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**The First Grade Studies in Retrospect**

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**The First Grade Studies in Retrospect**

by

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**Dissertation**

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

The First Grade Studies, a monumental, federally-funded effort conducted in the mid-1960's, were intended to answer the pressing question about the best way to teach beginning reading and a variety of other questions. Cooperative in nature with projects at 27 sites across the nation, the First Grade Studies were developed in response to increasing criticism of the schools during the preceding decades. In the early 1950's, as anti-Communist sentiment raged, articles in the popular press criticized schools for failing to develop allegiance to the American way of life and for failing to teach fundamental skills because of emphasis on "frills and fads" (Gray, 1952). The criticism became more focused on reading in 1955 with the publication of Rudolf Flesch's *Why Johnny Can't Read*, which implored parents to teach their children by a phonics method (*A Surprise for Johnny*, 1955). When the technological superiority of the United States seemed challenged by Communist Russia's launch of Sputnik in 1957, concerns about beginning reading instruction became ranked with the H-bomb and baseball (Terman & Walcutt, 1958). In Smith's (1965) survey of the history of American reading instruction, she described the impact of these influences:

Educators and laymen alike awakened to the sharp realization that we must put forth more vigorous effort if we were to preserve and improve the American way of life. In all aspects of national endeavor pressures were felt to produce more and more and to do it faster and faster. In reading, pressure to produce higher competency in a shorter time became apparent (p. 312).

In response to the criticism, reading researchers from universities around the nation met as early as 1959 and 1960 at Syracuse University and at the University of Chicago where they envisioned a "nation-wide cooperative research project in the area of beginning reading instruction" to clarify existing research in reading (Stauffer,

1961, p 153). Donald Durrell, professor of education and director of the reading clinic at Boston University, led the effort to gain funding from the United States Office of Education (U.S.O.E.) (Petty, 1983). When nearly one million dollars was made available by U.S.O.E. (Harris & Sewer, 1966), 76 researchers proposed studies of beginning reading (Bond, 1966), and 27 studies were funded. With the guidance of Durrell and under the leadership of Guy L. Bond, director of the Coordinating Center at the University of Minnesota, the directors of the selected projects met and agreed to use experimental designs as well as uniform instrumentation, uniform instructional time, and uniform data collection procedures and to search scientifically for the answer to the question about the best way to teach beginning reading.

The Cooperative Research Program in First Grade Reading Instruction was unique in its scope and size and in its collaborative nature. Never before had the community of university professors and other professional educators come together to address a question by coordinating the designs of studies of a wide variety of materials and methods at numerous sites throughout the nation -- from Boston to San Diego and from northern Michigan to central Texas. In May and October, 1966, and in March, 1967, summaries of the studies were published in *The Reading Teacher*, and in the summer of 1967, Bond and Robert Dykstra, assistant director of the Coordinating Center, published the final report from the Coordinating Center in *The Reading Research Quarterly*. The report focused on an analysis of data from 15 of the studies in which investigators had studied various methods of beginning reading instruction, including the basal reader, basal plus phonics, Initial Teaching Alphabet (i.t.a.), linguistic, language experience, and phonic/linguistic approaches. The studies had been designed to determine the best method of beginning reading instruction, but

the analysis of the data led to the conclusion that no particular method was consistently superior. Thirty years later, in 1997, as the question about the best method of teaching beginning reading was again being raised (Shanahan & Neuman, 1997), an entire issue of the *Reading Research Quarterly* was devoted to revisiting the studies and reconsidering their importance (Bond & Dykstra, 1967/1997).

#### The Purposes of this Inquiry

My purposes in conducting this historical inquiry were to collect the retrospective views of the primary researchers of the First Grade Studies, to collect additional perspectives and contextualizing information from a review of extant primary and secondary sources, to create generalizations through analysis and categorization of interview statements, and to apply historical understanding to the continuing controversy about beginning reading instruction. Four research questions guided my inquiry: (1) How do surviving primary researchers view the First Grade Studies in retrospect? (2) What were the guiding philosophies and perspectives of those researchers? (3) How did their questions, methods, and findings relate to the context? (4) How can the First Grade Studies contribute to our current understanding?

#### Design of the Research

My research relied on statements gathered in interviews with surviving primary researchers of the First Grade Studies and on information gathered from library resources to extend and contextualize the interview statements. From the 27 First Grade Studies, 10 of the 14 surviving researchers agreed to interviews in which they agreed to share their memories and reflect on the significance of the studies. The researchers who participated as informants, their current titles, and their current locations are listed in Table 1.



Table 1  
Informants

<u>Researcher</u>	<u>Current Title</u>	<u>Current Location</u>
Donald Lashinger	Professor, Emeritus	Williamsburg, VA
Jeanne S. Chall	Professor, Emeritus	deceased
Robert Ruddell	Professor, Emeritus	Oakland, CA
Albert Mazurkiewicz	Professor	Kean University, NJ
W. Dorsey Hammond	Professor	Oakland University, MI
Robert Dykstra	Professor, Emeritus	New Brighton, MN
John C. Manning	Professor	University of Minnesota
Elaine Vilscek	Professor	University of Northern Colorado
Nita Wyatt Sundbye	Professor, Emerita	Lawrence, KS
Edward B. Fry	Professor, Emeritus	Laguna Beach, CA

The interview questions, which were designed to elicit the perspectives of the researchers, included biographical questions about the informants' formative experiences, contextual questions to ascertain the guiding philosophies and perspectives of the researchers, informational questions to retrieve unrecorded facts and clarify the available information, and impact questions to discern the participants' perspectives on the influence and relevance of the studies to current issues. The questions were supplemented by prompts for elaboration, by probes to uncover additional information about the context, and by requests for illuminating stories or anecdotes. I transcribed the interviews and mailed the transcripts to the informants for review to ensure accuracy. Nine of the informants reviewed the transcripts and returned them with annotations of corrections.

Statements from the interview transcripts were analyzed by the method of constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Initially, interview statements were independently analyzed by two researchers through a process of open coding. After the two researchers met and agreed upon initial categories for the

informants' statements, the analysis moved between coding the statements and formulating categories. Categories across transcripts were confirmed during a second meeting between the two researchers and by the independent inspection of two colleagues. Finally, a historical explanation was created by situating the categories of informants' statements within the historical trends suggested by the literature (Kraus & Joyce, 1985): A theory was developed to explain changes across time in methods of beginning reading instruction.

### Significance

H. S. Tarbell (1895) said, "History gives us caution, warns us against the moving of the pendulum, and gives us points of departure from which to measure progress. It gives us courage to attack difficult problems. It shows us where the abiding problems are" (p. 243).

Many educators rely on the conventional wisdom, the institutionalized myths, but the psychological distance provided by historical inquiry can enlarge our understanding of the fundamental issues and problems (Kleibard, 1992). Educators who do not understand the historical roots of current practices may be left to the whim of capricious influences -- especially since "that which has been claimed as a wave may be but a ripple on the great sea of practice" (O. L. Davis, personal communication, 1995). By revisiting the First Grade Studies through interviews with the surviving primary researchers, important viewpoints and perspectives, which may have been lost over time, may be recovered and reinterpreted with the benefit of the wisdom of hindsight.

Robinson (2002) reminded us:

Reading education has often resembled a pendulum swinging from one extreme to another. What was learned in the past about the strengths and

weakness of a particular approach or philosophy of reading is seemingly forgotten yet is often reinvented by succeeding generations of educators. Frequently what is considered new and innovative is often a reworking of ideas and methods of the past (pp. 139-140).

In the current milieu, when much of reading research is "fragmented, narrowly focused, repetitive, and unimportant" (Cranney & Miller, 1987), a historical view offers opportunities for significant reflection about progress. To Monaghan's (1976) assertion that the prevailing philosophies of a time may have more impact on school practices than does most educational research, Monaghan and Hartman (2002) added that historical reflection can provide the expanded perspective to reveal more significant interdisciplinary understandings. This expanded perspective may enable educators to understand more clearly the social / political and philosophical influences on the recurring shifts in methods for beginning reading instruction.

Many of the issues addressed by the First Grade Studies continue to be debated today both in the popular press (Levine, 1994; Hancock & Wingert, 1996) and in professional circles (Smith, 1994; Vacca, 1996). The problems of children who are not reading well and the polemics among advocates of various approaches continue. Since the controversies of the sixties are similar in many ways to current controversies, the reflection and insight of those who can now view the controversies of the sixties with the wisdom of hindsight may serve to inform and enlighten today's conversations and decisions. Ravitch and Vinovskis (1995) made this point:

As policy makers and the public venture forth once again into the troubled waters of educational reform, they need the knowledge, experience, and wisdom that history provides. Why reinvent the wheel? Why pursue a path without knowing what happened the last time around? Just as it would be foolish and self-defeating to enter military combat without a plan and without knowledge of the terrain and one's allies and adversaries, so reformers dare not venture forth without considering the sources of their ideas and the experiences of the past (p. ix).

A historical retrospective may be significant in a culture that values experimentation and innovation because a method may be valued simply because it seems new. Davis (personal communication, 1993) noted that many American educators have a ten-year rule-of-thumb: They only value those ideas and practices presented within the past ten years. If we as educators ignore the past and refuse "to concede that others tried many things, learned what was good, and discovered a fair portion of the true" (Messerli, 1977, p. ix), we may repeat the past and continue the rancorous debate. This research endeavors to restore to memory viewpoints which were lost or hidden and reconsider them within a theory which may explain the recurring question about the best way to teach beginning reading.

#### Contents of the Chapters

Chapter 2: Review of the literature. Chapter two includes brief descriptions of the social / political and the educational contexts for the First Grade Studies and brief descriptions of the prominent views of beginning reading instruction in the early sixties. After describing fundamental issues, the meetings to plan the First Grade Studies and the reports of the studies are reviewed.

Chapter 3: Methodology. Chapter three includes a review of the processes of conducting oral history interviews, gathering contextualizing information from library resources, analyzing the informants' statements by the method of constant comparative analysis, and constructing a historical explanation as well as acknowledgement of limitations in the data collection and analysis procedures.

Chapter 4: Findings. In chapter four, research questions (1) and (2) are addressed in presentations of categories across transcripts: Perspectives of the surviving researchers, participants' views on impelling influences, reflection on

planning the First Grade Studies, reflection on the conduct of the studies, perspectives on the outcomes, impact of the First Grade Studies, and comparisons of issues of the sixties with current issues.

Chapter 5: Discussion and implications. In chapter five, research questions (3) and (4) are addressed as categories of the informants' statements are situated within the trends suggested by the review of the literature for the purpose of achieving a historical understanding of the First Grade Studies. The chapter concludes with parallels between events of the sixties and current events concerned with the controversies about beginning reading instruction.

## Chapter Two

### Review of the Literature

In 1962, the United States Office of Education (U.S.O.E.) expanded programs under the Cooperative Research Act (1955) and established a new program, Project English (U. S. Office of Education). Donald D. Durrell, professor of education and director of the reading clinic at Boston University, was named a member of the Cooperative Research Council. Durrell wrote to his friend Francis Keppel, who as past dean of education at Harvard University had become the new Commissioner of Education, about the need for research:

The controversies about beginning reading could easily be resolved by large-scale cooperative research. Ten days ago, I sent the attached inquiry to eighty reading research people. Already thirty replies have come, all favorable to the idea, with twenty-five indicating a desire to present research proposals. If only twenty proposals were selected for support, we would involve 400 public school classrooms, compare most major approaches to beginning reading, for an expenditure of \$600,000. *Such a study would have far-reaching effects on beginning reading practice* (Durrell quoted in Petty, 1983, p. 48, emphasis added).

Although Durrell hoped the studies of first grade reading instruction would begin in September, 1963, the process was delayed until the next year when he wrote the proposal specifications, and requests for proposals were distributed nationwide (Petty, 1983). By March, 1964, 76 proposals (Bond, 1966) for projects costing up to \$30,000 (Harris & Sewer, 1966) were submitted, and by May, the Cooperative Research Council had reviewed the proposals and selected projects for funding (D. Gunderson, personal communication, December 20, 1998).

Recently, Shanahan and Neuman (1997) noted that “eclecticism has been under renewed attack . . . and some members of the research community have again become involved in the search for the best method” (p. 208). Pearson (1997)

concluded, “We have pretty much come full circle, back to the issues and questions that prompted us as a profession to undertake the First Grade Studies some 35 years ago” (p. 431). This historical investigation of the First Grade Studies is an effort to understand the nature of this recurring controversy about beginning reading instruction. In this chapter, the retrospective views of the living primary researchers, which are the focus of chapter four, are presaged by a review of the literature. Included in this review of the literature are brief descriptions of the social / political and the educational contexts for the First Grade Studies, brief descriptions of the prominent views of beginning reading instruction in the early sixties, and a brief review of meetings held to plan the First Grade Studies.

#### The Social / Political Context of the First Grade Studies

The controversies which prompted the First Grade Studies were manifestations of contentious times during the preceding decades. Perspective on the First Grade Studies may be gained through a clearer understanding of the social / political milieu during the decades prior to the First Grade Studies and of the developing concerns about American schooling in general and American reading instruction in particular. To develop the context and characterize the pressures of the times, I have reached into the preceding decades for changing trends in international affairs, in economic conditions, in demographic patterns and lifestyles, and in fundamental world views.

#### Changes in America

Throughout World War II, government spending on wartime production spurred the economy and gave Americans a rapidly rising standard of living, easing the hardships of the Depression. “War had trumped the New Deal as the agent of

recovery” (Jennings & Brewster, 1998, p. 247). “Americans had bet on material power, on machinery and science, . . . and they had won” (Commager, 1950, p. 430.) The United States had developed a new world view during the War, turning from its tradition of isolationism and focusing on involvement in the world and pursuance of alliances (White, 1996).

Contentious times. During the months after the war, however, relations between the United States and the Soviet Union began to deteriorate: Truman disagreed with Stalin (Steel, 1972); Stalin claimed that capitalism made war inevitable (Isaacs & Downing, 1998); and Churchill proclaimed an “iron curtain” had fallen across the Eurasian continent (Cannadine, 1989). By 1947, Truman framed the ideological struggle in simple adversarial terms as a struggle between freedom and oppression, between democracy and tyranny (Isaacs & Downing, 1998), and Walter Lippman (1947), dean of American journalists, declared *The Cold War*. Ironically, during this time of growing economic prosperity, Americans also lived with suspicion and fear. In 1947, the administration established a loyalty oath policy, the House established a Committee on Un-American Activities, and J. Edgar Hoover began his search for Communists (Foster, 1995). Between 1947 and 1953, over three million Americans, including some teachers and university professors, were detained and accused of subversive activities (Jennings & Brewster, 1998). Americans not only lived in fear of accusation, they also lived in fear of a recurrent depression, in fear of a nuclear war (White, 1996), and in fear of Soviet expansion (The Elemental Fact, 1950). By 1950, wartime tendencies toward unity were gone, consensus was replaced by partisanship, and the Cold War had crept slowly into the minds of Americans (Rose, 1999).



Demographic and lifestyle changes. Despite the atmosphere of fear and anxiety, Americans were enjoying an era of economic prosperity and growth, the highest per capita income in the world, and an abundance of consumer goods (White, 1996). Americans who had put off marriage and family during the depression and during the war were now marrying younger and in greater numbers, resulting in an unexpected increase in births (Davis, 1950). Americans were also on the move from farms to urban areas and to the new suburban housing developments, and by mid-century, more than half of the population lived in urban areas (White, 1996).

Whereas “self-sufficiency had been an American virtue, hearkening back to life on the frontier and the Puritan work ethic” (White, 1996, p. 179), a new urban lifestyle and a consumer economy were emerging (Rose, 1999). The new suburbanites not only rejected the time-honored value of individualism in favor of the values of the new corporate culture but also adopted the conformist mores of this new class of affluent workers (Mills, 1951). Their values were more influenced by clever marketing campaigns than by the churches and the schools. “There was even an air of patriotism attached to the buying and selling” (Jennings & Brewster, 1998, p. 326).

The conflict which arose between rural and urban lifestyles and values may have been best articulated by Whitaker Chambers, star witness at the Communist conspiracy trial of Alger Hiss. Chambers believed there was “an uncomplicated struggle between good and evil, spirituality and materialism, individualism and collectivism” (quoted in Rose, 1999, p. 319), which he further characterized as a conflict between Freedom and Communism, and as a “crisis with religious, moral, social, political and economic dimensions” (Chambers, 1952, p. 19). Chambers (1952) explained, “The communist vision is the view of man without God. It is the

vision of man's mind displacing God" (p. 60). When McCarthy set out on the campaign trail in 1950 and began his accusations of Communist subversion, he represented the view of those who wanted to return to a simpler past and basic conservative values (Rose, 1999).

### Concerns about American Schooling

These contentious times manifested themselves in concerns about American schooling. To understand the controversy, I have reached into the previous decades to find the roots of the viewpoints. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, most Americans attended rural schools where memorization, recitation, and whipping were customary (Sitton & Rowald, 1987). During the decades of the thirties and forties, however, the progressive philosophy of education began to influence American schooling. In the *Thirty-sixth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education*, Gray (1937) described developments in educational theory and practice:

Education is conceived primarily as a process of growth toward desirable goals, rather than as a series of lessons that aim merely to promote memorization of facts. . . . In organizing school activities persistent attention is given to the interests, needs, and capacities of the learners. . . . Of special significance are the experiences that promote social understanding, develop power to solve personal and social problems intelligently, and build up appreciations that are directly valuable in promoting the best in contemporary civilization (pp. 13-14).

Ernest O. Melby (1951), dean of the School of Education at New York University, represented those who staunchly supported the need for education for democracy when he wrote that "the democratic way of life requires an educated citizenry capable of participating in the affairs of state. . . . Our freedoms must be cherished and the responsibilities which accompany them must be learned" (p. 441). He feared the antithesis: "An authoritarian school with a rigid curriculum and

arbitrary disciplinary practices tends to destroy individual initiative, to level out the inventive and creative qualities of individual children, . . . qualities of mind and heart that are important in a democratic society” (p. 142).

Nevertheless, during the early 1950's, as babies born after World War II began to enter school and as anti-Communist sentiment raged, criticism of this modern education grew from “barely audible rumble to an unavoidable roar” (Scott & Hill, 1954). A Roper Survey conducted for *Life* magazine in 1950 found that only one third of those polled were “really satisfied” with their schools (What U. S. Thinks, 1950, p. 11). Claims were made that the progressive philosophy of educating the whole child increased costs because schools attended to the child’s social and emotional development, vocational training, and leisure-time activities (Woodring, 1952); moreover, the dissatisfied claimed that “the schools were failing to teach the Three R’s adequately or that the schools were costing too much money or that there were too many so called fads and frills in the schools” (Kennan, 1951, p. 318). In addition, tax increases were needed for new school buildings and the repair of existing school buildings (Scott & Hill, 1954). Alan Zoll and the National Council for American Education (Skaife, 1951) published and widely distributed a pamphlet with an acrimonious attack:

For a generation your tax money has helped pay the salaries of poisonous propagandists who have been endeavoring to make radicals out of the youth of our land; trying to corrupt them and lower their moral standards; destroying their faith in God and country; attempting to rob them of their self-reliance and substituting dependence on the government, on doles, on subsidies; seeking to ensnare them with the false doctrine that it is better to have statism than liberty; undermining the Christian principles and ethics on which this nation was founded; scoffing at everything American and exalting everything Communist” (How Red Are the Schools, 1950, quoted in Skaife, 1951, p. 29).

Concerns in the popular press. The concerns about American schooling during these contentious times also appeared in the popular press. When Albert Lynd (1949), a Harvard educated history professor, found “an educational revolution” replacing traditional education, he wrote about the “Quackery in the Public Schools” in the *Atlantic Monthly*, focusing his criticism on the “super-pedagogues” in the teachers colleges, with their “counterfeit academics” and “pseudo-scholarship” (Lynd, 1950, p. 36). Mortimer Smith in *And Madly Teach* (1950) also blamed the schools of education and the teachers’ colleges for teaching children principles which undermined democracy and impeded the free exercise of individual liberty. A more direct attack was made in *Life* magazine by the highly respected Episcopal scholar Bernard Iddings Bell (1950), who wrote, “Leaders of business and industry commonly deplore the ignorance, laxness and gaucherie of the products that tumble by the thousands each year from the end of our educational assembly line” (p. 89). Arthur Bestor (1953), in *Educational Wastelands*, derided the anti-intellectualism in the public schools and “the idea that the school must undertake to meet every need that some other agency is failing to meet” (p. 11). Further, he disagreed with the conclusion of the Commission on Life Adjustment Education that twenty percent of youth can prepare for college and twenty percent can prepare for skilled trades while sixty percent should receive “life adjustment education” because this conclusion implied that the majority are “incapable of benefiting by intellectual training or even training for skilled and desirable occupations” (p. 12). Mortimer Smith (1954) in *The Diminished Mind: A Study of Planned Mediocrity in our Schools* also opposed “life adjustment education” and its courses in home economics, driver education, personal grooming, etc. Smith (1954) feared the “social reconstructionists” would establish a

“collectivist society” while he and other “traditional humanists” favored “disciplined knowledge” and the transmission of our cultural heritage.

### Concerns about Reading Instruction

The contentious times also manifested themselves in concerns about reading instruction. As early as 1948, Constance McCullough, a member of the teaching faculty at San Francisco State College, lamented, “Educators and publishers all over the country are being urged to return to emphases of the past, a past that is rosier for the fact that it is no longer with us. . . . Back to the skills and drills; away with the frills” (p 1). To understand the pressures for change, I have reached into the previous decades to find the roots of the controversy.

