1 | The Essentials of Reading

Part 1 Research: What a Child Needs to Know in Order to Learn to Read

All babies learn how to speak; it is a universal, natural phenomenon. However, all children do not learn how to read. It is easy to underestimate the unique challenge that the task of learning to read presents to children. As adult, fluent readers, we may find it difficult to appreciate the enormous scale of the conceptual leap that is involved in understanding the equivalence of little black marks on paper to speech. Reading is a cultural invention, not a biologically-programmed facility. Children do not suddenly start reading. They need to be taught.

The Alphabetic Principle

How children learn to read, and how best to teach them, are problems that have been addressed over the years by a huge amount of empirical research. As far as the fundamental basics involved in learning how to read are concerned, the results are unequivocal. The most important finding, consistently verified and no longer in question, is that in order for children to learn how to read in an alphabetic language, such as English, they must understand that print is a code or a cipher representing speech sounds. It is the writing system which is unique about reading. Children must learn the writing system that is used to represent the sounds of the language. Research confirms what common sense would lead one intuitively to believe.

An understanding of this basic relationship is crucial in learning how to read. At some point, and regardless of the method of instruction, children must grasp and make use of this principle that units of print correspond to units of speech. This principle is known as the *alphabetic principle* (Adams, 1990; Bradley, 1987: Byrne, 1992; Gough, Ehri, & Treiman,

1992; Rieben & Perfetti, 1991; Stanovich, 1992; Tunmer & Rohl, 1991; Williams, 1985).

The principle may be induced, it may be learned along with, or after, the accumulation of a *sight word* vocabulary (words recognised automatically on sight), or it may be learned through direct instruction. Whatever the method of instruction used, in order for children to read independently and be capable of decoding the many unknown words that will be encountered in the early stages of learning to read, this principle – the alphabetic principle – must be understood (Alegria & Morais, 1991; Byrne, 1991; Ehri, 1991; Perfetti, 1991; Stanovich, 1992). Recent advances in the science of reading, particularly in the field of eye movement studies (which confirm the importance of identifying individual letter sounds), mean that there is no longer any dispute about the processes involved in reading (Garrod, 1995; Perfetti, 1995a; Rayner, 1995). Because both historically speaking, and historically for each individual, speech came first, it does not seem so surprising that one of the first processes that takes place during reading is the translation of the printed symbols into speech sounds. Thus, as a preliminary process in reading, the printed symbols are translated into a form of language that is familiar and already understood.

Two Types of Knowledge Necessary

What does a child need to know in order to be able to read? When children come to school they know how to speak a language, but what they frequently do not know is the writing system. Thus, what needs to be taught is the writing system, and how to translate the written symbols into speech sounds. There are *two* kinds of knowledge required in order for a child to learn this translation process, the process which has been called the alphabetic principle. A child must:

1. be aware that spoken words are made up of separate sounds and be able to identify them (this is known as *phonological awareness)*; and
2. learn the specific correspondences of letters or groups of letters to specific speech sounds.

Phonological Awareness

Simply being aware that speech is made up of separate sounds aids understanding of the alphabetic principle. There is

consistent and wide-ranging research evidence that a child's awareness of this concept, or the child's level of *phonological awareness* (sensitivity to the sounds in speech), or even more particularly, *phoneme awareness* (sensitivity to the individual speech sounds in words), is the best single predictor of success in learning to read, not only in English (Blachman, 1984; Bradley & Bryant, 1983; Fox & Routh, 1980; Gough & Juel, 1991; Goldstein, 1976; Mann & Liberman, 1984; Stanovich, 1986), but also in Swedish, Spanish, French, Italian, and Russian (for reviews, see Adams & Bruck, 1993). Phonological measures are even better than standardised tests of intelligence in predicting reading ability (Stanovich, 1992).

