area of phonics.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Presentation of the Results

Responses to the open-ended surveys were evaluated by comparing the teacher responses in the surveys to the major components of effective phonics instruction as described in research studies of the past thirty years. Possible reasons for responses at variance with these components were presented based upon the writer's experience and knowledge of the teachers, their approach to phonics instruction and the curriculum provided by the school.

Refer to Table I. This table represents the survey summary of twenty-four teachers. Results are expressed in percentages. The first column lists the survey questions. The next five columns represent the respondents' choices to each question.

Refer to Table II. This table represents the survey results of seven first grade teachers. Results are expressed in percentages. The first column lists the survey questions. The next five columns represent the respondents' choices to each question.

Refer to Table III. This table represents the survey results of six second grade teachers. Results are expressed in percentages. The first column lists the survey questions. The next five columns represent the respondents' choices to each question..

Refer to Table IV. This table represents the survey results of seven third grade teachers. Results are expressed in percentages. The first column lists the survey questions. The next five columns represent the respondents' choices to each question.

Refer to Table V. This table represents the survey results of four special education teachers. Results are expressed in percentages. The first column lists the survey questions. The next five columns represent the respondents' choices to each question.

TABLE I

**Survey Results of
Twenty-Four Teachers
Expressed As Percents**

Question	Always	Usually	Sometime	Seldom	Never
1. I teach phonics in a logical, sequential manner from basic to complex?	46	38	8	4	4
2. I teach phonics using a direct instructional method?	17	54	17	8	4
3. I teach students thinking strategies that they can use independently to analyze unknown words?	29	63	8	0	0
4. In teaching phonics, I include all useful phonic components such as consonant sounds, blends, digraphs, silent consonants, vowel uses and rules, vowel controllers, murmur diphthongs, schwa, prefixes, suffixes?	21	63	12	4	0
5. I use visual aids (blackboard, charts, pictures) when teaching phonics?	37	46	17	0	0
6. My instruction combines letter/sounds practice (visual/auditory) with writing (kinesthetic) reinforcement?	30	52	18	0	0
7. I encourage correct pronunciation of letter sounds (i.e. /b/, not /buh/)?	83	17	0	0	0
8. (1st grade teachers) I review phonic skills continually during early reading stages so that students can learn to use these skills automatically?	70	30	0	0	0
9. I integrate phonics instruction across the curriculum using spelling and writing as a means to do so?	42	42	16	0	0

TABLE II

**Survey Results of Seven
First Grade Teachers
Expressed As Percents**

Question	Always	Usually	Sometime	Seldom	Never
1. I teach phonics in a logical, sequential manner from basic to complex?	86	14	0	0	0
2. I teach phonics using a direct instructional method?	43	57	0	0	0
3. I teach students thinking strategies that they can use independently to analyze unknown words?	14	86	0	0	0
4. In teaching phonics, I include all useful phonic components such as consonant sounds, blends, digraphs, silent consonants, vowel uses and rules, vowel controllers, murmur diphthongs, schwa, prefixes, suffixes?	29	71	0	0	0
5. I use visual aids (blackboard, charts, pictures) when teaching phonics?	57	43	0	0	0
6. My instruction combines letter/sounds practice (visual/auditory) with writing (kinesthetic) reinforcement?	43	57	0	0	0
7. I encourage correct pronunciation of letter sounds (i.e. /b/, not /buh/)?	86	14	0	0	0
8. (1st grade teachers) I review phonic skills continually during early reading stages so that students can learn to use these skills automatically?	100	0	0	0	0
9. I integrate phonics instruction across the curriculum using spelling and writing as a means to do so?	57	43	0	0	0

TABLE III

**Survey Results of Six
Second Grade Teachers
Expressed As Percents**

Question	Always	Usually	Sometime	Seldom	Never
1. I teach phonics in a logical, sequential manner from basic to complex?	50	33	17	0	0
2. I teach phonics using a direct instructional method?	0	50	33	17	0
3. I teach students thinking strategies that they can use independently to analyze unknown words?	50	33	17	0	0
4. In teaching phonics, I include all useful phonic components such as consonant sounds, blends, digraphs, silent consonants, vowel uses and rules, vowel controllers, murmur diphthongs, schwa, prefixes, suffixes?	33	50	17	0	0
5. I use visual aids (blackboard, charts, pictures) when teaching phonics?	17	67	17	0	0
6. My instruction combines letter/sounds practice (visual/auditory) with writing (kinesthetic) reinforcement?	20	80	0	0	0
7. I encourage correct pronunciation of letter sounds (i.e. /b/, not /buh/)?	83	17	0	0	0
8. (1st grade teachers) I review phonic skills continually during early reading stages so that students can learn to use these skills automatically?	--	--	--	--	--
9. I integrate phonics instruction across the curriculum using spelling and writing as a means to do so?	50	33	17	0	0

