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Whole Language versus Direct Phonics Instruction

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Abstract

There has been a debate for the past 30 years over which method is superior for teaching emergent readers, whole language instruction or direct phonics instruction? This literature review poses the question: when differentiated instruction is implemented, is it better to use whole language instruction, direct phonics instruction, or use a combination of both? This paper analyzes research studies looking at the advantages and disadvantages of each method. The studies investigate how whole language and direct phonics instruction each have benefits and drawbacks for whole class instruction. It also examines the benefits of direct phonics instruction as an intervention or supplementary instruction for struggling readers. The paper then explores how whole language methods can be used to engage families in reading at home. The findings of the literature review are that both direct phonics instruction and whole language instruction should be taught together in the classroom, with supplemental instruction in direct phonics given to struggling readers, and families of emergent readers should be encouraged to, and supported in, surrounding their children in literature from birth.

Keywords: whole language instruction, direct phonics instruction, emergent reader, family involvement, elementary

Whole Language Instruction Versus Direct Phonics Instruction

Chapter One: Introduction

The question of how young children should learn to read has been debated for years to the point that is has a name, “the reading wars” (Pearson, 2004). Is it better for students to be immersed in whole language and just pick up the skills needed to read and write, or should students be taught phonics directly, so they have the specific skills to tackle individual words as they come across them? An educator’s idea of these methods can often be based on the way the educator learned to read themselves or resources and professional development given to them by their school, rather than an evidenced-based reason. Comparing the arguments on both sides of the debate can be dizzying as they seem to contradict each other. With an understanding of both sides of the argument, research can be an insight into what is actually working. The research presented supports both sides of the argument, but when analyzed deeper, starts to come into agreement. Is one way better than the other, or should both be used in tandem with each other to give students the best start to their reading journey?

Along with looking at reading instruction in schools, it is crucial to remember that learning does not start and stop when students enter and exit a school building. Children develop early literacy and reading skills at home before they are old enough to go to school, and after they start school, the support they get at home continues to influence their reading. The following research shows that the level of family engagement with reading a child has from when they are born is influential on their reading successes in life. As the debate over the best way to teach students in school to read continues, what does research say is the best way for families to support their child’s reading success? The research looks at best practices in schools, but also how schools and families can work together to support student learning at home.

The applications of this research are centered around differentiation. Differentiation is described by Tomlinson as a classroom environment that has multiple options for students to learn information, understand ideas and concepts, and demonstrate what they have learned. Tomlinson points out that all students are different, so they will not all learn in the same way (2017). This understanding, that students all learn in different ways and will need different supports in their learning, acts as a guide when distilling the research around whole language and direct phonics instruction.

Scope of Research

The debate over the best way to teach children how to read has been taking place for the past few decades. This debate centers on if it is best to teach children to read with a holistic whole language approach or a specific direct phonics instruction approach. To learn more about the specifics of the arguments on both sides of this debate, the research presented in this paper will look at both whole language and direct phonics instructional methods and how teacher training and knowledge can impact the success of a model. The research presented in this paper focuses specifically on direct phonics instruction and whole language instruction as separate instructional models, and balanced literacy was not part of the scope of this research. The paper will then look at what research studies have said about using direct phonics as supplementary instruction or an intervention for students who are struggling to learn to read. Lastly, the research presented examines how family engagement can impact a student's reading ability and if whole language or direct phonics is more beneficial for families to use at home.

Importance of the Research

The debate over how to teach children to read started in the 1980s and 1990s and has continued to be researched into the new millennium. It was explained by Moats in 2007 in

Whole-Language High Jinks as a debate between phonics-based instruction and a more naturalistic whole language approach. Moats supported phonics-based instruction and made the argument that over 60 percent of people are able to learn how to read no matter how the instruction is given to them. Moats made the argument that the other 40 percent of people can learn to read if given specific and direct instruction based on common reading assessments, but if they are taught using the whole language approach, they score considerably lower using the same assessments. Moats cites work done by the National Reading Panel in 1997 that listed the five essential components reading programs should have as phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary development, and reading comprehension (2007). The argument Moats made was whole language programs were not serving readers, especially struggling readers, well, and a more rigorous direct phonics-based approach should be used instead (2007). On the other side of the argument, Ryan and Goodman wrote in 2016 in *Whole Language and the Fight for Public Education in the US* that the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) created a culture of testing and prewritten programs and worksheets that did not allow for children to learn language naturally by simply experiencing it. Ryan and Goodman argued that whole language instruction gave students the power to take control over their own learning, choosing what they wanted to read and write about (2016). As the debate raged on, researchers started comparing student reading data to find the best way to teach children how to read.

Studying the best way to teach students how to read is important to the education community as it continues to evolve. As more schools begin using technology and more personalized learning for students, knowing what method or approach has the greatest impact on student learning is crucial. The studies in this paper gives insight into how classroom instruction

can be done, what community supports set students up for success, and the rationale behind the teaching methods.

Research Questions

In light of what is known about differentiated instruction, do emergent readers have more success when taught to read through whole language, when given specific phonics instruction, or when taught though a combination of both?

Definition of Terms

Whole language instruction is a method of teaching reading where read-aloud, shared reading and writing, and phonics skills are taught in the context of another text (Manning& Kamii, 2000). Whole language came to be a popular and prominent way to teach reading in the 1980s and 1990s. It sought to differentiate itself from the basal reader and route memorization methods and instead teach reading through a more holistic lens, incorporating more literature into reading curriculum (Pearson, 2004). Throughout this paper, whole language is defined as a system of teaching children how to read using authentic text and teaching reading and writing basics through those texts instead of in isolation.

Direct phonics instruction is when children are taught to read by learning specific phonics rules and skills. An example is when learning letter sounds, a student would learn the sounds independently of text, and then after mastering the skill, would apply the skill using letter sounds to read. In the early 2000s, direct phonics instruction was required by NCLB. This led to more research and implementation of direct, systematic phonics instruction (Pearson, 2004). In this paper, direct phonics instruction is defined as reading instruction that teaches phonics skills in isolation before applying those skills to reading.

Emergent Readers are children just starting to read, between prekindergarten and second grade. These students are learning the foundations of reading, letter sounds, how to decode a word, and strategies to figure out unknown words. In this paper, emergent readers are defined as children who are just starting the process of learning how to read.

Family Involvement is the amount of reading a child does with their family at home starting from birth. Children are growing as readers and writers from when they are born, not just when they start school (Anderson et al., 2018). The amount of reading a child does at home before they start school, and while they are in school, has an impact on their reading success. In this paper, family involvement is defined as the amount of reading families do at home with their child.

Summary

Learning to read sets students up for success throughout their lives. How they learn to read can determine their success at reading, and subsequently their success in school and adulthood. With the debate around which method is better, whole language or direct phonics instruction, it is crucial to turn to research to see what is working and should continue to be used, and what can be let go because it is ineffective. Studying what has worked in the past can allow teachers to build lessons that reach all their students and are backed by strong, researched methods. Every child can learn to read, but as Moats said, some students are not succeding because they are being taught in a way that does not work for them.

