

BEGINNING READING:
INFLUENCES ON POLICY IN
THE UNITED STATES AND ENGLAND
1998-2010

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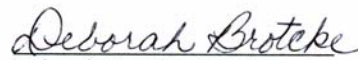
Beginning Reading: Influences on Policy in the United States and England 1998-2010

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Abstract

The study investigated the divergence in beginning reading methods between the United States (US) and England from 1998 to 2010. Researchers, policy makers, and publishers were interviewed to explore their knowledge and perceptions concerning how literacy policy was determined.

The first three of twelve findings showed that despite the challenges inherent in the political sphere, both governments were driven by low literacy rates to seek greater involvement in literacy education. The intervention was determined by its structure: a central parliamentary system in England, and a federal system of state rights in the US.

Three further research-related findings revealed the uneasy relationship existing between policy makers and researchers. Political expediency, the speed of decision making and ideology

also helped shape literacy policy. Secondly, research is viewed differently in each nation. Peer-reviewed, scientifically-based research supporting systematic phonics prevailed in the US, whereas in England additional and more eclectic sources were also included. Thirdly, research showed that educator training in beginning reading was more pervasive and effective in England than the US. English stakeholders proved more knowledgeable about research in the US, whereas little is known about the synthetic phonics approach currently used in England.

Two of the findings considered the differing role of mainstream or niche publishers. Though both are commercially based and politically engaged, the former are more business-oriented, while the latter support their chosen pedagogy. Finally it was found brain research was either supported or rejected, depending on the stakeholders' personal beliefs concerning beginning reading pedagogy.

The future livelihood and well-being of all children depends on reading ability. It is recommended that further research in reading be jointly undertaken by researchers in the US and England. The resulting shared knowledge and data would provide an improved basis for educator training, classroom pedagogy and literacy policy. Educators, researchers and their governments would then be better positioned to achieve their common goal of universal literacy.

Acknowledgements

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Of course this work could not have been accomplished without the generous contribution of my anonymous interviewees. With many calls upon their limited time, they graciously shared their knowledge and views of the field of beginning reading and its recent history. The breadth and depth of their expertise was evident as they shared information crucial to this study. Thank you.

A passionate interest in beginning reading drove me on, but the daily pragmatic and empathetic support that enabled this research to go forward and come to fruition needs to be gratefully acknowledged. Thank you, dear Graham, for being my rock, constant reader and resident technology wizard. Also, throughout the doctoral process, I have been deeply sustained by the kind and interested support of my children, Zoë, Max and Jonna, and my forbearing friends. All have variously listened to me, cheered me on or even read and helpfully commented on parts of the manuscript, as I worked to complete this opus. Thank you, all.

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Chapter One: Introduction

What is the best way to teach a young child to read?
No two people, it seems, agree on an answer.
(Chall, 1967, p. 1)

Presciently, Jeanne Chall's statement also applies to how the two nations of the United States (US) and England currently differ in their approach to teaching reading to their youngest school entrants. In the UK, following a government mandate in September 2007, the schools in England were given strong guidance regarding the use of high quality synthetic phonics programs with their beginner readers. In the US, government attempts to introduce a similar approach through the aegis of the federally-funded Reading First program has not been so far-reaching or nationally inclusive. Reading First has become mired in controversy concerning its management, which in turn has led to a congressional reduction of its funding by 61% in 2008 (United States Department of Education, 2010a).

Previously, from American Colonial times until the 1990s, these two countries had followed broadly similar paths in the methods used to teach beginning readers. However officially, since September 2007, with synthetic phonics used in England and the Balanced Reading approach continuing in the US, the two nations began to travel down different paths.

Recent Educational Policy in England and the US

Emerging from the more purist Whole Language era of the late 1970's and 80's, when phonics was present on a spectrum varying from 'not at all' to 'incidentally, as the need arises', the mid-1990's and the early years of the new century saw an increased emphasis on phonics. It was taught with more consistency in classrooms in both the US and England, but not rigorously prioritized, and with most educators adopting the more familiar analytic form (Adams, 1990, 2008; McGuinness, 1997; National Reading Panel [NRP], 2000a). In the US, the meta-analysis

of the National Reading Panel (NRP, 2000a) led it to conclude there was a need for systematic phonics in beginning reading. However, it did not recommend that teaching the extended alphabetic code of the English language be the first step in reading. Government attempts to influence educators to use this systematic approach through the financial incentives offered to local districts in their adoption of Reading First, the practical arm of the federal law No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (NRP, 2000a), have also met with limited success (Manzo, 2008da; Manzo, 2008a).

However, the synthetic phonic approach of teaching the basic 42 sounds of the English language first, used in the initial teaching alphabet (i.t.a.) classrooms of the 1960's and 70's in both the UK and the US (Downing, 1965), was now reconfigured in such programs as Jolly Learning (Lloyd, 1992) and Read Write, Inc. (Miskin, 2007), which were becoming known, used and gradually gathering influence in the classrooms of Great Britain (McGuinness, 2004).

Problem Statement

In both the US and England, and following a brief resurgence of phonics in the 1970's, a philosophical approach to reading known as Whole Language was in the ascendance in the late 1970's and early 80's. However, by the 1990's, concern was growing about poor literacy levels in both nations (Adams, 2008; Rose, 2006a). In response, educators in both the US and England began to include more phonics in their beginning reading classes, but many used the more familiar analytic approach, teaching sounds as met and needed in text being read. In both nations little was known about another phonic approach, known as synthetic phonics in Great Britain (Johnston & Watson, 1997; Stuart, 1999), and referred to as systematic phonics in the US (Adams, 1990; Ehri & Robbins, 1991; McGuinness, 1997). However, word was spreading by word-of-mouth in England about this 'new' method (Grant, 2001).

Balanced Reading and the US. The release of two government reports, the first initially in the US (NRP, 2000a), and the other in England (Brooks, 2003) confirmed the need for some kind of phonics instruction in beginning reading. Following the NRP of 2000, with its recommendation that systematic phonics was necessary to reading success, educators in the US have mostly continued with their Balanced Reading approach, with phonics being one of many methods introduced at school entry.

Balanced Reading uses an eclectic approach to beginning reading, with phonics often restricted to the sounds of the written alphabet, which are taught after students have first learned the names of the letters. Concurrently, other methods are combined with this approach, such as learning a core sight-word vocabulary of both regularly and irregularly-spelled words, along with strategies such as using context (picture clues) and syntax to determine unknown words, rhyming and sound patterns to learn phonemic awareness, and repetitive pattern books to practice fluency in reading (Blair-Larsen & Williams, 1999).

Synthetic Phonics and the UK. In England on the other hand, the Rose Report recommended in 2006 that the form of phonics taught should be synthetic, and further should be taught immediately on school entry in place of other methods. In September, 2007 the English government mandated this approach nationwide for all four and five year-old school entrants.

Thus, these two English-speaking nations, which since the times of the Pilgrims concurrently had been using similar methods of teaching reading --- varying from the alphabetic approach of Colonial times, through the Word method of the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth century, the brief resurgence of phonics in the 1970's, Whole Language in the 1980's, and finally to Balanced Reading in the 1990's --- were now for the first time proceeding in radically different ways in the pedagogy each was using to teach their beginner readers.

Purpose of the Study

Whether children live in England or America, they are learning to read and write the same language --- English. As such, it is important to use an approach to reading, fundamental for their future academic, professional and personal fulfillment, which produces the most successful readers. It is against this backdrop that the study investigates the story behind the adoption of two differing beginning reading models in the US and England. The study compared the current pedagogies used in both nations, while retaining a primary focus on reading developments in the US. Educators, researchers, policy makers, and publishers were interviewed to explore how different approaches came to be used in the US and England. It also explored the influences on policy makers that resulted in different reading approaches being used in each country.

Rose, commissioned to write the Rose Report in 2005, has cited American research influences behind his report's recommendation for the use of synthetic phonics in beginning reading. These include the NRP (2000a), Ehri's (2003) report to the Rose Committee, the works of Raynor on eye-movement during reading (Rayner, 1998; Rayner, Juhasz, & Pollatsek, 2005), Shaywitz's (2003) study of the processes used by the brain during reading, Foorman and the first grade comparative studies of analytic and systematic phonics (Foorman, Francis, Novy, & Liberman, 1991), Stanovich's (1986) work on the 'Matthew Effect' and the importance of an early start in reading, and McGuinness' (1997) history of writing systems (Rose, 2006a).

Given this weighting of the US evidence in England, why has the US not responded in a similar way and likewise introduced synthetic phonics nationwide? This study endeavored to discover what the factors are that have led to these separate paths taken. What has influenced the policy decisions made in the US and England, which in turn have vital consequences for the

children of each nation? What are the factors that affect the influential choices researchers, policy makers and publishers are making in both nations concerning beginning reading?

It was the intent of this case study, through interviews with selected stakeholders in both countries, to trace the steps that led to these different approaches; to explore how the findings of reading research are viewed differently in both nations; and what other factors influence the policy decisions made.

Researcher Background

The researcher, a primary educator in England and the US, is uniquely positioned to understand the educational establishment in both countries, their structure and history. As a teacher in England in the mid-1970's, she taught beginning reading using *i.t.a.* in her first year of teaching. This experience showed the researcher that children of all ability levels, by learning the extended sounds of their language, were able to learn to read early. This was little-realized in England then and, on her later transfer to the US, seemed even less known at the schools in which she taught in New Jersey and Illinois.

Many years later, during the first year in her doctorate program, the researcher learned about the *Jolly Phonics* program, sold by Jolly Learning, and about the recent history of synthetic phonics. Upon contacting the creator of the *Jolly Phonics*, Sue Lloyd, it was discovered that both shared common roots in the *i.t.a.* experience. Lloyd had over the years, created *Jolly Phonics*, an intensive 12 to 16 week, interactive synthetic phonic program that, unlike the *Initial Teaching Alphabet*, uses traditional orthography. The researcher's interest in the outcome of using this approach to beginning reading led her to keep abreast of the developments in teaching reading in England. She watched with some puzzlement as England adopted synthetic phonics as their beginning reading program in September 2007, and yet the US, the home of much of the

research that was influential in this decision, was only able to take faltering steps in the same direction.

The researcher has a strong bias in favor of synthetic phonics for beginner readers. This bias would have great influence on any study of synthetic phonics. This case study, however, did not deal with the effectiveness of any reading instruction. Instead it dealt with what factors influence policy decisions; a topic much less influenced by researcher bias. The researcher consciously took all possible precautions to set aside her bias while conducting interviews, during the analysis of interviews and when drawing final conclusions based on the information shared by the different respondents. The researcher finished each interview with a sense of renewed respect for the dedication and sincerity of each interviewee. It was an honor to be the recipient of their informed views, so graciously, and depending on the topic, at times painstakingly shared.

Definition of Terms Used

Analytic Phonics: In this approach, children are not taught to sound phonemes in isolation, but to look for a common phoneme, such as the p in /pig, pen, part, pain/ analytically to find that the /p/ sounds the same in all these words. The US NRP further clarifies this issue, characterizing analytic phonics as a “whole to part approach”, where “children are taught to analyze letter-sound relations once the word is identified” (as cited in Ehri et al., 2001, p. 395).

Balanced Reading: Often seen as an amalgamation of whole language and phonics, Balanced Reading is “a comprehensive approach to reading instruction, one that is more than authentic and holistic and more than skills-based” (Rasinski & Padak, 2004, p. 92). The NRP of 2000 bolstered the use of Balanced Reading in the US, with the equal weight it gave to phonemic awareness,

phonics, fluency and reading comprehension, including vocabulary, needed to produce a proficient reader (Rasinski & Padak, 2004).

Beginning Reading: Will be used in the context of this paper to describe the reading approach and methodologies used during the first formal year of school.

Emic Perspective: More usually associated with ethnographic research, it is the overt intention of the interviewer to set aside bias and enter into the “insider’s perspective” held by the participants in the study, as each shares his or her perspective of the topic under discussion (Patton, 2002, p. 84).

Etic Perspective: the opposite side of the coin (see emic above) the researcher maintains an “outsider’s point-of-view”, and stands back from the interviewee’s perspective, as when comparing the “similarities and differences” of differing cultures (Patton, 2002, pp. 84, 268).

Grapheme: A combination of letters used to spell a single sound in English (phoneme), for example the letters /s/ and /h/ are pushed together to spell the phoneme /sh/, as in ‘ship’. For further clarification, it can also be a group of letters which make this one sound, such as <igh> in ‘high’ (Manzo, 2008d), or <ou> as in ‘out’.

Phoneme: The distinctive individual sounds of the English language, which run together to make words. Words in turn are co-articulated, such that the ending of one word blends into the one that follows. Knowledge of phonemes is needed for interpreting written language, but is not needed or heeded in spoken language.

Phonemic Awareness: The ability to detect, be consciously aware, of the ‘hidden’ individual sounds in the continuous stream of connected speech.

Phonics: The relationship between letters and the sounds they make. Two main forms of phonics are analytic and synthetic. Both are based on isolating individual sounds from the continuous

stream of speech, and using this ability to decode unknown words in reading, and to encode them to write.

Phonological Awareness: The ability to distinguish the underlying structure of the individual sounds of language, its phonemes and syllables. An important and reliable predictor of later reading ability, it has been previously taught orally, but research demonstrates the utility of doing phonological awareness practice in the context of reading activities (Adams, 1990; McGuinness, 2004).

Policy Makers: Those at a national level who have been involved in lobbying for, formulating or implementing reading policy.

Synthetic Phonics: In which the most commonly heard sounds of a language, its phonemes and graphemes, are learned separately and systematically. Synthetic phonics does not teach the names of the letters first. It begins with the basic 42 to 44 sounds of the English language, the alphabet plus other commonly heard sounds, such as /ch/ and /sh/, /oi/, /ai/, /er/ etc. The students are taught how to blend (synthesize) the known sounds together to read words, and break them apart from continuous speech to write. When the extended alphabet is known, decodable books can be used for students to practice this new skill in order to automatically read left-to-right, all the way through unknown words.

Systematic Phonics: In which children “receive explicit, systematic instruction in a set of pre-specified associations between letters and sounds, and they are taught how to use them to read, typically in texts containing controlled vocabulary” (NRP, 2000a, p. 2-103). This broad definition covers a variety of approaches, including synthetic phonics, but also incorporates other approaches not used in synthetic phonics, such as the systematic teaching of onset and rhymes e.g. ‘ail’ is learned and applied in reading ‘rail’, ‘sail, ‘tail’ etc., and the teaching of blended

consonants, such as /s-t/ is /st/. At the outset of learning, children are taught the names of the letters of the alphabet before learning their sounds, and the extended alphabet may be taught over a period of two to three of the first school years (Opitz & Hoyt, 2008).

Whole Language: A philosophy based on the belief that written language, like spoken language, is learned naturally and must therefore be taught as a whole, and not reduced to its parts. As such, it is difficult to define operationally (Hempenstall, 1997). A Whole Language program requires a book-rich classroom environment where reading and writing are seen as authentic tools for communication; texts are read for functional reasons, and instruction is individualized and collaborative between teacher and students, who are both empowered through the choices involved. Teachers who use a whole language approach employ semantic (meaning-based) and syntactic (structural and context) cues to help readers make meaning from the text. Phonics is used as needed in text, as a source of “graphic information” but does not take precedence over other meaning-making strategies, and is not systematically taught as “children discover the alphabetic principle when they learn to write” (Goodman, 1986, pp. 37-38). Accurate representation of the words on the page is not required if substitutions and omissions do not hinder comprehension, as learners are believed to be constructing their own meaning from the text (Pearson, 1989).

Whole Word: Also known as the ‘look-say’ method, children are taught to recognize words on sight, with a controlled vocabulary being built over a period of the first year or more of school before the sounds of the alphabet and their use are taught. This method is especially difficult for students with memorization issues.

Conclusion

This case study investigated the story behind the divergence in reading methods used in the US and England, and the factors that influenced the formation of the centralized policy of each country. Researchers were interviewed, who provided the research-based knowledge for beginning reading; policy makers, who use the research to inform reading policy; and publishers who provide the reading materials used in each nation's classrooms. Their knowledge and perceptions concerning how events unfolded shed light on how each nation came to follow its separate path, and to what extent the influences on policy decisions are similar and/or different between the US and England.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

Through the centuries teachers in the United States (US) and England have used similar methods to teach reading to their youngest students. The methods changed during this time from Alphabetic to Word, to Whole Language, and to Balanced Reading, with occasional excursions into phonics, but whichever pedagogy was in favor both nations adopted it. However, from September 2007 these paths diverged. From this date, teachers of the youngest school-age students in England have been officially required to use synthetic phonics in their classrooms. Meanwhile, kindergarten teachers in America, under no such mandate, have mainly continued to teach using Balanced Reading, the pedagogy previously common to both nations.

Historical Perspective

Over the centuries, as information was shared between the two nations about the benefits of differing pedagogies, there was agreement between their educators, accord among researchers, and acceptance from their governments about the direction reading education was taking. Materials were duly produced by the publishers to support the chosen methodology. However, until the 1900's there was little research to support the claims of proponents for each method.

Since children were first taught to read in English, an alphabetic approach was the traditional pedagogy used (Adams, 1990; Chall, 2000; McGuinness, 1997).

Alphabetic Approach. In England and in America, in Colonial times reading was traditionally taught by first teaching the names of the letters of the Alphabet. Then, how they co-joined to make sounds by blending consonants (C) and vowels (V) together to form syllables, such as /ba/, /be/, /bi/, /bo/, /bu/. This latter approach, based as it is on the sounds the syllables of the language make, treats the code as a syllabary (McGuinness, 1997).

Using durable one page hornbooks, and later the equally durable two-sided, tri-folded battledores and charts, children learned to read by memorizing sequentially all the combinations of CV pronunciation, followed by VC, then CCV, then CVC etc., gradually building their knowledge of the written code of their spoken language. Only then were they expected to be able to read words (Adams, 1990; McGuinness, 1997; Rodgers, 1995a). In English-speaking Colonial America, children were taught to read this way in order to be able to study their Bible and patriotic tracts: as Adams (1990) points out this straightforward approach was adopted in order to “teach the means, and get on with the purpose” (p. 21).

In England children sometimes began this slow process as early as the age of three when they were first given a hornbook with the letters, and the beginning of the syllabary, usually up to “de, di, do, du...”, after which they had to create the rest of the syllabary themselves. Rodgers wondered whimsically if the necessarily halting manner in which “fe, fi, fo, fu” would then have first been painstakingly constructed by the novice reader might have led to Jack and the Beanstalk’s giant’s chant: “Fe, fi, fo, fum, I smell the blood of an Englishman” (Rodgers, 1995a, p. 75).

The Word Approach. However, from the beginning to mid-1800’s, a new method of teaching reading began to be adopted throughout the English-speaking world (Adams, 1990; McGuinness, 1997). Though gradual in nature, it had taken firm hold in American and British classrooms by the 1930’s. Instead of teaching the code, reflecting the alphabetic nature of the English language, it reflected its philosophy of teaching for meaning, it began with the teaching of whole words which were to be recognized on sight. Hence, it became known as the Word Method (Adams, 1990; Blumenfeld, 1973; Chall, 1967; Rodgers, 1995a, 1995b).

The influential American educator, Horace Mann, the secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education, writing in the 1870's, was particularly scathing in his comments about the Alphabetic approach to reading. The meticulous learning of the complex syllabary of the English language was, Mann believed, a tedium that could be circumvented by teaching meaningful whole words to beginner readers. He likened the letters first taught to "skeleton-shaped, bloodless, ghostly apparitions" (as quoted in Adams, 1990, p. 22).

Ironically, a Superintendent and Inspector of schools in early nineteenth century America also wrote in graphic terms about the tedium and limitations of Mann's preferred method:

I found the primary schools on my first inspection of them in 1857, in a deplorable condition. ... The reading books and charts in the schools were designed for the 'word-method', a method of very limited capabilities Slow and tedious processes by which they brought their pupils up into only semi-fluent reading. (Rodgers, 1995c, p. 1203)

Both Mann and the superintendent had the interests of the children at heart, to lighten the burden of learning to read. However, each fundamentally disagreed about which method would best achieve this end. This disagreement has resonated down through the ages.

From the late nineteenth century, scientific research began to be applied in the field of education. As such, in 1886, the gestalt use of teaching whole words first with its early emphasis on meaning, was seemingly supported by the studies of James McKeen Cattell (Adams, 1990). He found that adult subjects recognized words faster than individual letters; and phrases faster than strings of letters. This was taken to show that readers recognized words in a logographic way by shape, therefore supporting teaching whole words rather than individual sounds to young readers. Though earlier disproved by work done in 1918 and in other studies since, including studies by Adams, this notion prevailed throughout much of the twentieth century (Adams,

1990). This fundamental error, the belief that how the proficient reader reads is how children should be taught to read, has been a recurring theme in teaching reading ever since (Clay, 1991).

Over the following century Word came to dominate classrooms in both England and the US. From the 1930's and 1940's it became as dominant in teaching reading on both sides of the Atlantic as the Alphabetic approach that had preceded it. In the US this approach became synonymous with the series *Dick and Jane* (1930), and in England with *Janet and John* (1940). In the US it provided for the dawn of the Basal, a carefully scripted manual for teachers accompanying reading materials geared for each grade level, and in England provision of successive reading-leveled books, through which students worked according to ability (Chall, 1967; McGuinness, 1997; Rodgers, 1995b).

In the next two decades, with more repetitions of the key vocabulary, children took longer to learn a limited number of words each year, until the requisite 1,500 had been learned by third grade (Chall, 2000). To help identify unknown words, children were encouraged to look at pictures, some sound/letter correspondences were taught from first grade, but phonics was “relegated to the position of an ancillary tool” (Adams, 1990, p. 23) to be used only in relation to need during the reading process, and was not taught as a separate skill (Adams, 1990; Chall, 1967).

From the 1930's, alongside the Language Experience approach to reading, in which children's own writing was used as reading material, Word continued into the 1950's. Reading-books and other grade-level curricula text were highly repetitive and simplistic, as the core words of the Word method were based on the most common words within the child's everyday speech and were limited by the sight words learned (Adams, 1990; Chall, 1967; Flesch, 1955; Rodgers, 1995a, 1995b). However in the mid-50's this educator equilibrium was upset by a

challenge from two converging sources outside their ranks: the needs of the new technological age and Rudolf Flesch.

The Need for Phonics. By the mid-twentieth century, the public became aware that America seemed to be falling behind its Soviet counterparts, not only in the Space Race but in its educational preparation for students to enter that race (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998). Flesch's (1955) work *Why Johnny Can't Read*, a polemic against the whole-word, meaning-based approach to reading, as well as providing a phonic-based alternative for parents, gave practical voice to these concerns in relation to literacy (Flesch, 1955). *Johnny* was meant for the parents of America, but was targeted at its educators, too. It led to a spirited debate about what was wrong with the commonly-used whole-word method. Flesch successfully stirred the American public into action to clamor for something to be done to address this problem (Adams, 1990; Chall, 1967; Flesch, 1955).

At the broader level of government and researchers, Flesch's challenge led to a conference to discuss his claims, which in turn had two influential outcomes. The first was to be a national classroom-based study of phonics versus the basal predominantly used in American classrooms. This became the influential Bond and Dykstra study known as *The First Grade Cooperative Studies* (Adams, 1990; Bond & Dykstra, 1967; Chall, 2000). These studies reported that a multi-pronged approach was superior to a single one, no way of teaching reading was superior to another, and that the teacher was more important than the method.

The other outcome was that Chall's membership of the initial federal study, directly led to her federally-funded meta-analyses of studies from 1912 to 1965, *Learning to Read: The Great Debate*. This, in turn, led her to conclude that phonics was important as a beginning reading tool, and that:

The long-existing fear that an initial code emphasis produces readers who do not read for meaning or with enjoyment is unfounded. On the contrary, the evidence indicates that better results in terms of reading for meaning are achieved with the programs that emphasize code at the start than with the programs that stress meaning at the beginning.

(Chall, 1967, p.307)

However, and echoing the Cooperative Studies, she was also to conclude that teacher quality could make or break any approach to reading, which served to dilute her former message (McGuinness, 2004).

Following Flesch's work, and these studies, sounds were incorporated into reading programs in the lower grades, but not exclusively at the very beginning of a child's reading career. Sounds were more usually taught in an analytic way, with students taking apart a known word to learn and apply its sounds to other words by analogy (Adams, 1990; Blumenfeld, 1973; Chall, 1967, 2000; McGuinness, 1997; Rodgers, 1995c). However, during the Word era another form of phonics, less well-known and called 'synthetic' (the approach Flesch had outlined for parents to teach at home to their children) had occasionally made its presence felt.

The Synthetic Phonics Pedagogy. In the US, synthetic phonics was first introduced in the latter part of the nineteenth century by Leigh (1878) in *Leigh Phonics*, Pollard (1892) in her *Manual of Synthetic Reading and Spelling*, and by Dale (1898) *On the Teaching of English Reading*, which was sold on both sides of the Atlantic (McGuinness, 2004).

Using this method, Flesch had outlined how to teach children to read. It taught students how to recognize the letter and letter-combinations that represent the 42-44 sounds of the English language, and how to use them by blending together the sounds they represent. Unlike the alphabetic approach, students are not required to learn all the syllables of their language, nor like

Word are they first required to memorize all words on sight. It is a basic tenet of synthetic phonics that once students know the basic sounds, how to use them, and have had plenty of practice using them in reading, they are free to read and understand any text within their spoken language knowledge (Adams, 1990; Chall, 1967; McGuinness, 1997, 2004; Rodgers, 1995c).

In the 1960's McGuinness describes two such synthetic programs in the US: the *Lindamood* program of the late 1960's, which had similarities with Nellie Dale's sound articulation approach; and the *Hay-Wingo* program from the 50's, which later evolved into the *Lippincott* program of the 1960's (Flesch, 1955; McGuinness, 1997).

In England, synthetic phonics was also to later reappear in the 1960's and 70's, with Sir James Pitman's program, commonly known by its abbreviation, of *i.t.a.* It was based, as was Dale's program, on the shorthand method of writing invented for stenographers by his grandfather, Isaac Pitman (Downing, 1965; Pitman, 1961). As with Leigh's method, it used special co-joined letters to represent digraphs such as /sh/ and /oi/ (Travers, 1974). Once again, as with Dale's program, *i.t.a.* proved popular on both sides of the Atlantic in the 1960's and early 70's (McGuinness, 1997).

Adams (1990) felt that the most long-lasting effect of *i.t.a.* is the re-emphasis it placed on the need for an alphabetic approach to teaching beginning readers. It was the lot of synthetic phonics, however, to be successfully eclipsed by the rise of Word, and later by another new approach to teaching reading called Whole Language. Whole Language is based on its philosophy of reading for meaning, and first came on the scene in both the UK and US in the 1970's.

The Whole Language Approach. Behind Whole Language lay the reasoning that reading is a natural process (Goodman, 1986), that the “whole purpose of reading is to make

sense of written language directly, not by converting it into sound” (Smith, 1999, p. 150). Smith (1999) believed phonics was “normally acquired unconsciously in the course of reading”, but “becomes a hazard” when enforced early and before children are readers, when it merely confused, or even later when it was “unnecessary” (p. 152). He thus unconsciously echoes the views of Gates, researcher and creator of *Dick and Jane* of the 1930’s who, while advocating for Word, had the same reaction to the place of phonics in reading (Chall, 1967).

In Whole Language the child is not directly taught the alphabetic basis of writing but, with the teacher serving as facilitator, is encouraged to guess unknown words, by reference to their graphic appearance, syntax and/or context, known as the “three-cueing system.” Getting meaning from text was considered more important than accuracy, and as such Goodman (2000) termed reading a “psycholinguistic guessing game” (p. 2). With the Word method in supremacy, this was probably an accurate portrayal of how children guessed at words they had never met before. However, now children were to be actively encouraged to tackle unknown words, mainly by using the two ‘cues’ of context and syntax, as they strove to create meaning from the text read (Goodman, 1986, 1989; Goodman, Smith, Meredith, & Goodman, 1987; Smith, 1985; Stahl & Miller, 1989).

Frank Smith, a psycholinguist graduate from Harvard, was also influential in England in the 1970’s, where his views and methods were, at the same time, espoused and spread by the writings of Waterland, a school teacher, and equally decried by the English educationalist Morris, who pointed out that his “extraordinary assumptions” were “unsupported by research evidence” (as cited in Rodgers, 1995c, p. 1750).

Whole Language had a strong philosophical appeal among educators. Stahl (1991) lists its attractions: its use of real literature; invented spelling; the emphasis on reading for enjoyment

rather than to improve reading achievement; and the shift it brought in the definition of reading from learning to decode accurately to comprehension and reading response. Such changes made reading instruction more meaningful and child-centered, empowering teachers to cater to the individual needs of the child, who became “an agent of his or her own learning” (Rayner, Foorman, Perfetti, Pesetsky, & Seidenberg, 2001, p. 87).

As many researchers have pointed out, like Word before it, these philosophical beliefs were not founded on scientific research (McGuinness, 1997; Moorman, Blanton, & McLaughlin 1994; Stahl, 1991; Vellutino, 1991). Goodman’s own research study, completed in 1966, which shows students read words more successfully when these are presented in continuous text as opposed to lists of words, has not been replicated (Nicholson, 1991; Vellutino, 1991). Also, as further outlined by Stahl (1991) referencing other researchers, most children do not easily pick up how to read unaided (Foorman et al., 1991); it leads to poor spelling; and even skilled readers guess unknown words wrongly one time out of four, so it is an inefficient means of determining unknown words (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). From the 1960’s on, research was increasingly available to inform educators of the merits, or not, of Whole Language as a reading method.

The Emergence of Literacy Research

During the 1960’s, Ehri, a psycho-linguist, was just beginning what was to be a long career in studying how children learn to read and spell words. At this time, Goodman was working on miscue analysis, analyzing the errors children made while reading using the Word method. As an outcome of his work, he proposed that learning to read words was not based on memorizing individual words, but through guessing words by using grapho-phonetic (initial and ending sounds), context and semantics clues (Goodman et al., 1987).

In her personal perspective of her meeting with Goodman in 1974, Ehri (1997) captured how his “close-minded and dogmatic approach” (p. 99) to views other than his own propelled her into thirty years of empirical research in how children acquire reading. Goodman meanwhile went on to form the Whole Language movement of the 70’s and 80’s, during which time educators paid little heed to Ehri’s research findings. Thirty years later however, Ehri was chosen to chair the NRP’s Subgroup on Alphabetics (NRP, 2000b), the antithesis of Whole Language.

Another area of research from 1975 onwards, also available but little understood, were the experiments about eye movements made during reading. These found that when reading, the eyes process left to right through each word, only fixing longer on unfamiliar words, so that “when reading for comprehension, skilled readers tend to look at each individual word, and to process its component letters quite thoroughly” (Adams, 1990, p. 102). Rayner et al (as quoted in Snowling & Hulme, 2005, p. 36) show this is achieved by the “parallel processing of letter groups” at times of fixation which, in turn, is influenced by the automatic recognition of common patterns, word length and word meaning. All combine to produce faster recognition of even pseudo words (Rayner, 1998; Rayner, Juhasz, & Pollatsek, 2005).

Adults, such as in Cattell’s study, could therefore quickly say words faster than naming letters, but this ability, especially in experienced readers, masks formidable activity in the brain (Rayner, 1998; Rayner, et al., 2001; Rayner, et al., 2005). The absence of the ability to automatically process text means readers “ may require more of the limited capacity needed for higher order processes of comprehension. (Perfetti & Hogaboam, 1975, p. 467) which, ironically, is the first object of both Word and Whole Language proponents.

However, such knowledge was not well-known, or indeed, was yet to be discovered in the late 80’s/early 90’s. Equally unknown were the studies yet to come about which neural

pathways in the brain are used by skilled readers, later made possible by using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) (Shaywitz, 2003). Nor was it appreciated how ‘form follows function’, which provided the rationale behind Diane McGuinness’s work of the late 1990’s, which fully documented how writing is an artificial, man-made construct, the code for which must be taught to novice readers (McGuinness, 1997, 2004, 2005). However, the availability of existing reading level data already showed that many children were not naturally learning to read using the gestalt Whole Language approach. Something was wrong.

Renewal of Government Involvement in Literacy

Echoing the two government-sponsored reports of the 1950’s, following the publication of Flesch’s *Johnny*, the US government responded to this new public concern over literacy rates with a new report.

A Need for Reform in the US. In 1983, the US government commissioned the report, *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), which highlighted a series of disturbing literacy statistics. It found, compared to other industrialized nations of the 1970’s, American students were: “never first or second” (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998, p. 165) and even came last seven times out of nineteen in the comparative tables; 23 million American adults and about 13 percent of all 17 year olds were functionally illiterate by the simplest tests of everyday reading, writing, and comprehension; SAT scores were falling; and high school standardized tests were lower than those from the ‘Sputnik’ era, which had in themselves generated great concern in the 1950’s (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998).

By 1992, with improvements in technology, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) was able to report on the status of reading throughout America. The nation was “stunned” (Adams, 2008, p. 2) to learn that 40% of children were below “basic”. If one were to

add the 8% of children not included in the data due to their special education or limited English proficiency status, Adams (2008) concludes “that nearly half of our nation’s students lacked the minimal knowledge and skills required for grade-level learning” (p. 2).

Balanced Reading. Responding to falling scores, and to the children who were unable to read that they represented, many educators during the late 1980’s and 1990’s advocated that teachers combine Whole Language and Phonics. Indeed, in the US in the self-report section of the NAEP of 1992, most teachers, apart from those in California who were still predominantly using Whole Language, were reporting that they used a balanced approach to reading instruction.

