In the government document, *Put Reading First*, widely distributed to teachers and parents nationwide for free, the authors make a very strong claim that systematic and explicit phonics instruction “significantly improves children’s reading comprehension. Systematic phonics instruction results in better growth in children’s ability to comprehend what they read than non-systematic or no phonics instruction. This is not surprising because the ability to read the words in a text accurately and quickly is highly related to successful reading comprehension” (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001, p. 14). In the same publication, the authors present the “official” government position in regard to literature-based programs as “non-systematic programs of phonics instruction” that “emphasize reading and writing activities. Phonics instruction is embedded in these activities, but letter–sound relationships are taught incidentally, usually based on key letters that appear in student reading materials” (p. 17).
The implication of these claims is that literature-based classrooms with knowledgeable teachers facilitating discussions about books, encouraging children to choose what to read from a wide range of authentic materials, making time for them to read and respond, and teaching phonics and skills in meaningful contexts are not effective in improving children's growth in reading comprehension and phonics knowledge. Given that this strong position regarding the effectiveness of systematic phonics programs over literature-based programs is embedded within the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (2001) and is driving program mandates nationwide, we thought that further investigation was imperative. Consequently, we developed a research study that included an analysis of the reading strategies, comprehension, and phonics knowledge of second graders in two literature-based programs and in two commercial phonics-based reading programs. We believe that the findings of our study will shed light on this most important and timely question of whether commercial phonics-based reading programs are, in fact, more effective than literature-based reading programs in developing phonics, accuracy, and comprehension.

**The Background of Current Debates**

Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, literature enjoyed a prominent place in the nation’s classrooms. Research documented the importance of encouraging and allowing children to just read (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1984), the number of children’s books published increased, and teacher researchers, such as Nancie Atwell (1987), were successful in inviting children to read and talk about what they read. Of particular importance was the resurgence of interest in Louise Rosenblatt’s reader response theory, leading to a paradigm shift in our views of comprehension, with a heightened emphasis on interpretation:

*Every reading act is an event, or a transaction involving a particular reader and a particular pattern of signs, a text, and occurring at a particular time in a particular context . . . the reader and the text are two aspects of a total dynamic situation. The “meaning” does not reside ready-made “in” the text or “in” the reader but happens or comes into being during the transaction between reader and text.* (Rosenblatt, 2004, p. 1369)

**However, increasingly since the late 1990s, authentic literature has been replaced by commercial basal anthologies and decodable texts.**

In literature-based classrooms, reader response theory comes alive as children talk with each other, ask questions, and make personal connections as they “live through” their readings and transactions with texts (Rosenblatt, 1978). Reading is perceived as a process of inquiry (Short, Harste, & Burke, 1996). There are no single “right” answers. “Students read to inquire about their world and their lives . . . Dialoging about literature allows students to interrogate their views of the world and try on new perspectives” (Short, 1999, p. 135). Through literature discussions, readers socially construct a meaning that is more than the sum of their individual meanings (Rosenblatt, 1978). Studies document many benefits for children in literature-based classrooms (Galda & Cullinan, 2003; Morrow & Gambrell, 2000; Tunnell & Jacobs, 1998). Children grow as readers and writers (Elsee, 2001; Gunner, Smith, & Smith, 1999), in their knowledge and use of written language (Purcell-Gates, McIntyre, & Freppon, 1995), in providing stronger retellings (Morrow, 1992), and in making predictions, evaluating literature, and connecting literature to their own lives (Eeds & Wells, 1989). Children in literature-based classrooms also perceive themselves as readers and writers and demonstrate the ability to apply phonics knowledge and use strategies when experiencing difficulty (Dahl & Freppon, 1995).