In the early twentieth century, teachers of reading were concerned with “enunciation, articulation, pronunciation” (Yoakam, 1954, p. 427). One oral method of beginning reading instruction was the alphabet method, in which the child learned long lists of words by first naming the letters and then pronouncing the words (Huey, 1908) because “it was assumed that there was a necessary connection between naming the letters of a word and pronouncing the word” (Reeder, 1900, p. 63 quoted in Huey, 1908, p. 71). With another oral method, commonly termed at the time the “phonetic” method, the child learned to associate sounds with letters. During the second decade of the century, however, William S. Gray at the University of Chicago and other reading researchers gathered data showing the greater economy and efficiency of silent reading (Gray, 1933). This led during the 1920’s to a shift from rote oral reading to meaningful silent reading (Gray, 1934), and isolated instruction in phonics fell out of fashion in many schools across the nation (Smith, 1943). In 1925, “phonetic training” was one of the major concerns in every one of the twenty-one

most widely used systems for the teaching of reading (Gates, 1928), but this changed in the sixteen basal series published between 1925 and 1935 (Smith, 1965). By 1941, most primary grade teachers believed that first graders should begin with having their attention directed toward thought and most teachers trained their pupils to “perceive or envisage words as wholes or configurations . . . [and to] use context cues to the fullest extent” (Brownell, 1941, p. 202).

Throughout World War II, Gray (1944) maintained the progressive view: “Reading is not to be thought of as a group of skills to be mastered. . . . Rather, it is a series of experiences which help the child in his living” (p. 497). In 1948, however, Gray acknowledged that “the results of inadequate attention to word analysis have been dramatized during recent years by the large number of young people who are inefficient in reading” (1948a, p. 118). In response to “the wrath of parents” and increasing public demand for greater attention to the development of word-attack skills, Gray (1948b) amended his view and published *On Their Own in Reading*, which advocated the use of phonetic clues in addition to context clues, word form clues, and structural clues. In 1952, Gray, now professor Emeritus, again responded to the criticism, acknowledging newspaper articles bearing titles such as “Johnny Can’t Read” (p. 9), which attacked methods of instruction: “Teachers who were trained or influenced by the ‘progressive’ methods . . . discarded the old system of phonetics, whereby children learned to sound out words, and substituted a method of flashing cards. . . . Each word becomes the equivalent of a Chinese ideograph” (quoted in Gray, 1952, p. 11). Gray (1952) also acknowledged other criticisms, including the schools’ failure to develop obedience and respect for authority and the failure to develop allegiance to “the American way of life.” In response, Gray (1952)

issued a call for a coordinated effort: “The problems faced by schools today demand a nation-wide attack . . . under the direction of a national agency, which would attempt to find tentative answers to some of the instructional issues faced today” (Gray, 1952, p. 37). Presciently, Gray (1952) also predicted the conclusion of the First Grade Studies: “There is no one best method of teaching reading” (p. 109).

*Why Johnny Can't Read.* The contentions of the times became more clearly focused on reading methods in 1955 with the publication of Rudolf Flesch's *Why Johnny Can't Read*. Flesch, who earned his Ph.D. in education from Columbia University in 1944, had authored several best-selling books for professional writers, including the well-known, *The Art of Plain Talk* (Rettie, 1955). In *Why Johnny Can't Read*, Flesch attacked the “look-say method,” a whole word method, and implored parents to teach their children by a phonics method. The book was organized in two parts: the first was a “little compendium of arguments against our current system of teaching reading” (p. xiii), and the second was a “home primer,” which consisted of lists of phonetically related words for home instruction. Flesch contended that “the teaching of reading -- all over the United States, in all the schools, in all the textbooks -- is totally wrong and flies in the face of all logic and common sense. . . . Do you know there are no remedial reading cases in Germany, in France, in Italy, in Norway, in Spain -- practically anywhere in the world except in the United States?” (p. 2). He went on to declare, “We too could have perfect readers in all schools at the end of second grade if we taught our children by the system used in Germany. . . . It's very simple. . . . Teach the child what each letter stands for and he can read” (pp. 2-3).

Responses to Flesch. The responses to Flesch from two leaders in the field of reading were immediate. A. Sterl Artley (1955), at Mississippi Southern University,

was direct: “Within the last year . . . have appeared articles extolling the virtues of the phonics approach to reading instruction. One of the writers contends that . . . all the teacher needs to do is teach the child what each letter stands for” (p. 197). Artley (1955) described this as the philosophy of the “old oaken bucket,” explaining that “the point of view most widely accepted by reputable reading people today -- Gates, Gray, Witty, Durrell, Betts, and others -- is that phonics is merely one of several methods that the child may use to unlock words” (p. 197), and he contentiously added, “I will defend to the last the point that unless children see early that reading is an avenue to new and exciting experiences they are not going to turn to it in their free time” (p. 199). More cautiously, Nila Banton Smith (1955), at New York University, reviewed the research on phonics and stated the consensus position of reading specialists: not all children need phonics instruction, but some children are helped when phonics is taught functionally.

Responses to Flesch quickly followed in the popular press. In *The Saturday Review*, the reading researcher Emmett Betts (1955a) labeled Flesch “a master of histrionics” (p. 21). *Time* called the book “a caricature, not a portrait” (How Johnny, 1955, p. 55), and decried the “exaggerated statements” (Why Johnny, 1955, p. 28). Continuing the attacks on Flesch, *The Nation’s Schools* declared, “The public is misled on the meaning of reading” (Witty, 1955, p. 35), and *The New Republic* found the book to have “extremely dogmatic and unfounded criticism of our schools. . . . Flesch exposes his utter failure to understand the difference between reading in the true sense . . . and the uttering of a mere sequence of sounds” (Rettie, 1955, p. 22).

The newspapers told a different story. *The New York Times* declared the battle lines over teaching reading had been drawn and went on to suggest that families



would be setting aside time in the summer months “to get in points for the Phonic Method” (A Surprise for Johnny, 1955, p. 24). Exceptions to the negative reactions to Flesch were also found in the one hundred and twenty Hearst daily newspapers, which printed the book in serial form (A big row, 1955, p. 57), possibly contributing to widespread conversation and concern about Flesch’s charges.

By August, sales of *Why Johnny Can’t Read* had reached 60,000 copies (Why Johnny, 1955), and the “warfare between the entrenched ‘experts’ and the advocates of common sense” (Flesch, 1955, p. 10) had become a national obsession. Indeed, *Why Johnny Can’t Read* remained on the bestseller list for thirty-nine weeks (The First R, 1956, p. 52). The first mass market version sold an additional 144,000 copies (Monaghan & Saul, 1987, p. 106). The debate even spawned a television program, “Are Our Children Learning to Read?” in September (Robbins, 1955, p. 172).

Helen Robinson (1955), at the University of Chicago, reviewed *Why Johnny Can’t Read* in October of its publication year. She criticized Flesch for being selective in the research he reported, for limiting the definition of reading to word calling, and for basing his conclusions on visits to two schools and on experience teaching only two children. She asserted, “Research does not support the conclusion that *all* pupils can learn to recognize words by any single method” (p. 92). To this Paul Witty, professor at Northwestern University, added, “Many children do need help in the mastery of phonic skills although some appear to have made satisfactory progress in reading without formal instruction. Therefore, a system of careful diagnosis of individual needs should precede the introduction of instruction in word analysis” (Witty & Sizemore, 1955, p. 369).

By December, leaders of the field of reading had prepared their responses for

a themed issue of *The Reading Teacher*, and they lined up against Flesch. Betts (1955b) explained there are three “facets” of reading instruction, i.e., interests, word recognition skills, and ability to think, and he added acerbically, “Over the years, zealots and charlatans have sold stupid and inane programs of phonics to parents and some teachers as a cure-all for reading ills” (Betts, 1955b, p. 68). Smith (1955) and Artley (1955) reminded readers that children are, indeed, taught phonics in school, and Gray (1955) reminded readers of the words of his mentor Guy T. Buswell, who in 1922 had written:

If the primary emphasis is placed upon word recognition, the outcome is the ability to follow the printed lines, to pronounce all the words, but to display no vital concern for the content. . . . On the other hand, when the chief emphasis is placed on the thought . . . the pupils do develop a vital concern for the content, but develop more slowly in word recognition (quoted in Gray, 1955, p.105).

The leaders in the field of reading band together. Flesch (1955) had left the leaders of the field of reading on the defensive. They banded together on January 1, 1956, to form the International Reading Association (I.R.A.) through a merger of the International Council for the Improvement of Reading Instruction and the National Association of Remedial Teaching (Jerrolds, 1977). William S. Gray was asked to be the first president, and the first annual meeting was held in Chicago in May, 1956, “to define the nature of the progress made thus far in developing efficient readers and . . . consider the challenging problems and controversial issues still faced” (Robinson, 1956, p. 248).

### Crisis in Education

World War II had brought about the rise of the military-industrial complex and the fifties saw the rise of the “cult of science” (Jamison & Eyerman, 1994), both

of which increased the need for technologically trained workers (Keppel, 1966). As these changes manifested themselves in pressing educational needs, the contentious debates of the times escalated into a “Crisis in Education” (1958, p. 25).

The Soviet threat. Early in 1956, when William Benton, former U. S. Senator, returned from a visit to Soviet Russia, he warned in the *New York Times Magazine* that the Cold War must move to the classrooms because the Soviet leaders were boasting about Russia's “gold reserve” of trained technicians. While Benton (1956) merely mentioned “the tide” of forty-two million children soon entering school, he emphasized the Soviet threat and the need for an educated work force as the first line in the Cold War defense.

Then on October 4, 1957, Communist Russia launched Sputnik, the first artificial earth satellite, and it seemed clear that the technological superiority of the United States was challenged. Admiral Hyman G. Rickover (1957) warned the nation about Russia: “Faced with this formidable and ruthless adversary, who has openly promised ‘to bury’ us and who grows daily in industrial and military might, what are we to do?” (p. 87). Rickover’s answer lay in reorganizing the educational system, and he, like Bestor (1955) before him, believed that “solid learning” was needed to develop the intellectual tools necessary for the modern world. Recognizing that this reorganization “may require a reappraisal of cherished convictions” (Rickover, 1957, p. 87), he, nevertheless, called for objectives designed to produce “trained manpower” (p. 88) to replace “non-academic school objectives, notable on teaching children manners and social graces” (p. 89). While Woodring (1958) lamented, “The crescendo of criticism that has assailed the schools for the past 10 years has, since the launching of Sputnik, become a deafening roar . . . [and] the leadership of American

education is rapidly passing out of the hands of professional educators” (p. 19), Kliebard (1986) explained, “The development of the intellect was not so much a good in itself or for giving the individual a way of mastering the modern world but a direct avenue to victory in the Cold War” (p. 266). “The mood had swung to the intellectual, particularly to scientists, mathematicians and engineers, as the key to world preeminence” (Kliebard, 1986, p. 268).

The picture became clear in March, 1958, when *Life* featured an article titled “Crisis in Education,” contrasting a “typical” American student described as “likable” and “good-humored” and a “typical” Russian student described as “hard working” and “aggressive.” The associated editorial, titled “It’s Time to Close our Carnival” (Wilson, 1958), criticized the American curriculum as being too easy, American teachers as not being intelligent enough, and American students as being lazy; and it warned parents to “get tough” with children. “A child who hears ‘eggheads’ derided at home, and who sees his parents caring for little more than economic success and entertainment, can hardly be expected to excel as a scholar. . . . The outcome of the arms race will depend eventually on our schools” (Wilson, 1958, p. 37). Communists, it seemed, were so purposeful while Americans, it seemed, were so “aimless and slothful” (Rose, 1999, p. 326).

Congress reacts. Sputnik initiated the space race and served as an impetus to increase funding of the space program and of educational programs. The United States Congress under the leadership of Lyndon Johnson reacted quickly and decisively, and on September 2, 1958, President Eisenhower signed into law the National Defense Education Act (NDEA), which focused on science and mathematics education. It included provisions for student loans, fellowships, grants for equipment,

grants for audio-visual research, contracts for vocational trades programs, grants for guidance and counseling services, and contracts for language teaching (McGlathery, 1962).

### Crisis in Reading

As the contentious debates escalated into a crisis, another broadside against progressive methods for teaching beginning reading reached the popular press with the publication of *Reading: Chaos and Cure* (McGraw Hill, 1958). Terman and Walcutt (1958) wrote, “The reading problem concerns more Americans today than anything but the H-bomb and major-league baseball” (p. 1), and they supported their contention by making a case for the relationship between poor reading skills and the inability to become a successful scientist as well as a case for the relationship between poor reading skills and juvenile delinquency (p. 86). Terman and Walcutt (1958) attacked whole word procedures and argued that good reading in an alphabetic language can only be achieved by learning the sound values of the characters used to represent them; they declared, “There is a war between phonics and meaning” (p. 10).

### The Contenders

For more than three decades, whole word basals had been the predominant materials used in American classrooms for reading instruction (Hoffman, 2001). These beginning reading materials were developed during the 1920’s when there was a shift from rote oral reading to meaningful silent reading (Gray, 1934). In 1925, “phonetic training” was one of the major concerns in every one of the twenty-one most widely used systems for the teaching of reading (Gates, 1928), but this changed in the sixteen basal series published between 1925 and 1935 (Smith, 1965). These whole word basals were developed upon the Gestalt principle of learning from wholes

to parts; furthermore, they were designed “to contribute to a broad understanding of modern life” and to develop citizens able to participate in “remoulding American life” (Gray, 1933).

### The Consensus Position

Over the decades of the thirties and forties, both the leaders and teachers in the field of reading had come to consensus about how to teach beginning reading. They agreed that a child should first learn to recognize fifty to one hundred words by sight (Duker & Nally, 1956) because “learning to spell words without knowing what they mean is a hollow and mechanical procedure” (Goldenson, 1957, p. 85). Then, they taught other word recognition clues, e.g., meaning clues, structural clues, and phonetic clues (Gray, 1948b). Most important to reading specialists, however, was that “the habit of reading to gather meaning should be firmly fixed at the very beginning of the process” (Duker & Nally, 1956, p. 145), and they believed a “child tends to become overanalytical, and to lack fluency and understanding” (Bond & Tinker, 1957, p. 28) when methods concentrate attention on letters and sounds.

The leaders agree. Authorities in the field of reading favored multiple methods of instruction. William Gray (1957) called for “a flexible pattern of instruction,” Emmett Betts (1960) advocated “variable approaches,” Arthur Gates (1958) spoke in defense of “a combination of methods,” Paul Witty (1959) prescribed a program which “combines the best features” of both individual and group instruction, and A. Sterl Artley (1961) argued for an “eclectic approach” to reading. When the leaders in the field of reading met at a conference sponsored by the Carnegie Corporation in September, 1961, they denied using a sight-word method to the neglect of phonics and supported first learning “sight words” and then learning “word recognition skills”

including phonics. These experts in the field of reading, like Gray (1952), concluded, “We are agreed that there is no single best way of learning to read, and therefore no single best way of teaching children to read” (Conant, 1962, p. 5).

The teachers agree. This consensus view seemed held not only by the leaders in the field of reading but also by most elementary classroom teachers. During the summer of 1955, while many people were reading *Why Johnny Can't Read*, David H. Russell (1955), at the University of California at Berkeley, surveyed approximately 220 experienced teachers and other school people from thirty-three different states. These students in the summer session classes at Teachers College, Columbia University, the University of California at Berkeley, and the University of Oregon were asked for their views about the place of phonics in the curriculum. Russell found over 90% of the respondents thought phonics should be taught as a part of the elementary school's reading program.

In another survey, conducted during 1956 and 1957 by Barbara Purcell (1958), a student at West Virginia University, 150 elementary classroom teachers in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia revealed that they were remarkably similar in their practices. All of the teachers used a basal series and about 98% divided their classes into reading groups based on achievement. Over 90% taught children to use initial consonant clues, and over 90% taught vowel sounds and rules. Purcell concluded that these teachers were “striking a middle path” between the old ways and the new ways.

Nationwide surveys confirm the agreement. These early findings related to the practices of elementary classroom teachers were confirmed by two nation-wide surveys. With funding from the Carnegie Corporation, Allen Barton and David

Wilder (1962), professors at Teachers College, Columbia University, sent questionnaires to a random sample of elementary schools across the United States. They found that 90% of first grade teachers reported using a basal reading series, about one-third used children's story books as supplemental readers, about one-fourth used experience charts, and less than 4% used filmstrips, television, or reading kits. They also found that teachers were overwhelmingly in favor of children learning some sight words first, but 97% were also in favor of teaching the sounds of letters and letter combinations.

A second nation-wide survey of reading practices was funded by the Carnegie Corporation and conducted by Mary Austin, professor at Harvard University, with her graduate student, Coleman Morrison. Austin and Morrison (1963) made personal visits to 65 school systems and analyzed questionnaires from nearly one thousand communities. They found that the vast majority of these schools reported reliance on basal readers used in self-contained, heterogeneously organized classrooms with two or three reading groups. While Austin and Morrison (1963) acknowledged the "heated controversy that frequently rages between the warring factions relative to the phonics issue" (p. 27), they found that phonics was considered a skill of major importance in the vast majority of schools. In general, in the first grade children were taught to recognize fifty to seventy-five words by sight, and in the second grade children were taught about the sounds of vowels, including digraphs and diphthongs (p. 30). After dismissing the phonics controversy (p. 28), Austin and Morrison expressed greater concern about the need for comprehension and critical reading skills "by each one who hopes to participate intelligently as a citizen and to lead a well-rounded personal life" (p. 69).



### Challengers to the Consensus Position

The contentious debate, that was focused on reading with the publication of *Why Johnny Can't Read* and escalated into a crisis by the launch of Sputnik, was further exacerbated by challengers to the consensus position. Among these were the scientific linguists in American universities, spelling reformers in England, and advocates of phonics systems as well as those who favored child-centered instruction, the advocates of individualized reading and language experience approaches.

Assertions of scientific linguists. In 1955, the same year Flesch's polemics reached the American public, Henry Lee Smith (1956), then at the University of Buffalo, was invited to present a lecture at Harvard University about the progress made by linguistic scientists and the extent to which their scientifically accurate analysis and description of the structure of American English could be applied to reading instruction. In the same year, James P. Soffietti, a professor of linguistics at Syracuse University, published "Why Children Fail to Read: A Linguistic Analysis" in the *Harvard Educational Review*, making claims similar to those made by Flesch, but clothing his assertions in the authority of science, as had many linguists since the formation of the Society for the Study of Linguistics in 1925 (Bloomfield, 1925).

Ruth Strickland, professor of linguistics at Indiana University, explained that the linguistic view of reading begins with "the primacy of speech and the fact that written language is an outgrowth of speech" (Strickland, 1962a, p. 264). A U.S.O.E. funded study by Walter Loban (1963), professor of linguistics at the University of California at Berkeley, provided evidence for these theoretical views. He found that children's general language ability was highly correlated with their reading ability, and he concluded that competence in spoken language is a necessary base for

competence in reading and writing. Charles C. Fries (1963), professor Emeritus of linguistics at the University of Michigan, elaborated: “The process of learning to read is the process of transfer from the auditory signs for language signals, which the child has already learned, to the new visual signs for the same signals” (p. xv).

Fries (1963) further explained the linguistic view of reading: “Perhaps the most important weakness of the present approaches to the teaching of reading arises out of a misunderstanding or an ignoring of the structural significance of alphabetic writing and the nature of the spelling patterns of present-day English” (p. xv). He clearly differentiated phonics, phonetics, and phonemics: phonics denotes certain teaching practices, phonetics is the science of speech sounds, but phonemics is the set of scientific techniques used by modern linguists to determine the bundles of phonetic features which form patterns in words. He explained that the linguists’ spelling patterns approach to beginning reading instruction gave attention to whole words rather than to individual isolated letters, but it differed “fundamentally” from any of the common word-method approaches in that the reader responded to the major patterns of spelling. He also explained that the linguists’ spelling patterns approach differed “fundamentally” from any phonics approach because “underlying the phonics approach is the assumption that much of learning to read is learning to match words as written, letter by letter, with words as pronounced, sound by sound” (Fries, 1963, p. xvi).

Robert A. Hall (1961), professor of linguistics at Cornell University, was perhaps the most contentious scientific linguist, stating that English orthography is undemocratic because it “was deliberately loaded with difficulties in order to make it accessible only to a chosen few” (p. 33). Echoing Veblen (1899), Hall explained:

The irregularities of English spelling originated between four and five hundred years ago, at a time when English society was organized according to strict class distinctions, when the upper classes . . . wanted to keep the art of reading and writing as their private possession (p. 33).

Hall (1961) went on to denigrate reading specialists, who had a “stranglehold on the teachers’ colleges” (p. 32), as well as their basal series constructed according to the “see-and-say” method because there were irregularly spelled words from the beginning. “The children who are supposed to learn from such books are confused from the start. They never get the idea that there is any regularity, any fundamental principle whatsoever in English spelling” (p. 27).

Other scientific linguists wanted to apply their knowledge to the solution of pressing educational problems. While Smith (1956) explained that most instructional materials used for beginning reading were developed from a “prescientific point of view” (p. 20), Soffietti (1955) suggested instructional materials which seem to differ very little from those proposed in 1942 by Leonard Bloomfield, then professor of linguistics at Yale University. Bloomfield had asserted that early reading material “must show each letter in only one phonetic value . . . [and] consist of two-letter and three-letter words in which the letters have the sound-values assigned at the outset . . . (with) short sentences of the type *Nat had a bat*” (Bloomfield, 1942, p. 185). Clarence Barnhart, noted lexicographer, published Bloomfield’s materials in 1961.

Strickland’s (1962b) investigations and insights into basal readers were presented in her U.S.O.E. funded study, a comparison of the structure of children’s language and the structure of the language in children’s reading books. She found that the children in her sample learned the basic structures of their language at an early age, and she concluded that “the oral language children use is far more advanced than the language of the books in which they are taught to read” (p. 106).

Assertions of advocates of spelling reform. Sir James Pitman is credited with the assertion that the Initial Teaching Alphabet (i.t.a.) was not a method but a medium (Downing, 1966), and Mazurkiewicz (1966) reiterated that the i.t.a. is not a program but a specialized alphabet, consisting of forty-four characters for the forty-four sounds of English. i.t.a. used only lower case letters because it was argued that lower case letters provided the maximum discrimination in the visual pattern. Further, i.t.a. reduced ambiguities in English spelling arising from several letters corresponding to the same sound values and several letters having more than one sound value. Sounds rather than letter names were taught to take the “guesswork” out of reading (Mazurkiewicz, 1966).

i.t.a. arose from the spelling reform movement in England enlivened by George Bernard Shaw in 1948 (Harrison, 1964). During the fifties, spelling reformers in England proposed the “simplification and rationalization” of the “anomalous, irregular, inconsistent spelling in English” (Tauber & Beck, 1958, p. 249), and in 1959, Sir James Pitman, revived his grandfather’s work and designed an alphabet for teaching reading in the initial stages (Harrison, 1964). Research with i.t.a., which was known as the Augmented Roman Alphabet until 1963 (Downing, 1966), began in the schools in England in 1961 under the sponsorship of the University of London Institute of Education and under the direction of John Downing. When Downing (1966) reviewed the initial reports of this research, he stressed the preliminary nature of the findings, but concluded, “Generally, i.t.a. does appear to make beginning reading easier to a significant degree, but we have emphasized that i.t.a. does not appear to be a panacea” (p. 32).

