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ABSTRACT

A study addressed the problem of making accurate descriptions of how teachers in first-grade classrooms help their students learn to read and write. It also related the approaches to reading instruction that teachers use to their students' views of reading and their achievement at the end of first grade. For the study, information was gathered from classroom observations, teacher interviews, discussions with students, and assessments of their progress. Findings showed that many of the differences among first-grade classrooms within any type of approach to reading instruction arise from differences in implementation. Observations and discussions confirmed the belief that most teachers of beginning reading are eclectics, engaging their students in activities that have been found to be effective, regardless of the program, approach, or method they profess to be using. In general, teachers pull from the repertoire of activities that come from their own experience and convictions, and fashion programs that vary, according to the needs of the children in their classrooms and what their own experiences tell them will work. They are influenced by theory, but adapt it to their own ways of working with students. (Contains 27 references, 1 table, and 2 figures containing several tables of data). (Author/SR)

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CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF READING

Technical Report No. 606

SIX TEACHERS IN THEIR CLASSROOMS: A CLOSER LOOK AT BEGINNING READING INSTRUCTION

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November 1994

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Abstract

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SIX TEACHERS IN THEIR CLASSROOMS: A CLOSER LOOK AT BEGINNING READING INSTRUCTION

The field of reading education is known for views about beginning reading instruction that vary from decade to decade (Adams, 1990). The field is also known for the often impassioned rhetoric that is produced by the developers and followers of different approaches to beginning reading instruction. Educators are not the only people involved in these discussions: Irate parents, interested citizens, and state legislators often express fervently held beliefs about beginning reading instruction. The arguments that arise from this rhetoric frequently include assertions about the evident superiority of a given approach to that of any other, as well as about the tendency of any other approach to violate the true meaning of reading, be damaging to children, and to undermine democratic principles. A number of these and other concerns that have been expressed seem to have very little to do with providing effective reading instruction for all children.

Research About Different Approaches to Reading Instruction

What has been learned from classroom research about the effects on student achievement of different approaches to beginning reading instruction? Can this research contribute to the resolution of the disagreements and the reduction of the confusion? In this section, we present information from two traditions of research--comparison studies and component studies--as we discuss research about the effects of different approaches to reading instruction.

Comparison Studies

A strong tradition in research about beginning reading consists of comparing the effects on student achievement of one approach to those of another approach. The comparison studies of the past 75 years most often involved comparing programs that stressed phonics instruction with those that stressed "whole-word" methods. Phonics programs emphasize the learning of individual sound/symbol correspondences. Their intent is that children will learn to "sound out words." Whole-word programs emphasize the learning of single words, which the children then read in stories that have a limited and controlled number of words. (Different labels are sometimes attached to each of these approaches. For example, approaches emphasizing phonics are sometimes described as *code-emphasis*, and those emphasizing whole words as *meaning-emphasis* or a *sight-word method.*)

In the mid-sixties, the findings of 50 years of comparison studies were summarized in Jeanne Chall's widely read report, *Learning to Read, the Great Debate* (Chall, 1967). A major conclusion of this report was that reading programs that include early and systematic attention to the code lead to higher reading achievement than do programs that teach the code later and less systematically. Popp (1975) suggested that an increased emphasis on phonics instruction in the beginning reading levels of basal reading programs in the years between 1967 to 1975 was due to the conclusions of this report.

The same concern that led to the writing of *Learning to Read* also led to the Cooperative Research Program in First Grade Reading (Bond & Dykstra, 1967). This federally funded series of studies was designed to resolve some of the persistent issues in beginning reading. Instead of resolving them, however, the Bond and Dykstra studies served as further fuel for the debate. One of the most problematic and often quoted findings of these studies is that the variation in achievement between classrooms *within* different types of programs was often greater than that *between* different types of programs. In general, however, code-emphasis programs seemed to produce higher achievement than meaning-emphasis programs (Dykstra, 1974). And, although there were few significant interactions between site and treatment, some individual sites using the programs that generally scored the lowest, outperformed other sites using programs that generally scored higher. Thus, the data from the Bond

and Dykstra studies have been interpreted as both supporting systematic instruction in the code and pointing out that the presence of such instruction is less important than individual teacher effects (see Adams, 1990). Compounding the difficulty in interpretation is that few of the researchers actually observed the classes. We will discuss this point later.

The advent of whole language. The issues that propelled the earlier debate (i.e., whole word vs. phonics) are no longer relevant, according to the proponents of the whole language movement (e.g., Altwerger, Edelsky, & Flores, 1987). Whole language theorists argue that both whole-word and phonics approaches were rooted in a word-by-word conception of reading, a conception that distorts the meaning of whole texts. Whole language theorists argue that a text must always be treated as a whole, and that individual units, such as letters and words are meaningless outside of the context of a meaningful text. Furthermore, they argue that reading instruction that starts with teaching letters and sounds or with teaching words in isolation ignores the knowledge that children already possess about reading. They also argue that such instruction will distort the way children will view reading in the classroom (Goodman, 1986). Whole language theorists believe that children come to school understanding that they can get meaning from written texts and that texts are a source of pleasure to them. They believe that children will lose this understanding if exposed to an overly analytic approach that teaches them to view reading as collections of letters and words. Thus, whole language theorists advocate that instruction must always begin with meaningful text, and that any discussion of individual words and letter-sound correspondences be done with the focus remaining on the meaning of the entire text.

Stahl and Miller (1989) performed a meta-analysis of studies comparing the reading achievement of students in whole language and language experience classrooms to the achievement of students in classrooms using traditional basal reading programs, most of which adopt a whole word approach along with some phonics instruction. (The researchers combined data from the language experience and whole language classrooms because they view language experience as a precursor to whole language.)

The meta-analysis revealed little difference in the effects of these approaches on students' reading achievement. There was, however, a tendency for whole language approaches to be more effective in kindergarten than in first grade, a tendency for whole language approaches to be more effective on measures of word recognition and less effective on measures of comprehension, and a tendency for the more recent studies (which typically involved whole language approaches rather than language experience approaches) to show lower effect sizes. Stahl, McKenna, and Pagnucco (1994) updated this meta-analysis, using studies from 1988 to 1994. This update confirmed the earlier findings: Whole language approaches seemed to be similar to more traditional programs in their effects on student achievement.

Component Studies

Another tradition of research that illuminates the varying approaches to the teaching of reading involves studying the effects of various components of instruction. The richest source of information about the components of effective beginning reading instruction is the teacher effectiveness literature (see Barr, 1984; Rosenshine & Stevens, 1984, for review). Among the results derived from this group of studies is that the time students spend on reading texts of an appropriate level is consistently one of the most powerful predictors of growth in reading. Harris and Serwer (1966), for example, found that the amount of time students spent reading texts was strongly related to reading growth, whereas time spent on non-reading activities (e.g., art with reading, audiovisual activities, and even discussion of topics related to the reading) had little relationship to reading growth. Other studies have examined factors that increase or decrease the amount of time students spend reading connected text (see Berliner, 1981).

But it is not only the amount of time that students spend reading text that influences their achievement, it is also the pace of instruction. Barr (1974-1975) examined 15 first-grade classes and found that the

amount of content covered by the teacher over the course of a year influenced students' final achievement. Barr and Dreeben (1983) reanalyzed the observational data used in the original study and found that the organization of the school and the classrooms (e.g., grouping patterns), also influenced content coverage, which in turn influenced achievement. Stahl, Suttles, and Pagnucco (1992) found similar effects in their comparisons of traditional and process classrooms. (In this study, *process* teachers claimed to use a whole language philosophy, but their instruction differed from what is conventionally considered to be whole language in significant ways.) The researchers found that the amount of material covered, as evidenced by each child's placement in basal readers, had a greater influence on achievement than did the approach espoused by the teachers.