In chapter two of this paper, research studies will be analyzed to determine the difference in whole language and direct phonics instruction, along with community supports that can help students succeed. In chapter three, the research will be synthesized into a methodology of which

reading instruction works best for students in the primary grades and how teachers can implement it in their classrooms.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Whole language, direct phonics, or a combination of both, what is the best way to teach children how to read? The following research dives into what whole language and direct phonics instruction are, the successes and downfalls of both approaches, and how different approaches may be applied in different situations. The first theme will address research around the instructional methods looking at whole language, direct phonics instruction, and the impact teachers' knowledge around an instructional method can have. In the second theme, the studies look at how direct phonics instruction can be used as supplementary instruction for struggling students. In the third theme, the research then shifts to how family literacy practices can impact a child's reading and gives suggestions on how schools can work with families to encourage literacy in the home.

Review of Proposed Problem

Whole language and direct phonics instruction are both methods of reading instruction. The following studies look at how both instructional models can impact students reading, measured by their reading scores. Whole language and direct phonics instruction both have strengths for teaching students to read, and how they are implemented can determine the impact on students reading. The research looks at the impact of both methods of instruction and the best setting for each type of instruction, whole group, supplementary instruction, and at home.

Review of Importance of Topic

Learning to read is a foundational skill in a student's academic career, with the most influential years being early elementary. In light of what is known about differentiated

instruction, do emergent readers have more success when taught to read through whole language, when given specific phonics instruction, or when taught though a combination of both? Research looked at the impact of both methods, how teacher knowledge and experience can influence a student's instruction, and how the instruction given at school may be different than the best practices for literacy at home.

Research Around Instructional Methods

Views vary on the best way to teach children how to read. The whole language approach to reading instruction has students reading books, poems, songs, and other authentic text and learning the skills needed for reading though exposure to language. Direct phonics instruction asserts that students need to be explicitly taught the foundations of language, for example letter sounds, and use those skills that were taught in isolation to read. The following are studies about the effectiveness of teaching using a whole language approach, a direct phonics approach, and how a teacher's knowledge and training can impact the instruction a student receives.

Whole language. There are many different strategies that teachers can use to teach students to read. Cooper looked at whole language in 2008 in the thesis research for *The Impact of the Relationship Between Early Literacy Levels and the Combination of the Nine Chosen Reading Strategies in Kindergarten Students.* In this quantitative study, Cooper worked with 32 kindergarten student participants in South Carolina in the United States. The participants were white, Hispanic, and African American, with 21 boys and 11 girls. Of the participants, 63 percent qualified for free or reduced lunch. All of the students were five years old before September 1st, 2007 (Cooper, 2008). Over the course of three months, Cooper compared developmental reading assessment (DRA) scores from a pretest and a posttest of the participants to pretest and posttest scores across nine months from sixteen kindergarteners the year before. In the three months

between the pre and posttests with the participants, Cooper looked at the combined effect of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, drill and practice, high expectations for learning with applications from brain research explored, activating students' prior knowledge, and utilizing parental support to determine what combination worked best (2008). These strategies were applied with all 32 participants as their main reading instruction over 3 months (Cooper, 2008). The results of Cooper's study revealed that these strategies, when combined, produced better readers. The participating students were assessed using the DRA after three months and 56.3 percent of them had grown two or more levels. In comparison, from the group of sixteen students from the year before who had only received phonics and phonemic awareness instruction, only 3.75 percent of them grew two or more reading levels over nine months (Cooper, 2008). The results of the study are impressive and indicate that when a wide variety of instructional methods and materials are used, students become stronger readers. There were limitations to the study, however. The students were chosen because of availability (Cooper, 2008), the materials the teacher created and used were not included, making it hard to replicate the study, and the study didn't compare if some strategies were more effective than others. Cooper's research indicated that when more than just direct phonics and phonemic awareness instruction are present, the student's reading increased faster and at higher levels.

Where Cooper's research showed that more than just direct phonics and phonemic awareness instruction produced better reading results, the methodology discussed by Manning and Kamii in *Whole Language vs. Isolated Phonics Instruction: A Longitudinal Study in Kindergarten With Reading and Writing Tasks* written in 2000 gives a clearer view into the learning process of students receiving both types of instruction. The study discussed by Manning and Kamii had 38 participants, all kindergarten students in a public elementary school where half

of the students were white, and half were African American, with 31 percent qualifying for free and reduced lunch (2000). The students were split between two classrooms. One classroom's reading instruction focused on phonics worksheets and whole class activities on the chalkboard around stretching out words and blending sounds. The other classroom's reading instruction was whole language with read aloud happening over an hour a day, shared reading and writing, and phonics taught in the context of another text (Manning & Kamii, 2000).

The study consisted of five interviews with each student over the course of eight months. At each interview the students were asked to write eight words and read two to four sentences (Manning & Kamii, 2000). At the first interviews the students in the whole language classroom were performing lower than their phonics-based classroom peers, but at the end of the study 73% of the whole language group was at a level three or four on the study's measure compared to just 32% of the phonics classroom students. The study also noted that some students regressed in their levels, with a much higher regression rate of 30% in the phonics group versus three percent in the whole language group (Manning & Kamii, 2000). The findings written about by Manning and Kamii made a strong case for a whole language approach to reading instruction. One of the largest differences in instruction between the phonics classroom and the whole language classroom was that children's books were read aloud for an hour a day in the whole language classroom and were only occasionally read in the phonics classroom (Manning & Kamii, 2000). This fits in with the strategy of activating prior knowledge used by Cooper (2008). Read alouds gave students a chance to connect what they knew to stories and they could see those stories told through language.

Whole language instruction has research that supports its benefits to student reading achievement. Integrating authentic texts into the classroom with daily read alouds (Manning &

Kamii, 2000) allowed them to activate their prior knowledge (Cooper, 2008) and connect with what they were learning to make it more meaningful. As Manning and Kamii found, the students who were in a whole language classroom started out a bit slower on the phonics assessments, but by the end of the year had made greater growth and had less backwards slide (2000). Reading instruction sets students up for a lifetime of successful reading, and whole language can help spark that love of reading.

Direct phonics instruction. On the other side of the debate from whole language is direct, specific, phonics instruction. Moats makes the case for needing direct phonics instruction when talking about shared reading, arguing that when teachers read a text over and over until students can "read" it as well, the teacher is not doing anything to teach the students to read. Moats says, "…children who are so taught aren't actually learning to read becomes clear when they attempt to read an unfamiliar text for the first time and are stymied" (Moats, 2007, p. 19) This statement, and others like it, encouraged researchers to investigate student gains when given direct, specific, phonics instruction on top of their whole language instruction.