However, increasingly since the late 1990s, authentic literature has been replaced by commercial basal anthologies and decodable texts, and literature discussions by scripted lessons that tell the teacher what to ask and how the children should respond. To justify this change in reading instruction, publishers of commercial reading programs point to research supporting elements of their programs. Promotional materials for Open Court, for example, point to a controversial study (Allington & Woodside-Jiron, 2002; Coles, 2000) by Foorman, Francis, Fletcher, Mehta, and Schatschneider (1998) that found that students in Open Court programs did statistically better than those in Embedded Phonics and Whole Language Programs on measures of decoding, phonological processing, and word reading. To promote their SRA Reading Mastery program, McGraw-Hill published a booklet (Results with Reading Mastery, 2002) coauthored with the American Federation of Teachers and the National Association of Elementary School Principals, which includes testimony and test scores from eight elementary schools, and a list of studies “supporting instruction in
Reading Mastery” (p. 18). While not all the studies in the booklet examine the Reading Mastery program as a whole, they all support at least some component of the program.

Not surprisingly, publishers of these commercial reading programs are also quick to claim that their programs are consistent with findings of “scientifically based” reading research, as determined by the National Reading Panel Report (NRP, 2000). Now, with the implementation of No Child Left Behind legislation (2001), teachers, locally and nationally, are increasingly mandated to use particular commercial programs, often Open Court and Reading Mastery, which meet government criteria for funding. But is there adequate scientific justification for mandating these commercial programs? Our study explores this question.

**OUR STUDY OF READING PROGRAMS**

The research we report is drawn from a study that examined the impact of second-grade reading programs on classroom instruction, and children’s understandings and perceptions of reading and their reading strategies (Altwerger, Arya, Laster, Jin, Martens, Renman, et al., 2004; Wilson, Pitcher, Altwerger, Arya, Jin, Lang, et al., 2003; Wilson, Martens, Arya, & Altwerger, in press). We conducted our study in four second grades in four different schools within a large urban metropolitan area. Two of the schools used commercial reading programs—Reading Mastery (Engelmann, Bruner, Hanner, Osborn, Ostborn, & Zoref, 1995) and Open Court (SRA/McGraw-Hill, 2000). The other two schools used literature-based instruction—one an adaptation of Fountas and Pinnell’s (1996) *Guided Reading* and the other a school-designed adaptation of a system-wide literature curriculum.

The 100 students in the study were from low socioeconomic conditions, but not coded for special education and not receiving English as a Second Language services. They had all been in their respective programs since the beginning of first grade. To study the children’s actual reading process and use of strategies, we used miscue analysis procedures (Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 1987). We audiotaped the children reading aloud to us from trade books that had an identifiable story grammar. The texts were leveled according to Fountas and Pinnell’s (1996, 2001) guidelines. We had eight levels of books, ranging from kindergarten to fourth grade reading level, with two to three books at each level. Miscue data was derived from children’s reading of stories that were challenging (without being frustrating), determined on the basis of miscue percentages and retelling ability.

As per standard miscue analysis procedure, we told the children that if they came to something they didn’t know while reading, they should proceed as they normally would when they read alone, and that we would not help them. We also told them that when they finished reading, we would ask them to retell the story. The retelling consisted of two parts. In the unaided retelling, the children shared, without being interrupted, what they remembered from the reading. Then, in the aided retelling, we asked questions but avoided giving information about the text; these questions were re-phrasings of the readers’ comments or general prompts.

To give us an indication of the children’s ability to use phonics in isolation, we gave the standardized phonics test from the Woodcock Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery (Woodcock, Johnson, & Bonner, 1990). Members of the research team also observed and documented language arts instruction in the classrooms and interviewed principals and teachers to learn their perceptions of the reading program in use. Our observations of language arts instruction allowed us to compare the children’s readings and retellings with what was going on during their reading instruction. In this manner, we built a comprehensive picture of the children as readers.

To analyze their miscues, we followed miscue analysis procedures (Goodman et al., 1987). Miscue analysis is a “window” (Goodman, 1973) that allows teachers and researchers to examine the oral reading “miscues,” or unexpected responses a child makes while reading. This analysis indicates how proficiently the reader integrates language cues, such as syntactic (grammatical), semantic (meaning-based), and graphophonic (phonics) cues, and reading strategies such as predicting and correcting, with a focus on constructing meaning. Two of us coded each child’s reading at an interrater reliability of .90.

