

1

Examining the Historical Context for Teaching Reading

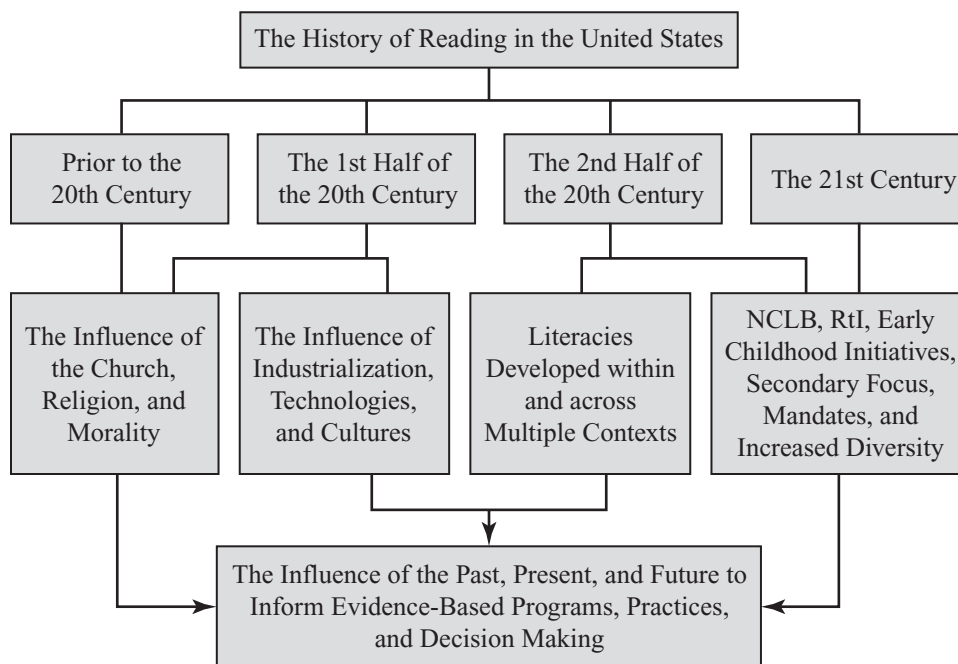


FIGURE 1.1 *Chapter Overview*

Learning Goals

After reading, discussing, and engaging in activities related to this chapter, you will be able to:

1. Relate the history of reading instruction to your own development as a reader.
2. Explain why reading specialists and literacy coaches need to understand the influences of methods and approaches to teaching reading that have been used in the United States.

3. Define and describe historical terminology, methods, and materials used for teaching reading in the United States.
4. Explain what is meant by evidence-based practice and programs and describe how reading specialists and literacy coaches can foster such practices.
5. *Personal Learning Goal:* In a three-minute brainstorming session, share what you know about the history of reading instruction. Write a goal or a question that reflects something you want to learn about this topic. Share this with others in your group.

Standards for Reading Professionals



This chapter provides focused support for current IRA Standards for Reading Professionals. See our companion website for a complete listing of the standards that align with this chapter.

Vignette

Barbara Johnson has recently been hired as her district's reading coordinator. She is responsible for overseeing the literacy instructional programs in the twenty-four elementary and middle schools in the district. For the past five years, she has served as her school's reading specialist. Her supervisor, the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, has expressed concern about the district's lack of a cohesive reading program for the elementary grades, and he has been pushing Barbara to "get teachers on the same page for reading."

The community has experienced a gradual increase in the number of English language learners over the past ten years, as well as a number of

new teachers. District standardized test scores have dipped in comparison to comparable districts in the state, and teachers, administrators, parents, and the school board have all expressed concern about achieving adequate yearly progress.

There are currently several integrated reading series in use in the elementary grades, as well as supplemental programs for teaching phonics and spelling. Although teachers use a Readers/Writers Workshop approach, there is little agreement about its structure. Some upper-grade teachers have chosen to use class sets of chapter books for their reading instruction rather than any commercial reading series.

Thinking Points

1. What do you suspect are the underlying issues Barbara may want to investigate?
2. Which issue should she address first?

Expanding the Vignette: Exploring the Issues

Barbara decided that her first step was to meet with teachers and reading specialists at each of the twenty-four schools. Almost immediately she became aware of the strong prejudices some teachers held in favor of the reading approaches they were currently using. She frequently heard

comments from veteran teachers, such as: "I've been doing this for years, and my students all became readers. Why should I think about changing how I teach?" "Look, reading programs and approaches come and go, and we just jump on any bandwagon that comes along. Yes, I teach

phonics, and, yes, I teach comprehension. I've been through all the phases and I've seen all the trends. What I've learned is that what I use to teach reading isn't nearly as important as how I teach it."

However, several new teachers expressed concerns, such as: "I'm just trying to figure out what I'm doing. At the university, my professors said I should be teaching in a particular way, but I don't see the teachers at my school doing that.

I don't know what to do or what I should use. I just want to survive this school year."

Barbara felt overwhelmed after discussing these issues with the teachers and reading specialists throughout her district. They seemed surprised when asked if there was a research base for why they taught as they did. She knew the assistant superintendent was expecting a plan of action, and she knew he wanted it immediately. However, she didn't know where to begin.

Thinking Points

1. What additional issues and questions have you identified in the vignette?
2. What are some short-term suggestions you would give Barbara?
3. What long-term measures should Barbara consider, given the district policies and the teachers with whom she is working?
4. What are some proactive measures a reading specialist or coach, either at the school or district level, could take to avoid the problems you identified?

Keep your answers to these questions in mind as you read. We will revisit the vignette at the end of this chapter.

What Barbara is experiencing is not uncommon. She works in a district in which the reading program is loosely defined. Consequently, teachers are all doing what they *believe* works best, based on their experience, resources, and student population. As an experienced reading specialist and teacher, she, too, has used a number of innovative approaches, materials, and trends. However, she has also seen these same approaches and materials fall into disfavor and disappear when the new tidal wave of methods and instructional resources hits. How can Barbara lead the teachers toward an investigation of practices that are evidence based?

Why Change?

We find it amazing that between the two of us, we have over seventy years of teaching experience, and during this time, we've survived a variety of trends and approaches. Throughout, we've adjusted our instruction, learned new methods, and adapted to "the latest."

Although we "old-timers" like to say "kids don't change," the reality is that they *do* change. Society changes, the school population changes, parents change, teachers change, and reading curriculum changes. It's part of the teacher's life—and the more reading specialists understand the change process, including what's come before, the better able we are to make sound instructional decisions about what children and adolescents need to become proficient readers and writers in a complex world.

In this chapter we provide an historical synopsis of some of the approaches and methods that have been used for teaching reading during the twentieth century and into the

twenty-first. We attempt to situate them in the political, cultural, social, and historical contexts that shaped them. Think about how you learned to read. If you and your parents share your memories, you will most likely discover that their memories of learning to read are different from yours. If you are a “seasoned” teacher and have taught for twenty to thirty years, you have probably gone through at least three major cycles in reading instructional approaches and materials. In the following section, we’ll explore some of these and how theory, research, political, and sociocultural factors have influenced the methods, approaches, and materials used in schools. We will also investigate how responsible educators use evidence to inform their decision making.

Exploring Reading Instruction over Time

*Tears must be shed—by tender little creatures liable to so many accidents and diseases;
Tears must be shed—by eager little creatures so often refused desired toys;
Tears must be shed—by affectionate little creatures, forced to part from a charming playmate;
But tears need not be shed—by little creatures, ignorant and playful
though they be, while learning to read.*

—*Reading without Tears*, Preface, p. vii

Some time ago, one of our graduate students shared a rare, old book his grandmother had stored in her attic. The book was written for teachers and was an early attempt at providing methodology instruction for teaching children to read. The title of the book is *Reading without Tears: A Pleasant Mode of Learning to Read*. Although the book doesn’t include the author’s name, we have discovered via the Internet that the author of the volume was Favell Lee Mortimer. There is no publication date given, but on the inside cover of the book in beautiful old penmanship is the following: “Harriet Ely, July 3, 1867.” Was Harriet a reading teacher? A principal? A mother or grandmother who wanted to help her children or grandchildren learn to read? In the opening section, the author of this book suggests that the act of teaching reading should occur only under certain conditions:

Only let them not begin too soon (never before four, sometimes not till five); only—let not the lessons be too long; and only—let them be omitted altogether, when the little learners are sick, though only from a cold; or when they are wearied from walking or playing; or when they are excited by promised pleasures. . . . (*Reading without Tears*, p. vii)

From the title of this book, and from the author’s expressed concerns, it appears that when this book was written, certainly before 1867, there were reading methods that brought young children to tears. We wonder about the reading instructional approaches that have come and gone during our own teaching careers, and which, if any, have evoked frustration to the point of eliciting children’s (and sometimes teachers’) tears.