It is quite logical that this should be so when one considers to what a large extent dealing with language sounds features in the process of reading. In fact, research evidence suggests that *all* readers make use of speech sound information while reading. Chinese readers, for example, are instructed in the alphabet first, for the purposes of pronunciation, before being introduced to Chinese characters. At first the alphabetic script is written with the characters until they are learned, and thereafter alphabetic writing is used only when introducing new characters (Hu & Catts, 1993; Perfetti, 1995a). And, remarkable as it may seem, it has even been discovered that the more successful among deaf readers also make some use of abstract phonological knowledge while reading (Liberman & Shankweiler, 1991). In contrast to these examples, adult illiterates do not possess any awareness of the phonological structure of words (Byrne & Ledez, 1994; Morais & Kolinsky, 1994; Pratt & Brady, 1988).

Letter-Sound Correspondences

In addition to knowledge about the sounds of language, a child must also learn the writing system. In English, there are twenty-six letters that either singly or in combination represent the forty-four sounds of spoken language (Morris, 1994). An abundance of research evidence has demonstrated that the ability to recognise letter shapes and to translate these to their corresponding speech sounds is also necessary in learning how to read (Anderson et al., 1985; Backman et al., 1984; Chall, 1983; Cunningham, 1990; Manis & Morrison, 1985; Share & Jorm, 1987; Williams, 1985).

A Reciprocal Process

Both phonological awareness and knowledge of letter-sound correspondences act in concert to generate an understanding of the alphabetic principle (Alegria & Morais, 1991; Ehri, 1991; Perfetti, 1991). Knowing that words are made up of separate speech sounds (or *phonemes*) and being able to hear these and identify them is not sufficient to understand the alphabetic principle. Supplementing this knowledge with information about how letters correspond to various sounds, however, will produce the necessary alphabetic insight. Learning the sounds that the letters represent is not sufficient on its own either. That needs to be supplemented by the ability to identify and segment sounds in spoken words.

Although most children by the age of 3 or 4 will have developed a minimal level of phonological awareness, being able to recognise rhyme, for example (Maclean, Bryant, & Bradley, 1987), there is evidence that the more advanced type of phonological awareness, being aware of individual or separate sounds in words, does not evolve from this rudimentary ability without intervention (Cary & Verhaeghe, 1992; Seymour & Evans, 1994). It appears that it is the introduction of an alphabetic code which is particularly instrumental in initiating the development of this specialised phonological knowledge. Although some of the more advanced phonological awareness skills examined in research investigations (such as being able to substitute different sounds in spoken words, for example) are not a prerequisite for learning to read (Perfetti, 1991), studies suggest that at least some level of phoneme awareness is necessary, but not sufficient, in early reading development (Ball, 1993; Gough & Juel, 1987; Tunmer & Nesdale, 1985).

These findings have important implications for instruction. Presenting a child with word families, or the two words *fat* and *bat*, for example, is not sufficient for the child to deduce that the letter f corresponds to the phoneme /f/ and the letter b to the phoneme /b/. Experiments show that children fail to deduce these associations for themselves (Byrne, 1991). Progress can only be made if information about both (a) how words are made up of separate sounds, and (b) how certain letters represent certain sounds, is provided.

Many studies have shown the value of direct, explicit instruction, particularly that which includes the teaching of

letter-sound associations, and blending skills, in developing higher-order phonological skills (Cary & Verhaege, 1994; Foorman & Francis, 1994; Perfetti, Beck, Bell, & Hughes, 1987; Seymour & Evans, 1994). Ehri (1983) suggests that since it is the introduction of letters that provides children with concrete symbols with which to associate sounds, higher-order phonological skills develop only as a result of letter-sound teaching.

Once the alphabetic principle is grasped it is a robust and powerful tool. An initial understanding of the principle spreads, so that a minimal ability to decode leads to further insights about other sounds and letters in the developing reading vocabulary. With increasing practice, these effects quickly become widespread (Byrne & Fielding-Barnsley, 1990; Goswami & Bryant, 1990). Gough and Walsh (1991) found that children who are cipher readers learn to read and spell new exception words faster and more accurately than those who are not. Thus, even though training to improve *both* phoneme awareness *and* knowledge of letter-sound correspondences is crucial during the beginning stages of reading instruction, later it may only be necessary to teach a limited number of additional letter-sound correspondences, as this will be sufficient to spur the development of further phonological skills (Byrne, 1992).