The characteristics of the texts children read also influences their achievement. Juel and Roper/Schneider (1985) compared two groups of classes, each of which used the same district-mandated supplementary synthetic phonics program. One group of classes also used a basal reading program that provided student texts containing a high percentage of decodable words. The other group also used a basal program with texts containing a much lower percentage of decodable words. Juel and Roper/Schneider found that the basal reading program with texts containing a higher percentage of decodable words "encouraged the use of a phonic strategy, provided practice in using such a strategy, and fostered induction of letter-sound correspondences . . . that were not directly taught" (p. 150).

Materials and instruction are confounded in the Juel and Roper/Schneider study. Not only did the students' text differ, but the instruction associated with the texts differed. This confound contributed to the difficulty of interpreting these results. Such confounds, however, are endemic to naturalistic studies, as we will discuss later.

Difficulties with Classroom Studies

Both the comparison and the component studies point up the difficulties of labeling the instructional approaches used in classrooms and then relating the label of the approach to student achievement. Central to the problem of labeling and comparing approaches, or evaluating components of instruction, is the challenge of finding classrooms that represent *pure* implementations of various approaches, or consistent use of various components of instruction. Often the classroom implementation of an approach is a far cry from what the label conjures up in the mind of a developer or advocate. Studies of beginning reading that examine different approaches often ignore what might be important differences in what goes on in classrooms. Barr (1984) pointed out the importance of observing the instruction in the classroom, rather than characterizing an approach based on its global characteristics.

It is evident that any approach to the teaching of beginning reading is necessarily complex and involves the orchestration of teacher instruction, independent work, instructional materials, and textbooks and tradebooks. To label particular approaches to reading instruction as *code-emphasis*, *meaning-emphasis* or *whole language* may provide answers to some basic questions about classroom organization. We have come to believe, however, that such labels are likely to obscure important differences among teachers and classrooms. Our concerns are borne out by research. Chall and Feldmann (1966), for example, observed 12 first-grade teachers using the same basal reading program and found that teachers were interpreting the program in very different ways. They found that the amount of emphasis the teachers placed on decoding was related to student achievement, rather than what the teachers *said* they were doing. Similarly, Stahl and Miller (1989) found that the overall size of the effect of whole language/language experience approaches dropped considerably when only studies that used observations to verify the treatment were included. In comparison studies in which classrooms were observed, the average effects dropped from approximately equal to that of a traditional basal reading program approach to a moderately strong effect favoring the basal approach.

We believe all of these research studies point up the need for comparison studies that include verifications of classroom practice. One model for verifying that a particular approach is being implemented involves having consultants come into classrooms to work on the approach with students and teachers. On subsequent visits, the consultants make observations to verify the use of the approach. The U.S. Department of Education Follow Through Program, which examined the effects on student achievement of a number of models of classroom instruction, followed the classroom consultation model (Abt Associates, 1977). Other studies of classroom practice indicate that how an approach is carried out when consultants are available to give help and feedback is not the way it usually works when the teachers are left on their own to implement a new approach (see Stallings & Krasavage, 1986).

We became interested in acquiring information about the classrooms of first-grade teachers who espoused different approaches to beginning reading instruction, but who had not had extensive staff development or any classroom consulting in the approach they were using. We wanted to observe teachers who had worked out how to implement an approach, either on their own or by talking informally with other teachers. Our goal was to find out if the activities of their classrooms were characterized by the approach they espoused. In addition, we wanted to see if the reading achievement of the students, and their views about reading, in any way reflected the approach to reading instruction that was in use in their classrooms.

A natural experiment. Our study addresses the problem of making accurate descriptions of how teachers in first-grade classrooms go about helping their students learn to read and write. It also relates the approach to reading instruction that the teachers espouse to their students' views of reading and to student achievement at the end of first grade. To carry out this study, we gathered information from classroom observations, teacher interviews, discussions with students, and assessments of student progress. The study is a "natural" experiment. In a more traditional experiment, researchers consciously manipulate the relevant variables and observe the results. In classrooms, this is often difficult if not impossible: On the one hand, teachers frequently interpret an approach in their own way, which leads to variations in how the approach is carried out. On the other hand, teachers who do not feel comfortable with an approach will change it until they are comfortable. Our strategy was to look for naturally occurring variations in instruction, observe them so that we could describe them well, and then relate the results of this instruction to the children's achievement and attitudes. We compared, as in a traditional experiment, but compared *found*, rather than manipulated, variations.

Natural experiments have their own problems. First, it is impossible to avoid confounds. Classrooms are inherently complex and multidimensional, and they vary in a number of dimensions. It would be difficult to find two classrooms that are identical except in the targeted area. Second, because natural experiments do not involve random selection, it cannot be claimed that the results of such studies generalize to a larger population. Instead, studies such as this may only describe the classes that participated, and may or may not generalize to other classrooms.

We looked for six classrooms that would present significant contrasts. We chose four classrooms from a district that mandated the use of a particular basal program. These four classrooms had different instructional patterns. Two (B and C) used the basal program in a conventional manner, and the other two (D and E) used the student textbook only as one, among many sources, of reading material. We contrasted these four classrooms with two others from different districts. One of these classrooms (A) used a basal program that emphasized synthetic phonics and a scripted direct instruction approach to teaching. The other classroom (F) used a variety of materials within a very open structure.

Our intention was:

- to see how teachers instantiate information from the whole language movement within the demands of their school districts, including the use of a mandated basal reading program,
- to contrast the use of phonetically controlled textbooks with other instruction (B versus D and E),
- to contrast the use of phonetically controlled textbooks with non-phonetically controlled materials (A, B, D, and E versus F),
- to contrast the use of scripted direct instruction with unscripted instruction (A versus B), and
- to contrast the use of an open classroom structure containing phonetically controlled student readers with the use of an open classroom structure containing a variety of materials that do not emphasize phonics or vocabulary control (D and E versus F).

These six classes exemplify a wide range of beginning reading instruction classes, from the highly structured, synthetic phonics approach of Teacher A to the open, child-centered approach of Teacher F. The classrooms were not selected as exemplars of different approaches, nor were they a random sample of a larger population of similar classrooms. Instead, they represent six individual teachers' attempts to organize beginning reading instruction. As often happens in natural experiments, the six classes did not fit neatly into contrasting categories.

It must be noted that to a greater or lesser extent all six teachers had been influenced by the whole language movement. The effects of this influence, however, were different. For example, Teacher A, who used a direct instruction approach to instruction, included process writing and a free reading period in her program. Although her instruction was phonically oriented, it included a number of elements of whole language instruction.

Method

Subjects

Six teachers in six first-grade classrooms were chosen to represent a range of approaches to first-grade reading instruction. These six teachers readily labeled themselves as either whole language, direct instruction, or traditional. They had been teaching from 2 to 16 years. All were rated by their principals as good teachers and recommended by them for participation in this study. The children in the classrooms were of similar socioeconomic status.

Four of the classrooms (B, C, D, and E) were located in a small central Illinois city that is sustained by a number of small manufacturing plants and agricultural companies. These four classes were located in two schools that served primarily lower SES children. Approximately half of the students were members of minority groups. One of the classrooms (C) was designated as a bilingual class, even though less than half of the students spoke a language other than English in their home. Independent of language difficulties, some of the lowest performing children in this school were in Teacher C's class. Of the 19 children in her class, she reported that 6 could identify fewer than 10 letters at the beginning of the year. This was by far the lowest percentage of the six classrooms. Because the pupils were very different from those in the other classrooms, the pupils in this class are not included in the numerical comparisons. The *teacher*, however, is included, as an example of how different teachers instantiate different aspects of first grade reading instruction.

