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A balanced position provides a comfortable place for experienced reading teachers who have enhanced their instruction by thoughtfully adopting and adapting new ideas appropriate for their students.

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eadng is a complex process that involves recognising written symbolic representations of speech, coordinating the words into thoughts, matching the thoughts to a previous bank of knowledge, and constructing meaning. The basic process takes several years to learn, and the more advanced aspects of reading, such as critical thinking and the synthesis of ideas, take several years more. Potential readers also come from a multiplicity of backgrounds and with divergent levels of knowledge, verbal skills, and reasoning abilities. How could there be a single method of instruction that would make every child a successful reader?

Nonetheless, in the field of reading, “magic” methodologies continue to be proposed. Though each method may contain worthwhile elements when applied to particular situations, many new ideas tend to be adopted wholesale. The information then filters down to classroom teachers in the form of mandates, one-day workshops, or in teaching materials that arrive without explanation or training. Many teachers have only a single undergraduate course in teaching reading and, thus, lack the background for interpreting new trends. Essential parts of the theory get lost, and some flashy component becomes all that is left. These flashy leftovers may become popular, but they are usually not rich enough in philosophical content to accomplish the complex task of teaching reading or complete enough to meet the variety of student needs.

Looking for a balanced approach in instructional methods may be a reaction to unworkable single methodologies. Yet when found, a balanced position provides a comfortable place for experienced reading teachers who have enhanced their instruction by thoughtfully adopting and adapting new ideas appropriate for their students.

Surveys of practising teachers find the majority using eclectic or balanced approaches (Baumann et al., 1998; Worthy and Hoffman, 1997; Pressley and Rankin as cited in Metsala, 1997). In a survey conducted by J. Baumann of more than 1,200 pre-kindergarten to upper primary teachers, 89% said they used a balanced approach, blending phonics and skills instruction with holistic principles and practices. They also allocated classroom time in a balanced way, spending moderate amounts of time for reading strategy instruction and moderate amounts of time for more holistic activities such as reading aloud to students, independent reading, responding to literature, and writing. Eighty-three percent also balanced

instructional materials using a combination of basal reading programs and children's trade books.

Yet, teachers are still left wondering about the blend of activities they are using. Is there a better sequence or a more powerful combination? Is it an eclectic, tossed salad approach when it should be a melting pot?

It is not just the presence of a variety of activities that makes a program of reading instruction effective or ineffective. It is the way in which its pieces are fitted together to complement and support one another, always with full consideration of the needs and progress of the young readers with whom it will be used (Adams, 1990, p. 122).

Balanced instruction is more than an eclectic approach. It resolves the whole language/direct instruction dilemma by thoughtfully integrating practices. Balanced reading and balanced writing use a whole-part-whole approach, integrate English and blend teacher and student leadership. The components do support one another and are flexible enough to be adjusted to meet the needs of a variety of students.

This chapter summarises the whole-part-whole approach, includes a brief discussion on integrating English, and covers the importance of blending teacher and student leadership. In doing so, we hope to introduce you to the benefits of balanced reading and writing.

Solving the Whole-Part Dilemma Through Balance

Proponents of explicit instruction and whole language often speak in extremes, especially about the other's approach, but both share the same long-term objectives. Their goals are to develop in children the desire to read, and for them to take pleasure in and to read a variety of materials with deep understanding. The debate as to whether reading instruction should proceed from discrete skills toward a whole or start with the whole has created a dilemma for teachers, especially early primary teachers, over choosing the best approach.

One solution is to use a whole-part-whole approach, which combines both methods of instruction. The whole-part-whole approach is truly representative of the way people learn. For example, in understanding something, both students and adults need to see the big picture first. Then, they

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