But exactly what this ‘balance’ looked like varied from teacher to teacher. Strickland (1998) believes it does not mean “a little of this and a little of that”, but that avoiding “instructional extremes” should rather be informed “by how children learn and how they can best be taught” (p. 52). Effectively, for educators it allowed them to keep the print-rich, authentic literature environment of Whole Language, while combining this with the incidental teaching of phonics (Galda, Cullinan, & Strickland, 1997).

A Need for Reform in England. A Balanced Reading approach to improve poor reading scores was also taking place in England, and was encompassed in the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) in 1998. A decade before in 1989, reading scores had shown 35% of British children were reading below grade level (remarkably similar to what the NAEP was reporting in the US). To raise reading levels, the NLS ‘Searchlight’ approach to teaching reading was implemented. The ‘Searchlights’ focused on early readers, had a multi-skills approach which now included phonics, but appeared to weight it equally with three other stated components of reading: word recognition (sight words), syntax (grammar) and context (meaning). Though not mandated, schools were pressured to adopt the NLS through the revamped, formerly more advisory, office

of the nationally-run English school inspectorate, now commonly known as Ofsted (Stannard & Huxford, 2007).

Thus the two countries moved along, each mirroring the other in reading pedagogy use through successive centuries. In both countries, as the new twenty-first century was dawning, concern with poor reading levels led to two influential reading reports. In the US this was the NRP of 2000, and in the UK the *Rose Report*, which was commissioned in 2005 and reported in 2006.

The US Response. In the US, reading standards published in the NAEP scores of 1996 were, at best blush, holding steady compared to those of 1992, but in some cases showed a decline. Across the board, on average 45% of nine year-olds were reading below the basic level for their grade level. Following the Reading Excellent Act (1996), which recommended using evidence-based reading programs, and the Snow Report about the prevention of reading failures (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998), the Director of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) in consultation with the Secretary of Education formed the National Reading Panel (NRP). The Panel members were asked to create a meta-analysis of evidence-based research to see if any conclusions could be reached regarding the best methods to teach reading (Ehri et al., 2001).

The National Reading Panel. The Panel identified and formed sub-groups to investigate five areas related to reading instruction, these came to be known as the ‘five pillars’ of reading instruction. Two of the ‘pillars’, Phonemic Awareness (PA) and Phonics, were combined into Alphabetics. The others were Fluency, Listening Comprehension/Reading Comprehension, and Vocabulary. Of these, Alphabetics proved to be the only ‘pillar’ where sufficient studies were

available which met the Panel’s double pronged evidence-based and peer-reviewed criteria for analysis. The Panel did, however, report findings and conclusions for all five areas (NRP, 2000a).

Fluency, the ability “to read text with speed, accuracy and proper expression” (NRP, 2000b, p. 3-1) was reported to be taught in two ways --- through the guided, repetitive reading of texts and silent reading. The former, explicit approach was recommended. However, the Panel was unable to find any definitive connection between silent reading and fluency. Regarding silent reading, the panel found hundreds of studies that correlated silent reading with fluency, but not causative ones. Given that it is “so intuitively appealing and so frequently recommended”, due to the commonly-held reasoning that it contributes both to vocabulary development and comprehension, the Panel recommended that “rigorous and experimental research” be undertaken in this area (NRP, 2000a, p. 3-4).

Vocabulary through instruction was considered critical by the Panel, as it eases children’s ability to comprehend text. Twenty-one different approaches to vocabulary instruction were found, but collectively the studies used too many variables to allow for direct comparison. It was reported that vocabulary should be taught both directly in an interactive manner, with the tasks being restructured to meet the children’s developmental and ability needs, and indirectly by using repetition and multiple exposures to the targeted words; that computer use is effective; and dependence on one method is less effective than using many methods (NRP, 2000a).

Comprehension, the reader’s ability to derive meaning from text had, according to the Panel, a solid scientific foundation. It found the reader’s ability to understand text was improved by learning how to self-monitor the text read; how to use graphic organizers to practice strategies learned; by learning about the structure of stories as an aid for recall; and how to summarize to enable the learner to integrate ideas and generalize from what has been read. The Panel

recommended the strategies be taught in combination with each other, and once again believed more research was needed (NRP, 2000a).

Finally, the only area in which the Panel was able to conduct meta-analyses of studies of the last thirty years that met its criteria was in Alphabetics: that is in phonemic awareness and phonics. This combined research showed effective reading instruction included phonological awareness, a combination of phonemic awareness and phonics. They recommended that children should be taught to isolate the sounds in words by breaking them apart and manipulating them (phonemic awareness), and that this needed to be taught alongside phonics (NRP, 2000a).

The results were reported separately. PA, in which children are taught to isolate the smallest sound segments (phonemes) of language, was found to yield “impressive” and replicated gains when used with beginner readers. It yielded a positive impact on reading and had a long-term effect on spelling, especially where PA was combined explicitly with the written letters the phonemes represent (graphemes) (NRP, 2000a).

The Phonics Instruction group focused on studies comparing how the learner links the individual sound heard with the written symbol it represents (grapheme), and how to join these together to make spelling patterns and words. This was identified as being taught in many shapes and forms: incidentally and analytically by taking known words apart, or systematically and synthetically by teaching the known phonemes of written language. It was found that systematic phonics was preferable to incidental, and had a “significant” effect on children’s ability to read, spell and “significant improvement in their ability to comprehend text” (NRP, 2000a, p. 9).

The Panel concluded that systematic phonics was more effective than unsystematic and most effective when taught earlier, kindergarten to first, than later; children at all socio-economic levels benefit; it was an effective preventative intervention for at-risk readers (those whose I.Q.

is higher than reading level), but less effective, though still productive, for those who are disabled (low I.Q.); taught alongside phonemic awareness, it was most effective in improving ability to decode regularly and irregularly spelled words for kindergartners and first graders, as well as for older struggling readers; and can be taught individually, small group or whole class (NRP, 2000a). However, there was a caveat:

Finally, it is important to emphasize that systematic phonics instruction should be integrated with other reading instruction to create a *balanced reading program*. ...

Phonics should not become the dominant component in a reading program, neither in the amount of time devoted to it nor in the significance attached. It is important to evaluate children's reading competence in many ways, not only by their phonics skills but also by their interest in books and their ability to understand information that is read to them. By emphasizing all of the processes that contribute to growth in reading, teachers will have the best chance of making every child a reader. (NRP, 2000a, p. 2-136, italics added)

The report was influential among educators, but its final summing-up appeared to support the continuation of a Balanced Reading approach to teaching beginning reading. Further, it confirmed the need for early systematic teaching of phonics, but was unable to determine which, analytic or synthetic, was the better methodology for beginning reading (NRP, 2000a).

The English Response. The NRP drew the special attention of researchers and policy makers in England. At the turn of the new century, there was growing concern that though reading levels had pleasingly improved in England from 65% prior to the adoption of the 'Searchlights' approach in 1998 to around 80% by 2003, it effectively meant 20% of the nation's children were still reading below standard for their grade level (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2005). Balanced Reading was failing one fifth of children in the UK.

Coupled with a British meta-analysis of 43 studies (Torgerson, 2006), the NRP's evidence provided a foundation for the work to be undertaken by the Independent Review of the Teaching of Reading (Rose, 2006b). In June, 2005 Jim Rose, a retired Chief Inspector of Schools, was chosen to head this endeavor.

The Rose Report

Rose and his advisory panel were influenced, as the NRP before it, by research undertaken in America. He cited the first reports of Chall (1967) as well as Bond and Dykstra (1967), to *Becoming a Nation of Readers* (1985), *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998), and the work of the NRP (2000a), as restated by Ehri for the House of Common Select Committee in 2003.

In Ehri's (2003) evidence, these cumulative research studies determined that systematic phonics taught early in a child's reading career, were connected to his or her later success as a reader. What form that phonics should take, when it should be implemented, and for how long had not been clearly defined. Rose accepted the charge to decide the "expectations for best practices in early reading **and** synthetic phonics. So, I was expected to make the judgment about synthetic phonics in particular --- that was specified in the remit" (Rose, 2006a, Conference Proceedings). The Rose Report was published in March, 2006.

The Rose Report based its findings on the research and interviews previously undertaken by the House of Commons Select Committee; its own review of the research, including the meta-analysis of previously cited studies, making special mention of the work of Ehri (Ehri & Robbins, 1991; Ehri, 1987, 1997), Adams (1990) and McGuinness (1997, 2004, 2005); and its own visits to "best practice" schools which were using either the analytic or synthetic approach to beginning reading. In essence, the Report's remit was wider-reaching than the meta-analysis of the NRP, and

led to a more definitive recommendation about the place of synthetic phonics in early reading (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2005).

Rose in his address to Reading Reform Conference in November, 2006 also commented on the influence on the review's work of the research by Stanovitch and Cunningham (Stanovich, 1986), which showed that general knowledge is dependent on reading volume at all ability levels, and that those who get off to an early start in reading have improved cognitive development --- whatever his or her original cognitive level. Revisiting eleventh graders, whom they had earlier researched regarding reading volume in third grade, Stanovich and Cunningham had found those who read most in third grade foretold who would be the most avid readers in eleventh grade (as cited in Cunningham & Stanovich, 1998). Stanovich calls this the "Matthew Effect" (in reference to biblical text Matthew 13:12), with the 'poor' readers getting poorer while the 'rich' readers get richer, such that teachers need to help young readers "out of the gate quickly ... by cracking the spelling to sound code" (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1998, p. 7), whatever their cognitive level, because this is their entry point to the "positive feedback loop" (p. 7) that determines their cognitive growth and future success (Rose, 2006a).

To this end, in its recommendations the final report of the Independent Review of the Teaching of Reading cautioned against the Whole Language method of teaching children to use picture clues to infer an unknown word, as this interfered with the child's developing ability to focus on the printed word, a habitual prerequisite for maintenance of word accuracy (Rose, 2006b). The Report concluded that the importance of the crucial skill of early phonics had not been communicated clearly enough to teachers, resulting in diffused teaching at the earliest stages of many strategies, rather than concentrating on phonics (Rose, 2006b).

The Report also found that the Searchlights Model of the National Literacy Program, was based upon the processes used by skilled reader, as in the model created by Clay (1991, 1985), but that this did “not best reflect how a beginner reader progresses to become a skilled reader” (Rose, 2006a, Conference Proceedings). That the emphasis for the beginner reader needs initially to be on decoding new words met in print in order to secure ease of word recognition (Rose, 2006b). As Ehri (as cited in Rose, 2006b) reported to the Rose Report committee:

The impact of phonics instruction on reading was significantly greater...when phonics was the method used to start children out... These results show that early instruction in systematic phonics is especially beneficial for learning to read. (p. 30)

The results from previous studies and reports (Brooks, 2003; Ehri et al, 2001; Ehri, 2003) submitted to the Secretary of State and the Department of Education and Skills, the evidence of witnesses, and their observations of analytic and synthetic-run classrooms, led the Rose Report to conclude that though the teaching of phonics should be part of “a broad and rich language curriculum” including “speaking, listening, reading and writing and enlarging children’s stock of words” (Rose, 2006b, p. 69), it could also make recommendations about the form this phonics should take. It provided answers to the following questions which were unable to be answered by the meta-analysis of the NRP (2000a):

- What kinds of phonics instruction work best? Synthetic Phonics is more effective than analytic phonics, but no one synthetic approach has yet been shown to be better than another.
- How useful are different kinds of phonological instruction? The multi-modal form of early synthetic instruction including visual, sound and actions as each sound is introduced

produces the best retention. The direct teaching of the blending or synthesis of sounds to form words is crucial, too.

- How rapid should be the rate of letter-sound teaching? Twelve to sixteen weeks at 20 to 30 minutes a day seems to be a rate that is fast and timely enough to introduce the 44 phonemes
- What is the optimal age for phonics instruction to begin? At the first stage of children's introduction to the written code, which in England is Reception (children aged four to five). Rose clarified this later, by saying there is no set time, e.g. the "strike of midnight when a child is five" (Rose, 2006a, Conference Proceedings) that is right for everybody, and, indeed, if a child has good phonemic awareness earlier is also possible.
- And, what kind of phonics instruction works best for children who are at risk of reading problems? The first, fast and focused approach of synthetic phonics, which involves a multi-modal approach to provide maximum opportunity for retention (Rose, 2006b).

The Report emphasized the need for further teacher training in "accurate word recognition and language comprehension" (Rose, 2006b, p. 77), and made recommendations regarding teacher training, especially in relation to the teachers of pre-school children.

Unlike Brooks (2003) and the House of Commons report (2005) that had paved the way for the Rose Report, it made no recommendations regarding further research studies comparing analytic and synthetic phonics in England's schools. Indeed the British Government effectively rendered any such studies moot by its action of immediately mandating that state-run schools adopt a synthetic phonic program for its beginner readers.

Nationwide Adoption of Synthetic Phonics. The swift response of the British Government was to require, by spring of 2007, that all publicly-run schools submit plans

concerning which synthetic program they intended using in their schools, and by September, 2008 a Government-created program called *Letters and Sounds* was offered free to schools. The latter was a surprising move, as there were a several good, commercially well-known synthetic programs already in use. The public mandate for the free program served the dual purpose of signaling the Government's position, and also ensured a lack of money would not stand in the way of the adoption of synthetic phonics. It was at this juncture that the United States and England officially parted ways in how reading was taught to their youngest students.

What was it that allowed the Rose Report to go one stage further than the NRP and actually recommend synthetic phonics, early and fast for the youngest readers? It used the same research base as the Panel, and understood how they had arrived at their conclusions. However, the directive to make a decision about which phonics was better was not the only difference in their endeavor. The Report also:

- sought expert testimony from other than researchers --- policy makers such as Nick Gibb, the opposition's Shadow Schools Minister; creators of synthetic programs, and practitioners using either analytic or synthetic phonics;
- conducted their own review of research, both in pedagogies used to teach reading and in the studies of eye-movement and brain research related to the reading process;
- made its own observations of schools using each approach stating that:
“focusing on the practice observed in the classroom and its supportive context, rather than debating the research, is therefore not without significance for this review” (Rose, 2006b, pp. 62- 207).

However, the original impetus for the Review had come from the results of the Clackmannanshire study, which was also to prove influential in the Review's synthesis of research. The Westminster Select Committee Enquiry into Teaching Children to Read had concluded that, "in view of the evidence of the Clackmannanshire study ... we recommend that the Government should undertake an immediate review of the National Literacy Strategy" (Education and Skills Committee, 2005b, p. 23). It was at this point the Rose Review team had been formed.

Clackmannanshire Study. Johnston and Watson of St. Andrews University in Scotland, undertook the Clackmannanshire study, funded by the Scottish government, as part of a large grant made available to study the best way to teach reading. They eventually completed a 7-year study of children from age 4/5 to 11/12: children who had begun their reading life with synthetic phonics (Johnston & Watson, 1997, 2005). The Clackmannanshire Study (Johnston and Watson, 2005) was unusual in that it was the first to follow the same group of children throughout their primary (elementary) school career. Initially, the study lasted 16 weeks and covered thirteen classes in eight schools. Five classes were taught using the synthetic phonic method of rapidly learning six letter sounds in eight days, how to write the sounds and blend (synthesize) them to read and spell words, in twenty minute lessons daily. The remaining five classes were split into two uneven groups, four classes being taught phonemic awareness orally without reference to print, and analytic phonics, and one control group who learned analytic phonics only. The five classes learned one sound a week and did twenty minutes a day. Classroom teachers delivered the lessons to all the groups. Johnston and Watson partly wanted to find out if the speed of introducing sounds made a difference to reading levels (Watson, 1999).

By the end of sixteen weeks the synthetic phonics group was eight months ahead of the analytic group and seven months ahead of the other two groups and nine months ahead of the

phonemic awareness/analytic phonics group. For ethical reasons, Johnston and Watson decided to turn around and teach synthetic phonics to the five classes who had not received these lessons. At the end of their second year of schooling, when tested again, all the students in the thirteen classes were well above their chronological age in reading and spelling, though the first group of eight classes still performed significantly better in spelling (Johnston & Watson, 2004; Watson, 1999). Also of note, of the original group of synthetic phonics trained students *none* required remedial help, though members of the other two groups did (Johnston & Watson, 2001).

Fast forwarding to the end of their seventh year of schooling the synthetic phonic children, now aged eleven to twelve years old, were three and half years ahead of the average Scottish child in decoding ability, one year and eight months ahead in spelling, and three and a half months above in comprehension ability. A startling fact was that the boys did substantially better in reading than the girls, the opposite of what is generally found in international studies (Mullins et al, 2003, Johnston & Watson, 2005). The researchers concluded that first and fast introduction of synthetic phonics works best for beginner readers, and has lasting effects over the students' school careers (Johnston & Watson, 2005). These results caused quite a stir in the media (Ellis, 2007).

That comprehension was lower has been the subject of some debate, and even criticized as showing synthetic phonics does not aid comprehension. However the researchers believed it can be partly attributed to the poor vocabulary associated with the children's low socio-economic background (Johnston & Watson, 2005). Stannard believed as such it is a factor which demonstrates the complexity of reading (Stannard & Huxford, 2007), and it also echoes the five-pillar recommendations of the NRP (2000a).

Ellis (2007), a literacy consultant to Scottish education districts, questions whether the enriched continuing education experience in comprehension provided by the Scottish Department of Education to the Clackmannanshire cohort has been fully appreciated by supporters of the study. Along with all other areas of Scotland, Clackmannanshire benefitted from follow-up initiatives provided as part of the large Scottish educational grant that had funded the original study, such that home visits and extra-curricular support activities were also provided in Clackmannanshire. As Ellis (2007) states, although this extra support (provided to all Clackmannan schools) does not in itself explain the success of this cohort, which must spring from the foundations laid in their first year, it did provide ideal conditions for this cohort to continue to excel.

As Moss and Huxford conclude “perhaps the real lesson from this broader examination of the Clackmannanshire study is that any study driven by mainly one paradigm can only offer limited insights” (as cited in Ellis, 2007, p. 294). For the English government’s new synthetic phonic initiative to succeed to the same extent, Ellis suggests it will need more than a synthetic phonic introduction to reading. This view is shared by Stannard, an architect of the National Literacy Strategy, who cautions that following the initial learning of the extended code (synthetic phonics) a program including inferential thinking, fluency, and “critical literacy” would be needed to influence comprehension (Stannard & Huxford, 2007, p. 191).

Moss and Huxford believe strong supporters of synthetic phonics in England have outmaneuvered others (effectively those who support a more balanced approach) and have greater influence on policy (as cited in Ellis, 2007). This speaks to the view of Dominic Wyse and Morag Styles who believe the rush to implement synthetic phonics has been precipitate; that a large scale study of analytic versus synthetic phonics would have been a more appropriate response (Wyse &

Styles, 2007). This recommendations had also been forwarded previously by Brooks (2003). In this respect parallels can be drawn to the opposition to the NCLB initiative in the US. Although in the case of Reading First, the opposition appears to have succeeded in cutting off the funding for these evidence-based programs (Manzo, 2008c).

However, the Clackmannanshire study was influential in England. It led to the Rose Report, was described in great detail within it, and instrumental in its recommendation in favor of synthetic phonics. However it and another study of *Jolly Phonics* conducted in Canada (Sumbler, 1999), had not been included in the NRP meta-analysis because they were not peer-reviewed.

Given that educators and researchers have differed so widely over how best to teach reading, how have publishers of reading material negotiated the differing approaches, and how do they interpret research evidence, as they produce materials that need to be commercially attractive to educators?

The Role of Publishers

Throughout the history of reading, publishers have sought to benefit from the commercial opportunities education provides. From the hornbook and battledore of earlier centuries (Rodgers, 1995a, 1995b) to today, publishers have been mainly reactive in relation to the teaching of reading in both countries. In the US this took the form of producing the differing 'basals' (reading books and scripted teacher texts for each grade level) that accompanied the controlled text of Word (Adams, 1990; Chall, 1967); the literature-based texts of the Whole language era; and the small-group, guided reading materials that accompany Balanced Reading. In England, publishers similarly provided graduated reading series reflecting the needs of the differing reading pedagogies, such as *Janet and John* (1940) in the Word era to such as the

popular Oxford Reading Tree (Oxford University Press [OUP], 2009) in Whole Language and Balanced Reading times. Though in this case short reading books were produced in graduated, readability leveled series, leveled for ability rather than age.

Publishing is a commercial enterprise, so it is not surprising that Chall should find that “the ultimate difficulty of textbooks is based not only on educational needs but also in market considerations” (Chall, 2000, p. 54). Further, it has been suggested that school administrators are often unduly influenced by educational publishers. According to Rodgers (1995a) this is a fine-honed publishing tradition. She quotes a story mockingly penned by the principal teacher of a New York school in 1895 about publishers’ agents who were willing to go to great lengths to influence teachers, principals and school boards to buy their reading series.

Chall documented the relationship between reading scores and basal content, noting a drop in reading scores in the US after 1984, which she attributed to less attention being given to systematic instruction in phonics in the earlier grades, as shown in the basal manuals used in schools (as cited in Adams, 1990). Chall noted in her review of publishers, that following the intense public debate about reading in the 60’s and the informed contribution to this by syntheses of research about reading practices by herself and others, publishers had reacted such that the most popular basals of the 1970’s “as compared with those of the early 1960’s, contained earlier and heavier instruction in phonics” (Popp as cited in Chall, 2000, p. 62) and a more extensive vocabulary. However, Chall (2000) points out that the textbooks of the 1980’s, when similarly compared to those of the 1970’s, with publishers reacting to the Whole Language influence, “seemed to provide less instruction in phonics and heavier emphasis on reading comprehension and word meanings, even in first grade” (p.63), with the decline in phonics further increasing by 1986-7 (Hoffman et al, as cited in Chall, 2000).

Chall notes that though the text books were now emphasizing comprehension from the beginning of reading in the 1980's, conversely scores in reading comprehension went down. Whereas in the 1970's, when "there was a stronger emphasis on learning letter-sound relationships and less focus on language and cognition" in beginning reading, comprehension scores increased (Chall, 2000, p. 64).

US Publishers. The complex effect of changing reading pedagogies on publishers is captured in the publishing story of two states. In California and Texas, publishers produced programs based on a systematic phonic approach to meet their stated requirements. California and Texas (of which, for later significance, President Bush was formerly Governor) had indeed adopted systematic phonics ahead of the NRP (2000a) recommendations. The former because of its disastrously low scores following its previous adoption state-wide of Whole Language (Adams, 2008; Campbell, Hombo, & Mazzeo, 2000), and the latter due in part to the strong research-based influence of its home-grown researchers, such as Texas-based Foorman, and the pressure of public opinion (Hiebert, Martin, & Menon, 2005; Hoffman, Sailors, & Patterson, 2002).

Indeed, Texas has changed its reading emphasis three times in the last 20 years. In 1990, a few years after California switched to Whole Language, Texas too required a literature-based curriculum. In 1993, given the struggles of low ability readers to read the texts provided, it required more predictable text with high frequency words, but by the end of the 90's, along with California, Texas was moving towards a phonic-based basal and decodable texts.

The early adoption of phonics-based approach by California and Texas was crucial, given that textbook publishers are commercially influenced by the needs of these two populous states. Since 1993, publishers writing for Texas have had to provide books that are 80% decodable in

the early grades, and this too has influenced the content of material produced (Hoffman et al., 2002). Although, Hoffman et al. (2002) concluded in the rush to meet the requirements of Texas, publishers sacrificed both quality and reader engagement. Nevertheless, it did mean these publishers were positioning themselves to produce systematic, evidence-based programs for schools that were to later follow the mandated approach of Reading First (Ehri, Simone, Stahl, & Willows, 2003).

Reading First, the literacy arm of the NCLB ("No Child Left Behind", 2001), required that districts use materials supported by scientific research. Publishers were forced to respond by basing their reading materials upon evidence-based research, and did so by initiating experimental research of their programs in schools. This has proved a difficult challenge, given the need to meet differing states' adoption cycles, while "meeting the needs of a diverse group of stakeholders" (Baughman, 2008, p. 86). To these stakeholders, such as state departments of education, districts, schools, administrators, and teachers, is now added the federal government (Baughman, 2008). Publishers submit their programs for evaluation to the *What Works Clearing House*, which has more recently been dubbed the "nothing works" clearing house because few programs can meet its strict requirements (Viadero, 2008). This institution's aim is to determine whether a program submitted is "effective given the quality of research conducted to support [its] effectiveness" (Baughman, 2008, p. 86). Publishers are asked to show that their program has been or is currently part of a Random Controlled Trial (RCT) study. As publishing houses are juggling the adoption cycles of many differing states in many curricular subjects, the RCT requirement has further raised the bar of an already complex publishing process (Baughman, 2008).

Publishers in England. Until 1992, in England as in the US, publishers had provided material, first developed under Whole Language and later adapted to the needs of Balanced Reading, such as the well-known Oxford Tree Reading Publications (OUP, 2009). However, unlike the US experience in the same period, another approach to reading was slowly spreading throughout England in a grassroots manner, with new publishing houses developing alongside it.

Jolly Phonics, a synthetic program named after its publisher Chris Jolly, established a new format for publishing reading materials, based on small independent publishing houses. It, and others that followed, filled a gap in the publishing scene, and were proactive rather than reactive to the market. While established publishers were attuned to and providing for the balanced approach of the National Literacy Strategy, educators such as Sue Lloyd, a teacher, and Ruth Miskin, a principal, had in the late 1980's /early 1990's been separately developing a synthetic phonic approach to teaching beginning reading.

After a fruitless search for interested mainstream publishers, Lloyd eventually connected with Jolly, an educational publisher who had an interest in simplified spelling. Separately, Miskin (2005, 2007) formed her own publishing enterprise, *Read, Write Inc*, which has a program for remedial as well as beginner readers.

Stannard, the director and main architect of The National Literacy Strategy (NLS) of 1997, discussed the place of these niche publishers on the British reading scene. He mentions *Jolly Phonics* in particular as developing “a strong market share in the schools”, alongside Penguin Books’ *Phonographix, Success for All*, and Miskin’s program *Best Phonics Practice* (Stannard & Huxford, 2007). He comments that all were endorsed by the NLS, adding “there was no single preferred approach, nor is there today” (Stannard & Huxford, 2007, p. 184).

Stannard viewed some of these publishers as strongly aligned with powerful lobby groups who were supporting the introduction of synthetic phonics, in particular the Reading Reform Foundation. Although eventually endorsed by both parties, he believed these lobby groups to be “politically aligned” (Stannard & Huxford, 2007, p. 184), most particularly with the right-wing Conservative Party, especially in the person of Nick Gibb, the Shadow Minister for Schools. Gibb had made influential speeches in Parliament about synthetic phonics and its success in Clackmannanshire (Ellis, 2007). Stannard notes that Miskin, aligned with powerful right-wing proponents such as Chris Woodhead, the Chief Inspector of Schools in the late 90’s, had been invited to help write the phonic objectives of the NLS. This perspective speaks to the political side of education. Stannard comments:

Literacy education is inextricably bound up with politics ... because literacy ... is part of a nation’s cultural identity and a fundamental concern for governments in the pursuit of equity and excellence ... [and] one of the most public and internationally compared measures of a nation’s educational, economic and cultural development. (Stannard & Huxford, 2007, p. 181)

And further that the “competence” of a government is reflected in the literacy standard of its people, and that “England is no exception”. The same dynamics may be said to apply in the US.

Government Policy Decisions

The forms of government in the United States and England are important to understanding how educational policy is created. Since the founding of the United States, a Presidential system of government has obtained, where the powers not invested in the central government by the US Constitution automatically devolve to the individual states. Education is one such power. In England, on the other hand, under the Parliamentary system, from the early

nineteenth century, as Dame Schools began to be replaced by government grants to religious and private schools, education policy has been under central government control. Its policies were disseminated through local education authorities to the schools, which in turn were advised by and held accountable for results by a national system of school inspectors.

In more recent times, to circumvent the increasing influence of such local bodies as the Inner London Education Authority, the English government has given fiscal control of the annual school budget directly to schools, and appointed an inspectorate, known as Ofsted, to oversee accountability for curricular outcomes. Since 2002, this has led to the formation of local school committees, who make curricular decisions in consultation with Local Authorities as they balance this budget. The Local Authorities, with their budgets slashed, assumed the new but lesser role of aiding failing schools to pass their Ofsted inspections (Stannard & Huxford, 2007). In the US the situation is more complex.

Education Policy in the US. For most of its history, education in the U.S. has come under the aegis of local school boards established in each township. Although school boards wielded considerable control over individual teachers and what was taught, initially they in turn were influenced by the principal teacher of their school (the origin of the term ‘principal’), who often served in the role of an advisor to the Board (Rodgers, 1995a).

By the 1800’s with the push for universal education, common schools were established, which were owned and regulated by the local communities they served. It was not until 1826 that states first began to take steps to control education, when the State of Massachusetts, under the influence of Horace Mann, their first Superintendent of Schools, began to organize a system of local boards under one State Board of Education. Other states followed suit, and thus began a greater state control of education (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998).

The federal government has also sought to influence education policy. However, it has no mandated control over schools and the curriculum, and indeed, it was not until 1979 that the U.S. Department of Education was established. This department has established policies for federal financial aid for education, including monitoring and distributing those funds; collecting data on America's schools; disseminating research; focusing national attention on key educational issues; and prohibiting discrimination and ensuring equal access to education for all. It has no power to enforce federal education laws except by the persuasive might of withholding access to its \$68.6 billion annual budget (United States Department of Education, 2010a).

When George W. Bush became President in 2000, he sought to use the statutory power of the federal government to achieve a change in how reading was taught, by introducing nationwide the systematic phonics approach to reading recommended by the NRP, and by adding it to NCLB (2001). It became known as Reading First (Debray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009; Miskel & Song, 2004).

Debray-Pelot and McGuinn (2009) believed the NCLB legislation, and the change it represented, has led to a new era of politics in education. That NCLB was borne from a set of new alliances forged in the 1990's of previously disparate groups, such as businessmen who were worried about the low educational levels of the workforce; civil rights leaders who were concerned about the widening gap between minorities and the affluent; and governors who were reform-minded. These groups, allied "with wide-spread public concerns about educational performance" (Debray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009, pp. 23-24), supported a more active federal role in education. This helped pave the way for the new legislation that promised standards, supported by testing to provide accountability, of which Reading First was to be a part.

Debray-Pelot and McGuinn (2009) posit that the NCLB was passed in a bi-partisan manner by both houses of Congress because of these new alliances. Given this broad support, the NCLB had teeth. It required states to develop assessments in reading and other basic skills, and to use reading materials based on evidence-based research in order to receive the ‘carrot’ of Reading First federal funding, and the requirement to meet an Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) of 3%, which was to be part of public record, was its ‘stick’ (Miskel & Song, 2004).

As the broader education policy was formulated, behind the scenes President Bush was seen to reach out across the political divide to Senator Kennedy, a powerful Democrat senator from Massachusetts, who became an ally of the legislation. Bush, as the former Governor of Texas, had overseen reforms in reading in his own state, and in his position as President was determined to put the weight of his office behind applying these nationwide (Miskel & Song, 2004).

Reading First. Although NCLB needed much negotiation to ready it for vote in Congress, especially regarding its provision that each school in the nation had to achieve 3% AYP, the Reading First part of the legislation passed with little alteration. The main change to the Republican proposed bill, pushed by Senator Kennedy and the Democrats, was that Reading First monies be targeted to the schools of lower socio-economic status, traditionally those who had previously received ‘Title One’ money. It was felt this would help close the achievement gap. On the Republican side, there was a concerted effort to keep the provision that grants would only be given to whole-class programs. This was a move to prevent grant money going to the popular, but not scientifically research based, one-to-one *Reading Recovery* program (Miskel & Song, 2004).

Reading Recovery. In response to the problem of struggling readers, Marie Clay in New

Zealand who had created *Reading Recovery*, believed children who were failing could be brought up to grade level by short, intense individual tutoring, based on what good readers do. She developed the program *Reading Recovery*, a short intensive program of up to twenty weeks, where students are coached intensively to the same level as their grade-level peers (Clay 1985, 1991, 1998).

However, there were many concerns raised regarding the implementation of *Reading Recovery*: its minimal dependence on the latest research knowledge about the effectiveness of systematic phonics; its cut-off for entry to the program denies those below this level the reading help needed; a problem compounded by the fact that *Reading Recovery* and normal classroom literacy practices are separated; the exaggeration of its effectiveness because children are either not accepted in the program as too low, or dropped from the program when they make insufficient progress; its long-term individual effect is diminished where no further support is provided for the released student to retain his or her growth; and its significant per individual costs (Shanahan & Barr, 1995).

For these reasons, Reading First had not included *Reading Recovery* on its list of acceptable systematic phonics programs. It was also the intent of those in place at the NICHD, such as Dr. Reid Lyon and Robert Sweet, that any programs used in Reading First would be those based on Scientifically Based Reading Research (SBRR), that is evidence-based researched programs, such as reviewed by the NRP (Shaughnessy, 2008).

Since 2002, however, *Reading Recovery* has once again experienced a surge in favor in the US. It had not been part of the NRP's meta-analysis, but was now seven years later approved by the What Works Clearinghouse (Viadero & Manzo, 2007). This endorsement was questioned by its critics, such as Fletcher who, although admitting that the program does work, questioned

its cost (given the one to one tutoring), and the studies' validity, on the grounds that the assessment instrument used had been created by Clay, the founder of the program, and so may have shown the program in a more favorable light. Allington countered by arguing that this could equally be said of DIBELS in relation to Reading First assessments. Former Secretary of State for Education, Susan Neuman, was quoted as clarifying why Reading First had not included *Reading Recovery* on its recommended list for consideration for funding. She stated such funds were mainly targeted for "comprehensive core reading programs, not pullout programs that benefitted only a handful of students" (as cited in Viadero & Manzo, 2007, p. 14).