Instructional Implications

These findings indicate that in order to promote early reading success, it is of critical importance that beginning-reading instruction is focused on:

1. developing phoneme awareness; and

2. developing knowledge about letter-sound associations.

Since research shows that children, even at the ages of 6 or 7 (Lundberg, Frost, & Petersen, 1988; Vellutino & Scanlon, 1987), lack the ability to hear separate sounds in words, and that they are also unable to deduce letter-sound associations for themselves (Byrne, 1991), appropriate instructional intervention is particularly important.

There are several ways in which a teacher can promote the development of these two forms of crucial knowledge, and dramatically improve reading progress. The teacher can: (a) begin instruction regardless of children's print concept

understanding; (b) teach children to hear and identify phonemes; (c) teach the alphabetic code; (d) teach synthesis or blending skills explicitly; (e) develop children's knowledge of spelling patterns; and (f) promote fluent, automatic decoding through carefully arranged reading practice. A discussion of each of these follows.

(a) Developing an Understanding of Print Concepts

Before attending school, most children will have adequate knowledge of the various conventions of print: the correct way to hold a book, how to turn the pages, the direction in which print is read, and the concept that print symbols correspond to words and sentences that are read either silently or aloud. Pointing to words while reading to children, for example, helps them to understand that print represents spoken language (Adams & Bruck, 1993). If however, children have little or no understanding of these concepts, teaching children to read need not be delayed. Indeed, studies show that children from disadvantaged backgrounds can benefit early on from code-oriented instruction while learning about basic print concepts at the same time (Ball & Blachman, 1988; Ehri, 1989; Vellutino & Scanlon, 1987).

(b) Providing Direct Instruction in Awareness of Speech Sounds

Since the printed symbols of alphabetic languages represent speech sounds, having an awareness of these sounds (or phonemes), is particularly important in learning to read English (Liberman & Liberman, 1992). However, many children in the age range of 6-7 years are not able to hear the separate sounds in spoken words or to say what they are (Bowey & Francis, 1991; Wimmer, Landerl, Linortner, & Hummer, 1991). Unless specifically stimulated (either through direct training in hearing the separate sounds in spoken words, or through the explicit teaching of letter-sound correspondences), sensitivity to the phonemic structure of words does not develop (Badian, 1993). Simply being exposed to reading activities, of the type that does not provoke the specific awareness that words are composed of separate sounds, or does not make the links between sounds and spelling explicit, will not improve phonological awareness (Ellis, 1993).

Appropriate instruction, therefore, is vital if children are to be made aware of the existence of phonemes, and of how words in speech can be segmented (Gleitman & Rozin, 1977). Direct instruction to help children develop this sensitivity to phonemes during or before initial reading instruction can have dramatic effects, producing statistically significant advantages in reading achievement (Alegria, Pinot and Morais, 1982; Bradley & Bryant, 1985; Tunmer, Herriman, & Nesdale, 1988; Olofsson & Lundberg, 1985; Vellutino & Scanlon, 1987).

Although such instruction is best provided in the first year of school, such training can be accomplished at any age. Phoneme awareness training programmes are described by Ball and Blachman (1991), Blachman (1987), Camp et al., (1981), Liberman and Shankweiler (1991), Lie (1991), Lindamood and Lindamood(1975), and Rosner (1975).

The learning of songs and nursery rhymes, at home or nursery school, before attending primary school, will help to develop sensitivity to the sounds in language. Kindergarten children (5 years of age) exposed to such activities become significantly better readers and spellers in the primary grades than children without this experience (Lundberg, Frost, & Peterson, 1988).