The suggested approach in *Reading without Tears* relies heavily on phonics and the gradual introduction of sound–letter correspondences. For example, the first lesson after introducing the alphabet consists of simple phonetically regular sentences in large, dark type (see Figure 1.2). The remainder of the old text includes gradually more difficult sentences

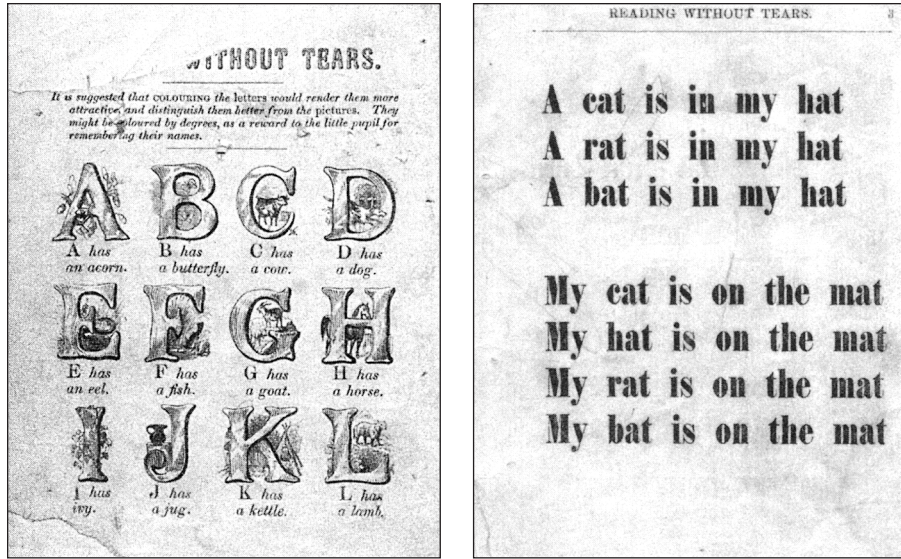


FIGURE 1.2 Reading without Tears: *The Alphabet and First Story*

that carry more meaning. Note the complexity of the sentences that are found in Figure 1.3 (midway through the book) and then in Figure 1.4 (see page 6), the final story of the book, “The Beggar Boy.”

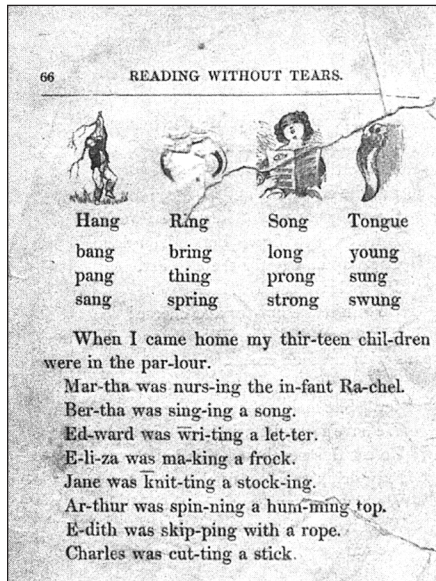


FIGURE 1.3 Reading without Tears: *page 66*

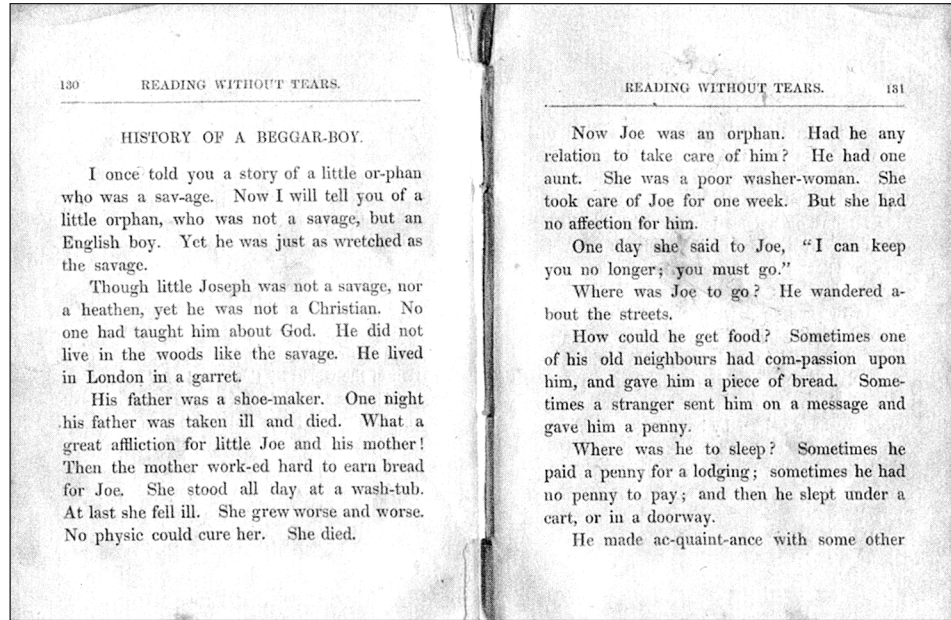


FIGURE 1.4 Reading without Tears: “*The Beggar Boy*,” page 130

The methods suggested in this 140+ year-old book parallel many of those recommended today, and they demonstrate that the search for the most effective ways to teach children to read has preoccupied reading teachers and specialists for a long time.

The Early Years of the United States

The earliest “textbook” used in the Jamestown settlement in 1607 was the Horn Book, a paddle-shaped piece of wood with a transparent sheet of animal horn that protected the alphabet and verses written on the wood (Ruddell, 2006). Later, *The New England Primer* (1790–1850) was published, with grim admonitions for children to behave themselves or suffer the consequences. This early textbook included the alphabet, verses, rhymes, and stories, such as the following:

*In the burying place may see
Graves shorter there than I;
From Death's arrest no age is free,
Young children too may die.
My god, may such an awful sight,
Awakening be to me!
Oh! That by early grace I might
For Death prepared be.*

Religious and patriotic views dominated instruction in the country from 1607 to 1840. The instructional emphasis was on knowledge of the alphabet, recitation, memorization of Bible verses, spelling bees, oral reading, and elocution. Teachers were most often highly moral men who could read and write (Ruddell, 2006).

In the mid and late 1800s, the Civil War, Gold Rush, westward expansion, and industrial revolution increased the need for an educated populace. In 1841, Rev. William Holmes McGuffey published the first *McGuffey Reader* with fifty-five lessons that introduced a strict ethical code that required children to be prompt, good, kind, honest, and truthful. The first two readers focused on alphabet knowledge, phonics, syllables, and sight words, and the stories were written at increasingly difficult reading levels with some comprehension questions. The second reader included 85 lessons with 160 pages that outlined history, biology, astronomy, zoology, and botany, along with table manners and attitudes toward God, teachers, parents, and the poor. In all, there were six readers, with the third through sixth intended for what would be today's middle and secondary students. The sixth was published in 1885, with 186 selections that quoted great authors such as Longfellow, Shakespeare, and Dickens (Payne, 2001). The "eclectic" readers (so-called because they included selections from a variety of sources) were very moralistic and presented a picture of a white Protestant America (see Figure 1.5).

