Table I-8 presents a summary of these findings. About ten of the sixteen authors of the 1972–1978 textbooks referred to one or both of these studies. Generally, the texts that preferred a meaning-emphasis approach referred to these studies more frequently than those who preferred a code-emphasis.

What is perhaps of even greater interest is how these researchers were referred to. While some textbook authors referred to the major conclusions from each, many referred only to one or more specific findings. It should be noted too, from Table I-8, that some of the conclusions might be considered different or even opposed to the findings and conclusions from the studies. They seemed to come more from the discussions of the studies rather than from the study itself. For example, for the 27 USOE studies most textbooks seemed to conclude that the crucial factor was the teacher rather than one of the approaches studied. (see pp. 6–7 for USOE Studies).

The Great Debate: Then and Now

Where is the Great Debate now? The present update would indicate that it has lessened with regard to practice and research. Practice as judged by the almost universal use of basal readers finds a definite movement toward a greater code emphasis. The basal readers teach more phonics and they teach it earlier than in 1967.

The research evidence from the classroom, the clinic and the laboratory is also stronger now for a code-emphasis than it was in 1967.

And yet the "great debate" of the late 1960s has not gone away altogether: it seems to have taken on somewhat different forms. One change seems to be in the movement of the Debate from practice to theory.

Carroll's (1978) comprehensive review of the influence of psycholinguistics on reading noted that the "great debate" in reading had spilled over into psycholinguistics. Where previously the debate was over "look-say" versus "phonics," the controversy now focused on whether reading is a "psycholinguistic guessing game" or a process of "decoding print into spoken form."

The form of the debate seems also to have moved more toward the theoretical. Fewer researchers seem to ask, as they did in the late 1960s, which approach produces the better results. Instead, more seem to ask which is the better theory.

In his 1970 article on the reception of *The Great Debate,* Groff saw the controversy mainly in terms of resistance from those committed to the basal readers of the late 1960s. But in the same article he noted that practice was changing in the direction of our findings.

There seems to be little resistance to the emphasis upon decoding in beginning reading. Even the authors of basal readers boast that their products now contain much more of this, while insisting in the same breath that Chall was wrong.

Groff's recent article (1978), "The New Antiphonics," also notes the theoretical positions on beginning reading taken by Frank Smith and Kenneth Goodman, who base their reading models on psycholinguistic theory. Basically, Groff notes, these theories have lead them to propose a sight approach to reading, with no teaching of phonics, not even "later and less" phonics combined with context and picture clues characteristic of the meaning-emphasis programs common from the 1920s to 1950s.

In 1979, the Council on Basic Education, long a supporter of code-emphasis programs, wrote in "Beginning Reading Revisited," that they were " . . . heartened by the fact that now even 'basal readers' which used to prolong or delay the teaching of letter sounds and blending, provide more instruction in phonics and provide it earlier." (p. 5)

With the publication in 1979 of Rudolph Flesch's "Why Johnny Still Can't Read" in *Family Circle*, some aspects of the earlier beginning reading debate flared up again, but not with the old intensity. Flesch's position was essentially the same as it was in *Why Johnny Can't Read* (1955), that Johnny can't read because he isn't taught intensive, synthetic phonics. The *Family Circle* article was followed in 1981 by a book of the same title. Neither the article nor the book acknowledged the increase in phonics teaching over the past decade, the changes in the basal readers, and the improved achievement in reading of children at age 9 in 1980 as compared to 1970 on the National Assessment of Educational Progress tests (see pages 45–46).

Generally, the reactions to Flesch's recent works do not seem to be as strong and heated as they were to his original work. The position papers of the Board of Directors of the International Reading Association, appearing shortly after the *Family Circle Article, There's More to Reading than Some Folks Say,* does not mention the article or the author.

Generally, the strong tone of the 1960's debate, often heated and bitter, seems to have abated. In the 1960's, seldom did those who held one view seem to reach out and listen to or read the views of the other. Indeed, I found the language then used to be more characteristic of politics and religion than that of science and scholarship.

Has the emotional nature of the debate changed in the last fifteen years? Has the increased knowledge from research contributed to the easing of such intense feelings?

Some changes have occurred. But overall, it seems as though the beginning reading debate has not lost all of its emotion. While more reading

professionals accept heavier and earlier decoding for beginning reading now than in 1967, there is still much passionate disagreement, particularly among those holding different theoretical views of the reading process and those preferring different kinds of phonics.

