I n 1999, I (Dewitz, the first author of this book) was an author/consultant for core reading programs, but was asked by the publishing company to assist with a new elementary science program. My job was to design the reading lessons that accompanied the science content. What should the teacher do before the students read the text? How would he or she support students’ comprehension while they read, and what should be the follow-up activities? I decided, with the approval of the editors, to begin each chapter with a graphic organizer. The teacher would present the bare elements of the graphic organizer, and through discussion and reading, the organizer would be fleshed out.

I designed several graphic organizers, and they were passed around the editorial table for discussion. Suggestions were made, and I executed a few revisions. Later that day, the publisher and I had a discussion, and he disagreed with the complexity of the graphic organizers. One in particular, at the sixth-grade level, depicted the three types of rocks—igneous, sedimentary, and metamorphic—organized around the rock cycle. The publisher wanted to eliminate the rock cycle, claiming that the graphic organizer was too complex and that teachers wanted simple graphic organizers. As we argued back and forth about the needs of teachers versus the accuracy of the graphic organizer, the publisher became exasperated. He finally declared, “Look, sales are more important than clarity and accuracy. We want the program to sell. Teachers can always change the graphic organizer on their own.”

This story illuminates one—but certainly not the only—conflict that underlies the creation of educational materials. The process is more complex than simply translating research-based understanding about reading into sound instructional principles. In this chapter, we take you through the process of creating a core reading program, introduce you to the players who create these programs, and discuss the political, economic, and educational influences that shape such programs. The content of this chapter came from interviews with program authors, editors and managers at publishing companies, and executives.
at development houses. Most executives in development houses had previously served as editorial directors of reading and language arts for the major publishing houses. We interviewed people who were responsible for developing Harcourt’s StoryTown (2008), Macmillan/McGraw-Hill’s Treasures (2009), and Pearson Scott Foresman’s Reading Street series (2008b). All were asked the same basic questions: How is a core reading program created, and what is your role in its creation? We wanted to be able to describe the process from multiple perspectives, because only a limited amount of research exists on how core reading programs are developed. We chose to interview authors and editors who had worked with core reading programs for at least 10 years; several had worked with programs for more than 20 years. These experienced professionals were asked to describe how the process of creating a core reading program had changed, because the latest generation of programs had to conform not only to the state guidelines but also to the influential NRP report (NICHD, 2000), all under the pressure of some very tight production guidelines.

All of the people interviewed requested that they remain anonymous. Like any employee (and at some level we are all employees), their personal views may not always reflect the stated policies of publishing company executives. As you will soon learn, the creation of a core reading program requires compromises. Sometimes an editor’s, author’s, or writer’s views prevail, and at other times they do not.

What You Will Learn

• Who creates and writes a core reading program
• What influences the content and instruction in these programs
• What the process is of creating a core reading program
• How quality is controlled as core reading programs are created
• How the process of creating these programs influences the final product

What You Will Be Able to Do

• View your core program with less awe, liberating you to make changes to its use in order to better meet the needs of your students
• Explain to other educators and parents that a core reading program is a product of both experimental research and market research
• Weigh the research base of a core program against the needs of your students
This chapter serves a clear purpose: to show how the process of creating a core reading program will ultimately shape its content. Understanding how something is made gives the user greater appreciation for its strengths and limitations. We also believe that any school district that plans to pay tens of thousands of dollars for a new core reading program needs to have a clear appreciation of the decision-making process that was used to create the multiple components of that program. The creation process does not really start in the publishing company, but in the three large states that influence the content and methods in core reading programs—Texas, California, and Florida—and in many smaller states whose content standards for reading are studied and reviewed before lessons are designed and readings are selected. Before we look at the process of creating a core reading program, we review some early accounts of the publishing process.

Previous Research on the Creation of Core Reading Programs

Little has been written about how core reading programs are created, and what is known is dated, especially considering the changes in these programs over the past 20 years. The book Report Card on Basal Readers (Goodman, Shannon, Freeman, & Murphy, 1988) describes the process and emphasizes the shared roles of authors, editors, and marketing executives. Goodman et al. (1988) did little original research on the specific topic of how basal reading programs are created, but drew heavily on a series of interviews conducted earlier (Graham, 1978). Graham (cited in Goodman et al., 1988) emphasized the essential commercial nature of core reading program publishing and argued that programs are driven more by market forces than by the scholarly expertise of the program authors. In the 1970s, as one publisher was bringing out a new program that sought to emulate other successful programs, the publisher was reported to have said, “You can’t be too advanced, or educators won’t buy it. You can’t be too late with innovations or your competition will have beaten you to it. You have to be exactly on target” (Graham, cited in Goodman et al., 1988, p. 53).