To study the children’s comprehension, we analyzed their retellings for inclusion of characters, setting, plot episodes, inferences, and connections, and for general cohesion (smoothness and completeness of the retelling) (Morrow, 2001). Two researchers analyzed each retelling transcript by scoring each element on a scale of 0 to 2 with a 0 indicating no evidence and a 2 indicating strong evidence. We established an interrater reliability of .95 for this
analysis. The Woodcock Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery–R (Woodcock, Johnson, & Bonner, 1990) was scored according to the publisher’s directions, which resulted in standard scores.

**WHAT WE LEARNED**

Through the analysis of the children’s reading, retellings, and phonics test results, we constructed profiles of readers in each of the two types of program. By observing in classrooms during language arts, we learned details about the instructional practices that impacted the children’s reading. Therefore, as we present what we learned from the analysis, we contextualize the profiles of readers in the two program types by first describing instruction in the readers’ classrooms to show the relationship between instruction and reading patterns.

**Literature-Based Programs**

**Characteristics.** In the literature-based programs we observed in this study, the teachers focus the children on constructing meaning as they read. Through such experiences as shared reading, read-aloud, guided reading, independent reading, literature discussions, strategy discussions, interactive writing, guided writing, and independent writing, children are supported in integrating all of the language cueing systems (syntactic, semantic, and graphophonic) to predict and construct meaning.

During reading instruction, the teachers use authentic fiction and nonfiction trade books. They create and write the lessons, taking into account the children’s interests and needs and including both reading and writing experiences. In guided reading groups, the teachers support the children in using multiple strategies and cueing systems and provide time for the children to practice what was discussed that day. Skills and phonics are taught, but primarily in meaningful contexts, not in isolation. For example, when the children encounter difficulties, the teachers encourage them to: “Read that again so that it sounds good”; “If you don’t know it, skip it and come back”; and, “Use the sounds and the picture to figure out the word” (Jordan, 2002). When beginning a new book, the children first take a picture walk and make predictions about what they will read. After transacting with the texts in the regular discussions of literature, children share their perceptions and socially construct meaning. They are encouraged to make inferences and connect what they are reading to themselves, other texts, and the world. The teachers support children’s growth in comprehension through such strategies as K-W-L, compare/contrast charts, timelines, and story maps.

**Profile of the Literature-Based Readers.** Our analysis of the children’s readings and retellings in literature-based (LB) classrooms reveals similar patterns in the children’s use of multiple language cues with a focus on constructing meaning as they read. Their miscues are usually either fully acceptable in the sentences and text or partially acceptable from the beginning of the sentence up to and including the miscue or from the miscue to the end of the sentence. If their reading isn’t making sense, they frequently stop and work to solve the problem. For example, the reading sample in Figure 1 is from Ted’s reading of *Peter’s Chair* (Keats, 1998).

In this sample, Ted demonstrates his willingness to take risks and integrate a variety of cues and correction strategies when he reads. He begins by reading, “While take.” His substitution of “While” for “We’ll” shows he is picking up on graphic and sound cues. Since “While” is not the same part of speech as “We’ll,” his attention to syntactic cues is less obvious. However, “While” is a common word to begin a sentence. When this substitution doesn’t make sense, Ted immediately stops and corrects. He continues reading until he comes to “crocodile.” After an unsuccessful partial attempt (“cro-”), he goes back to the beginning of the sentence and begins again, this time saying “blank” for “crocodile.” “Blank” is one of the strategies the literature-based children use when they come to something they don’t know while reading. It allows them to keep reading and transacting with the text and indicates their awareness that “getting all the words” isn’t necessary to understand. If that particular text item is critical to the story, there will be other cues as to the necessary meaning or it will appear again.