Two of the classrooms (A and F) were in schools located in two adjacent small cities. These cities contain a large university as well as a small manufacturing and agricultural support base. Classroom A was located in a school in a blue-collar neighborhood. Approximately 60% of its students were members of minority groups. Classroom F was located in a neighborhood in which a large number of university staff lived, but district-wide busing made its demographic characteristics similar to those of the other schools in the district. Forty percent of its students were members of minority groups.

Only those children who spent the full first year of first grade in their teachers' classrooms were included in the study; thus, retainees and children who transferred into a class after October 1 were not included. Children taking part in special education and special reading programs were included.

Teacher Observations and Interviews

We observed each teacher for three full days over a period of several weeks during the last half of the school year. (Two teachers, D and E, were observed nine times beginning in September, as part of Winsor's, 1990 study.) Field notes were taken during all the reading and literacy events that occurred during each of the three days. Our goal was to capture the essence of the instruction that was provided by the teachers and the activities that the students were engaged in.

In addition, we interviewed each teacher for about an hour and a half. Interviews were scheduled at the teacher's convenience, usually after school. The first section of the interview dealt with general attitudes toward reading and reading instruction; the second with specific details about her instructional plans. In the first section, we asked questions such as "What makes someone a good reader?" "What abilities to you think first graders should have at the beginning of the year to be successful in learning to read?" and "What are the goals of your reading program?" As was the case in other studies of children's attitude toward reading (e.g., Garner & Kraus, 1981), we wished to see if there were differences in the way teachers viewed competent reading behavior. In the second section, we asked for the details of what the teacher typically did in her classroom. We began by asking for a description of a typical day of reading instruction, and then asked about how decoding was taught, how comprehension was handled, how oral and silent reading were incorporated, what activities were used to foster children's appreciation of reading, how much writing was done, and if and how teachers' manuals were used. At the end of the interview the teachers were encouraged to talk about anything that was not covered in the interview questions.

The interviews were combined with the classroom observations to provide descriptions of the reading instruction in the six classrooms. The descriptions were then tied to measures of student attitudes about reading and to the results of achievement tests, that were administered at the end of first grade.

Children's Attitudes and Abilities

To gather information about the children's abilities to decode words and to read stories and about their metacognitive knowledge of decoding, we interviewed each child in the class separately. In the beginning of this 30- to 40-minute session, a child was given the Burke (1993) interview to determine his or her basic orientation to reading. This interview consists of a series of questions such as "What do you do when you come to something you don't know while you're reading? and "What makes (someone) a good reader? The questions are designed to determine whether a child views reading as a meaning-gathering act or a decoding act. For the "What makes someone a good reader?," a response such as "He can sound words out" might suggest a decoding orientation whereas "He seems to understand what he is reading" might suggest a meaning focus.

Following this interview, the child was presented with six groups of words (such as *pin, win, tin*, each group of words sharing a common characteristic) and asked to tell how he or she would teach someone

how to read those words. The responses were categorized in four ways: the child (a) pointed out the common characteristic, (b) gave a general "Tell them to sound it out" response, (c) said "Just tell them the words" or (d) provided a semantic cue. These categories were derived from the examination of the student responses. The first author and a graduate student agreed on how to categorize the student responses 95% of the time.

To examine students' ability to decode words in isolation and in context, the *Decoding Skills Test* (Richardson & DiBenedetto, 1985) was administered. This test contains a number of subtests: graded word lists, other lists of monosyllabic and polysyllabic words, monosyllabic and polysyllabic nonsense words that are also classified by phonic pattern, graded passages that contain words from the graded word lists, and comprehension questions for the passages. The test permits a child's ability to read sight words to be compared with several factors--decoding skill, the ability to transfer knowledge of real words to nonsense words by analogy, the ability to use context to read words not recognized in isolation, and the reading of words in isolation. The test also assesses the reading of connected text containing the same words.

Results

Although our intention was to find teachers who represented a spectrum of approaches to reading instruction, we did not expect to find "pure" examples of different approaches. And, indeed, we did not. For example, one teacher was described by her principal as a whole language teacher. Yet, when she was first observed, she was conducting a lesson on how to make diacritical marks on words with vowel digraphs--certainly not a typical whole language activity. From other observations and our interviews with her, we found that she used big books, process writing, and many other activities associated with whole language. Although she had personal sympathy with the goals of the whole language movement, she felt her students needed some careful decoding instruction. Her approach is best characterized as pragmatic, because she was using activities typical of several approaches in a way that she believed would best work with her students.

In the next section, we use information from the interviews to describe some similarities across the six teachers and then some differences. Then, using both observational and interview information, we describe the six classrooms. Table 1 organizes this information: Each class/teacher is categorized according to the label that she used to describe her reading instruction; some of the most noticeable classroom characteristics are listed, and the type of beginning reading instruction in the basal reading program (if any) that is in use in the classroom is noted.

[Insert Table 1 about here.]

Teacher Attitudes Toward Reading

Responses to the first section of the teacher interview revealed that the teachers' goals for their students were more similar than different. When asked what made someone a good reader, four of the six teachers mentioned fluency (A, B, C, and E) and five of the six (all but C) mentioned comprehension. When asked how they would know if a student was reading something well, four mentioned fluency (A, B, E, and F) and five mentioned comprehension (all but A). When asked about the goals of their program, all the teachers said they wanted their children to enjoy reading, with three (A, D, and F) adding that they wanted all children to feel successful as readers. Two (B and F) mentioned an external criterion, that of having all children able to read a first grade reader by the end of the school year.

The overall orientation to reading of these six teachers was markedly different. Teachers A, B, and C, whose instruction was more code-oriented, emphasized the importance of children knowing letter sounds. Teacher E also felt that students should know the sounds of the letters of the alphabet. The

two teachers who were the most whole language-oriented, wanted children to have the "idea that print has meaning" (Teacher D) or "to have been read to before they came, to have an interest in books" (Teacher F). Teacher F, in fact, believed that an interest in books was more important than specific literacy knowledge, such as knowledge of the alphabet.

Classroom Observations

The teacher in Class A used a reading program that featured highly organized and systematic synthetic phonics and blending instruction. Each classroom was observed for three full days. As noted above, Classes B, C, D, and E were required to use a district-mandated basal reading program that stresses the use of phonics rules to teach word identification. The program provided textbooks with stories written to contain high percentages of words following the patterns taught in the lessons (see Juel & Roper/Schneider, 1985). The teacher of Class F characterized herself as a "language teacher." She relied on stories but did not use a basal reading program. Instead, she developed instructional materials according to her students' needs. Each of these classrooms is described in more detail below:

Direct instruction. Teacher A used a commercially developed direct instruction basal reading program that features synthetic phonics and blending as the basis for the teaching of decoding skill. Each of the small-group lessons we observed had the same format: The teacher held up a page of either letters or words for the students to read. When the instruction was with letters, students were to say a sound when the teacher touched a letter. When the students read words, they first blended the letters into words as the teacher pointed to each letter. The group then read aloud a list of words in unison, then re-read them individually.

After practice with identifying letters and reading words in isolation, the students read a short story in the student text. These stories ranged in length from three lines to a full page, and were written to match the letter/sound and word identification instruction. The teacher began by having her students read the title and discuss any problematic words. Then the group read the story in unison, with the teacher clapping for every word to keep the students together and to maintain a fluent pace. (Even within the group reading, the teacher said she could hear when an individual child made an error. When this happened, the teacher would request the child to retry the word at the point of error. When the chil ' read the word correctly, the entire group re-read the sentence.)