In the United States, Downing worked with the Ford Foundation to establish

the Initial Teaching Alphabet Foundation at Hofstra University, in Hempsted, New York, as well as three large-scale research projects in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania; Cleveland, Ohio; and White Plains, New York, in the Fall of 1963 (Block, 1966). Edward Fry (1965), one of the primary researchers in the First Grade Studies, wrote in his U.S.O.E. report that this “activity [was] probably directly traceable to the well publicized and well financed efforts of Sir James Pitman . . . with the help of his political office as a Member of Parliament, his own publishing firm, and the Ford Foundation” (Fry, 1965, p. 13).

Controversy about phonics instruction. Phonics had been a subject of controversy and considerable investigation by reading researchers since early in the twentieth century. In 1956, Emmett Betts, professor at Temple University, located 199 references about phonics and phonics instruction from the research literature, and he concluded, “The evidence appears to be clear that an overemphasis on phonics produces word calling and lowered comprehension. On the other hand, an underemphasis may produce word guessing and inaccurate comprehension” (p. 363). In 1963, Theodore Clymer, professor at the University of Minnesota, studied basal readers to determine which phonic generalizations were being taught. He was able to identify 45 phonic generalizations ranging from the familiar “when there are two vowels side by side, the long sound of the first one is heard” (p. 256) to the less familiar “when the last syllable sound is r, it is unaccented” (p 268). Clymer calculated the utility of these phonic generalizations and concluded that many of the generalizations are of limited value. Nevertheless, when Smith (1965) revised and republished her 1934 dissertation *American Reading Instruction* in 1965, she commented that “phonics has been a subject of high controversy during the present

period” (p. 357). While she reported that some teachers believed phonics was in disgrace and many citizens, who saw only the children’s readers, were alarmed because it seemed that phonics was no longer taught in the public schools; Smith (1965) emphasized that the teachers’ manuals of the basal series did provide guidance for phonics instruction, and she explained that most of the series had adopted an “intrinsic” (analytic) method in which the sounds of letters were generalized from words in meaningful settings rather than being taught in isolation. Chall (1967), on the other hand, who compared methods of beginning reading instruction during the mid-1960’s, wrote, “Any general statement about phonics programs will be true about some and false about others” (p. 16). Differentiating the approach used in most basal series from the approach used in most supplemental programs, she emphasized “synthetic” programs that first teach the sounds corresponding to certain letters and then teach blending to form words (Chall, 1967).

Approaches of advocates of child-centered instruction. Willard C. Olson (1952), at the University of Wisconsin, believed in the importance of seeking and self-selection of interesting books by children and in “pacing” by teachers to insure that each child has materials with which that child can succeed. May Lazar (1957), assistant director of the Bureau of Educational Research in New York City, described this new approach: “Individualized reading is a way of thinking about reading -- an attitude toward the place of reading in the total curriculum, toward the materials and methods used, and toward the child’s developmental needs” (p. 76). “Individualized reading . . . provides the child with an environment which stimulates exploration, with opportunities for choosing materials which appeal to him, and with guidance which permits him to develop at his own rate” (p. 77). Lazar (1957) further explained

that individualized reading considers the child's mental health in relation to learning because the approach "recognizes interest and purpose, . . . allows the child to learn and develop at his own pace, . . . emphasizes the need for active participation, . . . [and] provides consistently successful experiences in reading" (p. 77).

Jeanette Veatch (1959), at the University of Pennsylvania, supported the basic philosophy of individualized reading as well as "the conditions of self-selection [and] individual conferences" (p. 10), and Russell Stauffer (1959), professor at the University of Delaware and editor of the *Reading Teacher*, enthusiastically endorsed individualized reading as a method that would usher in the time "when each child would be recognized as a living human being, differing from every other human being in his needs and in the contributions he can make, yet a member of society who must coordinate his life with that of his fellow members" (p. 338). While Artley (1961) claimed that nothing since Flesch has "aroused so much discussion and controversy as individualized reading" (p. 320) and Smith (1961) worried that individualized reading "loomed large on the horizon" (p. 149), Stauffer (1960) further endorsed individualized reading as the approach "that breaks sharply with the piecemeal, memoriter, story-parroting, non-thinking approach" (p. 377). Harry Sartain (1960), at the University of Pennsylvania, reviewed 74 journal articles about individualized reading -- some of which were descriptions and some of which were reports of research, and he concluded more moderately, "Although the scientific studies seem to indicate that self-selection alone is not the answer, dozens of enthusiastic advocates recount unusual success" (p. 263).

While the supplemental use of experience stories and experience charts had been reported in the literature at least since the thirties (Lee, 1933), Roach Van Allen

advocated the sole use of the method in a “language experience approach.” When he spoke at the 1962 annual meeting of IRA, he suggested that the language experience approach had not been well described in the professional literature, but in 1963, he and Doris Lee described the approach in *Learning to Read through Experience*. In the language experience approach distinction is not made between speaking, listening, writing and reading as each is considered to facilitate the others. At first teachers may write the names of objects or sentences about activities for the child, and later the teacher writes what the child dictates until the child expresses an interest in writing. Then the teacher helps the child write what he personally wishes to say, or the teacher may use a chart to write a group story. Abundant language experiences are provided through talk about trips, films, objects from home, etc., and materials which invite creative self-expression, e.g., paints and easels, finger crayons and paper, clay, scrap materials, etc., are made readily available.

#### Fundamental Issues

While considering the views of the advocates of the consensus position and the challengers, at least two fundamental issues appear: (1) Should beginning reading methods emphasize attention to letters and sounds or to whole words? and (2) Should beginning reading methods emphasize attention to letters and sounds or to meaning?

Habits of word recognition. During the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, the predominant methods were the alphabet method, in which the child learned long lists of words by first naming the letters (Huey, 1908), and “phonetic” methods, the term commonly used at the time to refer to methods in which the child learned to associate sounds with letters. Then in 1922, Judd and Buswell found that it was not necessary to relate visual symbols to spoken words, and a new view that



maintained “movements of the vocal apparatus are not essential and reduce efficiency in silent reading” (Gray, 1941, p. 899) emerged. During the decades of the thirties and forties, whole word methods with a focus on meaning became predominant, and educators asserted that the methods of the nineteenth century had a “tendency to slow up the reading rate by forcing the child to practice the habit of piecemeal recognition” (Adams, 1949, p. 48). Progressive educators became convinced that “inner speech” actually impedes effective silent reading (Bond & Tinker, 1957). During the decade of the fifties, however, the ideas of the scientific linguists, the spelling reformers, and phonics advocates again focused attention on the sounds of letters, and the challengers to the whole word view decried the method accepted by the leading experts for at least two decades. Terman and Walcutt (1958) argued:

Teaching words as meaningful wholes ignores the very basic fact that a printed word has meaning *because it is a symbol of a sound*, a spoken word that already has meaning to the child. It is not the configuration that means; it is the sound, *which the child already knows*. He does not have to memorize the configuration of a word for its meaning -- as he is made laboriously and with infinite drill to do today -- he has to learn to recognize it instantly as a *sound*” (pp. 50-51).

Nevertheless, at least one leader in the field of reading took a more moderate view. Hildreth (1959) remarked, “In reading, although the primary stimulation is visual . . . there are also auditory clues, inner speech and hearing, residuals of memory for the spoken sounds of words” (p. 565).

Habits of mind. While the issue of giving attention to letters and their sounds or to whole words was an important fundamental issue, Anna Cordts, professor at Rutgers University, expressed a more important concern about “the wrong habits” engendered by phonics methods: “When a child has been taught the sounds of the letters before he has learned to read for meaning, he has to unlearn the habit of

attending to the sounds in order to be free to concentrate on what the sentence is telling him” (Cordts, 1962, p. 28 quoted in Mathews, 1966, p. 197). Progressive educators emphasized whole words because they were more concerned with reading for meaning, and they viewed the emphasis on the parts of language as a return to piecemeal approaches “very much like those of fifty years ago . . . using intensive phonics drills with beginning readers” (Harris, 1964, p. 138). Albert Harris (1964), professor at New York University, explained the progressive view:

Educators identified with the progressive approach . . . have favored reading for a purpose over reading for its own sake. They have emphasized the importance of interest and motivation and criticized reliance on drill; consequently, they have tended to favor silent reading for meaning over heavy phonics programs and accurate word recognition in oral reading (p. 128).

Educators of the progressive persuasion were fundamentally concerned about citizenship in a democracy. Helen Robinson (1961) lamented, “Reflective reading with the power to understand and examine new ideas critically is never mentioned by those who write prolifically of our shortcomings in teaching reading” (p. 409) while advocates of individualized reading and the language experience approach echoed Constance McCullough (1945), then at Western Reserve University, who wrote, “In our role as citizens of a democracy and of a possibly democratic world, we bear an obligation to keep informed on social, economic, and political problems” (p. 5). Stauffer (1959) endorsed the individualized reading approach because he thought pupils would “read for a wide variety of purposes, . . . (and) participate intelligently in the thought life of the world” (p. 339). He believed the approach gave “recognition of the role of an individual in a free society, the need for accurate communication, and the need for people schooled in the art of independent thinking” (p. 341). Roach Van Allen (1962) asserted that it is “important to develop in children a feeling that

their own ideas are worthy of expression and that their own language is a vehicle of communication” (p. 154), and -- perhaps most poignantly -- Van Allen added:

A danger to society far greater than the fact that all children read the same book is the danger of uniform response to ideas. Uniform, blind thinking of American youth is the dream leaders of authoritarian societies and movements envision. The contrasting dream of men and women who cherish a free society is that reading instruction will develop thinking individuals who are critical of sources and assumptions (p. 156).

### Reading Researchers React

The challengers to the consensus position of the forties and fifties put the leaders of the field of reading on the defensive. Nevertheless, the advocates of linguistic and spelling reform methods, among others, embodied the pressures of the times. Smith (1965) described the impact of these pressures:

Educators and laymen alike awakened to the sharp realization that we must put forth more vigorous effort if we were to preserve and improve the American way of life. In all aspects of national endeavor pressures were felt to produce more and more and to do it faster and faster. In reading, pressure to produce higher competency in a shorter time became apparent (p. 312).

After *Why Johnny Can't Read* was published and concerns linked to the Soviet threat appeared in the public press, a chorus of reading researchers joined Gray's earlier call for cooperative research. First, Robinson (1955) and Betts (1956); and later, Russell (1961), Smith (1962), Iverson (1962), and Gardner (quoted in Conant, 1962) called for carefully designed experimental studies on the relative values of different methods of teaching beginning reading. Especially following the launch of Sputnik, other leaders in the field of reading research held ad hoc and more formal meetings to discuss the controversy and their views; however, the National Conference on Research in English (NCRE) took the lead. When Thomas Horn of the

University of Texas was president of NCRE in 1957-58, he appointed a Research Committee with William Sheldon of Syracuse University as general chairman, and with Ralph Staiger of Mississippi Southern College, Donald Durrell of Boston University, Russell Stauffer of the University of Delaware, and Guy Bond of the University of Minnesota as the subcommittee chairmen (Petty, 1983, p. 45). The next year, when Staiger was president of NCRE, he pursued Horn's initiating action and called for a conference. Sheldon worked with the Carnegie Corporation to obtain \$5,000 in funding and organized a conference which met in Syracuse in October of 1959 (Petty, 1983). Since there was general agreement that the research evidence available was "vague, contradictory, incomplete, and faulty in design" (Harris & Sewer, 1966, p. 7), plans for coordinated studies in elementary reading instruction were developed (Petty, 1983).

Another meeting was held at the University of Chicago in October, 1960, due to the efforts of Helen Robinson and funding from the William S. Gray Foundation (Petty, 1983). Participants were organized into four groups: (1) Utilization of Research, chaired by Guy Bond; (2) Needed Research, chaired by Russell Stauffer; (3) Research Designs, chaired by David Russell; and (4) Cooperative Research, chaired by William Sheldon (Stauffer, 1961). Together, they developed a proposal for a large-scale cooperative effort to compare different approaches to beginning reading (Harris & Sewer, 1966, p. 7). As the contentious debates continued, the proposals for coordinated research that had been developed at the meetings in Syracuse and Chicago were presented to U.S.O.E. by Thomas Horn of the University of Texas (Stauffer, 1961).

Like the first meeting calling for cooperative research, the 1962 annual

conference of I.R.A. was organized by William Sheldon of Syracuse University, I.R.A. president that year. At the meeting, William J. Iverson (1962), professor at Stanford University, acknowledged the criticism: “The most recurrent charge alleges that this temporary expedient (visual configuration) is permanently damaging. . . . The young reader, it is charged, becomes habituated in leaping into recognition on the basis of configuration” (p. 212). When Nila B. Smith (1962), soon-to-be president elect of I.R.A. and professor at New York University, reviewed the “pageant in American reading instruction” presented at the 1962 I.R.A. conference, she called for “more cooperative discussion and research between linguistic specialists and reading specialists” (p. 182); William J. Iverson (1962), called for research to answer the question, “Should we teach phonic skills through phonemically regular words, entirely synthetically, or through sight words?” (p. 213); and Mary C. Austin (1962), recent past president of I.R.A. and professor at Harvard University, called for studies to determine whether phonics should be introduced “prior to, concurrently, or following the teaching of a basic sight vocabulary” (p. 177). As these leaders in the field of reading spoke, the federal government was making plans and provisions to fund coordinated research to answer the questions they posed.

#### The Federal Government Acts

“Prior to 1960, one of the most distinctive attributes of America’s political culture had been the tenacity with which the United States, unlike most nations, had resisted a national education policy” (Keppel, 1966, p. xvii), but with the election of John F. Kennedy as President, education became a national priority. In 1960, John W. Gardner (1961), President of the Carnegie Corporation, had submitted a chapter for the report of the President’s Commission on National Goals in which he had written,

“Some subjects are more important than others. Reading is the most important of all” (p. 86). During the Kennedy administration, concern for more adequate instruction of English became related to the larger concern for the quality of instruction in all fields. Appropriations through the U.S.O.E. had been meager throughout the fifties (Keppel, 1966), but during the first year of the Kennedy administration, the Cooperative Research Act, first passed by Congress in 1954 (Public Law 531), was revived and enlarged (U. S. Office of Education, 1962). This law provided for appropriations “to enter into contracts or jointly financed cooperative arrangements with universities and colleges and State educational agencies for the conduct of research, surveys, and demonstrations in the field of education” (Public Law 531, p. 533). The path to increasing federal appropriations for education had been paved by appropriations for math and science curriculum projects with National Science Foundation grants beginning in 1952 and for education and training in math and science as well as in language with National Defense and Education Act grants beginning in 1958. Early in 1962, U.S.O.E. announced Project English, the federal program which would eventually fund the First Grade Studies.

Project English provided funds under Public Law 531 for Curriculum Study Centers to develop new instructional materials and methods (Office of Education, 1962). In May of 1962, fifty educators from all sections of the country met at the Carnegie Institute of Technology in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to discuss Project English and areas of needed research in teaching English. They expressed concerns about teaching beginning reading as well as concerns about increasing vocabulary, understanding the relationship between reading speed and comprehension, and developing appreciation for literature. This group, like those before it, urged

cooperative research with parallel research studies for verification of findings (Steinberg & Jenkins, 1962).

U.S.O.E. funded another meeting to include the linguists in the national discussion. In late January, 1963, linguists, psychologists and reading specialists met at Indiana University under the sponsorship of the Cooperative Research Program. This study group on reading came from the Panel on Educational Research and Development, a nationally representative group responsible to the President's Science Advisor, the U. S. Commissioner of Education, and the Director of the National Science Foundation (Center for Applied Linguistics, 1963). The group called for cooperative research ventures and gave support to the proposals of the Modern Language Association and the National Council of Teachers of English for research to improve the content of children's reading materials, and they issued consensus statements: beginning reading must be based on instant recognition of the letters; sound instructional materials must lead the beginning reader through all of the major and some of the minor spelling-patterns; and there should be no pictures in beginning reading materials because they constitute distracting elements. The group also conceded agreement to a limited number of sight words (Ferguson, 1963).

Funding for the First Grade Studies. The breakthrough for the funding for the First Grade Studies came when Francis Keppel, the dean of education at Harvard, was appointed Commissioner of Education. As one of Kennedy's "best and brightest" (Wofford, 1980), Keppel believed that research and experiments promised to raise the quality of American education (Keppel, 1966). The key connection for the First Grade Studies was between Keppel and Donald Durrell, who as the deans of education at Harvard and at Boston University, had been friends since the 1940's

(Manning, 1998). Along with John Carroll from Harvard, David Krathwohl from Syracuse, Theodore Clymer from the University of Minnesota, and James Miller from the University of Chicago, Durrell was appointed to the Cooperative Research Council, the panel which set priorities and reviewed proposals (D. Gunderson, personal communication, December 20, 1998). Durrell wrote the proposal specifications for studies of first-grade reading instruction and requests for proposals were distributed nation-wide (Petty, 1983). By March of 1964, 76 proposals (Bond, 1966) for projects costing up to \$30,000 (Harris & Sewer, 1966) were submitted, and by May, the Cooperative Research Council had reviewed the proposals and selected projects for funding (D. Gunderson, personal communication, December 20, 1998).

In March, there was a conference at the University of Chicago held under the auspices of the National Conference of Research in English with funding from U.S.O.E. to plan for the cooperative first-grade studies. Groups met to discuss the functions and activities of the Coordinating Center, personnel for the Coordinating Center, the research design, the common data to be collected, and the utilization of technological data processing equipment for the statistical analysis (Robinson, 1964).

On May 31 and June 1, U.S.O.E. funded a meeting of the directors of the 27 individual projects at the University of Minnesota. This Conference on Coordination of Accepted Proposals for the Cooperative Research Program in First Grade Reading Instruction (Bond & Dykstra, 1964) was called to discuss the experimental procedures, the pre-tests and the post-tests to be used, the design of the data sheets, and the card-punching procedures. The participants were able to reach agreement about the research design, the data to be collected, and the procedures for statistical analysis (Bond & Dykstra, 1964).



## The First Grade Studies

The First Grade Studies were the nationwide set of studies conducted during the 1964-1965 school year to answer the pressing question about the best way to teach beginning reading and a variety of other questions. Envisioned as the first year of a three year investigation, these studies were conducted by university professors and other professional educators with teachers of first graders at 27 sites across the nation from Boston to San Diego and from Milwaukee, Wisconsin to Austin, Texas. While the majority of the studies compared the effectiveness of two or more sets of materials for beginning reading instruction, other studies asked questions which were not addressed in the final analysis, including the correlation between teacher beliefs and teacher practices, the effects of inservice training, and the effects of extended readiness training.

Reports of the First Grade Studies. Each of the 27 First Grade Studies was detailed in a report to U.S.O.E. In general, these reports included statements of the problems to be addressed, reviews of related research, descriptions of the procedures followed, presentations of data, descriptions of the analysis of the data, and summaries and conclusions. These reports were among the first documents made available through the Educational Resources and Information Center (ERIC).

In May, 1966, twenty reports of the studies of the Cooperative Research Program in First Grade Reading Instruction were published in *The Reading Teacher*, and in October, six more reports of the studies were published in *The Reading Teacher*. (Olive Niles summary was published in March, 1967.) The researchers had found that no method was consistently superior, and Russell Stauffer (1966), editor of *The Reading Teacher*, concluded, "I have become acutely aware of one tidy

generalization -- there is no one method of teaching reading” (p. 4). At the time, Stauffer noted that “the widest variation among these uncontrolled variables was shown by the teachers involved” (p. 563), and Stauffer joined Bond (1966) in concluding that the greatest benefits of the studies were in teacher involvement, research experience, and professional growth.

In the summer of 1967, the final report from the Coordinating Center by Guy L. Bond and Robert Dykstra was published in *The Reading Research Quarterly* as the Report of the Cooperative Research Program in First Grade Reading Instruction. Bond and Dykstra (1967) focused on data from 15 studies in which investigators studied certain approaches to beginning reading instruction: basal, basal plus phonics, i.t.a., linguistic, language experience, and phonic/linguistic. Three questions were addressed in the report: (1) the relationship between various pupil, teacher, class, school, and community characteristics and pupil achievement in first grade reading; (2) the relationship of the approaches to beginning reading instruction and pupil achievement in first grade reading; and (3) the relationship of pupil readiness at the beginning of first grade and the outcomes with the various approaches to beginning reading instruction. The authors concluded that letter recognition was the single best predictor of first-grade reading achievement and that no particular method of beginning reading instruction and no particular set of reading materials proved superior to the others. They also reported that in many cases, greater differences in pupil achievement existed among classrooms within a treatment than between treatments (Bond & Dykstra, 1967, p. 96).

The primary researchers, the number of classrooms, the primary question or focus, and the findings of the studies included in the final report are listed in Table 2.

