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The Differences in First Graders’ Oral Reading Patterns between Literature Based Instruction and a Basal Program with a Heavy Emphasis on Phonics and Writing

Cynthia E. Parada

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THESIS

THE DIFFERENCES IN FIRST GRADERS' ORAL READING PATTERNS BETWEEN LITERATURE BASED INSTRUCTION AND A BASAL PROGRAM WITH A HEAVY EMPHASIS ON PHONICS AND WRITING

Submitted to the Graduate Committee of the Department of Education and Human Development
State University of New York
College at Brockport
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science in Education

by
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April 1995
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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to see if average first grade students in a basal reading program that heavily emphasized phonics and writing showed differences in reading patterns at 20 weeks, compared to average first grade students in a literature based program.

This study examined the oral reading patterns of first graders after 20 weeks of reading instruction. Students were divided into two groups each receiving very different approaches to teaching reading. The basal group concentrated on phonics and writing and followed The Open Court Phonics program. Skills were taught sequentially and consistently. The literature based group taught phonics and skills in the context of the literature and used an older version of The Open Court Phonics program as a guide.

At 20 weeks all students under study were administered running reading records. Oral reading patterns and behaviors were recorded and analyzed. The analysis of the data indicated the basal reading group experienced more success at 20 weeks than the literature group did.
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Chapter 1

Statement of the Problem

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to see if average first grade students in a basal reading program that heavily emphasized phonics and writing showed differences in reading patterns at 20 weeks, compared to average first grade students in a literature based program.

Question to be Answered

Will average first graders in the basal reader program under study display reading patterns after the first 20 weeks of first grade different from average first graders of a non-basal literature based program as measured by the running reading record?

Need for the Study

With the trend of reading instruction moving towards whole language, teachers need to have a better understanding of the role phonics and writing play in reading achievement. Juel (1988) believes
children entering first grade weak in phonemic awareness become poor readers and writers throughout their school years. Many teachers are abandoning their basals and are opting to develop their own programs using literature. As with any self-designed program, this attempt to create a more meaning-based reading approach runs the risk of having some gaps. One area that is frequently said to be neglected is the early development of phonemic awareness and phonics instruction. Not all literature based programs are weak in phonics, but this is an area that is sometimes difficult to keep as consistent as first graders need in a non-basal program. Juel states, "It seems clear that instructors should not wait to build phonemic awareness until after the child has already experienced failure learning to read" (1988, p.446).
Definition of Terms

In this study the following terms are defined as follows:

**Intensive Phonics/Writing Program:** The 1995 edition of *The Open Court Reading Program* has a daily specific phonics lesson built into the program that is in addition to the reading and writing components. It also includes a variety of writing experiences daily.

**Reading Achievement:** The progress made by selected subjects will be measured by running reading records given at twenty weeks.

**Literature Based Program:** A program designed by the teacher using literature in place of a basal. All components of reading instruction center around the given piece of literature for that unit.

**Running Reading Record:** A technique used to measure reading achievement. A story is read orally by the student for word recognition. Miscues are recorded for levels of reading achievement. Students are
grouped into one of three categories. These categories are independent, instructional, and frustration. In this case the running reading record was developed by the school used in the study.

**Miscue Analysis:** Term used to describe information gained by observing and recording various types of oral reading patterns, keeping in mind that not all miscues are mistakes.

**Phonemic Awareness:** Pertains to the awareness of the sound/symbol relationship of letters.

**Phonics:** The sound/symbol relationship of printed letters and uttered sounds.
Chapter II

Review of Literature

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to see if average first grade students in a basal reading program that heavily emphasized phonics and writing showed differences in reading patterns at 20 weeks, compared to average first grade students in a literature based program. This chapter first examines current research on the role environment plays in writing and reading development. Further relevant research explores the reading/writing relationships in phonemic awareness, comprehension, and the use of running reading records to examine oral reading patterns.