Among teachers and administrators the *Debate* seems also to have lessened, particularly since the most widely used basal readers now have stronger phonics programs. But there still seems to be considerable disagreement among those favoring different kinds of phonics—direct/synthetic phonics or indirect/analytic phonics.

It is between these points of view that one finds heated discussions and accusations (one of the other), reminiscent of the 1960's. Thus, according to the proponents of direct/synthetic phonics, one often hears that only "phonics-first" programs teach phonics. All others, particularly the phonics in the widely used basal readers, are really mixtures of a sight method.

According to many direct phonics proponents, dyslexia does not or need not exist if only a phonics-first program is taught. There is a conspiracy for sight methods by textbook publishers and the International Reading Association. (The textbook publishers of synthetic phonics programs are, obviously, not included.)

Strong positions are taken also by many proponents of indirect/analytic phonics and of top-down reading models. And if direct/synthetic phonics proponents seem to recognize no other phonics but their own in spite of contrary evidence, it is equally disturbing to find reputable researchers, theorists, authors, publishers, and teachers claim that direct phonics destroys reading for meaning, when the research evidence indicates the opposite.

The ideological nature of the current debate may seem more puzzling because so much more evidence exists today. And yet the persistence of strong feelings on the issues, and the easy distortion of facts, brings to mind another question. Could it be that the phonics debate is only part of a much broader debate, one concerned with how children are to be educated and what they are to be taught.

The strong stands taken in the debate makes one wonder whether the issues do not far exceed those involved only in initial reading methods. If initial reading methods alone were the problem, it would seem that the research results would have a better chance of being accepted. Yet the strong positions, both in the 1960s and in the 1980s, on the Follow Through studies, on the reading models, on the First Grade Studies—issues that seem to keep coming back again and again in different forms—suggest broader reasons.

One is of course the substantial financial investment in a basal series and its monetary rewards to the authors and publishers. Basal readers comprise the largest portion of an elementary school's budget for instructional materials. There are only about 13 publishing houses who publish basal reading series and the four most popular have more than 50 percent of the sales. The investment in a series which is harder to pin down now than in 1967 would probably be about $25 million today. Thus the claim by publishers that their series is indeed the best means millions.

I would suggest another factor—that of the values and hopes of teachers and administrators. From their training, from conferences they attend, the journals they read, and book salesmen who visit them, they form preferences for particular materials and procedures. These are based only partly on research evidence. They are based perhaps more on philosophies of education and on preferred views of human development and of learning to read. In a recent study of the history of phonics, Balmuth (1981) includes an excerpt from Horace Mann's lecture in 1841 that denounces alphabetic methods of beginning reading. He refers to letters as

> skeleton-shaped, bloodless, ghostly apparitions, and hence it is no wonder that the children look and feel so deathlike, when compelled to face them. The letters are more minute too, than any objects which ever attract the attention of children. Children require some medium between the vast and the microscopic. They want some diversity, also, but the forms of the twenty-six letters have as little variety as twenty-six grains of sand." (Quoted in Balmuth, p. 190)

The rest of Mann's discussion of the alphabetic approach to reading and spelling also conveys his strong dislike: " . . . it is upon this emptiness, blankness, silence and death that we compel children to fasten their eyes"; "the odor and fungousness of spelling-book paper"; "a soporific effluvium seems to emanate from the page, steeping all their faculties in lethargy." (p. 190) Mann's description of the whole-word method is somewhat more cheerful. Mann says that lessons in which words are taught first

> will be like an excursion to the fields of elysium, compared with the old method of plunging children, day by day, for months together, in the cold waters of oblivion, and compelling them to say falsely, that they love the chill and torpor of the immersion." (pp. 190–191)

Why would Mann so praise sight methods and so condemn phonic methods? Was it his wife's recent authorship of a sight primer, as Balmuth notes? Indeed, it has often been said that basal-reader authors and publishers have held back from using phonics and other innovations because of high royaltics and profits. Certainly, millions are made each year on the basal readers, more than on any other textbooks. Yet it should be noted that the

authors and publishers of the direct/synthetic phonics programs are also recipients of royalties and profits. It would seem that while financial gains cannot be ignored in the debate, they do not account for all or most of the debates.