Also as part of Reading First entitlement to federal grants, districts had to show they were planning to implement kindergarten to third-grade reading programs, that were based on scientific research (Baughman, 2008). The department set up to monitor compliance had a list of programs that were acceptable, and where grant applications failed in this respect advice was given about which programs states should use. Thus funds from Reading First, based on scientifically supported research, were limited to poorer districts in the US. There was no direct requirement for other districts to adopt this new approach, except should each voluntarily decide it would boost reading levels and help them improve their AYP, which was a binding part of the NCLB federal law.

Reading First Issues. In succeeding years Reading First experienced two serious problems. Initially, it became mired in controversy over a suggestion of a conflict of financial interest on the part of those distributing funds (Manzo, 2005, 2007) and, on the other, negative reports were released about its impact on reading levels (Manzo, 2008a, 2008b). Those in the Department of Education entrusted with assigning the grants were continually fighting against districts applying for grants, in order to prevent them from using Reading First money to buy

programs not viewed as research-based. It was alleged that districts applying for grants were guided, even coerced, by the DOE officials implementing Reading First grants, toward certain programs such as *Reading Mastery*, a Direct Instruction Program (Manzo, 2007).

Reading Mastery, an intensely scripted program developed by the University of Oregon, was originally known as *DISTAR* and used in *Project Follow Through* (1967 – 1995) to teach reading to disadvantaged Head Start children. A study tracking the progress of children trained in *DISTAR* in first through sixth grade found that the positive effects diminished as the years passed, but were still evident by 9th Grade, being “.8 of a grade equivalent”, according to Becker and Gersten in their 1982 study (as cited in McGuinness, 2004, p. 104).

The undeclared conflict of Reading First officials of the DOE, who stood to gain financially from some of the programs, such as *Reading Mastery*, which were on the accepted short list, sullied the neutral stance necessary for a successful grant process (Manzo, 2005, 2007).

Reid Lyon, a former director at the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NRP, 2000a) of the NICHD, in a report in *Education Week*, said “hyper-vigilant monitoring” was necessary, but he had not anticipated how the Reading First mandates would be “complicated by the issue of local control” which had “historically always been there”, but had forced Reading First to be “very prescriptive” (Manzo, 2007, p.18). Hence, the power of local school boards is still a force to be reckoned with in the implementation of current educational policy decisions.

In addition to criticisms about its implementation, the publication of the final Reading First Impact Study (2008) found that, though improving children’s decoding skills, the program had had no effect on their comprehension (Manzo, 2008c). Proponents suggested a flaw inherent in comparing the Reading First (RF) schools with others in the same districts. The comparison

failed to take into account how the control schools were also using explicit systematic phonic instruction, and their teachers indeed had been unofficially trained alongside RF schools, rendering them less valid as controls. This argument was rejected by other observers, who said staff development and classroom practices differed, as shown by surveys and classroom observation (Shaughnessy, 2008).

Lyon felt three lessons could be learned, belatedly, from the Reading First program. First, its implementation was rushed, whereas with hindsight it needed a year to develop the essential infrastructure. Secondly, make sure everyone involved understands the essential components of the program, while concurrently being aware that differing states and districts would have different needs. Lastly, there needs to be a built-in system in place to evaluate the program in place prior to its initiation. He added that the recent study on Reading First, although planned from the outset, had been delayed and then abbreviated in scope, whereas “the complexity and uniqueness of a program demanded comprehensive, continuous and systematic feedback to ensure improvements in implementation where needed” (Lyon, 2008, para 13).

Using Research to Create Policy

According to Carol Weiss of Harvard, who studies the uses of research in policymaking, it is utilized in an ad hoc fashion by policy makers who accumulate “evidence for or against a program or policy and use ordinary knowledge and common sense as well as research” to reach a decision, whilst remaining open to considering ideas contrary to their own or those of their organizations (as quoted in Brown, 1996, p. 7).

Policy Needs. In her doctoral dissertation, focusing on research that challenges the status-quo, Brown (1996) quoted from studies undertaken by Weiss regarding how policy makers use research. Weiss found that policy makers, faced with the sheer cumulative amount of research

available and their limited time to process it, tended to rely upon research collations compiled by others, in their decision-making process.

To aid in these research syntheses, Brown (1996) quotes Phillips as wondering if some way could be found “to incorporate evaluation of the ongoing stream of work plus the basic theoretical orientation that has inspired it” (p. 8). Citing the work of Lindblom and Cohen, Brown (1996) focuses attention on the advisability and tendency of policy makers to use different amalgams of research and other usable knowledge in making better decisions. In England, the Rose Report was constructed and operated to take advantage of such "other usable knowledge" (Rose, 2006b). To fulfill this charge, the report created a synthesis of research, testimony from interested bystanders in education, and observation of best practice using both types of phonics to better inform policy (Rose, 2006b). In this fashion it went beyond the pro-forma evidence that usually provides the basis for policy change. As described by Rose (2006a, Conference Proceedings), the report deliberately had his name on it to show he had been personally charged to come to some resolution, “no sitting on the fence”, about whether analytic or synthetic phonics was the better approach to teaching beginning reading.

Peer Review. The issue of peer review has a place in the discussion of how educational research influences policy decisions in England as compared to the US. In England, the Clackmannanshire study was the driving force behind the government’s sponsorship of the Rose Report (Ellis, 2007; House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2005; Rose, 2006b). The Clackmannanshire study was undertaken by Johnston and Watson, researchers from St. Andrew’s University, under the aegis of a grant from the Scottish government. The lack of peer review of this study and the later timing of its longitudinal results meant it was not included in the NRP, even though it was clearly evidence-based (Ehri et al., 2001). However, the London Dockside study by Stuart (1999) was

included and favorably reviewed as “it was published just in time” (L. Ehri, personal communication, 1/14/10).

In the US, peer-review is one of the filters attending on the acceptance of studies by the research community, a condition reaffirmed by the parameters set for research subjected to meta-analysis by the influential National Reading Panel (2000). In England, on the contrary, the lack of official peer-review, though peer-review is respected as an arbiter of quality and validity (Hobbs & Stewart, 2006), does not automatically disbar such studies from serious consideration during policy review. This fact has important ramifications for how reading research has been viewed in both nations (NRP, 2000a; Rose, 2006b).

Policy Usage in England. Ellis, of Strathclyde University in Scotland, believes there are parallels to be drawn between how reading policy is influenced by the government structure of both Scotland and the US, as compared to that in England. As in the US, Scotland, the home of the Clackmannanshire study, has been more measured in its approach to adopting synthetic phonics. It, like the US, does not have a centralized education system but rather one based on non-statutory, broad guidelines, which follow a set of national priorities, as set by the Scottish Minister for Education. It is accepted that different authorities may, based on local circumstances, interpret and implement these differently, but each is held accountable for meeting the national standards (Ellis, 2007).

Ellis (2007) believes there is a complex set of relations that “explain the tensions between academic research, curriculum development and policy development in literacy” (p. 282). She feels the Scottish approach, with curricular decisions evolving closer to the point of delivery (for example, teachers) makes the process more apolitical.

Like Humes and Bryce, (2003), Ellis (2007) finds this approach more closely aligned to “evolution rather than revolution” (p. 282). She further cautions that the focus of researchers is necessarily different from that of policy makers or teachers, since researchers use a different perspective.

Such concerns were echoed in the 2006 meeting of the Reading Reform Foundation (RRF, 2006, Conference Proceedings). For years the leading members of this organization had fought for the implementation of synthetic phonics nationwide in England. In November, 2006, at their national conference members in a round-table discussion voiced concern that the long-awaited government-mandated policy would not be as effective as the previous grassroots spread of synthetic phonics, because it would be imposed from “above”, and teachers would either not fully understand or agree with its ethos.

However, the English government did feel there were sufficiently strong grounds to justify taking the ‘revolutionary’ step of implementing synthetic phonics nationwide.

Policy Usage in the US. Miskel and Song (2004) investigating the policy decisions behind *Reading First*, found a small influential group of policy makers was the driving force behind the decisions made. This was contrary to their initial hypothesis that such a small group interacts and is responsive to the broader influence of outside pressure groups, such as teacher unions (Miskel & Song, 2004).

They found that this small elite was able to “attain desired political objectives in a more effective and efficient manner” (Miskel & Song, 2004, p. 106) than if dependent on interaction with a larger circle of interested parties. Miskel and Song also found that in making policy it does help to have ‘friends in high places’ citing the political clout of such people as the President and Senators who, because they were willing to “pool their considerable political capital” and

work together reaching across the aisle of Congress, were able “to enact significant new reading policy in ... near record time” (Miskel & Song, 2004, p. 106). But, such an action can only take place given unity, active commitment, some media attention, and weak opposition. As Miskel and Song point out, rather than leaping whole-cloth from the legislature, Reading First was the result of previous deliberation behind the scenes which had resulted in the previous initiatives of the federally-funded research about reading failure in 1998 (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998), and the Reading Excellence Act (REA) of 1999, in which ‘scientifically based reading research’ was a pre-requisite for grant approval (Miskel & Song, 2004).

Also by controlling entry to the inner elite, the group protected itself from the larger group that might undermine their efforts to introduce an approach to beginning reading that was changing the paradigm, and thus challenging the status quo. As Brown (1996) discovered in her dissertation concerning the ability of policy makers to accept such research, “a small subset followed scientific evidence where it led, or at least considered it, and gave it as much or more weight than their own predilections” (p. 186). However, and in-line with the human propensity to hang on to assumptions, Brown (1996) also reports “another larger subset gave greater weight to their own values: within the imposing constraints of their jobs and overwhelming amounts of information” (p. 186)

However, as Miskel and Song (2004) also point out, the disadvantage of having innovative legislation tightly controlled and orchestrated by a small elite is that it then leaves itself open to post-implementation criticism from those excluded from the inner circle. That in fact “sizeable segments of the K-12 and scholarly research communities have deep reservations about the enactment of Reading First” (Miskel & Song, 2004, p. 107). They cite Mazzoni and

Pearson as warning about the likely aftermath of deeper divisions, which often “undermines implementation efforts of the new policy” (Miskel & Song, 2004, p. 107).

Thus, in a complex dance, Government policy is both influenced by and initiates research in reading, researchers lead and respond to policy needs, and publishers, as a commercial enterprise, must be responsive to the direction of both. How has this intricate interweaving of separate entities impacted the reading ability of the students in each nation?

Conclusion

Historically, the United States and England have traditionally traded reading pedagogies across the ocean, each influenced by the new methods of teaching practiced by the other. Until, that is, the current century. Given the code-based structure of the written English language, the available research in how children learn to read, and the knowledge gained from brain research and eye movement, it is perplexing to know why each nation is currently pursuing a different approach to teaching beginning reading.

This study interviewed key stakeholders: researchers who have contributed to the field of reading research; publishers who by turns proactively or reactively provide the materials that reflect the needs of educators who actually teach reading; and policy makers who have sought to implement reading initiatives, in order to investigate the reasoning behind the different routes England and the US are presently traveling in the teaching of reading to their youngest students.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This case study explored how the approach to beginning reading instruction for students at school entry has recently diverged between the United States (US) and England. With a primary focus on the US, it investigated the reasons behind the differing approaches now being used in both nations, despite a previous history of using similar pedagogical approaches and materials. According to Yin (2003), if the question driving the research is “the desire to understand complex social phenomena” (p. 2) and is asking questions about how or why “a contemporary set of events” (p. 8) evolved, a case study approach is needed .

Research Rationale

This inquiry, which concerns the process followed by the two countries as each adopted differing early literacy programs, is necessarily qualitative. To summarize Patton (2002): it needed to capture how people interact with and influence each other; the differing experiences of differently situated participants, as described in their own words; the fluid, dynamic nature of the process involved; and the light the participants can shed on the phenomenon under study. The following guiding questions directed the investigator’s collection of research data. The central question was:

What has led to the policy decisions made in the US and England regarding beginning reading instruction?

This included the subsidiary questions:

1. What light can the separate experience and knowledge of policy makers, researchers and publishers shed on the approaches to teaching beginning reading in the U.S. and England?

2. What are the policy-based decisions that have been made by the national government about teaching beginning reading in both countries?
3. What role has research evidence played in the decisions the policy makers in each country have made?
4. What other influences affected the decisions the policy makers, researchers and publishers have made in each country?
5. How are the influences on policy decisions similar and/or different between the United States and England?

The heuristic nature of this case study, concerned as it is with how each nation made decisions about beginning reading programs, is reflective of the researcher's intense interest in beginning reading. It guided the purposeful selection of others "who share an intensity of experience with the phenomenon" (Patton, 2002, p. 107), in order to discover how the stakeholders in the two nations have come to adopt their differing approaches, and what they view as the possible outcomes for young readers.

Researcher Bias

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), it is "impossible to embark upon research without some idea of what one is looking for and foolish not to make that quest explicit" (p. 157). Aware as the researcher is of the pitfall of bias inherent in a study about beginning reading, in which she favors students being taught their written code on school entry, she decided to mitigate this effect by the study of a topic that is research neutral, but as yet little realized: the exploration of why stakeholders in the US and England arrived at different conclusions concerning the most effective method for beginning readers, whilst weighing the same research

evidence. To this end, the researcher entered into the emic view the participants had of the circumstances surrounding this “complex phenomenon” (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2005, p. 309), in order to better understand the reasons for the recent divergence in policy between the two countries.

In accord with this emic spirit, the researcher set aside her own views during interviews in order to understand the information each respondent sought to share. The main objective of the interviews was to gather information from different respondents, discussed from their unique and informed perspective, as they reconstructed their understanding of the phenomenon of teaching beginning reading as practiced in either the US or England. With this end in mind, the researcher sought to “plumb the experience and ... place it in [the] context” (Seidman, 2006, p. 17) of the respondents, as expressed in their own words, in order to shed light upon the differing paths each country has recently taken. As an integral part of this process, the researcher avoided asking leading questions, and sought instead to enter into each interview with the intent of understanding the respondents’ unique knowledge, with an appreciation of their willingness to share information about the events surrounding this most basic of issues --- teaching beginning reading.

The interviewer also carried this emic perspective forward, in the voices of her interviewees as apparent in the data shared in Chapter Four. Their ‘voices’ here reveal how they make “sense of their world”, as they sought to capture “what practices they engage in”, recognize or support in regard to teaching beginning reading, and as evidenced in their informed and considered responses (Patton, 2002, p. 454).

However, once analysis began it was necessary, in order to do cross-categorical analysis of the differing strata and countries, to stand back from the former intense and broadly accepting

view of each interviewee's perspective, and to set their views within the broader comparative framework of the study. At this stage, the researcher determined "key phrases, terms and practices" (Patton, 2002, p. 454) used by the respondents, or indeed in some cases their absence from the interviews, to help shed light on how each respondent's separate experience of the phenomenon of teaching beginning reading could be combined with those of others, to answer the essential research question: What has led to the policy decisions made in the US and England regarding beginning reading instruction? At all times, the oversight of the doctoral committee has further minimized any procedural and/or analytic errors overlooked by this doctoral candidate.

Qualitative Research Design

A case study approach was used to seek an understanding of the views policy makers, researchers and publishers hold about how and why both countries are going their separate ways. Purposeful sampling determined which participants were finally interviewed. In the words of Patton (2002), "studying information-rich cases yields insights and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations" (p. 230). Some interviewees approached were either unavailable for interview, but all participants who finally agreed to interview were well-versed in, and closely involved with, many aspects of bringing beginning reading to school-entry children.

To view the case from the standpoint of three differing layers of stakeholders in two countries, the researcher interviewed seventeen participants (see Table 1): policy makers, researchers and publishers in the US and England, and one in Scotland.

To represent those involved in literacy policy, three people were interviewed from each country. These interviewees combined have considerable background knowledge about the policy decisions made at government level in both countries. In the US, one policy maker has been involved in literacy policy in both of the former President Bush administrations, the elder

and younger; another works for the Education Department, and the third as a senior staffer for the Republican administration. In England, a policy maker closely involved with the Rose Report agreed to interview, a Civil Servant who works in the Education Department, and a member of a lobbying group associated with synthetic phonics.

The English Civil Servant, subject to government protocol, was only able to answer my questions by e-mail. To offset this imbalance, an administrator and educator from a Scottish University, who had been approached to give background information about Scottish and English differences in education, suggested the researcher contact an individual in England who has written extensively about literacy policy since 2003. Dr. Gemma Moss, a professor of education and Director of the Center for Critical Education Policy Studies, agreed to help with the study by providing copies of her government reports, including an unpublished manuscript. However, it took some time to locate her, and now at a much later stage of the interviewing process, and in deference to her busy schedule, she was not asked to interview. The documents she sourced and provided for me have been, and remain, a valuable resource as I have sought to understand the dynamics in operation at the policy level in England and the US, and how this affects the beginning reading community as they choose reading pedagogy for the young school entrants.

Six of the participants were reading researchers, representing those who support either a balanced or a synthetic approach to teaching reading - three from the US and three from England. As the interview request process ran its course, the interviewees, almost, balanced. One researcher from each nation represented a more phonological approach to reading, and the other two a more balanced one. This was healthy from the point-of-view of interviewer bias, and also added necessary knowledge and experience about alternative stand points on the beginning reading issue.

One researcher interviewed from each nation had served in the past on his or her nation's government-sponsored reading initiatives, in the case of the US, the NRP, and in England, The Rose Report; in the US, another was the author of a government-funded report about reading pedagogy, and in England another a lead researcher for a government-funded meta-analysis of past evidence-based reading research; another in the US has been the president of a prominent teacher organization, and the other in England was approached due to his extensive knowledge of the literacy scene in the US as well as his native England. All have published extensively, work or have worked with Master or Doctoral student-teachers at University-level, and are well known and respected in the field of reading pedagogy.

To represent the publishing industry, initially two publishers based in England and two in the US - one a mainstream publisher and the other a niche publisher of a synthetics phonics' programs - were approached for interview. Things went relatively smoothly in lining up the interviews in England, but the researcher had problems finding a major publisher in the US that would agree to be interviewed. The number of major publishing houses with beginning reading (usually K-5) programs was limited to three, so the pool was small.

One US publishing house quickly identified one of their national consultants as a good source for my questions, and the interviews proceeded satisfactorily in due course. Another publishing house agreed to allow an editor to be part of an exploratory, fact-finding interview, but was unable to change this to an official interview, when the need unexpectedly arose. The third publishing house apparently agreed to an interview, somehow misinterpreting the initial interview request, fielded by an assistant, as one for specific product information. The potential interviewee had to reverse this decision upon receipt of the Informed Consent document, citing company policy disallowing such interview interactions. In some cases initial calls and e-mails

elicited no response; or in one case permission to interview was agreed, though with some reservation, and the Informed Consent document was not signed and returned by the interviewee. Eventually, two publishers, one retired for ten years and the other still involved in publishing as a consultant, kindly and ably agreed to fill this interview gap.

Although the interview balance of three US to two English publishers resulted, this did not appear to imbalance the amount and quality of information shared. The difficulty of arranging interviews with the American as opposed to English mainstream publishing house, which were both part of the same organization that is prominent in the publishing industry on both sides of the Atlantic, eventually became an item of data in itself.

The policy makers were those who were part of the decision-making process that has led to the implementation of beginning reading programs in each country in the last few years. They were drawn both from central government, and from those who have served on the committees that have determined policy initiatives. The researchers were those who, through the results of their research, have advocated for a synthetic phonics approach; and those, who while acknowledging the need for phonics, believe it is only one element of the multi-strategy approach needed to teach reading. The publishers, two of whom sell products in the US and UK, were able to describe the products sold in each country, and explain the parameters of creating the programs used in each country, the role of research in this process, and any other factors which affect the publishing decisions made and, in the US, the impact the NRP and Reading First have had on recent publications, and the effects felt by the Rose Report in England.

Table 1

Description of Number of Interviewees by Category, Nationality and Professional Status

Role	Country	#	Interviewees
Policy Makers	USA	3	Participants in the policy-making process: creating, influencing or implementing policy decisions
	England	3	Participants in the policy-making process, either influencing or implementing policy decisions
	Scotland	1	Participant with knowledge of English and Scottish beginning reading issues
Researchers	USA	3	Representing knowledge of latest research in systematic phonics and balanced reading
	England	3	Representing knowledge of latest research in synthetic phonics and balanced reading
Publishers	USA	3	One publisher from a mainstream publishing house One retired publisher from a major publishing house
	England	2	One editor from a mainstream publishing house One publisher from a smaller, successful publishing house. Sells in the US too.

This layered approach to data collection allowed multiple perspectives to be generated. From these “multiple sources of evidence” and in search of the “theory triangulation” contained in interview data, “converging lines of inquiry” (Yin, 2003, p. 98) emerged and enabled subsequent cross-category comparative analysis (Patton, 2002). These revealed themselves in common patterns and themes that emerged from the participants’ differing experiences, as shown in their responses (Patton, 2002), and ultimately helped to answer the research questions.

Ethical Issues and Confidentiality

Following Seidman's (2006) protocol for protecting participants' rights during the interview process, participants were initially given a description of the study, their role within it and the unique part they held in shedding light on the issues raised in this study. Participants were asked to read and sign the Informed Consent form before the interview began (see Appendix A). As all initial interviews took place by telephone, the forms were sent as an e-mail attachment to the participants for their informed consent to be obtained, with the signed form returned to the researcher prior to the interview by fax or as an e-mail attachment (Seidman, 2006). Two interviews of participants, one of about 60 minutes and a follow-up for 30 to 45 minutes, were originally planned.

In one case, as previously mentioned and following Civil Service protocol, an interview with a Civil Servant from the Department of Education in England was conducted solely by e-mail. One policy interview, with a member of the late Senator Edward Kennedy's staff had to be cancelled, but another top staffer was graciously able to step in and help with my enquiries. In England an interview arranged with a policy maker in the Conservative Party was cancelled as the time for it drew near, as pressures on time for that interviewee no longer allowed the time needed for the interview to take place. The interviews were recorded and transcribed by a professional transcriber, who was not told the identities of the interviewees.

The consent form outlined the conditions for the interviews - place, duration and time. The latter varying according to the participant's role. The interviews of researchers and publishers were around one hour for the initial meeting and around 30 minutes for each follow-up interview. However, in light of the pressures on policy makers' schedules and their reduced ability to commit to this amount of time, 30 minutes was proposed for the first interview and 20

minutes for the follow-up interviews, though in practice the time spent was indeed longer, though the second interview duration was generally as stated.

At all times steps were taken to minimize risks to participants, including the use of pseudonyms. However, participants were cautioned that though the researcher would at all times maintain the highest level of confidentiality, including the confidentiality of interview material and any other data related to it, the nature of their involvement as well-known researchers, policy makers and publishers might lead to those knowledgeable about the field of beginning reading to surmise their identity.

Each interviewee was assured that participation is voluntary and that he or she might withdraw at any time, freely and without prejudice; and they were also advised about the possible benefits of the study for the participant and others, especially for young beginner readers. Each was informed how the use of the participant's words and experience these reflect, would be crucial in the dissertation and might be used in further articles related to the dissertation; and the contact names and telephone numbers of the researcher, dissertation chair and the local Institutional Review Board (IRB) were included on the Informed Consent form (Seidman, 2006). Also, participants were additionally informed that the interview would be recorded and professionally transcribed by a transcriber who would not be told the identity of the participant. It was suggested a copy of the Informed Consent form be retained for the participant's own records.

Each participant was asked to review his or her own transcripts to see if what each said was a fair and accurate representation of what he or she intended to say. Audio recordings and transcripts will only otherwise be shared with the dissertation chair, Dr. R. Banaszak or Dr. Joan Fee of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), as needed or requested. Following completion of

the study, all recordings and transcripts thereof will be stored in a safety deposit box for three years. At which time, they will either be returned to interviewees or destroyed, as determined by the participants' wishes.

Data Collection

All interviews were based on an interview protocol, but were also interactively informed by the interviewee's responses, and the results were subsequently transcribed to facilitate analysis. Follow-up interviews were not needed in every case and were undertaken as necessary out of respect for interviewees' busy schedules and extensive commitments. All approached following the first interview agreed to a follow-up interview, either by e-mail or telephone. Many sent documents to inform the research, and all showed interest in the general purpose of this enquiry.

Seidman (2006) states, "interviewing provides access to the context of people's behavior" (p. 10). The participants were chosen specifically to provide "in-depth understanding" (Patton, 2002, p. 46) of the decisions made in implementing reading programs, that can only be obtained from those who were involved at these decision-making levels. Participants were invited to discuss the broader process of reading program implementation.

Participants were interviewed by phone, at a time and in a location convenient and comfortable for each. In this usually quiet setting (not always possible for publishers and policy makers), the words of the participants were recorded for later transcription. As well as recording the interviews, the researcher also took notes. This helped her to keep the interview focused, and aided in the interview pacing, as well as providing an opportunity to jot down words or phrases the participant used, that might be needed later clarification or prompted a new line of questioning. The researcher has made every effort to keep the participants' comments

confidential by using pseudonyms, and by synthesizing the interviews' content but, due to the nature of the research into literacy policy making, where in each nation most know each other well, it may be possible for such informed readers to identify one or more of the participants. The informed consent form explained this possibility to participants.

Immediately following each interview, while it was still vivid in the researcher's mind, she recorded her thoughts and impressions of what had been conveyed by the participant. Such reflection helped the researcher "make sense of the interview ... uncovered areas of ambiguity or uncertainty" and ensured a greater "rigor of qualitative enquiry" (Patton, 2002, pp. 383, 389). These notes were also used later but rarely, given the availability of the recordings and transcripts, to help inform and contextualize analysis.

Any data the participants have collected relating to events both before and after their role in the decision-making process were gratefully received and used, where necessary, to clarify or better delineate the steps of that process, and to further validate the participant's recollections. The researcher was aware participants may not agree to the formal sharing of written data, but was pleasantly surprised at the gracious sharing of relevant material which proved especially helpful during analysis.

As time has passed, it is not possible to directly observe the events that led to the policy decisions, but the words and recollections of researchers, publishers and policy makers combined and, albeit vicariously, took us back to the time and chain of events that has led to the current situation (Patton, 2002). Their differing perspectives also revealed views that differed, or were held in common, about the current policies being enacted and/or are in the process of development in each country.

Data Analysis

The researcher initially sorted the interview questions according to the guiding research questions, under the overall umbrella of the central research question (Yin, 2003). From the questions, brain-storming and cross-checking ensured all relevant issues would be raised by the researcher, and eight themes emerged to be covered in each interview: the role of research, peer review, the role of politics, the role of publishing, the role of data – both evaluation of programs and student achievement – teacher training, pedagogy, and ‘other’.

However, the final coding used for analysis was shaped by the results of the interviews undertaken, and the ‘other’ category soon became two: money and power. The coding of the transcripts, initially in the time-honored form of color-coding, was amended and is presented in table form below. Then, digitally, quotes were sorted under these categories to help analysis and for ease of finding and recording relevant quotes during the writing of the research findings. The findings, emerging from this double sort of eight themes was then compared, cross-categorically for verification purposes with the guiding interview questions (Patton, 2002). It was at this point, with some relief, that the researcher found that the research question was indeed mostly answered.

Following this initial analysis, the researcher referred back to the participants either for clarification of issues previously discussed or with follow-up questions. This also provided an opportunity for the interviewees to comment further on any thoughts they might have had following the initial interview, a “key verification step in research and analysis” (Cresswell, 1998, p. 140).

Though guided by the outcomes of the interviews for coding the data, the researcher created the matrix (see Table 2) to allow tabulation of the data collected. In the spirit of inductive

design (Patton, 2002), the matrix did indeed grow and change as the topics raised in the interviews suggested, with two new themes emerging and the issue of peer review receding into the background. It was also the case that some data could be recorded in more than one section e.g. power/money/policy.

Initially, to begin analysis, the researcher color-coded the interview transcripts according to the original themes. Through this process key issues revealed themselves as the interviews progressed (Hubberman & Miles as cited in Cresswell, 1998) and were duly added to the chart. However, the researcher also became aware that each interview produced information unique to the participant’s experience and knowledge: the voice of each interviewee was distinct. It was often the case that interviewees in each strata and both nations naturally spent more time on one issue than another. This was considered to be another data point in itself.

Table 2 *Data Organization Matrix*

Role	Country	Role of Research	Politics	Role of Publishing	Data	Teacher Training	Pedagogy	Money	Power
Policy Makers	USA								
	England								
Researchers	USA								
	England								
Publishers	USA								
	England								

The data in each part of the table, separately and collectively, provided the basis for a cross-country analytical comparison regarding why the stakeholders, at each strata in each country, separately arrived at their varying approaches to beginning reading instruction. These categories then morphed into three broad categories reflecting the differing strata of interviewees, with the issues related to the interaction of research and government dominating.

Study Limitations

The number of interviewees is relatively small and precludes generalization, but time, resources and distance limited the study to the design described. One cannot guarantee any of those interviewed remembered clearly all the steps taken in the implementation process. They may indeed have chosen not to share negative information.

In the same spirit, participants may have tailored their answers, knowingly or otherwise, to show their research and/or programs in a more advantageous way. The constructivist approach recognizes that participants bring their own “socially constructed nature of reality” (Patton, 2002, p. 102) to their reflections: however at its core it presupposes the integrity of different stakeholders. By interviewing subjects with a variety of perspectives, the researcher believed the goal to overcome the limited perspective of any one participant was largely achieved.

Study Delimitations

In this study, beginning reading was restricted to the 20 years spanning the closing of the twentieth and the opening of the twenty-first centuries. It focused on the first formal year of education: kindergarten (age five to six years old) in the US, and reception (age four to five years old) in England. In the interest of keeping the study manageable by one person, it was delimited to the US and England. This “bounded system” (Cresswell, 1998, p. 61) of time, place and age-level allowed the study to focus on what has been happening in both nations in the years when the foundations for change were being laid, and to the age-group in which the foundations of reading are being laid.

The researchers were purposefully chosen to represent a fair view of both those who support an initial systematic phonics approach to reading, and those who favor a multi-strategy balanced approach of which phonics is one element. In the event, in both nations, some

researchers interviewed, though following a more balanced approach to reading, tended to reflect nuances of the reading policy currently extant in their native land - balanced reading in the US and synthetic phonics in England. Publisher and policy maker interviews, similarly chosen to explain what has been happening at the national and other levels in both countries, were affected by the exigencies of seeking participants who were freely available to interview. Hence, one main publishing house in the US was finally 'represented' by two retired publishers, one of whom still works as a consultant in the publishing industry. 'Policy makers' was a more eclectic nomenclature for, variously, creators of policy, those who seek to influence them and those who implement the result.

Conclusion

Reading is the most basic of subjects. The strength of its foundation provides the basis for much that will later follow. It can limit or expand a person's horizons, and can hinder or broaden an individual's future career opportunities. Clearly therefore the established choice of method used to teach beginning reading is crucial to children's future hopes of success. Discovering by what process decisions were made in each country, either to implement synthetic phonics as a beginning reading pedagogy or to continue on the path of balanced reading, was of great importance in this research. This study helped determine why such different paths, with the potential for impeding or fostering reading achievement, have been taken, and whether this divergence is temporary or entrenched. Consulting with those who are at the forefront of this decision-making process helped to shed light on the reasons behind the choices each country has made as it has reached its separate decision; a decision that will long affect the future well-being of its children, and the nation itself.

Chapter Four: Findings

The recent variations in the approach to how reading is taught in the US and England may long affect the lives of each nation's children. According to Stannard (2007), the chief architect of the National Literacy Strategy in England, how each government separately introduces policies regarding reading pedagogy is largely based on the cultural and governmental structure of each nation:

Literacy education is inextricably bound up with politics ... because literacy ... is part of a nation's cultural identity and a fundamental concern for governments in the pursuit of equity and excellence ... (and) one of the most public and internationally compared measures of a nation's educational, economic and cultural development. (Stannard & Huxford, 2007, p. 181)

Research Design

To investigate how and why the reading pedagogy in the US and England has changed, and the role each nation's government has played in changes made in beginning reading pedagogy, this study sought to explore the interplay between researchers, who study how best to teach reading; those involved in literacy policy decisions, either the policy makers themselves, or those who support them, or who study literacy policy; and the publishers, who ultimately bring the results of this interaction to the teachers and students in each nation's classrooms. This research sought to find out what has led to the policy decisions made in the US and England regarding beginning reading instruction.

The subsidiary questions, as follows, are:

1. What are the policy-based decisions that have been made by the national government about teaching beginning reading in both countries?

2. What light can the separate experience and knowledge of policy makers, researchers and publishers shed on the approaches to teaching beginning reading in the United States and England?
3. What role has research evidence played in the decisions the policy makers in each country have made?
4. What other influences affected the decisions the policy makers, researchers and publishers have made in each country?
5. How are the influences on policy decisions similar and/or different between the United States and England?

Participants

To answer these questions researchers, “whose names are on the spines of the books”, as one researcher phrased it, were approached to provide their understanding of the background to developments in research, the research itself and how it is used in policy decisions and practice. Those involved in policy, either through its creation, involvement in government-solicited reports, or in policy implementation were asked to share the steps of this process, and their views regarding the pathway from creation to implementation. Publishers, an interface between policy decisions and teachers, were approached to provide an overview of their industry, including the constraints, commercial, political and otherwise, of providing materials for an ever-changing market.

Participants discussed their knowledge and views during the interviews and through the data many subsequently shared --- such as government-sponsored papers, recent or past research of their own or others, or chapters which they had contributed to books --- to shed light on the processes that have led to the separate pedagogical realities of teaching beginning reading in the

US or England. They discussed the factors that influenced the formation of the centralized policy of each country and how these have impacted the pedagogical decisions made in the schools, and the daily reality lived in classrooms. Their knowledge, parallel and at times interwoven, concerning how events unfolded and the parameters that affected the decisions and actions taken, helps to explain how each nation came to follow its separate path.