TABLE IV

**Survey Results of Seven
Third Grade Teachers
Expressed As Percents**

Question	Always	Usually	Sometime	Seldom	Never
1. I teach phonics in a logical, sequential manner from basic to complex?	0	51	14	14	14
2. I teach phonics using a direct instructional method?	14	43	14	14	14
3. I teach students thinking strategies that they can use independently to analyze unknown words?	29	71	0	0	0
4. In teaching phonics, I include all useful phonic components such as consonant sounds, blends, digraphs, silent consonants, vowel uses and rules, vowel controllers, murmur diphthongs, schwa, prefixes, suffixes?	14	57	29	0	0
5. I use visual aids (blackboard, charts, pictures) when teaching phonics?	43	29	28	0	0
6. My instruction combines letter/sounds practice (visual/auditory) with writing (kinesthetic) reinforcement?	43	14	43	0	0
7. I encourage correct pronunciation of letter sounds (i.e. /b/, not /buh/)?	100	0	0	0	0
8. (1st grade teachers) I review phonic skills continually during early reading stages so that students can learn to use these skills automatically?	--	--	--	--	--
9. I integrate phonics instruction across the curriculum using spelling and writing as a means to do so?	29	57	14	0	0

TABLE V

**Survey Results of Four
Mixed Special Education Teachers
Expressed As Percents**

Question	Always	Usually	Sometime	Seldom	Never
teach phonics in a logical, sequential manner from basic to complex?	50	50	0	0	0
2. I teach phonics using a direct instructional method?	0	75	25	0	0
3. I teach students thinking strategies that they can use independently to analyze unknown words?	25	50	25	0	0
4. In teaching phonics, I include all useful phonic components such as consonant sounds, blends, digraphs, silent consonants, vowel uses and rules, vowel controllers, murmur diphthongs, schwa, prefixes, suffixes?	0	75	0	25	0
5. I use visual aids (blackboard, charts, pictures) when teaching phonics?	25	75	0	0	0
6. My instruction combines letter/sounds practice (visual/auditory) with writing (kinesthetic) reinforcement?	0	75	25	0	0
7. I encourage correct pronunciation of letter sounds (i.e. /b/, not /buh/)?	50	50	0	0	0
8. (1st grade teachers) I review phonic skills continually during early reading stages so that students can learn to use these skills automatically? (3 teachers responded)*	0	100 *	0	0	0
9. I integrate phonics instruction across the curriculum using spelling and writing as a means to do so?	25	25	50	0	0

Discussion of the Results

The results of the survey, as expressed in the five tables, were analyzed in relationship to related literature as presented in Chapter II and the experience of the author of this master's project in working with the twenty-four teachers over a period of six years.

In discussing the results of the survey, Table I, the survey summary, offered a range of responses which reflect, for the most part, the various orientations of twenty-four teachers from three different grade levels and special education. These orientations were based not only on the grade level of the teachers involved but also their approach to the subject of reading in general and phonics in particular.

Another influence was the choice of a new integrated reading program. Beginning with the 1994-1995 school year the elementary school purchased a new integrated reading series, which also incorporated a language arts and spelling program. The name of the series is Treasury of Literature by Harcourt Brace and Company published in 1995. The reading books used authentic children's literature selections including the original text as written by the author. The reading selections' vocabulary were not changed or deluded for the "average" reader as were most earlier basal readers. Besides the reading text there was also a practice book which included skills and strategies for decoding, grammar, vocabulary, comprehension, literary appreciation, study skills and language.

An integrated spelling practice book included a phonics review by grouping words into lists that had the same phonics elements such as short vowels. It also included vocabulary from the text book into lessons that corresponded with the literature. Teachers were able to order a grade level phonics workbook for their students to use if they chose. All of the first grade teachers used the phonics workbook as practice in their phonics instruction, one-half of the second grade teachers used a phonics workbook and none of the third grade teachers chose to use a workbook. Two out of four special education teachers used a phonics workbook.

In Table I, the survey summary of all twenty-four teachers, the first question asked the teachers if they taught phonics in a logical, sequential manner. In response to question one, nearly one-half of the twenty-four teachers responded “always.” Over one-third of the teachers responded “usually” and a few of the teachers chose “sometimes,” “seldom” and “never.” Teaching phonics in a systematic manner from the most basic concept to the more complex has been well documented by research as an effective instructional component. Both Samuel’s (1976) early analysis on sequential steps of subskills and Groff’s (1989) insistence on mastery of basic skills before introducing more complex skills emphasized the need for starting with the basics and then building more intricate associations.

In Table II, survey summary of seven first grade teachers, six out of seven or eighty-six percent, taught phonics systematically. All of the first grade teachers chose either “always” or “usually.” All of the first grade teachers at this school teach systematic, sequential phonics most of the time. This was a strong indication that the first grade teachers considered this an important issue in effective phonics instruction. First grade teachers expended a great amount of time and effort at the beginning of the school year teaching and reviewing letter sound and recognition. While this was part of the kindergarten curriculum, first grade teachers repeated this beginning skill more intensively.