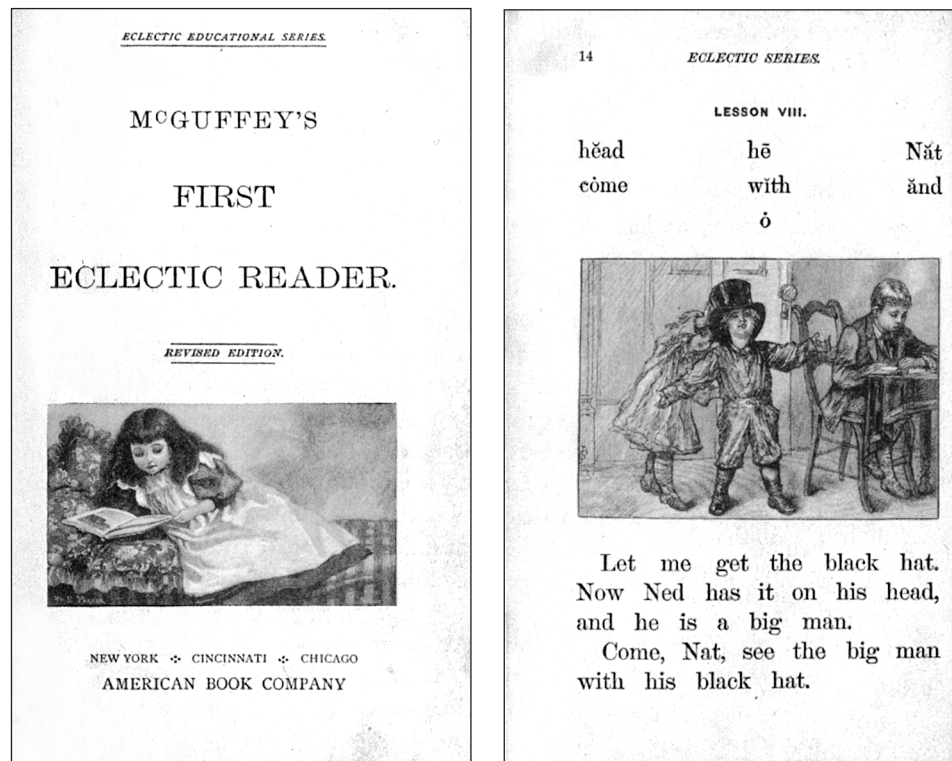


FIGURE 1.5 McGuffey Reader Excerpt

The First Half of the Twentieth Century

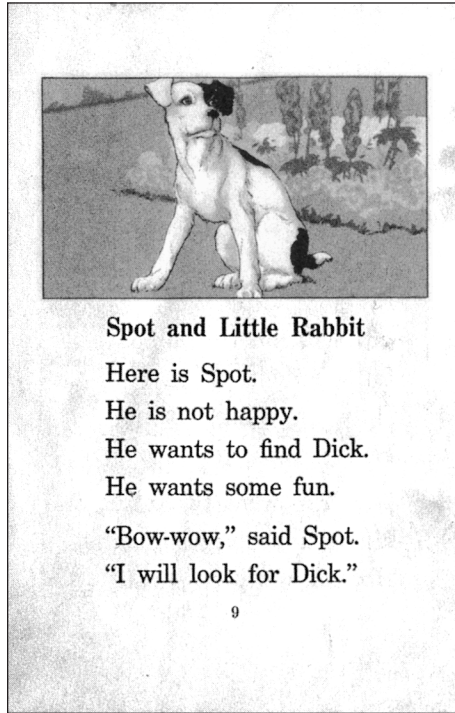
In 1908, E. B. Huey published *The Psychology and Pedagogy of Reading*, an influential and progressive text that examined the reading process using the scientific method (Huey, 1908/1968). At about this time, universal education in the United States was gaining momentum with an enormous increase in those attending school, and with the support of federal and state legislatures. However, as waves of immigrants from Western Europe were landing on Ellis Island, children of immigrants, descendants of former slaves, and the sons and daughters of the poor continued to labor in factories, fields, and sweatshops, with little access to formal education.

In the schools, reading for information and commerce replaced the primary purpose of reading during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which was reading the Bible. As the United States entered World War I, the armed forces needed to identify young men who demonstrated leadership. Because this had to be accomplished rapidly, the decision was made to use newly developed “scientific testing.” The intent was to identify both the “leaders” and the “followers.” The result was the country’s first large-scale testing program (Ruddell, 2005) and the development of a constellation of instruments, a number of which, though revised, are still in use today. Thorndike’s 1917 measure of reading comprehension, which he described as ability in reading, Binet’s IQ test, and Gray’s (1915) *Standardized Oral Reading Paragraphs* are among the early “scientifically constructed” tests that attempted to measure complex cognitive abilities and processes.

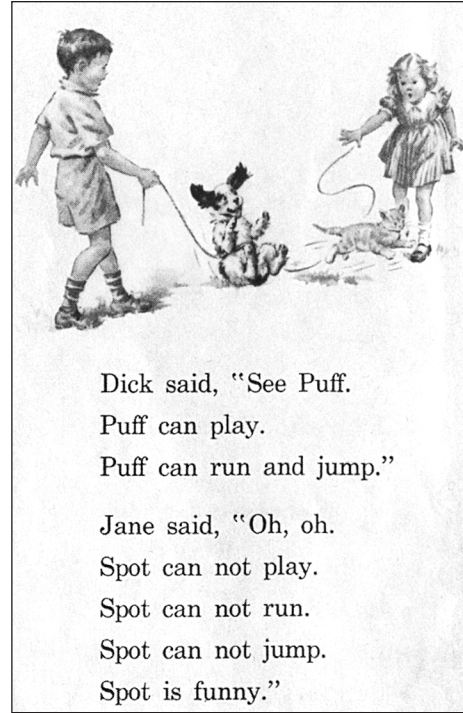
During the first half of the twentieth century, educators explored a variety of approaches for teaching reading, including phonics. Whether to teach phonics was not argued; what was debated was when and how phonics should be taught. There were those who advocated for synthetic phonics instruction (students learn the parts and blend them into words), and there were those who recommended analytic phonics instruction (students learn words and then analyze the parts). Analytic phonics was popularly referred to as a “look–say” approach, later to be skewered in the popular press.

In the late 1930s through the 1960s, publishers provided a variety of leveled readers that were used to teach children to read. Instructional approaches reflected the dominance of behaviorism and the quest to produce scripted teachers’ guides. Remember that during the first half of the century, the majority of teachers received less than two years of preparation in regional “Normal Schools.” The leveled readers also reflected the work of researchers such as Thorndike (1921) and Dolch (1942), who identified the words most frequently used in books. Publishers then produced children’s “readers” with stories written according to these word lists. The resulting books included contrived stories with carefully controlled vocabulary, and sight words that were frequently repeated so that a child eventually achieved independence in reading them. Nila Banton Smith’s (1935) *American Reading Instruction* and her second edition (1965) provide a comprehensive and fascinating examination of literacy instruction in those times.

Throughout the United States, from the mid 1930s until the 1980s, millions of children came to know a “typical” American family and its members: Father, Mother, Dick, Jane, Sally, and, of course, their pets, Puff and Spot (see Figures 1.6 and 1.7 opposite and 1.8 on page 10). If children were not reading about Dick and Jane, they most likely were reading in other books about Alice and Jerry, Ann and David, or Janet and Mark, all of whom lived in

**FIGURE 1.6** *Dick and Jane: 1935*

Source: Reprinted with permission of SRA/Scott Foresman.

**FIGURE 1.7** *Dick and Jane: 1945*

Source: Reprinted with permission of SRA/Scott Foresman.

white, middle-class families and communities like Dick and Jane’s. The homogenization of American culture and the resulting lack of diversity in some of the early readers characterized the instructional materials that were used in classrooms for over forty years. Later editions of this series included illustrations of children of different ethnicities. These were portrayed as classmates, neighbors, and friends of Dick, Jane, and Sally, or their counterparts in the other readers.