As soon as possible, however, the more advanced skill of being able to identify individual sounds in words should be developed. In one study (Sawyer, 1992), 6-year-old children were given daily instruction in auditory segmentation (training to hear the separate sounds in spoken words), with the result that by the end of one year, the usual discrepancy between the below-average readers and average readers was narrowed, and after one more year, was eliminated.

Although early reading instruction often includes teaching letter recognition and letter-sound relationships, attention to phoneme segmenting skills (detecting the separate sounds within a *spoken* word) may rarely be given. This is a significant shortcoming because contrary to what many may believe to be the case, proficient reading is more dependent on auditory skills than it is on visual skills (Bakker et al., 1990; Brouininks, 1969; Hynd, 1992). Badian (1994) found evidence that compared to visual processing skills, auditory-analysis skills contribute almost twice as much to the variance in children's word reading. A recent study conducted over three

years by Grogan (1995) found that once the less important factors of age and intelligence were partialed out of statistical analyses, auditory skills (related to memory for speech sound sequences) at age 4 were almost *three times more influential* on reading ability at age 7 than visual skills (related to memory for printed letter sequences).

It is thus absolutely critical that children be helped to develop this initial ability to hear the separate sounds in words, since it is also true that only a minimal amount of phonological awareness is required in order to facilitate the learning of letter-to-sound correspondences (Juel et al. 1986; Tunmer et al, 1988; Tunmer & Rohl, 1991), which will, in reciprocal fashion, promote further, higher-order phonological awareness skills. For all children, but particularly for children 'at risk' (those who will experience particular difficulty in learning how to read), ensuring that this sort of instruction is included may help boost their performance significantly at the start, as well as reduce the incidence of reading failure in primary schools later on (Mann, 1991a; Wagner, 1988).

(c) Providing Direct Teaching of the Alphabetic Code

Since there is some evidence that beginning readers may initially treat words as if they are pictures, rather than examine the letters in a left to right sequence (Byrne & Fielding-Barnsley, 1989; Ehri, 1992; Gough & Hillinger, 1980), instruction is required in order to give children a more productive strategy. Without instruction, the continued reliance on the visual appearance of words eventually leads to severe difficulties in learning to read (Gough & Juel, 1991; Snowling, 1987). Children must be helped to break away from a whole-word or logographic way of looking at words, in order to advance to an alphabetic stage where connections are made between spellings and sounds. This is a crucial step in learning to read (for reviews, see Adams, 1990; Adams & Bruck, 1993; Liberman & Shankweiler, 1991; Rieben & Perfetti, 1991; Stanovich, 1991; Sawyer & Fox, 1991).

The most effective route in helping children to establish the connections between letters and sounds is through direct instruction. A number of studies indicate that teaching letter shapes along with their corresponding speech sounds is more effective than teaching either letter recognition or phoneme awareness on its own (Ball & Blachman, 1991; Bradley &

Bryant, 1983; Byrne & Fielding-Barnsley, 1991; Cunningham, 1990; Ohnmacht, 1969); indeed, some researchers have found that phonological training by itself produces no significant effects, unless it is supplemented with training in letter-sound correspondences (Byrne, 1991; Defior & Tudela, 1994).

On the question of whether or not teaching letter names should be part of an early reading programme, researchers are divided (Adams, 1990; Hohn & Ehri, 1983). Although letter-name knowledge is an important predictor of later reading success, some researchers provide evidence that confusion between letter names and sounds can persist throughout primary school (Harrison, Zollner, & Magill, 1996), and others argue that the teaching of letter sounds is more profitable for developing blending and reading skills (Englemann & Bruner, 1983). However, a year-long study comparing two systematic phonological, code-oriented programmes, one which taught letter names along with letter sounds, and one which did not, found no significant differences in achievement (O'Connor, Jenkins, Cole, & Mills, 1993).