Coding of Interviews

To retain confidentiality, participants were coded as follows:

- country – *US* for United States or *E* for England
- strata of interviewee – *R* for Researcher; *PM* for Policy Maker; *PB* for Publisher
- number - reflecting the order the interview took place within the strata in each country

To humanize these codes each participant was randomly assigned, with due regard for gender, a first and then a last name from a telephone directory. An outline of the interviewees, their roles, codes and pseudonyms, is contained in Table 3 (see next page).

Table 3

Coding Scheme for and Pseudonyms of Interviewees

Role	Country	#	Interviewees	Code	Pseudonyms
Policy Makers	USA	3	Participants in the policy-making process, either influencing or implementing policy decisions	US-PM1 US-PM2 US-PM3	<i>Matthew Forth</i> <i>Donna Peters</i> <i>Brittany Brock</i>
	England	3	Participants in the policy-making process, either influencing or implementing policy decisions	E-PM1 E-PM2 E-PM3	<i>David Walker</i> <i>Mary Mullen</i> <i>Marie Fischer</i>
	Scotland	1	Participant with knowledge of English and Scottish beginning reading issues	S-PM1	<i>Catherine Mason</i>
Researchers	USA	3	Representing knowledge of latest research in systematic phonics and balanced reading	US-R1 US-R2 US-R3	<i>Beatrice Frable</i> <i>Scott Malm</i> <i>Peter Schuman</i>
	England	3	Representing knowledge of latest research in synthetic phonics and balanced reading	E-R1 E-R2 E-R3	<i>Julian Straley</i> <i>Norman Williams</i> <i>Robert Foster</i>
Publishers	USA	3	One publisher from a mainstream publishing house	US-PB1	<i>Georgina Schultz</i>
			One retired publisher from a major publishing house	US-PB2	<i>Don Missele</i>
			One retired publisher, currently consulting for a major publishing house	US-PB3	<i>Bill Aguirre</i>
	England	2	One editor from a mainstream publishing house	E-PB1	<i>Sally Ney</i>
			One publisher from a smaller, successful publishing house. Sells in the US too.	E-PB2	<i>Evan Smith</i>

Note: For the sake of clarity the interviewee names are italicized throughout this paper.

Policy-Maker Interviews. Some interviewees were careful to distance themselves from the designation ‘policy maker’, rather defining their role as either informing those who make policy, or as people who aid in the implementation stage of policy. However, for the sake of this study, those involved in providing input for policy making decisions will be prefixed by the initials *PM*.

In the US, the first interviewee, *Matthew Forth* a retired policy maker (US-PM1), was active in two previous Republican administrations. Upon joining the Department of Education, this policy maker sought out research and information about issues surrounding children’s ability to learn to read, and was later closely involved with Reading First. The second, *Donna Peters* (US-PM2), a current member of the US Education Department, was able to discuss various aspects of how literacy bills are created, and was an expert in the issues surrounding their oversight and implementation, focusing on Reading First in particular. The third, *Brittany Brock* (US-PM3), serves on the Republican Policy Overview Committee, which includes Education, and was able to give background information concerning how literacy initiatives are brought to the floor of the Senate, and what happens subsequently.

In England, the first policy maker interviewee, *David Walker* (E-PM1), was involved in determining and analyzing information that formed the basis of the Rose Report, which influenced the House of Commons Select Committee to recommend synthetic phonics be taught nationwide to all school entrants. The second, *Mary Mullen* (E-PM2), limited by parliamentary protocol regarding civil servants, was only able to answer questions about parliamentary procedures by e-mail. The third, *Marie Fischer* (E-PM3), is a member of an organization involved in lobbying for a change in reading pedagogy in England, and was able to comment upon the layers of control at central, local and other levels that affect what is taught in schools.

The interviewee from Scotland, *Catherine Mason* (S-PM1), provided an informed view of English educational philosophy in general, and beginning reading pedagogy in particular. *Catherine* has first-hand knowledge of educating pre-service teachers at the university-level, and also works as a consultant inspector of education departments in English universities. Our discussion surrounding literacy policy eventually led to my contacting Gemma Moss, an English researcher, who has been involved in government funded studies of literacy policy makers and their decisions in England. Moss has provided research-based insights into the changing role of central government in England (and elsewhere) in literacy policy, both by phone and e-mail, but mainly through her government reports. Her knowledge of the interplay between the public nature of success or failure of literacy initiatives, with its repercussions in the political sphere, proved especially valuable in this dissertation.

Researcher Interviews. In both the US and England, researchers generously made themselves available for interviews, and followed up as promptly as their heavy schedules allowed. Only one required further information about the research topic other than that provided for all, but with the provision of additional background information agreed to the interview and provided much subsidiary data as well. Indeed, after the first contact and as the interviews started many participants sent documents and articles written by themselves or others that would inform the research.

In the US, the first researcher, *Beatrice Frable* (US-R1), has been involved with policy makers and publishers while researching and writing widely in the field of beginning reading, and was able to give a broad-brushed, informative overview of the inter-relationship among the three categories of interviewees. The second researcher, a university professor, *Scott Malm* (US-R2), has served on literacy panels for the government, speaks widely at conferences and

publishes frequently in the realm of literacy, and shared knowledge that informed all levels of this research study. The third researcher, *Peter Schuman* (US-R3), likewise a researcher and professor but also involved in teaching Masters' and Doctoral candidates, gave insight into the realities of teacher training in literacy at the bachelor of education level, and the problems inherent in conducting and interpreting research. Both *Scott* and *Peter* are proponents of a more balanced approach to literacy, while the former, *Beatrice*, is more closely associated with a phonological approach to beginning reading.

In England, the first researcher, *Julian Straley* (E-R1), has collaborated with others to write reports commissioned by the government to determine the effectiveness of different approaches to teaching reading, including phonics, and also served as an advisory member of the Rose Report. This researcher echoed the stance of the National Reading Panel (2000) in supporting the use of systematic phonics, but felt that scientifically-based research trials had not yet clearly confirmed if this should be synthetic. The second researcher, *Norman Williams* (E-R2), has written consistently and widely in support of balanced reading, and while acknowledging the need for phonics, does not believe this should be taught synthetically. The third researcher, *Robert Foster* (E-R3), familiar with the research community and teaching in the US as well as England, affirms the place of a systematic phonics approach in beginning reading, but is a proponent of embedding it in the broader literacy framework in order to achieve gains in comprehension.

Publisher Interviews. In some ways the influences on policy decisions and pedagogy appear to be universal, and in others unique to the experience of each nation. However, the role of the publishers is to bring the pedagogy and content decided by policy into the classrooms. To investigate the attributes of this intermediary role two publishing house from each nation were

approached, one a major enterprise and the other smaller but influential. Things went relatively smoothly in lining up the interviews in England with *Sally Ney* (E-PB1) and *Evan Smith* (E-PB2), but the researcher had problems finding a major publisher in the US that would agree to be interviewed. The number of major publishing houses with beginning reading (usually K-5) programs was limited to three, so the pool was small.

Initially, one publishing house agreed to allow an editor to be part of an exploratory, fact-finding interview but would not agree to an official interview; another publishing house originally agreed to an interview, but reversed this decision upon receipt of the Informed Consent document. In some cases initial calls and e-mails elicited no response; or in one case permission to interview was agreed, though with reservations, and the Informed Consent document was not signed and returned by the interviewee. However, another publishing house smoothly arranged an interview with one of their national consultants. Eventually, two publishers, one retired for ten years *Don Missele* (US-PB2) and one still continuing to work as a consultant in publishing, *Bill Aguirre* (US-PB3), agreed to interview.

In England, as in the US, publishers have been consolidating over the last few years, with two major houses recently purchasing well-known and respected synthetic phonic programs. Harcourt bought *Fast Phonics First* from the researchers Johnston and Watson, who had created it for their Clackmannanshire research study (Johnston & Watson, 1997); and Oxford University Press (OUP) bought Miskin's (2005) program, *Read, Write Inc.* In the US, publisher *Bill Aguirre* commented that over the span of his career publishing houses involved in providing materials for the school market had shrunk from "10 or a dozen major competitors in the text world" to "three big players and some smaller niche publishers" (US-PB3).

Initially, this paper will isolate the three strands of policy makers, researchers and publishers from each other, and using the voice of the interviewees and the documents they subsequently shared, paint a backcloth of the findings, before finally comparing the results of the two countries' experiences.

The Role of Government

During the course of the interviews, especially in the US, the structure of each government and the ramifications on the ability of each to affect literacy, was much discussed. In both nations, the national government had become more involved with education, and literacy in particular, from the 1980's forward. The form this took, and the outcomes, was dependent on established governmental structures, but the motivating factor was common and as captured by Stannard and Huxford (2007) above, "a fundamental concern for governments in the pursuit of equity and excellence" (p. 181).

The story behind the differences in the pedagogy in beginning reading appears rooted not only in each nation's "educational, economic and cultural development" (Stannard & Huxford, 2007, p. 181), but in the way each nation's broader culture affects the interplay between all levels of government, both at national and local level; the type of government-sponsored reports undertaken, and the relative weight given to research within them; the dissemination of research knowledge to teachers; and the ability of teachers at the grassroots level to explore new pedagogies or retain favored approaches to teaching beginning reading.

Literacy Policy in England. Until the late 1980's, the Local Education Authorities (LEA) in England, centrally supported by taxpayer money, had oversight of the budget and curricular standards of schools in their purview. To ensure standards, a team of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) observed and reported back to its authority on each school's progress. With the

Education Reform Act of 1988 this situation was to change dramatically. As pinpointed by an English *researcher Norman Williams*, a critic of the Rose Report and current literacy policy, it was at this juncture that the national government became more deliberately and directly involved in education such that:

For the first time it put the curriculum of primary schools and secondary schools ... into the hands of the Secretary of State for Education. So, for the first time we had a National Curriculum in 1988. The law specifies that there has to be one and it specifies what is contained in it. (E-R2)

The National Curriculum. With the implementation of the National Curriculum in the following year, and in tune with the wider Conservative Party philosophy of market-place choice, more power was given to consumers --- by introducing a system of school-choice for parents, and by devolving the Local Authority control over budget, with its key management decisions, directly to the individual schools. To ensure accountability the new national inspectorate, Ofsted, was established. It incorporated the former more advisory HMI into a more rigorous and accountable inspection system, that evaluated (audited) but no longer advised schools, and wrote publicly-available reports of individual school results (E-R3, E-PB1). These changes combined to weaken the power of the Local Authorities, and as *researcher Norman Williams* explained, “because the enactment of laws is by nature a political process ... was a significant moment when politics entered primary teaching in an important way” (E-R2) to establish a top-down system of government control of education (Stannard & Huxford, 2007).

Government control was further accelerated by the breakup of the “monolithic Inner London Education Authority” (ILEA) in the early 1990’s. ILEA was a bastion of Labour, the main opposition political party, and often served as a “thorn in the government’s side” (Stannard

& Huxford, 2007, p. 4). In the words of *researcher Robert Foster*, grounding current literacy policy historically, though not necessarily “generous spirited”, Margaret Thatcher’s politically driven need to break up ILEA was “a wise thing to do” (E-R3). Concurrently, she established a new agency to oversee the content of the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) programs and regulate the supply of teachers. It curtailed the freedom of these establishments to continue their previous programs with the mandate that 60% of the pre-service training had to be school-based ... and the colleges had to pay schools for this service. Although this proved a fiscal and curricula challenge for colleges, it did pave the way for a greater collaboration between researchers and practitioners, and also provided monies to the universities to provide more rigor and guidance for teacher mentors (E-R3).

So in many ways the Conservatives laid the groundwork for the “New Labour” government that swept into power in 1997, citing education as their number one priority. LEA performance was now to be inspected by inspectors from the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (the derivation of Ofsted) and the Audit Commission. Those who were failing were to be taken over by an improvement team, whilst under threat of suspension (“Labour party manifesto”, 1997).

The National Literacy Strategy. It was this new Labour government that “basically enacted, no ... implemented is a better word, because it wasn’t a statutory thing, the National Literacy Strategy” (E-R2). *Researcher Norman Williams*, capturing the scope of the NLS, went on to quote Norma Earl and her associates from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education as stating that this was the “biggest scale of educational reform that they had ever seen or ever heard of” for it introduced a new pedagogy with “all the schools in the country” having to do it (E-R2). The Labour Government had committed to raising standards, for international

comparisons were showing that, “Britain is outperformed by a group of countries” including America, but that, “most disturbing in international studies is evidence of the existence of a ‘long tail’ in the results among British schools, since performance of lower ability children is substantially below that of other countries” (Literacy Task Force, as cited in Stannard & Huxford, 2007, p. 21).

As further outlined by Stannard and Huxford (2007), the new Labor government not only established a new literacy strategy but also “famously set the target” (E-R2) that 80% of eleven year olds would reach Level 4 in Reading in the national tests by 2002. Thus the stage was set for ushering in the National Literacy Strategy of 1998.

The Strategy influentially recommended a daily literacy-hour period, which included a phonic component. *Norman Williams* commented on the incremental nature of Government intervention: the National Curriculum had originally told teachers “what they needed to teach,” but now the National Literacy Strategy “suggested particular teaching methods that ought to be used” (E-P2). *Evan Smith*, a niche publisher, further commented on the extent of this change, “though it [the Literacy Hour] might not be officially statutory” the schools were significantly influenced by Ofsted inspectors and Local Authority advisors with a “very strong kind of top-down message that they ought to be teaching in this way”(E-PB2).

The results were positive, especially in the first few years of the program, with children in Year 6 (aged 11) of whom previously 67% were reaching expectation for English prior to 1998, showing gains that “quickly rose to around 80% of Year 6 children” (E- PM1). However, the gains stalled and further, the results from the Progress in International Literacy Study (PIRLS) showed a persistent “longer tail of underperformance than most of our English-speaking counterparts ... which a reforming government could not possibly ignore” (E-PM1). Some, as

represented by *researcher Norman Williams*, felt the reasons for the improvement in scores had been misinterpreted, “the overall pattern is a rise up to 2000, but we think that is attributable to teachers getting better at teaching to the test and then a plateau from 2000 onward” (E-R2).

Another participant, *policy maker David Walker*, a member of the Rose Report, supplies a counter view. In his opinion this reasoning contains a fallacy: the tests had been designed to assess the content of the new program “so teaching inevitably meant covering that which would be tested” (E-PM1). Supporting this reasoning, he shared that it was also the case that the new rigor of the Literacy Hour had helped to improve pedagogy, which “led to considerable gains because it ensured that children at least had daily direct instruction in reading. And for many schools that had not been the case” (E-PM1). However, whichever view is more accurate, this effect had now leveled off, and there was growing concern about the remaining 20% who were falling behind in literacy (Rose, 2006a).

The New Literacy Initiative. The House of Commons Select Committee, asked to investigate this matter in 2003, reviewed the evidence, and took statements from many in the literacy field, including advocates for both analytic and synthetic phonic approaches. The policy debate, as reported by many involved, was intense and as *policy maker Catherine Mason*, a Scottish commentator, captured “in the early stages at least, was framed very, very much by this sort of polarization of synthetic and analytic phonics” (S-PM1). The Select Committee recommended that a Report be ordered to settle this point.

The Influential Rose Report. The named report, hereinafter known as the Rose Report, therefore charged Jim Rose, a retired Chief Inspector of Ofsted, with the task of deciding which form of phonics, analytic or synthetic, was the best method for teaching beginner readers. The literacy “war” in England had now moved on from the previous divisive battle between Whole

Language and Phonics, and was now focused on which form of phonics, analytic or synthetic, would best help children learn to read more effectively. By this point, as *policy maker David Walker*, closely involved in the literacy policy arena shared, “Everyone was tired ... with the various definite maybes that seemed to be constantly coming across from reports on literacy in general and phonics in particular” (E-PM1). Also, in the view of *mainstream publisher Sally Ney*, pressure from literacy reformists advocating for synthetic phonics was finally bearing fruit politically, “obviously, ... [as they] became more and more vocal, that is where the political spotlight started to fall, and that was when Jim Rose undertook his review of early reading” (E-PB1).

As Rose (now Sir Jim Rose) outlined in his talk at the Reading Reform Conference in November, 2006, this type of Report meant that he had been asked to collect and weigh the evidence and then to come to a decision with “no sitting upon the fence” (Rose, 2006a, Conference Proceedings). This report which was to be so influential, since it was used as a basis to support the government’s decision to mandate synthetic phonics in England for beginning readers, was unlike the NRP (2000a) in the US. The NRP findings were based on a meta-analysis of past evidence-based research, and similar to that conducted by the English researchers, Torgerson, Brooks, and Hall (2006). Both of these studies were included in the survey of the evidence conducted by the Rose Report (Ehri, 2003; Rose, 2006b), but the nature of the report, a ‘named’ report of a type little-used in the US, meant that other evidence could be considered as well.

Evidence for the Report was solicited from researchers, including those who had undertaken meta-analyses of previous research; those who had created successful synthetic phonic reading programs, Sue Lloyd (*Jolly Phonics*), Ruth Miskin (*ReadWriteInc*) and Marlynn

Grant (*Sound Discovery*); those who had conducted two studies which had received much publicity --- Clackmannanshire (Johnston & Watson, 2005) and London Docklands (Stuart, 1999); advocates of the opposing pedagogies of analytic and synthetic phonics, including teachers, researchers and members of the Reading Reform Foundation; a Member of Parliament (MP) who had been influential in raising this matter in the House of Commons, including the Clackmannanshire study in particular; publishers; school principals; and representatives from Local Authorities and teacher training establishments. In fact the review of evidence was more eclectic still, and was further broadened to include observational visits to ten schools separately recommended by the analytic and synthetic camps to demonstrate best practice in teaching beginning reading (Rose, 2006b).

The Rose Report was to mark the final stage in the process which had begun with the National Curriculum of 1988, which had in the words of *policy maker David Walker*, prominent in the literacy scene and one of its members, “legislated for what schools should teach, not how they should teach it” (E-PM1); through the National Strategies of 1998, where the government for the first time “sought to influence pedagogy” which had previously been viewed “as the preserve of the teachers” (E-PM1); to the Rose Report of 2006, which finally recommended one particular reading pedagogy.

A National Mandate. That the Rose Report recommended synthetic phonics did not come as a surprise for many, for as English Civil Servant, *Mary Mullen*, who is involved in implementing literacy policy, remarked:

Jim Rose did advocate the teaching of phonics to all children, and therefore, I don't think it came as a particular surprise. I believe ... that (synthetic) phonics was already widely taught in many schools, this was just a way to formalize the system. (E –PM2)

At this juncture, immediately following the release of the report in March, 2006, and to the surprise of many, the government immediately mandated this phonic method be taught “first and fast” (Rose, 2006a, Conference Proceedings) to all in Reception (4-5 year olds) from September, 2007. As captured by *researcher Norman Williams*, who favors a more balanced reading approach, it was surprising that after “10 or more years of central control” that, “what they’d effectively done was not just controlled the content – the programs of study, but they’ve now controlled pedagogy. They’ve controlled the teaching method, and that’s another first for the English government” (E-R2).

As to why a comparative study of analytic and synthetic phonics was not first undertaken, in the view of another *quantitative researcher, Julian Straley*, who had always favored such a study, the “ policy makers and politicians here didn’t want to put the large amount of money that would’ve been needed behind such research”. Which, coupled with their need for “an answer that they could implement immediately, or almost immediately” (E-R1) within a school year, meant there was indeed no time for such a study.

This national mandate did not necessarily mean all schools needed to adapt to a new beginning reading pedagogy. As had been stated by *Mary Mullen, the Civil Servant*, many were already using this approach. One synthetic phonics publishing company shared that even before the Select Committee of 2003, it was “being more widely used in schools to teach reading ... than was the Government's own strategy on which they were spending about 50 million UK pounds a year” with marketing data showing “under half of schools using the Government's own *Progression in Phonics*, which was the program at the time” (E-PB2).

Immediately prior to the mandated starting date of September, 2007 for synthetic phonics implementation, schools were given a Government-approved list of commercially-available

synthetic programs and free access to *Letters and Sounds*, the newly-created government publication. As yet, in mid-2010, with the change to synthetic phonics coinciding with the abolition of the annual standardized national test for seven year olds, there are no nationally produced reading results to show how the new approach is faring.

In conclusion, it must be stated that strong opposition to this changing pedagogy has been absent among teachers. As *niche publisher Evan Smith* explains, “in terms of the regular classroom teaching at kindergarten/reception I think the essential issues are understood ... the understanding about synthetic phonics and the kind of difference that it can make is known and is uncontroversial; it’s accepted” (E-PB2). This is an important consideration when viewing the adoption of synthetic phonics in England.

Assessment and Literacy Targets. As outlined by *policy maker Marie Fischer*, a member of the Reading Reform Foundation, since this change of pedagogy, the type of assessment for children has changed. Instead of the former nationally-normed tests, children are now assessed by their teachers at the end of Key Stage One (around seven years old) using tests determined and moderated by the Local Authorities. *Marie* explained how these tests are essentially “parallel” in nature and “quite a nightmare” to administer, as “it involves a lot of time of Local Authority advisors moderating assessments to see if they’re [teachers are] doing it similar from one school to the next” (E-PM3). She summed up that, absent a “decent national instrument being used to test the effectiveness of any phonics teaching” (E-PM3), it remains difficult to draw any firm conclusions from the many separate evaluations now used by individual local authorities and schools.

Echoing *Marie Fischer*, the *researcher Julian Straley* commented that though the assessment “is based on some pretty sharp guidelines ... there’s a lot of controversy about that at

the moment too because of the apparent variation in teacher assessment” (E-R1). Further commenting about the results, he said, “Nobody’s talking much ... it’s gone very quiet. I did hear a rumour early on (during the first year, the pilot stage) that the results were good, but since then not a word” (E-R1). He later reiterated this view, “Nobody has gone public on whether the results were any good or not. If they had been astoundingly good we would’ve heard, but they may just have been confusing or not outstandingly good.” He cautioned, “it doesn’t necessarily mean that they were bad” (E-R1).

The government had ushered in synthetic phonics to address the problem of literacy rates stalling around the 80% mark. However, given public and teacher opposition to statutory national testing of children at seven year olds, assessment has been dropped precisely at a time when there is a need to know how the new policy is working. “We were hoping to introduce something called single level testing which was to do with testing children when ready, and that’s proved to be so complicated and statistically difficult that that’s being put on the backburner” (E-R3).

Reading Recovery and Intervention. What has been the government’s response to this seeming stagnation in reading levels? Recently, influenced by a substantial matching funds contribution by a private agency, the government has supported use of *Reading Recovery* for its struggling readers. *Policy maker Marie Fischer*, a proponent of synthetic phonics, discussed in some depth the thorny issue of the place of *Reading Recovery* in this evolving literacy policy. She pinpointed an anomaly that has arisen. Describing it variously as “ludicrous” and “almost a spectacle”, she laments that the “biggest irony” is that Ruth Miskin, then a headmistress of an inner-city school, began using synthetic phonics with beginning readers because she saw its effectiveness with “the weakest pupils” who “were given phonics by the intervention specialists”. However, currently this has come full circle, with the Reading Reform Foundation

now in the position of “having to defend the special needs children, who have been officially given something closer to Whole Language” (E-PM3). Marie states that paradoxically it is now the “remedial teaching” field where “the overwhelming philosophy is not synthetic phonics, it’s *Reading Recovery*” (E-PM3).

Marie feels this dichotomy is not aided by the ambivalence in the research world about how dyslexia is defined, as it has no “clear means of diagnosis”. She concludes however, “more fundamentally ... at the moment there is nothing to suggest that there needs to be a different intervention and that teaching for both [beginner and remedial readers] is the same, which is synthetic phonics.” *Marie* shared how she asked a local education authority, “Hang on, we’ve got the Rose Report, and as a local authority you are telling me that you are in line with the Rose recommendations, but for this intervention program [Reading Recovery] you are doing the opposite of the Rose recommendations?” (E-PM3).

Researcher Julian Straley, with a background in meta-analysis, says his concern “is still that *Reading Recovery* doesn't have enough systematic, synthetic phonics in it”, for they still “do this sort of roaming around the known and they still do a lot of getting the meaning from the text, fix-it-up sort of stuff” (E-R1). While acknowledging that “they've tried to put more phonic work into *Reading Recovery* ... more blending and segmenting in the way [of] systematic phonics.” He added “it tends to be rather more analytic frankly, even now” (E-R1). *Julian* feels this could be construed as a simple “question of semantics”, however he states the core of the issue is “it doesn’t ever in the end just reduce to a question of semantics, because children’s life chances are at stake here, so it’s got to be more just than an exercise in words” (E-R1). He cites the work of Shanahan and Barr (Shanahan & Barr, 1995) in the US as a support for this view of *Reading Recovery*.

Policy maker David Walker reaches a similar conclusion citing the “serious criticism” of *Reading Recovery* by Moats (2007), which he had recently revisited. “She makes several criticisms of *Reading Recovery*” in relation to its dropping 25 to 40 percent of students “from the program’s own data analysis because they did not do well enough” (E-PM1, Moats, 2007), and the problem of maintaining the student gains made after they leave the program. He feels this concern is fortunately obviated by,

the personalization agenda ... looming large here ... So, the underpinning even of Reading Recovery [is] this business of making sure one-to-one tuition is put in place as quickly as possible. So, although they'd sort of been discontinued from the program, they'd still get some one-to-one support. (E-PM1)

Further citing Moats, he also feels that *Reading Recovery* “is not catching those youngsters who are having the most difficulty” (E-PM1). *David* reflects that ultimately Moats believes “*Reading Recovery* is not ‘effective’ ... unless it is modified with systematic sequential instruction, and decoding and phonemic awareness, and ... without these changes the gains have been almost zero for the poorest readers” (E-PM1).

Literacy Targets. Moss (2009), who has studied literacy policy in England and Scotland, pointed out that policy makers variously use targets to manage “public expectations about what the education services ought to deliver” as a “spur to action” for practitioners, and “to act as public guarantees that whatever policy has been adopted is working” (p. 159). But the early gains from 65% in 1998 to 80% in 2002, having stabilized as “a stubborn plateau” has proved difficult for the government, because such target-setting “gets played out on a very public stage” (Moss, 2009, p. 159).

To the Labour Government's embarrassment "despite the confident predictions, the policy has never fully succeeded in meeting the performance targets that were set" (Moss, 2009, p. 161). In fact the Labour Party had gone a stage further to tie itself to a new unreachable target of 85%. It was into this breach that the Conservative Party (Tories) was to step. Using the public forum of the House of Commons in the person of Tory Shadow Schools Minister, Nick Gibb, and Lord Prior in the House of Lords, questions were asked about synthetic phonics, quoting the positive results shown in the Clackmannanshire study, asking in effect, "and what is Her Majesty's Government going to do about it?" (E-PM2). It was this pressure that had led to the formation of the Select Committee in Education and eventually the Rose Report (2006).

However on this occasion given the change in assessment at Key Stage One, the Labour Government appears to have painted itself into a corner, for it cannot prove if the new policy is working ... or not.

Looming Political Change. With the current uncertain future of the Labour Party - which must seek re-election by May, 2010 – everyone's attention is now turning to the Conservative Party (E-PB1, E-PB2, E-PM1, E-PM3). *Mainstream Publisher Sally Ney* commented that, "it seems fairly likely that the Conservatives will win" which would probably "lead to some quite big differences" but "possibly more in other areas than in literacy" (E-PB1). She added, presciently, that she believed "the Tories will come out very strongly in favor of synthetic phonics" (E-PB1). Indeed the Conservative Party has recently published a manifesto, which unequivocally states its support of a synthetic phonic approach to beginning reading: "Yet we have the means and the method to tackle reading failure effectively through synthetic phonics" (Conservatives, 2009).

Hence, at this time a synthetic phonic approach to beginning reading continues to be a strong element in the preferred literacy policy in England. Although the story about the adoption of *Reading Recovery* for remedial education reveals a national government currently at odds with itself about the implementation of synthetic phonics.

Literacy Policy in the United States. The story above portrays a national government using gradual incremental steps to gain greater control of education and, latterly, reading pedagogy in particular. However, the situation in the United States is quite different. As prominent *researcher Peter Schuman*, a member of US reading panels, pointed out there is a basic difference between the two countries in the implementation of education policy:

the UK, or any European nation, or maybe any other nation in the world ... have a true national education policy. Whatever the ministry or department is that is in charge of education, [it] really has the power to establish curriculum and professional development standards, assessments and so on. In the United States, because of our history and our federalism, education has largely been the province of the states or the local districts (US-R3).

Historical Underpinnings. Reflecting on the historical underpinnings of the constitutional relationship between the individual States and the central government, another respected literacy *researcher Beatrice Frable*, compared the states after the Civil War to the current condition of the European Union in relation to its central government, where member countries have combined economically and legislatively in many ways, but still retain the right to decide the educational path of their own students (US-R1). This situation still holds true in the US to this day, and affects the ways and the means by which the federal government can attempt to influence education; a situation which is further complicated by the fact that while “the states

still jealously guard their prerogative over education” they, in turn, cede parts of this control “to districts and large cities, and large urban areas” (US-R1).

In fact, “it’s been a really complicated history of how the federal government has been able to be involved in education at all” and it “has only been able to get involved in education for “categorical reasons” to give “support for a specific thing, or for a specific population ... for a specific action or crisis” (US-R3). *Researcher Peter Schuman* goes on to cite the example of the federal government’s intervention to provide education for former slaves following the Civil War; and in the Civil Rights era of the 1960’s, saying in effect:

We are going to be involved in schools, not for education reasons but for Civil Rights’ reasons. “Poor children are getting cheated, so we are going to help with that.” ... In fact, it created a separate system within the system - these disadvantaged children would be taught separately, they would have different teachers, different materials, paid for by the U.S. government. (US-R3)

Fast forwarding to the 1990’s, *Peter* points out that “this much more specific kind of involvement” (US-R3) became focused on literacy, as the concern for the variability in State standards in reading instruction and attainment came into focus. A focus determined by national concern over the wide disparity in state literacy levels as revealed by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores of 1992 and 1994 (Adams, 2008). As *Beatrice* commented, this situation was further compounded by the late 1990’s, when it became evident that, “most states didn’t even have frameworks for what they needed to get done in school” and this led to a “very active initiative to get states to say what they expected teachers to teach and children to learn in 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th thru 12th grade” (US-R1).

The government can enforce laws such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), but *researcher Beatrice Frable* points out working within the constitutional constraints, “the only thing that the Fed, that is the Federal Government, can do is to offer sanctions and incentives” (US-R1). In parallel, *Peter* noted “money influences what states will do, what government policy wishes them to do” (US-R3). However, he also notes, true to the Civil Rights basis of federal intervention, the main way the government exerts “an influence on literacy is they give money based on the proportion of children who are living in poverty” (US-R3). As such, they have the power to give money to support federal literacy initiatives, and conversely, the power to withhold it “if the schools are not honoring federal law as far as Civil Rights goes” (US-R3).

Researcher Peter Schuman further explained how George W. Bush had used this approach to enlarge government’s influence over reading, by:

pushing the idea that literacy was a Civil Right ... the federal government would have some right to say something about accountability and the teaching of reading for all kids, and not just for the parts of education that they were funding directly. (US-R3)

This stance was then buttressed, points out *Peter*, by the standards-based requirements built into NCLB. Based on the carrot of “We are going to give you even more money for poor kids than we used to, but we want you to test everybody”, balanced with the stick of:

if your schools aren’t hitting certain standards ... your own standards ... then we want kids to be able to leave your schools and go to other schools. We want you to provide tutoring programs for them and so on. (US-R3)

Peter summarizes that though not able to dictate a pedagogical approach such as synthetic phonics, central government has in this way influenced what is taught in classrooms and, to quote the same researcher, “has likely increased the teaching of phonics” (US-R3).

New Literacy Initiative: Reading First. It was the Reading First arm of the NCLB Act (2002) that sought to change the way reading was being taught in schools. As scholarly researcher *Beatrice Frable* explained, this policy goal was separated into two “waves”. The first was NCLB with Reading First, both part of the reauthorization of the Elementary Secondary Education Act (United States Department of Education, 2010b) “that provides for poor children” (US-R1). Then, came the later “wave” of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA, 2004), which laid the groundwork for Response to Intervention. Some states felt the funding ‘carrot’ for NCLB was not large enough and refused the money, saying this would not cover all the expenses involved. However, *Beatrice Frable* pointed out, “that really wasn’t the point. The point wasn’t that it was supposed to be a profit-making program, the point was that the Feds were going to assist on something the states should have been doing anyhow” (US-R1).

Just as the English government justified their mandate for synthetic phonics as acting on the findings of the Rose Report (2006), the American government supported their intervention by referring to the findings of the meta-analysis of reading research undertaken by the NRP (2000a). The same report which, along with the report by Torgerson, Brooks and Hall (2003), had been the starting point for the Rose Report’s review of reading evidence. Both the NRP and Brook’s review of the available evidence-based research came to the same conclusion – that though there was evidence to support the systematic use of phonics in teaching reading in the first three years of school, there was not sufficient evidence to say whether this should be analytic or synthetic.

At this point in the US, given the constitutional constraints outlined above, the Bush government used the power of the public purse to entice states to adopt the pedagogical approach of synthetic phonics for beginning readers, as favored by proponents of Reading First. The lure proved effective, for as *Beatrice* points out, couching the situation in human terms:

education is horribly neglected, [so most states] try and go along with it ... (pause) ... You know, in actual fact everybody needs the money ... it [education] should be our first priority and it's just way under-funded, so in actual fact, nobody can afford to give up the Federal money they have had. (US-R1)

It is significant that in order to get the money, states would need to adopt approved programs that were based on a “Gold Standard” – that is with its effectiveness proven by “quantitative ... or scientifically-based research”, which meant “randomized trials” that “were peer-reviewed, and ... various standards that were included in quantitative research as opposed to qualitative” for “qualitative is more observation and less stringent” (US-PM1).