![Figure 1. Example of Ted’s (LB) reading of *Peter’s Chair* (Keats, 1998).](image)
In the next line, Ted substitutes “pictures” for “picture” and “my” for “me.” Both of these substitutions show his attention to syntactic cues (they are the same parts of speech as the text items) and graphophonic cues (there is high graphic and sound similarity). While “pictures” makes sense and would have been an acceptable substitution, “my” is not. Ted stops and, while he could have just made that one correction, he goes back to the beginning of the noun phrase and also corrects “pictures.” Ted’s substitution of “saw” for “stood” in the last line again indicates he is drawing on syntactic and graphophonic cues. “Saw” is also an example of a partially acceptable miscue; it makes sense from the beginning of the sentence up to and including “saw.” When Ted realizes that “saw” doesn’t make sense, he immediately corrects it.

The retellings of the literature-based children demonstrate the children’s focus and understanding that their reading needs to make sense. In addition to including facts from the story, such as setting, characters, and plot events, their retellings generally show some degree of cohesiveness and that the children are making inferences and connecting to the text. An excerpt from Terri’s unaided retelling of Jamaica Tag-Along (Havill, 1989) provides an example:

The little girl went to play with the basketball with her brother . . . . But her brother didn’t want her to. And then he told her to go play on the swing. And then, the little boy came and bothered her while she was making her castle and then a woman was pushing a stroller back and forth and then she said, “Leave the little girl alone” . . . . And then her brother came and they helped her build a castle . . . [Jamaica was] annoying . . . because she keeps on asking her brother to take her with him . . . . By the end [she changes]. The boy asks her “Can, do you need some help” and she said, “Yes, if you want to help.”

It is clear from Terri’s retelling that she constructs meaning as she reads. She gives the gist of the story, including characters and plot episodes, with some cohesion rather than only stating scattered details. She also makes an inference, saying that Jamaica was “annoying.”

The literature-based children, then, are immersed in rich literacy environments where they read, transact, and discuss authentic literature, are encouraged to use multiple cues to make sense of texts, and learn phonics and skills in meaningful contexts. When they read, their focus on constructing meaning is evident in their strategy use, corrections, and retellings.

### The retellings of the literature-based children demonstrate the children’s focus and understanding that their reading needs to make sense.

#### Commercial Phonics-Based Programs

**Characteristics.** The two commercial phonics-based programs (CPB) are similar in that they both are scripted, incorporate systematic explicit phonics instruction, and include reading anthologies in their second-grade programs. There are some differences, though. The anthology in the Reading Mastery program, for example, is written by the program authors who control vocabulary and concept development and try to increase children’s background knowledge (Osborn, 1995). Reading Mastery also includes word practice using lists of difficult-to-decode words, common feature words, easy-to-decode or familiar words, and vocabulary from the text to be read (Osborn, 1995). During reading instruction, the stories are read out loud, with the teachers stopping at specific places to insert comprehension questions. In one lesson, for example, the teacher read, “Everybody, touch the dock,” and paused for the children to point to the picture in their books. She continued by saying, “What do we call a place with those docks?” and the children replied in unison, “Harbor” (Lang, 2002). Students are allowed a certain number of errors as they read. If they make more than the allowable number, they re-read; if not, they earn points for not going over the limit of permissible errors (Osborn, 1995).

The Open Court program provides teachers with detailed lessons and includes an anthology containing stories that have been published elsewhere. The anthology is set up in thematic units, containing both classic and contemporary literature. In addition to the anthology, pre-decodable and decodable books are used to explicitly and systematically teach decoding skills (SRA/McGraw-Hill, 2000). Choral readings and teacher-directed literal and inferential questions are used to develop reading fluency and comprehension. The teachers are advised to follow a three-part scripted instructional plan for both word study and for comprehension at all grade levels, focusing on skills such as sounds and letters, phonemic awareness, phonics, word knowledge, spelling, vocabulary, and comprehension.

**Profile of the Commercial Phonics-Based Readers.** Our analysis of the commercial phonics-based children’s miscues and retellings show similar patterns in their reading. The children rely heavily on graphophonic cues as they read. They often make substitutions, either real words or nonwords, which do not make sense and they continue reading without even attempting to correct their miscues. The sample
from Sandy’s reading of Gregory the Terrible Eater (Sharmat, 1980) in Figure 2 provides an example.