Reading, Writing and Environment

A review of the research on reading and writing relationships suggests that these emergent skills have roots that begin long before school instruction begins. Children who are read to frequently and are exposed to various forms of their language, written or
spoken, are already on their way to becoming emergent readers and writers. Sulzby (1985) studied young children’s emergent reading of favorite story books, and found that the better a child understood a story, the more "written in nature" his/her language became when retelling orally. Children who are read to at home are given wonderful opportunities to begin internalizing some important purposes of print. Sulzby states, "As current research increasingly addresses the relationship between reading and writing as parts of literacy, it is important to note that writing also involves reading what one is composing." (1985, p.461) As young children are exposed to print, this understanding of written language begins to take root.

Gates (1988) found in her study of children in kindergarten through the second grade, that children who were read to frequently as kindergartners had significantly more lexical and syntactic knowledge of written narrative even before formal instruction began. By second grade this knowledge had grown and developed, showing a difference between the children read to often and the others. This finding gives
further support to the importance of a print rich home environment.

Children who are given opportunities at home to write are able to experiment and use writing in ways that are modeled for them. Shook, Marrion and Ollila (1989) studied 108 children seeking to clarify the perceptions and attitudes that young children have about the writing process. This study found that children's transition into the writing process begins in the home. Children provided with crayons, paper and other materials wrote lists, signs, notes and other forms modeled by their parents. This reinforces their growing awareness of the many purposes of written language.

Burns and Casbergue (1992) also conducted a study focusing on the significance of the home environment on literacy development. In this study children ranging in age from three to five years were asked to write a letter to anyone they wanted, with their parents helping them. The children who had more directive parents produced less and were not as enthusiastic as the parents that allowed their children to be creative and have more emergent looking
products in the end. Children take ownership in their writing at very early ages while concurrently taking an active role in their emergent reading development by reading and making sense of what they have written.

Burns and Casbergue (1992) believe that a home environment that allows for writing to naturally emerge will also be encouraging those emergent reading skills.

The school is also an important environment for literacy development. Children are very sensitive to their surroundings when reading and writing, and teachers control this environment. Literature studies that provide children with various ways to express themselves, including writing, allow for more understanding of the reading material. Hickman (1981) went into a first grade classroom and saw how closely the children's writing correlated with the book to which they were responding. When the researcher was talking to individual students about their artwork and stories, the students used the book during their retelling, as well as their own writing. This environment that gave students the opportunity to use their own writing as a way to respond also gave much
more meaning to the literature. Hickman (1981) states,

The first graders' perception about The Little Red Hen, for instance, might never have been put into words in an environment with fewer opportunities. Various expressions of response were either facilitated by or generated by the climate of the school and the classroom. (p.352)

Graves (1975) also found that children wrote more frequently and were more creative when given opportunities to choose their own times and topics. While studying a group of seven year old children, Graves (1975) found that for this study, the writing process consists of three phases. Children begin with the prewriting phase which involves behavior preceding a writing episode including art work and discussions with other children. The second phase is the composing phase where the actual writing takes place, and finally, the postwriting phase which includes any behavior immediately following the writing episode.

After observing these children Graves (1975) found that children responded and were much more excited about their writing when they were in an environment that allowed choices. This type of writing was observed in the homes and in open flexible
classrooms. In classrooms where teachers assigned topics and times for writing, children produced less, and were not as enthusiastic about their writing.

The Role of Phonemic Awareness in the Reading/Writing Relationship

With a greater emphasis now being placed on the writing component in language arts, researchers are taking a closer look at young children’s early attempts at writing. Roberts (1992) examined young children’s concept of word. Students ranging in age from five to eight years were interviewed and then given a series of tasks to do. These tasks included word unit identification, sentence dictation spacing, sentence dictation explanation, and word unit explanation. Roberts believes that invented spelling is a result of already having internalized the concept of word. As children are exposed to written language, they begin to understand the conventions for segmenting words in their own writing. Roberts states, "As this understanding develops, children come to learn that words are units of meaning which stand in a symbolic relationship to their referents" (1992, p.125). This conventional concept
of word is a gradual evolvement that occurs when children have more experience with language in all its forms.

In her study, Roberts (1992) describes the knowledge of concept of word as being on a continuum. She uses the terms "tacit" and "explicit" to describe different points on this continuum. Tacit knowledge is defined as an unconscious awareness of the concept of word, which evolves to explicit knowledge, or conscious awareness of the concept of word. As a result of her study, Roberts (1992) found that having tacit knowledge is the foundation for their use of word units in spoken and written language.