Table 2

## Studies Included in the Final Report from the Coordinating Center

Researchers / Location	Number of Classes	Study Focus	Findings
Elizabeth Bordeaux & N. H. Shope Goldsboro, North Carolina	30	Compared: 1. Scott Foresman basals, 2. Scott Foresman plus <i>Speech-to-Print Phonics</i> , 3. Scott Foresman plus phonics plus AV materials	No overall significant differences
Edward B. Fry Rutgers University	21	Compared: 1. i.t.a. <i>Early-to-Read</i> 2. diacritical markings on Sheldon readers 3. Sheldon readers	No overall significant differences
Harry T. Hahn Oakland University	36	Compared: 1. basal readers 2. i.t.a trade books 3. Van Allen language arts plus <i>Speech-to-Print Phonics</i>	Significant differences favoring i.t.a. and phonics for word reading
Robert B. Hayes Pennsylvania Dept. of Instruction	14	Compared: 1. Scott Foresman basals, 2. Scott Foresman plus American Educ. phonics, 3. Lippincott with filmstrips, 4. i.t.a. <i>Early-to Read</i>	No overall significant differences

William Kendrick San Diego County Department of Education	21	Compared: 1. language experience approach 2. Ginn readers	No overall significant differences
John Manning University of Minnesota had	36	Compared: 1. Ginn Basic Reading, 2. Ginn plus readiness, 3. Ginn plus readiness plus writing	Significant differences favoring readiness (but this group higher pre-tests)
Albert J. Mazurkiewicz Lehigh University	118 pairs	Compared: 1. i.t.a. <i>Early-to-Read</i> , 2. readers with TO (traditional orthography)	Significant differences favoring i.t.a for word reading but not for meaning
Helen Murphy Boston University	30	Compared: 1. Scott Foresman readers, 2. Scott Foresman plus <i>Speech-to-Print Phonics</i> , 3. Scott Foresman plus <i>Speech-to-Print</i> plus writing	Significant differences favoring <i>Speech-to-Print</i>
Robert B. Ruddell University of California Berkeley	24	Compared: 1. Sheldon <i>Basic Reading</i> 2. McGraw <i>Programmed Reading</i> 3. Sheldon plus supplement 4. McGraw plus supplement	Significant differences favoring McGraw for word reading and Sheldon for meaning
J. Wesley Schneyer University of Pennsylvania	24	Compared: 1. Charles C. Fries <i>Basic Reading Series</i> , 2. Scott Foresman readers	No overall significant differences

William Sheldon & Donald Lashinger  Syracuse University	21	Compared: 1. Ginn Basic Readers, 2. <i>Structural Reading Series</i> , 3. <i>Let's Read</i> by Bloomfield and Barnhart	No significant differences
Russell Stauffer  University of Delaware	20	Compared: 1. language arts approach, 2. basic readers	Significant differences favoring language arts (but this group had higher pre-test scores)
Harold J. Tanyzer & Harvey Alpert  Hofstra University	23	Compared: 1. Lippincott <i>Basic Reading</i> , 2. i.t.a. <i>Early-to-Read</i> , favoring i.t.a. 3. Scott Foresman basals	Significant differences favoring i.t.a. and Lippincott
Elaine Vilscek, Lorraine Morgan, and Donald Cleland  University of Pittsburgh	24	Compared: 1. co-ordinated language experience approach, 2. Scott Foresman readers	Significant differences favoring language experience for meaning
Nita M. Wyatt  University of Kansas	30	Compared: 1. sex groups with basals, 2. sex groups with Lippincott favoring 3. ability groups with basals	Significant differences favoring Lippincott for word reading

The researchers, the focus of each study, and the findings of each study *not* included in the final report from the Coordinating Center are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Studies *Not* Included in the Final Report from the Coordinating Center

Researchers / Location	Study Focus	Findings
Jeanne S. Chall & Shirley Feldman City College of New York	Correlated June reading achievement with teacher characteristics recorded with a Classroom Observation Inventory	Positive correlation between June reading achievement and teacher competence, a thinking approach, and appropriate material. Teacher statements did not correlate with observed practices.
Albert J. Harris & Blanche L. Sewer City University of New York	Compared: 1. basal reader approach, 2. basal plus phonovisual, 3. language experience, 4. language experience plus audio-visual phonics	Significant differences favoring basal readers
Arthur W. Heilman Pennsylvania State University	Compared: 1. experimental teachers with two-week preschool training seminar and 25 after-school meetings, 2. control teachers	No significant differences
Thomas Horn University of Texas	Compared: 1. oral-aural English, 2. oral-aural Spanish 3. audio-lingual English	No significant differences (A large number of zero scores were obtained on pre-tests.)

James B. Macdonald, Compared: No significant differences  
Theodore L. Harris, 1. self-selected tradebooks  
& John S. Mann plus teacher conferences,  
2. ability-group procedures  
University of  
Wisconsin

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Sister Marita Compared: No overall significant  
differences  
Marquette 1. basal groups AM and  
University individualized reading PM,  
Milwaukee, WI 2. basal groups AM and PM,  
3. child-centered instruction  
with discussion

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Roy McCanne Compared: Significant differences  
favoring basal readers  
Colorado 1. *Betts Basic Readers*,  
Department 2. a TESL method with  
of Education 3. language experience  
method of Van Allen

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Katherine A. Morrill Compared: No overall significant  
differences  
South Connecticut 1. consultant help on a one-  
State College to-one basis,  
2. consultant help with  
groups of teachers

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Olive Niles Compared: No overall significant  
differences  
Springfield, MA 1. basal readers,  
2. remediation time,  
3. readiness plus trade books  
4. readiness plus trade books  
plus remediation time

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Hale C. Reid & Louise Beltramo  State University of Iowa	Compared: 1. Ginn basal readers, 2. McKee Harrison readers, 3. Easy-to-read books, 4. Continental Press skills development	No significant differences
George D. Spache, Micaela C. Andres, H. A. Curtis, M. L. Rowland, M. L. Fields  University of Florida	Compared: 1. typical basal readers, 2. Continental press visual discrimination, visual- motor skills, blending, and rhyming	No significant differences
Doris Spencer  Johnson State College	Compared: 1. Scott Foresman basals, 2. individualized approach plus Speech-to-Print phonics plus story reading	Significant differences favoring the individualized approach

### Summary

The First Grade Studies were the nationwide set of studies conducted at 27 sites across the nation during the mid-1960's to address the pressing question about the best way to teach beginning reading and a variety of other questions. The controversies which prompted the First Grade Studies were manifestations of contentious times and developing concerns about American schooling and about reading instruction. During World War II, as the country turned from its tradition of isolationism toward internationalism and as government spending on wartime production gave Americans a rapidly rising standard of living, the memorization and recitation of rural schools was being replaced by attention to children's interests and education for the modern world. In the late forties, with the emergence of the Cold



War, the ideological struggle between democracy and Communism, and with the lifestyle changes which accompanied Americans' moving from rural to urban areas, there was movement away from the time-honored American value of individualism. During the early 1950's, as criticism of modern education grew in the popular press, the contentions were manifested in concerns about reading instruction. Whole word methods, which had replaced the alphabet and phonics methods of the early twentieth century, were now challenged, especially with the publication of Rudolf Flesch's *Why Johnny Can't Read* (1955). Although the leaders in the field of reading lined up against Flesch, his book became a bestseller, and with the launch of Sputnik, the contentious debates of the times escalated into a crisis. As schools became the avenue to victory in the Cold War, the debate about reading methods became a war between phonics and meaning. The consensus position favoring emphasis on whole words and meaning was challenged by scientific methods giving emphasis to letters and sounds, including the linguistic method and i.t.a., among others, as well as by child-centered approaches, including individualized reading and a language experience approach. Reading researchers responded by calling for cooperative research, holding a series of planning meetings which resulted in funding through the U.S.O.E. for the First Grade Studies. While the majority of the studies compared two or more sets of materials to find the best method of beginning reading instruction, reports in *The Reading Teacher* and in the *Reading Research Quarterly* concluded that no method was consistently superior.

## Chapter Three

### Methodology

This historical investigation was conducted to collect the retrospective views of the living primary researchers of the First Grade Studies through oral history interviews, to collect additional perspectives and contextualizing information from a review of the professional literature and popular press as well as from relevant histories, to develop generalizations through analysis and categorization of the informants' statements, to create a historical interpretation of the findings, and to apply historical understanding to the controversy about methods for beginning reading instruction.

Researcher background. This research has arisen out of my curiosity. Having been a reading teacher for almost twenty years before I began this investigation, I had become intrigued with the “great debate” about methods for teaching beginning reading. Time and again colleagues and parents asked me whether I thought a phonics approach or a whole language approach was the best way to teach reading, and time and again, the inquisitors were not satisfied with my ambiguous response. I was left curious about the reasons for the debate. A second attraction to historical research developed from my fascination with the historical references in graduate reading courses. When I learned that the perennial question about the best way to teach beginning reading had been addressed in the sixties by the First Grade Studies and when I found that the interest of the field of reading had been piqued by re-publication of the final report from the Coordinating Center in the 1997 *Reading Research Quarterly*, inquiry about the First Grade Studies became the topic of my attention for the better part of five years.

### Oral History Interviews

After reading the summaries of the twenty-seven First Grade Studies published in May and October, 1966, and in March, 1967, in *The Reading Teacher* as well as the final report of the Cooperative Research Program in First Grade Reading Instruction by Bond and Dykstra published in 1967 in the *Reading Research Quarterly*, I arranged and conducted oral history interviews with surviving primary researchers in the First Grade Studies. The statements gathered in oral history interviews are the recollections and reminiscences of living people about the past (Sitton, Mehaffy, & Davis, 1983). These distanced perspectives, which probed beyond the surface of the published summaries, were used to develop a historical interpretation and understanding of the First Grade Studies.

Locating the informants. Initially, my committee chair and I met with Robert Ruddell, one of the primary researchers in the First Grade Studies, at the annual meeting of the International Reading Association (I.R.A.) in Atlanta, Georgia, on May 5, 1997. Ruddell graciously shared a few personal experiences and provided the locations of other researchers. Then, I made a list of all of the primary researchers and set about locating all I could. I was able to identify and locate 14 living primary researchers in the First Grade Studies from various sources, for example, from graduate faculty, other primary researchers, university websites, and internet databases. I was able to locate Jeanne Chall, Robert Dykstra, Shirley Feldman, Edward Fry, Harry Hahn, Dorsey Hammond, Donald Lashinger, John Manning, Albert Mazurkiewicz, Robert Ruddell, Nita Wyatt Sundbye, Harold Tanyzer, and Elaine Vilscek as well as Donald Durrell, who is credited with creating the design. After obtaining human subjects permission from the Human Subjects Committee of

the University of Texas at Austin, I approached the primary researchers I had located for oral history interviews with a brief introductory letter sent through the U. S. mail. I received replies by U. S. mail, by e-mail, and by telephone. Hahn's office called to say his memories had faded, and Durrell's daughter called to tell me that he would not be able to participate because he could not speak. Feldman did not reply. Tanyzer replied and did not consent to participate. Finally, I was able to interview ten primary researchers, which represents about one-third of the original primary researchers.

Developing and refining the interview questionnaire. The interviews were guided by a set of questions designed to generate multiple perspectives. My interests included learning about the major influences on each investigator's work, their memories about the First Grade Studies, and their views about the studies after a period of thirty years. Because of time constraints, I adopted the more structured format of "the long interview" (McCracken, 1988) which is more sharply focused and more intensive than a life history interview. The long interview is guided by an open-ended questionnaire, designed to give the interviewer a "highly efficient, productive, 'stream-lined' instrument of inquiry" (McCracken, 1988, p. 7), thus enabling the interviewer and informant to maximize their time together. I originally planned to conduct unstructured interviews, but I developed and revised a more focused set of questions after receiving guidance from my committee chair. The final set of questions includes biographical questions to uncover the informants' formative experiences, contextualizing questions to ascertain the guiding philosophies and perspectives of the researchers, informational questions to retrieve unrecorded facts and clarify the available information, and impact questions to discern lasting influences and applications to current issues. The interview questions are in Table 4.

## Table 4

### Interview Questions

Formative experiences:

1. Would you tell me a little about your early reading experiences?
2. Where did you study and get your degrees? Who were your mentors?
3. What grades did you teach? Where? Would you describe the children?
4. Would you tell me a little about how you came to the field of reading?

Perspectives on literacy issues in the sixties:

1. Where were you in the sixties?
2. How would you describe the field of reading in the sixties?
3. What were the predominant views? What were the emergent views?
4. Whose work in language and literacy was significant to you in the sixties?
5. What event do you consider most important in reading research in the 60's?

The First Grade Studies:

1. What do you remember about the First Grade Studies?
2. What events do you think led to the First Grade Studies?
3. How did you become involved in the First Grade Studies?
4. Would you tell me about your memories of the early planning meetings?
5. What were you most intensely curious about at the time?
6. In addition to your reported findings, what else did you learn?
7. What to you seemed different or unique about the conduct of the studies?
8. How did you view the First Grade Studies when they were completed?
9. How do you now view the First Grade Studies?
10. What do you see as the importance or contribution of the First Grade Studies?

Perspectives on current issues:

1. What issues do you consider the most important in beginning reading today?
2. How do these issues compare with the issues of the sixties?

Wrapping Up:

1. What other thoughts would you like to share?
2. Do you have any letters, diaries, or books I could use to understand the time?
3. If you remember any other anecdotes, would you share them with me?

Arranging the interviews. My informants and I negotiated times and locations for the interviews in various ways, and as much as was possible, given my time constraints, we met at times and places convenient to the informants. Before leaving to travel to the sites of the interviews, I confirmed the meeting times with the informants by U. S. mail, an e-mail, or a telephone call, depending on informants'

preferences. When time allowed, I also sent a copy of the interview questions and a copy of the informed consent agreement for the informants' consideration. The names of the informants and the dates and locations of the interviews are listed in Table 5.

Table 5

Interviews

<u>Informant Names</u>	<u>Interview Dates</u>	<u>Locations</u>
Donald Lashinger	March 17th 1998	College of William and Mary
Jeanne S. Chall	March 18, 1998	Harvard University
Robert Ruddell	May 4, 1998	Orlando, Florida
Albert Mazurkiewicz	July 15, 1998	Kean University
W. Dorsey Hammond	July 20, 1998	Jackson, Mississippi
Robert Dykstra	July 23, 1998	University of Minnesota
John C. Manning	July 23, 1998	University of Minnesota
Elaine Vilscek	November 20, 1999	Denver, Colorado
Nita Wyatt Sundbye	November 27, 1999	Lawrence, Kansas
Edward B. Fry	December 2, 1999	Orlando, Florida

Equipment. Sitton, Mehaffy, and Davis (1983) and Brown (1988), among others, made suggestions about purchasing a reliable tape recorder, checking for its proper functioning, and taking extra audio tapes and batteries to the interviews. I considered video taping the interviews but opted for using a small, unobtrusive audio tape recorder to facilitate comfort and candor. I checked my equipment carefully before leaving for each interview, and at that time, I placed a lead on the tape with my name, the date, the location, and the informant's name. Along with the extra tapes and batteries, I took at least two copies of the consent form, two copies of the interview questions, and paper and pens for taking notes.

Conducting the interviews. Nine of the ten informants met with me at the scheduled time and location. Fry was ill on the scheduled day of the interview, but he

subsequently sent handwritten responses to the interview questions as well as his vita and numerous journal articles, and he met with me informally at the annual meeting of the National Reading Conference in December, 1999. For four interviews, we met at a conference hotel; for five, we met in the informant's office; and for one, we met in the informant's home. Although Brown (1988) admonishes interviewers to help informants become comfortable and relaxed, in most cases it was the informants who helped me. I was, for the most part, welcomed into my informants' worlds and into their memories. Two of the informants invited me to eat with them; others simply allotted me one hour of their time. Some of the informants were cordial; others were more perfunctory. Chall did not feel comfortable with the tape recorder, and she asked me to take notes. Remarkably, however, eight of the informants participated with me in tape recording the oral history interview. For each of the interviews, we were able to find a secluded location where we could avoid background noise, but during several interviews, we were interrupted.

Although my interview questions focused our talk, I followed the advice of Sitton, Mehaffy, and Davis (1983) and adopted a more flexible questioning sequence. I supplemented the questions in the list by extemporaneous prompts for elaboration, with probes to uncover information about the social / political and educational contexts, and with requests for illuminating stories and anecdotes. I attempted to avoid leading questions -- questions which suggest by their phrasing the answer expected by the interviewer (Henige, 1982), but I asked for clarification when I did not understand, e.g., "When did that happen?" or "Please tell me more." I also gave floating prompts, e.g., raising my eyebrows or repeating key terms as questions, as well as conversational affirmations, e.g., O.K. or um hum (McCracken, 1988).

Although Briggs (1986), Brown (1988), and Seidman (1991) urge interviewers to gain information from pauses or nervous laughter, I found my informants to be confident and polished conversationalists who not only responded with well-considered and articulate answers but also with unexpected information and important personal insights.

Listening as much as possible is the “cardinal rule” of the oral history interviewer in order to permit the informant to reveal relevant material and unexpected insights (Stave, 1977). Brown (1988) has observed that interviewers who are by nature quiet and reserved find it easier to allow the informants to do most of the talking, and I found this to be natural since I much prefer to listen. In addition, Sitton, Mehaffy, and Davis (1983) advise interviewers to be cooperative, reassuring, courteous, and attentive; to smile and nod; in a word, to be facilitators.

There came a point, after about an hour in most of the interviews, when my informants and I had considered all or most of the questions and had exhausted the subject matter. At that point, I thanked the informants for their participation and invited them to communicate with me about any other thoughts they might want to share. We also reviewed the informed consent agreement, which reminded them that I would be sending a copy of the transcript for their review and comment.

Developing and revising the transcripts. The interviews were transcribed, word-for-word. On the average the eight interviews resulted in transcripts of twenty, single-spaced pages; and on the average, and I devoted one hour to each page, for more than one hundred and fifty hours of transcription activity. Brown (1988) argues against transcription because “the nuances of inflection and emphasis cannot be captured on paper” (p. 50), but I found creating, reading, and re-reading the



transcripts to be the source of recurring insight. As Seidman (1991) and others advise, I sent the transcripts to the informants with letters asking for additions and corrections and forms asking for indications of acceptance of the transcripts as accurate renderings of our interviews. The responses varied: Hammond did not respond; Dykstra and Mazurkiewicz wrote their changes on the acceptance form; others made marks on their transcripts; and Vilscek asked for extensive revisions, which in effect led me to produce a second version of the transcript. Since the interviews are both recorded and transcribed, they may be primary source material for other historical research, and they have been contributed to the archives in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Texas at Austin.

Dependability of the informants' statements. Concerns about the dependability of statements derived from oral history interviews arise because memories are “sometimes unreliable even when (informants) are giving eyewitness accounts of happenings in the past” (Evans, 1999, p. 66). Because human memory is fallible (Sitton, Mehaffy, & Davis, 1983), the statements from oral history interviews may be verified with written records. “When there is a conflict between written and oral documents, it is not always the oral testimony that is unreliable. Occasionally, oral history will cast a new light on written records and prove them false or at least show that they must be interpreted in a new way” (Hoopes, 1979, p. 10). Nevertheless, oral history statements unsupported by contemporary documents may be spurious, and I addressed concerns about the dependability of the data through the method of triangulation. As suggested by Glaser and Strauss (1967), library resources were used to corroborate the statements gathered in the interviews and thereby establish their dependability.

### Contextualizing Resources

In order to achieve historical significance, the oral historian must engage in library research and contextualize the interview statements (Hoopes, 1979). Glaser and Strauss (1967) maintained that every library resource represents at least one person who is equivalent to an interviewee: "In publications, people converse, announce positions, argue with a range of eloquence, and describe events or scenes in ways entirely comparable to what is seen and heard during field work" (p. 163). In addition, library resources have the advantage of providing accessibility to long deceased, geographically distant, or reluctant persons (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Trevelyan once said that the appeal of history "compels the historian to 'scorn delights' and live laborious days in the ardour of his own curiosity to know what happened long ago in that land of mystery we call the past" (Trevelyan quoted in Cannadine, 1992, p. 196). Indeed, I immersed myself for the better part of four years in my primary and secondary source materials.

In addition to the summaries of the First Grade Studies and the final report from the Coordinating Center, innumerable other documents served as primary sources. The final reports of the twenty-seven First Grade Studies sent to the Cooperative Research Office at U.S.O.E. were important; materials for children including basal readers and testing materials were also important; most important, however, were systematic searches of several professional journals: *The Reading Teacher*, *The Reading Research Quarterly*, *The Elementary English Review*, *Elementary English*, and *The Elementary School Journal*. Information was also gathered from the popular press, for example, *Time*, *Life*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, *The New York Times*, teacher education methods textbooks, reports of International

Reading Association Conferences, and current articles and books.

As secondary sources, I read and studied a score of books on historical method as well contextualizing histories of the fifties and sixties to help situate the First Grade Studies within the social / political and educational contexts of the time. Finally, documentaries about the times and films from the times contributed to my understanding.

#### Analysis of the Informants' Statements

Like Evans (1999), I found that “doing historical research is rather like doing a jigsaw puzzle where the pieces are not all present in one box but are scattered over the house in several boxes and where . . . a significant number of the pieces are still missing” (Evans, 1999, p. 77). Nevertheless, at some point, the historian must begin to look for similarities and differences among people and events, to discern types and patterns, and form categories. Historians as disparate as Elton (1967) and Carr (1962) and Evans (1999) have agreed that it is the formation of generalizations that distinguishes history from a chronicle. “The accretion of knowledge about the past does not by itself guarantee an increased ability to understand ourselves” (Donovan, 1973, p. 55). Indeed, it is in the analysis and interpretation of the source material that the act of creation lies (Donovan, 1973; Evans, 1999).

Constant comparative analysis. The informants' statements were analyzed using the method of constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The initial analytical process of open coding of the statements gathered in the oral history interviews involved naming concepts in the statements by looking at parts of each sentence or paragraph and giving names to ideas and events. First, two researchers independently read and coded transcripts; they subsequently met and agreed upon

initial categories for the informants' statements. Continuing to use the method of constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), the analysis then moved between coding the statements and formulating categories, which are the objects of the analysis (McCracken, 1988). The oral historian compares the statements, giving attention to similarities and differences; patterns are seen and categories form (Bailyn, 1994). While a single case can indicate a category, and a few more cases can confirm the category, the researcher cannot begin to know all of the categories until the process of analysis is well underway (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Throughout the process "theoretical sensitivity" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was the essential characteristic by which I attempted to focus on relevant data and be alert to the subtleties of meaning because I intended to capture the more subtle messages. After additional independent coding, the two researchers met a second time to arrive at agreement about the categories across the transcripts, and these final categories were further confirmed by the independent inspection of two colleagues. In addition, throughout the processes of coding the data and developing the categories, I marked statements and anecdotes from the transcripts as characteristic illustrations or as descriptions of events which could be used while writing a narrative (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Dependability of the analysis. Evans (1999) asserts there is a qualitative difference between the statements made by the informants and the interpretations advanced by historians. Indeed, historians transform the traces of the past into history through a process that is influenced by values, ideological perspectives, and epistemological positions (Munslow, 1997). Because the oral historian is the instrument used to understand the ways in which the informants see the world

(McCracken, 1988) and because oral history may be a projection of the historian's way of thinking (Bailyn, 1994), attention was given to dependability through the method of triangulation. No *a priori* determination of categories was made; nor was special attention given to any particular dimensions. The issue of the dependability of the analysis was addressed when the two researchers met to agree about initial categories for the informants' statements, when they later met to reach agreement about the categories across the transcripts, and when the categories were again confirmed by the independent inspection of two colleagues.