This issue aside, early code instruction should be systematic, structured, and sequenced, so that the skills to be learned are taught in progression from the simple to the more complex (Williams, 1985); for example, consonant, and short vowel sounds should be taught before digraphs and blends; simple, regularly spelled words should be introduced before irregularly spelled words (Felton, 1993).

(d) Helping Children to Blend Phonemes to Form Words

Many children require particular assistance in learning how to synthesise or combine separate phonemes together to form a word. What is the most effective way to accomplish this? Following the simple-to-complex rule, it has been found that if simple words containing *continuants* (sounds such as 'sss', 'mmm', 'fff', for example) are used first when modelling the blending process, children find the task much easier; 'sss' /*a*/ 'mmm' is an easier word to synthesise than 'buh' /*a*/ 'guh', since the latter consonant phonemes, if not pronounced carefully in isolation, produce the *schwa* ('uh' sound) (Byrne & Fielding-Barnsley, 1990).

Instruction that involves teaching the specific relationships between letters and sounds is found to help develop blending

skills more effectively than instruction involving writing activities (Vellutino, 1991). Tunmer & Hoover (1993) found evidence that only letter-to-phoneme knowledge (required in reading) contributed to variability in reading real and nonsense words whereas phoneme-to-letter knowledge (required in spelling) did not. These findings are not unrelated to others which show that it is more difficult for young children to isolate or segment phonemes in a spoken word than to synthesise or blend individually presented spoken phonemes to form a word (Perfetti, Beck, Bell, & Hughes, 1987; Torgesen, Morgan, & Davis, 1992); similarly, segmenting a spoken word into its separate phonemes and then blending them in order to write a word (as is demanded in the task of spelling) is a more difficult task for young chldren to perform than simply blending individual letter sounds (presented visually) together to form a word (as is demanded in the task of reading).

However, if instead of asking children to spell a word by writing it, children are asked to 'make' a word using manipulative materials (letters printed on cards or blocks, or magnetic letters, etc.), this is a task found to be very effective in developing blending skills. The value of this technique should not be overlooked. It has been employed by a number of researchers and has resulted in significant effects compared to groups who did not receive this type of instruction (Ball & Blachman, 1991; Bradley & Bryant, 1983; Iversen & Tunmer, 1993). Uhry and Shepherd (1993), however, found that this particular type of segmentation/spelling training (where manipulative materials are used and no writing is involved) even produced significantly better blending and reading ability compared to a control group who were actually taught blending skills specifically (children simply listened to the teacher model blending). The segmentation aspect of the training is likely to improve memory for strings of phonemes, a factor in blending ability. Thus, the fact that this training produces better reading and blending is consistent with a great deal of research which shows that there is a relationship between verbal short-term memory, phonological awareness and reading (see Brady, 1986 for review).

O'Connor and Jenkins (1995) make the point that for some children, even if they succeed in learning letter-sound correspondences and a strategy for blending phonemes into

words, the invitation to notice that spoken words can be decomposed into phonemes may go unheeded. Thus, a number of studies have found that supplementing letter-sound and synthesis instruction with related spelling activities (using manipulative materials and/or some writing) not only improves segmentation ability but also reading performance (Ehri, 1989 ; Foorman & Francis, 1994; O'Connor & Jenkins, 1995).

(e) Developing Knowledge of Spelling Patterns

Beginning readers are often insensitive to frequent spelling patterns (Bruck & Treiman, 1992; Ehri & Robbins, 1992), but with carefully arranged reading practice this knowledge develops very rapidly (Treiman, Goswami, & Bruck, 1990). Writing activities which closely parallel reading development (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1990) are also found to help children develop knowledge of spelling patterns. Some researchers argue, however, that writing activities should be kept to a minimum in the beginning, since for many 5- and 6-year-olds, the motor demands of writing may disrupt the transfer of alphabetic understanding from spelling to reading (Foorman, Francis, Novy, & Liberman, 1991). That is, for many children, more learning will take place if they are permitted to concentrate on mastering one skill at a time, without interference from the simultaneous demands of another (Bialystok & Niccols, 1989).