The study *Whole Language Instruction vs. Phonics Instruction: Effects of Reading Fluency and Spelling Accuracy of First Grade Students* done by Maddox and Feng looked at the results of a four-week intensive phonics program (2013). Their study included 22 first grade students, thirteen boys and nine girls, that were a mix of above, on, and below grade level according to the Aimsweb RCBM. Half of the students were in the whole language control group and the other half were in the direct phonics experimental group. Over the course of the four weeks, each group focused on the same specific phonics patterns, with the whole language group being exposed to the patterns through literature only, and the phonics group being given specific, direct instruction on the patterns (Maddox & Feng, 2013). After the four weeks, the students

were given a post test on their reading fluency and spelling accuracy. At the beginning of the study, there was no statistical difference between the two groups. At the end of the study the phonics group had made greater gains on both the reading and spelling assessments. According to Maddox and Feng, when the whole language group came across a word they did not know they were prompted to use the picture clues or reread. The phonics group was encouraged to decode the unknown word. In light of the phonics group having better results on the spelling assessment, Maddox and Feng proposed that "the absence of any phonics instruction is actually detrimental to spelling development" (2013 p. 17). There were a few limitations to the study, there was a small sample size chosen for convenience, and there was a teacher researcher, so there may have been unintended crossover (Maddox & Feng, 2013). These findings support the use of direct phonics instruction to improve students reading and spelling skills.

Supporting Maddox and Feng's findings that direct phonics instruction is necessary for spelling development, in 2016 Wolf looked at the impact of phonics instruction with preschoolers in *Letter Sound Reading: Teaching Preschool Children Print-To-Sound Processing*. Wolf studied 41 preschool students from four preschools, with 20 being in the control group and 21 in the intervention group. The students had an average age of around four and a half, were randomly assigned to control or intervention groups and came from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds (Wolf, 2016). The study looked at the impact of letter name, letter sound, rhyming activities, and adult reading had on a student's ability to read letter sound names and extrapolate that knowledge to decoding consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) words. The students were given these mini reading lessons three times a week for about three minutes at a time, totaling nine to twelve minutes of instruction per week over the course of eight weeks (Wolf, 2016). The findings from Wolf showed that the students who received the reading instruction knew more

letter sounds at the end of the eight weeks, and four students from the intervention group who knew many of their letter sounds before the intervention started were able to decode CVC words (2016). The study had the limitations of a short time frame and a small number of participants (Wolf, 2016). The data gathered within that short time frame showed that direct phonics instruction was beneficial for students and being provided with the instruction improved the students' reading skills.

Wolf found direct phonics instruction improved reading skills of preschoolers (2016), and Maddox and Feng discovered the same results with first graders (2013). These studies showed that a direct phonics approach was beneficial to early readers at different stages of their reading development. As mentioned above, Moats claimed that students who did not have direct phonics instruction are unable to read a new text put in front of them (2007). Wolf found evidence of this when preschool students were asked to read the CVC word "mom." One student said the names of the letters and then read the word. Wolf pointed out that student did not read the word, they had memorized it and recognized it. Another student was presented with the same word and used the letter sounds to decode it. That student was energized and excited by their ability to correctly read the word, and asked to read more words (Wolf, 2016). That energy and excitement came from having the tools to read an unknown word, tools that were taught through direct phonics instruction.

Impact of teacher knowledge. The most powerful role in a classroom is the teacher. The type of instruction a teacher gives, how knowledgeable they are on teaching strategies for those skills, and what they believe is the best way to teach reading will all have an impact on the instruction they give. Consequently, a teacher's knowledge and support of an instructional method will influence how and what the students in their classroom learn. Discussed above are

research-based best practices for whole language and direct phonics instruction. Below are studies on how teacher training and beliefs may influence the instruction given in an individual classroom.

Teacher buy-in and support of the reading program they are teaching is an important factor in the student success rate of the program. The study *Investigating the Implementation of Whole Language: Strengths and Weaknesses* conducted by LeDoux in 2007 looked into teacher's thoughts on the strengths and weaknesses of whole language instruction. LeDoux interviewed five professionals who had worked with whole language instruction. Three were former teachers, now professors, one was a current reading specialist, and the other was a special education teacher who worked with whole language as well as other reading programs (LeDoux, 2007). LeDoux looked for similarities among the answers given by the five professionals and found that whole language gave readers an, "…authentic reading experience" (LeDoux, 2007 p. 23). LeDoux noted that the experts appreciated the use of real children's literature that was high quality and related to students' lives and backgrounds as opposed to just using leveled readers (2007). This study noted it was limited as it was a small sample size and all the professionals taught in the state of California. There were also no current classroom teachers interviewed for the study.

While LeDoux surveyed teachers about what they felt were best practices based on what they had taught over their careers, Brady et al. conducted a quantitative study in 2009 on teacher knowledge around direct phonics instruction, *First Grade Teachers Knowledge of Phonological Awareness and Code Concepts.* In their study, Brady et al. worked with 65 first grade teachers from 19 schools in Connecticut. Over 75% of the teachers were female, with a majority holding a master's degree (2009). The purpose of the study was to see if intensive professional

development around phonics and phonological awareness would improve teachers' knowledge of the two subjects. The teachers were given a knowledge assessment at the beginning of the yearlong study to assess their knowledge around phonics and phonemic awareness. The teachers then participated in a yearlong professional development, meeting for two days in the summer and then monthly over the course of the school year. Along with the monthly professional development days, each teacher was also assigned a mentor that worked with them in their classroom weekly (Brady et al., 2009). At the end of the study the teachers were again given the knowledge assessment again, and the knowledge of the cohort had improved. Brady et al. noted that teachers who had scored higher on the knowledge assessment in the beginning made less growth, but the final scores of all teachers improved at the end of the study. Brady et al. noted that higher levels of teacher knowledge should correlate to better student outcomes in the classroom. The study did note that its biggest limitation was not tracking student scores along with teacher knowledge (Brady et al., 2009). LeDoux surveyed teachers with many years of experience where the Brady et al. study included teachers with varying years of experience. Brady et al. stated that "…newer teachers in this cohort more often felt unprepared for teaching students to read…" (2009, p. 445). This observation and study suggested that teachers need specific professional development to teach students how to read as they enter the teaching profession.

Building on the work done by Brady et al., Ehri and Flugman designed a quantitative study, *Mentoring Teachers in Systematic Phonics Instruction,* that looked at teachers' understanding and feelings towards phonics instruction, as well as student outcomes, after intensive professional development. Ehri and Flugman conducted the study involving 69 kindergarten through third grade teachers from 23 public schools in the greater New York City

area. These teachers were given 135 hours of professional development and mentorship over the course of a school year. The mentors worked individually with teachers twice a week, preparing for and implementing phonics instruction following a standard order for phonics instruction. The mentors kept monthly notes on teacher knowledge and effectiveness, and the teachers' views on reading instruction were assessed at the beginning and end of the study (Ehri & Flugman, 2018). The study found that students made large gains in their reading and phonics skills over the course of the year. It also surveyed the teachers on their thoughts about the direct phonics instruction model, and, after the 135 hours of professional development and seeing the success with their students, the teachers were more in favor of the direct phonics instructional model at the end of the study (Ehri & Flugman, 2018). When looking at teacher knowledge and views on reading instruction, Ehri and Flugman discovered by working with a mentor, teachers not only learned effective teaching strategies, but they also learned more about the structure of speech and writing themselves (2018), making them more competent teachers. Limitations noted in this study were that the teachers were evaluated by the mentors, leaving room for bias, and that the extensive professional development program was expensive, and it could be hard to get the funding to replicate the results (Ehri & Flugman, 2018).