A broader, more comprehensive explanation lies, I believe, in differences in philosophies and goals of education. In *The Great Debate* I noted that sight methods had been associated with progressive education while phonics was associated more with traditional schooling, with drill and hard work. Indeed, the excerpts from Horace Mann reveal the tendency, even then, to associate sight methods with the open, good, and happy, and the alphabet and phonics with drill and drudgery.

Today, a meaning emphasis (analytic phonics) tends to be associated with cognitive psychologies, with natural language development, and with more open and free learning environments. Direct phonics is associated with greater structure in the learning environment and in the materials to be learned.

A common assumption is that the more open programs lead to greater cognitive development and to greater satisfaction with school than the more direct and structured ones. And yet some of the evidence seems to indicate the contrary, particularly for children below grade 3 and from lower income families. Studies that have compared the effects of structured and unstructured classes on child's attitudes toward school and on cognitive development have found either no differences between these two types of class patterns on these measures (Stallings, 1975; Evans, 1979) or that the direct and structured classes held a slight advantage (Rosenshine, 1979).

It is of interest to note that debates similar to those on phonics are found for direct instruction, mastery learning, open structure classrooms, alternative schools and the like. It would seem that a greater understanding of the values behind and effectiveness of these broader issues would bring a greater understanding of the persistent debates on phonics. Equally, I believe these broader issues in education would be helped by an understanding of the long debates on phonics.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The conclusions and recommendations noted below are based on research evidence from the classroom, from the laboratory, and from the clinic between 1967 and 1981.

Research comparing the effectiveness of a code-emphasis to that of a meaning-emphasis tapered off in the 1970s. The findings from these studies were essentially the same as those from the earlier research reported in *The*

Great Debate. Both found that code-emphasis programs produced better results than meaning-emphasis programs.

The considerable basic research from the laboratory and clinic on the reading process conducted during the 1970s tended to give further support to the importance of phonics or decoding for the development of word recognition, accuracy in oral reading, and silent reading comprehension. Almost all of the summaries of past research by various investigators also concluded that code-emphasis programs were more effective than meaning-emphasis.

In the 1970s more beginning reading methods research concerned themselves with the effectiveness of different kinds of phonics, e.g., direct-synthetic or indirect-analytic. Most of the widely used basal reader series of the 1970s employed indirect/analytic phonics. Direct/synthetic phonics was used by fewer published reading programs, and they were used less widely. In the direct/synthetic phonics programs, sounds are taught directly, the sounds are isolated from the words, and sound blending is usually demonstrated and practiced.

For the original *Great Debate*, there was not enough evidence to study the relative effectiveness of direct/synthetic or indirect/analytic phonics. We could conlude only that earlier, stronger, and more systematic phonics (code-emphasis) was more effective than programs that taught later and less phonics. For the present update, considerable research was available on the synthetic/analytic issues from the classrom, the laboratory, and for exceptional populations. Overall, although there was not total agreement, the research from the laboratory tended to favor direct-synthetic phonics. Classroom studies (including special needs population) were less clear cut, but about half favored direct-synthetic phonics. The other half found equal results for the indirect and direct programs. Few of the studies, however, favored the indirect-analytic.

The correlational evidence for the importance of early learning of letters remains as strong in the more recent research as in 1967. Several experimental studies, however, have questioned the value of teaching letter names for early reading achievement.

Much of the current basic research on the reading process, from beginning reading to reading disability, from linguistics to psycholinguistics, tends to support the importance of phonics in beginning reading and in later reading comprehension.

The basal readers have changed since the late 1960s. Comparative analses of widely used basal reading programs of the 1970s with those of the 1950s and early 1960s reveal earlier and heavier phonics, a loosening of vocabulary control, changes in the story content (more minority representation), and more folk and fairy tales, and a higher picture load.

Professional views about phonics seem also to have changed. The teacher education textbooks on methods of teaching reading have changed since 1967. More of them in the 1970s than in the early 1960s favored a code-emphasis for beginning reading. The younger authors seem to have made the greatest shift to a code-emphasis.

Generally, a greater consensus appears to have developed on the need for phonics. Although there are still strong disagreements on how to teach phonics, most views seem to be closer than they were in 1967.

Strong disagreement is found on two issues in the phonics debate. One involves theory, with many "top-down" theorists claiming that the teaching of phonics is unnecessary and even harmful to the development of reading comprehension. A second controversy exists and seems to grow on the synthetic/analytic issue. Many direct-synthetic phonics proponents claim that analytic phonics is really "look-say," and many indirect-analytic proponents claim that direct phonics is too hard and hurts comprehension.