Following unison reading, the teacher asked questions about the story that were in the teacher's manual. Most of these questions were literal, but the teacher added some inferential and opinion questions, a departure from the literal questions provided in the teacher's guide. Following the questions, the teacher had individual students reread portions of the story. Finally, she sent everyone in the group back to their desks and had the children read the story again to a partner. Then each member of the group worked independently on seatwork that included written questions about the day's story, independent reading, and writing practice.

Teacher A's instruction stressed accurate, fluent and automatic decoding of words both in context and in isolation. Students read new words upwards of ten times in both context and isolation. In the interview, Teacher A said that good readers read fluently and that she viewed fluency as a sign that her students were comprehending. Although the comprehension questions from the manual stressed primarily sentence-level, literal comprehension, she interspersed inferential questions as the students read. Silent reading was not a part of group work, but there was a 20 minute sustained silent reading period each day, during which students read books of their own selection. In addition, we observed children reading books from the classroom library whenever they finished their seatwork.

Teacher A also incorporated process writing into her class. She had taken a workshop in whole language, and integrated process writing along with free reading into her classroom. During the seatwork period, children wrote independent stories. Invented spelling was encouraged in their writing.

The students in this classroom were busy. They were attentive and highly engaged in all the activities, from unison reading of words, to answering questions, to independent reading and writing.

Traditional instruction. The district-mandated basal reading program for the teaching of decoding skills used by Teacher B places a great deal more emphasis on explicit statements of phonics rules than does the program used by Teacher A. Teacher B used this program in the morning, as her regular reading instruction, and used materials from other publishers during a second reading period in the afternoon. She described her morning period as reading instruction and the afternoon period as a time for reinforcement and practice toward fluency.

Teacher B had an aide to help her with her four reading groups. The teacher worked with two groups in the morning and two in the afternoon, each for about 30 minutes. Her aide worked with the other two groups. The teacher began each morning lesson by either introducing a new phonics rule or reviewing previously taught vowel combinations. By the time we observed her class, they were working with "special vowel sounds," such as *ou*, *aw*, and *ough*. These were displayed on a bulletin board, with each vowel combination paired with a picture of a word containing that combination. The teacher had prepared ditto sheets with lists of words containing these sounds, and had the students practice reading these aloud prior to reading the story. (She remarked that the earlier version of the program had such lists in the students' book, but, regrettably, had dropped them from the edition she was using.) If some of the words were unfamiliar (e.g., *sprain* or *stew*), she would discuss their meanings.

Following the word identification practice, the students silently read the story from the student text of the basal program. Following this reading, the teacher and students discussed the story. In the interview, the teacher said that in the beginning of the year the children read out loud. She noted that much of the silent reading consisted of subvocalizations, but that she did "not care that it is not silent, because I like to listen."

While Teacher B was working with one group, the aide was working in the hallway with another group. Her instruction primarily involved giving directions for the completion of the worksheets associated with the program.

In the afternoon, the groups either re-read orally the story that they had read silently in the morning or read stories taken from the student text of another basal reading program. This reading was usually done as a round-robin activity. In the interview the teacher explained that she had tried paired reading, in which students read to each other, but said that this did not work well in her class.

Teacher B believed that the hallmark of a good first-grade reader is fluent and automatic decoding. She thought that children need additional practice in reading stories at their level to develop fluency and accurate decoding. During a daily 15-minute silent sustained reading period, the students read trade books. She reported, however, that some of the children chose to read from a basal text during that time. She was the only teacher of the six who did not report the use of process writing.

Although Teacher B's classroom appeared very traditional, she told us that she did not take her instruction directly from the basal program teacher's manual, and that she used it primarily for its comprehension questions. She reported reordering the skills, dropping some and adding work in others. Thus, Teacher B seemed in control of the instruction, using the basal program to meet her own instructional goals. We suspect that one reason for her lack of reliance on the basal manual was her thoroughly developed repertoire for phonics instruction. She reported that she wanted to "concentrate

on what the children are doing" when they were reading aloud. Teacher B came across as a warm, concerned person, who kept the children in her class busy and well organized.

A mix of whole language beliefs with phonics instruction. Teacher C's class was designated as a bilingual class, but only 9 of the 19 children in the class came from non-English speaking homes. Teacher C was fluent in Spanish and used Spanish both in the morning message and to define English words that she felt might cause trouble for some of her students.

Teacher C used the district mandated basal reading program. In the mornings she provided direct instruction of phonics skills while the aide directed the oral reading of the stories from the student text of the program. Teacher C used process writing in place of some of the workbook pages the program provided. She spent time on storybook reading in the afternoon, and also used her large collection of "big books" in various ways. Although she taught decoding using the district mandated rule-based approach, she was introduced as a whole language teacher and many of her practices and attitudes reflected a whole language approach.

Similar to Teacher B, Teacher C conducted reading instruction in both the morning and the afternoon. Teacher C said her morning and afternoon programs had similar goals, and were set up so that she had the opportunity to work with all four reading groups. In addition, she conducted whole class instruction with big books, and provided opportunities for children to read small versions of previously read big books to each other.

In the interview, Teacher C said that while she was doing the morning phonics lessons, the aide was listening to children read aloud from their basal readers. However, we observed relatively little reading of connected text. Instead, we observed that the aide spent a great deal of time presenting words on flashcards and having children practice reading words containing a specific letter-sound pattern. During one observation, a variety of activities were taking place. The teacher discussed the meanings of words written on the board with one group of five students, the aide had a group of six students indicate with a "yes" or "no" card whether a spoken word (e.g., *fly*) contained a consonant blend, eight students were writing journal entries and drawing pictures to accompany their entries, and an additional four students were with a Chapter 1 teacher.

In sharp contrast with Teachers A and B, we observed less than 20 minutes a day of instructional time allocated to connected text reading in Teacher C's classroom. Individual students do not usually read for all of the time allocated. Although we did not do child-based observations, it was our impression that many children read little or no connected text during a day. During the students' oral reading of stories, Teacher C used the story as a springboard for discussion of concepts related to the story. For example, in one story the teacher stopped twice in an eleven minute reading session to have extended group discussions about how animals react to the weather. Because this was a bilingual class, such concept development may have been important and planned, but such discussions also removed children's focus from the print in the text.

In her interview, this teacher indicated that she was strongly influenced by the whole language movements' emphasis on comprehension of authentic texts and that she tried to include "authentic" reading and writing tasks in her program. Her presentation of big books was intended to be a model of reading for children.

During the reading of big books, she used a variety of cues when children missed or hesitated on a word: She would direct their attention to previous context, or the picture, as well as to the spelling of the word. Her expanded discussions of a text appear to be attempts to situate texts in a larger conceptual universe. In many ways, Teacher C's instructional approach, at least in regards to her afternoon program, resembled that of Teacher E, who also engaged children in the choral reading of

big books. These two teachers instantiated the whole language approach in that they both wanted children to learn to read naturally, through exposure to interesting text. Both teachers wanted children to pick up books read in class and read them on their own. Thus, there was little instruction about the print in these big books. Although Teacher C's personal beliefs about how a class should be run were rooted in a whole language approach, she felt that her children were in need of phonics instruction, because of their poor preparation before entering school. Thus, she provided the phonics instruction from the district basal reading program. It seemed evident that Teacher C was attempting to meet the diverse needs of her class. She stressed not only reading of authentic texts, but also included phonics instruction and conceptual development in English for her non-native speaking students. The result seemed to be a mix of whole language activities and phonics instruction.