As influential *policy maker Matthew Forth*, a member of two former Republican government administrations, went on to explain the reason this definition was included “to make sure that any product being used and being funded by Reading First met that standard” (US-PM1). Now in practice, admitted the policy maker, there were very few programs that met this “objective review”. He named two of them as *Direct Instruction*, “which back in the seventies went through lengthy clinical trials and in the report that was released, I think in 1978, concluded that in fact they did meet what would be called the ‘Gold Standard’” (US-PM1). He also cited another which “came close” as *Open Court* “the original [program] reviewed by the people down in Texas” (US-PM1).

This view is largely supported by *niche publisher Georgina Schultz*, who then added: but then there was such a hullabaloo about you can't just give it to one publisher. And then ... the watering down, the whole watering down process came along. Then it went from being validated programs to base programs and pretty soon it was everything. (US-PB1)

However, further commenting about effects of implementation in Reading First Districts, *Georgina* noted. “They started putting pieces of Reading First into their non-Reading First schools.” This led to a situation where “there was never really any pure way to look at data to determine whether or not it was Reading First specifically that was working, because everything just got muddied up” (US-PB1).

Policy maker Matthew Forth, added a third program to his approved list, *Success for All* by Robert Slavin, which in the estimation of the policy maker was unnecessarily “very complicated” but had “gone through those kind of trials, so his program would have been eligible” (US-PM1).

It is important to note that these three programs, survivors of evidence-based research, took a synthetic phonic approach to teaching beginning reading. *Open Court* is now part of the McGraw-Hill stable, which also includes *Reading Mastery* (US-R1, US-R3), and Robert Slavin’s *Success for All* has transferred to the current home of synthetic phonics – “I believe that Bob’s over in England now” (US-R1). This is confirmed by Stannard and Huxford (2007) in *The Literacy Game*. In effect, at this stage in 2002, the United States’ government was supporting a synthetic phonic approach to reading --- four years in advance of England. However this situation was soon to change.

Success for All was eventually dropped from the recommended list, which led its author, Slavin, to make an official complaint to the U.S. Inspector General (US-PM1). In the view of the *policy maker Matthew Forth*, an important player in Reading First legislation, Slavin’s reaction to this event was regrettable, “I’m not particularly impressed with the way he destroyed the whole farm instead of taking care of fixing the fence” (US-PM1). Indeed, it set in motion the chain of events which eventually led to the broadening of language included in Reading First.

Originally conceived and based on an evidence-based ‘Gold Standard’, Matthew reveals “the language that was included in the final legislation, which was signed by the President” was now based on all five pillars of the National Reading Panel. This ultimately “opened the door to other products that had not gone through the clinical trials necessitated by the ‘Gold Standard’” (US-PM1).

He continued, “even programs like *Reading Recovery* [which] just simply do not meet the standards of quantitative research ... got their foot in the door, and even had the Institute for Education and Science produce a report that said they met the standards” (US-PM1). Ironically, and as alluded to by *Matthew*, *Reading Recovery* was in fact one of the very few programs that passed the hurdle of the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) (2007), when others, such as *Reading Mastery* (2008), did not.

Given this confluence of circumstances, Reading First was destined to have a rocky ride. As previously discussed, the \$6 billion operated as a “carrot” for States, but the intransigence of states where a Whole Language/Balanced Reading philosophy prevailed, meant that the initial restricted number of programs that were offered under Reading First, and seemingly promoted by the Department of Education, were resisted. As *Donna Peters, a Civil Servant* at the Department of Education explained:

So people got the impression - and it may be because people actually said this to them - that, “Oh, I have to use curriculum X in order to get this grant.” ... and then they went back to the states and said, “Oh we’d better put this curriculum in.” Then they reapplied and they got the funding. So yeah, it didn’t look good. (US-PM2)

Also, referring to Slavin’s complaint to the Inspector General, *Donna* added she believed because of the scale of the program when *Success for All* was turned down, its creators felt they

had lost a lot of money, which likely prompted their complaint to the Inspector General, “and that kicked off a whole investigation”. However, she added:

There was another factor ... this was a big political, high-profile program, and the people running it ... almost [got] too involved. They didn’t necessarily understand all the controls you have to have being in the government. The person who ran this program [Chris Doherty] was brought in as an appointee ... and he wanted this program to be a certain kind of program. The safeguards ... just weren’t there ... He cared a lot about this program, it’s just that he also maybe went too far with things that he maybe shouldn’t have. (US-PM2)

As an example, *Donna* told the story behind the “bidders’ conference, in which the Department gave application guidance to the states. *Donna* explained:

They had a panel that got up and talked about different curricula you could use. But ... they had three or four people talk about how great one curriculum was. To us, in hindsight, that’s really a problem because you are basically endorsing this one program. The message people got was ‘okay, we’re only hearing from one curriculum, so that must be the only one that you want us to use’. You’re not going to find on the books anywhere that you can’t have a panel with one curriculum representing it, but that’s true you really can’t. Now we’re a lot more careful about that. (US-PM2)

As a result of these problems synthetic phonics was pushed aside, and a blend of systematic phonics and balanced reading based on the pillars of the NRP – Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Fluency, Comprehension and Vocabulary – took its place. As captured by *Matthew Forth*, “We sort of slipped back to using the five components of reading instruction ... a backstop for the fact that we couldn’t force programs through the grid of quantitative research and clinical

trials” (US-PM1). For, as the hapless policy makers discovered in practice, “we didn’t have that many great reading programs that would have qualified” (US-PM1) .

Matthew said his hope was that publishers would be encouraged by the Reading First process to “implement programs” based on “research findings” that “are worthy of consideration and that maybe ... could really make a difference with your kids” (US-PM1). He added, “We were hoping that could be a carrot or an incentive for them to do that, but obviously, you know, it became a political firestorm” (US-PM1).

The Demise of Reading First. In the event, and as the policy maker had alluded to, other factors were operating to hurry Reading First towards its demise. Members of the Review Board that oversaw applications of state grants, were accused of gaining financially from advice they gave to states about which programs to use. As *Donna Peters, a civil servant* in the Department of Education, was to comment, “the trouble with conflicts of interests [is] it’s not that there were that many instances where anyone gained financially from the program, but it’s enough that it looked like people did” (US-PM2).

This regretful situation was compounded by ‘colorful e-mails’ that surfaced and were bruited about by the media, concerning which programs were going to be funded through Reading First grant applications (Manzo, 2007). However, all US participants touched lightly, if at all, on this topic, as captured in this passing comment by *researcher Peter Schuman* “not the scandals or any of that” (US-R3), as he went on to explain the realities of the grant application progress:

Investigations of Reading First have said that the federal government overstepped. I think there were times that the federal government overstepped, and I think there were times

when states and local districts were begging them, ‘Would you tell us what we are supposed to do so we can do it?’ (US-R3)

In *Peter’s* view, “some of it was the federal government’s fault that the Reading First director pushed particular programs,” but he asks also that we understand the confusion experienced in the grant application progress at state level. States who had two or three proposals turned back, because they hadn’t “managed to meet the standards of the law” and failed to get the grant, just wanted the federal government to:

tell you specifically what to do so that you can get started. So, they would put pressure on the Reading First director to tell what they should buy or what they should do. They would push for that. And of course, the Feds should have never answered those kinds of questions, but they did ... and that was a real problem. (US-R3)

A senior staffer in the Senate, *Brittany Brock*, who had been involved in Reading First, refuted the accusation that the Department of Education had, in this way, “overstepped” its boundaries, and took some pains to clarify what she saw as a “common misconception” about program oversight (US-PM3). She stated that, “the vast majority of states never listed what program or what curriculum they were going to use when they applied for the funds” and did not state “we’ll be using Houghton Mifflin’ or ... Direct Instruction”. Indeed, that “very few states, probably a handful - there would probably be no more than five - actually laid out the programs that they would be using” (US-PM3).

Matthew Forth, who as a *policy maker* in the Bush Administration, was more closely involved with the initial rolling out of the Reading First legislation, stressed the important role that evaluation, or the early lack of it, was to play in the implementation process. He pointed out that 25 million dollars a year had indeed been set aside “to do a thorough study that could have

been randomly selected, could have been comparing apples with apples” a design, that if put in place from the beginning, “would have really informed the field and then allowed it to be modified or improved as needed” (US-PM1).

However, of these monies, only \$7 million was ever spent on evaluation, the rest being swallowed up as “here again it kind of got caught up in politics” with “the bulk of the money” being used to set up regional technical assistance centers rather than being “put into a research study to evaluate the efficacy, and whether the Reading First really worked or not (US-PM1).

Matthew very much regretted that “a major review of Reading First ... quantitative research [which] validated either the success or failure of the program ... didn’t happen”. That alternatively the results “came out with a somewhat mute form, or negative impact, or no change” as “the design of the study was not good and the money wasn’t there” (US-PM1).

As a *policy maker*, still actively involved in literacy legislation, *staffer Brittany Brock* echoed his concern, stating that one problem was the evaluation “didn’t start until after they had had the money for in some cases two years, and so behavior had begun to change across the board, especially with Reading First” (US-PM3). Another thorny issue, was that the research design of “regression discontinuity”. It aimed to capture the intended “more systemic change” of affecting schools above the cut-off line for grant monies, through the planned “bleed-over of professional development, where you would have not just teachers in Reading First schools receiving professional development and the enrichment, but you would have all teachers in the district receiving the enrichment” (US-PM3). *Brittany* concluded:

I’ve remained concerned about the evaluation that was done of Reading First, and remained concerned about (the use of) regression discontinuity in education overall, but

that being said certainly there was some back and forth about you're not going to really conduct this evaluation in this way. (US-PM3)

Finally, and paradoxically, as this result had been part of Reading First's intent – to achieve “more systemic change” – the design did not ultimately give Congress, or indeed the American public, what they wanted to know:

How are we getting at these neediest kids; needy from a financial perspective and needy from an achievement perspective, what are we doing for them? And I don't think the evaluation really got on that issue and I think that was problematic. (US-PM3)

Niche Publisher Georgina Schultz believed that the bleed-over effect went much further than this, affecting even more affluent schools, pointing out:

districts that had a lot of diversity in their socioeconomic levels ... the poor kids got the Reading First, but the more affluent schools were taking what was working in the Reading First schools and implementing some of those procedure. (US-PB1)

So, in effect, “all scores went up,” leading observers to dismiss the impact of Reading First. She concluded, as sadly as the policy makers *Matthew* and *Brittany* had done before, that “there's no purity” in the results of the evaluation (US-PB1).

In the words of *Matthew Forth*, again regretfully, “It has made a significant and a measurable difference, a positive difference for kids, and had that study been done appropriately ...” (US-PM1). This view is supported by others. *Staffer Brittany Brock* spoke of the experience of hosting an annual conference of “4,000 people from all 50 states” at the Department of Education, who “came to that conference to talk about Reading First, and talk about the strategies for continuing the process” (US-PM3). She found that “overwhelmingly ... they were supportive” of Reading First, feeling that it had led to “positive systemic change” (US-PM3).

But, she added, “they were concerned about how they would be able to continue that without additional funding” (US-PM3). Adversely affected by these myriad conditions, the Reading First program lost its funding.

Continuing Literacy Support Politically. However, schools have continued to use the programs they had purchased, and the recent government initiative of giving Stimulus money to education has allowed some districts to continue or expand their Reading First initiatives. As *publisher Georgina Schultz* explained the Stimulus money is:

helping, but it’s helping very slowly because again, the money’s there, but what we hear very often is, ‘Yeah, it’s there now but will it be there next year? If we decided to purchase will they take it away?’ People are scared. (US-PB1)

The Stimulus money is a temporary measure to cover the years 2009 to 2011, and may be followed by a new literacy bill, which is currently wending its way through Congress. As *civil servant Donna Peters* who works for the Department of Education explained, there are two different bills, “ On the House side, it’s the Student Financial Aid bill and within it there’s something called the Early Learning Challenge, that would just concentrate on Birth to 5” (US-PM2). The other in the Senate, “is actually a birth to Grade 12 – they’re calling it the Comprehensive Literacy Bill or the LEARN Act ... those would be funds that would go to states and they could serve either Birth to Age 5 or K-3, all the way up to grade 12” (US-PM2). *Donna* added, “it looks pretty certain that we’re going to have some kind of big literacy initiative” (US-PM2).

Since this conversation, the Bill - Literacy Education for All, Results for the Nation (LEARN) Act - has been introduced in the Senate, and versions of it were co-sponsored in the House of Representatives. For the first time, 40% of the funding, will go to the adolescent age

students to address literacy (Bell, 2009). Hence in the US, the new government appears committed to continuing the support, through legislation and funding, for improving the literacy levels of all children birth-to-18. As reported in *Education Week*:

The Senate proposal would authorize \$2.4 billion annually for literacy for five years, with 10 percent of the money slated for pre-K programs, 35 percent for K-3 programs (the same grade span covered by Reading First), and half for literacy efforts in grades 4-12. ... If the draft bill were to become law, literacy efforts in grades 4-12 would get a huge boost in federal funds. (Zehr, 2009, p.19)

However, this report simplifies a more complex reality. As part of the annual funding for key education programs a joint House and Senate Conference “approved a bill that would finance programs in the U.S. Department of Education at about \$63.7 billion” (Klein, 2009). In effect, and discounting the unprecedented one-time infusion of \$100 billion Stimulus money for fiscal years 2009 and 2010 (provided under The American Recovery and Reinvestment Fund), this represents a 0.7 increase in funding for 2010. In literacy, the Striving Readers, formerly covering adolescents only, would be enlarged to cover all children from Pre-Kindergarten through 12th grade, and will see its budget increase from \$35 million to \$125 million annually in 2010. However, this is small change when compared to the \$1 billion annually formerly awarded through Reading First (US-PM3).

Regarding the passage of the bills, *staffer Brittany Brock* cautions one should look at the success of bills being approved in the Senate, rather than the House. The latter generates a lot of bills, but a simple majority leads to bills passing. However she counsels, in the Senate the 60 votes needed to pass a bill gives a truer view of its likely passage in the whole Congress (US-PM3). In this regard, she points to the success of the House in approving the Student Loan

legislation which, strangely enough, includes provision for funding of Early Education of pre-school children.

According to *researcher Peter Schuman*, the release of the National Early Literacy Panel Report (NELP, 2009), a meta-analysis of evidence-based research about best practice in preparing young children from birth to age 5 to read, is “one of the biggest things” to influence early childhood pedagogy (US-PM3). Among its key findings directly related to reading were that alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, and phonological memory (the ability to remember spoken information for a short period of time) are directly connected to children’s later success in reading (NELP, 2009). These findings partially mirror those of the NRP (2000a) which, based on their meta-analysis, had highlighted the importance of phonemic awareness and recommended a systematic phonic approach be used in beginning reading (NRP, 2000a). Combined, these findings support President Obama’s push for early learning.

Current *policy maker, staffer Brittany Brock* raised the issue of the effectiveness of the Office of the President. She discussed the role of Barack Obama in this regard, who made it clear in his announcements that he wants there to be increased support for pre-school children. He further signaled his support for this initiative by backing it up with monies made available from his Presidential budget (US-PM3).

Looking back, *policy maker Matthew Forth* reminds us of the power of another President, reflecting on the former Presidency of George W. Bush who had wanted “to change the paradigm” (US-PM1): in his Presidency Bush had proposed and actively supported the Reading First initiative. In this respect, the Presidents of two different parties have actively supported educational initiatives related to early reading; just as in England, the opposing governments of Labour and Conservatives have also supported the adoption of synthetic phonics.

Thus in both nations those involved in literacy policy worked to ensure that phonics was included in early reading. Although the route taken was dependent on the political and constitutional system of each nation, and though the form of phonics recommended differed according to the recommendations in each of an influential report (the NRP in the US; the Rose Report in England), each government moved forward with the same intent – to raise the low literacy levels.

Government influence in changing the paradigm in how to teach reading is an important issue for both nations. While both the Labour and Conservative governments currently support synthetic phonics pedagogy in beginning reading in England, this commitment has not been evident in the field of remedial reading. While support for systematic phonics at the core of Reading First principles, was championed in a bi-partisan manner in the US, this continuation is not assured. However, local districts' use of Stimulus monies to continue Reading First programs; the recent NELP report on early childhood education, which identified the connection between early phonological knowledge and later reading success; and the President's commitment to early childhood education demonstrate how research and policy can positively interact. Clearly, the issue of government structure is pervasive, and significantly impacts the style and effect it, at the center, can have on the pedagogy used in the classrooms at the periphery. What, meanwhile, has been the shared experience of each country's researchers?

US and English Researchers

Throughout the history of teaching reading in England and the US, the two nations have shared research and philosophies, in relation to teaching beginning reading. Effectively, this had led to a situation where each nation tended to adopt and mirror the same approaches.

As the influential English *policy maker*, *David Walker*, affirmed, “I would suspect our history on this is not much different than in the States. We went through the Whole Language scene as others did, and I think we suffered the same sort of outcome” (E-PM1). Researchers in England variously shared this view. *Quantitative Researcher Julian Straley* explained, “What’s happened in the last few years here ... the general attitude that either phonics wasn’t necessary or it was only necessary for a few children ... has gone with most teachers” (E-R1). *Researcher Robert Foster*, who is in favor of a broader evidence base for literacy policy decisions, has also said many agree that phonics needs to be taught early:

There's not much residual dispute [that] the vast majority of kids will benefit from skillful teaching of letter sound relationships at a very early stage in their infant school career....

That's why ... there aren't many academics really fighting the Government. (E-R3)

This view was also shared by researchers interviewed in the US. As *researcher Beatrice Frable* explained:

Pretty much we have been able to teach people how to sound words out, and that’s been true over the centuries, over populations, over languages, and over children’s background variables, including their intellectual ability. One can do that. So the issue for me is that should make you feel good (*chuckles*). (US-R1)

Adding, clarifying this view, “Education is complex, but the basic idea of beginning reading has been richly researched,” and as shown by the NRP, “it doesn’t even much matter which of the many curricula that [you use to] try to teach these basic skills ... you’re better off than if you use one that doesn’t” (US-R1). Further referring to the meta-analyses undertaken in the US, *researcher Peter Schuman* concurs:

There are all kinds of ways of talking about this kind of research ... It's almost two questions, "Do you need to be taught phonics?" Well, no it's possible to learn to read without being taught it. "Can you read well without using decoding, using the alphabetic system, knowing those patterns?" No, apparently you can't (US-R3).

Even *researcher Scott Malm*, who is generally considered to be more in favor of balanced reading, stated that, "kids need to develop phonemic awareness and I think we know how to do that. I think they need to develop decoding skills, and I think we know how to do that" (US-R3).

These researchers' views were echoed by publishers, too. *Bill Aguirre, the mainstream publishing consultant*, stated that, "publishers had always paid attention to the research about the importance of phonics instruction and the importance of breaking the alphabetic code, and what you needed to focus on in order to do that" (US-PB3). *Niche Publisher Georgina Schultz* pointed out, "There's a lot of research to support that the vast majority of children need explicit, systematic instructions in phonics and instruction phonics and phonemic awareness to learn to read. Some children don't. Very few children don't" (US-PB1).

The meta-analyses of past research in both countries did indeed support the inclusion of phonics, systematically taught, at the beginning of children's reading career (Brooks, 2003; Ehri, 2003; NRP, 2000a; Torgerson et al., 2006).

English *Researcher Norman Williams*, comparing the Rose Report and the National Reading Panel, states that the latter "was more about research where the thing in England was a rather smaller scale" and that Rose had made "reference to some research in his report, but a very small amount" (E-R2). Implying political influences at work, he adds:

If the Minister commissions the person to do the work, obviously it becomes a political issue doesn't it? You could ask the question, 'Why did they appoint Jim Rose?' Many

would say that it was because he had a track record of giving governments what they wanted to hear. (E-R2)

On the contrary, he felt, “If we had had something like the National Reading Panel, we would’ve concluded similarly to the way that they did, because quite clearly there is not one single set of teaching reading through phonics” (E-R2). As the NRP had indeed concluded by endorsing “systematic phonics” (E-R2). In this discussion *Norman* did not mention a meta-analysis-based research study, completed by Torgerson et al. (2006) in England which, using many of the same studies as in the NRP, in fact concurred with the results of the NRP (2000a).

However events in England, beginning with the National Literacy Strategy in 1998 (Stannard & Huxford, 2007), through the Rose Report of 2006, to the official mandate in September, 2007 in favor of synthetic phonics as the beginning reading pedagogy, have led to England and the US parting ways in the type of phonics used. What has led to this situation in a time of mass communication when the same research evidence is available to all?

The Relationship Between Research and Policy

In England. The debate in England about whether to teach phonics was indeed largely over by the end of the 1990’s. *Policy maker David Walker* pinpointed a fallacy in the purists’ Whole Language approach to teaching beginning reading that had formerly been so influential, “They say fluent readers don’t need to do this [phonics]; therefore, we must try to get children to do what the fluent readers do immediately,” but this “is asking too much. You can’t read off how to teach reading from how fluent readers do it, anymore than you can read off successful tennis playing from just watching how Roger Federer does it” (E-R1).

The National Literacy Strategy. The National Literacy Strategy of 1998, research-based, began the process of moving teachers, who were essentially using Whole Language, to a

more balanced approach to reading, that would include phonics. To this end, in the initial Reception year and Key Stage One years combined (age 4 -7), the newly suggested Literacy Hour was envisaged as “allotted primarily to phonics with a limited time for learning phonemically irregular words [sight words], and in Key Stage 2 (7 to 11 years of age) to spelling” (Stannard & Huxford, 2007, p. 80). This led to “the place and importance of phonics and other word-level work to become more strongly established” (Stannard & Huxford, 2007, p. 81). However, choosing the type of phonics acceptable to teachers led to a debate about which kind of phonics is more relevant -- synthetic, i.e. teaching children the basic sound of their written language and how to blend them together to read, or analytic, that is a “whole to part approach” where “children are taught to analyze letter-sound relations once the word is identified” (Ehri et al., 2001, p. 395).

Although the research-based NLS had wanted to introduce synthetic phonics: a pragmatic decision was made at the beginning of the Strategy to suggest teaching approaches that would be acceptable to the widest number of teachers and, later, through publishing more detailed and structured guidance, to move teachers towards more effective approaches. (Stannard & Huxford, 2007, p. 80)

In effect, this decision led to the introduction of a “balanced” Literacy Hour within the National Strategies in 1998:

based on what was called the Searchlights mode -- which was largely derived from the Marie Clay view of reading ... [which] at least introduced more structured teaching of reading ... through a daily ... almost routinized in most schools ... Literacy Hour. (E-PM1)

As policy maker David Walker summed up, the introduction of the Literacy Hour had “led to considerable gains” raising the reading levels from 65% to 80% “because it ensured that

children at least had daily direct instruction in reading” (E-PM1). However, this still left around 20% of children failing to meet grade-level targets at age 11 (E-PM1). In the words of British *mainstream publisher Sally Ney*, the stalled reading levels continued, even though “I think most teachers of beginning readers did follow the advice to use the Searchlight Model with varying degrees of success” (E-PB1). She further commented regarding the concern raised by the plight of the remaining 20%, “obviously, as the advocates of phonics became more and more vocal that is where the political spotlight started to fall and that was when Jim Rose undertook his review of early reading” (E-PB1).

The Influence of Lobbying. *Researcher Norman Williams* concurred that the Reading Reform Foundation, the supporters of synthetic phonics, “[whose] mission really is basically to get synthetic phonics into schools everywhere – they lobby, they act politically and so on” (E-R2), intensified their lobbying at government-level. *Publisher Sally Ney* also shared that the Foundation were “people who’ve always believed that you ought to be starting with phonics” and believed the Searchlights model of the National Strategy was short-changing the children “probably rightly” because it “wasn’t advice that was based on particularly sound research, [that] it was advice that was based on politicians trying to keep all towns happy” and because they believed “they had much more solid research behind what they were advocating” (E-PB1).

Researcher Norman Williams went on to explain how pressure was brought to bear at policy level as questions were asked in the House of Common by a “prominent back bencher ... called Nick Gibb” who “was active ... on ... the Education Select Committee”. In his opinion Gibb “was unashamedly very keen on synthetic phonics and apparently did a lot of work behind the scenes trying to get this on the agenda” (E-R2). *Policy maker, Marie Fischer*, an advocate for synthetic phonics, explained how this same Conservative Member of Parliament, Nick Gibb, a

“key person” contacted her “to ask me about the teaching of reading” (E-PM3). Gibb got "on board with trying to work from inside Parliament”, which coupled with the help from Lord Jim Prior in the House of Lords “just kept the pressure up - writing letters, writing the newsletters, pointing out testing and research and so on” (E-PM3).

It was at this juncture indeed that the process of the parting of ways in how their teachers taught beginning reading in the US and England accelerated. The stalled reading levels; pressure from the Reading Reform Foundation; questions from the Opposition party in the House of Commons and Lords; and media publicity about the success of synthetic phonics as shown in the Clackmannanshire Study and Miskin’s synthetic phonic program (McDonald, Wyse, Hepplewhite, Miskin, & Kowalska, 2007; Miskin, 2007) raised public and political awareness in England about the continuing poor literacy levels, and the potential for a method to help alleviate it. In the words of *lobbyist policy maker Marie Fischer*:

I think it was this sort of really relentless criticism, backed up by other people doing good things. So we had the Clackmannanshire program getting more of a mention. We had Ruth Miskin who had quite a claim to fame through her work in London. We had Sue Lloyd and Jolly Phonics making inroads with ordinary Reception teachers. And then along came the Reading Reform Foundation that started to really say it as it was. (E-PM3)

The research from Clackmannanshire (Johnston & Watson, 2005) referred to by *Marie*, had featured prominently in the Rose Report (2006). Unlike the NRP (2000a) in the US, where lack of peer review had been an impediment to its inclusion, the Report cast its net wide and looked at evidence beyond the published, peer-reviewed, evidence-based research that formed the remit of the National Reading Panel (2000). Moss (2007) suggests this more free-spirited

approach derived “from the political process at Westminster [the seat of government]” rather than “from [any] systematic research undertaken on phonics” (p. 28). She cited the meta-analysis that had been undertaken for the government by Torgerson et al. in 2006 to show that its own funded research had concluded that there was evidence for the effectiveness of an early systematic approach to phonics, but none to allow the conclusion this should be synthetic rather than analytic in form (Moss, 2007).

The Rose Report. The Rose Report, as its remit allowed, trawled farther and wider than such research alone. Besides studying the synthetic phonic results from the London Docklands in England (Stuart, 1999), also part of the NRP (2000), it also included the Clackmannanshire study (Johnston & Watson, 2005). It took evidence from many stakeholders involved in literacy, soliciting the views of advocates for analytic and synthetic phonics, among researchers, publishers, politicians and others. The evidence of Johnston, one of the researchers involved in the Scottish Clackmannanshire study, “that analytic phonics is good but synthetic phonics is better ... [that] a child very quickly learns that this symbol is a picture of a sound, that's how the alphabet evolved in the first place” (E-PM1), was influential in their findings. As also were the observations they made of children being taught in schools by the synthetic and analytic phonics methods. These included a synthetic phonic community-outreach program in Dunbartonshire in Scotland (MacKay, 2006, E-PM1), and a school involved in a ten-year, evidence-based research study of synthetic phonics in practice in Bristol, England (Grant, 2004).

The Rose Report (Rose, 2006b) recommended in favor of synthetic rather than embedded analytic phonics. This was immediately taken up by the Education Select Committee and put into place by the government in September, 2007. This effectively removed balanced reading as the

initial approach to teaching beginning reading in England – but which, given the failure of Reading First, is the approach still predominantly used in the US today.

Reactions to the Rose Report. Stakeholders were mixed in their acceptance of this turn of events, "now, this has caused a lot of controversy. Basically my argument is, and I think this is generally accepted, he [Jim Rose] simply didn't review the research evidence properly. He hardly reviewed any research evidence" (E-R2).

Another *researcher, Robert Foster*, conversant with the antecedents of the 'simple view', voiced his concern about the "potential danger" of including Phil Gough's "simple view of reading" (Hoover & Gough, 1990) in the Rose Report (Rose, 2006b). Unlike the traditional view of reading being a complex art, the 'simple view' separates decoding and comprehension. As such, the researcher believed it could "be construed as 'teach him to read and everything else will ... fall into place'" and that "the main job [of the teacher is teaching] decoding and they need to do that well" (E-R3).

Whilst agreeing with the premise that decoding and comprehension are separate, *Robert* considers this a "very dangerous" situation. For, in regard to comprehension, the teacher of students who have not had the advantage of access to "vocabulary knowledge, world knowledge, knowledge of book structures and those things [that] have been put in place from birth" and the additional benefits of "lots of interactions around stories [and] their vocabulary developed in interaction with parents, siblings, games" has an advantage compared to "a child who has a much smaller vocabulary and much less world knowledge." He added that this "would explain why you don't get any immediate effect on comprehension from getting word recognition in place" (E-R3).

Alternatively, the *niche publisher Evan Smith* supports Phil Gough's interpretation of the two components operating distinctly, basing it on the premise that "a child's oral vocabulary is very much greater than their reading vocabulary, and that oral vocabulary can be increasing at the rate of about ten words a day". *Evan Smith* shared that, "If you look at the Jim Rose Review really what he said was that we're looking at two quite separate concepts here. One is the ability to decode ... and the second was the comprehension side" (E-PB2). *Evan* went on to explain how this applies in the day-to-day reading experience of the beginning reader:

The instances where a child is reading a word that isn't in their oral vocabulary is relatively slight, but it'll be there. What is needed is for the teacher to explain to the child what that word means, but they typically won't need also to tell them what it says or [need to tie] it into a context, because the child has already done that. The child will typically prompt the teacher as to 'what does that word mean?'. (E-PB2)

Evan continued,

From the point of view of a [beginning reading] program like us ours [it] doesn't set out, at least within the core of letters, sounds and blending part, to increase a child's comprehension and vocabulary and awareness as such. But when you come into the readers we have, like other readers, then yes they definitely do. (E-PB2)

This synthetic approach was brought into the Reception (four/five years of age) classes in England on the basis of research studies, but also because of the relative success of those schools using this method compared to analytic, as observed by Ofsted for the Rose Report (2006), and also due to the passionate advocacy of its supporters, "the phonics monomaniacs" (E-R1), who had brought beginning reading pedagogy to the fore in the political arena.

The Adoption of Synthetic Phonics. Timing is everything. Fox found in her study that “the significance of such a small scale study’s findings [Clackmannanshire] would not have had the same weight at an earlier point in the policy cycle” (Moss, 2007, p. 28). However, the release of the Clackmannanshire data in favor of synthetic phonics came at a time when the combination of stalled literacy rates, coupled with the political support of those in opposition to the current government deciding to press the case for synthetic phonics, melded together. The advocates of synthetic phonics readily seized this opportunity to further their cause.

Another factor in favor of the introduction of synthetic phonics was that it was well-known and used in one third and more of classrooms; it had been featured in the newspapers and on television programs; and also was backed by professional training. The *publisher Evan Smith* spoke of the reach of *the Jolly Phonics* program, stating that the number of teachers trained in each year was “never more than 2,000,” but that this number represented “only a small proportion of ... the total number of teachers ... using it” (E-PB2). He cautioned however, “we also need to ask the question, [even] if they had the training, would they also have used the program in a way that we recommended” (E-PB2).

In addition, as captured by the *researcher Robert Foster*, who is pragmatically interested in what happens in the classroom, teachers had previously gained knowledge about the teaching of reading from the professional training that had accompanied the former National Literacy Strategy:

Every school has a literacy coordinator, and in pretty well every local authority the literacy coordinators will have gone to regional local meetings about the [NLS] Strategy, in which someone from the Strategy or associated with the development or dispersal,

dissemination effort would be presenting. So, a heck of a lot of teachers would have had access to it, but there's also DVDs that people can play, there's online resources. (E-R3)

Robert felt that, “My government has got pretty good resources for teachers out there and I've been very impressed at some of the things that I've found” (E-R3). Comparing this situation to twenty years ago, he explained how he had interviewed “exemplary” teachers in Scotland, “all were experienced and well-organized” who, he found, could well describe how they taught. However, when they were asked, “Can you talk to me about how what you do enables a child to learn to read?” he found that “they were very, very poorly informed in that area, and they actually ... said well I don't know, that's what I do and it kind of clicks” (E-R3).

Robert believes that in comparison to the Scottish teachers of 20 years ago, teachers in England now “are much better informed” and would “have a much better answer to that question” (E-R3). That the NLS professional training has “significantly impacted the teaching of reading for the better”(E-R3). He later went on to add that current comparisons between students in England and Scotland showed that the English students were now reading at a better level than their Scottish peers.

This train of events in England is a lived case of the tenuous acceptance of research in the political process. A recent report from the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory in the US found that “policymakers and practitioners did not mention research evidence as often, nor discuss it as strongly, as other sources of information” (Nelson, Leffler, & Hansen, 2009, p. 1). This study of policy makers and practitioners concluded that both of these stakeholders held that “political perspectives, public sentiment, potential legal pitfalls, economic considerations, pressure from the media, and the welfare of individuals all take precedence over research evidence in influencing decisions” (Nelson et al., 2009, p. 2).

Supporting this view indeed, the Rose Report's findings (Rose, 2006) were not primarily based on research. Indeed they appeared to owe much to the pragmatic guidance of its namesake author, Sir Jim Rose, who had been grounded in classroom practice through his years as one of HMI for Schools and later, the more feared Ofsted. He was handed a generous remit by the Parliamentary Select Committee. It included the freedom of a 'named' review regarding its shape and findings, with the subtle political finesse that 'only his head would roll' should they prove politically untenable. This was significantly coupled with the injunction to determine which is the better method to teach beginning reading – analytic or synthetic phonics? He stepped up to the plate and found for synthetic phonics. The rest, as they say, is history.