Surveying teachers on their thoughts about instructional models showed that the model a teacher had more experience with may be the model they thought was best, and that teachers need to gain experience and knowledge around teaching students to read. A teacher's understanding of an instructional model, and the success they have seen while using it are influential to what they will use in their classroom. The research above noted that both whole language instruction and direct phonics instruction have been shown to lead to positive student growth outcomes. The work by LeDoux, Brady et al., and Ehri and Flugman show that

professional development and teacher experience may influence the outcome of either instructional model.

Direct Phonics as Supplementary Instruction

The research around whole language and direct phonics instructional models show that both can be successful. Differentiated instruction is different instruction for different students so that each student is getting the instruction that best fits their needs. When taking a more focused differentiated lens to literacy instruction, researchers looked at how direct phonics instruction can be a strong supplementary or intervention model for struggling readers. Looking more closely at struggling readers, this research investigated the impact of different supplemental interventions and asked, did supplemental reading and phonics interventions help grow a student's reading ability?

The investigation into what type of reading instruction is best goes back decades. In 1994, Castle, Riach, and Nicholson did an experiment in New Zealand looking at the effects of early phonics interventions on students' reading and writing skills. When focusing on reading skills, the researchers looked at a group of 51 students that were in the first weeks of formal schooling across five schools. These students were chosen because they scored low on phonemic awareness skills assessments. The 51 students were broken into three groups of seventeen students: a group of students who got the full phonemic training program, a group of students who saw the same materials as the phonemic training group but sorted the materials based on category rather than sounds, and a third group of students who received no outside training. According to Castle, Riach, and Nicholson, the two training groups met for twenty minutes each week over fifteen weeks, totaling five hours of training (1994). The phonemic training group received training on segmenting, blending, letter sounds, and CVC words. The second training

group were presented with the same materials, but instead of sorting picture cards by sounds they would sort them by category. They would use plastic letters but call them by their name instead of their sounds, and they would read the same poems as the phonemic training group but not dig deeper into the rhyming and word families in the poems (Castle, Riach, & Nicholson, 1994). After only five hours of supplementary training, the post experiment results showed that the phonics training groups outperformed the other two groups on a phonemic awareness test, a nonsense word reading test, and a dictation test. Castle, Riach, and Nicholson concluded that the extra phonics training was beneficial to the students stating, "If children do not have a rudimentary knowledge of letter-sound rules, however, then they are likely to make very little progress in reading" (1994, p. 355). Over the next three decades, research continued to be conducted around supplemental phonics instruction for struggling readers.

In another study out of New Zealand, Ryder, Tunmer, and Greaney researched using direct phonics instruction as a support for struggling readers in *Explicit Instruction in Phonemic Awareness and Phonemically Based Decoding Skills as an Intervention Strategy for Struggling Readers in Whole Language Classrooms* (2007). The study included 24 students between the ages of six and seven at a low to middle income school in New Zealand. The students were assessed using the Burt Word Reading Test, New Zealand Revision, and twelve pairs of students with similar scores were made. Splitting up the pairs, two groups were created, one group of twelve was the experiment group and the other was the control (Ryder, Tunmer, & Greaney, 2007). All 24 students had whole language instruction as their main classroom instruction, and the twelve students in the experiment group were also given direct phonics instruction that was scripted and given by a trained teaching aide (Ryder, Tunmer, & Greaney, 2007). The interventions took place over 24 weeks. After the 24 weeks, the students were assessed again. All

students made gains, but the experimental group made much greater gains than the control group. When compared to scores of non-struggling readers of the same age, "…the intervention group children performed, on average, only two months below age-appropriate levels, whereas the control group children performed ten months below…" (Ryder, Tunmer, & Greaney, 2007, p. 363). The researchers did a follow up assessment two years later and found that the intervention students were still outperforming the control students, indicating that the intervention had long term benefits for the students (Ryder, Tunmer, & Greaney, 2007).

Continuing to look into the effects of supplemental phonics-based instruction in struggling kindergarteners, Vadasy and Sanders looked the effects of phonics-based instruction on students who were considered Language Minority (parents had indicated that a language other than English was spoken at home) and students who were native English speakers in 2010. Their study was conducted between ten schools and 24 classrooms. There were 67 treatment students, 38 of whom were considered language minority (LM). There were 81 control students, 46 of whom were LM. The phonics instruction used by Vadasy and Sanders in 2010 was given to students in a one-on-one setting outside of the classroom reading instruction by trained paraprofessionals. The training was given four days a week for eighteen weeks from January through May. The skills the students worked on were similar to the study done by Castle, Riach, and Nicholson. In Vadasy and Sanders' experiment the students got instruction on letter sound correspondence, phonics decoding, spelling, and practice in decodable texts (2010). The students worked one-on-one with the paraprofessional for 30 minutes each day, spending twenty minutes on phonics skills, and ten minutes in decodable texts. At the end of the eighteen weeks, all the students were assessed again, and the treatment students outperformed the control students across the board. Vadasy and Sanders also found that the LM students performed as well as the

non-LM student on every measure except word reading (2010). This showed that the language interventions benefited both the LM students and the non-LM students. A limitation noted by Vadasy and Sanders in their experiment was that students were given their LM label from the home language questionnaire given to parents by the school, not by the students' language proficiency (2010). The similar experiments done by Vadasy and Sanders in 2010 and Castle, Riach, and Nicholson in 1994 showed that early phonics-based interventions with kindergarteners improved their reading scores and thereby their reading success.

Kindergarten is not the only grade where literacy interventions can be effective. Students are learning the basic skills to read through the second grade, and McIntyre et al. found that interventions in first and second grade can greatly increase a student's reading ability in their 2005 study *Supplemental Instruction in Early Reading: Does It Matter For Struggling Readers?*. They went to 29 first and second grade teachers across 17 schools and asked them to identify the lowest 20% of readers in their classroom. This resulted in a sample size of 196 students. McIntyre et al. designed their experiment to reflect more real-world circumstances since the classroom teachers and schools would be the ones giving the supplemental instruction, not the researchers. To gather baseline data, McIntyre et al. gave all students a reading comprehension assessment and the first graders were additionally given a sentence dictation assessment since there would be a phonics focus in first grade (2005). Over the course of one school year, the researchers observed and interviewed the participating classroom teachers twice, looking for both the instruction the students got in the whole group setting, along with the supplemental instruction. The supplemental instruction allowed by McIntyre et al. was varied, but specific. The teachers could choose from: book clubs, Carbo Reading, early intervention, locally designed, or Reading Recovery (2005). At the end of the school year, it was discovered that of

the 196 students, 39 first graders, and 20 second graders had received consistent 30 minute daily additional instruction. The study found that the students who had received the additional instruction showed higher gains on the reading comprehension assessment. The researchers also noted that there was not a significant difference in the phonics gains but pointed out that none of the interventions were a systematic phonics intervention. McIntyre et al. noted that may hinder students as they continue as readers and encounter longer or more complex words (2005). The study did have the limitation of having various interventions used. McIntyre et al. conclude that their "…study supports supplemental reading for struggling readers in first and second grades" (2005, p. 104). This more real-world setting shows that if time is made to support struggling readers, they will achieve more.