The Second Half of the Twentieth Century

During World War II, educators and the public discovered once again that many soldiers were unable to read well enough to comprehend training manuals and other related texts. The advent of content area reading—teaching students how to read informational and expository texts—was a direct result. Post–World War II was a time of increased prosperity and political conservatism as the United States entered the Cold War. Along with the growing nationalism during the two World Wars and the notion of the United States as the melting pot, immigrant and Native American children were strongly encouraged to assimilate,

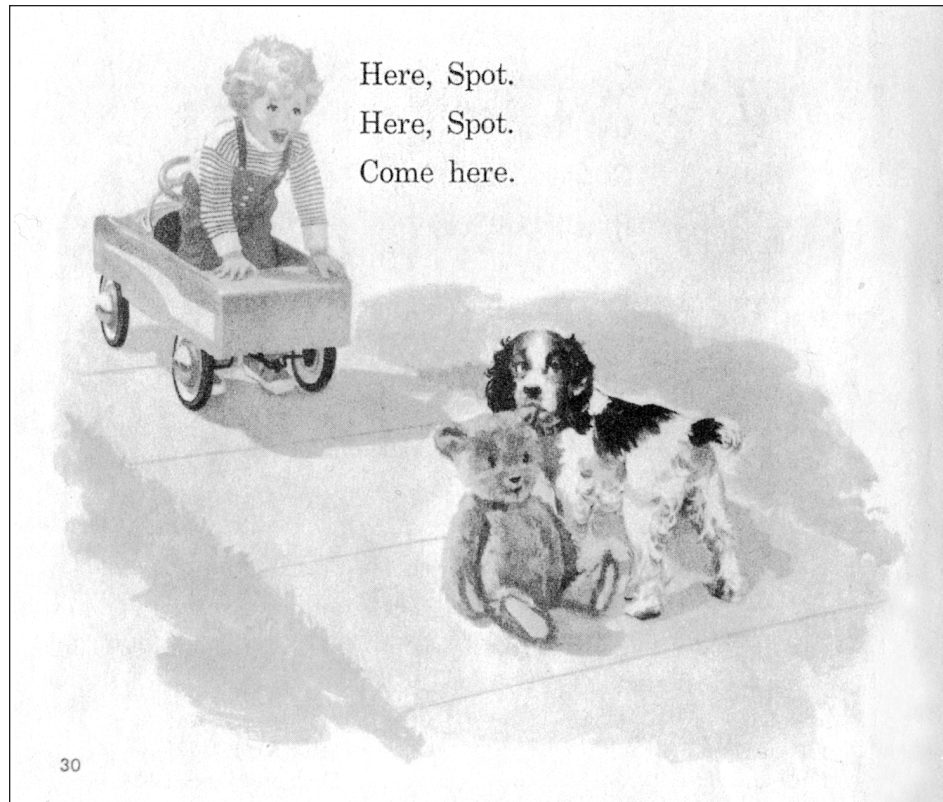


FIGURE 1.8 *Dick and Jane: 1962*

Source: Reprinted with permission of SRA/Scott Foresman.

often losing most of their cultural heritage in one generation. When the Russians launched *Sputnik*, the “Race for Space” brought millions of dollars to the task of reforming the science, mathematics, and reading programs in schools. Laws were passed to increase the age of mandatory school attendance. Although the United States offered “education to all,” many inequities remained in the quality of education for the rich and poor, particularly in racially segregated schools.

During this time, phonics was taught in many schools, and debate continued about the best approach, synthetic or analytic. Rudolph Flesch’s (1955) famous publication *Why Johnny Can’t Read* mobilized proponents of synthetic phonics, including many parents throughout the country. Then, the publication of the book *Learning to Read: The Great Debate* (Chall, 1967) divided reading professionals into two camps: those advocating synthetic phonics and those advocating more holistic and analytic methods of phonics instruction. The First Grade Studies (Bond & Dykstra, 1967a, 1967b; reprinted in *Reading Research Quarterly*, 1997) attempted to answer the question about the most effective way to teach reading, once and for all. Guy Bond and Robert Dykstra, and their colleagues involved in

the First Grade Studies, concluded that no one method was so much more effective in all situations that it should be considered the one best method for teaching reading. Unfortunately, both sides interpreted the findings to support their positions on phonics. According to Bob Dykstra (Shearer, 2001), “Reading educators all over the country were telling their audiences that the most important conclusion of this research was that the teacher is the most important element in the instructional situation. Although this may well be true and is a ‘feel good’ thing to say, it was not a conclusion we reached, nor that the data support” (p. 2).

In response to perceived concerns about a lack of phonics instruction, some researchers during the 1960s and 1970s became very interested in examining the linguistic foundations of the reading process. From their work came new approaches, including programmed reading with its sequential lessons in workbooks, cards, and worksheets (Sullivan & Buchanan, 1963), reading machines (e.g., the language master and tachistoscope), color-coded text, scripted teacher’s guides (see Figure 1.9), and the Linguistic Approach, advocated by linguists interested in studying how “talk” is translated into reading (Fries, 1963). The intent of these methods and programs was to provide beginning readers with consistency, explicit instruction, a

28

SOUNDS

Objective: Teaching thhh as in this

Task 1 Teacher Identifies Sounds

a. Do the small th's first.

th

thhh. What sound is this?
Wait. thhh. Good.

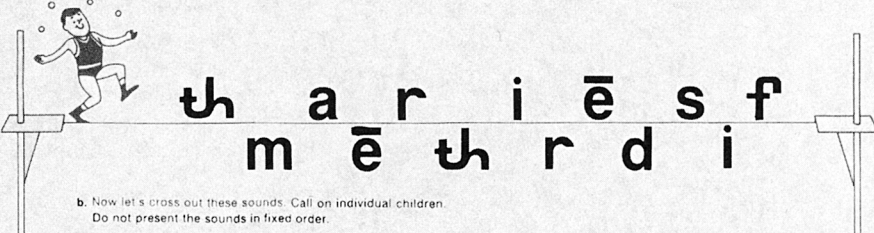
th

thhh. Tell me. thhh.
Wait. Yes. thhh. Good.

b. I bet you don't know this. What? You are smart! Identify th if necessary.
Listen to some words starting with thhh: this, them, they, the, there, these, those, that.
Say them with me. This, everybody, this. That, everybody, that. Them, everybody, them.
Does your tongue tickle? thhh.

Task 2 Children Identify Sounds
Use acetate and crayon.

a. When I point, you say what it is. Be certain the children are looking where you point.
Repeat correct responses, and praise the children.



b. Now let's cross out these sounds. Call on individual children.
Do not present the sounds in fixed order.

65 NOW GO TO READING SOUNDS.

FIGURE 1.9 *DISTAR Teacher's Script*

Source: S. Engelmann and E. C. Burner, *Distar Reading I, An Instructional System*. Copyright © 1969 by Science Research Associates. Reprinted with permission of McGraw-Hill Educators.

great deal of practice in decoding, and the gradual introduction of texts that contained the specific linguistic elements that were being taught.

One of the most interesting experiments implemented during the 1960s and early 1970s was the Initial Teaching Alphabet (i/t/a) (Downing, 1962; Mazurkiewicz & Tanyzer, 1966). The i/t/a alphabet was originally called the Augmented Roman Alphabet, and it consisted of forty-four lowercase characters, twenty-four of them conventional letters. Each symbol in i/t/a, according to Sir James Pitman who created the alphabet, had one phonic meaning. For example, the two sounds of the *th* digraph, as in *the* (voiced) and in *thistle* (voiceless) had two distinctive symbols. The purpose of i/t/a was to provide children with a phonetically regular alphabet so that they could quickly learn to read i/t/a stories, with the goal of eventually transferring their developing reading skills to conventional English. Children's books were written with i/t/a (see Figure 1.10), and, not surprisingly, though the students learned to read these books, many had difficulty later when they attempted to read conventional texts.

During the 1960s, a social, political, cultural, and moral revolution was occurring outside the walls of schools. The Beatles changed the music, clothing, and culture of the students, the Vietnam War polarized the nation, marijuana and LSD began to show up in even the most rural schools, and television brought the Civil Rights movement and "The War" into every home. University attendance exploded as large numbers of white students