(f) Developing Reading Fluency, Automatic Decoding

Once spelling-to-sound relationships are established, fluent, efficient decoding is dependent upon practice and abundant exposure to text written at an appropriate level. The degree to which children are successful in their first efforts at decoding print will largely determine their inclination to read more (Juel & Roper-Schneider, 1985). Children will not enjoy reading if they experience initial difficulty with decoding, and they will miss out on the much needed practice. The importance of ensuring that children's first books contain liberally-repeated spelling patterns, sequenced in difficulty, and that the children themselves are sufficiently equipped to decode the first words they encounter with a high rate of success, is strongly supported by research evidence.

Summary

While learning to decipher words is only one part in the whole process of becoming a proficient reader, it is a vital part in the beginning. Early decoding fluency profoundly influences all other aspects of reading development (for reviews, see Adams, 1990; Liberman & Shankweiler, 1991; Stanovich, 1986, 1992). Children who quickly master the idea that spoken words are made-up of separate sounds, that printed letter symbols correspond to these sounds, and that reading involves the deciphering of these letter symbols into their corresponding speech sounds and then blending the sounds to form words, will progress faster and further than those who do not. To produce significantly superior reading achievement, these are the reading skills that need to be taught first.

Whether it is developed through direct instruction or otherwise, understanding the alphabetic principle is *the* crucial prerequisite in the early stages of learning to read, speeding the development of all other subsequent reading-related skills.

Part 2 Practice: The Eclectic Approach

Reading Methods in Use

What is the state of present reading practice? How do the teachers in the primary schools of England and Wales help children learn how to read? In one large survey, teachers, when asked to describe their predominant approach to teaching reading, responded as follows:

A mixture of methods	almost 85%
'Look-and-Say' (whole-word recognition) approach	less than 10%
'Real books' (use of non-scheme books)	5%
Phonics (code-emphasis) approach	3%

(HMI, 1990).

Fewer than 15% of teachers, according to this survey, concentrate on only one method of teaching reading, while a very large majority report using a combination of methods to teach children how to read. These findings were confirmed in a later survey which found that 83% of teachers reported using a combination of approaches to teach reading (Cato et al., 1992).

No Particular Focus or Reading Approach

Current practice does not reflect the fundamental conclusions of research discussed earlier in this chapter. Instead of an early focus on phonological learning and letter-sound associations, as research demonstrates is essential, a much less focused approach is adopted. Almost 85% of teachers describe their approach as a mixture of methods. That this idea is so popular among teachers is hardly surprising. The mixed methods or eclectic philosophy is supported and encouraged by:

School inspectors
'In most schools the eclectic requirements of the National Curriculum, which provide for a carefully considered combination of approaches, were well understood and observed' (HMI, 1989-90, p. 13).
'As in the previous survey, a policy of using a mix of teaching methods was evident in nearly all the schools' (HMI, 1992 para. 35).

National Curriculum Dictates
Pupils should 'be taught to use various approaches to word identification and recognition ...' (SCAA, 1994a).

Teacher Training
'No one approach works well for every child' (Redfern & Edwards, 1992, p. 4).
'Effective practice ... is characterised by ... a variety of different approaches' (Ackerman & Mont, 1991).

Publishers of graded reading schemes
'There is no one method or technique that is the ONLY way to learn to read. Children learn in a variety of ways' (Ladybird series, 1992).

Government-supported adult literacy publications
'Reading should involve a combination of skills – whole word recognition, prediction and phonics' (ALBSU, 1994).

Television programmes
One typical programme included: demonstrations of shared reading, attention to pictures, limited attention to initial consonant sounds, and praise for 'guessing well'! (Words and Pictures, BBC series, 1994).

The Influences Shaping Practice

One large contributing influence on the practice of the mixed-methods notion is teacher training. Students are taught that there is no single method of teaching reading that is suitable for all children. As one interviewee, in a National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) survey, summarised it, 'eclecticism rules' (Brooks, Gorman, Kendall, & Tate, 1992).