According to Goodman and his colleagues (1988), authors lent credibility to a core reading program and worked to promote the product, but for the most part they did not write the program. The shape of lesson plans, the reading selections, and the skill being taught were all determined by the marketplace. This view is somewhat at odds with what we learned from our interviews and
suggests a much more uniform view of the author–publisher relationship than exists in all publishing companies. We believe that the role of the authors varied from one publisher to another and even from one author to another within one publishing house. Reading selections were either written in-house or selected from a corpus of children’s literature. This selection process was driven by concerns for gender, ethnic, and racial balance and for the elimination of any reference to Communists, witches, or secular humanism. Most selections were heavily edited for readability and then edited again to make sure that there was a fit between the selection and the skill with which it was paired. Goodman et al. (1988) stressed that the goal of the publisher was to present a slick, attractive package with the aura of science surrounding it.

When Chall and Squire (1991) wrote about core reading programs a few years later, they stressed many of the same themes. Squire held a unique position and perspective on the publishing of core reading programs because he was both an acknowledged scholar in the area of language arts and a full-time employee of Ginn and Company. Chall was an influential scholar and analyst of reading instruction. In their discussion of the publishing process, they highlighted several trends that cause core reading program publishing to be a conservative endeavor. First, the costs of creating a program are high and the risks are even higher, so publishers cannot afford to be wrong. Chall and Squire pointed out that in the early 1990s, profit margins were small and barely exceeded what a company could earn by putting their money in a savings account. This led publishers to produce programs based on what the market demanded. Publishers rely on market research, especially focus groups attended by typical classroom teachers, to determine the appeal of their products. Programs must first pass the thumb, or flip, test, a quick cursory examination of the programs in which teachers look for a limited number of important elements. Art and graphic design are critical to the initial success of a program, because the graphic designer can make program elements pop.

Time and a complex market also limit the innovations in a core reading program. Chall and Squire (1991) documented that it took three to five years to produce a new program. That lengthy development period makes it difficult for publishers to respond to new research or educational trends. Publishing companies have to produce increasingly complex programs and include with each generation a greater number of components: student and teacher’s editions, workbooks, assessments, and the like. Even if schools do not purchase all of the components, school districts expect to see them, just as it is nice to know that
navigation is available on your new car even if you cannot afford it or don’t need it. In order to keep pace with the competition, publishers must produce all of the components that their competitors produce, thus raising their costs. Finally, Chall and Squire argued that the rising costs to produce a core reading program comes from the number of groups that exert pressure on the content. They specifically addressed the influence of state and local curriculum standards on program development. These pressures on the publishing industry reinforced Venezky’s (1987) argument that core reading programs are cautious, conservative documents, not on the leading edge of research.

**The Cast of Characters:**
**Who Creates the Programs?**

A large cast of characters is responsible for creating a core reading program. Some of these people work for the publisher, some for universities, others for development houses that complete the outsourced work for the publisher, and some are freelance writers. At publishing houses, the cast typically includes the editors, senior editors, project managers, and marketing executives. Other editors, writers, and graphic designers work at the development houses or at independent companies to which much of the actual program writing is outsourced.

**Publishers and Editors**

The publisher, senior editors, program managers, and marketing executives decide on the scope and focus of the program. Their central role is to decide whether to produce a new core reading program and to weigh the development costs against the likely revenue. Creating a new core reading program is a high-risk financial enterprise, and the senior executives must get it right. In most cases, these senior executives are responsible for determining costs, revenues, and profit projections and providing them to corporate chief executive officers. They must create a program that is appealing to the market and balances costs against the likely revenue. A new core reading program costs anywhere from US$70 million to US$90 million to produce, plus at least half that again in marketing costs. So the senior management must weigh the philosophy and structure of the program against the demands of the market. They must create a program that will sell across the country and in all markets.
The marketing of a core reading program drives its development. At least three versions of each program are developed: one for California, one for Texas, and one for the rest of the nation. So the ultimate shape and scope of a core reading program is neither solely based on scientific research nor solely driven by the author team. The cost of each component must be weighed against the likely revenue. Core reading programs are a compromise shaped as much by market research as by scientific reading research.

Within the publishing companies, the programs are produced by senior editors, editors, program managers, and marketing executives. Core reading programs are complex, with numerous components. Each generation of core reading programs adds new components, but old components are rarely deleted. The current crop of programs includes the standard student and teacher's editions; sets of small leveled and decodable books; practice books for spelling, grammar, and writing; transparencies; word and picture cards; CDs that read all selections to the students; and so forth. For the 2008 and 2009 core reading programs, several publishers—Pearson Scott Foresman, Harcourt, and The McGraw-Hill Companies—added fluency builders; workbooks at multiple levels for advanced, on-level, and below-level readers; intervention kits that are integrated with the core reading program; and intervention kits that can stand alone.