As has been noted by the studies above, as students continue on their reading journey they will encounter longer and more complex words. This means as a student gets older, they need to have the skills to take apart and figure out complicated words. Berninger et al. looked into this in their 2003 study *Comparison of Three Approaches to Supplementary Reading Instruction for Low-Achieving Second Grade Readers.* Berninger et al. worked with 96 second graders spread over eight schools who were chosen based on number of words read assessments. The students were split into four equal groups, receiving one of the following treatments: reading comprehension training, word recognition training, a combination of both trainings, or no outside training beyond the classroom (2003). The students were given the training in pairs outside of the literacy block, similar to the studies done by Vadasy and Sanders, and Castle, Riach, and Nicholson, and Ryder, Tunmer, and Greane. The students who got the word recognition training and the students who received both were given phonics interventions similar to the other studies with younger students. The students in the Berninger et al. study word recognition treatment

practiced phonemes, hearing and segmenting sounds, and decoding words. The students also worked on sight words (2003). The reading comprehension treatment groups, and the combination treatment group read a fourth of a book at each session and discussed it. Each treatment group got 24 lessons. According to the results from Berninger et al., the students in the single treatment groups showed more growth than the control group, while the double treatment had the greatest impact on students' reading scores (2003). Limitations noted by Berninger et al. were that the researchers were not able to follow up with the students in third grade, and the classroom instruction the students were getting varied across classrooms and schools (2003). The combination treatment group scoring higher than the control or the single treatment groups supported the idea that a combination of whole language and direct phonics instruction benefits a student's reading ability.

This research clearly stated that supplemental reading interventions worked with struggling readers at all levels of primary elementary. These interventions helped the students gain the skills, especially the phonics skills, needed to succeed in their reading career. Every study showed that students who received the phonics and reading support outside of classroom reading instruction outperformed their comparable peers. As shown by McIntyre et al. though, there has to be time made for these interventions. The students who actually got the 30-minute daily intervention outperformed their peers who were identified as benefiting from the intervention, but who did not receive it, or did not receive it consistently. Berninger et al. showed in their research that a combination of phonics and reading comprehension, a skill very aligned with whole language instruction, gave the best results with the second-grade supplementary instruction groups. Students who were struggling benefited from additional, differentiated, supplementary instruction.

Impact of Family Involvement on Early Reading

Children develop rapidly in their first years of life and are expected to enter school with a beginning understanding of books and reading skills. These three studies looked at the impact of reading to children at home, and detailed the roles race, social economic standing, and parental education played in the preparedness and success of students' reading in the primary grades. The studies also shed light on how whole language instructional techniques may be what families should focus on at home verses focusing on direct phonics skills.

Anderson, Atkinson, Swaggerty, and O'Brian looked at how reading books at home can impact students' reading readiness, and their overall reading journey. Anderson et al. asserted that there is no difference between pre-reading skills and reading skills because all the skills lead to reading. They recognize that children are growing as readers and writers before they can read or write in the traditional sense (2018). They also differentiated between constrained and unconstrained skills. They defined constrained skills as skills that can be learned in a few years, such as letter sounds, whereas unconstrained skills can't truly be measured or mastered, such as the ability to tell a story or the motivation to read (2018). In this quantitative study, 152 incoming kindergarten parent/student pairs participated. Each family was asked questions around the reading they did at home, called Shared Book Reading (SBR) in this study, and the student's language and literacy skills were assessed. The study aimed to see if there was a connection between the amount of SBR the students had participated in and their incoming literature scores. The findings were children in families that were low-income, or culturally and linguistically diverse, had limited experience with SBR at home. The overall percentage of parents who reported reading with their children daily was 23%, and the number who reported reading with their child two to three times over the past week was 63%. When broken down into lower and

higher income families, it showed that 16.2% of lower income families reported reading with their child daily while 33% of higher income families reported reading daily with their child. 54% of lower income families reported reading two to three times in the past week, compared to 74% of higher income families (Anderson et al., 2018). Next, the researchers looked at the students' literacy assessment scores from the beginning of kindergarten. The students were assessed on letter name fluency, hearing onset sounds, concepts of print, and comprehension. The students also listened to a story and then used the book to retell the story and answer questions based on Bloom's Taxonomy (Anderson et al., 2018).

After comparing the students' literacy assessments with the amount of SBR reported by their families Anderson et al. found a strong connection between SBR and higher vocabulary and language skills (2018). The more SBR the student had been a part of at home, the higher their literacy and vocabulary scores were. The researchers also looked at the difference of SBR and teaching specific phonics skills, such as letter sounds, to students at home and they found that the students who were more focused on letter sounds were more successful on constrained skills in kindergarten and first grade, but students who had more SBR had stronger comprehension scores in fourth grade, leading them to assert that SBR had a large impact on a child's unrestrained literacy skills (Anderson et al., 2018). Anderson et al. concluded that SBR was vital for students in their early years, and efforts should be made to get books to families to encourage SBR at home (2018). With the importance of reading at home with children established, it is important to look at the best ways to invite, encourage, and engage families in reading at home.

Who has a more powerful impact when inviting families to engage in reading at home with their children? This was the question asked by Colgate, Ginns, and Bagnall in a 2017 quantitative analysis of kindergarten and second grade students in Australia. Colgate et al.

analyzed many research studies looking at the impact of teacher involvement with families on how often the families read at home; the studies they found contradicted each other, some saying teachers had an impact while others saying there was no correlation (2017). With the studies showing that teacher invitation may positively affect the number of families who were reading at home, Colgate et al. set up a study comparing family involvement when families were invited by the teacher, and when families were invited by the student. They used a reading challenge used nationwide in Australia, where families were challenged to read 30 or more books from an approved reading list over the course of 7 months. The books could all be found at libraries, and the program was well established and supported, ensuring access to the literature was not a barrier (2017). The study took place at two schools and included 203 families, 110 kindergarten families, and 93 second-grade families. In the kindergarten classes, the families were personally invited to participate in the reading challenge by the classroom teacher. In the second-grade classes the students wrote letters to their families asking them to participate in the reading challenge with them.

At the end of the challenge, Colgate et al. analyzed the difference in participation between the families who got personal invitations, and those who only received the generic form from the school. In the kindergarten classrooms, where the teacher had sent personal invitations, it was found that 76.8% of families who were invited participated, versus 51.9% who did not receive an invitation from the teacher. In the second-grade classrooms, 70.9% of the families who were invited by their child participated, while 42.1% who did not get personal invitations participated (2017). With these findings, Colgate et al. determined that teacher invitation does have an impact on family reading at home, and since it has an impact, they surmised that even more contact with the families would have a greater impact on families reading at home (2017).