However, while most teacher trainees appear to be well acquainted with the popular concept that only a mixture of methods should be used to teach reading, few may learn the actual details of how to teach a child to read. In fact, a recent survey conducted by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted, 1994) revealed that nearly half of primary school teachers do not feel adequately prepared to teach reading at all. In the NFER survey it was found that trainee teachers may receive as little as six hours of instruction in the teaching of reading. Researchers studied 181 teacher training courses in 92 institutions and questioned 400 graduates. High proportions of graduates reported receiving little or no teaching about reading, and admitted having little confidence in their ability to teach the subject.

The same NFER report found that new teachers' experience was heavily influenced by their individual school placements and by the methods they saw in use at first hand. According to school inspectors' reports from various educational authorities over the last few years, what is ostensibly being used to teach children to read is a mixture of methods. Whether the government's plans to make teacher training more school-based are implemented or not, there is then a very high probability that the eclectic approach will continue its reign.

The Mixed-Method Approach

As the eclectic view is currently so fashionable, it is important to examine more closely exactly what is meant by these 'almost 85%' of teachers, when they say they use a combination of approaches (HMI, 1990). In the NFER survey conducted by Cato and her colleagues (Cato et al., 1992), when asked to describe their approach to teaching reading, 83% of teachers said that they used an approach involving the combination of reading schemes and 'real books', 12%, an approach involving only reading schemes, and 5%, an approach involving only 'real books'. But these are not

teaching methods. Reading schemes and 'real books' are types of reading materials. It is important, therefore, to examine the nature of the instructional *methods* used in conjunction with these materials.

In nearly all Key Stage 1 classrooms (ages 5-7) in England and Wales, graded reading-scheme materials, and the teaching methods advocated by them, are widely in use and form the basis for reading instruction (HMI Reports and Surveys, 1989-1994). In fact nearly all teachers make use of published reading schemes; they are used in 'more than 95%' of classes (HMI, 1990, p. 2).

Similarly, ordinary story books or 'real books' are materials widely used in primary classrooms. Although the HMI report of 1990 revealed that only 5% of teachers concentrate on a 'real books' approach, the later survey cited above (Cato et al., 1992) suggests that such materials, and the methods that accompany them, may be more widely used than would at first appear. If the 'almost 85%' (HMI, 1990) of teachers using a mixed-methods approach use these materials, along with the 5% of teachers who concentrate only on a 'real books' approach, approximately 90% of teachers may use such materials during reading instruction. In short, these figures suggest that the use of 'real books' may be almost as popular as the use of reading schemes.

There are thus two main components of the mixed-methods or eclectic approach. These are:

1. the use of the teaching methods that are dictated by the teacher manuals of current reading schemes;

2. the teaching methods that are implicit with the use of non-graded, ordinary story books, or 'real books'.

The teaching manuals of published reading schemes adopt a definite approach towards the teaching of reading. Crucial questions arise from this: Perhaps the teaching approach advocated by today's reading schemes consists of a mixture of methods? Perhaps there is some reading instruction advocated by these schemes, which has an emphasis on the alphabetic code? If this were the case, such instruction would in effect represent at least a partial implementation of relevant research findings. Do the reading schemes in use focus on different approaches at different stages of the reading process? Do they have an early focus, for example, on the

development of phonological and alphabetic knowledge, as research suggests is essential? Or, do they adopt a mixed-methods approach to the teaching of reading right at the outset, and throughout the different stages of learning to read? These are questions examined in the next chapter, where we focus on teaching materials.

Summary

There appears to be no particular instructional focus given at different stages of the reading process. Teachers report using a mixture of methods to teach reading right from the beginning, and this eclectic philosophy is advocated very strongly by teacher training institutions. Materials in use include published reading schemes and ordinary story books or 'real books'.