All of the first grade teachers used a phonics workbook, Phonics A by Modern Curriculum Press, revised and published in 1988. The first two units of the workbook practice consonant letter-sound associations. In the workbook the rest of the sequence of skills are learning to blend letter sounds using short vowel sounds in words, followed by long vowel words, consonant blends, Y as a vowel, “ed” and “ing” endings, consonant digraphs and contractions. Some first grade teachers taught long vowel sounds and words first instead of the short vowels. Nowhere in the workbook are the vowel/consonant patterns explicitly stated or efforts made to teach or offer practice so

that the students could identify those patterns. One assumed that the teacher instructed students in this important concept.

All of the first grade teachers used additional teaching tools such as letter and word cards, games, computer programs, etc. for phonics instruction. Many first grade teachers taught additional vowel combinations that were not included in the phonics workbook. Two teachers also used a program of learning phonics through spelling known as the McCracken method. This program placed a greater emphasis on writing and spelling. For the most part, first grade teachers followed the scope of the phonics workbook, but also offered additional practice in skills and included more combinations than suggested by the workbook.

In Table III, a summary of six second grade teachers, one-half of the teachers responded “always” to the question of use of a systematic method of phonics instruction, a third responded “usually” and one teacher chose “sometime.” Of the six teachers, three teachers used the Phonics Book B by Steck-Vaughn revised in 1991. This book presented phonics instruction in a systematic manner. It reviewed the basic skills from first grade discussed previously and then included more complex associations such as consonant blends in beginning and ending word positions, silent letter consonant digraphs, R-controlled vowels, vowel digraphs and diphthongs, word endings, suffixes and prefixes. Also included are compound words, synonyms, antonyms and homonyms. Teachers taught whole class lessons in phonics skills in a sequential manner.

Three teachers did not order or use the phonics book. Some of these teachers used the whole language approach to reading instruction that involved reading from the literature book as well as trade books and involved more process writing. Phonics in these classrooms was not always taught systematically to the whole class but often as an intervention technique where the teacher noted a deficiency of skills. There was a greater emphasis on process writing where spelling was used as a basis for phonics instruction. Mini-lessons were constructed for small group or individual situations as needed. In the

literature workbook there was a dilute strand of phonics that used the vocabulary from the selections in the literature workbook but it was not systematic or inclusive. The second grade integrated spelling practice book grouped words by phonetic similarities.

In Table IV, the survey summary for seven third grade teachers, none of the teachers always taught systematic phonics, a little over one-half of the teachers indicated that they usually taught in a sequential method. The remaining three responses of “sometime,” “seldom” and “never” were each chosen once. None of the seven teachers used a phonics workbook. All taught phonics to some degree by use of the integrated spelling workbook, the literature workbook and teacher made materials. The spelling book offered a rapid review of phonics elements from the previous years and added additional emphasis to prefixes and suffixes. Teachers gave whole class lessons on particular skills using transparencies, charts and other teacher made materials. On the survey teachers noted that they taught lessons in prefixes and suffixes. By third grade many students have reached the point of automaticity in decoding words. Many third grade teachers felt that a great emphasis on phonics was not necessary for the whole class.

In Table V, the summary of four special education and chapter one teachers, two teachers always taught phonics systematically while the other two did usually. All of the special education teachers taught phonics in a systematic, sequential manner most of the time. These teachers consider teaching phonics in a systematic manner to be an effective component of phonics instruction. These teachers had students from all three grade levels who were deficient in reading skills. These teachers used a greater variety of materials to teach phonics. Some indicated that they used phonics oriented reading booklets that emphasized particular skills. Because of the greater need for more individual instruction, most of the teachers did not use the same literature books as the regular classroom teachers. Much more practice was provided for basic phonics skills.

To summarize the results of question one, teaching phonics in a logical, sequential manner, nearly one-half of the twenty-four teachers indicated that they always followed

this component of instruction. When the “always” and “usually” scores were combined, eighty-four percent of the twenty-four teachers used systematic phonics instruction always or most of the time. When comparing the responses to this question across grade levels, one can readily see the level of importance that each grade level assigned systematic phonics instruction. In comparing the three grade levels the heaviest use of systematic phonics instruction was by first grade teachers and special education teachers. Their combined “always” and “usually” scores were each one hundred percent. Second grade teachers were next with a combined score of eighty-three percent. Third grade teachers used sequential instruction the least with a combined “always” and usually” score of fifty-one percent. To conclude it was evident that at this school early first grade and special education phonics instruction were the most systematic. A declining emphasis on systematic phonics instruction was apparent in the second grade and continued in the third grade.