Contextualized instruction. Teacher D seemed more clearly a whole language teacher, not only in philosophy but in practice. Although she used the same district-mandated basal reader program as Teachers B and C, her children read in the student texts independently. The majority of her instruction occurred with the whole-class reading of big books and trade books. She did not use the phonic instruction in the basal reading program, nor did she use all the worksheets associated with that instruction, but instead presented phonics instruction in the context of the big books and other reading and writing activities.

Because of different bus schedules, children arrived in Teacher D's classroom at different times. As they arrived, they were encouraged to read in self-selected books or to write in their journals. As they carried out these activities, Teacher D actively circulated among the children and commented on their work. The school day officially opened with a whole class activity, such as the teacher reading aloud to the class, the students doing choral reading of rhymes from handmade charts, or the students taking part in a reading lesson from a big book. A group lesson followed. Most such lessons usually followed directly from the reading, but other lessons included commercial worksheets.

Teacher D did not preteach the vocabulary or letter-sound correspondences presented in the basal program. Rather, she began a lesson by providing a short introduction to the story in the student text. For example, with a story about two frogs, one who lived in the city and one who lived at sea, she began with a short discussion of the difficulty of a frog living in the city and then reminded the children of "Country Mouse, City Mouse," another story with a similar plot and structure. Students then read the story silently and then out loud--either with a partner, to the teacher, or chorally with the class. Following the oral reading, the teacher discussed the story, asking a mixture of her own literal and "higher level" questions. After they read the story, the students did the vocabulary and comprehension exercises in the workbooks from the basal program.

Other reading and writing activities were integrated into the classroom. The teacher considered independent reading and journal writing as seatwork activities, and students were observed reading books and pulling out their journals at their desks and writing in them.

Phonics instruction took place during separate lessons and was integrated into other reading activities. Some word identification and decoding activities were part of the work with big books. For example, following a choral reading, individual students were called upon to point out individual words. If they could not figure out a word from context, they were given letter-sound cues. When letter-sound relationships were discussed, students were asked to look out for these letter combinations in their outside reading. To reinforce this, the teacher reported choosing books with words containing the combinations the students were discussing. Much of the letter-sound instruction was implicit, from daily exposure to the highly patterned texts in the student reader. Although some work on phonics was integrated into this instruction, the teacher stressed that children use context to figure out unknown words and use their knowledge of letter sound relationships only if context failed.

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Letter-sound instruction also occurred during writing. For example, when a child could not spell a word, the teacher asked the child to "think of the letters that make those sounds." Children were thus encouraged to use invented spelling to spell words.

This class seemed to be well-balanced, with an overall whole language orientation. Children were engaged in meaningful reading and writing activities, with a lot of instructional support to help them. This support was not given in teacher directed "preteaching," but rather, as instruction that was reactive to the children's needs.

Learning through immersion. Although Teacher E's daily plan resembled that of Teacher D, there were many differences in the execution of that plan. Both teachers read rhymes from chart paper and big books. Both disregarded the basal program teacher's manual but had students read independently from the program's student texts, as a way of fulfilling the district mandate that the basal program be used. Most noticeable, however, was the difference in the management of the two classrooms. The children in Teacher E's class were observed as off-task far more than those in any other class we observed. At times, during the reading of big books, it appeared that half of the students were looking in the other direction, not following the reading at all.

In the whole-group phonics lesson we observed, the children listened for sounds in spoken words, matched words to a song, spelled words together, but did little or no reading of written words. The less able students did not participate as much as the more able students in these activities. There did not seem to be any extension of this decoding work to connected text, either in this lesson or in other lessons we observed.

The basal reading program was used in a fairly traditional manner. The class was divided into three groups. Each group was taught a skill lesson (if the teacher determined that her students need that particular skill). The teacher then discussed the new vocabulary, and had the students read the text silently or chorally. (During oral reading, she tended to help students who hesitated or missed a word by providing the word, rather than giving either phonics or context cues.) She then discussed the story with the students. In responding to students, the teacher seemed more concerned with verifying answers than with reactive teaching. There were very few instances of the teacher expanding on students' responses during story discussion. Finally, the students did independent seatwork. During the reading group time, the group of most able students was more likely to read the text silently. The children in the least able group were more likely to read the story in a round-robin fashion or chorally.

Teacher E had the students chorally read quite often, using the student texts from the basal program, big books and rhymes. But, especially low levels of engagement were observed during choral reading and many students mumbled or otherwise avoided engagement with print.

A language-based approach. Teacher F had developed her teaching approach over many years, evolving into what she called a *language-based* approach. Her room was filled with tradebooks, charts, and materials for writing. Lessons were organized by centers: a reading group center (where the teacher worked), a writing center, an art center, a social studies center, and a listening center. A student teacher and a great many adult volunteers helped the children in these centers. The atmosphere was busy, as nearly all of the children were occupied in one of the centers. Teacher F used basal program texts as sources for reading materials, particularly for children reading at the pre-primer level, where she said that appropriate material was difficult to find. She also used a variety of tradebooks. When she used the basal texts, she did not follow the instruction recommended in the teacher's manual.

One morning we observed one reading group that had read several versions of "The Little Red Hen." They discussed the differences among versions, and made up their own version. For another, less able group, the teacher had made up short predictable books, each repeating a refrain such as "When I go

to the circus, I want _____." The students wrote words in the blanks. In addition to including writing in reading lessons, Teacher F incorporated a great deal of process writing into her program. When asked about her decoding instruction, she said that her children learned about letter-sound relationships through writing, by sounding spoken words out, by finding letters to match sounds, and from some whole class phonics instruction.

Another morning's work began by having the students gather as a group to review information from the social studies unit on America. A student teacher asked students to talk about all of the things they had learned about America. The student teacher solicited and took contributions about, for example, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Harriet Tubman, the Constitution, and the American flag--and wrote them on a large sheet of chart paper.

The students were next given the agenda for the centers. In the writing center, they were to write down three things they remembered about America. In the America center, students were to design a flag about themselves. In the math center, they were to play a math game. In the art center, they were to make copies of a flower painting by Georgia O'Keefe. They also were to spend time in the reading center.

Students were called to the reading center in small groups. In the first group, two children discussed a story they had read. They began by writing its title and filling in portions of a story map on a worksheet. The teacher went over the story map with each child. After the story maps were finished, students took turns reading the story aloud. When they finished, they filled out the "Problem" and "Solution" portions of the story map and discussed how they would tell somebody else about the story.

A second group of three students read silently from a basal preprimer. They then re-read the story aloud, each child taking a different sentence. After the reading, the students looked through the book to choose the story they would read the following day.

A third group of two children, also reading in a preprimer, began by reviewing two new words on word cards. Then they looked at the pictures in the book before reading the story aloud, taking turns to read sentence by sentence. When a child missed a word, the teacher asked the child to "look at the word closely" or to "look at the picture."

At the end of the morning, a video cassette recorder and television were brought in and the whole class watched Reading Rainbow, a television program intended to increase children's interest in literature. After lunch, students spent 20 minutes writing in their journals, followed by small group conferences with the teacher and Author's Chair (Hansen & Graves, 1983).

Books were everywhere in this classroom, including a book loft in which children looked at books. Yet, for all the emphasis in this class on reading, children spent very little time reading independently. For example, although they watched the student teacher put words put on a chart, the students did not have to read them back. The reading group time was short (so as to fit seven reading groups into a schedule), and much of this time was spent on writing and discussing the story. In this particular classroom, students tended to read only a little, but discuss a lot. The result was that students spent very little time engaged with print.

End-of-Year Measures

Achievement differences. Analysis of the achievement measures found clear differences in students' abilities to decode words, but not on the reading of connected text. To examine effects on oral reading accuracy and comprehension separately, we defined the oral reading level as the highest passage read with 95% accuracy and the comprehension level as the highest passage read with 80% of the questions

answered correctly. Differences in both oral reading level and comprehension did not reach statistical significance. (These means are shown in Figure 1).