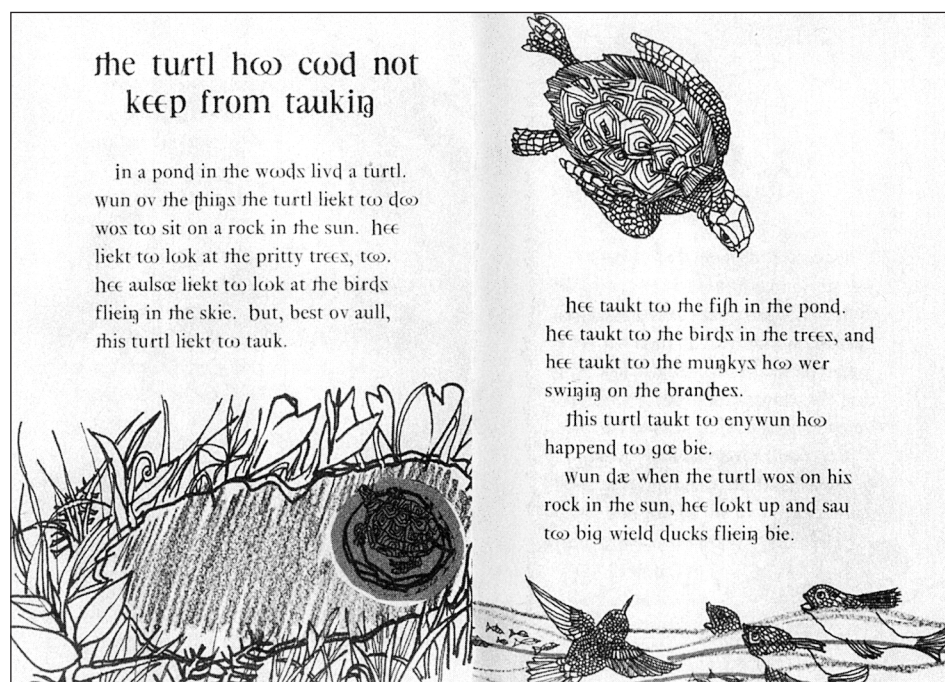


FIGURE 1.10 Initial Teaching Alphabet Text

Source: Reprinted from M. Miller, *The Trick*, 1966, Initial Teaching Alphabet Publications, Inc.

and a small, but increasing, number of students from various racial and ethnic groups took their seats as “first generation college students,” many to avoid the draft. In general, the public schools seemed oblivious to these social and moral phenomena, continuing to ask the same pedagogical questions, independently of the context of the times.

As teachers began to place a greater emphasis on phonics and decoding, many found their students were not developing proficient comprehension. As with phonics, a discrete list of comprehension skills was identified and it was recommended that the skills be taught and that students practice them frequently through a variety of skills exercises (Clymer, 1963). Among these comprehension skills were finding the main idea and supporting details, sequencing, drawing conclusions, making generalizations, comparing and contrasting, and identifying cause-and-effect relationships.

The primary instructional materials during the 1970s and 1980s were basal reading programs and they included leveled readers, phonics activities, and a great deal of comprehension skill practice, usually found on the pages of the accompanying workbooks. The programs also included highly structured, detailed teacher’s guides, with different lesson plans for each of the three instructional groups (high, average, low). The fallout from the political and cultural revolution of the earlier decade fostered an attitude of conservatism that was manifested in instructional materials designed for schools.

However, as with the other approaches and methods that had been used over the decades, problems such as the following appeared.

1. Because reading instruction took place in ability groups, there were built-in advantages for capable readers, who were exposed to far more vocabulary in the “high” group reading books than in the books assigned to the “low” groups. Over the years of elementary school, therefore, the “rich got richer, and the poor got poorer” (Stanovich, 1986).
2. The contrived texts, for the most part, contained stories (with very little informational text) that reflected little or no diversity in characters, families, and cultures.
3. The teachers’ guides and workbooks included end-of-story questions and activities that kept students busy, but they simply tested, rather than taught, comprehension. Once again, the methods and materials for teaching fell into disfavor.

During the next two decades (1980s, 1990s), theorists and researchers from across the fields of psychology, linguistics, and education explored how readers think about text, how they make connections while they read, and how they ultimately construct meaning. Educators’ conversations about reading methods and materials included references to schema formation, the influence on meaning-making of prior knowledge and experience (Anderson & Pearson, 1984); transactional theory, the view that meaning is constructed through an active interchange of ideas within a particular context, as with reader and text (Rosenblatt, 1978); and scaffolding, how learners benefit from the assistance of more experienced individuals, and how they eventually gain independence when that support is gradually lessened (Bruner, 1983; Vygotsky, 1978). Instead of focusing on the finite skills that readers develop, educators began talking about how to build students’ backgrounds, promote concept formation, instill joy and delight in reading, and forge connections among the language processes of reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

Also during the early 1980s, computers began to be used in the schools, mostly for drill and practice and for teaching students to learn to write basic computer programs. Remember, at that time, people actually believed that computer users would have to write their own programs! Not surprisingly, in the early stages of computer use, teachers lacked the time, training, and technical support to help students, and software was comparatively unsophisticated.

At the time, linguistics, psychology, and research on the writing process were fostering more holistic instructional approaches (Calkins, 1983; Cambourne, 1988; Goodman, 1986). An amazing grassroots movement, led by classroom teachers, ushered in a new theoretical perspective that swept the nation and evolved into what was eventually called “whole language.” For about a ten-year period in the United States (mid 1980s to the mid 1990s), there was a decreased emphasis on teaching discrete skills, whether phonics/decoding or comprehension. The 1985 publication of *Becoming a Nation of Readers* (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985) supported this shift in pedagogy. Instructional materials for reading included literature, with a wide variety of unadapted texts, stories, and books that were not contrived and that had not been controlled for vocabulary difficulty or readability.

As you might have guessed by now, once again, reading approaches and materials came under intense scrutiny. This time, the changes were propelled by a number of factors, including:

1. The low reading performance of students as measured by standardized tests in states where more holistic teaching approaches were used;
2. A series of federally funded research studies that revealed that, for most children, learning to read is not a “natural” process; that for most children, identifying, blending, and segmenting sounds in words appears to be an important predictor of eventual reading achievement; that these same children appear to benefit from explicit phonics instruction; that many children need practice in reading texts with a high percentage of decodable words; and that young children who have difficulty learning to read benefit from early, intensive reading intervention (Adams, 1990; National Reading Panel, 2000; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998); and
3. The huge influx of immigrant children in states such as California, Texas, Arizona, and Florida whose home language was other than English.

These factors collectively had an enormous impact on reading instruction toward the end of the 1990s. In the next section, we look at what’s to come in the twenty-first century.

BEYOND THE BOOK

Chapter 1 Focus Issue: Why Do You Teach the Way You Do?

- How did your teacher preparation program shape your knowledge base and philosophy as a beginning teacher of reading and writing?
- In what ways did the unique social culture of the school and surrounding community influence and shape your emerging beliefs and practices?
- How have your views been influenced or supported by colleagues, literacy professionals, and administrators?

- How have professional development, professional affiliations (such as International Reading Association [IRA] membership or attendance at conferences), journal subscriptions, and/or professional service changed you as a literacy educator?
 - How have outside forces such as the economy, NCLB, RtI, and now, Race to the Top performance mandates, changing student and professional standards, and other factors altered the way you teach?
-

Teaching Reading in the Twenty-First Century

At the beginning of the century, many classrooms were dynamic and process-oriented in their approach to reading and writing. Although the workshop approach to literacy had been around for years (Atwell, 1998; 2007), a new generation of educators adapted it to reflect a more focused and goal-oriented view of instruction (Dorn & Soffos, 2005; Serafini, 2001). This was in part a response to more rigid standards and testing requirements, but also a result of better understandings about the interrelated nature of language processes (reading, writing, speaking, listening, representing). By the end of the 1990s, we witnessed the widespread use of Six Trait Writing (Culham, 2003) and other approaches that attempted to make visible the writer's in-process thinking and provide the student with a structure for cognitive self-assessment. Although many teachers still engaged in variations of Daily Oral Language (Byers, 2001), which included the use of sentences with errors or missing elements written on the board to teach grammar and spelling, classrooms across the nation were also embracing literature circles (Daniels, 2002) and recognizing the role of scaffolding student-to-student interaction as a powerful way to improve comprehension and develop critical language skills (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008; Shearer, Ruddell, & Vogt, 2001). Guided reading described the teacher's role as that of cognitive coach (Dorn, French, & Jones, 1998) and became a widely used model for instruction (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Opitz & Ford, 2001). Guided reading proponents favored what was commonly called a *balanced literacy approach*, a comprehensive literacy program characterized by the use of authentic texts and explicit skill instruction. In such an approach, responsibility for implementing strategies was gradually shifted from teacher to student as a skill or strategy was acquired. Although books were often leveled, students were grouped in flexible, creative, and nonstatic ways. Rather than establishing fixed reading groups, teachers varied the way they grouped students, at times working with the whole class or calling together groups of various sizes for work on a particular skill or strategy (Caldwell & Ford, 2002; Opitz & Ford, 2008; Mosteller, Light, & Sachs, 1996). Proponents of flexible grouping were responding to the growing body of research related to the harmful effects of practices such as round robin reading and fixed ability grouping (Caldwell & Ford, 2002; Worthy, Broaddus, & Ivey, 2001). Moreover, there was an emphasis, even in the primary grades, on the fostering of critical literacy (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004a; Van Sluys, Lewison, & Seely-Flint, 2006). Technology was no longer a stranger in the classroom, and teachers moved beyond the primitive use of computers for drill and fill tutorials into using technology as a truly innovative and socially driven means for teaching and learning that challenged previous assumptions about literacy's forms and purposes.