One limitation noted in the study was a lack of assessment of the students reading abilities before the study started, so they were not able to track the students reading growth (Colgate et al., 2017). Knowing that teachers reaching out to families can impact the amount that families read with their children at home, it is important to break down what types of communication will have the largest impact.

It has been established that families reading at home with their children has an impact on the child's reading ability. Bojczyk, Haverback, Pae, Hairston, and Haring were interested if a child's home literacy practices would predict their vocabulary skills in kindergarten and first grade (2017). Their study looked at 198 kindergarten and first grade students at two schools, both with over 90% of the students receiving free or reduced lunch. About 80% of the students were African American, with 70% of the parents of the students being employed, and 21% not working (Bojczyk et al., 2017). Bojczyk et al. noted that past studies have shown that students who come from lower income or minority culture households tend to come to school with more reading deficiencies. They also noted that African American students live unproportionally in poverty (2017). The parents of the participating students were asked how often they did various reading activities, such as: using flashcards, practicing with workbooks, reading to their child, reading the backs of cereal boxes, singing the alphabet song, going to the library, and how often the parents themselves read. The researchers looked at the literacy data from the students in the fall, focusing on word identification, word attack strategies, passage comprehension, and, in kindergarten, letter identification (Bojczyk et al., 2017). After comparing the students' scores with the activities their parents reported doing at home, Bojczyk et al. determined that the amount of reading and literacy activities done at home greatly influenced a child's vocabulary and literacy skills (2017). They conclude that teachers should encourage, engage, and support

families in reading at home, starting before the children are enrolled at school, and continuing throughout the school year (Bojczyk et al., 2017). It has been statistically proven that the more reading a student does at home, the more successful they will be at reading.

Children are learning all the time, and parents and teachers have the opportunity to work as partners, with everyone supporting the student's reading growth. Bojczyk et al. stated that "Parenting plays a crucial role in children's early language development." (p.502, 2017). Bojczyk et al. went on to assert that teachers play a crucial role in supporting families with their child's early language development, especially for families who are low income or part of a cultural minority (2017). Colgate et al. noted that parent involvement in their child's education could be parents coming to school, volunteering, and being part of committees, while it could also be them working independently with their child at home (2017), with both options being valuable and important. When Anderson et al. looked at the amount of SBR families were doing at home, they found that access to quality literature may be a barrier to families reading with their children at home. They set up the community with a monthly book delivery service for children up to age five, to help eliminate that barrier (2018). Colgate et al. noted in their study that the books required for the reading challenge were all available to families from the library, and they interviewed parents to make sure that access to those books would not be a barrier (2017). This is congruent with one of the findings that Bojczyk et al. had, noting that the positive connection between home book reading and students vocabulary skills could be encouraged through partnerships with the local libraries (2017). Working with schools and community libraries to help eliminate the barrier between families and quality literature could improve children's literacy skills when they enter school.

Once a student is enrolled in school, teachers can have a larger impact on their reading at home and can help close any gaps that existed when a child entered school. As all the above research stated, students living in low-income homes, and language and cultural minority homes, were generally read to less and came into school will lower vocabulary and reading skills. This meant that when a child came to school, it may have looked like they had a language disability, but they just had not had as much exposure to books (Bojczyk et al., 2017). These families knew there were barriers their children needed to overcome, and most were highly motivated to help their child learn and be as successful as possible. This meant that teachers and parents needed to work together to support a child's reading journey. Colgate et al. noted that parents often saw teachers as reading experts (2017) and accept that advice or direction from the teacher would be beneficial. Bojckyk et al. looked at the relationship between parents and teachers and powerfully stated that parents "…must feel as though the teachers are more than just resources, but rather co-instructors…" (p. 508, 2017). If teachers go into parent communication with the mindset of engaging the families as co-instructors, it will change how they send home information, and the types of conversations they have with the families. Bojczyk et al. noted that family interactions can play a stronger role in a child's reading outcome than their childcare or school experiences. Colgate et al. found that teachers inviting families to join in the reading challenge had an impact on how many families participated and completed it, and they went on to assert that if just an invitation could have that much impact, more communication from the teacher would be even more beneficial (2017). Bojczyk et al. had more specific guidelines for teachers to follow when engaging families in the role of co-instructor. All of the activities that are sent home should have clear directions to follow so that parents can easily implement them. It should not be assumed that families will know how to do any of the activities already (2017). This supports the

professional development studied by Ehri and Flugman in 2018. Parents look to teachers as reading experts, and the more a teacher engaged families, the better the students' reading scores were over their schooling career. This means that teachers need to be well versed in how to teach students how to read and be able to provide families with appropriate supplemental activities at home. When teachers engaged parents in the role of co-instructor, and had them read more at home, the child had the potential to be more successful throughout their life as studies show that early literacy skills are linked to success throughout a person's life (Bojczyk, 2017). All three of the studies showed that a whole language approach to reading at home has the best long-lasting effects on that child's reading success. Getting literature into the hands of families and encouraging them to read with their child allows the child to learn through exposure, which is authentic whole language instruction.

Summary

The first theme addressed research around the instructional methods looking at whole language, direct phonics instruction, and impact of teacher knowledge. The research presented found that both whole language instruction and direct phonics instruction could have positive outcomes for emergent readers. The research also showed that the knowledge or training a teacher had in one method or the other could influence which model they think is more effective, and impact how they teach in the classroom. This research supported the use of both whole language and direct phonics instruction.

The second theme looked at how direct phonics instruction could be used as supplementary instruction for struggling students. The research showed that supplementary phonics instruction for struggling readers improved their reading scores over the students who did not receive the supplemental instruction. It also showed that struggling readers who received

the supplemental instruction continued to perform higher the following year. The findings also discovered that supplemental instruction was beneficial to students when given regularly. This research supported teachers using direct phonics instruction as supplementary instruction for struggling readers.

The third theme shifted to how family literacy practices could impact a child's reading and gave suggestions on how schools could work with families to encourage literacy in the home. These studies showed that the amount of literature being read to a student at home starting from birth impacted their reading ability when they were in school. The research also showed that once a student was in school, teachers reaching out to families to invite them to read at home increased the number of families who participate in home reading. This research supported teachers and families working together as co-instructors.

Conclusion

The foundations of a student's academic career begin with how they learn to read. The studies in this paper have looked at multiple instructional methods, and the successes and potential downfalls of each approach. Whole language has the potential to create a love of reading, and support comprehension and understanding as a child gets older. Phonics instruction has been shown to impact students early reading abilities and has been very successful as an intervention for struggling readers. A teacher's personal experience and knowledge can impact how a student is taught in school, and the amount of literature they are exposed to at home can also impact their reading ability. With all of these insights the question stands, in light of what is known about differentiated instruction, do emergent readers have more success when taught to read through whole language, when given specific phonics instruction, or when taught though a

combination of both? The following chapter will synthesize the research and argue that in a differentiated classroom, all types of instruction play an important role.