It is the task of the editors and program managers to produce the prototypes for all these components and shepherd their development as writers and editors, both within and outside the company, create the text. These editors are typically fairly young (30 to 50 years old), often former schoolteachers, but not necessarily with any particular expertise in reading instruction. Those who have been with a company or in the publishing industry for a long time have developed their own knowledge of reading instruction, but their knowledge is not necessarily grounded in classroom applications. Editorial staffs change often. It is common for an editor to work for several publishers over the course of a career and for people to shift from one company to another while a program is being developed. This means there are few trade secrets, and a shared common vision about the nature of core reading programs exists. Publishers will closely study the competitive programs as they develop their own products.

**Development Houses**

Core reading programs are largely written and edited at development houses. Often, but not always, the student anthology or the teacher’s edition is created
at the publishing company. The rest of the writing and editing is outsourced. A development house is a small company that employs editors who write, assemble, review, edit, and coordinate the content of the core reading program.

The main function of a development house is to service publishers. Twenty years ago, publishers employed their own editors. When a new program was being produced, the publisher would gear up and hire more writers or editors, only to let them go or shift them to something new after a project was completed. Now the finances of publishing have compelled publishers to outsource more of the writing to these small development houses. Development houses work for more than one publisher at a time. As one executive at a development house told me, “We are writing the third and fourth grades of Scott [Foresman] and the workbooks and assessments for Harcourt.” The task of producing a core reading program is so large that no development house can undertake the project alone.

The writing of the core reading program is shared between editors in the development houses and freelance writers. One executive at a development house stated, “We rely on freelance writers for the most part to write the content of core programs, using the guidelines the publisher has given us.” So in this model, the people outside the development house produce the content of the teacher’s editions, the leveled books, the practice books, and the assessments, while employees at the development house do the editing. Some development houses use freelance writers and editors to create and edit the content, while the development house coordinates the process, seeing that specifications and timelines are met. In either case, it is a long supply chain from the original conception of a core reading program to the final writing and editing. For example, the leveled book your students read started with a set of guidelines from the publisher that may or may not have been reviewed by an author. These guidelines were given to a development house that delivered them to a freelance writer in Vermont. An editor at the development house in New York edited it, and a project manager in Illinois made sure it fit into the overall core reading program. Figure 6 is our view of how a core reading program is created based on the interviews we conducted. You can study this figure and return to it as you read through the chapter.

**The Authors**

The program authors are the public face of a core reading program and most likely the only names you will ever know. Their role in developing a program
varies, depending on their area of expertise and the relationship between the authors and the publishing company. Some programs are very author driven, meaning the authors have considerable input about the design of the basic lessons and even participate in selecting the literature that goes into the student anthology. In other publishing companies, the authors’ roles are much more proscribed—and more than one author told us that they had no idea how the literature was chosen and they were not involved in any of the decisions about workbooks, leveled readers, or assessments. As a consumer, you will not know which program is author driven and which program is not. Even within a publishing company, some authors take a more active role in creating a core reading program than others. It is important to understand that the concept of author in a core reading program has a very different meaning from its conventional usage. Ernest Hemingway wrote his novels, even though he had a wonderful editor, Maxwell Perkins. Core reading program authors do not write the programs. One very experienced author told us that the term program author was a euphemism.

The role of the author in a core reading program has changed significantly over the past 20 years. When programs were produced in the 1980s, authors had more influence on program content. One author stated, “We actually wrote the
program. I got every page to read after it was formatted and developed by an editor. We wrote and rewrote. We could really call ourselves authors.” Another author commented that the influence of the author has waned. The demands of the major state curricula limit how an author can shape a core reading program. If the curriculum guide of California or Texas demands that certain comprehension skills must be included in the program, then the publishers—despite what the research suggests—must comply, and the authors—despite their knowledge—must follow these guidelines. Because the timelines for developing a core reading program have been compressed in recent years, from 3 to 5 years down to 12 or 18 months, authors cannot even review what others have written.

The composition of the author teams for each of the three major publishers, Pearson Scott Foresman, Harcourt, and The McGraw-Hill Companies, has changed in interesting ways since their last complete new program in 2002 or 2003. It is likely that the changing author teams reflect the publishers’ perceptions of market demands. Pearson Scott Foresman has dropped three authors whose areas of study were early childhood education, general special education, and cultural diversity and added very prominent names from the hot area of RTI, namely Sharon Vaughn, Deborah Simmons, and Edward Kame‘enui.