Several highly influential documents were published in the late 1990s and early 2000s. They were widely disseminated, not only to educators and administrators, but also to national and state legislators and other policymakers. These included substantial research syntheses of studies related to reading/language arts. The Report of the National Reading Panel (NRP, 2000), the Report of the Committee on Reading Disabilities (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998), and the series of reports of the Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA) had a powerful influence on the literacy research agenda at the beginning of the 2000s.

Major findings from these reports identified five areas that the Panel believed had a sufficient amount of scientifically-based research on which to draw conclusions: comprehension, fluency, phonemic awareness, phonics, and word meaning/vocabulary. In the mid 2000s, the National Literacy Panel on Language Minority Children and Youth (NLP) published their findings about literacy instruction for language minority students (August & Shanahan, 2008), and the Institute for Education Sciences of the U.S. Department of Education issued recommendations for literacy and language instruction for English learners in the elementary grades (Gersten, Baker, Shanahan, Linan-Thompson, Collins, & Scarcella, 2007). These important documents reinforced and extended the findings and recommendations of the NRP and CIERA reports.

Major findings from these reports include:

- Assessment must be continual, ongoing, dynamic, and inextricably linked to instruction.
- For most children, learning to read is not a natural process and must include explicit, systematic instruction in phonics as well as instruction in specific comprehension skills and strategies.
- Reading and writing are highly interrelated, especially in early stages.
- Adolescents need to spend more time writing and reading high-quality literature.
- Motivation can be enhanced and assessed.
- Children not reaching benchmarks can benefit from thirty minutes a day of intensive intervention in addition to regular classroom instruction.
- Teachers should actively seek connections between home and school literacies.

Despite the fact that the National Reading Panel Report and other federally funded reports were embraced by legislators and the press and served as catalysts for numerous reform efforts throughout the country, there were also thoughtful, scholarly, and highly critical responses to them (Cunningham, 2001; Purcell-Gates, 2000). These suggested that the National Reading Panel Report had serious flaws. Chief among them were that the methods used by the panel for selecting research studies to analyze were limited.

The conversations about how research should be conducted continue today. Topics include methodologies that are or are not appropriate for particular research questions; the role of large-scale, empirical studies of children using control and experimental groups; and the place of qualitative studies, including case study and ethnography (see Dillon, 2005; Hinchman, 2005; Steinkuehler, Black, & Clinton, 2005; Tobin, 2005). At the time of this writing, the Institute for Educational Sciences (IES) within the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) has indicated that there will be a more flexible approach to educational research design within the Obama administration. The changes recommended by IES

remain to be seen, but it is our hope that researchers will be able to employ the full range of research methodologies to answer the pressing educational questions in our field.

During the early and mid 2000s, many U.S. schools worked diligently to meet the requirements of the historic, bipartisan, federal legislation titled No Child Left Behind (NCLB), which was a major component of the reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 2001. Signed into law in early 2002, NCLB and the accompanying Reading First initiative:

- Significantly increased the amount of federal funding for improving reading instruction in the early grades. Participating schools had to provide detailed descriptions of their methods to ensure that they were using “scientifically-based reading instruction.”
- Required that teachers engage in systematic instruction and assessment of children’s phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. Schools that did not meet the Department of Education’s criteria for “adequate yearly progress” were expected to engage in systematic improvements in order to meet children’s literacy needs or face sanctions.
- Required that reading instruction must be based on “what works.” Who and what determines “what works” was a major question in the mid 2000s. The point on which everyone seemed to agree was that we needed to keep seeking more effective ways to help all children achieve literacy (Allington & Walmsley, 2007).

In 2004, the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) gave rise to a general education initiative called Response to Intervention (RtI). Designed to reduce the number of students placed in special education, RtI seeks to identify and address the needs of struggling readers before they fail. Components of RtI include:

- High-quality (research-based) classroom instruction;
- Periodic screening of all students to identify those in need of support;
- Careful monitoring of student learning;
- Targeted differentiated instruction; and
- Increasing intensity in the levels of support provided to struggling readers.

RtI is often, but not always, implemented in a three-tiered model. (See Chapter 6 for a complete discussion of the reading professional’s role in implementing RtI.)

In 2005, a new grant program was authorized under Title I and No Child Left Behind. Called Striving Readers, the program intended to raise the reading achievement levels of middle and high school-aged students in Title I eligible schools. The project’s components include:

- Professional development for teachers across subject areas;
- Targeted intervention for struggling readers; and
- Rigorous project evaluation.

The release of *Reading Next: A Vision for Action and Research in Middle and High School Literacy* (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004) had a powerful impact on adolescent literacy programs. Revised in 2006, it outlined fifteen key elements for adolescent literacy intervention.

Shortly thereafter, a number of educators began to envision the use of the RtI model with struggling adolescent readers. To fulfill the requirements of both Reading First and Striving Readers and to meet students' literacy needs, it became readily apparent that many more reading specialists and literacy coaches would be needed (Shanklin, 2007). In the decade before the economic downturn of 2008–2009, the number of K–12 literacy coaches increased considerably, even though there were few agreed-on roles and responsibilities for these newly created positions in the nation's schools (Bean, Cassidy, Grumet, Shelton, & Wallis, 2002; Walpole & Blamey, 2008).

One of the quiet revolutions that occurred in the first decade of the millennium was the unprecedented growth of pre-kindergarten programs (Maeroff, 2006). According to a *New York Times* report released by Rutgers Early Childhood Professor Steven Barnett (2009), in the six years between 2002 and 2008, enrollment in pre-school rose to 1.1 million, and spending on early childhood programs nearly doubled, from \$2.4 billion to \$4.6 billion. (See <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/08/education/08school.html?r=1&ref=us>.)

The International Reading Association and other literacy-related entities strove to maintain a “seat at the table” in Washington, working hard to improve the efficacy of NCLB, while voicing a number of continued concerns about the nature of evidence, methodology, and “best practice.” In *A Call to Action and a Framework for Change: IRA's Position on NCLB Reform*, posted on the reading.org website (www.reading.org/resources/issues/focus_nclb.html), the organization urged that the following items be added to the five essential elements of effective reading: classroom organization, differentiated instruction, expert intensive tutoring, motivation and student engagement, writing, and oral language.

With stimulus money available and all the attention paid to professional development, it came as no surprise when, late in 2009, the Obama administration announced that it would be introducing the new Literacy Education for All, Results for the Nation (LEARN) Act proposal to Congress. LEARN sought to provide funds for professional development efforts for K–12 teachers in high-poverty and low-achieving states.

Change and Challenge

As the 2007 target date for the Reauthorization of NCLB/ESEA came and went, the war in Iraq and growing conflict in Afghanistan continued to strain the federal budget. One of the factors that stalled the reauthorization process was the perceived failure of the government to devote the kinds of money necessary to enable schools to meet the demands of NCLB. As discussion on NCLB continued, many legislators sought to reconnect NCLB to its earlier label, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Although both political parties promised to put educational reform at the forefront, by the time Barack Obama assumed the Presidency, the nation was in what many called the greatest recession since The Great Depression. A rapidly declining stock market, the bailout of financial institutions, the collapse of the housing market, and continued military conflict threatened to make educational reform less of a priority. Rising unemployment meant a greatly reduced tax base, on which schools relied. As families struggled to remain in their homes, many school districts across the nation were forced to cut teacher salaries and eliminate a number of teaching positions. Among the results were larger class sizes and an increasing need to

find on-site ways to address professional development. Funds for professional development that involved travel virtually evaporated. Reading specialists who had never missed IRA conventions or their state reading conferences found that their districts simply had no funds available for these vital professional activities.

Race to the Top: The New Template for ESEA

On March 10, 2009, President Obama delivered the first major education speech of his presidency, laying the foundation for restructuring the nation's educational system with the announcement of his "five pillars of educational reform."