#### Constructing an Explanation

An oral historian starts with the informants' statements, information from the contextualizing references, and a provisional interpretation. "As (s)he works, both the interpretation and the selection and ordering of facts may undergo subtle and perhaps partly unconscious changes through the reciprocal action of one on the other" (Carr, 1962, p. 30). While comparing statements, historians "elicit" meaning by using their "historical imagination" (White, 1973), which differs from a literary imagination in that it is bounded by the documents (Bailyn, 1994). Somekawa and Smith (1988) describe this as a dialectical process in which facts lead to interpretations and these in turn lead to a search for further evidence and so on. "Facts thus precede interpretation conceptually, while interpretation precedes evidence" (Evans, 1999, p. 66).

"Filling in the gaps" is "a rationale that is still given for the vast majority of Ph.D. theses in history today" (Evans, 1999, p. 17), but the criteria for judging the value of historical writing are more often based upon its power to provide explanation. A historian is more than a chronicler; a historian is an interpreter of the meaning of the past (Kraus & Joyce, 1985). Historical explanation can be

accomplished by putting the categories of evidence into context (Kraus & Joyce, 1985), by arguing that events were part of one movement rather than another, that they belonged to one period or trend rather than another. For example, Evans (1999) suggests that historians can uncover deep structures when they juxtapose the intrigues and rivalries and the social, political, and intellectual trends; by situating surface disturbances within their undercurrents, historians can reveal underlying and persistent belief systems and mentalities.

Following these suggestions, the categories of informants' statements were juxtaposed with the historical trends found in the review of the literature. I compared the categories of the statements made by the informants with the patterns and trends revealed in the contextualizing resources and developed a theory to explain the changes across time in methods of beginning reading instruction.

The issue of voice. Who (then) is the author of an oral history? Is it the informant expressing recollections and reminiscences, or is it the historian posing questions, analyzing, and constructing an explanation? Frish (1990) proposes a synthetic reconstruction where authorship is shared. While Burke (1991) cautions historians to make themselves present in their work “not out of self-indulgence but as a warning to the reader that they are not omniscient or impartial and that other interpretations besides theirs are possible” (p. 239), I, for the most part, intended to rely on the informants' statements to guide the construction of categories. Nevertheless, the framework for the analysis and the categories themselves are surely products of my questions and biases.

The issue of purpose. While realist historians look to the past for forgotten alternatives and believe the present should be kept out the past (Elton, 1967; 1991),

historians since Carr (1962) have adopted a pragmatic view, believing that the criterion for interpretation is suitability for some present purpose. Zeldin (1976) proposes that the reason for resurrecting the past is “to make the present aware of all the forces that make it what it is” (p. 240); Bailyn (1994) reiterates that the reason for historical study is to explain how the present world came to be; and Evans (1999) confirms that “all history has a present-day purpose and inspiration, which may be moral or political or ideological” (p. 168). Perhaps, most resoundingly, historians believe history is important because man understands himself in terms of his history (Donovan, 1973), because we are rooted in our yesterdays (Munslow, 1997), because our sense of the past shapes our view of ourselves and our world (Bailyn, 1994), and because our memories of the past are the *Mystic Chords of Memory* that give shape and substance to our lives (Kammen, 1991).

### Limitations

The limitations of this inquiry may be characterized as limitations in the data collection procedures and limitations in the analysis procedures. Problems for historical inquiry arise from the nature of the evidence. Because the data sources for historical inquiry seem to be limited only by the energy and resourcefulness of the researcher, historical evidence can seem overwhelming in its abundance (Tyack, 1967), but the limits of time and place usually constrain the researcher, yielding fragmentary and incomplete evidence (Winks, 1969). My interviews were limited to those primary researchers who were still living and further limited by the survival of their memories. In addition, Borg and Gall (1989) emphasized the importance of evaluating the competence, biases, and motives of respondents and interviewees. "The gulf between what is actually stated in a written source and what actually

occurred, the deficiencies of historical memory in oral testimony, and the gap between rhetoric and practice are just three of the problems faced by historians in their attempts to make sense of the past" (Foster, 1995, p. 29).

Despite casting a broad net, it is inevitable that the documents uncovered and used as sources represent only a fraction of the possible documents. The available library resources are "the product of the chance survival of some documents and the corresponding chance loss or deliberate destruction of others" (Evans, 1999, p. 75). Historians of many persuasions not only agree that their work is limited by the traces of the past; they also agree that the documents are fallible. The documents are written by human beings who make mistakes or assert false claims, and "the social institutions and material practices which were involved in their production played a significant part in shaping what was said and how it was said" (Somekawa & Smith, 1988, p. 153). At the very least, "documents are always written from somebody's point of view, with a specific purpose and audience in mind" (Evans, 1999, p. 70).

Subjectivity is the salient limitation of any historical inquiry. Until recently, most historians have claimed their accounts, having been based upon exhaustive research and deliberation, were factual descriptions (Tosh, 1991). Recently, however, there has been increasing recognition that the historical narrative is shaped by the perspective of the author (Davidson & Lytle, 1992) and that the historian's moral or aesthetic stance is far more important in determining what history is written than considerations of empirical data (White, 1983). Indeed, the method of constant comparative analysis is predicated, in large part, upon the "templates" the researcher brings to the analysis (Seidman, 1991), and it is the experiences and viewpoints of the researcher that are used to generate categories and hypotheses.



While the "constant comparative method is especially useful for generation of theories" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 114), there is no assertion of generality. The explicit coding and analytic procedure of constant comparative analysis is designed to discover theory -- not to test theory. The grounded theory is a hypothesis about relations among categories that is suggested -- not tested. Moreover, since a grounded theory is developed from reality, a reality in which active persons continually shape and re-shape their world, "the published word is not the final one, but only a pause in the never-ending process of generating theory" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 40).

## Chapter Four

### Findings

Interviews with primary researchers of the First Grade Studies resulted in eight transcripts and two sets of notes, which were read and re-read and analyzed by the method of constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Straus, 1967). Initially, two researchers independently coded statements from the transcripts. After meeting and agreeing upon initial categories for the statements, the analysis then moved between coding the statements and formulating categories. Giving attention to similarities and differences, patterns of statements and categories of memories began to emerge. Categories across the transcripts were confirmed during a second meeting between the two researchers and by the independent inspection of two colleagues.

The inquiry has been guided by four research questions: (1) How do primary researchers view the First Grade Studies in retrospect? (2) What were the guiding philosophies and perspectives of those researchers? (3) How did their questions, methods, and findings relate to the context? (4) How can the First Grade Studies contribute to our current understandings? While the broader contextual issues suggested by questions (3) and (4) are addressed as a historical explanation in chapter five, questions (1) and (2) are addressed in this chapter as categories across transcripts, which explicate the perspectives of the surviving primary researchers and constructions of composite memories gleaned from the analytical process.

Prompted by the structure of the categories of interview questions, seven general themes were constructed from the transcript analysis: Perspectives of the surviving researchers, participants' views on impelling influences, reflection on planning the First Grade Studies, reflection on the conduct of the studies, perspectives

on the outcomes, impact of the First Grade Studies, and comparisons of issues of the sixties with current issues.

### Perspectives of the Surviving Researchers

All of the researchers I interviewed as part of this investigation were relatively young professionals at the time of the First Grade Studies. Hammond was just beginning a doctoral program (5:190-191), and Lashinger was finishing his doctoral program (1:35). Ruddell (2:58) and Vilscek (2:43) had finished their doctorates in 1963 while Dykstra (5:178) and Wyatt Sundbye (7:264) had finished theirs in 1962. Fry (personal communication, 1998) joined the faculty at Rutgers University in 1963, and Manning had been at “Cal State, Fresno” since 1960 (7:249, 251). Only Mazurkiewicz and Chall were relatively established in their careers. Mazurkiewicz had been at Lehigh University since 1957 (7:261; 8:313), and Chall (personal communication, 1998) had been at City College, New York since 1952. Because most of the informants were relatively young professionals at the time of the First Grade Studies, they may have had different vantage points than the “giants” in the field, who had established reputations for research. Manning referred to a “quantum leap” between the younger participants and the “big stars” (11:439). Indeed, the views of Bond, Durrell, Harris, Horn, McCullough, Russell, Smith, Spache, Stauffer, Witty and other established leaders in the field may have provided a broadened view.

The informants had varied experiences while learning to read. Of those who remembered learning to read, only Hammond said he was not reading before he went to school (2:72-72); in first grade, however, he quickly moved to the top reading group (2:47-48). Vilscek (1:14), Wyatt Sundbye (1:13), and Mazurkiewicz (3:103) said they learned to read before they went to school. Hammond (1:34), Lashinger

(1:10), and Manning (1:35-36) remembered being read to at home. Dykstra and Wyatt Sundbye remembered being avid readers: Dykstra remembered waiting for boxes of books, which arrived at his one-room school house from the county library every six weeks, and “devouring” them during the first week (1:18); and Wyatt Sundbye remembered reading a book a day in eighth and ninth grades (2:48-53). Only Ruddell said, “My mother believed I had a reading problem” (1:13), but he and his mother read and re-read library books one summer, and he “never had a reading problem after that!” (1:16).

Similarly, the informants had a varied teaching experiences. Hammond (3:85) and Mazurkiewicz (7:248) taught the fourth grade; Dykstra (1:34), Ruddell (2:64), and Wyatt Sundbye (3:93) taught in fifth grade. Lashinger (1:22) and Manning (2:67) taught in junior high. Fry taught in a college reading lab (personal communication, 1998). Only Vilscek (2:71) taught in the primary grades.

Becoming involved in the First Grade Studies. Six of the ten informants disclosed the influence of their mentors in becoming involved in the First Grade Studies. Ruddell remembered his mentor at Indiana University, Ruth Strickland, who involved him in meetings with the leading linguists from across the country (4:163-164). Manning recalled meeting Donald Durrell, and he said, “That meeting literally changed my life. Durrell asked me to come . . . to Boston University and study for my doctorate degree” (3:100-102). Similarly, Dykstra said that “Ted Clymer, who was then a professor at University of Minnesota and was a graduate of River Falls, came through River Falls [where Dykstra was teaching] looking for a teaching assistant, a graduate assistant, . . . and I took the teaching assistantship” (1:38).

Others remembered being “tapped” (Hammond, 14:554) by their mentors to

work on the First Grade Studies. Vilscek was asked to write the proposal by her mentor Donald Cleland (9:338), and Lashinger recalled his advisor William Sheldon asking him to take care of the proposal and the approvals (4:129-140). Hammond was attending the University of Delaware to study for a master's degree, and when Russell Stauffer invited him to work on the study of first grade reading, Hammond enrolled in the doctoral program (5:190).

Views of beginning reading instruction. All of the informants were asked to speak about views of beginning reading instruction during the fifties and early sixties, and all agreed that the predominant view centered on whole word basal readers with controlled vocabulary (Chall, personal communication, 1998; Dykstra, 6:222; E. B. Fry, personal communication, 1998; Hammond, 6:244; Lashinger, 2:57-58; Manning, 4:137; Mazurkiewicz, 8:294-297; Ruddell, 6:219; Vilscek, 5:192; & Wyatt Sundbye, 8:308). Dykstra considered the reasons for the predominance of these whole word basals:

That probably goes back to Gray and so forth. Nobody questioned it. . . . I remember when I went to the county normal school, I was taught that we don't teach children the alphabet before they learn to read, and the reason we don't teach children the alphabet is because we don't want them focusing on letters. We want them focusing on words. Meaning was paramount (6:217-222).

Wyatt Sundbye emphatically concurred:

I was taught that you use the whole word method -- meaning based -- the whole word method, and that phonics was an absolute no, no. You don't do that if you're a good teacher. . . . I really believed that, that any teachers who taught phonics were really dinosaurs -- throw backs. They weren't in the modern world. They weren't up to-date. They weren't doing the right thing. I was brainwashed (8:308-318).

Despite the predominance of the whole word basals, all of the researchers I

interviewed agreed that a multiplicity of options -- none of which owned a particularly large research base -- were being considered during the late fifties and the early sixties. Dykstra characterized the times as “exciting . . . transitional . . . experimental. . . [It was] a time at which people for the first time took a serious look at the basal reader” (5:186-191), and Hammond reiterated that “it was a time when reading was breaking away from the standard vocabulary control -- Dick and Jane and Spot and Sally kind of thing” (6:243-244). Mazurkiewicz attributed this to “the ferment, the discussions, the arguments in the field about whether we needed to have phonics, whether we needed to have a linguistic approach, whether we needed the other kinds of approaches” (15:581-583), and Dykstra added, “Suddenly, everybody was saying we’ve got to help children make this association between letters and sounds from the beginning, which was sort of revolutionary at the time” (7:258-260).

Four of the informants noted the influence of the linguists in the late fifties and the early sixties. Dykstra explained that linguists were “coming along sort of saying, ‘Why aren’t we taking advantage of the alphabetic system we have? . . . Why are we ignoring the alphabetic system and teaching kids to recognize words as wholes?’” (6:211-212), and Ruddell elaborated, “In the sixties there was a very strong impact from the field of linguistics” (4:155-156). Ruddell disclosed the strong influence of the linguistic view on him in his central position as Strickland’s assistant: “We had the most significant linguists in the country coming to do a major study that she had been commissioned to do from the U. S. Office of Education on the impact of linguistics on language learning and on reading” (4:163 - 5:166). Ruddell explained the impact on his thinking:

What became clear in my mind, maybe it just seems clear now as I look back on the sixties, was that there is a lot of regularity to the English language.

Rudolf Flesch's effort in the late fifties had pointed to the regularity (5:166-169). . . . Henry Lee Smith and Charles Fries [had] the idea that, indeed, if we developed a strong regularity in the patterning and taught that, then kids ought to learn to read much better and much faster (5:179-181).

Ruddell was the only informant who commented on Noam Chomsky's "revolutionary" ideas about transformational grammar and the only informant who mentioned Ravin McDavid at the University of Chicago, a dialect specialist, and Nelson Francis at Brown University, a specialist in grammatical structures (4:158-161). Two other informants, Lashinger (5:187) and Wyatt Sundbye (9:361), noted the importance of Charles C. Fries and his book on structural linguistics.

Five informants remarked on the importance of the Initial Teaching Alphabet (i.t.a.). Dykstra (7:257) and Hammond (6:245) merely mentioned i.t.a., but Mazurkiewicz (23:922-924) continued to enthusiastically endorse its value and propose its use. Fry (personal communication, 1999) described efforts to spread i.t.a. to the United States from England while Manning explained that i.t.a. was called the Augmented Roman Alphabet until "Tanyzer and Mazurkiewicz developed sort of the American version of i.t.a." (13:532-533). Manning even claimed that because Kennedy was President, "people thought the Augmented Roman Alphabet was a Papist plot, and so they changed the name from the Augmented Roman Alphabet to the Initial Teaching Alphabet" (13:523-535). From Fry's perspective (personal communication, 1999), the name change arose because English parents did not want their children learning a Roman alphabet; they wanted their children to learn an English alphabet.

Although there was a dearth of description of the instructional materials which were developed during the late fifties and the early sixties, all of the informants mentioned these new materials. In addition to the five who noted the importance of

i.t.a., five remembered the “linguistic readers” (Dykstra, 7:257; Hammond, 6:246), especially “Bloomfield” (Mazurkiewicz, 12:476; Dykstra, 6:210; Lashinger, 5:185; Wyatt Sundbye, 9:362), and “Lippincott and the Open Court notion” (Mazurkiewicz, 12:481). Lashinger (5:188-189) and Hammond (6:246) mentioned the programmed reading materials published by McGraw Hill; and Hammond (7:248), Vilscek (5:196), and Dykstra (5:189) mentioned the language experience approach. Only Chall (personal communication, 1998) emphasized synthetic phonics, and, ironically, only Dykstra mentioned individualized reading (5:189).

#### Participants’ Views on Impelling Influences

The informants noted four important influences which seemed to impel the field of reading toward conducting the First Grade Studies. Two of these, Rudolf Flesch and the Soviet threat, arose during the fifties while two others, the influence of Sir James Pitman in collaboration with the Ford Foundation and the influence of Donald Durrell in collaboration with the United States Office of Education (U.S.O.E.), arose during the early years of the sixties.

The influence of Rudolf Flesch. Seven of the researchers I interviewed referred to the influence of Rudolf Flesch and his book *Why Johnny Can’t Read* (1955) as an impetus for the First Grade Studies. Hammond (7:266) merely named Flesch, but Ruddell explained, “Rudolf Flesch’s effort in the late fifties had pointed to the regularity, that we weren’t teaching phonics, and we weren’t doing a lot of things” (5:168-170). Fry said, “Flesch had told the world that phonics was going to cure everything” (personal communication, 1999); Mazurkiewicz said that Flesch “upset everybody” (8:306); and Chall (personal communication, 1998) said that the field was still trying to get over Rudolf Flesch’s book because it was such a shock to the field.



Dykstra spoke emphatically about *Why Johnny Can't Read*. "It was a best seller! . . . It was serialized in newspapers! People who had children who were reading perfectly well were suddenly wondering about why we were teaching reading this old fashioned way" (Dykstra, 6:207-210). Lashinger not only remembered the impact of Flesch; he also remembered the "the educational muckrakers of the time . . . the Arthur Bestors, the Charles Walcutts -- *Tomorrow's Illiterates*. Their popular writings were generating questions" (2:44-45).

The impact of the Soviet threat. Three of the informants also reconsidered the impact of the Soviet threat as one the factors propelling the development of the First Grade Studies. Hammond commented, "I think part of it was probably because of Sputnik" (7:260), and Manning elaborated, "There was a tremendous controversy centering around schools because of Sputnik. Sputnik went up and, therefore, our schools were failing us. What epitomized that more than anything else was [the characters in the Scott, Foresman basal series] Dick, Jane, Sally, Spot, and Puff" (4:129-131). Wyatt Sundbye was the only informant who reexamined the response of Admiral Hyman Rickover to Sputnik. She recalled that he "was writing . . . in the papers" (11:435-437) about the implications of Sputnik, and she explained:

Sputnik went up, and a lot went on in the newspapers about how the Russians were ahead of the United States in terms of education, and we had to accelerate the achievement of our students, and one of the things we need to do was to teach more earlier -- particularly in the first grade -- and to accelerate the phonics programs. In those basals we were using it took three years to get through basic phonics (9:349-354).

The influence of Sir James Pitman and John Downing. Three of the informants summoned memories of the influence of Sir James Pitman and of John Downing, a professor at the University of London. Manning mentioned Downing's

influence, and said he brought him to Lompoc, California to make a presentation about i.t.a. (13:530). Mazurkiewicz said he sponsored “a special conference on i.t.a. for John Downing and James Pitman and exposed everybody who had come to the conference to what was going on” (2:49-51). Fry (personal communication, 1999) also remembered Downing’s visits to this country to make presentations at I.R.A.

Fry, who used i.t.a. in his First Grade Study, revealed becoming interested in i.t.a. as he visited in England during the return trip from a year as a Fulbright lecturer in Uganda (personal communication, 1999). He remembered “stopping off in Cambridge” and learning about i.t.a., and later meeting Sir James Pitman. Fry said that because Pitman was interested in spreading i.t.a. to America, he held banquets for visiting Americans, and he invited Fry to a “nice dinner” in the House of Commons dining room. Fry was told that George Bernard Shaw wrote his plays in Pitman shorthand, and because he favored simplified spelling, Shaw left “a chunk” of his royalties to a foundation to simplify English spelling. Fry was also told that when royalties from Lerner and Lowe’s *Pygmalion* started “pouring” into the foundation, “Sir James” used his position on the board of the foundation, his publishing firm, and his influence as a member of Parliament to promote i.t.a. The goal was to “switch the whole English language,” but Pitman started with “kids,” thinking that when they grew up, they would see how “logical and sensible” the system was (E. B. Fry, personal communication, 1999).

Fry (personal communication, 1999) also said that Pitman “hired” John Downing to help him. Indeed, Mazurkiewicz remembered his association with James Pitman and with John Downing (2:50), which began when he was awarded a grant from the Ford Foundation to go to London to study i.t.a. and Downing’s experiments.

Mazurkiewicz said, “I was intrigued by this notion of reforming the orthography because I knew about Franklin’s attempt . . . about all the variety of attempts along the way including Bernard Shaw’s. . . . Therefore, I was interested in the possibilities of Pitman’s notions” (9:357-361). Mazurkiewicz spoke enthusiastically about his association with the Ford Foundation, saying, “I could do no wrong when I came back” (1:18-19). The Ford Foundation gave Mazurkiewicz \$150,000 over a three year period to study the use of i.t.a. in the schools in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania (1:25).

The influence of Donald Durrell. Fry wrote cautiously, “I believe Donald Durrell helped” (personal communication, 1998), and Wyatt Sundbye added tentatively, “Durrell, I think, was in on it” (12:459); but Mazurkiewicz stated emphatically, “Durrell was the prime mover!” (17:672-673), and Manning asserted with great certainty, “Durrell was uniquely the architect of the First Grade Studies. There’s no question about that. Those studies were Durrell’s studies. He devised those in the summers of 1962 and 1963” (3:106-108). Manning further explained, “[Durrell] was very single-minded (3:122), and “that single-mindedness of purpose, again, was what was needed to drive a study of that particular magnitude” (13:502-503). Manning attributed the U.S.O.E. funding for the First Grade Studies to Durrell’s friendship with Francis Keppel. “They were good friends and collegial friends” (4:152), and he explained, “When Kennedy was elected President, Keppel was named the Secretary of Education, and Keppel was the person who got the funding for the First Grade Studies” (4:140-142).