One reason for the lack of differences in comprehension might be the relatively elevated performance of Classroom F (Language-Based) on this measure. Our observation was that they were better able to comprehend material that they did not read accurately than children in the other classrooms. We could not test this because of the low number of subjects in this class.

[Insert Figures 1 and 2 about here.]

We had four measures of various aspects of decoding ability. (The class means are shown on Figure 2). No significant differences were found between classes on the basal vocabulary lists. (This difference approached statistical significance, though, $p < .07$). On the list of regularly spelled words, the differences also approaches, but did not reach, statistical significance ($p < .09$). On the list of nonsense words, sharing the same spelling patterns as the decoding list, Classroom B, the Traditional class, decoded significantly more nonsense words than Classrooms D or E (F (4,78) = 3.29, $p <$ [illegible]). The final decoding measure was the transfer ratio, or the number of nonsense words that were recognized, given that the real word with the corresponding pattern was also recognized. On this measure, Classroom A (Direct Instruction) had significantly greater transfer than Classrooms D and E (F (4,76) = 4.33, $p < .005$). The nonsense word list can be thought of a measure of the child's mastery of decoding elements, whereas the transfer measure might be a measure of the child's use of a decoding strategy to decode unknown words in isolation. By this distinction, Classroom B had the strongest knowledge of spelling patterns, and Class A was best at using the knowledge that they had to decode unknown words. These were the two classes in which the teachers put the greatest emphasis on decoding instruction.

Since the words on the graded word lists were repeated in the short passages used for the oral reading measure, we were able to get a measure of contextual facilitation. This was calculated by dividing the number of words read correctly in context but not in isolation, by the total number of words read. There were no differences among the classrooms in contextual facilitation and, in contrast to the findings of Goodman (1965), the total amount of contextual facilitation was generally quite low, about 5%. This suggests that the six classrooms did not differ significantly in their ability to use context to aid in word recognition, a surprising finding given the emphasis paced by Teachers D (Contextualized Instruction) and F (Language-based).

We also calculated the correlations between the two isolated word tasks and the two comprehension tasks. These were quite high, ranging between .7 and .9, suggesting that, among this sample of first graders, single-word decoding and reading of connected text were strongly related.

Experimental contrasts. To examine our specific hypotheses about the effects of various classroom features on student performance, we used a set of planned, non-orthogonal contrasts. In accordance with our hypotheses, we set up contrasts comparing

- whole language influenced classes with more traditional classes (D, E, and F vs. A and B),
- the use of the same phonetically controlled texts with direct and less direct instruction (B vs. D and E),
- the use of phonetically controlled texts with non-controlled texts (A, B, D, and E vs. F),
- the use of scripted direct instruction with non-scripted instruction (A vs. B), and

- the use of an open classroom structure with phonetically controlled texts with the same type of structure with non-controlled texts (D and E vs. F).

We found only the first and second of these contrasts (whole language with traditional, and the use of direct instruction with the same phonetically controlled materials) to have significant effects, and only on the three measures of decoding--reading regularly spelled words, reading nonsense words, and transfer. No differences were found on the two connected text measures. This suggests that, first, the more traditional classes in our sample had greater success in teaching children to decode, and that this success seems to be due to the teacher-directed instruction, rather than the materials themselves. The instruction could be scripted or not, but it seems that it should be teacher directed. The overall effects of the classes on children's oral reading and comprehension seemed not to be statistically significant.

Student orientations toward reading. The students responded similarly to a number of the questions, despite the differences in their classroom instruction. For example, when asked, "What makes [someone] a good reader?" 42% of the children gave a response to the effect that a good reader says words correctly, another 36% gave some kind of performance-oriented response ("She's in the top group" or "He practices a lot at home") and only 2 children gave a meaning-oriented response. This orientation toward decoding is similar to that found in other studies of younger readers (see Baker & Brown, 1984; Stahl et al., 1992). In addition, responses to the questions "Why do you think you are a good reader?" "If you knew someone was having difficulty reading how would you help them?" "What would your teacher do to help that person?" and "When you are reading and you come to something you don't know, what do you do?" tended to be in favor of viewing reading as a decoding activity. Of some interest is that when responding to the question "How would your teacher help you?," 7 out of the 23 students in Classroom E did not know what their teacher would do.

Fifty-five percent of the students said they would sound words out when they didn't know a word, and 18% said they would use context. However, when students were asked for a second strategy, 14 out of the 18 students in Classroom A, 8 of the 13 in Classroom B, 12 of the 23 in Classroom E were unable to offer a second strategy. In contrast, only 5 of the 20 in Classroom D and 1 of 11 in Classroom F did not offer a second strategy. This difference was statistically reliable ($X^2[20] = 35.38$, $p < .02$), and suggests that the students in two of the classrooms were more flexible in their knowledge of word attack strategies. Students in Classrooms D and E were more likely to give responses involving the use of context. On the "Something you don't know" question, 8 of the 20 students in Classroom D and 6 of the 23 students in Classroom E gave a "use context" response, compared with only four of the students in the rest of the sample.

The differences among students in different classrooms were stronger on the second part of the interview in which students were given word sets that shared some orthographic relation and asked how they would teach them. The majority of responses mentioned sounding out words. Students in Classroom A were more likely to mention the particular shared orthographic element than students in the other classrooms. For all the sets, except *there, good*, and *was* (irregular words), about half of the class identified the shared characteristics, compared to 15% in the other classrooms, suggesting that this class was particularly sensitive to spelling patterns.

Students in Classroom E were more likely to say "I don't know" or give no response. It is difficult to interpret a non-response in a task such as this. Since this is not a usual classroom task, a non-response could simply mean that a student did not understand the task. But, students in Classroom E also had relatively high percentages of non-response on the question of what makes someone a good reader (39%) and what made them a good reader (also 39%), which suggests that they were not as aware of the processes of reading as were students in the other classrooms.

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Discussion

The instruction observed in these six classrooms was markedly different, but the students were more similar than different. During the interviews, first graders from five different classrooms expressed views of the task of reading as that of identifying words, and viewed reading success in terms of decoding. They did not mention the importance of comprehension, although they certainly endeavored their students to comprehend what they read. Very few children could be labeled "word callers," or readers who read words correctly but could not comprehend. Only a few students had an oral reading level one level or more greater than their comprehension level. Scores on the reading of isolated words was highly correlated with those of reading connected text, and the children did not rely heavily on context to facilitate word identification.

No matter what the orientation of the teachers, first graders tended to have a personal understanding that the difficulty in reading is the task of decoding words, and this belief may have influenced them more than the orientation of their teachers. There were differences in students' proficiency in decoding, though. Teachers whose overall emphasis was on decoding produced readers who were better decoders. Students in those classrooms were not any worse (and were generally slightly, although not significantly better) at comprehension than children in meaning oriented classrooms.

The differences in decoding skill were found in both children's knowledge about decoding and their ability to decode words in isolation. Students in Classroom A, the direct instruction class, were more likely to identify the shared orthographic element in words such as *pin*, *win*, and *tin*, and were also better at transferring their knowledge of orthographic patterns to nonsense words. They also had the highest oral reading level of the six classrooms, although these differences were not statistically significant. Students in Classroom B, who received instruction in phonics rules, on the other hand, knew more spelling patterns than students in the other classrooms, as evidenced by their decoding of nonsense words, but were similar to the other classrooms on the other measures.