Both of Sandy’s substitutions in this example demonstrate her dependence on graphophonic cues at the expense of meaning. There is a high degree of graphic similarity and sound similarity between “$wipped” and “wiped” and between “excited” and “excused,” indicating she is using her phonics knowledge. In addition, both substitutions show her attention to syntactic/grammatical cues since both are the same part of speech as the text item. However, neither makes sense, and Sandy continues reading without correcting.

The retellings of children in the commercial phonics-based programs showed understanding of facts (setting, characters, and plot events) and some cohesiveness, but few inferences and personal connections to the text. Excerpts from Jeff’s retelling of Flossie and the Fox (McKissack, 1986) provide an example (slash lines indicate the interviewer’s murmur of encouragement to continue):

A dog ran after a fox. And, the fox was faster than the dog./ And Flossie thought the fox was a cat when the cat had yellow [eyes] and big sharp claws/ Like the fox./ And the fox had a long red tail/ And Flossie known it was a fox when the fox ran faster than the dog . . . Flossie known the fox was really fast./ The fox has a long nose. The fox is in the daylight. The fox had sharp teeth. The fox could talk./ The fox told Flossie that he was a fox.

Jeff’s retelling is not cohesive; he starts with the last part of the story, and tells bits and pieces as he remembers them. By the end of the retelling, he had supplied information about all but one plot episode. While his overall retelling score is 82%, Jeff is not used to discussing what he reads without strong teacher guidance in the form of questions.

The commercial phonics-based children, then, when they read, tend to be more concerned with graphophonic similarities than with meaning construction, often continuing to read when their substitutions do not make sense. While their retellings indicate some comprehension, they lack coherence and inference.

Comparative Miscue Analysis Findings for the Literature-Based and Commercial Phonics-Based Children

Table 1 contains mean miscue analysis scores that are representative of children in both the literature-based and commercial phonics-based programs. Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was used to compare the mean scores for meaning-related variables and graphophonetic-related variables of children in literature-based and commercial phonics-based programs. Table 1-A contains means for selected meaning related variables. The “Meaning Construction No Loss” pattern is also referred to as the “Comprehending Score” in other miscue analysis research. This score includes miscues that were fully acceptable in the story or were unacceptable but successfully corrected. The comprehending score measures how proficiently students are using the reading process by determining the quality of readers’ miscues and readers’ ability to success fully focus on meaning during the reading (Goodman, 2003). It differs from the comprehension score (measured by the retellings) that focuses on meaning after they’re finished reading.

The “Meaning Construction Partial Loss” pattern includes miscues that are fully acceptable but have some meaning change or are partially acceptable from the beginning of the sentence up to and including the miscues or from the miscue to the end of the sentence. It also includes miscues that the reader attempted to correct but was unsuccessful. The “Meaning Construction Loss” pattern calculates the reader’s unacceptable miscues that are not successfully corrected, thereby causing the reader to lose meaning (Goodman et al., 1987).

As Table 1-A shows, while there are some differences between the retelling scores (comprehension when they finish reading) and meaning construction no loss scores (their comprehending as they are reading) of children who participated in literature-based and commercial phonics-based programs, those differences are not statistically significant at the 0.05 level. In other words, students perform equally well while reading and in talking about what they read. The meaning construction loss and partial loss scores, however, are statistically significant at the 0.05 level. This indicates that the literature-based children are risk takers who do not hesitate to use available cues to at least make meaning in parts of sentences if they are having difficulty with the entire sentence. When their miscues don’t make sense, they often attempt to correct, though they are not always successful. As a result of this concern for meaning, the literature-based children have low percentages of miscues that have “no acceptability”—they are less willing to continue reading when their read-
Table 1. Mean miscue analysis scores for children in the literature-based and commercial phonics-based programs