In the US. In 1985, twenty years before Rose was asked to investigate this matter, the U.S. Department of Education released a report prepared by the Commission on Reading entitled *Becoming a Nation of Readers*. It concluded, based on the work of Chall (1967) and Bond and Dyskstra (1967), that classroom research showed children who are taught phonics get off to a better start in learning to read than children who are not taught phonics.

Boulton (2004), co-producer and creator of the *Children of the Code* interview series, described how crucial Sweet's role was in "crafting language for NCLB, and how he had influenced "how reading is thought about and taught in the United States" (para 1). As Sweet shared during his interview with Boulton (2004):

I joined the Committee on Education in the Workforce and about two weeks after I got there we had the opportunity to write legislation which became the Reading Excellence Act. That was really where we defined scientifically based research for the first time and was sort of the initial beginnings of what the Federal Government now does through

Reading First and Early Reading First in providing funds for evidence based instruction.
(Boulton, 2004, interview with Robert Sweet)

Sweet (1989), in his earlier writings, sixteen years before the *Rose Report*, referenced the *Nation of Readers* report (1985), which stated, “the issue is no longer, as it was several decades ago, whether children should be taught phonics. The issues now are specific ones of just how it should be done” (Becoming a Nation of Readers, 1985, as quoted in Sweet, 1989, p.7).

This observation was echoed in 1998 in the federally-funded report *How to Prevent Reading Failure in Young Children* (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). The authors concluded:

In our view, then, the findings from a wide array of sources ... converge on the conclusion that attention to small units in early reading instruction is helpful for all children, harmful for none, and crucial for some ... in light of this convergence, it is perhaps puzzling that there remains any conflict about methods for teaching initial reading. (Snow et al., 1998, p. 77)

Thus, at the time that England was rolling out its balanced approach to the teaching of reading, the National Literacy Strategy, in 1998, US government-funded research and a future influential policy maker were many steps further ahead of the English educational establishment in publicly identifying and seeking to procure an early systematic phonic approach to reading.

The Influence of Whole Language. Teachers in the US in the late 1990’s were still teaching using the Whole Language approach to reading (Moats, 2007). Niche *publisher Georgina Schultz* pointed out that at this time, and later, “You have states that very much believe in Whole Language and you have states that don’t necessarily believe in Whole Language” (US-PB1). She discussed how the “philosophical bent” of Whole Language impeded districts’ and schools’ acceptance of Reading First programs as late as 2002. She explained the states “would

not go with the ones [reading programs] that had the most evidence of effectiveness, but rather with those that were aligned politically with or philosophically with their belief system” and so “schools couldn’t get their Reading First grants approved by the state ... they couldn’t get their grant approved because the state process of education believed in Whole Language” (US-PB1).

To further illustrate this *Georgina* shared a story recently told to her by a teacher who had been using a Direct Instruction approach (synthetic phonics) with her students when:

someone from the central office came in and saw her teaching her special needs children with Direct Instruction and they were reading fairly near to grade level, and the person asked why she was using that program. She said, ‘Because it works for my kids.’ They wanted to know where her guided reading was and she said, ‘That does not work for my kids.’ They removed the curriculum from her hands during instruction and threw it in the garbage ... in front of the kids. She was told she was not to use that stuff to teach the children. (US-PB1)

And as *Georgina* further commented, this was at a time when this “very large district [on the east coast] only [had] 14% of the eighth graders ... proficient at reading, and this is a district that went Whole Language completely” (US-PB1).

In England, Whole Language also continued to hold sway at this period, but less so among teachers in schools than at the teacher training college level. Uncannily, and echoing *Georgina*’s story in the US classroom, the *researcher Julian Straley* shared that he knows “several influential teacher trainers who hate the whole idea” of synthetic phonics (E-R1). One said to her student teachers, “We are obliged to tell you about phonics. Here is the report on it. That is all I’m going to say,” and then continued with her own lecture (E-R1). *Julian* hoped this

“horror story” was an isolated example, for otherwise he felt it would constitute “a dereliction of professional duty” (E-R1).

However this story apart, teachers in England, the beneficiaries of extensive government-sponsored professional development, and products of Colleges of Education more subject to government regulation (Ellis, 2007), were far more knowledgeable about synthetic phonics than their American counterparts.

Professional Development Need. Indeed in the US, research-based and government-funded reports, *Beginning to Read* (Adams, 1990), *Preventing Reading Failures* (Snow et al., 1998) and the NRP (2000a), proved to be in contrast to what was being taught in schools.

Researcher Scott Malm, a proponent of early intervention for struggling readers, discussing the efficacy of a literacy coach in his state who currently provides professional development to kindergarten teachers, explained how many teachers in the US are minimally trained to teach reading. The literacy coach found, “The vast majority of kindergarten teachers have never heard of phonemic awareness, nor do they think that giving children pencils and allowing them to write is developmentally appropriate” (US-R2). *Scott* said by “changing that mindset,” not by introducing workbooks “but into a reading-writing curriculum, you can dramatically impact the number of kids who are having difficulty in first grade” (US-R2). In fact, bearing out this analysis, in the county in which the literacy coach operates “both the retention rate and the referrals to special education have been more than cut in half ... simply by the provision of high quality training for kindergarten teachers” (US-R2).

Scott explains that the amount of training given by his and other universities in his state is limited to one two-credit semester course. He goes on to add three further restrictions to the scope of this course. One, this is “in a graduate program where they come out with a Master’s

degree and an initial certification”; secondly, “it’s not K-2 reading, it’s reading K-6”; and lastly, “it’s an NCATE-approved and state-approved program” (US-R2). Commenting on the quality of such a course he quipped, “They cover a lot of ground very fast and very shallowly” (US-R2).

He concludes, “My argument has been that we turn out the vast majority of our teachers who don’t know squat about teaching our kids to read” (US-R2). He feels that many professors feel powerless to change this situation for as “a professorial team we have virtually no input. The state tells us exactly which courses the students have to take.” *Scott* felt the poor standard of teacher education in the US where, in his experience, bachelor-level teachers can graduate without having taken even one course in reading, has led to the poor quality, misinformed teaching of reading in the early years in his state, and likely in much of the US, too.

The National Reading Panel. *The Preventing Reading Failures in Young Children* (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998) report with its support for systematic phonics, though out of step with teaching practice in the classroom at that time, did set the stage for the National Reading Panel that was to follow. As the Panel (NRP, 2000a) gathered to design the meta-analysis, they made two crucial decisions. First, only to consider studies that had adopted an “experimental or quasi-experimental design with a control group” and secondly, had appeared “in a refereed journal”, that is had been through the peer-review process necessary to be published in recognized professional journals (Ehri et al., 2001, p. 5). The NRP was to conclude that teaching phonics systematically was better than incidentally or not at all; that “the effects of systematic early phonics instruction were significant and substantial in kindergarten and the 1st grade,” was beneficial for spelling; and for “children of low socio economic status” (NRP, 2000a, p. 9). But added the caveat that it would be necessary to determine “objectively” how systematic phonics instruction “can be optimally incorporated” into “complete and balanced programs of reading instruction” (NRP, 2000b, pp. 2-137).

Research, Policy and Practice

One Policy Maker's View. *Policy maker Matthew Forth* speaking of the influence of the NRP from a policy maker's point of view, discusses the importance of the Panel's credibility. "I think their conclusions were valid" as they "were backed by many, many other such studies that have gone on way, way before" (US-PM1). He compared their conclusions with earlier research, such as that of Mitford Matthews, who in the late 1950's had "chronicled" past studies from the 1930's forward; the work of Chall (1967, 2000); and:

the studies from the early 1960's at Haskin's Laboratories up at Yale University [of] 40,000, and probably even higher now, students who have gone through these quantitative tests under the auspices of the National Institutes of Child Health and Human Development. (US-PM1)

He concluded, "I really do not believe there is any question about what we know about how to teach a person to read ... I don't really believe that we need to continue to beat this around" (US-PM1).

Matthew points out the Haskin research studies included the research conducted by such well-known researchers as Vellutino and Fletcher. He explained how these had "resonated" with him, and that they:

are just a few of the many excellent researchers who were involved in the decades long clinical trials of students learning to read that demonstrated beyond any reasonable doubt the efficacy of the 'gold standard' and the application of the 'essential components of Reading Instruction' as represented in the Reading First law. (US-PM1)

Besides the work of Vellutino and Scanlon (Vellutino, 1991), and Fletcher and Mathes in Texas, *Matthew* discussed, variously, "Canadian researcher" Stanovich (1986); the Reading

Excellence Act; the NRP report; Reading First; the legal language in IDEA; and *Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning about Print* (Adams, 1990), a major study released by the Center for the Study of Reading at the University of Illinois, and authored by Adams. In the latter, Adams (1990) had concluded, foreshadowing the conclusions of *Preventing Reading Failures* that was to follow in 1998, that all children would benefit from, and many children require, systematic, direct instruction in the elements of the alphabetic code.

Matthew stressed it was important to note that these later findings which had begun “to come out in the early 1990’s and up through today, were based upon the consistency of the research from the early 1960’s” (US-PM1). He felt such research went on unaffected by government change because in the world of Health and Human Services, NICHD “was a very, very small cog in a very large engine”. He added:

I think to some degree and that’s why the research is valid, to me ... they [NICHD] just simply funded universities all over the country, and that work produced really very excellent research in a whole range of topic areas that were all helpful in understanding what the cognitive process is, and what you can do to actually make a difference in the lives of kids, which is why it was done. (US-PM1)

Matthew concluded, “in sum, we had a body of knowledge that I felt was validated, that I concluded was a lot of common sense” (US-PM1). His main concern as a policy maker was that literacy was deteriorating in the US, such that the 1980’s figure of “23 million ... were unable to read at grade level” is “now ... much higher than that” (US-PM1). According to *Matthew*, money had been distributed to schools through Title One funds “in large measure” to address this situation, and “designed to support the improvement in reading instruction and map instruction for students who were two grades or more below grade level” (US-PM1). However, he found

“there was very little direction or very little emphasis on methodology at that point [in Title One], and that it was more a block grant and schools did whatever they wanted to” and, worryingly, found Title One funding was not impacting reading levels (US-PM1).

Around this time he was introduced to the work of the RRF of New York, and to Brunner who worked in the Idaho State Department of Education in the Title One program and was “a member of the RRF” (US-PM1). Brunner sent him “reams” of material. “I ended up calling them ‘Brunner Bundles’... because there was *so* much information to read” (US-PM1). It was this material that included the research work being conducted under the NICHD at major universities around the country, such that:

the combination of becoming aware of programs at the federal level that were having influence on reading instruction, and then finding that during the 1980’s that the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development is doing very important work. (US-PM1)

led him to seek out ways to spread this knowledge.

Matthew forged a working relationship with Brunner, who joined the administration, and “helped write the scope of work for *Becoming a Nation of Readers*”; and later “a study on why 85% of juvenile delinquents cannot read ... *Retarding America: The Imprisonment of Potential*”; and was instrumental in initiating “the study that Marilyn Jager Adams did --- *Learning to Read: Thinking and Learning about Print*” (US-PM1).

Given these antecedents to this seminal report, it is little wonder that Strickland and Cullinan, two balanced reading proponents and prominent members of the International Reading Association, were moved to write a rebuttal that was included at the end of the original edition (Adams, 1990).

Matthew Forth it must be noted does not believe he is typical of policy makers in the extent to which he read and used research in his policy making years. He admits, “I’m probably unique,” and pointed out how “unrealistic” it is for policy makers at any level “to take the time, have the interest ... to go into this, with the kind of depth that I have or that others in the research field do” (US-PM1).

One Researcher’s View. It is interesting to note that *Matthew Forth*, in favor of a phonological approach to beginning reading, quoted the same researchers who were championed by researcher *Scott Malm*. Interesting, in that *Scott* on most other occasions takes the same research as viewed positively by *Matthew* ... and rejects it.

Scott is a proponent of a more balanced approach to reading. He has recently been espoused (mystifyingly to him) by Whole Language advocates, whom he believes misguidedly “went wrong by not focusing enough on teaching those specific elements [of phonological awareness] early on” (US-R2). However, he believes he attracted their attention because he had been “critical of the instructional plans that were foisted on the populations in Texas and California, which then became national and federal policy” (US-R2). That went on in fact to become the Reading First component of the NCLB Act (2002). The law *Matthew* was so closely involved in bringing to fruition.

However, *Scott* quoting the same research as *Matthew*, drew out another aspect of it. He shared that the NCLB goal that all students will be reading at grade level by 2014, was based on research:

Congress has said ... that 98% of your kids will be reading on level in 2014 ... I think they based the 98% from ... the work that Frank Vellutino and Donna Scanlon have been doing, NICHD, or Mathes and Fletcher down in Texas. (US-R2)

But then, in support of his view of how early reading should be taught, he added:

What's interesting to me is that it doesn't matter whether they're doing *Reading Recovery* or whether their doing Vellutino and Scanlon's interactive strategies approach, or whether they're doing the Mathes and Fletcher systematic phonics instruction - no matter what it is – when you provide struggling kindergarten, first grade, and second kids with intensive expert instruction in anything – almost any framework – virtually everyone learns to read .(US-R2)

However, he laments, 'If you do what most schools do – and that's don't provide any instruction in kindergarten?' (US-R2). Here *Scott* paused significantly, for he strongly supports the need for such intervention for struggling readers.

He then pointed to the positive results achieved in the Vellutino and Fletcher studies as demonstrating the power of coupling early identification with the efficacious provision of expert, small group intervention for struggling kindergarten and first grade early readers. Scott stated, "As Vellutino has said all you need to know is how many letters they know on the first day of kindergarten" (Vellutino, 1991; Vellutino, Scanlon, & Zhang, 2008), then one needs to provide "20 or 30 minute sessions of expert instruction" two or three time a week (US-R2).

Scott does not therefore support a rigorous phonological start to beginning reading, as based in the meta-analysis of the NRP. While believing it is a necessary and early component of teaching young children to read, he disputes its place as a primary need, and further disputes its need to be intensive. As he states, he has "no particular problems with what the National Reading Panel found," indeed he concurs with their findings regarding phonemic awareness and "decoding skills," declaring twice, "I think we know how to do that" (US-R2). However, he expressed concern that the Panel had contributed to a narrowing of understanding about how to

teach reading, “by deciding only to look at experimental studies, and by the relatively limited areas of reading they actually looked at” (US-R2).

Scott believes it is the knowledgeable teacher who has “the scope and sequence in her head” who makes the difference. Mentioning research about children who succeed in kindergarten, he states:

I think if people actually looked at the data they would see that those kids are confined to a handful of very good kindergarten teachers, who don’t teach whole class letter of the week instruction, but actually provide lots of opportunities for those kids to learn what they need. (US-R2)

However, the latter comment is somewhat vague compared to *researcher Beatrice Frable’s* more concrete analysis of what is needed at beginning reading level, and the ease with which it can be provided. *Beatrice*, who has written widely about beginning reading, stated it “should make you feel good” that:

pretty much we have been able to teach people how to sound words out, and that’s been true over the centuries, over populations, over languages, and over children’s background variables, including their intellectual ability. One can do that. (US-R1)

It was this approach to reading that was affirmed by the meta-analysis of the NRP (2000a).

National Reading Panel – The Place of Evidence-Based Research

Both the US with Reading First (2002) and England with the Rose Report (2006) were to follow the research trail blazed by the NRP (2000a). The NRP was to prove a significant government initiative, whose findings “reflect the synthesis of hundreds of high quality studies, [which] remain the best evidence available about how to teach reading effectively to young children” (Herlihy, Kemple, Bloom, Zhu, & Berlin, 2009). *Researcher Beatrice Frable*

concurred with this view, “the basic idea of beginning reading has been richly researched” stating further that the NRP confirmed this with its “synthesis of hundreds of high quality studies ... the best evidence available about how to teach reading effectively to young children” (US-R1). However, in the view of *researcher Scott Malm*, the evidence-based research stipulated as a standard for inclusion in the NRP (2000a), had been too limited in scope:

What seemed to me the major deficit was both the National Reading Panel Report and the federal policy basically followed the NICHD model, which was good reading is [defined as] accurate word pronunciation, and fast word pronunciation, and if you looked at the NICHD research at all, often it’s those little things that are measured, and they call it ‘reading achievement’. (US-R2)

Researcher Peter Schuman, though a member of the NRP who supports the need for phonics, also sets it in a broader pedagogical context:

Phonics is just one, among many factors, and we need more sophisticated responses to kids learning needs, than something so narrow. Phonics should be part of those more ambitious efforts ... since phonics, within a comprehensive program of reading instruction, can make a real difference. (US-R3)

Peter also concurs with *Scott* that the research net cast by the NRP could have been wider. However, in his case he wishes the remit had included writing instruction. As a member of the NRP though, *Peter Schuman* believes the strength of the Panel lay in its positive effect on pedagogy in the classroom. He stated, “It has clearly gotten people to change their phonics instruction, at least in those [Reading First] schools” (US-R2). But, he remains concerned that “just changing the phonics piece of it isn’t going to be sufficient” (Us-R2). He reiterated:

I'm going to go right back to the National Reading Panel. All of those five things [phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension] need to be done, and there are some other things that probably need to be done too, that weren't in that report. (US-R2)

Contributing to this narrowing of understanding, *Scott Malm* echoing a concern voiced by others, is that the findings in the original "telephone-sized" report were not so clearly stated in "the plain language summary," *Put Reading First*, later released by the National Reading Institute for Literacy. It did not, in his view, "reflect what the Panel actually found" (US-R2). However, his was a lone voice in the interviews as researchers and policy makers alike reflected positively on the work of the NRP.

Researcher Peter Schuman, pointed out that its conclusions were used by policy makers to support the actions taken in Reading First, which was targeted to children of low SES: instead of the politicians saying, "We're going to tell you what to do" what they said is, "You have to follow these research studies." So, since [the Panel] had found that phonics instruction made a difference, that's why Reading First could say you have to teach phonics at these grade levels. It wasn't the federal government saying that, it was the National Reading Panel. (US-R3)

The place of research in policy deliberations was also captured by *civil servant Donna Peters* from the Department of Education, "Our job is to know as much about education research as we can" and though "none of us are researchers, [we] keep track of all the new research that's coming out [and] attend conferences so we know what the big studies are ... and in turn we pass that information along to our grantees." As the department consults on Bills before Congress, "we certainly would use any knowledge of research that we have to comment on those bills"

with a “lot of it being federally-funded research” but cautions “now that said of course, these bills go through so many people that whether that has an impact?” As an example *Donna* discussed two recent bills that relied on such research, “One is the National Early Literacy Panel and ... the other is ... from the National Academy of Sciences ... a study of early childhood assessment” (US-PM2).

At this juncture however, as Reading First enactment was looming in 2002, and four years and more before the Rose Report was to be published, two factors converged to derail the forward progress of systematic phonics in early reading pedagogy in the US. Firstly, there were only three reading programs in the US equipped to provide this systematic approach to phonics that the NRP had recommended across the K to 3 grade levels – *Success for All*, *Reading Mastery* and *Open Court*. Secondly, the predominant approach to beginning reading in the US was balanced reading, an approach that included phonics, but not necessarily either systematic or early, in the teaching of reading.

The Potential Marginalization of Stakeholders

As each Government gradually sought greater control from the center, either through the use of political mandates (mainly in England) or coercion and rewards (usually in the US), researchers and policy makers have reacted in different ways.

Some researchers became disillusioned and marginalized by the shape, effects and pace of policy decisions. *Norman Williams* a researcher in England who had resisted the imposition of synthetic phonics, despairingly said:

Also, this is quite apart from the fact that phonics is only one small but important piece in the teaching of reading. He [Rose] had very little to say, for example, about

comprehension or vocabulary. But all of that is immaterial, the fact was that he just didn't survey the research evidence properly. (E-R2)

And across the Atlantic, *Scott Malm* similarly concurred, "Well, the National Reading Panel contributed to the problem by deciding only to look at experimental studies, and by the relatively limited areas of reading they actually" considered (US-R3).

Others, alternatively, have chosen to become more directly involved in bringing research to bear on policy decisions made, and comment on the research-base for policy decisions made.

American researcher Peter Schuman, involved in US national panels, shared their findings:

If you turn to the research, these studies, these various national panels have done very large, thorough, and I believe well-done analyses of the existing research. What you find is, quite consistently, kids do better, on a whole bunch of measures if they're taught phonics for awhile in their early years. If they are taught how to decode, if they are taught the relationship between letters and sounds and spelling patterns and pronunciations kids make faster progress. (US-R2)

English researcher Robert Foster, knowledgeable about the literacy scene in the US as well as his native England, said that as he has become older, "I'm much more sympathetic towards some of the challenges that people in that area face and much more sympathetic towards people who try to build bridges" (E-R3).

The Links Between Research, Policy and Practitioners

Moss (2007), who has researched the links between research and literacy policy in England, setting this within the realm of policy process mechanisms in general, discusses the potential for disconnect between centralized policy initiatives, researchers, and practitioners. Moss (2007) warns how literacy policy, driven by "fast analysis and response" from the center,

puts researchers “at the periphery” of the action, ‘unable to intervene as policy switches from incorporating one set of ideas to another’ (p. 21). She also points out the pace of policy, determined by the glare of the spotlight, can lead to a feeling of being “locked out” among those involved in the slower-paced world of research (Moss, 2009, p. 168). Moss believes that allowing practitioners time through learning communities within schools “to properly evaluate which potential solution might meet their [local] needs” would “through dialogue with the centre contribute significantly to their development over the longer term” (Moss, 2005, p. 9).

The relationship between research and literacy policy is thus revealed to be one-sided. Research it appears is just one element of a complex set of interacting factors that influence policy makers as they make (and unmake) policy. Moss (2005) concluded that in “building” the new Primary Literacy Strategy (1997 to 2003) the government at “the center” had “proved exceptionally resourceful, flexible and innovative in [its] response to the range of challenges ... faced”, and in its “developing analysis of the range of information it collects” (p. 8).

Moss (2007) further develops this theme of top down versus grassroots control, warning the inherent danger in political “fast analysis and response” (p. 8) is its potential to alienate those furthest from the center - teachers and their local administrators. This potential for alienation is shared by researchers, who were “generally pessimistic about the possibility of research shaping policy,” believing that policy decisions were based on “the policy makers’ own ideological commitments or priorities” (Moss, 2007, p.19-20). This, it is believed, determines how they select from among “the often complex research literature,” with a potential for “distorting effects” (Moss, 2007, p. 20).

Moss (2007) contrasts this with policy makers’ own view that research is useful in supporting “existing policy directions or to warn of potential dangers ahead,” but that

realistically this must “be balanced against what is strategically and politically possible” (p. 20). For researchers this often means that research used in policy can become “transformed in the process as it adapted to new purposes and contexts of application” (Moss, 2007, p. 20).

Summary of Policy and Research

These travails of literacy policy were playing out against a backcloth of pooled research between the US and England. In the early years of the twenty-first century, a few years after the introduction of the balanced approach to reading of National Literacy Strategy in England, reading levels had clearly stalled. Concerned by this state of affairs England, with the Select Committee’s ordering of the Rose Report in 2003, was only just tentatively setting foot on the path blazed by Reading First in the US. However, as reported by the interviewees, Reading First, as envisaged by its creators in line with the findings of the NRP (2000a), was to be derailed by a lack of choice in publishing materials; a lack of knowledge among practitioners still more philosophically attuned to Whole Language; administrative errors in its implementation; allegations of financial improprieties; and unfavorably reported evaluation results.

Thus, while the English government, with its vehicle of the Rose Report, went on to mandate synthetic phonics for its beginner readers, Reading First lost its funding and the US continued with a balanced reading approach to teaching beginning reading.

The push-pull of researchers and policy makers is a significant part of the story of literacy policy over the last thirty years. The researchers have increasingly sought a place at the table, though some have felt marginalized in that process; policy makers have looked to research both for guidance, for an answer to the basic question of how to raise literacy levels, and as a justification for policies (Moss, 2009). This interplay has had important ramifications for the

publishers in each nation, who convert the outcomes of this complex state of affairs into commercially viable products that are used by the teachers and students of each nation.

Stakeholders' Personal Views

At some point in this discussion of factors in the desire to improve reading, it is necessary to ponder the personal stories shared by interviewees about their own children, or those of friends or family members who, despite being bright, lively and intelligent, had problems with learning to read. A problem often compounded or highlighted by the presence of a sibling, older or younger, who had learned to read with ease. The following captures the views shared by several other interviewees:

My extraordinarily gifted kid learned to read because I read Dr. Seuss to her. She never had to be taught phonics even when she got to school. She just could decode. ... Even for me as a teacher, it's very bizarre. My other child, who is very talented, artsy, music-y ... needed this and unfortunately didn't get enough of it in school, so we still struggled. We had to do a lot of support at home. If I wasn't able to provide that support at home, he would have been like so many other kids who just fell through the cracks, or just ended up in special ed. So, do all kids need it? I would say err on the side of caution. (US-PB1)

Such experiences appeared to give such people pause. There was a shared concern that maybe something more could have been done at the beginning of such children's reading development to help them set foot on the right path.

Lessons from Brain Research

The research linking changes that occur in the structure of the brain in relation to reading was seldom raised by interviewees, but it has served to highlight the possibility of a connection between the structure of language and the need for a phonological beginning in early reading.

English policy maker, David Walker, discussing the work of Goswami, a developmental neurologist from Cambridge University and that of the American researcher Wolf, felt such work is “affirming where we’ve come from on phonic work”(E-PM1). However he cautions, “at the moment ...we’ve not drawn the parallels or ... looked at the synergies that can be gained” further adding “we ought to be doing far more to put that right” (E-PM1). His view had some resonance with a policy maker in America, *Matthew Frable*, who shared that cognitive research had led him to draw the conclusion:

that we did have knowledge of how kids learn to read and how it affected their ... mental process ... the affect on the brain ... the brain research that came later [was therefore] ... in my opinion ... building on years of practical, common sense instruction. They were coming up with conclusions, which, in my judgment, were important because it no longer was a matter of opinion anymore, but rather a matter of fact, that based upon the kind of studies that have been done, we saw evidence that there was significant and measurable improvement that would take place if these principles were applied in the classroom.

(US-PM1)

Brain research and its effect were not discussed by most interviewees, but one negative one does need to be aired. *Researcher Scott Malm* denied its validity, saying, “you’ll have to pardon my skepticism, but I think the brain research that we have today is ... the equivalent of a polarized snapshot of a millisecond of brain activity of a kid in a tube” (US-R2). He believes that brain research, which depends on “exactly how quickly the brain works and how quickly the camera takes the picture,” means “you can get any kind of reading that you might want”(US-R2). Then he feels it is falsely used “to backup the type of teaching that, if you do it, you’ll end up with a bunch of dyslexics,” referring to the phonetic approach suggested by Shaywitz’s (2003)

studies (US-R2). In his view “I’ve been doing this for 40 years and I’ve never met a dyslexic, or to put it another way, I’ve never met a child that we couldn’t teach to read” (US-R2).

As *Scott* indicates, brain research is in its infancy. However *English policy maker David Walker* believes it is important that “synergies” be sought, as these would be helpful to the research community, and to parents who struggle to help the child who has reading difficulties.

The Role of Publishing Companies

Through the centuries publishers and their sales-force have traditionally been the means of bringing the latest pedagogy to the classroom (Rodgers, 1995a, 1995b, 1995c). However, in more modern times newer technologies than print have influenced the dissemination of such information, and the advent of large company holdings has diminished the number of publishing houses in the reading market over the last twenty or more years. In both countries, bigger publishers have bought smaller publishers, and were then gobbled up by still larger companies.

American publisher Bill Aguirre attempted to explain the intricacies of this latter phenomenon. “Rigby was part of Harcourt, so it’s now part of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt”, and that “MacMillan is part of McGraw-Hill” who had also “bought Open Court”(US-PB4). Eventually he concluded, “so the main people are Houghton-Mifflin, Pearson, and McGraw Hill” (US-PB4). In England a similar scenario was captured by publisher *Evan Smith*, who described how “Dorling Kindersley, [who had offered to purchase his company, was] subsequently ... bought out by Pearson” which, adding an interesting twist, “amalgamated ... with Penguin” (E-PB2).

Following common business practice, the names of the original houses are often retained, such that the layman may believe the original companies with their independent array of

publishing choices, is still in existence. However, and conversely, fewer publishers has resulted in a narrowing of choice in instructional materials for consumers.

Publishing in England. Looking back over her career, which began around the time of the implementation of the National Literacy Strategy in 1998, *publisher Sally Ney* commented with some nostalgia, “we look back on it as happy days” (E-PB1). Indeed, a new day was dawning for British publishers with this novel “fantastic” and “hugely competitive” phenomenon, which involved “a huge curriculum change in schools ... [for which] you need a whole new set of resources [and] which was funded by the government” (E-PB1). As she added, with her own company being one such, “the companies that got it right did extremely well in those few years with the introduction of the Strategy” (E-PB1).

Business Opportunities. This was a new opportunity for English publishers for, unlike the cyclical textbook adoptions in the US, British schools had never previously sought to change or update their curricula on any regular basis. *Don Missele, a retired American publisher* who had worked with schools in England as well as the States, points to the reverse being true, sharing that “one of the enormous, the important differences in education ... from a publisher’s perspective, is that the British schools to my view were terrifically under-funded for text materials and teaching materials in comparison with the US” (US-PB3). He went on to add, “I suspect in many cases the British viewed our expenditures as extravagant” (US-PB3).

Sally affirms that the “bulk of our marketing is to individual schools,” but adds that as time has moved on “we increasingly now talk to local authorities” through “a team of people whose job it is ... to talk to local authority advisors,” (E-PB1) to garner their support for when the publishers approach individual schools. Maybe referring to the state adoptions in the US, she felt that “somewhere down the line the idea of adoptions at the local authority level” is commercially

appealing, but added it is “quite new ... it doesn’t happen quite often, but obviously, it’s great if we can do it!” (E-PB1).

Referring back to the introduction of the National Strategy, *Sally Ney* explained how important it was to dialogue with people who are influentially placed in government or literacy circles. Referring to their own research efforts she said, “We [her publishing company] were reasonably close to the people involved in the National Strategy, so we knew it was coming and we knew what the schools were going to be expected to do, but we also did a lot of [our own] research” (E-PB2). Adding that her company “did a lot of going out and talking to the market schools [potential customers], such as focus groups, questionnaires, everything really to get a sense of how they would feel about it, and what they thought they would need in order to implement it” (E-PB2).

Also, capitalizing on her position as a member of the Educational Publishing Company (EPC) in which capacity she attended meetings with Jim Rose, *Sally* felt her publishers were well-positioned to gauge what was happening in government literacy policy. The EPC had “a reasonably good relationship with Jim Rose ... over the years,” such that during the evidential hearings for the Rose Report, the group was included in the outreach to hear the views of all stakeholders. However, though they were well-received by Rose at this time, she cannily commented, “but he was a shrewd man and a very clever man” who, while doing “a very good job, I think, of meeting with people across the spectrum” had probably been “playing his cards close to his chest,” while giving the impression to those who met with him “that he agreed with their point of view” (E-PB1).

As well as doing market research among teachers and following literacy policy closely, her publishers were also watching the ongoing research in Clackmannanshire in Scotland. In

advance of the conversations that took place with Rose during hearings, *Sally's* publishers had been “talking to Joyce Watson and Rhona Johnston who were the main researchers behind it [the Clackmannanshire study] ... about what has worked in that research for them and particularly about the resources that they had put together in order to do that research,” with a view to buying and “publishing it and bringing it to a wider market”(E-PB1). Following the meetings with Rose, the publishers moved quickly “to formalize that relationship with them [Johnson and Watson]” and “take their resource, *Fast Phonics First* ... and reworked it,” as they had “obviously produced it as researchers and we produced it as professional publishers,” such that the timing was right and “we were ready to have that ready to take to market when the Rose Report was published” (E-PB1).

Theirs was not the only publishing house to court creators of synthetic phonics programs. Another well known program in England at the time was *Read Write Inc* (Miskin, 2005). Developed independently by Miskin, she self-published her program, basically “trying to do everything ... as well as providing training ... which of course is very difficult” explained *Evan Smith*, another publisher who knows her well. So, she sold the rights to her program to the OUP, in order to concentrate on the professional training, “which she does independently of OUP” (E-PB2).

However, *Evan* believes that OUP are not handling or promoting *Read Write Inc* as it is intended to be used, positioning it in “the middle of their catalogue, whereas by rights” as a beginning reading program “it should be at the start”(E-PB2). *Evan* recognizes that part of the problem for OUP, a commercial problem, is they continue to publish the reading material known as *Oxford Reading Tree* (OUP, 2009), which is their main source of income. Thus “an anomaly arises... [which] they recognize,” according to *Evan*, that the books mainly published by OUP are

“largely based on increasing memorization of words and doesn’t have any phonic component to it” (E-PB2). It appears from these observations that the OUP is more concerned with form than substance.

Publishing and Business Imperatives. Policy maker Marie Fischer, who has been closely involved with the promotion of synthetic phonic programs in England believes publishers are driven largely by commercial interests to “sell loads of books,” and as such will follow “the latest fad or philosophy” (E-PM3). In her view, “Publishers need to rewrite material to make sales” (E-PM3). Reinforcing this point, she added:

I know some people, lovely people, involved in publishing, and the bottom line is that they still need to keep new books coming out, coming out, and coming out and they’ll still follow whatever is the latest incoming from government. (E-PM3)

As a case in point, she spoke of the fate of the same Miskin program in the hands of the OUP, and their rationalization of offering this and a *Reading Recovery*-based program in their reading materials, OUP:

seemed absolutely enraptured about being involved with this movement of getting synthetic phonics, [but] have since brought out Reading Books Project X, which they now claim is in-line with both the Rose recommendations and *Reading Recovery* - which is a contradiction in terms. (E-PM3)

Returning to her theme of the commercial forces at work in the publishing world, Marie concluded that the “establishment” supports *Reading Recovery* for it is “established through the Institute of Education, as far as I am aware, and is being supported by people with money and a lot of political clout,” so therefore she reasons “the published books need to be in line with *Reading Recovery*”(E-PM3). She points to how this in turn affects the teaching of reading,

“because of the need for new material, maybe that’s why teaching methods will be recyclable” (E-PM3).