At The McGraw-Hill Companies, prominent researchers James Flood and Steven Stahl have passed away, and researchers like Diane Lapp and James Hoffman were replaced with new authors whose expertise was in English-language learners (ELLs; Jana Echevarria) or multicultural education (Doris Walker-Dalhouse). Additionally, McGraw-Hill added Dolores Malcolm, a past president of IRA, and Adria Klein, a past president of the California Reading Association, perhaps to bolster their political clout.

At Harcourt, the author team replaced Nancy Roser, a generalist, and Hallie Yopp, an expert in phonemic awareness, with authors in the fields of multicultural education (Julie Washington and Robin Scarcella) and special education (Roxanne Hudson). At some publishing companies, the changes in the author teams suggest a move away from prominent researchers to teacher educators, and in all companies there is a need to establish bona fides with the current hot topics of the day: intervention and ELLs.

The Process of Creating a Core Reading Program
The creation of a new core reading program begins with an intense discussion around a complex set of factors that balance the philosophy of the new program
against the market demands of the upcoming adoption states and the major trends in reading instruction. The current crop of new core reading programs had to encompass a new focus on differentiation and intervention, renewed interest in vocabulary instruction, and additional material for teaching ELLs. So the first step in core reading program development is an evaluation of the marketplace, determining which states and major cities are likely to purchase core reading programs in the next two years. Next, editorial and marketing executives study the reading standards or frameworks in key adoption states: California, Texas, Florida, and several others. One publisher reported that they study reading frameworks in 20 major states. The executives at a publishing company have to be sure that they can create a product that will sell in key markets and then gear their production timetables to when materials are due in those states. They have to balance program development and market costs against likely revenues. Only when they are reasonably sure that they can create a financially successful program will they proceed to develop a new core reading program. The thrust of a new program begins with the contents standards of the key adoption states. These states are important for several reasons. Each has a large multicultural population, the textbook selection process is largely centralized with considerable state-supported financing, and the textbook guidelines are very specific.

The Influence of California, Texas, and Florida

California issued its criteria for new reading programs, its revised content standards, and its timeline for the adoption process in April 2006. Publishers had until April 2008 to submit their materials for review. Although California’s standards built on what had been adopted in 2002, several additional features had to be included in new core reading programs. California called for social studies and science content to be covered within the reading program in the primary grades. This meant more expository text. The new criteria also outlined a stronger focus on vocabulary and language development, an increased focus on oral reading fluency, and an improved assessment system including progress monitoring (California Department of Education, 2007). The Reading Language Arts Framework for California Public Schools (California Department of Education, 2007) also called for “30 minutes of extra support for struggling readers in kindergarten through grade eight” (p. 290). This meant that the publishers had to create an accompanying intervention program for California.
In September 2008, Texas issued its revised Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills and Proclamation, which were in effect the guidelines for new core reading programs that were to be submitted to the Texas Education Agency by April 2009. The Texas standards are quite specific and will cause the publishers to produce a product that is different from the one created for California, with the Texas program due just a year after the California program. In this next round of adoptions, Texas has mandated that 70 spelling–sound correspondences be taught in first grade and that all skills be included in both the teacher’s edition of the program and the student edition. This means skill instruction must be written in simple language in the anthology. Texas also seeks to mandate the amount of practice a student receives for each essential knowledge and skill. Texas requires that instructional materials cover essential knowledge and skills five times in the student text in addition to the end-of-section review exercises, end-of-chapter activities, and unit tests. So while the publishers are working to create a California program that requires a coordination of science and social studies with the reading curriculum, they must also create a program for Texas that includes the skills three or five times in each student edition. The publishers must tailor the programs to the demands of each state and do so in less than a year. Almost all authors and editors told us that compressed timelines influence how a core reading program is developed. We think it may also influence the quality of the product.

The Florida Department of Education (2006) issued its guidelines for new core reading programs in 2006, and publishers had to submit their products for evaluation by May 1, 2007. Like Texas and California, Florida’s guidelines were equally explicit, requiring an extensive series of benchmarks be met at each grade level, K through 5. In addition, Florida published a separate set of guidelines for special education students. Florida called for a core reading program that had explicit, systematic instruction in reading skills and rich literary text. The program had to contain assessment tools for progress monitoring and diagnosis aligned to the instructional materials. The guidelines called for a strong research base.