Since Classroom A and B had the strongest emphasis on decoding, it is not surprising that these children decoded better than the others, whose emphasis was on text reading. However, the children in Classroom D, whose decoding instruction was largely done in the context of reading connected text, also were among the most proficient at recognizing common words in isolation. These children also had the second highest average oral reading and comprehension levels of the six classrooms, averaging well above their grade level. These students (along with those in Classroom F) also flexible in their use of reading strategies, at least compared to Classrooms A and E. These teachers stressed the use of different cues to identify words in context.

These three classrooms were all successful at achieving their curricular aims. Teachers A and B (Direct Instruction and Traditional) viewed reading in terms of decoding accuracy and fluency. They organized their classrooms to achieve those goals. Teacher D (Contextualized Instruction) stressed that children should know that print had meaning, and her children were, on the average, good at getting meaning from what they read.

The remaining classrooms were less successful, for different reasons. Teacher E (Learning from Absorption) expected their students to learn to read from being exposed to adult reading models, both of big books and of picture storybooks. Children in this classroom were not only among the lowest on all of the achievement measures, but they also showed less awareness of reading strategies. They were less likely than students in Classrooms D and F, whose teachers also articulated an emphasis on comprehension, to provide a second strategy when they encountered a word they did not know. They were also less likely than the others to know what their teacher would do to help them when they were unable to read something. In Teacher E's class, the relatively high amount of off-task behavior among the students and their low awareness of reading processes could have been a result of their teacher's

desire that her children learn from exposure, and not instruction. The teacher felt it was her role to invite students to learn. This was an invitation that the students frequently did not accept. In addition, the teacher did not take an active role in listening to her students read connected text. In Classroom E, lessons were dominated by choral reading, and were characterized by relatively high amounts of off-task behavior.

Students in Classroom F, the language-based approach, also did not appear to spend as high a percentage of time reading connected text as did those in the other classrooms. This was partially due to the class structure, which utilized multiple centers and seven separate reading groups. Thus, students spent as much time each morning in art activities as they did reading connected text. The students in this class were more flexible in their knowledge of strategies to use while reading, and were relatively good comprehenders, given their level of word knowledge. Their lack of word knowledge and decoding skill, however, impaired their reading ability. The small amount of reading time given the children in this class may reflect that teacher's belief in developing individual programs to meet individual needs. Yet, in spite of the additional help of the student teacher and adult volunteers, managing seven different reading groups necessarily reduces the amount of teacher attention available to any individual child.

Dichotomies?

The studies about beginning reading have traditionally couched their positions in dichotomies. From the "whole word" and "phonics" debates of the sixties to the "whole language" and "skills" debates of the nineties, researchers have attempted to compare the effects of one approach to that of another. This assumes that classes within each approach were similar to each other, or at least more like each other than they were to other classes. Yet, in our study, we found strong differences between classes ostensively using the same approach.

Teachers A, B, and C could conventionally be classified as *skills oriented* or *code emphasis*. Yet Teachers A and C included activities in their classroom that are typical of whole language classrooms. For example, Teacher A, whose program put such a strong emphasis on sound/symbol relationships, and sounding out words, also included journal writing using invented spelling and allowed a great deal of time for free reading. Teacher C, who taught children phonics rules and diacritical marks, allocated a lot of time for shared reading and writing.

In some studies, Teachers D, E, and F might be described as whole language teachers. They emphasized the reading and writing of whole texts, and did not emphasize activities involving isolated word recognition and decoding. Yet, they all used basal reading materials. (They did not use these materials "by the book," nor did they use them with all children. Instead, they used basal texts as source materials, since they did not have the resources to purchase enough tradebooks of appropriate difficulty for their children to read.) All of these teachers did some instruction in decoding: Teacher D used the context of children's big book reading and writing, Teacher E used a stand alone phonics program which did not contain much practice in reading words early in the year, and Teacher F occasionally used stand alone materials but relied largely on children's invented spelling.

These three teachers varied significantly in how they managed their classrooms. Teacher D seemed to maintain the highest amount of student engagement, which she kept in a number of ways, for example, through subtle cues during the reading of big books, and by her encouragement of the children's independent reading and writing. Although Teacher E incorporated many of the same activities, she achieved less student engagement. She involved her students in a great deal of choral reading, and during that reading, many students were observed off-task. Teacher F's students also appeared to have less engaged time than in other classrooms, but this may have been the result of the time that children spent moving between centers.

McGee and Lomax (1990) suggest that what appears to be differences between whole language and more traditional classrooms in some studies may in fact be differences in the amount of engaged time the students spend in reading. Certainly, it is possible to attribute the relatively poor achievement scores of Classrooms E and F to differences in engaged time in reading. Yet it is also possible to argue that many of these differences in engaged time are a result of a whole language philosophy. Teacher E felt that she was addressing her students needs when she was reading to children as well as when children were reading to her. She was especially confident that children would eventually learn to read through exposure to reading materials, even though they were still struggling at the end of the year. Teacher F felt she was addressing her students' needs by giving small groups individual attention, even though there was a great deal of transition time.

Yet, a broader argument might be that a teacher's approach to instruction might not be as important as what the teacher does to implement that approach in the classroom. Many of the findings from teacher effectiveness research are as germane to whole language settings, as they were to the traditional settings in which they were developed. In all settings, the amount of time spent engaged in text of appropriate level is related to reading achievement (Berliner, 1981). It may not matter much whether the reading is done in basal readers or in trade books. Similarly, for all classrooms of first graders, some attention to the code leads to better achievement. But it may not matter as much whether the instruction is in isolation, through direct instruction, or in the context of reading a story book.

Subtle differences in instruction may lead to important differences in reading achievement. The most impressive differences found among classrooms were differences in flexibility of approach to identifying unknown words, with children in the more code-oriented classrooms clearly favoring a "sounding out" view of decoding, and children in the more whole language-oriented classrooms showing a greater awareness of alternative ways of dealing with unknown words. This awareness of alternatives seems to be directed related to the approach to instruction the students experienced. Greater awareness of alternatives may foretell better reading later on. Yet, there is no reason why alternative strategies cannot be discussed in code-oriented classrooms. That the children in Classroom F comprehended text as well as children in Classrooms A and B was impressive, given their significantly poorer word recognition and decoding knowledge. This indicates that these children are better able to construct meaning of what they read, even though they do not recognize many of the words. But in subsequent grades greater accuracy at word identification may be critical to comprehending the more complex texts the students will encounter.

In summary, our data indicate that overall ability in decoding isolated words is strongly related to reading and comprehending text at the first grade level. This relationship is understood by the students themselves, who tend to view reading success in terms of decoding ability. Decoding oriented classrooms were more successful in teaching children to decode, as might be expected. The children in the whole language oriented classrooms tended to be poorer decoders but more flexible readers, who were more cognizant of alternatives for recognizing words in context and were better able to construct meaning when encountering difficulties in decoding. Yet, in spite of these commonalities, differences among teachers, even between those sharing similar approaches to instruction, were significant, leading to significant differences in how their students viewed reading and to how well they read.

Our conclusions are that many of the differences among first grade classrooms within any type of approach to reading instruction arise from differences in implementation. The six teachers who were observed and interviewed were functioning without the support of special consultants and staff development programs. We were impressed with their very individualized interpretations of the approaches to reading instruction they espoused.

These teachers all took different messages from the whole language approach. These different messages led to different instructional decisions. Teacher A took a whole language workshop and decided to add process writing and sustained silent reading to her direct instruction program. Teacher C, who directly

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espoused a whole language philosophy, nevertheless did a great deal of phonics teaching in isolation because she believed her students "needed it." Teacher E instantiated whole language as a belief that students will learn naturally through exposure to reading and so provided only a limited amount of instruction. Teacher F evolved a program over a long period of time.