Peterson and Haines (1992) investigated young children's knowledge of phonemic segmentation and letter-sound relationships. They found that phonological awareness is developmental in nature, and this awareness occurs in the order of words to syllables to phonemes. Peterson and Haines tested 48 kindergarten children to determine ability to segment sentences into words and words into phonemes. The results were analyzed and three skill levels were determined. Students were placed in one of these
levels according to their test results. Each group was given a treatment or analogy training to increase phonemic awareness. Before the training sessions began, pre-tests of letter sound knowledge, segmentation skill, and word recognition by analogy were administered. At the end of the training students were administered tasks in each of these areas as post tests. The results showed that segmentation ability based on onset and rime detection is necessary for the development of letter-sound knowledge and for the ability to extract letter-sound knowledge by analogy. Peterson and Haines state, "The present research indicates that onset-rime segmentation is one level of phonemic awareness whose early emergence can facilitate beginning reading" (1992, p.121).

Researchers have also examined children’s use of invented spelling. The relationship between phonological awareness and reading has been well documented, but there is not as much documentation of how this can relate to invented spelling and children’s writing. According to Tangel and Blachman (1992), "In order to produce invented spellings, a
child must possess some degree of linguistic awareness, specifically a beginning awareness that a word is made up of segments of sound" (p. 235).

Tangel and Blachman worked with 149 kindergarten children. They divided the children into a treatment group and a control group. The treatment group received eleven weeks of phoneme awareness training, and at the end of that time period both groups were analyzed. "The results of this study found that the children who participated in the phoneme awareness intervention outperformed the control children on measures of phoneme segmentation, letter name and letter sound knowledge" (1992, p. 250-251).

Invented spelling provides a concrete representation of how children perceive the sound relationship of their language before and during early reading instruction. They found that the treatment group had more sophisticated invented spellings after receiving phoneme awareness instruction, and demonstrated greater skill in writing than the control group. Tangel and Blachman (1992) go on to discuss how important it is to give children many opportunities to use their invented spelling skills.
while interacting with print. They suggest having children write while being read to or after the story as a response.

In a similar study, Griffith (1991) studied first and third grade students. First graders who received phonemic awareness training were much more skilled in using invented spelling. Third graders were more apt to remember correct spellings of words. As a result of this study Griffith (1991) believes that although phonemic awareness is still considered to be developmental, there is a definite indication that it can also be encouraged and nurtured by early intervention. She states, of children high in phonemic awareness, "When reading they have the capacity to focus their attention on individual phonemes in words, thus facilitating the storage of phoneme spellings" (1991, p.231).

Clarke (1988) studied a group of first graders to see what effects invented spelling had on learning to spell and read, compared to traditional spelling methods. This five month study looked at the progress of children encouraged to use invented spelling in their creative writing, and those encouraged to use
traditional spelling. Within each group, the invented spelling and traditional spelling, there were students considered to be low achievers and others high achievers. The findings in this study showed the low achievers in the invented spelling group made the most progress over all. Clarke states that, "Beginning readers' spelling strategies progress from simple phonetic strategies to more complex and abstract strategies as a result of their increasing experience with and exposure to print" (1988, p.306). With writing and reading integrated into the language arts program, the invented spelling group had many opportunities to practice and grow in this skill.

Juel (1988) conducted a longitudinal study of 54 children from first through fourth grades. She wanted to find out if poor readers and writers remained poor in these areas through fourth grade. Her findings did indicate that good readers remained good readers, and poor readers remained poor readers. The result was the same in writing ability. It was noted that all of the poor readers and writers in the study that did not improve, began formal reading instruction with poor phonemic awareness skills.
The Correlation Between Writing Ability and Reading Comprehension

Recent research on the correlation between writing ability and reading comprehension suggests that good readers tend to be good writers. Cox, Shanahan and Sulzby (1990) looked at the correlation between reading ability and cohesive harmony in good readers' writing. In this study, 48 third and fifth grade students wrote two narratives and two reports. After the researchers analyzed the writing samples, the results showed that the better readers, regardless of grade level, used significantly more cohesive harmony in developing their reports than did the poor readers.