Question two of the survey asked the teachers to rate to what degree they used the direct instructional method to teach phonics. On Table I, the summary survey, only seventeen percent of all twenty-four teachers answered “always,” over one-half or fifty-four percent responded “usually,” seventeen percent responded “sometime,” and a few answered “seldom” or “never.” Many educators associate direct instruction with rigid teacher-dominated instruction of yesteryear. Current literature described direct instruction more as teaching cognitive skills that the learner can then apply to new situations. Direct instruction depends upon organizing and setting objectives, linking previous learned knowledge to new knowledge, and being able to apply strategies. (Carnine, Grossen & Selbert, 1992) In a long term study, Chall (1983a) found that fifth and sixth grade low income children who had received direct phonics instruction in first through third grade showed consistently higher scores than a control group.

In Table II, the survey of seven first grade teachers forty-three percent responded “always” and fifty-seven percent answered “usually.” From this information one

concluded that first grade teachers mostly teach phonics in a direct method. Since first grade children learn basic reading skills, direct instruction which builds upon a sound foundation is the optimal teaching method.

In Table III, the response of the six second grade teachers was very different from the first grade teachers. None of the second grade teachers responded “always” to question two, but three or fifty percent of them responded “usually.” Thirty-three percent answered “sometime,” and one teacher selected “seldom.” It was interesting to note that when comparing these scores against the list of materials teachers used in teaching phonics, the three teachers who usually taught by direct instruction also used the phonics book for student practice. The writer of this master’s project speculated that perhaps the term “direct instruction,” which was not explained before the survey was administered, could have used more explanation and clarification in light of recent research.

In Table IV, the survey results of seven third grade teachers for question two revealed a wider range of responses but emphasis again on “always” and “usually” which combined total fifty-seven percent. One teacher selected “always, three chose “usually,” and one each chose the remaining responses. The writer of this master’s project again compared the list of materials to responses. The teacher who chose “never” described teaching whole class lessons. Perhaps this teacher used indirect or analytic methods but it was not clear from the survey whether there was confusion as to the meaning of direct instruction.

In Table V, the survey results of four mixed special education teachers indicated that three of the teachers chose “usually,” and one chose “sometime.” Most of the special education teachers considered direct instruction an important component. The remaining teacher had had no formal phonics training in her teacher education courses and had been teaching for only a few years. Several of the studies by Chall (1983a) were based upon research using children in special education programs. She advised that direct instruction

was most crucial for these children who could possibly have more difficulty understanding indirect or analytical instruction.

To compare the grade level responses to question two, it was noted that again first grade teachers used direct instruction method more than any of the other grade levels and special education teachers again ranked second. The results of comparing the other grade levels was more varied than the results of question one. Third grade teachers use direct instruction to a greater extent than second grade teachers. This result was at odds to what research indicated most effective. There was a possible misunderstanding as to what constituted direct instruction, however whole word or whole language schema places a heavier reliance on the use of an indirect approach. Phonics is taught after words are introduced as “whole words” in vocabulary studies where meaning is emphasized over decoding skills. Over all, of the twenty-four teachers over seventy percent used the direct instruction method most of the time which indicated that at this school district, direct instruction method was considered an important element for effective phonics instruction in the primary grades.

Question three of the survey, teaching strategies in order to analyze and decode unknown words independently, was considered an adjunct of the direct instruction model. In examining research by Carnine, Grossen and Silbert (1992), the author of this master’s project discovered a teaching concept that may not yet be widely recognized or understood. Their studies appeared to be an evolution of the earlier concept of direct instruction as described by Chall (1983a). Chall characterized direct instruction as stating more clearly what was to be learned and how it was to be learned and measured. While Chall (1983a) addressed the question of direct instruction versus indirect or analytic instruction more from a point of view of teaching style, the above researchers approach direct instruction as a method of teaching cognitive strategies that cannot only be applied to the material at hand, but also applied to new, unknown situations. Direct strategic instruction has been recommended for the teaching of comprehension skills by the

Commission on Reading. (Anderson et al, 1985, p. 72) The same sort of higher order cognitive instruction of strategies has also been applied to the teaching of phonics. As earlier described in Chapter II of this project, Thompson's phonics program, Logical Phonics, offered a prime example of teaching cognitive strategies to decode unknown words. (See Appendix B) The series of questions gave the learner a step by step means of analyzing an unknown word by looking for particular phonics components, drawing conclusions from those findings and applying what had already been learned to the new word. From the experience of the author of this master's project, many children who have not been taught such strategies made an attempt to pronounce the beginning part of a word correctly and then guessed at the rest. Such guesses were frequently wrong and mislead the reader as to the meaning of the passage. Many children had been taught incomplete analysis procedures, such as to search for long or short vowels in words but not to recognize and interpret other phonic components.