These observations and interviews confirmed our belief that most teachers of beginning reading are eclectics, engaging their students in activities they have been found to be effective, regardless of the program, approach, or method they profess to be using. They are influenced by theory, but adapt it to their own ways of working with students. Teachers pull from the repertoire of activities that come from their own experiences and convictions, and fashion programs that vary--according to the needs of the children in their classrooms and what their own experiences tell them will work.

This study suggests that a teacher's approach to instruction may not be as important as how that teacher chooses to implement that approach in the classroom. Methods studies, such as those reviewed by Stahl and Miller (1989), have traditionally compared methods, either as professed by the teacher or as implemented through consultants. Concentrating on the overall method/approach professed by the teacher may have obscured differences in how that method was implemented. It may be these differences that lead to variance in achievement. In short, the question of "Which works better?" or even the more sophisticated one of "Which methods produce which results?" may need to be replaced with the question "What did the teacher do and what effects did that have on students' learning?"

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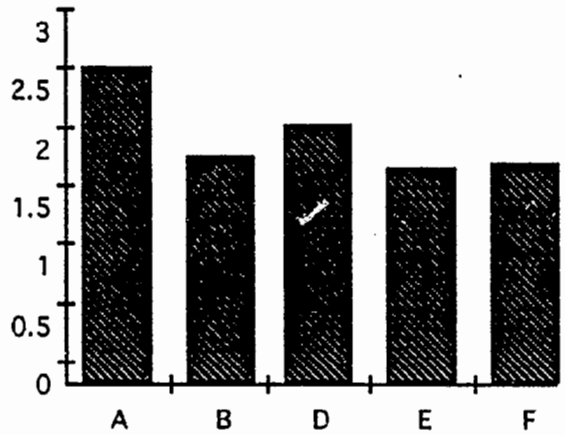
Table 1

Comparisons Between Classrooms*

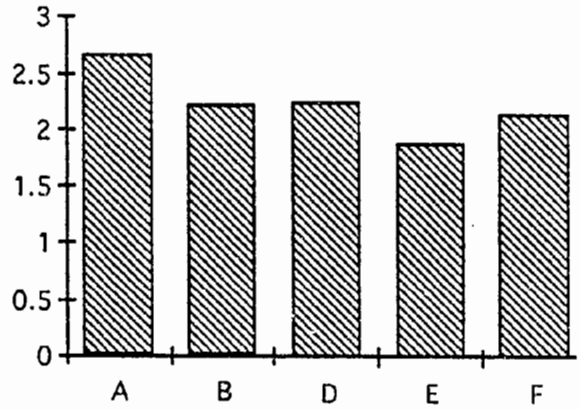
Class/Teacher	Approach	Most Noticeable Classroom Activities	Basal Reading Program and its Role in the Classroom
A	Direct Instruction	Direct instruction with a strong code orientation, process writing, independent reading of trade books	Synthetic phonics instruction with blending exercises, teacher-directed in small groups
B	Traditional	Teacher directed phonics lessons, round robin reading, extra reading time for fluency practice	District mandated, rule-based phonics instruction, teacher directed
C	An Uneasy Mix of Whole Language Beliefs with Phonics Instruction	Phonics lessons from basal in the morning, reading Big Books, teacher storybook reading, and process writing in the afternoon	District mandated, rule-based phonics instruction, skill lessons covered by teacher, oral reading covered by aide.
D	Contextualized Instruction	Teacher directed reading of Big Books, choral reading, process writing, phonics lessons integrated into reading.	District mandated, rule-based phonics instruction, but texts used for free reading.
E	Learning Through Absorption	Choral Reading, Big Books, process writing, storybook reading	District mandated, rule-based phonics instruction, text material covered in reading groups, low group met less frequently.
F	Language-Based	Process writing, storybook reading, use of a variety of materials, students do work in centers	No basal program in use, basal texts are used as reading matter, especially for low-achieving children.

**Not*. Teacher C is not included in the numerical comparisons.

Figure 1
Connected Text Measures

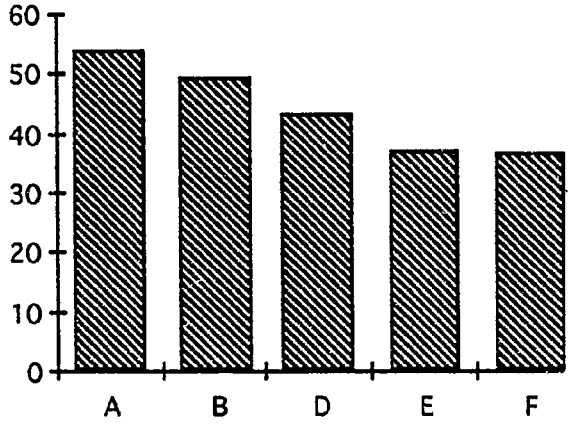


Oral Reading Level

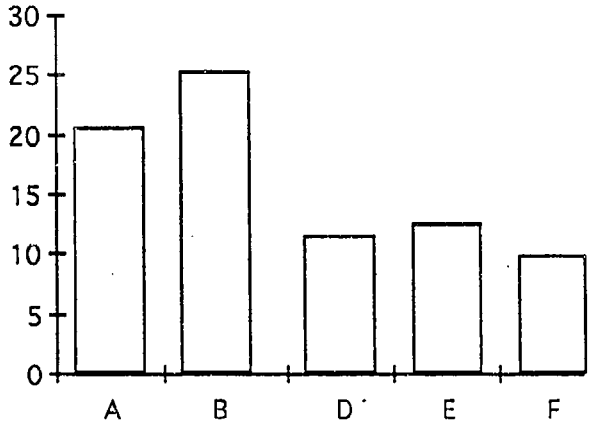


Comprehension Level

Figure 2
Word Recognition and Decoding Measures

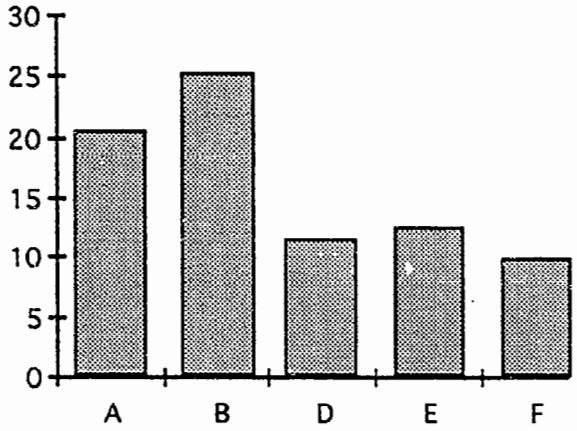


Basal Vocabulary Lists

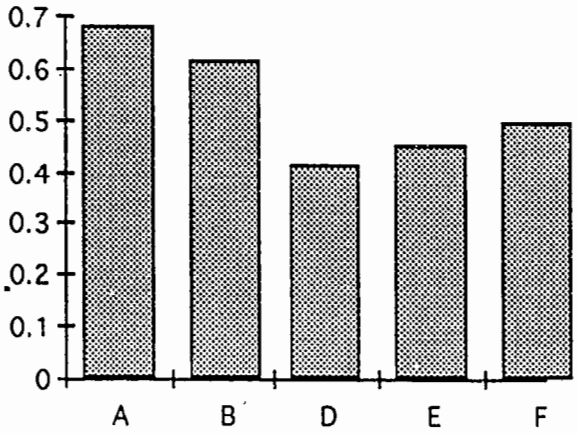


Decodable Words in isolation

Figure 2 (Continued)
Word Recognition and Decoding Measures



Nonsense Word Reading



Transfer Score