- "Investing in early childhood initiatives," reframing Early Head Start and Head Start.
- "Encouraging better standards and assessments" by using testing itineraries that are more suitable for students and better aligned with the world in which they live.
- "Recruiting, preparing, and rewarding outstanding teachers" with incentives for a new generation of teachers and for new levels of excellence among all teachers.
- "Promoting innovation and excellence in America's schools" by modernizing the school calendar and the structure of the school day and supporting effective charter schools.
- "Providing every American with a quality higher education—whether it's college or technical training."

(See ED Review, March 13, 2009 at <http://www.ed.gov/news/newsletters/edreview/2009/0313.html> for links to the entire speech.)

Still, the government was grappling with the Reauthorization of NCLB/ESEA. Because of all the strong emotions surrounding NCLB/ESEA, legislators and educators were looking to reframe these titles and to address some of the concerns expressed by critics of the Act. On January 4, 2010, in hopes of signaling a sincere commitment to reform, an article in *Education Week* released by the U.S. Department of Education announced that "the new template" for NCLB/ESEA will be Race to the Top. It incorporates many of the ideas related in President Obama's earlier address. Once again, schools applying for funds under the Race to the Top initiative will have to meet stringent guidelines, such as tying teacher evaluations to student achievement on standardized tests, and being required to prove that the school's educational practices result in "value added," meaning they meet a certain criteria in terms of measurable gains on students' test scores. You can follow the developments related to NCLB/ESEA and Race to the Top on the *Education Week* website at <http://www.edweek.org>.

As schools battled to do more with less, many districts were able to benefit from the influx of \$44 billion in the first round of money for schools from the federal stimulus package (www.ed.gov). This more than doubled the funding for education from the previous two years. Though not sufficient to cover local and state educational deficits, unprecedented funds were allocated to meet needs directly related to educational outcomes, such as hiring teachers and developing sustainable literacy programs.

Then, in 2009 and 2010, as part of the stimulus package under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), the federal government implemented the Race to the Top initiative, releasing \$4.35 billion in funds to support states implementing educational reforms. What made this initiative different was that one of its major goals was to ensure

that as students progressed from grades 3–12, they were *on track for college and career ready* by the time they graduated from high school. Thus, assessments became a huge issue in the equation. Because states would be competing against one another for these funds, strict compliance with parameters on raising standards, improving teacher quality, and expanding the reach of charter schools *as defined by the federal government* was seen as a blessing by some and as coercion by others. For more information on Race to the Top and updates on its implementation, visit <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/index.html>.

In spite of all the wrangling over NCLB throughout the years, many positive and lasting changes have grown directly or indirectly out of the National Reading Panel's original work.

- America's long neglected middle and high school reading programs have come to the forefront, and content area teachers are (sometimes reluctantly) joining in the literacy quest.
- Another great victory for literacy is the shift from a focus on Reading First and Striving Readers to the widespread adoption of the Response to Intervention model. A term that originated in U.S. Legislature, Response to Intervention (RtI) is a model for intervention emphasizing prevention of reading failure and seeking to reduce the number of referrals to special education. (See Chapter 6 for further discussion of RtI.)
- Never before has there been such momentum to ensure that highly qualified professionals—anyone working with children, from paraprofessionals to administrators—are highly skilled and educated in literacy processes and practices.
- Never before have we seen such collaboration among educators across the country to engage in meaningful professional development.
- Universities have re-examined their programs to raise the competency levels of all those responsible for direct and indirect literacy instruction and to align with increasing professional standards.
- Schools are recognizing the importance of using substantive content area instruction as a vehicle for facilitating English language acquisition for students at all levels of proficiency. Practices that embody the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) Model (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2010a; Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2010b) are leading educators' thinking and transforming their practice as they implement these powerful and effective techniques to enhance both content learning and language proficiency in their English learners.

The impact of NCLB/ESEA, combined with the economic challenges that began in 2008 and 2009, changed our schools forever. Historically, the infrastructures of society, such as government programs, schools, and transportation, feel the impact of economic crises most keenly and their unwieldy structures make them slowest to recover. The 2010s find us in times of challenge and opportunity. It may take the next ten years to decipher the full effects of all that occurred in the past decade. No one can or should make light of the suffering of communities struggling to educate their children. However, these trials force us to examine our essence and rededicate ourselves as educators. While the debate continues about issues such as adoption of nationwide standards for students or what constitutes evidence-based instructional practice, we suggest that the debate is not a sign of a broken system. We sincerely believe that healthy debate

is one of the best ways to remain focused on finding increasingly effective ways to improve our educational system and validate our hopes for our children.

Thinking Points: What’s Important to You?

Now that you have read our synthesis of the history of reading, the elements NCLB suggested as the most important aspects of literacy, and the Obama “five pillars,”

- Make a list of YOUR top five components of effective literacy instruction.
- What is the evidence base for these?
- Are there any items on your list that you are certain are research-based, but that you cannot support with data until you do some investigating?

Perhaps Barbara is like you. How can this exercise help Barbara relate to teachers’ beliefs and practices?

Looking to the Future: The Case for Evidence-Based Decision Making and Principled Practice

Because this chapter deals with past and present educational practice, and because so much continues to revolve around establishing a *research base* or *evidence base* for what we do, we think it is important to clarify what we mean by some of the terms that are often used to support our practices. In mid 2009, out of curiosity, we conducted a web search on bing.com using the designators *best practice in reading instruction*. Would you be surprised to know it called up 9,940,000 sites? Ask.com yielded links to 7,515,000 websites, while Google led us to a mere 1,440,000 sites. Is it any wonder that sincere educators who care so much about children are overwhelmed? We had similar results with the terms *evidence-based reading instruction*, well over a million links. Fortunately, the first link listed was to www.reading.org (IRA’s website), with their thoughtful, powerful position statement entitled “What Is Evidence-Based Reading Instruction?” (IRA, 2004).

IRA (2004) defines *evidenced-based* instruction, sometimes called *scientifically-based* or *research-based* instruction, as a program or collection of instructional practices with a proven record of success—reliable, trustworthy, with valid evidence to suggest that, when used with a particular group of children, the result will be adequate gains in literacy achievement.

Although qualitative methods are expanding our research repertoire, traditionally, high-quality research is that which is:

- Objective—that the data would yield a similar interpretation regardless of the individual evaluator.
- Valid—that the task is important in order for the student to become proficient in reading.
- Reliable—data will be consistent if the test is given on a different day or by a different person.
- Systematic—data are collected according to rigorous design methodology or observation standards.
- Refereed—data are approved for publication by independent reviewers in the field.

One important distinction is the difference between *evidence-based programs* and *evidence-based practices*. If you are on a quest for the one right program, you will be disappointed. Nobody has come up with one that is best in all settings, for all students, in all situations. However, there are programs that may be highly suitable for the majority of students in your social and cultural setting. More important, there are “just right” practices, or combinations of practices, with evidence to back them, that make them “just right” for your students. Evidence-based practices are generally ones proven to enhance literacy proficiency no matter what the program.

Principled Practice

Rather than continue the argument about what constitutes *research* and *evidence*, we advocate the notion of implementing *principled practice*, because we feel it is a more inclusive term (see Figure 1.11). We define *principled practice* as follows:

Principled practice encompasses the instructional strategies, methods, materials, and activities used by teachers based on their knowledge of research **and** their experience-based beliefs about what works with their students.

We believe that teachers who engage in principled practice neither slavishly follow a new idea, mandate, or practice based *solely* on claims of a research study or expert, nor reject a new idea *solely* because it involves a paradigm shift. Rather, they thoughtfully rely on a

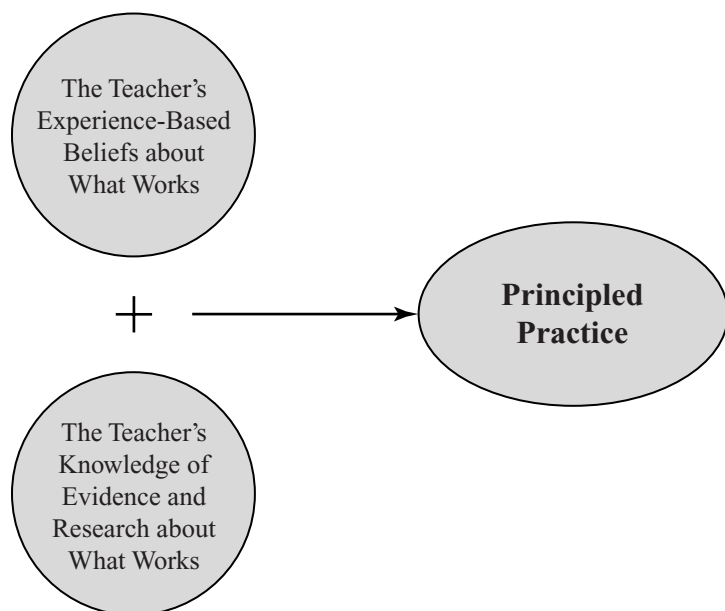


FIGURE 1.11 *What Is Principled Practice?*

body of evidence from several sources they deem credible. Then they weigh this evidence against their beliefs—what they know as experienced and knowledgeable educators—in order to develop their own *principled practice*. So when we use the terms evidence-based practice or research-based practice throughout this book, know that we are really talking about principled practice.