Shanahan and Lomax (1988) examined three theoretical models of the reading-writing relationship. The first was the interactive model where writing could influence reading and reading could influence writing. Second was the reading to writing model described as the process in which no writing knowledge is implicated in learning to read. The third model is the writing to read model where writing can influence reading without any transfer of knowledge from reading to writing.
The results of this study showed the interactive model superior and the best example of the reading-writing relationship. Shanahan and Lomax state, "Reading influences writing, and writing influences reading; theories of literacy development need to emphasize both of these characteristics" (1989, p.208). They also found that students using the interactive model gained in all areas including comprehension, in comparison to the other two models.

McKinley (1992) investigated how the reading and writing processes work together for better comprehension when composing from sources. Seven college students were composing from a single source, unlike a similar study by Spivey and King (1989) that studied students composing from multiple sources. Reading and writing behaviors were observed and charted for further analysis. The researcher was looking for reading and writing patterns, as well as reasoning operations involved in composing from sources. Sources for this study included news articles, encyclopedias, and interviews. The result of this study indicated strong correlations between writing and reading comprehension. It was found that
when students wrote extensively after reading, they performed much better on tests that were designed to measure literary understanding. McGinley states, "When students engaged in personal writing, they approached the stories from more diverse literary perspectives when compared to restricted writing, as evidenced by the range of descriptive, personal, interpretive, and evaluative statements appearing in their writing" (1992, p.228).

Spivey and King (1989) examined how readers compose from multiple sources, and how well they could organize their text in writing. They state, "This ability to organize, or chunk, semantic content appears to be an important link between reading ability and writing ability" (1989, p.21).

This study by Spivey and King (1989) was an important stepping stone to the work of McGinley (1992) who took their research a little further. McGinley examined how writing before and after reading one source could improve comprehension. Spivey and King (1989) investigated how writing and organizing information from multiple sources could improve understanding of the material. Both of these studies
shed more light on the relationship between reading comprehension and writing.

Tierney, Soter, O’Flahavan, and McGinley (1989) examined the effects of reading and writing on thinking critically. They found that reading and writing together proved more valuable than having students answer a series of comprehension questions. When comparing essays, they found that reading and writing in combination is more likely to prompt critical thinking. Their study found that it was least effective when reading was separated from writing, or when students had to answer questions.

Children have the ability to think critically about their own writing at an early age. Hudson (1986) found that children in grades one through five knew a lot more about their own writing than teachers believed. At the end of this study, children in each of these grades were able to answer specific questions about their writing including, ownership, setting, audience, purpose, and genre. Children take ownership in their writing very seriously. Hudson (1986) found that in some cases children claimed assigned writing topics were their own ideas because of a vested
interest in what they were writing about. When this occurred, the usual limitations found in assigned writing assignments were not so limiting anymore. Children were seen taking an active role in their learning to read and write.

**Oral Reading Patterns**

In order to best meet the needs of their students, teachers must understand, as much as possible, where each student is in his/her reading development. One way to do this is to listen to students reading out loud. By paying attention to miscues and developing patterns, a teacher can learn more than just where that student is in phonemic awareness; a more holistic view into the reader is presented. Goodman (1969) discusses the importance of tuning in to a reader’s miscues and states,

> By comparing the ways these miscues differ from the expected responses we can get direct insights into how the reading process is functioning in a particular reader at a particular point in time. Such insights reveal not only weaknesses, but the results of the reading process having miscarried in some minor or major ways. (1969, p.12)

Clay (1993) discusses the importance of recording oral reading behaviors for further analysis. She
uses running records to follow the progress of her students. She states, "To read a continuous text the child must use a variety of skills held in delicate balance. Specific weaknesses or strengths can upset that balance" (1993, p.30).

Having a running record of a student's oral reading patterns can help the teacher tune into specific areas to help that student maintain or gain that important balance.

**Summary**

Children begin building their foundation for early reading and writing skills at home before formal instruction begins. Parents need to be more aware of the importance of reading to their children and exposing them to print. The home is seen by many researchers as a child's first classroom. Parents also need to recognize the importance of providing materials for writing and modeling various purposes for writing.