In Table I, the survey summary of twenty-four teachers, responses to question three revealed that twenty-nine percent of the teachers answered always, sixty-three percent of the teachers answered usually and eight percent answered sometime. No one chose seldom or never. These statistics revealed that ninety-two percent of the teachers taught decoding strategies most of the time. The survey was not designed to measure the scope or content of strategies taught.

In Table II, the survey results of seven first grade teachers, all teachers included instruction in phonics strategies most of the time. Fourteen percent chose "always" while eighty-six percent chose "usually." This result reflected the great amount of effort that first grade teachers maintained to insure that first grade students could understand and apply the basic code of our language.

In Table III, the survey results of six second grade teachers, fifty percent always taught decoding strategies, thirty-three percent usually did so and seventeen percent sometimes taught decoding strategies. It was interesting to note that for second grade

teachers the statistics in the survey for Question three, teaching decoding strategies, are the same as for Question one, teaching phonics in a sequential, systematic manner. In reviewing the actual survey responses, some teachers answered both questions the same whereas others chose different responses for both questions.

In Table IV, the survey results of seven third grade teachers, nearly thirty percent always taught phonics strategies while over seventy percent usually did so. In combining those scores all third grade teachers chose to teach cognitive strategies most of the time. In comparing the second and third grade teachers responses, it was interesting to note that more third grade teachers taught strategies over all than did second grade teachers. Third grade teachers also chose to teach by direct instruction method more often than did second grade teachers.

In Table V, the results showed that of the four special education teachers, one always taught phonics strategies and two usually did so. The one teacher who responded “sometime” did not receive any phonics training and had only a few years experience in teaching.

When comparing responses for Question three in all of the Tables, first grade and third grade teachers were the most consistent in their efforts to teach decoding strategies. All first and third grade teachers taught strategies most of the time. The seven second grade teachers and four special education teachers had a greater range of percents, but the majority (over seventy-five percent) taught some form of phonic strategies. The author would suggest a further study in which teachers would describe what strategies they did teach and how they taught them.

Question four of the survey asked teachers if they included in their phonics instruction all useful phonics components. This is one area of phonics instruction in which there was disagreement among some researchers. The argument centers around the word “useful.” Several studies have produced lists of phonics generalizations. The most noted of these was Clymer’s table. (Adams, 1990, p. 269) The problem arose not only in

ordering these generalizations by frequency of usage but also in what the advantage that children could attain in learning words through spelling patterns. The Commission on Reading believed that some “reading programs try to teach too many letter-sound relationships and phonics instruction drags out over too many years.” (Anderson et al, 1985, p. 38) The Commission stated its position clearly and succinctly. “Keep it simple.” (p. 43) Representing the other side of the argument was Groff’s (1989) statement concerning phonics rules: “The proper thing to say about phonics rules is the more rules that are learned and applied, the better.” (Groff, 1989, p. 10) He felt that the more children understood about phonics generalizations the better they could “approximate pronunciations of written words.” (p. 10)

In Table I, the summary results of the twenty-four teachers, twenty-one percent of the teachers always taught all useful phonics components. Sixty-three percent usually taught all useful phonics components and twelve percent sometimes did so. One teacher seldom taught all useful components. In response to Question four eighty-four percent of the teachers taught all useful phonics components most of the time. This represented a great majority of the twenty-four teachers.

In Table II, all seven first grade teachers taught all useful phonics components most of the time, with twenty-nine percent responding “always” and seventy-one percent responding “usually.”

In Table III, the six second grade teachers chose a wider range of responses to Question four than the first grade teachers. Thirty-three percent chose “always,” fifty percent chose “usually” and seventeen percent chose “sometime.”

In Table IV, the seven third grade teachers’ responses showed even less consistency than the second grade teachers’ responses in teaching all useful phonics components. Fourteen percent of the third grade teachers chose “always,” fifty-seven percent chose “usually” and twenty-nine percent chose “sometime.” This result was not surprising in that many reading experts indicate that phonics instruction should be taught

thoroughly and intensively so that phonics instruction would be completed prior to third grade. (Anderson et al, 1985, p. 43) Third grade teachers in this school district used the new integrated spelling book and the literature workbook discussed earlier in this chapter to review phonics components taught in previous years. More emphasis was placed on the use of prefixes and suffixes than on any other component.

In Table V of the four special education teachers, three chose the response “usually” to describe their inclusion of all useful phonics components. The one teacher who had no phonics training chose “seldom.” In reading instruction several of these teachers preferred to incorporate phonics lessons on an as needed basis for individual students. Many low functioning students needed a great deal of practice and review to learn the most basic information.

To conclude results of Question four, over eighty percent of the primary teachers in this school district taught all useful phonics components most of the time. While the recommendations of reading researchers may vary, the majority of primary teachers at this school include all useful phonics components in their instruction.