Chapter Three: Discussion / Application and Future Studies

Using previous research to guide future applications and inspire potential research allows the process of teaching emergent readers to read to become more refined. The research in chapter two shows that both whole language and direct phonics instruction are beneficial to students learning to read. This leads to a possible application of training teachers in both direct phonics instruction and whole language and further research to support this application. There is evidence that struggling readers benefit from supplemental direct phonics support. An application of this insight could be using small, differentiated groups to teach the direct phonics skills that a student is missing with potential research looking into if linear or spiral instruction of phonics skills is more beneficial for struggling readers. Family involvement and a child being read to at home is shown in research to have a positive effect on the child's reading ability. A potential application of this is communities and schools working to supply students with books at home with future research investigating if sending home books with reading logs increased the amount of reading a student does at home. These insights, applications, and future research proposals turn the research in chapter two into actionable steps.

Insights Gained from the Research

While analyzing the studies above themes emerged, and from these themes, insights can be gained. The insights discussed below are how direct phonics instruction and whole language instruction may be taught together in the classroom, ways supplemental direct phonics instruction can benefit struggling readers, and the effect family involvement with literature has

on a child from birth. Each insight distills the research down to the impact it has on emergent readers.

Do emergent readers have more success when taught to read through whole language, when given specific phonics instruction, or when taught though a combination of both? The body of work around instruction, particularly whole group instruction, for whole language is over 10 years old now. As Pearson mentioned, whole language was at its peak popularity in the 1980s and 1990s, and then in the early 2000s with the instruction of No Child Left Behind and the Reading First program from the government, schools across the United States were required by the government to use a direct phonics instruction approach (2004). Educational practices have been described as a pendulum arm, swinging from one extreme to the other, which is what direct phonics instruction and whole language instruction appear to be to each other. When looking at the research though, both approaches have proven successful. Students in the Manning and Kamii study were found to be better readers and have stronger comprehension skills than the students who only received direct phonics instruction, even though they started off the year with slower growth (2000). Seemingly in contrast to that finding was the finding of Wolf who noted that students who received the direct phonics instruction did better on word reading than those who did not (2016). LeDoux (2007) and Ehri and Flugman (2018) both looked at how a teacher's knowledge, understanding, and feelings about a particular instructional model may impact what the teachers views as best practice. Instead of viewing all the research as opposing one another, it can be viewed as finding that both approaches to instruction have their benefits and using a combination of both in the classroom could have the biggest impact on student reading. That view is supported in the Ehri and Flugman study where they noted that there were nine statements in favor of whole language practices that it was predicted the teachers would disagree

with by the end of the year-long training on direct phonics instruction, and the teachers were still neutral on those statement, showing that even after intensive professional development on one method, teachers may still see the benefits of both (2018). When viewed through a differentiation lens, it makes sense that both methods would work, but neither method would work for all students. Different students learn in different ways, and by teaching reading using read aloud and learning words through text while also explicitly learning phonics skills the instruction is differentiated and more students will be successful. Differentiation encourages the use of more than one method of instruction and incorporating whole language and direct phonics instruction can help differentiate reading instruction.

With the conclusion that whole language and direct phonics instruction have the ability to be most impactful in a differentiated classroom to students learning to read when used together, how to differentiate, especially for struggling readers, should be looked into. Each student learns to read at their own pace, and some students need extra support and explicit instruction. The above research showed that using direct phonics instruction as supplementary instruction or as an intervention can help students master the skills needed for reading. Differentiating for students who are struggling with reading, and providing that instruction in a smaller group or one on one, has been shown to be very impactful on students' reading abilities. This instruction is more closely aligned to direct phonics instruction because the students need to have the skills taught to them directly and specifically and be given ample time to practice the skills. The studies showed that this differentiation worked with students who were part of a whole language classroom setting, so getting the whole language style instruction of seeing and hearing words within text was still beneficial for them, while they also benefited from the supplemental direct phonics instruction.

Learning to read does not start at school, it starts when a child is born. The research showed that children who are read to daily at home are stronger readers in school, and these benefits are not only seen in emergent readers but continue to benefit the child as they grow older. The studies looked at how many books a child was being read a week, and how teachers could support and encourage reading at home. The students who had positive, long term effects in their reading were the students who were read stories and books. This is the text that whole language is grounded in. One investigation showed that students who had done flashcards and specific phonics-based skills at home had a small advantage in kindergarten or first grade, but by the time they were in fourth grade that advantage had shifted to the students who had been read stories (Anderson et al., 2018). The whole language practice of immersing children in text is the best start a family can give a child as they start their reading journey.

Gaining insights from research helps guide next steps. The insights gained from this research show that whole language and direct phonics instruction are both effective and can be taught together in a classroom. Struggling readers benefit from supplemental direct phonics instruction, and the more families read to their children at home, the more successful those children are at learning to read in school. These insights can be applied to support reading development.

Application

The research in chapter two shows that whole language and direct phonics instruction can both have a place when teaching children to read. In order for it to be beneficial the findings need to be applied. Teachers need to be trained in how to integrate both models of instruction into the daily classroom instruction. Students who are struggling readers need to have time built into their day for differentiation with instruction on direct phonics skills. Schools and

communities should work together to get children of all ages access to quality literature, so they are surrounded by language at home and at school. These actions will support children as they become readers.

The central questions guiding this research in this paper was in light of what is known about differentiated instruction, do emergent readers have more success when taught to read through whole language, when given specific phonics instruction, or when taught though a combination of both? As stated above, there is research saying that both methods can be effective, which means using the methods together can give students the best reading instruction. One application of this research is to train teachers on how to use both methods. Brady et al. (2009), and Ehri and Flugman (2018) both studied professional development around direct phonics instruction with a mentor model. Each teacher in the studies worked with a mentor that was skilled in direct phonics instruction. This same mentorship approach could be used in professional development with teachers around incorporating whole language and direct phonics instruction together in the classroom. Both studies with mentors found that teachers were more confident in their teaching of direct phonics at the end of the professional development, so it follows that after a year of working with a mentor on using best practices from direct phonics instruction and whole language instruction a teacher would feel more confident in their instruction. They would understand the benefit of having students engage with authentic text and having daily read aloud while also explicitly teaching phonics skills that students need to be successful readers. As Ehri and Flugman pointed out, a limitation to their study was the expense of having enough mentors for each teacher participating (2018). At a school or district level, there could be staff wide professional development around combining the two methods, and then a smaller group set up with a mentorship program. After going through the mentorship program,

a teacher could choose to become a mentor themselves and work with their colleagues to continue to train more teachers in combining whole language and direct phonics instruction in the classroom.