Political influences. When I asked the informants to consider political influences serving as impelling influences toward the First Grade Studies, seven did not respond directly, including Lashinger who answered, “None that I’ve thought

about” (2:52), and only three began to venture into explanations of then contemporary political forces. Vilscek conjectured, “Those were the years -- the Kennedy years -- and so the whole idea of the renewal was part of that, and we were taking a look at renewal in terms of instruction, as well” (19:764-766). Manning ventured, “I think that then the basal readers were holding a central position, and the code emphasis people were very conservative and pulling to the right” (14:555-557). After declaring, “I’m not going to talk about politics” (20:815), Hammond compared questions about reading with questions about political leadership, saying the reduction of questions about reading instruction to thinking about phonics -- without considering comprehension -- is comparable to the reduction of political leadership to thinking about the economy -- without considering “statesmanship or integrity” (21:825-826).

#### Reflection on Planning the First Grade Studies

For the researchers involved in the First Grade Studies, the studies may have been the most important event of the decade of the sixties, if for no other reason than that they devoted much of their time and energy to the projects. The informants worked on the proposals and attended planning meetings at the University of Minnesota before they began their research.

Becoming involved through the proposal process. Three informants explained that they became involved in the First Grade Studies when they were asked to participate in the proposal writing process. Wyatt Sundbye said she learned about the Request for Proposals (RFP) from U.S.O.E. from a reading consultant in a small town near the University of Kansas. “I wrote a proposal, sent it off, and I didn’t expect anything to happen with it. I got it. I was amazed” (7:275-277). Vilscek, who had just finished her Ph.D., said that Cleland asked her to write the proposal, and she “just sat

down and wrote” (9:342-343). Chall said the dean at City College asked her to write a proposal and offered an assistant to do the “leg work” (J. S. Chall, personal communication, 1998), and Lashinger had vivid memories of William Sheldon at Syracuse University giving him the opportunity to work on the proposal, a document of about “fifteen pages, mostly narrative, accompanied by a budget” (4:145):

I was the “go-fer” on the proposal. I was Bill Sheldon’s graduate assistant. He was telling me one time about this possibility, and he said he didn’t think that they would be submitting a proposal. I said, “Why not?” He said, “Because we don’t have the personnel.” I said, “I’ll do it.” About a week later he called me on a Sunday at my apartment. He said, “Come on over here this afternoon. I want to talk to you.” I went over. He handed me a hand written proposal that he had written. He said, “You get this taken care of via the secretary, and get it through the dean’s office in the School of Education, and the Syracuse University Research Corporation, which was the equivalent of our Sponsored Programs Office. They administered all federal dollars or all outside dollars. I had a week -- a deadline of a week -- to get it through those sources, and get the approvals and what-have-you. We made the deadline, and away it went (4:129-141).

According to Wyatt Sundbye (7:283), the selection of the proposals for funding was, in part, determined by geographic location. Manning confirmed this:

I know one of the reasons I was in was because I was dealing with an Hispanic population in a rural area. Albert J. Harris was in because he was dealing with a black population in a urban area. . . . Nita Wyatt, for example, from Kansas was dealing basically with a mid-western population. Roy McCanne, from the Colorado Department of Education, whom no one knew at all, was dealing basically with a rural Indian population in Colorado (11:421-427).

Apparently another criteria for selecting the proposals was the formation of a collegial work group. Dykstra pointed out that “Flesch didn’t have a study. Charles Walcutt didn’t have a study so the people who were involved were in most cases were kinda long-time colleagues who knew each other very well. There was no rancor. Meetings were fun” (18:720-724). Manning reiterated:

There wasn't in a sense a hidden agenda. People pretty much knew where we were coming from. For example, Tanyzer and Mazurkiewicz, we knew they were i.t.a. people. We knew Kendrick was a [language experience] person. We knew Stauffer was a [language experience] person. We knew I was a Durrell person. . . . We knew Spache tended to be . . . a basal reader type. Albert J. Harris, the same . . ." (10:406 - 11:416)

Perspectives on the planning meetings. The informants' memories of the planning meetings seemed vibrant and fresh because their talk became animated and their descriptions were clear and detailed. Manning said with certainty, "Originally the Coordinating Center was going to be at the University of Chicago" (3:110-111) because of Helen Robinson, "who was extremely popular and extremely visible" (13:496-497). Manning whispered that Chicago was not chosen as the site of the Coordinating Center because "Robinson was very critical of Durrell's research" (3:112-113). He explained that Robinson had written a scathing critique of Durrell's studies of success in first grade reading, and "Durrell was not a person that was lightly crossed" (13:500-501).

Manning believed the reason the University of Minnesota became involved was "Durrell's friendship for Guy Bond" (3:109-110). Those who best knew Guy L. Bond, professor at the University of Minnesota, remembered him as a person who could facilitate collegial working relationships. Dykstra said, "Dr. Bond was chosen to be director of the Coordinating Center because he was such a great conciliator. He was wonderful at sort of reaching compromise and so forth" (4:127-129), and further, "He was a wonderful man, number one. He was a wonderful human being. He had wide interests. He was very enthusiastic about life. . . . He was fun to be around" (2:80-82). Manning reiterated, "Bond was so good because he was so affable. He liked everybody, and everybody liked him. . . . He was able to reach consensus very,

very quickly because people liked him so much” (8:320-324), and further, “I attribute the implementation and the agreement and how the study was done completely to Bond. Durrell could not have done it on his own. He would have alienated the hell out of everyone in the room!” (Manning, 13:509-513). Manning remembered decisions at the meetings being reached through consensus:

I cannot recall one vote ever being taken. I think that Bond was astute enough if he felt as though there was a disagreement or a *demur*, he was bright enough to make a modest compromise so that it didn't become necessary to take a vote. He was that sensitive and that bright that he would know in which direction to move in order to allay anyone's concerns (10:401-406).

Eight informants reexamined the importance of the Minneapolis planning meetings. Fry remembered the first planning meeting in Minneapolis (on May 31 and June 1, 1964) as a meeting of major importance because “no big study had ever done that before” (E. B. Fry, personal communication, 1998). Dykstra (3:104-105) remembered this meeting was held in the Nolte Center, a continuing education center, which Manning described as “a little place where visiting faculty could stay, a place where meetings were held. . . . I remember we stayed there in those rooms and ate there” (9:367-369). Dykstra explained the purpose of this two-day meeting of the directors of the 27 selected projects:

Since everybody was going to be sending their data to Minnesota, to Dr. Bond as the Coordinating Center director, agreements had to be reached. . . . Since we were going to make comparisons across these various studies, we had to try to make them as comparable as possible (3:105-110).

Manning described the format of the meetings as presentations by Bond or Durrell, small group discussions, and large group discussions. “I think that pretty much Durrell had conceptualized what needed to be done, and I think that Bond was

the person who really sort of translated that into what needed to be said about what needed to be done” (Manning, 9:362-364). Ruddell remembered that “the initial question of the commonality of instruments produced a lot of discussion” (12:454-455); but Manning thought, in general, there was “consensus” (10:401), Dykstra remembered the meetings as “collegial” (4:127), and Mazurkiewicz noted that the participants did not seem “ego involved” (14:555). Manning elaborated:

I think the reason why there was very, very little abrasive behavior was the prestige of Guy Bond, the prestige of the University of Minnesota, the prestige of the studies, where everyone pretty much lined up and realized that, hey, this is an opportunity that, literally, comes once in a lifetime (9:351-355).

Indeed, the initial planning meeting in Minnesota was productive, and during this meeting, the participants agreed upon design parameters. Manning explained that when the meeting was finished, “we had decided on so many days of instruction. We had decided on the control variables. We had decided on the experimental variables. Everyone was pretty agreed on the essentiality of the design” (10:394-397). Dykstra clarified, “We hashed out which readiness tests would be used, which achievement tests would be used, what data we would collect concerning parents’ information, community information, census information” (3:110-112), and Mazurkiewicz elaborated, “We agreed on standardized tests, for example, the Stanford and the Metropolitan, informal tests of word recognition, and a measure of writing -- actually a pictorial stimulus for writing” (14:569-572). Fry (personal communication, 1998) and Lashinger (9:344-345) concurred.

Lashinger added memories about a second meeting held in Minneapolis in December:

I remember that one very, very clearly. There were presentations of information about the various studies that were going on because the



original planning called for cooperation and collaboration and common data to be collected. . . . There were sharing sessions regarding the problems and the successes in collecting the data. There were planning sessions or discussions held for the collection of the end of year data or the end of year instrumentation (9:335-344).

Lashinger also remembered decisions being made at this December meeting about “regular word” tests, a writing sample, and an attitude inventory.

Memories of the “giants” in the field. The perception of the historical importance of the studies and the stature of the researchers who were leading the effort engendered a sense of awe in those who were young professionals at the time. Dykstra said, “I was a brand new assistant professor meeting all of these giants. It was a wonderful time” (4:131-132). Wyatt Sundbye also remembered that she was just beginning her career as a professor: “I started in ‘62, and it was in ‘64 that this thing happened so I was really a beginner” (7:267-268). She remembered “Bond and Dykstra, of course, and Harris, and Durrell was there -- Durrell and Murphy. Here were these gurus sitting there. To me they were untouchables almost. . . . I wasn’t in their league” (14:574-575). Vilscek remembered “those I considered giants in the field of reading” (5:186-187). . . . “[I was] awed by the people whom I regarded as influential in the field of reading: Don Durrell, Helen Murphy and Jeanne Chall” (7:265-266). Vilscek remembered herself as “primarily as a listener, listening to what some of the dictates were in terms of what was going to happen and how the studies were going to be coordinated” (7:270-272). Ruddell called himself the “new kid” on the block, and referring to Bond, Stauffer, and Durrell, he remarked with amazement, “These are people that I’d read . . . as a doctoral student! Now I’m working with them!” (11:429-430). Although Hammond did not attend the planning meetings in Minneapolis, he did elaborate on the notion of the “giants”:

Today we have so many reading people, but in the 1960's the giants in the field could be counted on two hands. There was Betts and Witty and Stauffer and Sheldon and Durrell and Helen Murphy and David Russell, (I know I'm missing some.), Don Cleland, Bill Martin was coming into his own in a different sort of way, Alvina Treut Burrows, Jeanette Veatch, Roach Van Allen (14:573-15:578).

Hammond may have expressed the sentiment of many of the informants when he said, "I knew my place with these people" (32:1281-1282).

#### Reflection on the Conduct of the Studies

Five informants nostalgically reminisced about the cooperative nature of the First Grade Studies. Vilscek recalled that the First Grade Studies were "the first, and only, national, coordinated beginning reading study" (13:530-531), and Manning added, "Nothing like that had ever been done before and nothing like that has ever been done since. . . . There was a spirit of cooperation" (9:329-330). Lashinger remembered, "The activities of the study itself, these were to a very, very great extent prescribed as a result of the collaboration or cooperation of the various project directors and the work of the Coordinating Center" (5:170-173). Mazurkiewicz thought we should remember "the fact that a whole group of disparate individuals involved with instruction could get together and suspend their egos" (22:878-879), and Dykstra found it "astounding" (18:714) that "all these leaders, these giants in the field, [were] willing to cooperate with one another in a research undertaking of this nature" (18:713-714).

Concerns about vested interests. Four informants expressed concerns about the vested interests of some of the other primary researchers. Hammond said, "Stauffer certainly had biases toward language experience. I'm sure Mazurkiewicz had biases toward i.t.a. Other people had biases toward linguistic readers" (16:635-637). Likewise, Vilscek remembered, "Many of the 'leaders' were senior authors on

these basal reading series” (5:192-193), and Mazurkiewicz said, ”All of these people had their commitments. They had been teaching this. They were involved with the materials. They were getting tremendous royalties. It’s very difficult to give up that” (20:807-809). Dykstra elaborated,

Everybody had a stake in this . . . imagine twenty-five of the leading “reading people” in the world! (3:117-119) . . . Dr. Bond was the author of the Lyons and Carnahan basal readers. Dr. Clymer was heavily involved with the Ginn basal readers. Paul McGee, Sheldon . . . so many of these people who were involved in the First Grade Studies were also authors of basal reading programs so . . . they had something to lose in terms of comparing the success of children learning in basal readers with these other new programs (5:193-198).

Concerns about implementation. Four of the informants expressed concerns about the implementation of the studies. Ruddell said, “There’s a lot of variation across the studies in terms of the conduct and how they worked with their designs” (8:303-304). He specifically expressed concerns about the lack of attention to inservicing with both the experimental and control teachers, the socioeconomic status of the students, and random assignment of classes to treatments (8:294-297). Lashinger, who expressed concerns about the practical aspects of implementation, said that as a result of doing the studies, he learned about “the importance of being able to have access to schools . . . and people within schools -- a whole set of personal characteristics that have to be present for people to work successfully in the real world with teachers and administrators and parents and children” (4:160-164). Wyatt Sundbye also expressed concerns about the practical aspects of implementation:

I learned how hard it is to control research. . . . [The coordinators of the First Grade Studies] were concerned about how much time was spent with reading, and then when I got out, and I actually tried to control the time, I found that teachers just had difficulty with that. They didn’t all know how to use the same amount of time. Some thought they were teaching nearly all the

time, and some thought they didn't have enough time. It's just difficult to control the variables that research thinks should be controlled. When you get out in the real world, you don't have control over a lot of things (16:633-640).

Additional concerns about implementation were evidenced in attempts to control for the Hawthorne effect. Ruddell said he used the Sheldon program and the Allyn Bacon series because the teachers had formerly used the Ginn series. "In effect, what I was trying to do was to eliminate the Hawthorne effect. I wanted, in effect, to create a Hawthorne effect for everybody" (8:293-294). Vilscek emphasized that they tried to eliminate the Hawthorne effect by being "as involved with [the basal teachers] as we were with the teachers in the integrated experience approach" (16:629-631) and by using a new basal series: "1964 was the year Scott Foresman first introduced Black characters in the stories. . . . There were 24 classroom teachers (24 classrooms), 12 using the Scott Foresman basal reader" (10:388-399; 395-396). Wyatt Sundbye also seemed to be referring to the Hawthorne effect:

There were some teachers who were just -- they pushed really too hard, particularly in that phonics approach. I remember one teacher, and I'd go to see her, and I would get at the end, and I'd say, "You are putting too much pressure on these kids. Slow down! You don't have to work this hard at it. It's not good for the kids." She was just determined that her kids would come out better (17:668-672).

Concerns about treatment fidelity. Concerns about treatment fidelity were sometimes expressed as concerns about monitoring. Hammond said, "I just knew that some studies were monitored better than others" (15:589), and he added, "We really did monitor [the Delaware] study really carefully. There were mornings Stauffer wouldn't go with me, and I'd really just as soon not have driven those seventy or eighty miles one way to get there but felt compelled" (34:1360-1362). Vilscek also said they were careful about monitoring: "We were there in the schools as many times as we could all week long. We did a lot of traveling to schools and also worked with

the children, demonstrating in the classroom, monitoring the teachers on the guidelines for each approach” (14:557-560).

Hammond expressed other concerns about treatment fidelity:

I think in one study the *Open Court* might be called a phonics-based program, in another it might be called a basal-reader program, in another it might be called a linguistic program. I think different programs had different labels (15:614-16:617). . . . I just knew that the language experience of Harry Hahn was different from the language experience of Delaware, which was different from the language experience of Cleland (15:589-592).

Vilscek was also concerned with problems about treatment fidelity. She explained that some teachers were not aware that there would be no basal readers used in 12 of the 24 classrooms. “Some were very unhappy when they found out they didn’t have the basal reader” (10:406). “We had two teachers who got very nervous, and we had to eliminate their data. They reverted to use of the basal reader” (12:473-475).

Dykstra illustrated the problem of treatment fidelity in an anecdote about his visit to McCanne’s project:

[Roy McCanne] was in the Colorado Department of Education. . . . I believe one of his treatment groups was the language experience approach. . . . Anyway, we went up to the school to observe, and we drove and drove and drove from Denver or wherever. Anyway, we got up to the school and every child had the phonics book of the day, a phonics reader, on their desk so obviously they were not getting a pure language experience approach (10:400-407).

Dykstra concluded, “Teachers are going to do what they think is right for kids. If that messes up your data a little bit . . . that’s tough. They are basically going to do what they think is best” (11:420-422).

Reflections on the monitoring visits from the Coordinating Center. Informants expressed fond memories of the visits from the Coordinating Center. Bond and Dykstra, together or separately, visited all of the sites (Dykstra, 9:348-349), and

Dykstra had vivid memories of these visits. He mentioned visiting George Spache's project in Florida, Harry Hahn's at Oakland University, and he remembered humorously his reception when he visited Tom Horn at the University of Texas: "I remember a couple of graduate students coming to pick me up at the airport and being amazed that I wasn't seventy years old and in the graveyard" (Dykstra, 11:427-429). He also remembered driving 300 or 400 miles across the state when he visited Roy McCanne's project in Colorado. Dykstra described the visits: "Basically, we'd go into a site and talk with the principal investigator, and somebody would take us out to some schools. We'd see if there were any problems. It was more just keeping in touch" (11:433-435). Vilscek confirmed this by saying, "Observations are what I recall" (8:319), and Manning confirmed the visits were cordial "rather than an evaluation of any kind" (10:391): "We went around to the schools and looked at what it was the children were doing, and it was more a cordial visit. We met with all the principals of the schools" (Manning, 10:380-382). Ruddell also remembered Guy Bond and Bob Dykstra came "to tour our schools and visit our teachers, to see what was going on with all of those teachers" (11:435-437).

Perspectives on data treatment. The major function of the Coordinating Center was to combine the data sent from the project sites around the nation and conduct data analysis. Dykstra said, "Our job was to analyze the data, to oversee the whole process" (9:347). Ruddell praised the work of the Coordinating Center in Minnesota, especially noting the common data base format which was used to analyze the data and the "covariance work" (9:336). Nevertheless, three informants had amused memories of the old computers and the punch cards. Lashinger said, after the data had been collected, "the old keypunch operators came onto the scene, . . . and one set of

cards went off to the Coordinating Center and one set remained [in Syracuse] for our own analysis” (8:327-9:329). Ruddell explained, “I had doctoral students who worked with me to punch the data” (12:466-467), and Hammond said, “We had a secretary that punched the cards -- a keypunch operator” (6:23). Hammond continued by telling how he was responsible for running the data when the final report was being prepared:

I was going over the computer center. Of course, [the cards] had to be in a metal box. . . . If one card got bent or had moisture, it would spill on the card reader, and they’d go all over the place. . . . [The computer] was basically an engineering type computer. It was a Scientific Data Systems computer, but we could do analysis of variance on it, co-variant analysis, and run some regression stuff. Of course, you didn’t run it yourself. You put them in this little window, and somebody else literally ran it (6:222-225; 234-237).

Vilscek remembered, “There was a lot more to research than I ever realized as a graduate student” (17:682-683). She had proposed using multivariate analysis of variance, but a program was not available to her at the University of Pittsburgh’s Computer Center. Instead, she “paid people at the American Institute of Research to do the analysis” (18:704-705).

Value of First Grade Studies. Despite the problems encountered in the conduct of the First Grade Studies, three informants believe they continue to have value. Ruddell emphasized their importance lies in their reflection of the “real life of classrooms” (10:399), and Manning agreed that they had a “rich smack of reality” (22:889). Hammond emphasized that their value lies in their ecological validity: “I think that unless you work in classrooms, unless you have taught youngsters, you tend to come up with really simple answers about how reading works” (18:734-736), and he explained, metaphorically:

It’s like me looking out the window of my office and watching a guy with a

derrick putting steel girders on the new athletic complex. From a distance that looks really easy. Oh, I could do that. I could swing that boom around and lay those girders in there, but you see, to the guy who's really doing it, he's dealing with all kinds of nuances that I'm not aware of -- like wind and sun and glare and power and leverage (19:740-745).

### Perspectives on the Outcomes

Dykstra spoke about writing the final reports from the Coordinating Center: "I can remember many nights during the summer at home writing until 1:00 in the morning" (13:528-530). "I wrote both reports. . . . I wrote the drafts and [Dr. Bond] critiqued the drafts, and there were some compromises that I made. [Bond] didn't want to name specific programs. I think we ended up naming some anyway because it was the only way we could do it" (17:678-681). "I think if [Bond] were here, he would agree he was more the consultant" (13:527-528). Dykstra cautioned me, however, to remember that he "was the junior partner and what happens with junior partners" (13:519-520).

Data from only 15 of the 27 First Grade Studies was used for the analysis presented in the final report, and Dykstra explained his reason: "We basically were looking at methods comparisons, and the studies that used methods comparisons were the ones that we used the data from" (12:464-466). He gave two examples of studies they did not use in the final analysis: "Chall and Feldman -- How do teachers interpret and implement basal readers? -- Nobody else studied the same question. Therefore, there was nothing that we could do" (11:446-449), and "I don't recall that we did anything with Dr. Horn's data because it was so idiosyncratic. I think he was doing something that nobody else was doing" (11:435-437). Dykstra continued to explain that "it was only where a number of different geographic places were doing i.t.a., for example, that we could add something to what they could do themselves"



(11:438-440), and he gave one example: “Now, Sheldon and Lashinger compared *Ginn Basic Readers*, *Structural Reading Series*, and *Let’s Read* by Bloomfield and Barnhart. Other people did a similar study so we used their data in combination with other people who were doing it” (11:450-12:453).