Questions five and six of the survey addressed the issue of teaching to children’s learning styles. The questions asked if teachers used visual aides, such as blackboard, charts and pictures (Question five), and combined visual/auditory instruction with kinesthetic reinforcement (Question six). The brain processes information which is received through all of the senses. Many theorists have maintained that children learn most effectively when the information is received visually, auditorily and kinesthetically or by “doing.” It has also been hypothesized that some children have a preference for a particular modality and learn best when that modality is utilized. (Carbo, Dunn & Dunn, 1986) Other reading researchers who had not been able to replicate Carbo’s test results have not supported this theory. Groff questioned the validity of the learning style theory and stated that normal children who did not have any neurological impairment should be taught phonics. (Groff, 1989, p. 17)

In response to Questions five and six, Table I, the summary results of twenty-four teachers indicated that over thirty percent of the teachers always addressed their phonics instruction to include all learning modalities. About fifty percent usually included visual, auditory and kinesthetic approaches and about seventeen percent sometimes did so. In Table II, the survey results of seven first grade teachers, all of the teachers used instruction to include all modalities most of the time. In Table III, the survey results of six second grade teachers revealed that while eighty-four percent used visual aids most of the time, seventeen percent did so only sometimes. All second grade teachers combined visual/auditory with kinesthetic practice most of the time. Writing skills are heavily stressed in second grade in all areas of instruction. In Table IV, the seven third grade teachers responses indicated that forty-three percent of the teachers always addressed learning styles. Twenty-nine percent of the teachers usually included visual instruction while only fourteen percent included the combined visual/auditory and kinesthetic. As was evidenced by the statistics, the visual component was more heavily stressed than the combination of visual/auditory and kinesthetic. In Table V, the results of the special education teachers selections indicated that all of the teachers used visual aids most of the time but that seventy-five percent usually used visual/auditory with kinesthetic.

To summarize Questions five and six, over eight percent of all the primary teachers included a visual, auditory and kinesthetic approaches to phonics instruction most of the time. Most of the twenty-four teachers were very much aware not only of the visual/auditory process of phonics instruction but also of the inclusion of a writing/kinesthetic element of phonics instruction.

Question seven asked teachers to respond to whether they encouraged correct pronunciation of letter sounds. Many children have had a tendency to pronounce many consonants incorrectly. They have often added the sound “uh” to consonants such as “b” which would become /buh/ instead of /b/ or “c” would be pronounced /cuh/ instead of /k/. By adding the additional sound, the technique of blending letter sounds together to

make the approximate sound of words would become much more difficult. Correct articulation of letter sounds is critical to facilitating the blending process. Many reading specialists have consulted with speech/language therapists to understand the mechanics of vocalization. One such specialist was Thompson (1986) who in her Logical Phonics program carefully included the proper sound for each letter and/or letter combinations. She advocated using mirrors to aid children so that they could see and imitate the correct tongue and teeth placement for letter sounds. She created a character for the short “u” letter sound that would remind children not to add the voiced “uh” sound to consonants

In reviewing Table I, the summary of the twenty-four teachers, over eighty percent always emphasized correct articulation and seventeen percent usually do. In Tables II through V, all of the teachers represented in each Table encouraged correct pronunciation most of the time. No one in any grade level chose the responses “sometimes,” “seldom” or “never.” These positive results demonstrated that the primary teachers at this school district were aware and incorporated correct articulation in their phonic instruction.

Question eight was for first grade teachers only and special education teachers who taught students at a first grade level. The question asked teachers if they reviewed continually during early reading stages so that students could automatically apply the skills learned. The response to this question on Table II by first grade teachers was completely affirmative. All the first grade teachers always reviewed skills so that students could apply them automatically to decode words. The three special education teachers who responded to the question (See Table V) answered “usually.” Research in the past twenty years has indicated that to achieve reading fluency the phonics cueing system must be learned and applied to the point of automaticity. In Chall’s (1983b) theory of reading stages, initial reading stage involved code instruction in which the phonics cueing system is emphasized and practiced in the context of reading text until the child’s reading ability would evolve to stage two with the development of fluency. This process can occur with maturation anytime from first grade to the end of second grade. Adams (1990) also maintains that

automaticity not only allows the reader to decode visually unfamiliar words but will also “supports higher-order comprehension processes as well.” (Adams, 1990, p. 414) Fluency in reading words permits the reader to remember the relationship of the words and syntax in a sentence. Information can then be interpreted and understood.

Question nine of the survey asked the teachers if they integrated phonics instruction across the curriculum using spelling and writing as a means to do so. With the new literature program as discussed earlier in this chapter, a dilute strand of phonics was integrated into the reading, language arts and spelling curriculum. The integrated spelling book listed words according to phonetic elements and included practice pages. The integrated literature workbook used selected vocabulary from the literature book to reinforce phonics skills.. Thompson (1986) emphasized that “phonics elements are best integrated across the curriculum using spelling and writing as the instructional vehicles.” She felt that that “workbooks and skill sheets are not needed, since phonics is an auditory/verbal process.” (Thompson, 1986) While phonetic elements were integrated into the reading/language arts curriculum, the books included did not offer a comprehensive, intensive, systematic phonics program. It was still up the individual teacher’s decision to fill the gaps with additional instruction in order to offer students all phonics elements.