Teachers need to provide a learning environment that allows children the freedom to express themselves and to experiment with their language. Invented
spelling allows children the opportunity to do this.

Research also indicates children with strong reading and writing skills are also skilled in the area of phonemic awareness, and have better comprehension skills. Early intervention in the area of phonemic awareness can help a child struggling developmentally in both reading and writing.

The use of running reading records has proven useful in following the development of individual readers. This assessment tool allows teachers to tune into a child’s strengths and weaknesses.
Chapter III

Design of the Study

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to see if average first grade students in a basal reading program that heavily emphasized phonics and writing showed differences in reading patterns at 20 weeks, compared to average first grade students in a literature based program.

Methodology

Subjects

The subjects of this study comprised twelve average students, as determined by word list performance after 10 weeks of first grade, from a rural, public elementary school in western New York State. Six of these students were in second grade and the remaining six were in first grade at the time of the study. The second graders had been in a literature based reading program in the first grade. The six first graders were in a basal reading program that heavily emphasized phonics and writing.
Materials

The 1995 edition of The Open Court Reading Program was used with the basal reading group. At 20 weeks a standard running reading record was administered, the same version that was given to the literature based group. The literature based program used a variety of classic literature, such as, The Little Red Hen, to create reading units that lasted approximately two to three weeks for each book.

A pre-primer word list was given at ten weeks to identify average students. The data from these lists along with teacher observations determined the six subjects for the study.

The running reading record procedure used for the study was developed by the school.

Procedures

At ten weeks all first graders were tested on a pre-primer word list to determine which six subjects were average. It was decided advanced students would show minimal oral reading patterns and below average students ran the risk of bringing possible learning disabilities into the study. Mastery of seven out of
ten words was expected.

Over a 20 week period first graders in the basal program participated in the new 1995 Open Court Reading Program. This program included daily phonic and writing activities. These activities included phonemic awareness, phonic blending, writing, workshop centers, and reading.

Writing consisted of letter formation practice in their workbooks, journals, and ongoing projects such as story writing that took them from rough copy to published piece.

During the workshop center time each day, students worked in centers that targeted specific needs. At this time the reading teacher and the reading assistant came in to help. These centers included activities such as, word building with alphabet cards, word family activities, story writing, small group reading of the story from that day, and independent work. These centers were always changing according to the needs of the class.

During reading each day students were involved in a whole group reading of big books. At this time students made predictions and were asked questions for
comprehension. Later in the day students worked in small groups reading new stories each day to take home to read to parents. For each story book read in class the students received a paper version to color and keep at home for their own library.

The literature based group focused more on themes and used poems and literature surrounding specific areas and topics. The phonics component from the old Open Court Reading program was used as a guide, but was not always followed consistently or sequentially.

Students' writing varied depending on the theme focus at the time. Story logs, journals, letters, and stories were some examples of the writing activities these students were involved in.

There were no specific letter formation exercises or workshop times on a daily basis. Time was set aside each day to incorporate other subject areas such as science and social studies into the literature study.

At 20 weeks all first graders were administered the same running reading record. The results from these data showed patterns of oral reading behavior and levels of reading comprehension.
Analysis

Running reading records were analyzed to
determine differences in oral reading patterns between
the two groups under study. Reading achievement
levels as well as patterns of miscues were compared.
Chapter IV

Analysis of Data

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to see if average first grade students in a basal reading program that heavily emphasized phonics and writing showed differences in reading patterns at 20 weeks, compared to average first grade students in a literature based program.

Analysis and Interpretations

After administering the twenty week running reading records to the subjects in both groups, oral reading patterns and reading achievement levels on first grade material were examined. A list of miscues and reading behaviors are listed in order of frequency for each group. Table 1 represents the subjects participating in the literature based reading program. Table 2 represents the subjects participating in the basal reading program.
Literature Based Group

Table 1

Oral Reading Patterns of the Literature Based Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Miscues</th>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher Aid</td>
<td>Repetitions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-meaning based substitutions</td>
<td>Self-corrections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omissions</td>
<td>Meaning based substitutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insertions</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Out of the sampling of students in the literature based group, one student read at the independent level, two students read at the instructional level, and three students were at the frustration level. These levels were determined by the number of miscues encountered during the oral reading. All students were given level one reading passages.