Realistically, it may well be that commercial interests dominate, but *publisher Sally Ney* explained how commercial needs can mesh with those raised by research. Referring to the implementation of synthetic phonics, she explained that when her company found out “because we consulted ... with the people who were putting *Letters and Sounds* together [that] the order of phonemes ... in *Letters and Sounds*”, the new government curriculum, was going to be slightly different from the sequence chosen by Watson and Johnson for *Fast Phonics First*” (E-PB1) they consulted with the original researchers. Watson and Johnson said that “there were several sensible orders that you could follow and it was more about being systematic within those various ways where you can do it” so “they were quite happy for us to tweak the order to match *Letters and Sounds* at that point” (E-PB1). She explained that therefore “we were able to get the timing right with *Fast Phonics First* using the same order of phonemes as *Letters and Sounds*” (E-PB1). Sally added, “None of our competitors have chosen or been able to do that” (E-PB1).

The Effect of Government Control. The advent of government into publishing has given the English publishing companies cause for complaint. However, *Sally Ney* points to how it has brought publishers together with a common interest: one which overrides their commercial differences. As a case in point she referred to the government’s decision to publish the curriculum, *Letters and Sounds*, as part of “an ongoing battle really between educational publishers and the government. Over the last 10 years or so they’ve increasingly done their own publishing, and some of it has affected us quite badly” (E-PB1).

Publisher Evan Smith, part of a small but influential publishing house, sets the decision of the government to publish their own synthetic phonics program, when there were already

well-known and accepted programs in use in more than a third of the nation's classrooms, against a broader backcloth of government control:

I think we're in a very mature phase in terms of the political process ... at least at a local level that has been promoted in opposition to [other synthetic phonics programs] --- so schools have been told that they should use Letters and Sounds, that it's policy. They have been given training on it for free, they've been provided with the materials for free, and they've had the Ofsted inspectors coming around to see how they're doing. (E-PB2)

Evan concluded that this "has put huge pressure on [schools] to use the government's program" such that it is now "used very widely, and the proportion of schools [using other synthetic phonics programs] has slipped back" (E-PB2). This situation has arisen as the government has grappled with how best to implement the synthetic phonic mandate in its schools. Their path has been eased, *Evan* feels by the fact that "the understanding about synthetic phonics and the kind of difference that it can make is known and is uncontroversial; it's accepted" (E-PB2). But he pointed out the difficulty remains, "How do you implement [it]?" (E-PB2).

He asks should this be attempted "through government directive [as] with *Letters and Sounds*; ... [or] through delegating responsibility to teachers and providing them incentives to achieve?" (E-PB2). He feels, "the knowledge [of synthetic phonics] is there, but it's not being widely implemented" though "implementation is in broad terms increasing" (E-PB2). Asking, rhetorically, "How do you promote that [synthetic phonics pedagogy]?", he concludes that it is "largely a political debate, but it [teaching beginning reading] doesn't need more politics ... [or] more control necessarily" (E-PB2). He sees the answer as lying rather with the dissemination of information and delegation of pedagogical decisions to teachers. He adds, "and I would

encourage this, that [this is what] is needed” (E-PB2). However, he asserts the most fundamental of questions remains: has the government policy of producing and disseminating its own synthetic phonic program “raised standards in literacy?” (E-PB2).

Before exploring this issue, it is interesting to discuss the layers between the government and the child being taught to read. *Evan* believes the further a person is from the child, “the more muddled and complex the picture they have of the teaching of reading” (E-PB2). He named “curriculum advisors, teachers’ unions, and teacher trainers at colleges and universities” as “people who have set out to find vehicles to have their say and really to undermine this kind of teaching” of synthetic phonics (E-PB2). He believes education has become “highly politicized” and that this has “been allowed by the public” because culturally “it has rather expected government to do something” (E-PB2).

Evan feels it is the manner in which the government has chosen to exert control that has undermined synthetic phonics. That in effect, though politically there is “a willingness to use synthetic phonics ... nonetheless the background has been unsupportive” (E-PB2). Once again he points to the fact that “standards have not risen” (E-PB2). Surprisingly, given his previous listing above, *Evan* added it is counterproductive to pick out any of the above people for not understanding synthetic phonics, but rather that one should look at “where the controls should lie in the first case” (E-PB2). – that is, with the classroom teacher and the school. He added in his opinion therefore:

those remote from the school, the government, should not be specifying detail to the extent that it does, and even if they feel details should be specified, not necessarily to do it themselves. It may be better done privately and commercially through competing providers. (E-PB2)

Evan Smith believes reading levels have continued to stall since the introduction of the new *Letters and Sounds* program. However, others believe a change of testing procedure has made it difficult to compare the previous testing of children at the end of their third year of school with the first cohort of children who were taught using synthetic phonics, and who will be finishing their third year of schooling in July, 2010 (E-R1 and E-PB1). Indeed *policy maker David Walker* paints a somewhat rosier picture:

However, the Early Years Foundation profile does have to record children's progress on Letters and Sounds, and what they're showing over the last couple of years is remarkable progress ... It is teacher assessment based on some pretty sharp guidelines for Key Stage 1. (E-PM1)

At this time, however, the jury is still out on whether reading levels are still stalled.

Political Changes on the Horizon. All parties in England --- policy makers, researchers and publishers --- pointed to Spring, 2010 as a time when "there may well be a change of government that wants to do things very differently" (E-R1). In effect however, *policy maker David Walker* added:

I don't think there is going to be much of a u-turn if any, in pursuit of the Reading Review [Rose Report] recommendations ... There was pretty much cross-party support, I think, for strengthening the phonic component of the teaching reading, the beginner readers, of any age. (E-PM1)

Out of commercial interests publishers have begun to forge links with the Conservative Party. As *publisher Sally Ney* captured the situation, "We can see the writing on the wall ... we're now increasingly talking to the Conservatives" (E-PB1). She summed up the two parties support

of synthetic phonics by saying, “Labor are now very much behind the synthetic phonics approach and the Tories even more so. They’re pretty aligned on that now” (E-PB1).

Indeed the Conservative Manifesto (Conservatives, 2009) has strongly supported the continuation of synthetic phonics as the pedagogy for beginning readers. Should they come to power, English publishers are positioned to produce the synthetic phonic programs they have advocated. In fact if *Evan Smith* is correct and “they don’t have the same commitment to *Letters and Sounds*” maybe those “happy days” will come again for publishers in England (E-PB2).

During the discussion it became apparent that publishers have many differing stakeholders to satisfy as they undertake new publishing initiatives: government decisions regarding literacy policy; the researchers on their advisory board who help keep them informed about the latest research; their competitors actions; and ultimately the likelihood of acceptance or buy-in from the schools. However, they are staying actively informed of any impending literacy policy changes, and are positioning themselves to capitalize on them. They stand ready therefore to produce the new programs the renewed but differing synthetic phonics mandate of a newly-elected Conservative government may soon demand.

Publishing in the US. The commercial possibilities of selling to local authorities instead of to individual schools may seem like a dream to English publishers, but the reality as lived by those in the states can have nightmarish overtones.

Publishing Parameters. The *retired publisher Don Missele* outlined the process:

In American publishing we’d distinguish between open territories ... that’s where the district or the school may be making the decisions ... [and] adoption states, where they adopt on a statewide basis or they list four or five, two or three series and then the districts can choose. (US-PB2)

Researcher Beatrice Frable rounded out this picture by describing the far-reaching effect of this state approval process. Initially, it encompasses ‘thirty-five of the 50 states’ theoretically stating “all of these are good and you can choose ... and we’ll let you use state funds to buy anything on list” (US-R1). But, in reality, she points out this process is more restrictive: “What actually happens in some states, most notably California, is they offer and approve only one program, [or as in] the last round, they approved two.” However, even these two or so approved are then further restricted, she believes, by the effect of a human propensity to be influenced by “whatever is most popular, stays most popular” (US-R1). In *Beatrice’s* view, given these parameters, the producers of the big basal programs end up writing “the programs for nobody in particular” in their attempt to satisfy the varying needs of the different adoption states (US-R1).

Another *researcher, Scott Malm*, reminds us of the commercial and human ramifications of the big state adoptions (California, Texas and Florida) on publishers’ bottom line. For producing such basals is the commercial equivalent of putting all one’s eggs in one basket, and as Scott shared, “I remember there was a time in which the Scott Foresman Company’s, Texas Southwestern office didn’t meet its sales quota for the Texas adoption end, and 301 people were fired on one day. Every single person” (US-R2).

Scott points to another anomaly in this system, which he limits to “nineteen textbook adoption states,” as being below “the Mason Dixon line” with only a few places north of this with “district wide adoptions ... like Chicago and Detroit” (US-R2). He explained how strange this felt when he moved from the north to the south:

to Florida, it was mind-boggling that there they have county-wide school districts, as opposed to Albany County in New York where there are 13 different school districts. Everybody was using the same reading program, the same math program, the same

science program and so on, and I just thought what idiot came up with this solution. (US-R2)

Scott, an American researcher, like *Evan*, the English publisher, believes the decision about which reading programs should be used should lie with the teacher and schools. Given their marketing constraints, *Scott* believes it's not possible "for a commercial publisher to produce a program that will actually help teachers teach kids to read" (US-R2). That they may think:

They can produce programs that will make incompetent teachers feel comfortable in not teaching lots of kids to read, but as far as teaching all kids to read. I mean I shouldn't say I don't think they can, they could, they couldn't do it with the kind of profit margins they currently have. If a company did one, they would have to be willing to settle for smaller sales and lower profits, and they'd also have to have smarter sales reps. It's sort of like arguing, could American car companies produce cars that got better gas mileage? I don't think there's any question that they could ... but they haven't. (US-R2)

Another factor restricting choices for individual teachers, or indeed their schools and districts, is the dwindling number of publishing houses. Although, reading series have been bought and retained their original names, they are subject to change or to marketing decisions, which affect their dissemination to teachers. As *publisher Georgina Schultz* explains regarding *Open Court*, the program now owned by McGraw-Hill, it was then revised to bring it more in-line with what "Texas and California want in the programs" (US-PB1).

Publishing as a Commercial Enterprise. However, in defense of American publishing, *consultant Bill Aguirre* explains that publishing houses are businesses and as such their commercial decisions are subject to the same forces as companies in other industries. In fact he

believes the publishing woes experienced because of the big basal format in the US are now eclipsed by those they are grappling with given the different technologies newly available in this digital era. He believes the maxim ‘print is dead’ is slowly but relentlessly affecting textbook publishing. *Bill* says the “big issues facing publishers” (US-PB3):

now go way beyond the challenge of adapting to pedagogical shifts. That’s almost a small problem in the overall context of a marketplace and a business model that is changing very rapidly. The basal major textbook model that major publishers have been following for a long time is becoming less viable. The impact of technology is changing the business so dramatically that I think the biggest problems publishers have right now is trying to figure out how to reshape their businesses and their business models to work in the shifting technological environment, and that’s really a bigger issue now than the pedagogical questions. (US-PB3)

However, this volatile situation runs parallel to the phenomenon of slow incremental change in education. As captured in the words of *retired publisher, Don Miselle* who, alluding to the “great deal of inertia” in education, says that the process of introducing new materials “took a long, long time,” with people somewhat optimistically and unrealistically predicting a speedier changeover (US-PB2). Relating the publishing in-joke that, “changing high school peoples’ minds was like rearranging cemeteries,” he shared that though “twenty years ago people were hopeful that technology was really going to assert itself ... I think it’s beginning to become a significant market now” (R-PB2). As an example, *Don* notes that Detroit “just signed a contract with Houghton-Harcourt for a \$40 million dollar digitized elementary curriculum” (US-PB2).

In both the US and England all publishers referred to new digital programs becoming available to teachers and parents to help children with reading – in England the use of

Whiteboard technology is established, and publishing companies provide materials for it; computer-based programs, such as *Rapid* (Pearson) in England and *System 44* (Scholastic) in US have reading programs specifically created for this digital market. However a problem for publishers is that most schools use digital technology as an adjunct to print, if at all, and in the words of the publishing consultant, the difficulty now “for publishers whose history was print publishing” has become “how to create, market and sell technology products and make them profitable, because their customers expect the print publishers to give away their technology material as supplemental ancillaries to the basal textbooks” (US-PB3).

Policy maker Marie Fischer, based in England, looks at the advent of technologies in a more positivist way. She feels the Internet, rather “like David and Goliath” (E-PM3), allows those who do not have the resources of the large publishing houses to make information and publishing materials available to a national and international audiences. She discusses how from the beginning of the National Literacy Strategy in 1998, and using its website, the Reading Reform Foundation “extremely critical of [its] guidance” was able to reach out to teachers as effectively as the national government (E-PM3). *Marie*, who is in the midst of creating and marketing a synthetic reading program on the Internet, then added that in her opinion, “the Internet might make the difference in modern times as to whether we can really get through [and get people] involved in synthetic phonics” (E-PM3).

Researchers and Publishing. Regarding the influence of and the use of research in publishing, the mainstream publishers in the US had, as with their English counterparts, researchers who advised them in the creation of programs and kept them abreast of current research. In the view of the *retired publisher, Don Miselle*, “Publishers weren’t really responsible for the development of the curriculum” but rather “searched out the educators and the leaders,

people like Marilyn Jager Adams, and tried to follow their suggestions” (US-PB2), that many of these researchers “had pretty pronounced views” and usually felt that the publishers “did what they wanted” (US-PB2).

However, once materials were created, he shared that his former publisher, like all others, did their own research about how acceptable it would be among teachers. He felt that “the pre-pub [published] stuff probably reflected some of the things that researchers suggested and wanted but usually, if it was too radical or graphic from the research, it was diluted for school consumption” (US-PB2). Adding, regarding teacher input:

honestly only perhaps a very small portion of the teachers took an active role in attempting to alter things. By and large most of them they had their lesson plans, they got into a groove. When they closed the door they were running their own show, and they got sort of petrified. (US-PB2)

This account suggests that the publishers act as a buffer between research and educators for pragmatic commercial reasons.

Niche Publishers. *Retired publisher Don Miselle* discussed the role of niche publishers in the reading field as providing for specific literacy needs. These are smaller publishing houses, which have moved to fill the void left by mainstream publishing houses, or publishing houses that are driven by pedagogical rather than by mainly commercial motives (US-PB2). Though some provide mainly supplemental materials, others such as *Open Court* “was a niche player for a long time because their market segment was teachers in districts who were heavily focused on phonics and direct instruction”. Critically adding about *Open Court*, now owned by McGraw-Hill, and confirming the knowledge shared by *niche publisher Georgina Schultz*, “I would say that they’ve edged closer to being kind of a mainstream publisher these days” (US-PB3).

The niche publishers interviewed in the US and England handled questions of research quite differently from their mainstream counterparts. Neither employs researchers to help guide and write new materials., though both discussed how their programs had been the focus of well-known and influential research studies. Concerning available reading research, *publisher Georgina Schultz* declared:

Every piece of research I've read supports what we do. I've never read anything that has been peer-reviewed that does not support what we do. And I have hunted ... for any research that could validate other approaches for children most at-risk and I could not find anything to validate another perspective. (US-PB1)

Both *Evan Smith* in England and *Georgina Schultz* in America also discussed the integral place of training in the sale of their programs to schools and districts. *Evan* took some care to tease out the three strands of his company's outreach policy. First, is the "face-to-face training of teachers" to ensure that the program is used as created; next, a step removed, was the broader strand needed "to explain the usage where ever we can" by explaining to educators "what's intended" by the program; and the third and final strand, "what I think you call PR," was aimed at a "wider audience ... to explain what the issues are," through the use of the media, and by using "freebies" such as parent guides, PowerPoint presentations as a community outreach (E-PB2). Combined, he felt:

What we do has been much more extensive than anyone else and I think therefore it's had a far wider influence and really has been responsible for the fact that public opinion is wholly behind synthetic phonics. It's government policy, and it's uncontroversially so. It's accepted within society. (E-PB2)

Georgina laughingly declared:

With a curriculum like this, you can't just sell it and say have a nice life. I always say when you buy this you're buying me along with it, you have to tell me, 'No you can't come!' to keep me away. (US-PB1)

More seriously, she shared:

We have a good cadre of consultants that are full time or per diem consultants, all of whom have taught the programs in classrooms. ... They're teachers who, like me, were committed to this and said "I want to take this to the next level and teach others to do it, so that more children can benefit." (US-PB1)

A strong commitment to their product and to the children who will use it pervades the commentary of both niche publishers.

American *policy maker Matthew Forth* felt, however, that "overall, I would say the press and the publishing industry are followers, not leaders," and he felt when he talked to publishers, "They would listen politely, but they'd go where the money is and who buys their products" (US-PM1). He added that in his view, "They don't necessarily care about pedagogy unfortunately" (US-PM1). *Matthew*, with a background in publishing coupled with a deep concern for literacy, then added dispiritedly, "I kind of knew the lingo and what they could do ... if they chose to" (US-PM1).

In defense of the publishing world, the *consultant publisher Bill Aguirre* felt the industry was more proactive than this suggests, stating that publishers have many ways to stay "in touch with what's going on in the research world" (US-PB3). Besides interacting with their own authors, *Bill* explained they:

have representatives who attend state board of education meetings in the major states; ... stay connected with the professional organizations including the International Reading

Association, the Council of Great City Schools; [and take part in] a kind of constant ongoing discussion about pedagogy, reading-wise. (US-PB3)

Bill felt it would be a poor publisher indeed who did not know about the major government-sponsored initiatives being undertaken in reading research, naming them as Adam's (1990) *Beginning to Read, Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (Snow et al., 1998), and that of the NRP in 2000. He counseled that knowledge of these reports was a commercial necessity, and determined by "a constantly changing environment," and in addition crucial for publishers to follow, as:

it takes a couple of years to develop a textbook program, so ... publishers have to ... keep an ear to the ground and make their best guess of where is the kind of collective sense of pedagogy going to be in a couple of years down the road when the program is done. (US-PB3)

In fact read critically, this outline does indeed confirm their role as followers rather than leaders in the field, with the added fillip that some publishers take "a much more conservative approach," acting as followers within their own field, while others "really look to be leading the pack in responding to those changes" (US-PB3). The former cautious type (true followers) wait, with the philosophy that if the one who "jumps in first" is successful, then "we're going to imitate" (US-PB3).

Bill Aguirre stated that given the recent recommendations of the NELP (2008) concerning the efficacy of "code-related interventions" and President Obama's stated pre-school agenda, nowadays "all the big publishers if they haven't already developed Pre-K materials [are] looking at it pretty seriously" (US-PB3). In effect, they will compete directly with "some smaller publishers who have done early childhood materials for a long time ... [for] publishers are

watching very carefully what's going on in the states with funding for preschool and curriculum expectations" (US-PB3). Thus the big publishing houses in the US may well be looking at usurping or buying-out smaller niche publishers in early reading, much as has happened previously in England.

Publishers Links with Policy

Thus government decisions in both countries affect publishers' commercial decisions. Publishers in the US, much like their counterparts in England, seek to stay abreast of the latest political developments in their field. As such they belong to an industry wide organization, Association of American Publishers (AAP), which comprises "most of the significant players" and is "the publishing industries' lobbying arm" watching "what's going on legislatively in Washington and in the major states" plus giving "a lot of attention to what's going on in the states around textbook funding, and they speak for the industry as a whole in those kinds of environments" (US-PB3).

However, though they hold meetings and seminars, *Bill Aguirre* cannily stated it is "general stuff" for "publishers have to be careful about the restraint of trade obligations". He added, "Where's there's a common interest, I think publishers work together through the APP to promote the industry-wide interest, but beyond that they keep their plans to themselves" (US-PB3). In reality, *publisher Georgina Schultz* says, "It's very difficult for us to see as publishers what other publishers are launching. It's sort of a small community and everybody knows everyone, [so] we can't exactly show up in their booth or at their sessions without getting thrown out" (US-PB1). In fact *publisher Bill Aguirre* says publishers do not talk directly with each other in his experience, for he cautions in the American business culture "that kind of conversation, if it occurred, would be of questionable propriety" (US-PB3).

At the conclusion of his interview, *Bill Aguirre*, with some concern for any misconceptions concerning publishers, outlined the interaction between publishers, policy makers and their market - the public:

Textbook publishers serve the public through the political process. Textbooks are adopted in a public process and it's a process in which, because it's a public process, everybody has their say and publishers have to be and are responsible to an extensive and ongoing political process in which the American public decides over time what they want their children to be taught in the schools. (US-PB3)

In this regard he feels, "it's easy to make the publisher into a whipping boy" for "when people have disagreements about pedagogy, or about the way things are done in the schools, or about how public education is going" (US-PB3). But he states in publishers' defense that "it's important for people to understand that ... publishers do their best to serve the public through the public process in an honorable (manner) and with intellectual integrity" (US-PB3). He states that "the process is ... extremely complex, and the contents of textbooks that are published for general consumption in the U.S. [are necessarily] impacted by that process" (US-PB3).

So many of the issues publishers face in bringing their programs to market – cultural, commercial and political – are common to both countries. As an interface between the teacher and the political arena, publishers keep their 'ear to the ground' to see which way reading pedagogy is going. However, given its commercial nature, they seemingly give precedence to marketing rather than pedagogical need as they create their instructional materials for school use.

Summary

The interconnectedness of literacy research, pedagogy, and policy echoes Stannard and

Huxford's (2007) view that "literacy education is inextricably bound up in politics" (p. 181).

Researchers, policy makers and publishers are also interconnected within this cultural and political context. Who among them has most power to influence what happens in the classroom?

Until the last twenty years control over education lay with the states, local school boards and schools in the US, and with local authorities and schools in England. However, in the last twenty years, spurred into action by low literacy rates in both nations, whether using them either as a wake-up call or an excuse, each national government has sought to intervene in teaching reading.

In the process, and in the glare of public spotlight that inevitably accompanies action within the political sphere, the pace of decision-making at the center has been faster than the teachers, schools and their administrators can easily absorb. It has also demanded greater speed and more concrete answers than the research community can readily accommodate (Moss, 2009, 2007). The resultant disconnect between the policy decisions at the center and those beyond its immediate circle, have marginalized many researchers, local government and practitioners alike from the chosen policy decisions. Publishers have mainly continued to stand on the sidelines, gauging the political, public and pedagogical climate, as they create their ultimately-commercial products.

The major finding of this research must be that it is the structure of government in England, as opposed to that in the US, which has determined how effective government has been in influencing pedagogy for beginning readers in each nation. Both governments, concerned by low literacy rates, have separately reached the same conclusion: systematic phonics is necessary for the beginner reader (Brooks, 2003; NRP, 2000a). Each government has sought to foster this in schools.

In the US, given that the individual states and not the national government controlled education, this had to be attempted through the carrot and stick of NCLB legislation and Reading First, the failure of which has ultimately led to the continuing dominance of the pedagogy of balanced reading. In England, change was more simply and quickly achieved through central government directive, with synthetic phonics mandated for beginner readers nationwide. However, this is not the whole story, as can be seen by the difficulties both governments continue to experience in seeking to set and implement literacy policy from the center (Moss, 2009).

Research Questions Revisited

The research question that drove this study have been substantially addressed.

What has led to the policy decisions made in the US and England regarding beginning reading instruction? In brief summation the answers are:

1. Policy-based decisions have been made by both national governments to become more involved in beginning reading pedagogy in each nation. Both governments were desirous of raising the low literacy levels. Each separately decided, on the basis of the NRP and Rose Report, to introduce a systematic approach to beginning reading for their youngest students. In the US, given its federal system, the government encouraged the use of systematic phonics by pressuring all schools to raise literacy rates by 3% annually by, hopefully, using a systematic approach to teaching beginning reading. *Reading First* grants to the lowest socio-economic groups were made available to enable them to purchase these programs and train their teachers to use them. In England, given its parliamentary system, this was achieved by central mandate.

2. Policy makers, researchers and publishers were able to shed light on the approaches to teaching beginning reading in the U.S. and England. In England, interviewees discussed the train of events surrounding the government's need to raise literacy levels from a stubborn

plateau, which led to the Rose Report (2006), created to determine which was the more effective pedagogy for the beginner reader: synthetic or analytic phonics. It found in favor of synthetic phonics, which was then instituted in all publicly-funded schools the following year. In the US, the interviewees discussed issues surrounding how the federal government used the Reading First section of the NCLB Law (2001) to facilitate the spread of systematic phonics as recommended by the NRP (2000a).

3. Research evidence has played a role in the decisions the policy makers in each country have made. Research does not necessarily enjoy a prime role in literacy policy deliberations. It is used to inform and/or justify policy, but is seldom the only or even the main reason for the policy decisions made.

4. Other influences do affect the decisions the policy makers, researchers and publishers have made in each country. Policy makers are affected by the political ramifications of their role: power, money, public pressure, lobbyists, timing any of which affect their willingness and ability to implement literacy policies. Researchers are affected by their own past research and that of others; the slower pace of research compared to policy is an obstacle to ease of working within the confines of literacy policy. Researchers make choices about whether to be part of the policy scene, or to remain on the outside. Publishers are mainly leaders not followers as they are subject to political whim, need to follow research and yet satisfy educators at the same time, while anticipating all such demands in the time it takes to create their products and bring them to market. Differences were noticed between mainstream publishers, which follow a more customary commercial business model, and niche, which are more committed to preserving the ethos of a single product.

5. There are different influences at work affecting the policy decisions in the United States and England. Mainly these center around the structure of government in power. In England the government has more power to mandate change from the center, whereas the central government in the US can pass laws and provide funding to encourage change, but has to work within the constitutional structure of states' rights to education. Cultural differences were also noted. Assumptions and beliefs of individuals influence their response to information.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The intent of this research inquiry was to explore the circumstances surrounding the literacy policy decisions separately reached by the governments of the US and England during the last twenty years. This is an issue of considerable importance since these decisions will long affect each nation's children, not only in regard to their own personal self-efficacy and well-being, but also due to their potential to impact the social and economic future of their respective countries.

The essential question driving the study was what has led to the decisions made in regard to beginning reading in the US and England? From this essential question, the study branched out and sought information about:

- the differences between the nations concerning which decisions were made
- the knowledge of researchers, policy makers and publishers concerning how policies were created
- the role research evidence played in shaping literacy decisions
- which other factors affected policy-making decisions
- whether factors unique to each country affected literacy outcomes.

Background

For most of the twentieth century in the US and England, with intermittent bursts of government activity, decisions regarding beginning reading pedagogy had largely been left in the hands of the teacher. However, when distressingly low levels of literacy became starkly apparent, the central government of each nation took action to address the social inequities this represented. This commitment, a humane goal in itself, was strongly influenced by the economic threat posed by an ill-educated citizenry and workforce, in an increasingly technical and global

society. Governments are comprised of people, and as such each policy maker interviewed discussed the responsibility they felt to children to improve literacy instruction, so each child would learn to read.

Finding One: Governments Seek to Improve Literacy

In the last twenty years the central government of each nation, very distant from the classrooms of early readers, has exercised a powerful ability to effect changes in literacy pedagogy at the beginning reading level. Firstly, they have funded research - studies, reports and meta-analyses - that have provided and disseminated evidence-based research about reading pedagogy. The wealthier US has been more productive than England, but both nations have benefitted from the results of this research. Secondly, each has used the power of legislation to effect change: the US through the NCLB Act (2001), and England through its use of central government mandate. Thirdly, as an incentive for change both governments have provided badly-needed funding for education: a carrot that cash-strapped education agencies can little afford to reject. The carrot is also a stick.

Finding Two: Literacy Policy is Affected by Government Structure

How the two governments went about this endeavor was determined by the structure of each. In the US, state control of education limited the federal government's power, whereas in England its centralized parliamentary system allowed government to determine and institute educational policy from the center, if not precisely seamlessly at least with greater ease.

In the US, the central government used the federal law associated with Civil Rights to justify federal control of education (ESEA, 1965, NCLB 2002). However, it eased acceptance of this intervention by granting money, first through Title One (1965 to date) and later Reading First (2002). From the mid-1980's when literacy levels remained unaffected, the government initiated

a series of studies and reports, which determined that systematic phonics was necessary for the beginner reader. Through Reading First (2002), it sought to implement this pedagogical approach in schools, and once again provided grants to help fund it. To increase literacy rates, grants were made contingent on states using evidence-based reading programs (NRP, 2000a), and accountability was enforced through the stipulation that each school publicly report its Annual Yearly Progress, which had to be 3% and above. This requirement, legislatively binding through the NCLB Act (2001), applied to all schools, and was designed to spur changes in pedagogy in all schools, not just those that received federal aid (NCLB, 2001).

In England, the government initially used its centralized power to set targets for literacy and to put in place a curriculum to achieve them (NLS, 1998). Though not statutory, it effectively used its inspectorate system and the publication of school results to enforce compliance. When the literacy targets set were reached but stagnated, the Labour government then turned to its centralized powers to determine the cause (Rose Report, 2006) and mandate the recommended solution, synthetic phonics, for all beginner readers in all its publicly-operated schools from September, 2007.

This research has also found that both nations, sharing the same two-party system of government, have enjoyed cross-party political backing for their government intervention in beginning reading initiatives, which has continued to this day as all unite to improve literacy levels. However, any decisions made by these democratically-elected governments, and their subsequent outcomes, are played out in the public sphere.

Finding Three: Political Restraints Affect Literacy Policy

The forces at play in the political process are many, complex and fluid. Each has the power, sometimes seemingly turning on a dime, to alter the shape and thrust of policy. These

influences, some more intangible than others, combine to affect policy decisions in literacy. First, any decisions made by the democratically-elected governments and their subsequent outcomes, can be played out to wide public attention, sometimes fuelled by sensational press coverage.

3A. Public Spotlight. In the US, publicity played a significant part in the Reading First debacle, and helped usher its demise. Passed as part of NCLB to raise literacy standards, Reading First enjoyed the full support of President George W. Bush, and was nurtured by a small but strong cadre of policy makers in his administration. It had every indication of being as successful as the more benign Title One program that preceded and continued alongside it. However, conversely, the roll-out was beset with problems. Played out under the full intensity of public scrutiny the combined impact of adverse events, almost salaciously reported by the media, political support for Reading First waned and funding was stripped away. This government retreat, accompanied by the money targeted for reading, has dampened the spread of systematic phonics as a beginning reading pedagogy in the US.

In England, in the initial years of the National Literacy Strategy, reading levels rose significantly and the Labour government reaped the reflected glory of reaching its 80% target. However, when these levels stalled it became equally incumbent upon them to find a solution to this continuing obstacle to social equality. A Select Committee (2005) appointed to investigate, and under pressure to find a solution, concluded the issue centered around which pedagogical approach was more effective for beginner readers, analytic or synthetic phonics. The Rose Report (2006) was ordered to determine the answer.

Publicity can also have a positive effect. In England, the media had previously provided favorable widespread coverage, in newspapers, television and radio, about the Clackmannanshire study, positively reviewed in the Rose Report, and Miskin's synthetic phonics program. This

background knowledge led the public at large to accept its recommendations, but also among educators too, one third and more of whom were already familiar with synthetic phonics through programs provided by small independent publishers (E-PB2).

Another example of politics being affected by publicity is the Labour Government's decision to bow to the pressure of public and educator concern with national testing of seven year old children in literacy and math. This led to the decision to change an existing nationally-normed test to an eclectic collection of local authority-created, teacher-given tests based on regulatory standards. The consequence is the loss of direct comparison nationwide between the first seven-year-old cohort to be trained in synthetic phonics, who began their education in September, 2007, with those who had previously experienced the balanced reading approach of the National Literacy Curriculum (E-R1).

Finally, another and perhaps less tangible factor is the issue of timing and chance.

3B. Confluence of Events. It is necessary for conditions to coalesce, people and programs to be in the right place at the right time, for policy to be formed and implemented.

In the US, there was a confluence of events and timelines leading to Reading First and its six billion dollar appropriation. Firstly, a small and influential cadre of policy makers seeking change in beginning reading found a champion in the new President George W. Bush (Miskel & Song, 2004). The new President wanted to “change the paradigm” in beginning reading pedagogy, the key he believed to preventing later reading failure (US-PM1). Secondly, the low literacy rates revealed in the NAEP results through the 1990's led to cross-party political support which, initiated by President Bush, was embraced by the Democrats in the person of the powerful and charismatic senator, Edward Kennedy. Given this intersection of people and circumstance, the passing of *Reading First* went relatively smoothly in both houses.

In England, the publication of the seven-year longitudinal data from the Clackmannanshire study coincided with the discovery of the stagnation of literacy rates. As such, this study was seized upon as providing a possible answer by the Parliamentary Select Committee and, with its reading pedagogy of synthetic phonics, went on to play a key role in the Rose Report on beginning reading methods. It is difficult to see how without this study, the Rose Report could have determined so conclusively in favor of synthetic phonics. Although, as research has shown, the presence in England of a strong lobbying group was also part of this equation.

3C. Lobbying. This research shows political lobbying to be a third influence in literacy policy decisions, It was to prove an influential force in England, in the form of the Reading Reform Foundation, more so indeed than its presence in the US. Begun as an offshoot of the Reading Reform Foundation in the US (now reborn as the National Right to Read Foundation), this English organization has grown in power and influence over the last two decades (Stannard & Huxford, 2007).