In Table I in response to Question nine, forty-two percent of the twenty-four teachers answered “always,” another forty-two percent answered “usually” and sixteen percent chose “sometime.” These percentages indicate that a great majority of the teachers used an integrated program most of the time. In Table II, the seven first grade teachers responded “always” fifty-seven percent and “usually” forty-three percent. First grade teachers all support integrated instruction most of the time.

In Table II fifty percent of the six second grade teachers chose “always,” thirty-three percent chose “usually” and one teacher chose “sometime” for Question nine.

Nearly all the second grade teachers integrate phonics across the curriculum most of the time.

In Table IV the third grade teachers chose “always” for Question nine only about thirty percent. Fifty-seven percent chose “usually.” One of the teachers chose “sometime” in response to Question nine. The responses of third grade teachers for Question nine support earlier conclusions that third grade teachers do not emphasize phonics to the extent found in earlier grade levels.

In response to Question nine in Table V, the survey of the four special teachers indicated that one teacher chose “always,” another chose “usually” and two chose “sometime.” These teachers for the most part use different reading materials and instructional methods than the regular classroom. While the mixed resource teachers may have their students for the entire reading/language arts curriculum, Chapter One teachers have their students for one-half hour a day for supplemental and remedial reading instruction. The individual needs of the students necessitated a variety of instruction that did not always allow phonics to be integrated across the entire curriculum.

To summarize the responses to Question nine, with the new integrated literature program by Harcourt Brace & Company initiated in 1994-1995, the great majority of the twenty-four teachers surveyed responded that they used an integrated approach most of the time.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Despite hundreds of studies over the past thirty years which produced volumes of documented research, the topic of effective phonics instruction has often been neglected or completely ignored in teacher education courses and inservice programs to update teachers on new developments. The writer of this master's project own personal experience in teacher education courses reflected this trend. Little was mentioned ten years ago in reading methods' courses concerning phonics as one of the three cueing systems in understanding the written word. In the past six years of teaching experience the writer found little offered at inservice programs or at the Ohio Chapter One annual conferences on phonics instruction. However, more information is available now on how to teach phonics effectively and efficiently than twenty years ago due to better formulated research methods, more accurate data collection and evaluation methods. To begin to rectify this situation, the Ohio legislature has mandated, in the form of Senate Bill 140 (See Appendix A), that phonics be taught through the third grade and that phonics instruction be available in teacher education courses and inservice programs

Research has documented that phonics instruction, in order to be most effective, should contain several major components. These components include systematic, direct, strategic and comprehensive instruction. Phonics is an auditory/verbal process that is most effectively learned when combined with auditory and visual instruction that incorporates meaningful reading and writing experiences. Correct pronunciation of letters and letter combinations is essential to produce approximations of uttered speech. Phonics practice should not be delegated to completing independent seatwork pages but practice should include applying phonics skills in reading meaningful text. Such practice is critical to producing reading fluency. Fluency allows the reader to focus more rapidly on

contextual and structural information in order to derive meaning from the text. Effective phonics instruction should not be an end in itself but a means, along with other instruction in contextual and structural meaning, of achieving an independent self-monitoring reader. Phonics can and should be included in any reading program whether basal or literature based.

The purpose of this study was to evaluate how selected grade level groups of teachers differ in their perceptions of effective phonics instruction as described by research of the last thirty years. The grade levels included first, second and third grade. In this study the writer surveyed the teachers' responses to questions concerning aspects of effective phonics instruction.

The writer examined the teachers' responses by comparing each grade level with other grade levels and also by comparing the responses to related literature. The results, with some deviations, showed that most of the twenty-four teachers' responses met the criteria for effective phonics instruction.

Conclusions

After analyzing the results of this survey in light of research findings, the writer was able to draw some conclusions based upon those results and personal experience. The majority of the twenty-four primary teachers responses indicated that they complied with what research has indicated to be effective phonics instruction. First grade teachers in particular were the strongest in every component.

There were some notable exceptions, especially with second grade teachers who, according to research, should also be utilizing effective instruction methods. One important discrepancy was in the area of direct instruction. There were several possible conclusions that could be drawn from this information. A number of the teachers were advocates of the whole language paradigm which is a meaning driven schema. In whole language phonics is traditionally taught indirectly after vocabulary word identification and meaning have been introduced. One teacher, a recent university graduate, did not receive

phonics training in reading methods courses. There was also the possibility that the phonics workbook, phonics skill pages in the literature workbook and spelling units were substituted for direct instruction.

Other deviations were the responses of third grade teachers to questions of systematic and direct phonics instruction. These conclusions could be expected considering that much of the research studies indicated that phonics instruction should be concluded by the end of second grade except in specific cases. Third grade students are expected to have a foundation in the phonics cueing system.