The most common miscue in this group was "teacher aid," when a student stops and does not proceed without help before continuing in the reading passage. In all of these cases the reader made no attempts to use context clues to figure out the
unknown word.

The second most observed miscue was non-meaning based substitutions. Students read words incorrectly or said something totally non-related to the story and did not stop to self correct.

There were very few omissions or insertions in this group.

In looking at reading behaviors, repetitions were the most frequent pattern. This behavior was observed most in the students who required teacher aid and achieved frustration levels on the running reading record.

Self corrections and meaning based substitutions were patterns observed in the students who achieved instructional and independent levels and had fewer miscues in their reading.
Basal Reading Group

Table 2
Oral Reading Patterns of the Basal Reading Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Miscues</th>
<th>Reading Behaviors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Aid</td>
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<td>Non-meaning based substitutions</td>
<td>repetitions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omissions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Out of the sampling of students in this group, three students read at the instructional level, and three students read at the independent level. All students were given level one reading passages.

In this group Table 2 shows that teacher aid is the most common miscue observed. However, it was observed that the students in this group tried sounding out the unknown word before waiting for teacher aid and continuing on. In this group insertions was the second most observed miscue. In this group it was observed that most of these
insertions added meaning to the passage. Non-meaning based substitutions were very few in this group and were observed most in the students achieving instructional levels. There were no omissions observed in this group.

In looking at reading behaviors, self-corrections and meaning based substitutions were the most observed patterns. This correlates with the higher achievement levels obtained by this group. The repetitions observed were before a teacher aid miscue, self-correcting, or using a meaning based substitution.

**Summary**

The literature based group required more teacher aid and made more non-meaning based substitutions while reading orally. Omissions and insertions were observed less frequently. The two most observable reading behaviors were repetitions and self-corrections. Meaning based substitutions were observed the least.

The basal reading group required teacher aid most frequently and made many insertions while reading orally. Non-meaning based substitutions and omissions
were observed the least. The two most frequent reading behaviors were self-corrections and meaning based substitutions. Repetitions were observed the least.
Chapter V

Conclusions and Implications

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to see if average first grade students in a basal reading program that heavily emphasized phonics and writing showed differences in reading patterns at 20 weeks, compared to average first grade students in a literature based program.

Conclusions

Analysis of the data indicates that the basal reading group out-performed students in the literature based reading program. The oral reading patterns in the basal group suggested stronger phonemic awareness and more appropriate word attack skills.

Subjects participating in the literature based reading program demonstrated patterns of weak phonemic awareness and word attack skills. The frequency of waiting for help with unknown words and substituting non-meaning based words throughout their reading are examples of this weakness.
When encountering difficult words in the text the basal group tended to self-correct or make a meaning based substitution before continuing on. There were very few repetitions in this group.

The oral reading patterns of the literature based group indicate very different strategies in the same situation. When encountering difficult words, this group tended to repeat the previous word read until teacher aid was given, a non-meaning based substitution was made, or they self-corrected. Very few students in this group made meaning-based substitutions.

In considering why the basal group was more successful, there are many possible answers. Students in the basal reading program were participating in a very consistent and sequential phonics program. They were building skills based on previous lessons enabling reinforcement of taught material to occur, and providing a sound foundation for new knowledge in phonics. Short vowels were introduced first in this group allowing early success in word family activities and the reading of simple stories.

The literature group followed the older version
of the Open Court phonics program. These lessons were out of sequence many times because they were taught in the context of the literature being used at that particular time. This group was introduced to long vowels first, because of the older program, and at the 20 week point had not had experience with short vowels or word family activities yet. Much time had been spent teaching long vowel rules that were difficult to understand, especially in the beginning of first grade. Perhaps this factor alone contributed most to the delayed success of this group.

The writing approaches were very different in both groups. The basal program kept this group writing consistently on a daily basis in different capacities. This program included letter formation, practice in phonic skills already taught, and creative writing using the writing process from rough draft to final copy.

The literature group did not write as consistently. Letter formation and phonic skills were not part of a daily writing activity, but were addressed through the on-going writing projects included in the literature studies. This suggests
that perhaps writing in several capacities as the basal group did enables first graders to be successful earlier.