Toward the end of the interview, Dykstra wanted to read a part of a talk he had given in Toronto in 1997. The retrospective conclusions he drew are presented here in full with his permission because the talk has not been published elsewhere. Dykstra read and explained:

I’m considerably removed from the study itself and all promotion and tenure decisions, and I’m going to give you my best shot at what all of this meant in terms of instruction. So this was what I concluded: “One. Early and relatively intensive teaching of sound-symbol correspondences (phonics) results in children performing better on tests of word recognition at the end of first and second grade.” So, in terms of just asking them to look at a word in isolation, kids who had phonics tended to do better on these tests of achievement than those that didn’t -- both in first and second grade. “Two. The superiority of code emphasis programs (phonics) did not carry over to the same degree when we looked at reading comprehension.” There wasn’t the same . . . you couldn’t say with the same degree of certainty that children who had the phonics programs were better comprehenders as measured by those tests. “Three. Children demonstrated that they could learn to recognize many more words than had been included in basal programs.” See, until this time, a first grade program tended to have three hundred fifty-four hundred words. That was it. Now, Lippincott came along with two thousand words, and *i.t.a.* came along with who knows how many words, and it was just very clear that children could handle that – didn’t need those very strict vocabulary controls. “Four. Children demonstrated that they could write and write well in first grade,” which was a surprise to many of us at that time. I specifically remember the initial teaching alphabet and the fluency with which kids wrote. As a matter of fact, I think that was the primary thing that came out of the initial teaching alphabet was how it freed up children’s writing. “Five.” No surprise here. “Girls were significantly more ready for reading, significantly better readers at the end of grades one and two.” I don’t know what to do about that. That’s what it was. “Six. The best predictor of reading ability in grades one and two was letter name knowledge.” At that time when we used predictive devices, that suggested if you insisted on using a reading readiness

test simply to find out which kids were gonna do well and which weren't – I don't know why that would be important to you – you'd give them a letter name knowledge test. "Seven. The particular project (usually synonymous with school system) in which your child learned to read was more important than the particular instructional materials he or she used." That's what I was just saying. The particular school system in which they learned to read was more important than the materials that were used, which would suggest if you have one of these school systems which are favored because of a lot of reasons – parents who are interested, etc., etc., etc., it doesn't make too much difference what you do to teach kids to read. So, . . . Let's see if I've got one more here. Yea. "Various instructional programs within an individual project tended to cluster in terms of pupil achievement even after readiness factors were statistically controlled." So as a parent if you wanted your child to learn to read, it's more important that you find a school system than a particular program. Then the last one. "That leads to my final finding or conclusion: Final reports of the first grade studies never said that the teacher was the most important determinant of whether or not a first grade child learns to read. The study was not designed to answer that question, and we never made such a determination, despite how many times you've heard it." And as a matter of fact, you couldn't say the teacher's the most important factor if you find differences between programs, which we did. It's statistically impossible. If there's so much variation between teachers within a program, you'd never be able to say this program is more effective than this program. So, we know its true, but we were not in a position to say it (15:595-16:644).

Reflections about the conclusions. The other informants, however, remembered the conclusions differently, especially reconsidering the importance of school effects and teacher effects. Three of the informants recalled their reservations about these conclusions from the Coordinating Center. After thirty years, Mazurkiewicz continued to disagree with the conclusions, and he stated unequivocally, "I was unhappy with them because I looked at it, and I said they should have been more forceful in stating that essentially almost anything was better than the basal" (21:844-845). Chall continued to remember the First Grade Studies from her own perspective: "They mushed it up. . . . They forgot that the method is also important" (personal communication, 1998), and she explained, "They were

reported not too accurately. . . . Bond didn't get it right. Bond said, 'This is the kind of report everybody can be happy about.' Dykstra got it right, but Dykstra didn't get the recognition" (personal communication, 1998). Hammond, who continued to emphasize the importance of effective pedagogy, also expressed his reservations about the conclusions from the final report by saying:

I think one of the shortcomings of the First Grade Study is they jumped to conclusions too soon. They talked about how the language experience approach was better for the more advanced kids and not as good for the least advanced kids, and yet at the end of the second grade, the language experience approach was better for the least advanced kids (1:11-20).

Six of the informants, however, simply remembered the conclusion that there is not one best method of teaching beginning reading. Ruddell said, "There's no one way to teach reading" (10:401-402); Lashinger said, "There is no best treatment" (6:214-215); Vilscek said, "I don't think there is only one solution, one way" (16:620); Manning said "It really didn't make any difference what program the kids were in" (18:737-738); and Fry wrote, "There may not be one [method]" (personal communication, 1998).

As Wyatt Sundbye said, instead of finding a "panacea" (19:770), "school effects and teacher effects seemed to me to make sense as explanation for differences more than the methodologies did" (18:723-725). Indeed, Dykstra remembered the relevant conclusion about school effects from the final report: "Seven. The particular project (usually synonymous with school system) in which your child learned to read was more important than the particular instructional materials he or she used" (16:624-626), and he told a story about fictional data to illustrate this point:

Let's just take Rochester, Minnesota, for example, and then we'll take Black Duck, Minnesota. . . . Suppose you did a study in Rochester, Minnesota, and you used language experience approach with some children,

Dr. Bond's basal readers with some other children, and i.t.a. with some other children. Then you do exactly the same things in Black Duck, Minnesota. . . . The three programs in Rochester would be grouped very closely together, and would probably be higher. In other words, the children would achieve better in all three programs in Rochester than they would in Black Duck. There was more relationship [among] the programs in Rochester than there was between i.t.a. in Rochester and i.t.a. in Black Duck. In other words, the total school environment (whatever that might be -- the parents in that school) was very important, but to say that the teacher was the most important factor would suggest that every one of those teachers in Rochester is better than the teachers in Black Duck, so we didn't say that (14:545-560).

Two other informants Ruddell (8:301-303) and Fry (personal communication, 1998) concurred, mentioning the influence of SES on reading achievement.

Nevertheless, it was the "teacher effects" (Wyatt Sundbye, 18:723) that five of the informants most remembered. Manning told me, "The major problem, looking back historically on the First Grade studies, was we were looking at the wrong thing. We should have been looking at what the teachers were doing" (19:739-742). Likewise, Ruddell said, "I think the findings that there was greater variation across teachers than there was across treatments is a very important kind of finding that says the teacher is still the variable element in reading instruction" (9:338-341). Fry wrote, "Good teachers make a difference. They are more important than the method as methods showed only small differences" (personal communication, 1998), and Lashinger elaborated, "The best program can be a complete failure for some children because of the way it's used by the teacher. The very worst program can be a resounding success for children because of the work of a very, very competent teacher" (6:215-218). Vilscek reluctantly concurred that the teachers were more important than the program, saying, "The teacher is that key component. I have to admit that was evident when I was in the basal classrooms as well" (16:628-629). The informants remembered the teacher effects despite Dykstra's final conclusion:

Final reports of the First Grade Studies never said that the teacher was the most important determinant of whether a first grade child learns to read. The study was not designed to answer that question, and we never made such a determination, despite how many times you've heard it (16:636-640).

Unreported findings about writing. Five informants emphasized that influences on children's writing and relationships between reading and writing remain unreported findings. Lashinger remarked that prior to the First Grade Studies "the relationship between reading and writing had not been discovered" (2:58-59). Dykstra observed that i.t.a. "had the very strong and positive influence of children feeling comfortable about writing because they thought they could spell everything" (10:385-387), and Mazurkiewicz illustrated this point: "We got i.t.a., and we saw the freedom with which they could write and express themselves, and the pages and pages of stuff that they would write" (11:415-416). Ruddell also spoke enthusiastically about the unreported significant differences in writing in his studies, which he attributed to the syntactical transformations of sentences children performed with his linguistic blocks. He had developed this supplement based on transformational grammar, which "emphasized the importance of syntax and the idea that you can transform sentences in certain ways" (5:204-205). Both the traditional basal readers and the programmed readers were supplemented by "generative, syntactical activities" using "linguistic blocks." Ruddell explained:

These were one inch cubes that were color coded. Nouns were blue, and verbs were red, and adjectives were green, and adverbs were purple, and so on; and we developed extensive lesson plans around those -- various generative, syntactical activities (6:211-214). . . . I think they make explicit to students an understanding of how the language is structured. Physically you can move a prepositional phrase. . . . You can expand a sentence from a basic sentence unit -- it was called a kernel sentence then -- to add adjectives, adverbs; you can do a lot of flexible things with the structure of a sentence, and I think the color coding made that explicit (7:247-252). . . . By working

with the syntactic blocks and understanding how the language is structured, put together and transformed, youngsters did produce longer communication units in their writing (6:236-238).

Hammond explained that a technique to increase writing fluency, which was developed during the Delaware study, that remains among the unreported outcomes; and he illustrated the development of the technique with an anecdote:

[Stauffer and I] were going down to Seaford -- that was one of the school sites -- in fall of '64, and Stauffer said to me, 'I want you to tell these first grade teachers that I want to see some writing going on, and I don't want them to worry about spelling. I want the kids to write and spell as best they can.' Now, you have to understand. Put this in the context of 1964. This was before the term invented spelling had even been invented. So, we started encouraging our teachers to encourage kids to write. We had some teachers who were marvelous at this. All of sudden, we began to see really fascinating spelling inventions, although we called it writing and spelling as best you can, and we would see elephant written LFNT by a little girl, and then later on -- Stauffer writes about this in his book -- we saw ELLFNT and so on. We started bringing back reams of this writing to the University of Delaware. Stauffer thought it was interesting. I thought it was interesting. Edmund Henderson was fascinated by it. So, Henderson got really interested -- he was not part of the study -- but he got really interested in the spellings of children. Now, Henderson later went to the University of Virginia, and among his doctoral students is Richard Gentry *Spell is a Four Letter Word*, all the work by Beers, and Henderson and Beers, Jerry Zutell at Ohio State, Shane Templeton out at the University of Nevada at Reno, and a lot of that really important spelling research on invented spellings that has been done in the last twenty years, and a lot of that can be traced right back to the University of Virginia with Henderson, who is now deceased, who in turn was a young professor at Delaware and saw Stauffer and me bringing back all the samples of children's writing (8:316-9:338).

Hammond believed the idea of invented spelling is one of the most significant advances of the last 25 years because it represents a shift in our view about writing. Before invented spelling, children first learned to spell words conventionally and then began to write in about the fourth grade, but invented spelling allowed children to write from the beginning. Hammond said that from the research on invented spelling,

“We learned that reading and writing should be learned concurrently, and, indeed, in some cases writing actually precedes reading” (9:362-364).

Perception of value to participants. Since most of the informants were near the beginning of their careers, an important outcome of the First Grade Studies may have been in providing professional opportunities. Wyatt Sundbye said, “It was just such an opportunity for the young people” (15:590), and Fry wrote that the opportunity to participate in the First Grade Studies “created many nation-wide friendships which continue to this day” (personal communication, 1998). For many others, the First Grade Studies may have been, as Vilscek said, “a growing experience” (15:580). In fact, the Syracuse study was the dissertation project for Lashinger (4:151), and Hammond was drawn to pursue his Ph.D. by involvement in the First Grade Studies (5:191-192).

Others created their own opportunities. Chall created her opportunity for her noted work *Learning to Read: The Great Debate* (1967) when she made the first contact with “the man from Carnegie” [the Carnegie Corporation] at a meeting held at Syracuse University in 1959 to plan coordinated studies in reading instruction. Chall told me, “We wanted to compare the methods. I said this could also be done historically” (personal communication, 1998). Dykstra explained he became involved in the First Grade Studies when he “simply went to [Bond’s] office and volunteered to help (9:342-343); he added, “I was very fortunate personally at my stage in my career to be involved in this -- meeting all of these people and being part of a study like this” (20:791-793). Manning also found his opportunity with Bond, and he told an anecdote about getting his “job” at the University of Minnesota:

I can remember exactly under what circumstances I came here. . . . I was coming with [Dr. Bond] down on the elevator in the old Sheraton-Ritz

Hotel in downtown Minneapolis, which is where the meetings were held, and he said, “Jack, would you like to come to the University of Minnesota? I’m retiring you know.” And my knees went out from under me. I thought he was kidding. And, he said, “We’d like to have ya. We’d like to have ya.” So I came (7:284-8:294).

Two other young researchers were offered opportunities with Ginn and Company. Vilscek found “an excellent professional opportunity” (13:518-519) when, shortly after the First Grade Studies, she was invited to talk with Silver Burdette, Ginn. She worked with the company “for approximately fifteen years” (13:503). Likewise, Clymer, the lead author for the Ginn basal reader series, asked Wyatt Sundbye to write in the program. She said, “It was a huge boost in my career. . . . [The First Grade Studies] exposed me to those leaders in the field, and they turned around, and they gave me opportunities to do things that I wouldn’t have had otherwise” (15:582-585).

#### The Impact of the First Grade Studies

Seven of the informants believed the First Grade Studies had little impact on the field of reading or on methods of teaching beginning reading. Vilscek regretted that the teachers in her study were “required to go back to teaching the basal reading program. . . . They were not permitted to teach the integrated experience approach the subsequent year” (16:649-651). Mazurkiewicz believed there was no immediate impact because of the reluctance of publishers to adopt new methods and the influence of the publishing companies:

Back in those days, publishing at the elementary -- at least one through three -- was cut-throat variety in that there were massive numbers of representatives who visited the schools and essentially wined and dined people in order to get us to buy their materials, but to keep them happy, also they had representatives coming in and doing workshops, and so on. So, they had a lot of service, and therefore it was very difficult to break into that pattern of the big “biggies” running the curriculum (19:772-779).



Fry wrote that the best that could be said about the studies was that “they calmed some critics and tuned down some people who thought they had the best method (for example, ITA)” (personal communication, 1998).

Not only did informants deny an immediate impact from the First Grade Studies, four also denied any long-term impact. “I don’t think they had nearly as much impact as one might think they would have had” (Wyatt Sundbye, 18:730); “I’m not sure that they really had much of an impact” (Vilscek, 19:746); “the contribution has been lost over the thirty years” (Lashinger, 6:224); “the individual studies . . . got lost” (Hammond, 15:586-593).

When I asked “why” there has been no lasting impact or influence from this massive, nation-wide set of studies, the informants had several answers. From Mazurkiewicz viewpoint, “the basal people always felt that theirs was the best way” (18:704), and they were “upset with the idea of a change” (15:595-596). Conversely two others expressed the notion that researchers need to find new ideas. Lashinger said, “Professors [and others] . . . have to do research and have to do writing” (6:233-234), and Wyatt Sundbye concurred, “It is because college researchers and teachers and people who write textbooks have to be on the cutting edge and have to support something new” (12:488-490). Basically, “people who are in colleges have to publish or perish” (Wyatt Sundbye, 13:503-504). More fundamentally, Ruddell recognized that “there’s a belief that the methodology will still reign” (10:407-408), and Wyatt Sundbye added, “Despite the fact that the research was done that really showed that you couldn’t find the perfect method and that the difference really was school difference and teacher difference, we have continued to insist that there is a method that’s the perfect one” (12:474-477). Vilscek concurred: “We were looking for a

quick answer, some very expedient way to get kids to all be successful in reading and writing” (15:615-16:616), and Hammond restated this idea when he expressed his belief that when the research question is reduced to decoding, it is reduced “to its simplest common denominator” (21:821).

Allegiance to views. While the informants seemed to believe that the First Grade Studies had neither an immediate impact nor a long-term impact on the field of reading, the studies did provide opportunities for the participants, and they also seemed to affect some informants’ views. Some informants had moderated or modified their views over the years, but three informants maintained allegiance to the views of beginning reading instruction they held in the sixties. Manning stated, “Every method I’ve used since the First Grade Studies -- and before the First Grade Studies -- I learned from Durrell” (16:633-635). Mazurkiewicz, who was committed to using i.t.a. and reforming the orthography in the sixties, had not changed his view: “I’m a proponent of spelling reform without any question” (23:923-924). Hammond, who was a proponent of the language experience approach in the sixties, continued to hold a “multi-dimensional . . . language-dependent . . . meaning-construction” view (23:912-913).

On the other hand, four informants had moderated or modified their views over the years. Dykstra’s early view focused on the importance of teaching the alphabet, but he now believes in “a broad program using multiple ways of unlocking words” (7:268). Lashinger’s previous view focused on finding the best of the three programs, but now he now focuses on the importance of the “teacher differential” (8:292). In the sixties, Ruddell adopted a linguistic view and focused on the regularity in the language, but he now adheres to the notion that teachers need a “clear

understanding of what strategies they can use and what conditions produce what results” (9:369-10:370). Wyatt Sundbye also adopted a linguistic view in the sixties, but now she subscribes to differentiated instruction based on diagnosis (6:214-220).

Teaching is complicated. Wyatt Sundbye concluded, “I wish [the First Grade Studies] had worked. I wish it had shown us the perfect method -- the best method (21:844-845). . . . “[but] it was not disconcerting to me that no method came out better than the others” (17:691). . . . There is no one answer” (21:838). “Good teachers know lots of things, and they have choices. I don’t think we will get away from it because that’s very complex” (19:772-773). Vilscek described superior teachers as “flexible, . . . anxious to try methods that were new” (16:638-641), and Ruddell elaborated by saying, “Good teachers are well informed, purposeful, strategically oriented, and reflective with “an understanding of what they’re doing and why they’re doing it” (9:367-368). Wyatt Sundbye concluded, “We can do phonics, we can do whole word, we can do whole language, but good teachers do all of them. . . . They have to make good decisions and do the right things for the right kids” (13:514-517), and she added that with any methodology “you can’t say this is what this produces. It produces certain things for certain children. It’s more complicated than the traditional knowledge about it” (16:655-656).

#### Comparisons of Issues of the Sixties and Current Issues

When I asked the informants to compare the issues of the sixties with current issues, seven thought there were many similarities. Manning said, “I do feel the conditions were not so dissimilar than what they are right now” (14:554-555), and Wyatt Sundbye lamented there has been no change in the “most important issue . . . whether there is a panacea” (19:769-770. Fry (personal communication, 1999) said

there are “the same old controversies,” and he wrote that most of the wide variety of methods investigated in the First Grade Studies are “active” today and the problems are similar “under slightly different names” (personal communication, 1998). Ruddell found parallels in the renewed phonics emphasis and in the type of research design employed (5:182-183) “with the Barbara Foorman work out of Houston” (8:318), adding, “These seem to be fresh studies although I’m not sure how fresh they really are, in retrospect” (5:184).

Manning found a parallel in the “upheaval. . . . Particularly in a place like Texas, for example, and California, for example, [there are] a lot of very, very strong points of view, almost cult-like in terms of what needs to be done” (14:554-555). Hammond also mentioned these states, expressing concerns about politicians who are influencing reading instruction, pointing to Pete Wilson of California, John Engler of Michigan, George W. Bush of Texas, and Tommy Thompson of Wisconsin, who have put an emphasis on education. He speculated that politicians step in when respect for education is relatively low, but he also said that the answers they give are the simple answers about using phonics and having all kids reading at grade level (20:801-812).

Three of the informants gave reasons for the parallels. Mazurkiewicz said, “Unfortunately, we have a problem in this field of reading. We don’t remember our elders” (10:397-398). Hammond reiterated, “We fail to learn from history! . . . We’re seeing a basic repeat of [the sixties]” (24:984-25:985), and Wyatt Sundbye concluded, “We go in cycles . . . and it’s a change for the sake of change” (12:486-490) . . . “endless cycles without any real thought behind it” (13:524).

Considering replication of the First Grade Studies. Mazurkiewicz believed a

replication of the First Grade Studies should be conducted similarly to the way the original studies were conducted. He said, “I think it’s a great idea. It would be marvelous. I’d like to participate all over again” (22:884-885). Manning believed the original design and the prestige of number of coordinated studies with central data collection and analysis would help “clear the air more than a series of articles or a group of experts getting together” (22:887-888).

Conversely, five informants suggested changes if the First Grade Studies were replicated. Dykstra said, “I guess you’d have to have a new set of questions” (19:754). Lashinger (7:287-289) elaborated, pointing to the importance of the investigating the teachers’ behavior as well as the importance of tighter controls and continuing the investigation through the intermediate grades, and Ruddell reiterated, “I would like to see questions go beyond just word analysis and comprehension. I think it would be important to have longitudinal data (12:484-486). . . . I would also want to see much more emphasis tied to what teachers do” (13:493-493). Hammond said, “the giants” (914:574), “most of the great people of the fifties and sixties . . . would say, ‘We’ve been there. We’ve done that. It didn’t work’” (24:978-980), and “I certainly wouldn’t do them the same way” (34:1375). In place of experimental studies, Hammond suggested getting away from the “race-horse phenomenon of which is best” (34:1376) and using different combinations of terminologies. Manning elaborated this idea by proposing “rubrics for evaluating the quality of the instruction based upon variables in addition to those of school achievement” (19:749-751). “The implication of that is we need to develop instrumentation or we need to develop the ability to look at what it is that effective teachers are doing regardless of the curriculum programs that they are using” (Manning, 20:819-21:822).

Manning became most passionate when he raised “the social implication.” He recognized the “whole business of standards” as a big issue all over the country, but he feared many do not understand the influence of changing demographics. He pointed out that within the next twenty years, the Hispanic-American population will triple, the African-American population will double, and the number of mothers who will not complete high school will approach ten million, and he asserted a poignant rationale for attending to additional variables:

The biggest problem I see in schools is not only do children not learn everything that we intend to teach them, they have a rotten time trying. . . . In other words, children who have difficulty in learning have a hard time psychologically and emotionally in schools. In short, where I am coming from is, we need teachers who teach not only in terms of achievement outcomes but also in terms of emotional and psychological outcomes (19:767-773). . . . I think that children turn against their teachers, they turn against the schools, they turn against their parents, they turn against society and I think we need to re-think what it is that schools are doing – not only in terms of achievement and (quote) standards but also in terms of what is going on inside the building psychologically and emotionally (20:791-795). . . . We need to develop instrumentation or we need to develop the ability to look at what it is that effective teachers are doing regardless of the curriculum programs that they are using, and the social implication of that. . . . With the changing demographics, instead of thinking about (quote) raising standards, we should be thinking about how we can make schools more emotionally and psychologically contributing to the well-being of the students (21:821-826).