The population of the special education teachers was small, only four teachers. One of the teachers who had been teaching only a few years also had no formal phonics training. The responses of one or two teachers caused wide discrepancies in percentages. The particular needs of the students required individual instruction in many cases.

The results of the survey and the writer's experience indicate that the full meaning of the terms as currently used in research studies may not have been understood by all the teachers surveyed.

Recommendations

The writer of this master's project recommends that more training be provided in teacher education programs and inservice training programs so that the information published in books, research articles, journals and other publications on effective phonics instruction can be more easily available and put into practice. The most effective methods for teaching all reading strategies should be available to all teachers. The writer of this project would also recommend an end to the claims and hostilities of the Great Debate of phonics versus whole language. Teachers should not have to declare themselves either "for" one or the other but instead "for" the good of the child learning to read.

Appendix A

OHIO SENATE BILL 140

Rule for Phonics. 3301-33-01

- (A) The Ohio State Board of Education shall formulate and prescribe minimum standards requiring the use of phonics as a technique in the teaching of reading in grades kindergarten through three.
- (B) As used in this rule, the term “phonics” means the relationship between letters, speech sounds, patterns, and meaning units (such as prefixes, suffixes, and root words) in written language.
- (C) Phonics instruction shall be based on the child’s understanding of essential concepts (such as print directionality, what a word is, letter knowledge, and that print carries the message).
- (D) Phonics instruction shall occur in meaningful contexts and may consist of a combination of several of the following activities:
 - (1) Illustrating the relationships between letters of the alphabet and sounds utilizing words in the spoken language of the student; how vowels and consonants blend to form syllables; and how syllables form words.
 - (2) Reading aloud to children to heighten awareness of the link between written and spoken language.
 - (3) Providing frequent opportunities for students to read and to re-read books and materials to practice and apply their understanding of phonics.
 - (4) Developing the ability of students to approximate word pronunciation by applying phonic generalizations.
 - (5) Demonstrating letter-sound relationships using familiar words as concrete examples.
 - (6) Showing students how to compare unknown words with similarly spelled familiar words to help recognize unknown words.
 - (7) Utilizing knowledge of letter-sound relationships, meaning of text, and structure of words to help students to recognize unknown words.
- (E) Phonics instruction functions as a technique to help students construct meaning from text and to develop independence in learning.
- (F) The State Board of Education shall provide inservice training programs for teachers on the use of phonics as a technique in the teaching of reading in grades kindergarten through three.

QUESTIONING STRATEGY

1. How many vowels do I see?
2. Where is/are the vowel(s)?
3. Do I see a Monster? (l,r,v,y)
4. Do I see a Dippy Double? (diphthong, irregular double vowel)
5. What vowel rule do I follow?
6. Do I see a consonant partner digraph?
7. Do I see a consonant partner blend?
8. Do I see a compound word?
9. Do I see a contraction?
10. Do I see a suffix or a prefix?

★

Appendix C

SURVEY
EFFECTIVE PHONICS INSTRUCTION

Please underline one answer for each question:

1. What grade do you currently teach?

First Second Third Mixed Special

2. What is your educational background?

B.A. B.A. + M.S. M.S. +

3. How many years have you been teaching?

1-5 6-10 11-20 21+

4. Have you ever received training in how to teach phonics?

Yes No

5. Do you include phonics instruction as a regular component of your reading classes?

Yes No

Please list the materials you use in teaching phonics and for student practice or reinforcement.

In analyzing your method of phonics instruction please answer each question by underlining one of the five responses that best represents your method.

1. In teaching phonics, I include all useful phonic components such as consonant sounds, blends, digraphs, silent consonants, vowel uses and rules, vowel controllers, murmur diphthongs, schwa, prefixes, suffixes.

Always Usually Sometimes Seldom Never

2. I teach phonics using a direct instructional method.

Always Usually Sometimes Seldom Never

3. I use visual aids (blackboard, charts, pictures) when teaching phonics.

Always Usually Sometimes Seldom Never

4. My instruction combines letter/sound practice (visual/auditory) with writing (kinesthetic) reinforcement.

Always Usually Sometimes Seldom Never

5. I encourage correct pronunciation of letter sounds. (i.e. /b/, not /buh/)

Always Usually Sometimes Seldom Never

6. I teach students thinking strategies that they can use independently to analyze unknown words.

Always Usually Sometimes Seldom Never

7. (First Grade Teachers) I review phonic skills continually during early reading stages so that students can learn to use these skills automatically .

Always Usually Sometimes Seldom Never

8. I teach phonics in a logical, sequential manner from basic to complex.

Always Usually Sometimes Seldom Never

9. I integrate phonics instruction across the curriculum using spelling and writing as a means to do so.

Always Usually Sometimes Seldom Never

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