It appears that a reading program including consistent and sequential phonics instruction introducing short vowels first, providing daily writing activities that reinforce and extend learning, and using literature would be an optimum reading program for children. It appeared at the 20 week point that the basal group experienced more success. However, further research would be necessary to determine if this pattern would continue throughout the year.

**Implications for Further Research**

The area of children’s writing needs to be examined more closely. The children in the basal reading group wrote extensively in comparison to the students in the literature based reading group. Writing provides children with a way to experiment with what they have internalized about their language. It also offers a means of practicing and reinforcing their knowledge of phonemic awareness. Graves (1975)
believes that future studies need to be conducted where children are observed while writing in their free writing experiences. Hickman (1981) believes that long term holistic studies are necessary to fully understand early literacy. Understanding children's writing and how it relates to learning to read is an area that could provide valuable information for early instruction.

There needs to be more research in how children learn vowel and vowel rules. Teachers need to know whether short vowels should be introduced first or if long vowels and vowel rules are better at the beginning of first grade. This study indicated more success introducing short vowels first, however, studies need to be conducted looking specifically at this area.

Although the area of phonemic awareness has been closely examined, there needs to be more information gathered on the importance of teaching phonics sequentially. Many whole language programs do not lend themselves to a strict sequential phonics program. Further research could provide valuable information to determine if this is a serious gap in
these programs or not.

Implications For Classroom Practice

There are different ways to guide children along as they develop into readers. Some teachers believe that literature based programs give children a more holistic approach to reading, and other teachers believe that basal programs offering consistency in phonics instruction are best. There will always be differences of opinions in how best to teach reading.

The results of this study indicate that students in first grade benefit from a structured reading program that is rich in literature. The success of the basal reading group suggests that students need consistent and sequential phonics instruction. Constant reinforcement of previously taught skills through specific writing activities helps to build strong foundations for new knowledge. These results also suggest that teaching short vowels first may make a contribution to early reading success.

Writing plays such an important role in the developmental process of reading, and teachers need to understand how writing can be used in different
capacities to reinforce and extend learning. Children should have the freedom to express themselves and to experiment with their language. Invented spelling is an excellent way for children to grow developmentally in phonemic awareness. Research shows that students weak in phonemic awareness skills become poor readers and writers. Teachers should not wait for students to fail before intervening with a phonics program. Whatever reading approach teachers are using, it is their responsibility to meet the needs of their students with phonemic awareness and phonics instruction.

Parents need to be aware of the importance of reading to their children and exposing them to print. The home is seen by many researchers as a child’s first classroom. Providing materials for writing, and modeling various purposes for writing are also things of which parents should be more aware.

**Summary**

Based on the analysis of the data first grade students in a basal reading program emphasizing phonics and writing were more successful in reading at 20 weeks as measured by the results of running reading
records. These students were more confident in their word attack skills and were more apt to attempt unknown words than students in the literature based group.

It can be concluded, therefore, that a reading program containing consistent phonemic awareness activities, phonic instruction, and opportunities for writing will help students become more successful in reading. These components of reading can be included in literature based programs designed by the teacher, as well as in basal programs that may or may not have all components included in them.

Consistency in tying these components together throughout the day made a significant difference for the basal group. From the first activity through the last there were common skills being reinforced constantly. Although the literature based group also was taught phonics, and the children had plenty of writing opportunities each day, the consistency was not always there.

Further research is needed to follow students in different reading programs for longer periods of time. The results of this study were for the first half of
first grade. More research needs to be conducted to see if students in other reading programs do catch up by the end of the year. Schools also need to learn when phonemic awareness activities should begin. Many kindergartens are redesigning their programs to better meet the needs of the students. There is a need to know whether children receiving more phonemic awareness instruction in kindergarten will better prepare them for reading in first grade.

The positive conclusion of this study is that teachers can have the freedom and flexibility to teach reading in the way they feel most comfortable and confident. Children need phonemic awareness, phonics instruction, and ample opportunities to write, and this can be a part of every teacher’s reading program. Children love to read especially when they are successful!
REFERENCES