Research as Principled Argument

Rather than using research as a bludgeon to manipulate and coerce, we suggest adopting Ian Wilkinson and David Bloome's (2008) definition of research as *principled argument*. They define research as *knowledge claims* linked to theory and evidence through a clear public chain of reasoning that constitutes a warrant to the claims (p. 7). Put simply, assuming the researchers provide access to their data, if you (a) follow the research path and the line of reasoning used, (b) explore the research base, (c) investigate the means and methods, and (d) look at the match between the design and its appropriateness to the question, is there a reason to believe the claims are warranted?

There are so many important questions about what constitutes evidence. The good thing is that, as we (Brenda & MaryEllen) reflect on our last thirty-five years as educators, we are convinced that today's teachers are more savvy than ever before. As you read this book and explore the resources available to you, you will find considerable support for your boundless intellectual curiosity.

Here are some suggestions: Start with IRA; join, visit the website, subscribe to the journals, and share them. Become active in your local or state reading council. Rely on your reading specialists, literacy coaches, and fellow teachers. Attend conferences whenever possible. Join study groups and share with your peers. Be a skeptic, but one with a positive outlook. We hope to provide you with a wealth of support as you continue to find the kind of evidence you need to make informed, principled decisions on behalf of children and adolescents.

■ ***Group Inquiry Activity*** Think about the school in which you teach.

1. What do you see as the three most critical needs related to teaching reading/ language arts in your school?
2. What could a reading specialist or literacy coach do to help alleviate these needs? Share your identified needs with a small group.
3. How many of the concerns are related or similar? Discuss what each of you has suggested that a reading specialist or literacy coach could do to help with these concerns. How could you get started?

Revisiting the Vignette

1. Reflect on reading specialist Barbara Johnson's dilemma described in the opening to this chapter. Are there any recommendations you would now modify based on what you learned in the chapter and through discussion with your peers?

2. Using what you have learned about the historical trends in reading instruction, how could Barbara and the teachers explore and implement evidence-based practice in the district's reading program? What steps should she take to begin this process?
3. How can Barbara reconcile the differences between the methods promoted by the university and those used by classroom teachers?

Points to Remember

Since the inception of schools in the United States, educators have debated the best approaches for teaching children to read, and teachers have used a wide variety of methods and materials for teaching reading. Early in the country's history, children of the elite were taught the alphabet and sound-symbol relationships, and they learned to read didactic texts. Later, analytic and synthetic phonics approaches were adopted, with ongoing debates as to the efficacy of each. Basal reading series were used in nearly every school in the country for many years, and teachers grouped students for instruction according to their abilities and reading levels. More holistic and integrated methods of teaching reading appeared in the 1980s and 1990s, though they had fallen into disfavor by the end of the twentieth century. Federally funded research and national panel recommendations that were controversial and critically reviewed urged more explicit teaching of phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency as well as vocabulary and comprehension. There is now general agreement that reading is a complex process involving the integration and thoughtful application of a variety of skills and strategies within a variety of social, political, cultural, and educational contexts.

Think back to the year 2000. There were so many new initiatives started in the first decade of the century that we never could have imagined back then. It will take a while before we know how things will work out with many of them. However, as reading professionals we are not passive spectators. We have a great deal invested in how these initiatives are implemented and we are the ones who will be shaping the future of literacy instruction. We are definitely up for the challenge.

We end this chapter with a quote from Harvey Graff's (2007) fascinating exploration of the history of reading in Western culture. We hope you will pause a moment to reflect on these words:

Failure to appreciate the provenance of the past, of history, in the present and the possibilities for the future makes us its prisoners, bound to repeat the past, rather than to learn from it and break its bonds. (p. 12)

We couldn't agree more.

Portfolio and Self-Assessment Projects

1. Interview a parent, grandparent, or other older person about how he or she learned to read. Ask about reading materials, instruction, or anything else that the person can remember about early literacy experiences. Share the responses during class.
2. Create a time line or other graphic organizer of the historical trends presented in this chapter. Relate them to current approaches and methods for teaching reading/language arts.

3. Create your own literacy history. Chronicle as many memories as you can about learning to read and write. Be sure to situate your experiences in pop culture and political/historical/social contexts. As you engage in this reflection, consider also your beliefs about students, teaching, and learning. What do you feel strongly about that's related to teaching reading (Dillon, 2000)? How did your family and community beliefs about the definitions, uses, and importance of literacy influence your development and beliefs? After you are finished, identify the communities and literacies present in your autobiography and compare them to those valued by schools. Write your literacy history or use another medium to convey your memories (i.e., create a picture book, poster, video, poem, or the like). Use the Literacy History Prompts in Appendix A (McLaughlin & Vogt, 1996) to jog your memories. Be sure to share your literacy history with others in your class; you'll be amazed at the power of this activity!
4. Make a case for items on your list of evidence-based practice. Keep a log of your inquiry path.
5. *Personal Goal*: Revisit the goal you set for yourself at the beginning of the chapter. Create a portfolio item that reflects what you have learned relative to your goal.

Recommended Readings: Suggestions for Book Clubs, Study Groups, and Professional Development

- Fresch, M. J. (2008). *An essential history of current reading practices*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association. This is a great resource to frame your thinking about evidence-based practice. The message is that it is essential for us to consider carefully the work of those who have gone before us. Researchers and classroom teachers will find it helpful and grounding.
- Graff, H. J. (2007). *Literacy and historical development: A reader*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press. This is a beautifully written, scholarly exploration of literacy's heritage and how social, cultural, and political contexts shaped its past and influence the present. Different from all the others in scope and conscience, it is a must read for any serious scholar of early literacy.
- Kirp, D. L. (2007). *The sandbox investment: The pre-school movement and kids-first politics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. This socially conscious historical perspective on the evolution of pre-school education examines the crippling effects of the disparities in opportunity afforded the rich and poor, yet clearly lives in the solution. Kirp argues that a good pre-school for all children is the smartest investment we can make for our future.
- Smith, N. B. (2002). *American reading instruction* (4th ed.). Newark, DE: International Reading Association. Nila Banton Smith's groundbreaking history of reading was first published in 1935 and revised in 1965. It is one of the most widely recognized classics in the field. After her death in 1976, IRA paid tribute to her work by updating the book in 1986 and again in 2002. The latest edition spans the last quarter of the twentieth century and contains an eloquent prologue by P. David Pearson and an equally brilliant epilogue by Steven Stahl.

Online Resources

<http://www.ed.gov/news/newsletters/index.html>

This will link you to the U.S. government's official education website. Although there are many resources here, one that is particularly useful is the Newsletter, to which you can subscribe. It is an excellent way to keep current on important news and search the archives for valuable information.

<http://www.historyliteracy.org>

This is the official website of the History of Literacy organization, part of IRA's History of Reading Special Interest Group (SIG). There are links to articles on numerous topics relating to historical aspects of literacy from its origins to the present.

The following position statements are on the IRA website: **www.reading.org** under the Research and Policy link:

International Reading Association. (2002). *What is evidence-based reading instruction?: A position statement of the International Reading Association*. International Reading Association, Newark: DE.

International Reading Association. *A call to action: A position statement of the International Reading Association*. International Reading Association, Newark: DE.

Companion Website Resources



The following resources to support and extend your learning of this chapter can be found on our companion website (www.pearsonhighered.com/vogt): key vocabulary, concepts, and other terms; extended examples; updated resources specifically tied to information in the chapter; links to related websites; and other support features.