My recommendations can be summarized as follows:

1. With regard to the phonics issue, it appears as if the research of the 1970s continues to support beginning programs that are code-oriented as compared to those that are meaning-oriented. Indeed, the research support seems to be even stronger than it was in 1967.

2. The current research also suggests that some advantage may accrue to direct as compared to indirect-phonics. It would seem that many of the characteristics of direct phonics, such as teaching letter-sounds directly, separating the letter-sounds from the words, giving practice in blending the sounds, and so forth are more effective than the less direct procedures used in current analytic phonics programs. Most analytic phonics programs teach letter-sounds indirectly from known sight words by inference and generalization. Letter-sounds are seldom isolated or taught directly.

The research from 1967–1981 that we analyzed, although not completely clear cut, seems to suggest that improvements might be made in beginning reading by using more of the direct-synthetic procedures in teaching decoding.

The fact that about half of the classroom comparisons of direct/indirect phonics found equal results suggests the need for further research on this issue. Such studies should continue beyond Grade 3 to permit study of effects on comprehension at Grade 4 and above. These studies might also find evidence regarding which approach is better for which kinds of students. For exceptional children, including those with reading and learning disabilities, the evidence seems to be stronger for a direct-synthetic approach.

3. With regard to the alphabet, my recommendation is that early knowledge of the letters helps the child know his or her whereabouts in reading. Although it may not be an absolute necessity before learning to read words, is high

association with reading achievement suggests the value of early learning of letters.

4. Basal readers have become more difficult since the early 1960s. A heavier phonic emphasis no doubt contributed to the higher vocabulary loads.

Lest we move too far in the direction of difficulty, we need to study the effects of different levels of difficulty and content on different kinds of students, and with different methods of teaching. (Compare similar recommendations in Chall, 1958).

5. We also need studies that continue beyond the third grade. Such studies are needed because declines in reading achievement at Grade 4 and beyond continue to be reported particularly for children from low income families (Chall and Snow, 1982) and nationally (National Assessment of Educational Progress (1981). Because the fourth grade usually represents a break between an emphasis on word recognition and decoding, and an emphasis on reading for comprehension, it would be well to follow up beginning reading studies at least till Grade 4 and beyond (Chall, 1979, 1983).

6. A final recommendation is for a more balanced rhetoric and use of research findings. How is it possible that during a time of growing research evidence, some of the statements on various issues of the debate seem as heated as in 1967—and in 1841. It would seem that an analysis of the phonics debate within broader educational and societal issues may be helpful.

A Concluding Note

The teaching of beginning reading has changed in the last fifteen years. The basal readers most widely used include more phonics in the primary grades and they teach it earlier. They contain more new words for each of the grades. That teachers may now be teaching differently than they taught prior to 1967 may be inferred from the methods textbooks used to train teachers then and now. The more recent ones show a greater preference for a code-emphasis and contain more pages devoted to decoding and phonics than the earlier ones.

What has happened to the children in the early grades during these fifteen years of change in research and practice? The evidence shows that the children are doing better. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (1981) tested a national sample of 9-year-old children in 1971, in 1975, and in 1980. It found a significant increase in reading achievement on both retests, from 1970 to 1975 and from 1975 to 1980.

Can we attribute the increase in reading achievement to the changes in practice? In a strict scientific sense, it might be risky. Yet it would be equally unscientific to deny the effects of the changes in schools and in

homes—changes that research has shown to be associated with better reading achievement. It would appear then that the greater use of code-emphasis programs in the basal readers, the greater difficulty of the readers, the greater concern by teachers with teaching children to decode, and the informal learning of letter names and sounds in *Sesame Street* and *The Electric Company* have contributed to the greater reading achievement in the early grades.[3]

This attempt to relate the national increased achievement in reading to the changed conditions in school and home is admittedly a hypothesis. But it seems a likely hypothesis. If we cannot relate what basic and applied research has found useful to how teachers are trained, how they teach, how effective textbooks are, and how well children achieve in reading, one wonders what causal conditions we might look for and accept.

Thus, the debate on beginning reading, although it continues in similar and other forms, helped to raise the reading achievement found on the National Assessment and other tests. The 9-year-olds (Grade 4) were reading better in 1975 and 1980 than in 1967.

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[3]This does not deny the possible effects of special programs such as Head Start and Title I that might also have contributed to the higher achievement.

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