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<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Literature-Based</td>
<td>60.61 NS</td>
<td>36.19 NS</td>
<td>*21.17</td>
<td>*43.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial Phonics-Based</td>
<td>54.35</td>
<td>34.38</td>
<td>*12.44</td>
<td>*52.27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B. Means for Graphophonics-Related Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sound Similarity</th>
<th>Graphic Similarity</th>
<th>Phonics Stand. Score</th>
<th>Miscues Per Hundred Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Literature-Based</td>
<td>86 NS</td>
<td>92 NS</td>
<td>103.09 NS</td>
<td>9.02 NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial Phonics-Based</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>109.81</td>
<td>10.23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:
NS = No statistically significant differences were found
* = Statistically significant differences were found at $p < .05$

Mng. Constr. = Meaning Construction
Sound Similarity = High Similarity + Some Similarity
Graphic Similarity = High Similarity + Some Similarity
Phonics Stand. Score = Phonics Standard Score from the Woodcock Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery—R, Achievement Word Attack Subtest. Standard scores are based on an average standard score of 100 with a standard deviation of 15.

In contrast, the commercial phonics-based children produce considerably more miscues that render the text sentences meaningless than the literature-based children.

Table 1-B represents findings regarding students' use of graphophonics. “Sound similarity” and “graphic similarity” reflect the children's use of sound and graphic cues in context and the “phonics standard score” shows their use of phonics out of context on the pseudo-word test (Woodcock, Johnson, & Bonner, 1990). “Miscues per hundred words” indicates the readers' accuracy as they read.

There are no statistically significant differences between the scores of children in literature-based and commercial phonics-based programs in their use of phonics in or out of context. This means that despite the heavy emphasis on isolated phonics and their use of decodable texts, commercial phonics-based programs do not produce readers who differ significantly in their use of graphophonics in or out of context as compared with readers in the literature-based programs. Furthermore, findings on miscue frequency, as measured by miscues per hundred words, indicate that the commercial phonics-based programs' emphasis on phonics and word identification does not result in more accurate readers than the literature-based programs. Apparently, programs that focus on integrating graphophonics with other cues while reading authentic texts for meaning produce readers that are not at a disadvantage in using graphophonics cues or in reading accuracy.

CONCLUSION

According to claims in Put Reading First, the children in commercial phonics-based programs, which emphasize systematic explicit phonics instruction, should be superior in their use of graphophonics within the reading process and in isolation. In addition, they should be more accurate readers and have an advantage in their ability to construct meaning during reading and in their overall comprehension of the texts. Based on these claims, school systems, along with their state and federal policy makers, are mandating programs that emphasize the use of systematic explicit phonics instruction.

In our study, however, we found no support for the claims made in Put Reading First and translated into the No Child Left Behind Act. Our findings show that the children in the commercial phonics-based programs are not significantly better than the children in literature-based programs in phonics use, in or out of textual context. Neither are they significantly better on accuracy or on comprehension. In fact, they are
statistically weaker when it comes to a willingness to take risks; as a result, they continue reading, accepting meaningless text. The commercial phonics-based children read decodable and controlled texts, often answer questions with one correct answer rather than multiple divergent answers, and rely heavily on graphophonics. This may handicap their ability to use multiple strategies for both text processing and comprehension.

On the other hand, children in literature-based programs, through their transactions with texts and immersion in rich discussions, attempt at every level to make sense of texts. They use what they know about language and the world, and integrate multiple strategies to construct meaning as they read. They focus on graphophonic cues, but do not rely solely on them. Because they demon-

Many of us feel a deep sense of hurt when districts seem to abandon trust in our decision making about students’ literacy lives in favor of prescriptive programs. Although it is healthy to grieve over this loss of trust, it is not healthy to remain marginalized and feeling helpless. Since every action is political, including non-action, we need to consider the actions we can take in pushing for more respectful and responsive outcomes within a program adoption.

- Never act alone. Teachers are too vulnerable to consider acting alone. Find a group of teachers and initiate conversations about the status of any pending or completed adoption. If you need to have such conversations away from the school site, do that. But do not stop talking. Talk is the forum in which our problems get focused and our actions take shape and form.