It provides strong mutual support among its advocates and a forum for the dissemination of knowledge about synthetic phonic methodology and programs, through its effective use of the Internet (RRF, 2010). It has affected the course of literacy policy, deliberately pursuing a policy of “relentless criticism” (E-PM2) through its website and the use of the media, newspaper, radio and television. Their interaction with leading politicians resulted in questions being asked about synthetic phonics in the House of Commons and the House of Lords. Its presence among those providing evidence for the Select Committee and Rose Report, also served to keep the case for synthetic phonics front and center in policy discussions (E-PM3). It continues to lobby for its cause to this day.

In the US, however, the usual channels for lobbying in regard to literacy initiatives were muted by a strong inner policy group that, working closely with the President and Congress, effectively shielded the legislation from such prominent groups as the International Reading Association and the teacher unions (Miskel & Song, 2004). However, avoiding the debate that such inclusion would have generated meant these organizations were not allied with Reading First, and therefore did not seek or wish to defend it when it later came under attack. In effect, the small cadre of policy makers which sought the same approach lobbied for in England, did not have the power to carry this through alone. As Reading First was rolled out, it had need of the support of these organizations, especially as Reading First foundered. Thus balanced reading has prevailed in the US.

In both nations central government literacy initiatives, whether successful or not, have also proved faster than schools at the periphery can easily absorb.

3D. The Pace of Policy. A fourth factor is the disconnect between the pace of policy decisions at the center and the time needed to act on them in the schools. The time needed to implement educational programs was longer than policy makers had anticipated (Moss, 2009). In both nations, schools at the periphery needed adequate time for discussion, professional development, provision of materials and on-going support new educational initiatives demand. However, both Reading First in the US and the synthetic phonic mandate in England were ushered in within a year, or slightly longer.

For example, in England a government program, *Letters and Sounds*, was provided. Mainstream publishers had to scramble to provide equivalent programs in their catalogs. Schools had to make hasty decisions regarding whether to retain their current synthetic phonic program,

or adopt the new, and free, government offering. Or other schools suddenly needed to train their teachers in the new mandated pedagogy: one that even the trainers needed to learn.

Confusingly, and almost at the same time, the English government unexpectedly authorized the use of *Reading Recovery*, a balanced reading program, as the official program for remedial readers. Supported by substantial monies from a private foundation, with training being provided by the government, it is the official intervention for struggling readers, aged six and up.

In the US, only three programs were initially available that satisfied NCLB and Reading First language requiring scientifically-based research: *Open Court*, *Success for All* and *Reading Mastery*. Oddly, two of these programs, *Success for All* and *Reading Mastery*, went on to be poorly-reviewed by the What Works Clearinghouse (WCC), set up by the government to guide states in their selection of reading programs. Mainstream publishers, who somehow escaped mention by the WWC, filled the gap under the expanded Reading First protocol of Alphabeticity, which had been extended to include the other three NRP pillars of Fluency, Vocabulary and Comprehension.

Coincidentally, *Reading Recovery* has once again experienced a surge in favor in the US, too. It had not been part of the NRP's meta-analysis, as it had not been independently and scientifically researched, but seven years later following the meta-analysis it was approved by the What Works Clearinghouse (Viadero & Manzo, 2007). In the article, this endorsement was questioned by its critics one of whom, Fletcher, although admitting that the program does work, questioned its cost (given the one to one tutoring); and also the studies validity on the grounds that the assessment instrument used had been created by Clay, the founder of Reading Recovery, leading maybe to a possible bias. Allington was quoted as countering that this could equally be said of DIBELS in relation to Reading First assessments. Former Secretary of State for

Education Neuman, was then quoted as stating that Reading First had not included *Reading Recovery* on its recommended list for consideration for funding, stating such funds were mainly targeted for “comprehensive core reading programs, not pullout programs that benefitted only a handful of students” (as cited in Viadero & Manzo, 2007, p.14).

Thus, *Reading Recovery*, revised to include more alphabetics, fluency and comprehension since the NRP (2000a), has found more acceptance in schools in the US, in some ways paralleling its experience in England. This leads to the last factor which both influences and is used in government policy: money.

3E. Money as a Motivator. Throughout this research the power of money to influence and enforce literacy policy has been a recurring theme. It has been a tool more prominently used in the US, as an incentive and threat to encourage cash-strapped states and districts to embrace government policy initiatives it accompanies. Presented as an aid to states to implement new literacy programs, it is also used to make-up for the short-fall in the states’ own provision for their neediest students. Though in the case of the recent Stimulus, money has not been targeted to literacy programs, this research shows that some states and districts have chosen to use the money for this purpose.

In England, the free provision of the synthetic phonic program, *Letters and Sounds* (2007), effectively removed any financial impediment for the adoption of this pedagogy by schools. Additionally, money has also been used as a lever. It is famously recognized that in the 1980’s the central government under Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher used money as a formidable weapon. It was wielded to great effect to curb the power of the local authorities (E-R3).

The Local Authorities, especially the left-wing Inner London Education Authority, had become a thorn in the Conservative Government's side. It removed this thorn by breaking up the larger authorities, and by disbursing central money directly to schools (E-R3). It was this individual power of schools to control their finances that allowed them to choose their own programs. As a side-effect it helped schools to fund synthetic phonic programs, which had been spreading in a grassroots manner since the early 1990's (Stannard & Huxford, 2007).

In fact, synthetic phonics was a growing presence in schools from the early 1990's on, and was well-established by the time of the Rose Report. Conflictingly in this research, one publisher placed it in a third or more of schools (E-PB2), while another said only braver schools had adopted it (E-PB1). However, with their newly independent financial power, schools bought such programs and their training. Its spread was resisted by those at local authority level, academia and educators alike, who were still strongly influenced by the philosophy of Whole Language, but its adherents persevered with creating, trialing and publishing programs for use in beginning reading classrooms, and for older struggling readers (Lloyd, 2001; Miskin, 2002; Grant, 2004).

Finding Four: Policy and Research, an Uneasy Alliance

Government policy makers have used research in two main ways: to inform policy and to justify it. This research shows that policy makers do not rely solely or even, it appears, mainly on research to guide policy. Many other considerations affect their decisions and may exercise greater influence on their thinking. Issues such as political expediency; the light of publicity; ideology; money; the needs of individuals; and lobbying take up the lion's share of policymakers' attention. Research is not as evident in the daily push-pull of decision-making as researchers might realize or wish (Brown, 1996; Nelson, Leffler, & Hansen, 2009).

The fast decisive nature of policy is at variance with the slower and more measured pace of research. This has led to the marginalization of some researchers. Others, on the contrary, have chosen to become more proactively involved in the sphere of literacy policy. This research heard the voices of both as they variously described either their close involvement, working on government-funded research, panels, reports or committees to forward policy, or their feeling of disenfranchisement as their research applications are unfunded, research contributions or opinions ignored.

In both countries, much research is funded by government, whether directly through Institutes such as the National Institute for Children and Human Development (NICHD) in the US, or indirectly through successful grant bids from the respective departments of education. Researchers make choices to work within government, alongside or outside government. However, given the differing pace of policy versus research, researchers and policy makers have an uneasy alliance in their mutual goal: the quest for a literate populace.

Finding Five: The Use of Research Differs in England versus the US

How research is viewed and accepted as a driver for policy is a major difference between the two nations. In the US, for the last ten years and more, only peer-reviewed, scientifically-based research has been accepted as a basis for pedagogical recommendations. Therefore, in Reading First, initially only systematic phonics (phonemic awareness and phonics) programs for beginning readers were allowed. However, as political and market forces shaped the roll-out of Reading First, the absence of programs fitting this narrow remit led to the additional consideration of the three pillars of fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. This resulted in the continuing practice of balanced reading, which had been supported by their inclusion. Balanced

Reading, although not backed by evidence-based research in the NRP (2000a), reflecting a move away from Whole Language, had previously been part of publishers' programs.

In England, peer-reviewed and evidence-based research is respected, such as in the meta-analysis of past research, but other more pragmatic sources may be considered as policy decisions are made. The Parliamentary Select Committees and Rose Report weighed scientifically-based research alongside evidence collected from many differing spheres: small-scale research studies (one of which, the Clackmannanshire Study (Johnston & Watson, 2005) had not been fully peer-reviewed); observation of differing pedagogies in classrooms; and the informed views of those involved in literacy besides researchers, such as members of the Reading Reform Foundation, educators, policy makers and publishers.

As a result of this more eclectic selection of evidence, the Rose Report was able to recommend synthetic phonics as the more effective approach to teaching beginning reading (Rose, 2006b). As a researcher who had been involved in the overview of reading studies commented, this pragmatic approach was rational given that the fate of so many children hung in the balance, and that sometimes issues are too important to wait for a definitive answer from painstakingly undertaken, narrowly focused research (E-R1).

Rose (2006a) concurs with this assessment, placing literacy within the political rather than the research sphere. He believes the Rose Report met the political need of addressing “the moral imperative” of determining how to “reduce inequality at the earliest stage” of reading pedagogy (Rose, 2006a). One must also add, it answered a political need to be seen to be doing something about the stagnating literacy levels.

Finding Six: Educator Knowledge of Research and Pedagogy Differs

Through its centralized authority, the English government has more influence than

the US over the training of pre-service and practicing teachers. It has used this to great effect to support the roll-out of new literacy initiatives by providing extensive professional development for practicing teachers, through the aegis of the local authority system. They have also controlled the pedagogy taught in teacher training facilities since the late 1980's, through regulation of content and regular evaluation oversight (E-R3, S-PM1). Such regulation may have been circumvented or resisted by a few who fear the potential for a strangle-hold on teacher initiative and creativity (E-R1). However, it is far-reaching and, since the Rose Report, includes the training of nursery teachers and their aides as well.

In the US, despite the evaluation of education colleges under the voluntary accreditation agency, National Council for the Accreditation of Teachers (NCATE), oversight of teacher training courses in States appears variable. Research data shows it is possible to graduate as a teacher without having taken a requirement in teaching reading at the Bachelor of Arts level (US-R3). NCATE is in the process of changing its accreditation standards, and is due to report by the end of 2010. Its goal is to enhance clinical practice, which will include giving student teachers "school-embedded experience" to provide "the opportunity to integrate theory with practice" (Levine & Leibbrand, 2010, para. 5). Such a system has been in place in England since the late 1980's (E-R3).

In England the research data shows that the training in reading strategies by the government includes not only techniques for teaching phonics on a daily basis, but also the rationale behind their use (E-R3). In addition, training has also been available through the aegis of niche publishers, such as *Jolly Phonics*, *Success for All*, and *Best Practice Phonics*, which have independently provided training in their synthetic-based programs (Stannard & Huxford,

2007). The spread of these programs throughout England from the mid-1990's effectively increased educator knowledge about this new pedagogy for beginning reading.

Just as the government, the niche publishers also took pains to include the broader goal of educating teachers about the reasoning behind the methods being introduced. It was a conscious aim to raise educators' knowledge and awareness, so they would understand the value of and need for the techniques being learned (E-PB2).

In contrast the terms 'synthetic phonics' or 'systematic phonics' are little-known among educators in the US, and professional in-service training of kindergarten teachers in reading has not significantly changed to reflect the latest research (US-R3). It remains to be seen if a recently issued report on pre-school children's literacy needs (NELP, 2008), plus the new government's intention to provide greater professional development in literacy (United States Department of Education, 2010b) will combine to raise the knowledge level of beginning reading pedagogy among American educators. Meanwhile there remains a noticeable difference in teacher knowledge and professional development between the two nations.

Public Knowledge. The knowledgeable layman in England is better informed about this issue, through the attention brought to the topic of beginning reading by a national media debate. Also now, of course as time has gone by, through their experience of their own children, or those of others, who are learning to read using a synthetic phonics approach.

Finding Seven: Mainstream and Niche Publishers Behave Differently

In both nations, the publishers interviewed fell into two camps, those in mainstream, large-scale publishing enterprises, and those involved in smaller, pedagogy-derived and driven publishing houses. The difference in size and in philosophy between them has important ramifications for their level of responsiveness to outside pressures.

Followers, not Leaders. Given the commercial nature of their enterprise, mainstream publishers do not determine literacy pedagogy but react to the forces surrounding it. Reading materials take several years to produce, so it behooves publishers to not only keep abreast of research, but ahead of literacy policy. They employ their own researcher-advisors, and balance this with market research among teachers to gauge what will be acceptable at their point-of-sale. Data from this study shows their knowledge from market research influences the extent to which they accommodate the advice of their researchers.

Publishers also keep informed about the latest government policy initiatives. As one US publisher commented it would be a poor publishing house that was not aware of the findings of *Preventing Reading Failure* (1998) or the NRP (2000a) (US-PB4). An English mainstream publisher discussed how her company proactively seeks information about latest government policy through a national organization, and individual meetings with policy makers (E-PB1).

Niche Publishers – Mavericks. The situation is not the same in the more specialized, and usually smaller publishing houses. In the case of both publishers interviewed, the publishing house was formed around a specialized reading program. In England this is generally known as “Synthetic Phonics”, and sometimes in the US as ‘Direct Instruction’. Both were intended for use in a whole class setting, with built-in interactive activities to ensure and show full learner engagement.

In both niche publishing houses interviewed, outside researchers are not employed on their staff. Each program was guided by its original creators, with research input. In the US, in particular, the program has been incrementally modified according to teacher-feedback which is trialed and piloted to ensure its reliability. Though aware of research, the publisher is only directly influenced by the results of its own data. Both publishing houses have, on the other

hand, been the subject of research studies, both with favorable results regarding their beginning reading levels. In essence, the chosen pedagogy drives publishing decisions, not outside researchers.

However, such niche publishers are still commercially-based (even if not-for-profit) and are therefore also affected by policy decisions. As such they too keep abreast of literacy actions in the political sphere. In the US, the publisher commented on the commercially competitive environment in which publishers work. However, in England a regard for those pursuing the same pedagogic aims transcends competition among the smaller publishers, such that Lloyd and Miskin, creators of 'rival' synthetic programs, are both active board members of the Reading Reform Foundation.

Finding Eight: Publishing Affected by Drives of Commerce

The other force affecting all publishers in both countries is the amalgamation of publishers, both within each nation and across the international divide. In the US this has reduced the number of large publishing houses to three. This had a side effect for this research as, guarding their territory and public persona, two of the three proved reluctant to agree to be interviewed for this study. But, conversely and strangely, the mainstream publisher in England, happy to oblige and relaxed in the interview, is part of a sister-organization to one in the US that refused permission to interview. Thus the national business climate common to both appears from this data to be subject to cultural differences within each nation.

In England, given the move to introduce synthetic phonics, two of the largest publishing houses bought out two smaller synthetic phonic companies. In one, the content of the program was slightly altered, and the books rendered more professional and put on an electronic (*Whiteboard*) platform. However in the other case, the newly purchased synthetic program was

added unchanged to the middle of the new publisher’s catalog of offerings, when as a beginning reading program it would be better-placed at the start. But in that position it would vie with the balanced reading books that are the publisher’s mainstay – a commercial issue (E-PB2). The same publishing house also later bought Reading Recovery materials, a balanced reading approach, as this program was advocated by the English government for older, struggling readers (E-PB1, E-PB2, E-PM3).

In the US, niche publishers, such as *Open Court*, have experienced the same fate. In this case, its new publisher took the program and made changes to it to make it more marketable for the large textbook adoption states (US-PB1, US-R1). Given these experiences, as revealed in the data, one might conclude it must be risky to allow one’s pedagogically-initiated and painstakingly-created product to pass into the hands of a mainstream publishing house.

Publishers, politically aware and commercially driven, share with policy makers and researchers the common desire to teach children to read. One US publisher stated that producing textbooks in the US is political in nature, inasmuch as the American public changes what it thinks needs to be taught “over time”. Publishers are put in a position where they “honorably” accede to the public’s wishes, while also listening to researchers and policy makers (“everyone has their say”), and their own beliefs, too (US-PB4).

Finding Nine – English and US Policy Makers in Accord

Surprisingly, research revealed that as the twenty-first century opened, policy makers in both nations were in accord about which reading pedagogy is best practice for beginner readers. The architects of Reading First (2002), with their advocacy of the ‘gold standard’ of Scientifically-Based Reading Research (SBRR), identified three programs that fit this criteria – *Reading Mastery*, *Open Court* and *Success for All*. These were synthetic programs. Thus

American policy makers were indeed slightly in advance of the English government at this time, which was still searching for a way to affect stalled reading levels. However, in the five years that followed, England through its vehicle of the Rose Report (2006), was to adopt synthetic phonics nationwide in September, 2007.

However as policy was put into action, events unrolled in both nations which contradicted their policy makers' apparent interpretation of research. To wit, in the US the moves to introduce systematic phonics were distorted in the last moments of Reading First legislation (US-PM1) by the inclusion of traditional reading methods associated with balanced reading. In England the government that had adopted synthetic phonics, then endorsed the use of the balanced reading approach of *Reading Recovery* for its struggling readers (E-R1, E-PM3). This latter anomaly has recently been investigated by a Parliamentary Select Committee. It found that the Government was at odds with itself in implementing Reading Recovery. Among its conclusions, it stated:

Teaching children to read is one of the most important things the State does. The Government has accepted Sir Jim Rose's recommendation that systematic phonics should be at the heart of the Government's strategy for teaching children to read. This is in conflict with the continuing practice of word memorization and other teaching practices from the 'whole language theory of reading' used particularly in Wave 3 Reading Recovery. The Government should vigorously review these practices with the objective of ensuring that Reading Recovery complies with its policy. (House of Commons Science and Technology Committee, 2009, para. 59)

However, the Reading Recovery program continues to be the intervention scheme used nationwide in England to support those with reading difficulties, as it continues to be a favored intervention pedagogy in the US.

Finding Ten – England is More Aware of American Research than Vice-Versa

Research is more easily available internationally through the use of the Internet, and the generous agreement of university libraries to share their materials. However, whereas English researchers and policy makers are aware of the major studies undertaken in the US, the reverse is not necessarily true. Researchers in England were knowledgeable about the National Reading Panel, but the Rose Report was never quoted by interviewees in the US.

As a corollary to this finding, one might add that in the US the balanced reading pedagogy reigns and little is known about the synthetic phonics approach.

Finding Eleven: Beliefs and Assumptions Affect How Reading is Taught

Teaching children to read by using a synthetic phonic approach requires a paradigm shift among educators. One way those who were trained during the Whole Language era appear to have begun this shift is by adopting a balanced reading approach to teaching reading. However in this approach, a combination of methods is used to teach the beginner reader, which are based on the habits of teaching sight words – picture clues, context and only the basic sounds of the alphabet – as seen in the previous years of Word and Whole Language methods. These methods are the antithesis of synthetic phonics.

Teachers who are not receptive to or are not exposed to new research, are more likely to continue with what they know and believe in. People's beliefs have an effect on what they do. In this context there will inevitably be a tendency to merge any new methods into the old and well-known ones, with subsequent loss of effect. The use of the word 'balanced' in 'balanced reading'

with its connotation of an even-handed and fair approach is misleading. For in effect this eclectic mixture of methods denies the novice reader the essential first knowledge that the written word is code-based, and that this code can be learned and used as a tool to read and write.

It is a startling fact that despite the energy and resources expended, literacy rates in America for fourth graders have only modestly increased since 1980. As reported in the latest NAEP scores for 2009, these hover around 33% of nine-year-olds remaining unable to read at grade level (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). This level is thirteen percentage points below the English literacy rates, which had increased from 65% to 80% from 1998 to 2002.

The gain in England is attributed to the implementation of the National Literacy Strategy, which required phonics be taught as part of the Literacy Hour. However, this researcher wonders what would this level be if one were to subtract from this equation the English schools who were using synthetic phonics, reportedly one third and more of schools? Would then the results drop to mirror the balanced reading results of the US? For the Literacy Hour was after all a balanced reading program, the same as currently used in the US.

It remains to be seen if it can be shown in England that the literacy rates of children completing their third year in school in July, 2010 have improved over the last cohort taught under the previous system. In the big laboratory that is England, all children when they began school in September, 2007 were taught to read by learning their written code. When will we know the results? Who in America is listening?

Finding Twelve: Brain Research, a Young Science

Research into brain activity during reading (e.g. fMRI) about how a person reads were not discussed by the interviewees of their own volition, and was absent in all but three of the

interviews. When briefly discussed, two reactions were noted. The subject was treated with considerable disdain on the part of an American balanced reading researcher, but with interest by both an American and an English policy maker. The latter felt it supported a systematic approach to reading, and other research findings.

As captured by the English policy maker, who discussed the work of Goswami at Cambridge, “I think it’s affirming where we’ve come from on phonic work”(E-PM1). However, the balanced reading researcher who vehemently disagreed with the validity of brain research in reading (US-R1), reminds one of the story told by Ehri (1997) regarding Goodman’s strong adverse response to her nascent theories concerning how sight words are remembered. Goodman’s reaction was understandable as her theories conflicted with his beliefs, the foundation of Whole Language, and he was therefore acting defensively to protect them.

As researchers, although it is valid to treat such current brain research knowledge with caution and respond critically, it seems advisable to keep an open mind to the findings of the nascent world of brain research.

Recommendations

The form of government structure in each nation; the weighting of research evidence; a combination of social, cultural, behavioral and economic factors have resulted in the beginning reading pedagogy for young school entrants to be synthetic phonics in England, and balanced reading in the US.

This study shows the interplay of three distinct groups of people –

- policy makers, operating within the structure of their government, whose views are grounded in the political realities of budgetary constraints and the need for re-election

- researchers, who value professional career advancement and credibility, as they undertake time-consuming research projects
- publishers, who are dependent on gauging the outcomes of political and research endeavors, while maintaining a viable business

Despite the vagaries among these groups, they share the same aim – to teach children to read well. However, operating under the differing time constraints based on their varying needs and desires, opportunities are lost through miscommunication; missteps are made in the decision-making process; research is misguided, under-valued or ignored; and the quality of the end-products brought to market, the products which will be used to teach the young reader, can be a commercial compromise.

It is unfortunate that in the last ten to twenty years a major longitudinal research study comparing a balanced reading to synthetic phonic approach to teaching beginning reading has not taken place. Lack of time and money, and the absence of political will have prevented it. However, absent the results from this kind of large-scale study, all – policy makers, researchers and publishers – when unsure of which direction to take, where they feel there are gaps in knowledge, will fall back to what they are familiar with and what is expedient. Belief and assumptions, rather than research data, will continue to influence the pedagogy chosen for beginner readers.

Recommendation 1: Comparative Study Within the US. Given the prevalence of a balanced approach for beginning readers, conduct a longitudinal study with two groups of students. One group would receive a synthetic phonic start to reading alongside reading in decodable books, and the other the customary introductory balanced reading approach provided in most American schools. Taking the form of parallel longitudinal studies, based on separate

studies in different states, involving children of different socio-economic and language backgrounds, the studies would determine if levels reached in the first year are sustained in subsequent years of the study, and what impact is shown in comprehension and spelling affects in children by age 11. It would need to be sufficiently large for validity and credibility purposes.

Although longitudinal the initial study would be short in duration and similar in design to the Clackmannanshire study, which released its first findings at the end of its first year but then provided follow up data at the end of the fifth and seventh year of the children's schooling. It is imperative that the same children are re-assessed at regular intervals to find out whether early trends continue or are subject to change, and to discover how the early start affects later comprehension and spelling levels. Ultimately, it would yield critical information about which approach is more effective, providing a foundation for literacy policy that is less based on belief in absence of such data.

Recommendation 2: An International Cooperative Study. National differences in beginning reading pedagogy between the US and England could be viewed as an enormous comparative study in itself. A study in which synthetic phonics (England) and balanced reading (the US) represent two experimental groups.

The caveat must be that it will be many years before any definitive results can be drawn. The international study of reading, Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), could be used in this study to report on the comparative literacy levels of both nations, but it would need to be three years hence, since the first cohort to be immersed in synthetic phonics in England was September, 2007, and PIRLS tests children in their fifth year of education.

There would be equity issues in comparing the two nations, as American children begin school a year later than English children, and even then many only attend for half a day. It would

be desirable for universities in England and US to cooperate on a joint longitudinal study. The purpose of the study is not to adversely compare beginning reading pedagogy in each country, but to advance the knowledge of best practice in reading, knowledge which can then be used to benefit the children in both nations.

This comparative study could also be extended to include other countries where English is the first language, such as Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.

Recommendation 3: A Qualitative Study of the Grassroots Spread of Synthetic Phonics. In the US and England, synthetic phonics has spread at the grassroots level among educators. In England, the ability of schools to purchase their own curricula, plus the availability of synthetic phonic programs and the training that accompanied them, was a major factor in its spread during the end of the twentieth and the beginning of this twenty-first century. In the US, an English publishing company called *Jolly Phonics* is experiencing a similar development in Illinois. An investigation of this process might provide a more complete picture of the role of grassroots knowledge in changing the paradigm of how beginning reading is adopted in England and the US. It was this grassroots spread of synthetic phonics in England that raised the awareness of all teachers about this different approach to teaching beginning reading, and subsequently allowed the national mandate for synthetic phonics to go forward more seamlessly.

Recommendation 4: Need for Professional Development in the US. Research data shows that pre-service training and professional development in the US has less oversight and is subject to greater variability than in England, due to the complexities of a system based on individual state educational standards. Though a significant feature of the nationally-based Reading First during its comparatively short implementation period, the knowledge of systematic phonics was restricted to educators in schools with lower socio-economic status, and was short-

lived. Recent developments in the proposed reauthorization of ESEA (2010) law indicate that professional development is being considered and that pedagogy should be based on evidence-based research.

It is critical that any new pedagogy, such as systematic phonics, be universally taught during initial teacher training. Therefore national oversight of the curricula and teaching in Colleges of Education is important. The recent moves towards developing national standards would necessarily include accountability. Any such body would include, as part of its responsibilities, oversight of teacher training establishments to ensure implementation of nationally agreed curricula standards, and that pre-service teachers are being taught about the need for systematic phonics, as recommended by the National Reading Panel (2000).

Separately, but equally as important, practicing educators need to receive extensive professional development about how to teach the new pedagogy, including the rationale behind the need for a systematic approach to phonics in beginning reading.

Recommendation 5: Greater Sharing of Information Between the Two Nations. Job-sharing exchanges, such as provided by the Fulbright Foundation, between each nation's pre-service teachers, practicing educators, and university researchers involved in beginning reading would encourage the sharing of knowledge about pedagogy among those wishing to improve beginning reading.

In addition, it is also hoped that this qualitative study will benefit those who are interested in the beginning reading pedagogy used in England and the US.

Limitations of the Study

The number of interviewees was relatively small and therefore precludes generalization. Though one cannot guarantee any of those interviewed remembered clearly all the steps taken in

the implementation process, or may indeed have chosen not to share negative information, the caliber of persons interviewed and their ability and willingness to discuss any issues raised was of great help to this study.

The participants did not appear to tailor their answers to favor their research, decisions and/or programs. By interviewing subjects with a variety of perspectives, the researcher believes the goal to overcome the limited perspective of any one participant was largely achieved. Indeed the variety of perspectives shared served to enlarge the knowledge and perspective of the researcher, and to broaden the scope of the study.

Study Delimitations

In this study, beginning reading was restricted to the years surrounding the opening of the new millennium. It focused on the first formal year of education: kindergarten (age five to six years old) in the US, and reception (age four to five years old) in England. This allowed the focus to fall on what has been happening in both nations in the years when the foundations for literacy change were being laid, and on the age-group in which the foundations of reading are being laid.

The researchers and educators, were originally and purposefully chosen to represent a fair view of both those who support an initial systematic phonics approach to reading, and those who favor a multi-strategy balanced approach of which phonics is one element. In the US the participants interviewed represented a more balanced reading approach to reading. The converse was true in England, where most interviewees supported a synthetic phonic approach. This appeared to dovetail with the pedagogical approach experienced by beginner readers in each nation.

The publisher and policy maker interviews, similarly chosen to explain what has been happening at the national and other levels in both countries, were likewise affected by the exigencies of seeking participants who were freely available to interview. Thus, one mainstream publishing house in the US was finally, perforce and satisfactorily, 'represented' by two retired publishers, one of whom still works as a consultant in the publishing industry. Also the term 'policy maker' evolved into a more eclectic nomenclature for, variously, creators of policy, those who seek to influence policy, and those who implement literacy policy initiatives.

Conclusion

Discovering what literacy policies were made in each country, and by what process such decisions were made and implemented, was the focus of this research. This study helped delineate why each country instituted different approaches to beginning reading, and found that ultimately the situation was remarkably fluid.

The English government has shown itself capable of adopting a synthetic phonic approach for beginning readers at the same time as promoting *Reading Recovery*, a balanced reading program, for its struggling readers. The American Reading First policy makers in 2002 found themselves in the surprising situation of only having three programs, all synthetic, that satisfied the scientific, evidence-based requirements of the NCLB. However, given external pressures, the policy makers went on to include language in the final legislation that allowed products to be considered that had not gone through clinical trials. This has effectively meant the continuation of a balanced reading approach in the schools of the US.

It has been illuminating to consult with those who are at the forefront of the decision-making process in literacy --- researchers, policy makers and publishers. They helped to shed light on the reasons behind the choices each country has made, as well as revealing the

idiosyncrasies of the policy decision-making dynamic. Also, it was apparent the pace of government provides a challenge for all on the receiving end of the literacy policy decisions. Literacy policy is a challenge for researchers, who move at the much slower speed demanded by meticulous and time-consuming research; for publishers who need time to create high quality commercial products for schools; and for educators, who have to implement the new programs in the classrooms.

Absent in this summary of stakeholders are the young beginning readers. These young readers, the concern for all levels from government to educator, suffer or benefit from the pedagogical decisions made around them. It is their need that drives this study. This study has found that it is factors beyond research and data that influence the literacy policy chosen, not least among these is the beliefs and assumptions of any and all along the way, which determine the pedagogy ultimately presented to the novice reader.

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Appendix One
Aurora University, Illinois, England
Institutional Review Board
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I am a doctoral candidate at Aurora University. You are invited to participate in a comparative research study about how reading is introduced to entry-level primary students in England and the US. As part of my dissertation, I will interview researchers, policy makers and publishers regarding the recent divergence in the introductory reading approaches used in each nation.

Given the distances involved between England and the US, most interviews will take place by telephone. Should you agree to participate, I will arrange a time convenient for you, for the first of two interviews. The first interview will be about one half-hour in length. Another shorter, follow-up interview of fifteen minutes will be scheduled sometime in the few weeks following to discuss any issues that may arise from the first interview, and will allow me to seek clarification or any further information necessary for the study. Both interviews will be recorded for later transcription by a professional transcriber who, for the sake of confidentiality, will not know your identity. The transcriptions of the interviews will be sent to you for you to determine if they are an accurate record of the interview, and if they capture what you intended to convey.

At all times, steps will be taken to minimize any risk to you as a participant in this study. I will maintain the highest level of confidentiality by using pseudonyms in the dissertation, and notes, recordings and transcriptions will only be shared with my dissertation chair and the head of the local Institutional Review Board. However, I wish you to be aware your prominence in reading research may lead to those knowledgeable about the field of early reading to surmise

Initials _____

your identity. In addition, I would like you to know that your words and experience, crucial to this dissertation, may also be used in future for further articles related to this dissertation. The data collected will be destroyed or returned to you, at your request, three years following the completion of this study.

Should you choose to participate in the study, your unique combination of knowledge and understanding of beginning reading, and your understanding of the influence of other stakeholders in _____ about how beginner readers are being taught will be invaluable.

Should you need any further information about this research study, please feel free to contact me at x-xxx-xxx xxxx (mobile number), or my dissertation chair, Dr. Ron Banaszak at Aurora University, Illinois at x-xxx-xxx-xxxx; or Dr. Joan Fee, head of the local Institutional Review Board (IRB), can be contacted about your rights as a subject.

Of course, your participation in this study is voluntary. As such, you may withdraw at any time, freely and without prejudice, should the necessity arise. At this time, and following your wishes, I would either return to you or destroy the records of any interview(s) already completed.. A copy of this form is included for your records.

CONSENT

I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's Signature _____ Date _____

I agree to my comments being recorded and transcribed.

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix 2

Table of Interviewee’s Pedagogical Viewpoints

Country	Status	Pseudonyms	Code	Views about beginning reading pedagogy
USA	Policy Makers	- Matthew Forth - policy maker	US-PM1	Synthetic Phonics
		- Donna Peters - civil servant	US-PM2	No view given
		- Brittany Brock – congressional staffer	US-PM3	Reading First
	Researchers	- Beatrice Frable - independent researcher and author	US-R1	Phonological approach
		- Scott Malm - Professor, past President of prominent teacher organization	US-R2	Balanced Reading
		- Peter Schuman - Professor, member of US Reading Panels, past President of prominent teacher organization	US-R3	Systematic phonics, plus vocabulary, fluency and comprehension
	Publishers	- Georgina Schultz (niche)	US-PB1	Synthetic Phonics
		- Don Missele (mainstream, retired)	US-PB2	Balanced Reading
		- Bill Aguirre (mainstream, publishing consultant)	US-PB3	Balanced Reading
England	Policy Makers	- David Walker - policy maker	E-R1	Synthetic Phonics
		- Mary Mullen - civil servant	E-R2	No view given
		- Marie Fisher - lobbyist	E-R3	Synthetic Phonics
	Researchers	- Julian Straley - quantitative researcher involved in meta-analysis	E-R1	Systematic Phonics, with synthetic sympathies
		- Norman Williams - Professor	E-R2	Balanced Reading
		- Robert Foster - Professor, knowledgeable about literacy in both England and UK	E-R3	Systematic phonics, including comprehension
	Publishers	- Sally Ney (mainstream)	E-PB1	Balanced Reading and Synthetic
- Evan Smith (Niche)		E-PB2	Synthetic	
Scotland	Policy Maker	- Catherine Mason – Professor; literacy consultant to English Government	S-PM1	Balanced Reading