## Summary

Interviews with primary researchers of the First Grade Studies resulted in eight transcripts and two sets of notes, which were read and re-read and analyzed by the method of constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). While the informants gave no single explanation for becoming involved in the First Grade Studies, most attributed their involvement to the influence of their mentors. All

agreed that during the early sixties the predominant view of beginning reading instruction centered on whole word basal readers with controlled vocabulary and that new methods and new materials for teaching beginning reading were being considered, especially noting the influence of the scientific linguists and the importance of the Initial Teaching Alphabet (i.t.a.). The informants reconsidered the influence of Rudolf Flesch and his book *Why Johnny Can't Read* (1955) and the impetus provided by the launch of Sputnik as well as the influence of Sir James Pitman and of Donald Durrell, and they remarked about the proposal process and the planning meetings in Minneapolis, recalling the cooperative agreements and the stature of the participants. While the informants expressed concerns about implementation of the designs and the treatments, they expressed fond memories about the work at the Coordinating Center and amused memories of the old computers. Despite their concerns, informants continued to value the ecological validity of the First Grade Studies. Dykstra reiterated the conclusions from the final report of the Coordinating Center, but others simply remembered that there is not one best method of teaching beginning reading and emphasized the importance of school effects and teacher effects as well as the unreported findings about writing. The informants agreed participation provided many professional opportunities, but most believed the studies had little immediate or long-term impact on the field or on teaching beginning reading. While the informants found many similarities between the issues of the sixties and current issues, they expressed regrets that there has been continued insistence about finding one perfect method, and when these surviving primary researchers considered replication of the First Grade Studies, most agreed there should be new questions focusing on effective teaching.

## Chapter Five

### Discussion and Implications

A historian is more than a chronicler or categorizer. A historian is an interpreter of the meaning of the past, recognizing that events are conceived in response to the social, political, and intellectual conditions of a time, considering questions of ideology and philosophy, and providing explanation by putting the categories of evidence into context (Kraus & Joyce, 1985). Historians can provide explanation by showing in what ways the prevailing concepts of one period of time differ from those of the preceding period of time (Donovan, 1973). Evans (1999) suggests that historians can uncover deep structures by arguing that events were part of one movement or period rather than another, and historians can reveal underlying and persistent belief systems and mentalities when they situate surface disturbances within the underlying social, political, and intellectual trends. Likewise, Monaghan and Hartman (2002) assert:

History provides another layer of context for understanding events by locating them in specific times and places. Understanding a particular reading method, for instance, requires more than simply knowing about it: It must be located in the milieu of its times (p. 33).

As a reading educator interested in applying historical understanding to the controversy about methods of teaching beginning reading, I developed four questions about the First Grade Studies to guide my inquiry: (1) How do surviving primary researchers view the First Grade Studies in retrospect? (2) What were the guiding philosophies and perspectives of those researchers? (3) How did their questions, methods, and findings relate to the context? (4) How can the First Grade Studies contribute to our current understandings? The first two questions were addressed in



the previous chapter. In this chapter, categories of the informants' statements are situated within the trends suggested by the review of the literature to address the second pair of questions and to achieve a historical understanding of the First Grade Studies.

#### Understanding Changes in the Social / Political Context

An understanding of changes in the social / political context during the decades preceding the First Grade Studies can provide illumination on the informants' talk. Prior to World War II, when most Americans lived in rural areas, the predominant world view was guided by beliefs in individualism and "authentically free men" participating in a democracy. During World War II, however, government spending on wartime production and the exigencies of the world situation engendered fundamental changes in the predominant world view. The nineteenth and early twentieth century idea of inventive, self-sufficient individuals was superseded by the idea of cooperative groups working to create scientific solutions. In the fifties, when the rise of the Cold War and the rise of the military-industrial complex increased the need for technologically trained workers, these social / political changes manifested themselves in pressing educational needs.

Understanding the informants' talk about the Soviet threat. While only three informants responded directly to questions and probes about the social / political context, references to this context threaded the informants' talk. Within the context of contentious times manifested in changing world views and a Cold War mentality, the informants' talk about the Soviet threat and Sputnik can be seen as symbolic of the social / political changes of the fifties. Whereas Hammond merely mentioned Sputnik (7:260), Manning elaborated on the controversy fueled by Sputnik (4:129-131), and

Wyatt Sundbye talked about the connections between the schools and Sputnik made in the newspapers (11:435-437), these informants may be understood to have been remembering changes in the social / political context which gave rise to the controversy addressed by the First Grade Studies.

Understanding the informants' talk about Rudolf Flesch. Similar to the illumination provided by the informants' talk about the Soviet threat, the informants' talk about the influence of Rudolf Flesch and his book *Why Johnny Can't Read* (1955) may be understood by noting parallels between changes in the social / political context and the predominant methods of beginning reading instruction. During the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, while the predominant world view of the rural population focused on isolationism and individualism, the alphabet method, in which the child learned long lists of words by first naming the letters, and the "phonetic" methods, in which the child learned to associate sounds with letters, were predominant. During the Great Depression and World War II, when the predominant world view of much of the population shifted toward cooperative solutions, a whole word method and a focus on meaning became predominant. During the decade of the fifties, as beliefs in science gained ascendance, the ideas of the scientific linguists and the spelling reformers, among others, were reconsidered.

The informants' talk about the influence of Rudolf Flesch may be understood to indicate their recognition of the movement to consider scientific methods of teaching beginning reading. Seven of the informants referred to the influence of Rudolf Flesch and his book *Why Johnny Can't Read* (1955). When Hammond (7:266) and Lashinger (2:45) named Flesch, when Ruddell (5:168-170) and Fry (personal communication, 1999) explained the contentions presented by Flesch, and when

Mazurkiewicz (8:306), Chall (personal communication, 1998), and Dykstra (6:207-210) alluded to the magnitude of the impact, these informants may be understood to be referring to the solutions being presented by the scientific linguists. Indeed, the quest for scientific solutions and the move away from “holistic” solutions gave rise to the contentious debate in the field of reading which resulted in the First Grade Studies.

Understanding the informants’ talk about predominant and emergent views.

Like the informants’ talk about the Soviet threat and the influence of Rudolf Flesch, the informants’ talk about predominant and emergent views may be illuminated by situating it within the movement away from the predominance of whole word methods toward consideration of scientific methods. All of the informants agreed that the predominant view of beginning reading instruction during the fifties and early sixties centered on the whole word basal readers with controlled vocabulary (J. S. Chall, personal communication, 1998; Dykstra, 6:222; E. B. Fry, personal communication, 1998; Hammond, 6:244; Lashinger, 2:57-58; Manning, 4:137; Mazurkiewicz, 8:294-297; Ruddell, 6:219; Vilscek, 5:192; & Wyatt Sundbye, 8:308). Yet, all of the informants also agreed that these basal readers were being challenged during the fifties and early sixties. Dykstra characterized the times as “exciting . . . transitional . . . experimental” (5:186-191). Hammond (6:243-244) recalled that the field of reading was breaking away from the standard vocabulary control, and Mazurkiewicz attributed “the ferment, the discussions, the arguments” (5:581-583) to the consideration of new approaches. Salient among the new approaches were the linguistic approach and i.t.a. Dykstra (6:211-212), Ruddell (4:155-156), Lashinger (5:187), and Wyatt Sundbye (9:361), noted the importance of linguistic solutions, and

Dykstra (7:257), Hammond (6:245), Manning (13:532-533), Mazurkiewicz (23:922-925), Fry (personal communication, 1999) described efforts to spread i.t.a. The informants' references to these emerging methods of teaching beginning reading may be understood as their recognition of the challenges to the predominant method.

Understanding the informants' mentioning of new materials. Like the consideration of the predominant and emergent views of reading instruction, the creation of new instructional materials may be illuminated by noting the parallels between the shifts in social / political context and the predominant methods of beginning reading instruction. During the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, a predominantly rural population with an individualistic world view, used the alphabet method of Webster's Blueback speller with its focus on naming individual letters and McGuffey's readers with a focus on letters and their sounds. During the Progressive era, when cooperative solutions became predominant, Gray's Scott-Foresman basal readers with a whole word method and a focus on meaning became predominant. During the decade of the fifties, as beliefs in science gained ascendance, instructional materials developed by the scientific linguists and spelling reformers, among others, were reconsidered.

Despite the dearth of description of new materials, all of the informants mentioned new materials for beginning reading instruction which were created during the late fifties and the early sixties. Dykstra (7:257), Hammond (6:245), Mazurkiewicz (23:922-924), Fry (personal communication, 1999), and Manning (13:532-533) mentioned i.t.a. Mazurkiewicz (12:476), Dykstra (7:257), Hammond (6:246), Lashinger (5:185), and Wyatt Sundbye (9:362) mentioned the "linguistic readers." Lashinger (5:188-189) and Hammond (6:246) mentioned the programmed

reading materials. The informants' mentioning of the new materials may be understood to be their recognition of the movement from progressive methods toward consideration of scientific methods and materials. Indeed, the quest for scientific solutions with an emphasis on letters and sounds and the concomitant movement away from whole words and meaning gave substance to the contentious debate which resulted in the First Grade Studies.

### Reflection on Questions of Epistemology

While the informants did not speak directly to the question of the epistemological positions reflected by various methods of teaching beginning reading, an understanding of several philosophical orientations may provide illumination on views of reading. Moreover, it seems that the predominant epistemological positions during the decades preceding the First Grade Studies were reflections of social / political changes. During the early decades of the twentieth century in America, there was a shift from the empiricism of the nineteenth century toward the pragmatism of the Progressive era. Empiricist philosophers and associationist psychologists tended toward an "atomistic" focus while pragmatist philosophers and Gestalt psychologists tended toward a focus on the "whole" (Cunningham & Fitzgerald, 1996). Empiricist philosophers and associationist psychologists believe "the whole is the sum of the parts" (Drucker, 1957, p. 37) while pragmatist philosophers and Gestaltist psychologists believe "the whole is more than the sum of the parts" (Werthimer, 1912, quoted in Diack, 1960, p. 67). During the 1950's, when it seemed machinery and science had won World War II and had given rise to economic prosperity, American beliefs turned to scientific methods. By the mid 1950's, as positivist philosophers (Cunningham, 2000) and behaviorist psychologists (Skinner, 1953;

1958) were gaining ascendance, the ideas of the scientific linguists and the spelling reformers, among others, were reconsidered.

Sense can be made of statements gathered in this inquiry by using a framework developed by Cunningham and Fitzgerald (1996). Hammond said, “We say it’s decoding. It’s about phonics, and we reduce it to its simplest common denominator” (21:823-824), and Manning said, “To Durrell, the null hypothesis was a debatable issue. Durrell never believed anything in null hypothesis way” (3:114-115). In 1962, Squire proclaimed, “The past quarter-century has produced an evolutionary shift . . . in the way in which we view language . . . from a deductive to an inductive approach” (p. 536). These statements may be understood to be indicative of a positivist epistemological position. Cunningham and Fitzgerald (1996) explained that positivism / radical empiricism was designed in the nineteenth century to remove metaphysics from the pursuit of knowledge. Positivist philosophers thought knowledge must be based on objectively observable, sense data. Positivist data is atomistic; their operational statements are reductionistic; their method is inductive (Cunningham & Fitzgerald, 1996). In the desire to achieve certainty, positivists -- even those today -- engage in reductionism and rely on verificationism (Cunningham, 2000). Positivist “truth” is the certain truth found in statements that can be verified through sense data.

When Hammond expressed concerns about reducing the considerations to decoding, he may be understood to have been concerned about reliance on reductionistic operational statements and atomistic sense data. When Manning said that Durrell “never believed anything in null hypothesis way” (3:114-115), he may be understood to be saying that Durrell believed truth is found in statements that can be

verified through sense data -- not in statements that can only be falsified. When Squire (1962) referred to a shift toward an inductive approach, he seems to have been referring to a shift to positivism. Chronologically, however, this would have been a shift to habits of mind which had been predominant in the 19th century rather than an “evolutionary” shift.

Cunningham and Fitzgerald (1996) continued their theory building by describing pragmatism, “the uniquely American epistemology” (p. 43), which developed during the early twentieth century:

Rather than depending on sense data and inductive logic for knowledge, the pragmatists argued that any idea could be considered knowledge if the consequences of that idea were advantageous. . . . To pragmatists, knowledge is a tool to be evaluated as a tool; it is never certain (p. 43).

Pragmatism was the epistemological stance adopted by progressive educators. Harris (1964) described the predominant view of the leaders of the field of reading throughout the fifties and the early sixties:

Educators identified with the progressive approach . . . have favored reading for a purpose over reading for its own sake. They have emphasized the importance of interest and motivation and criticized reliance on drill; consequently, they have tended to favor silent reading for meaning over heavy phonics programs and accurate word recognition in oral reading (p. 128).

Cunningham and Fitzgerald (1996) also described hypothetico-deductivism, which was heralded in the sixties by Kuhn (1962) and Campbell and Stanley (1963). Like positivism, this scientific method denies the possibility of knowing a reality beyond sense data -- data that is sometimes collected with scientific instruments. Unlike positivism, however, hypothetico-deductivism is deductive in method, with statements deduced from theories, and these statements are subject only to falsification -- not verification.

Despite Manning's comments about Durrell's views, the design of the First Grade Studies, which was attributed to Durrell by Manning (3:106-108), Mazurkiewicz (17:672-673), and Fry (personal communication, 1998) and was agreed upon in Minneapolis by the project directors, was a design using the scientific method of hypothetico-deductivism, and the data was collected with scientifically developed tests. Furthermore, two of the informants, Fry (1966) and Mazurkiewicz (14:571-15:577), contributed to the development of scientific instruments during the First Grade Studies.

Understanding that research supports the prevailing philosophical view.

Similar to the illumination provided to gathered statements by the juxtaposition of their epistemological origins, epistemological referents may illuminate research considerations. Indeed, Monaghan (1976) asserted that questions of philosophy may be the fundamental questions since the prevailing philosophies of a time may have more impact on school practices than does most research. When Wyatt Sundbye said, "Don't talk to me about research-based decisions in reading. I know that you can find some research that will support anything under the sun" (21:832-833), she may be understood to be expressing this point.

In my review of the literature, there was evidence that research has been used to support the prevailing philosophical view. I found that Gates, Jersild, McConnell and Challman (1950), called upon three "discoveries" which supported the change from the focus on letters associated with the alphabet and phonics methods to a focus on whole words associated with the methods of progressive educators:

One was the discovery that the eye, in reading, moves along the line by a series of starts and stops; the second, that the eye while at rest can take in briefly about an inch and a half of a line of print held at the ordinary



reading distance; and the third, that one need not see distinctly all of the letters, or even all of the words, in an 'eyeful' to recognize the group of words (p. 342).

My review of the literature also revealed Squire's (1962) statement about a shift from a predominant concern with meaning to a predominant concern about the significance of form and structure. It was this shift from meaning to form that was at issue in the First Grade Studies, and the shift was accompanied by a concomitant shift in research methodology. In 1962, Carlton Singleton, a former student of Durrell, wrote about the potential of new research designs which could be supported by the "rapid advances made in the utilization of machines for data processing" (p. 495). He wrote that educational research had "limped" along because the questions which could be asked were limited by the research designs that could be supported by the existing capability for statistical analysis. With some of the limitations on the designs for statistical analysis removed, some of the imitations on the types of research designs were also removed. Clymer (1962) reviewed possible research designs in *Elementary English*.

The informants' talk about punch cards, the new computers, and new programs (Lashinger, 8:328; Ruddell, 12:466-468; Hammond, 6:220-227; and Vilscek, 17:691-18:708) may be seen as representative of their awareness of the new data analysis procedures which could provide research to support a change in the prevailing epistemological position. Indeed, a major function of the Coordinating Center in Minnesota was to utilize the University's computing capabilities to conduct data analysis, which Ruddell praised, especially noting the common data base format (12:468-469) and the "covariance work" (9:336).

## Parallels

Just as Cunningham (2000) suggested that the recent National Reading Panel report exemplified a lapse to the positivist epistemological stance, seven of the informants believed there were parallels between the sixties and recent activities. Manning said, “I do feel the conditions were not so dissimilar than what they are right now” (14:554-555), and Wyatt Sundbye lamented that there has been no change in the “most important issue . . . whether there is a panacea” (19:769-770). Fry (personal communication, 1999) said there are “the same old controversies.” Moreover, he wrote that most of the wide variety of methods investigated in the First Grade Studies are “active” today and that the problems are similar “under slightly different names” (personal communication, 1998). Ruddell found parallels in the renewed phonics emphasis and in the type of research design employed (5:181-183) “with the Barbara Foorman work out of Houston” (8:317-318), adding, “These seem to be fresh studies although I’m not sure how fresh they really are, in retrospect” (5:184-185).

Manning found another parallel in the “upheaval. . . . Particularly in a place like Texas, for example, and California, for example, [with] a lot of very, very strong points of view, almost cult-like in terms of what needs to be done” (14:544-547). Hammond expressed concerns about politicians in these states who are influencing reading instruction, pointing to Pete Wilson of California, John Engler of Michigan, George W. Bush of Texas, and Tommy Thompson of Wisconsin, who have put an emphasis on education. He speculated that politicians step in when respect for education is relatively low, but he also said that the answers they give are the simple answers about using phonics and having all kids reading at grade level (20:801-811).

Indeed, other parallels may be drawn to support the similarities and the idea of

a lapse toward the positivism of the past. The parallels may begin with Nila Banton Smith's regretful early "retirement" in 1950 as president of the International Council for the Improvement of Reading Instruction (I.C.I.R.I.), one of the parent organizations of I.R.A. (Smith, 1950a). Smith had just submitted articles reviewing the available scientific evidence about the value of a phonics approach for the I.C.I.R.I. Bulletin (Smith, 1950b, 1950c), and it can be assumed that Emmett Betts, the father of the fledgling organization, and other progressive educators disapproved. Forty years later, in 1990, Marilyn Adams in her renowned book *Beginning to Read* presented the modern scientific evidence which supports a phonics approach. Adams has also endured criticism from some members of the profession and has moved to the private sector.

A second parallel can be drawn between Barbara Foorman's 1994 article entitled "The Relevance of a Connectionist Model of Reading for 'The Great Debate'" and Donald Durrell and Helen Murphy's 1953 article which began with the statement, "The child who learns to read easily is one who notices the separate sounds in spoken words" (p. 556). Although Murphy and Durrell used the term auditory discrimination, they measured the construct with a phonemes test, and their concept parallels the current concept of phonemic awareness.

This comparison continues as Durrell and his students (1958) conducted an experimental study from which they concluded that direct instruction in letter names and phonics produces higher reading achievement at the end of first grade than the instruction provided through basal reader systems. Likewise, Foorman and her team (1998) conducted an experimental study from which they drew the same conclusion.

There may also be parallels with the reports of experts. A conference of

reading experts, sponsored by the Carnegie Corporation and chaired by James B. Conant, past president of Harvard University, was held in September, 1961. These experts reported that schools used both sight word and phonics methods (Conant, 1962). Similarly, in April, 2000, a group of reading experts convened to review the research on how children learn to read, but this panel, the National Reading Panel, concluded that the most effective way to teach children to read is to begin by teaching children the sounds the letters represent.

Parallels continue with the research conducted by Mary Austin and Coleman Morrison in the early sixties. Funded by the Carnegie Corporation, Austin and Morrison studied programs to prepare teachers of elementary reading, and in *The Torchlighters* (1961) they characterized these programs as giving inadequate attention to both coursework about the teaching of reading and to practice teaching. Practice teachers were described as being deficient in understanding phonics and in adapting to individual differences. Recently, *Teaching Reading IS Rocket Science* (1999), prepared by Louisa Moats with funding from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), again addressed the state of teacher preparation and found it lacking. Specifically, the report again recommended that textbooks used in teacher preparation courses need systematic instruction about “speech sounds, the spelling system, and how to read words by sounding them out” (p. 13) to replace “untenable . . . faddish practices” (p. 11).

The comparisons continue with Austin and Morrison’s survey of reading practices in schools across the nation. In *The First R* (1963), they reported that 90% to 95% of 795 communities used basal readers, but they also found the response of 719 of 795 school systems was that phonics is “a word recognition skill of major or

considerable importance” (p. 28). Austin and Morrison concluded that “the importance of phonics or its utilization in the classroom cannot be considered controversial” (p. 28). Similarly, in the year 2000, Baumann, Hoffman, Duffy-Hester, and Moon reported on a survey of some 1,200 classroom teachers in which they found that “a majority of teachers embraced a balanced, eclectic approach to elementary reading instruction, blending phonics and holistic principles and practices” (p. 611), and they concluded that teachers prefer pragmatism to polemics.

Comparisons may be made in requests for funding of research. In April, 1961, then Commissioner of Education McMurrin appeared before the Senate appropriations committee to appeal for support for research activities in reading. Project English was officially announced in *Elementary English* in February, 1962 (Office of Education, 1962). Similarly, in September, 2000, the chairman of the National Reading Panel, Langenberg, went before the House Committee on Education and asked for research funding.

Most recently, *The Wall Street Journal* reported on April 23, 2001, that President Bush’s advisor Reid Lyon said he had little data on how best to prepare Head Start kids for reading, and he was negotiating for funding for three years to determine whether using phonics or using other methods is best (Davis, 2001). This activity may parallel the activity of Thomas Horn and Donald Durrell in 1961 and 1962 when they were approaching the Office of Education about funding a three year study to determine the best way to teach beginning reading.

## Conclusion

Since there may be movement toward conducting studies similar to the First Grade Studies -- to again search for the answer to the perennial question about the

best way to teach beginning reading -- it may be important to remember that the results of the First Grade Studies were much less than certain. While Robert Dykstra, at the Coordinating Center, concluded that the phonics treatments did influence word recognition but not comprehension; Guy Bond, the director of the Coordinating Center, focused on the fact that there was more difference between teachers within a treatment group than between treatment groups and concluded that it was teachers who make the difference. Russell Stauffer, then editor of *The Reading Teacher*, concluded simply that there is not one best way to teach beginning reading.

It also may be important to remember the words of H. S. Tarbell in 1895: "History gives us caution, warns us against the moving of the pendulum, and gives us points of departure from which to measure progress. It gives us courage to attack difficult problems. It shows us where the abiding problems are" (p. 243). Instead of relying on the conventional wisdom, the institutionalized myths, let us as educators endeavor to understand the historical roots of current practices and avoid the moving of the pendulum by realizing that innovative methods are often merely methods from the past. Let us engage in historical reflection to gain the expanded perspective that enables us to understand that the controversies of today are similar in many ways to the controversies of the past and to view, with the wisdom of hindsight, the problems of children who are not reading well and the polemics among advocates of various approaches. Let us learn from the lessons of the past that they may inform and enlighten our conversations and end the rancorous debate.

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