- Get involved in the adoption process. Most districts include teachers in adoptions because district administrators want to be able to claim that teachers were involved in the process and, therefore, should not complain about the choice. Getting your voice and the voices of like-minded colleagues on these committees is crucial.

- Slow the process down once you are on the committee. It is in the slowing down that you can expose any problematic aspects of the process. Ask questions: What are some other choices? How are English language learners served? How is reading defined and assessed? How much does this cost? What other companies have materials to explore? Who else has tried this in a district like ours?

- Unpack the definition of reading in these meetings. For example, if the children are asked to read non-words as part of the reading instruction, the definition of reading must include that it involves saying nonsense.

- Unpack the “research” that is presented in the meetings. Ask to see the studies to which program representatives refer. Find out how many children used the exact program in the study. Ask about the demographics. Find out what tests were used. Ask to see those tests. Ask how long the children were in the program. Ask if you can speak with teachers from the schools in the study to find out whether they supplemented the program. You may find that the teachers, not the program, made the success. Present other research from journals, such as Language Arts.

- Make your concerns about the product and the process public within adoption meetings. Explain what you would do instead. Take a lot of airtime and say that you are doing so in order to be clear about what your students need. Orchestrate your time in these meetings as thoroughly as the presenters orchestrate their presentations. Bring overheads of your students’ work and ask if there will be time for activities such as writers’ workshop, art, etc. Make sure that there will be people to agree with you (by shaking their heads or by stating so).

- Bring information to your colleagues at school. Tell them what is happening and invite them to come to the next meeting as your guest. If families in your school are able to come, consider bringing them, too, to speak about their perspectives and support for what is currently happening in your classroom.

- Talk to your union. A union is not supposed to take a stand on a specific curriculum, but they are supposed to make sure your voice is heard. See if the local union leader will attend meetings and write op ed pieces about the processes within adoptions.

- Finally, don’t give up. You may lose the first round, but your voice and your mind are crucial facets of your teaching. Don’t let anyone take them away.

—Richard Meyer
strate processing of both surface and deep structures of language, they are able to grapple with text and word-level processing and comprehension. This will enable them to develop independence as developing readers.

This study of children’s reading raises many critical questions and concerns. We must ask whether weaknesses in commercial phonics-based programs will launch readers who will be less independent in using multiple strategies for text processing, comprehending, and comprehension. Instead of teaching phonics more effectively, do the commercial phonics-based programs create readers for whom constructing meaning is less important than graphophonetic similarity? Our concern is that the widespread use of commercial phonics-based programs, instead of literature-based programs, will have a debilitating effect on the development of a whole generation of young readers. Although some first graders in commercial phonics-based programs may excel in decoding, they may ultimately have difficulty with the reading and comprehension demands placed on them in higher grades.

This study supports the contention that to grow readers who are successful in text processing and comprehension, and who can use graphophonic as well as other strategies efficiently during reading, there must be an emphasis on authentic and appealing literature in classrooms. Furthermore, there must be teaching beyond a scripted lesson. A teacher must model interaction with text, provide opportunities for children to talk about what they read, and facilitate peer interaction centered on reading. In the beginning grades, it is important for students to gain much more than mastery of grapheme–phoneme correspondence—they must learn how to use texts to make meaning while they are reading. This approach to reading will serve them for many years and with many different types of texts. The students in the literature-based programs in our study were adept at using graphophonetic cues, but they were also superior in comprehending and comprehension at higher levels. With the current trend toward mandating commercial phonics programs, we are concerned that many students will be given less than what they need to be successful readers.

**Author’s Note**

Miscue analysis markings used in the figures: • Substitutions are written above the text; words omitted are circled. • A small circle connected to a line(s) under a portion of text indicates a regression, and the letter(s) in the circle indicate what occurred: C indicates the miscue was corrected; R indicates a straight repetition of the text; UC means an unsuccessful attempt was made to correct the miscue. • A $ means that the substitution is a non-word.

**References**


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