The studies around how direct phonics instruction can be used as supplemental instruction for struggling readers is clear, if a student is struggling with reading giving them focused direct phonics instruction will help increase their reading ability. Not all phonics skills are the same, so an application for this supplemental phonics instruction is to differentiate the phonics skills being taught based on what the student needs. If a student is struggling with onset sounds, giving them instruction on decoding words may not be as meaningful, because they may not be ready for that skill yet. Using differentiated direct phonics instruction to teach students the phonics skills they need will help increase students' confidence along with their reading ability. This is beneficial for the teacher as well because a student will be more successful when working on a skill they are ready for, making for the most efficient use of classroom instructional time. For these differentiated supplementary groups to be most effective the instruction needs to take place consistently as discussed by McIntyre et al. (2005). Differentiating phonics instruction and giving direct phonics instruction to struggling readers can help improve their reading ability.

Children are learning to read long before they enter school, and the research shows that being surrounded by literature and being read to daily impacts a student's reading and comprehension ability. Applying this research, schools could work with early childhood and community programs to give literature access to children starting from birth. Books could be sent out to children monthly to encourage reading at home and ensure that families had access to literature. Once children are old enough to start school, the school library can work closely with classroom teachers and families to ensure that students are bringing home books weekly and

families are encouraged to engage in reading those books with their children. Colgate et al. found that a personal invitation from a teacher can impact how involved families are with reading to their children at home (2017). This whole language approach to reading, learning through text, will support a student's reading development and their enjoyment of reading.

Whole language and direct phonics instruction both have their place in teaching a child how to read. Applying what the research has revealed, teachers can be trained in how to effectively use both models of instruction in the classroom, struggling readers should be given differentiated supplemental support on phonics skills, and families need support and literature at home to help expose children to literature from birth. Further studies could be done around these applications to find what has the most impact.

Future Studies

When finding applications from research, those applications are only assumptions until further research is done to prove their effectiveness. Three possible future studies from this research are looking at if direct phonics instruction and whole language should be woven together, or both taught but at separate times in the classroom, if students who receive supplemental phonics instruction benefit from learning the skills in a specific order or in a repetitive spiral, and if sending home books with reading logs encourage more at home reading. These proposed topics for further research would expand on the current research.

Training teachers with a mentor program to incorporate whole language and direct phonics instruction into the daily reading instruction in the classroom would allow students to receive the benefits of both models of instruction. Further research could look at if student reading scores are higher when the models are interwoven with each other, or when both have a place in the classroom instruction but are taught separately. For example, if the reading

instruction has a whole language time and a direct phonics time the students may be introduced to a digraph during the phonics lesson, and then in a separate lesson read a poem that includes that digraph. If the reading instruction has both methods combined together the students would learn about a digraph and immediately read the poem that included that digraph. Researching if students benefit from separate reading and phonics lessons or having them integrated together can help guide teacher training in implementing a reading program that includes whole language and direct phonics instruction.

The research that has been done around supplemental direct phonics instruction had students learning multiple phonics skills at the same time (letter sounds, word decoding). When instruction is differentiated for a student that instruction should be targeted at the skill that student needs. Further research could be done to look at what type of supplemental phonics instruction helps raise student reading scores more. Does a linear approach, where a child focuses on one skill at a time and then moves onto the next skill or a spiral approach where they work on each skill for a bit and then circle back? An example of a linear approach would be a child working on onset sounds until they showed proficiency with that skill, then moving onto letter sounds, and once they were proficient with letter sounds working on decoding CVC words. A spiral approach would have the student working on all three skills in the same lesson, so each skill was worked on every day. This research would allow teachers to know how to best set up their supplemental instruction so that students were learning the phonics skills in the most effective way.

Family involvement with reading at home increasing student reading ability has research supporting it. Part of engaging families in reading at home is ensuring that they have access to books to read. In the Australian study done by Colgate et al. in 2017 the researchers used an

established countrywide program which guaranteed that all participating families had access to books. That opens the door to research looking at if students and families have access to books, will they read more at home. A possible future study could look at family reading with reading logs. Reading logs are a common home to school literacy connection used in schools. Research could be done on how much more reading a family logs at home when books are sent home with each reading log verses when just the reading log is sent home. The amount of reading logged at home could then be compared to students' reading scores from the beginning to the end of the school year. This would help establish how beneficial schools and communities putting resources into getting more books into the homes of families with emergent readers would be.

Research around the best way to integrate whole language and direct phonics instruction in the classroom, how to best structure supplemental phonics instruction for struggling readers, and how much of an impact providing books to families at home has on students' reading scores would all build on the insights and possible applications of the research presented in chapter two. Continual research allows teachers and the educational field as a whole to continue to develop and refine the most effective and impactful way to teach emergent readers.

Conclusion

The reading wars, debate over how young children should learn how to read has been happening for over three decades, is whole language or direct phonics instruction better? The research has looked at both methods and found success with both methods. With differentiation as the guiding principle, studies show that a combination of both methods is best. In a classroom environment where there are multiple options for students to learn information, teaching with a combination of whole language and direct phonics instruction allows students to receive the reading instruction that best works for them. The research also shows that struggling readers

benefit from supplemental instruction with direct phonics skills taught. Using supplemental instruction in a smaller group setting allows teachers to further differentiate instruction to meet the needs of struggling readers. These findings open up the possibilities for teacher training around both methods, and research into the best way to teach phonics skills to struggling readers. Along with the reading skills students learn at school, they begin learning to read from when they are born. The more literature and read alouds they are exposed to from birth, the better readers they become, research shows. This whole language approach to reading should be encouraged at home, giving a child as much exposure to literature and language as possible.

In light of what is known about differentiated instruction, do emergent readers have more success when taught to read through whole language, when given specific phonics instruction, or when taught though a combination of both? The research supports using a combination of both methods to teach emergent readers. The reading wars left the impression that direct phonics instruction and whole language instruction were diametrically opposed. When looked at with a differentiation lens, the research supports using both methods to give students the best start to their reading journey.

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Appendix

Article Tracking Matrix

Articles: author(s) name and year of publication	**Method** Qualitative/ Quantitative/ Meta-Analysis Mixed-methods	**Theme 1**	**Theme 2**	**Theme 3**	**Theme 4**	**Outlier**
Cooper, 2008	Quantitative	x				
Manning and Kamii, 2000	Qualitative	x				
Maddox and Feng, 2013	Qualitative	x				
Wolf, 2016	Qualitative	x				
LeDoux, 2007	Qualitative	x				
Brady et al., 2009	Quantitative	x				
Ehri and Flugman, 2018	Quantitative	x				
Castle, Riach, and Nicholson, 1994	Quantitative		x			
Ryder, Tunmer, and Greaney, 2007	Qualitative		x			
Vadasy and Sanders, 2010	Quantitative		x			
McIntyre et al., 2005	Quantitative		x			
Berninger et al., 2003	Quantitative		x			
Anderson, Atkinson, Swaggerty, and O'Brian, 2018	Quantitative			x		
Colgate, Ginns, and Bagnall, 2016	Quantitative			x		

Bojczyk, Haverback, Pae, Hairston, and Haring, 2017	Quantitative			x		