Each publisher should carefully review the research basis for any program or strategy submitted for consideration. In particular, attention should be paid to the research that was conducted initially to develop the program as well as the research conducted after publication, such as program evaluations. (Florida Department of Education, 2006, p. 3)
Establishing a research base for a strategy demanded careful documentation using research studies that supported various instructional practices. However, program evaluation after publication is difficult because the Florida Department of Education allows, at the most, 18 months between the publication of the guidelines and the submission of the products.

In addition to these precise curriculum standards, Texas and California exert considerable control over the content of stories and nonfiction selections that students read. In California, the textbook publishers must conform to standards about the depiction of race, gender, nationality, and disability. Some outside interest groups have counted the number of boys and girls in a core reading program and pushed publishers to equally represent gender across a wide range of occupations. This led one publisher to change the sex of the train character in *The Little Engine That Could* to create more balance in the story. Some interest groups have gone so far as to prohibit stories that include references to birthday cakes and fast foods, because these are not healthy for students (Finn & Ravitch, 2004). A parallel set of problems faces publishers in Texas. There, traditionalists have objected to the inclusion of stories with witches and goblins, nontraditional gender roles, and skeptical views of religion. After a major legal suit in 1983, Holt, Rinehart & Winston revised its content, even though it won the suit filed by religious fundamentalists. These fundamentalists wanted to remove myths, goblins, and even some fairy tales from the core reading program. One group objected to *The Wizard of Oz*, because the Scarecrow, the Lion, and the Tin Man each achieved a personal goal—a ticking heart, a medal, and a diploma—without an appeal to God. Because the adoption process is centralized in 22 states, and 3 of those states carry considerable clout, outside interest groups have fewer targets for their lobbying and at times are effective.

**Defining the Core Reading Program**

Against the backdrop of these demands, the authors and editors of the core reading program pose this question, if you could have anything in a reading program, what would it be? A broad-ranging discussion of this question at one publishing company began with a focus on the texts that students read. The authors and editors wanted texts that mattered, were worthy of being read, renewed the emphasis on vocabulary instruction, and built students’ knowledge from one selection to another. These authors and editors also wanted a more focused approach to comprehension skills and strategies, and responsible
teaching of word study. Another author viewed these opening meetings as an attempt to position the product—would it be on the cutting edge or take a more conservative approach? For example, in 1992 Houghton Mifflin came out with a literature-based program, one that deemphasized skills and did very well. A few years later, Silver Burdett Ginn straddled the fence between literature and skills. They brought in Lee Galda to enhance the literature options in Literature Works, but the new publisher, who came from Open Court, pushed the program in a skills direction. In the end, the program tried to do too much, and sales were not robust.

Another author described these opening meetings as strong, positive brainstorming sessions. The participants are “enthusiastic, energetic, and nonevaluative.” Ideas are offered and discussed, with authors suggesting program ideas that reflect those authors’ areas of expertise. These meetings typically take place over several weeks or months. It then becomes the task of the editors to winnow down the ideas. Some are accepted and make their way into the program, while others are rejected. For example, one author might want students to focus on personal response after reading a text, while another is concerned with the follow-up comprehension questions. Ultimately, these ideas compete for space in the core reading program. As these academic ideas are offered and discussed, the in-house editorial staff gathers the ideas, endorsing some and dropping others. A core reading program cannot incorporate all research-based ideas. For instance, those advocating for the inclusion of QARs (Raphael, 1984) must compete with those arguing for reciprocal teaching (Palinscar & Brown, 1984).

The third area of input that drives the conceptualization of the program is the market. The senior sales representatives are the voices for the teachers. A new program has to contain the ideas that teachers are expecting. As one editor put it, teachers expect some “old friends” and will consider some new ideas. Gathering teacher input is accomplished through focus groups. Groups of teachers are brought into a room, often with a one-way glass, and are asked to review prototype lessons for the core reading program. The leader of the focus group (not an employee of the publishing company), following a script, asks the teachers questions about elements of the program. Teachers are asked to evaluate lesson plan layout, instructional language at point of use, and small program elements designed to support learning for ELLs or struggling readers. The opinions of these teachers influence which program elements make their way into a core reading program and which might be excluded.
One author described a very important step in the process as the process by which editors and senior management wrestle with what is included in a lesson and what is excluded, saying, “There are so many good ideas, how do you create a lesson that is clean and effective without being constraining?” This gets to the heart of the major issue in the development of a core reading program. The authors and editors have to juggle many wants and needs. There are many skills and strategies to teach, and many constituencies have needs that must be met. In one publishing company, a solution to the complexity of the lesson plan was to have each story read twice. In a first read, skills and strategies are used to establish general comprehension, and in a second read, issues of author's craft, purpose, literary style, and literary analysis are explored. Ultimately this idea, while attractive, was abandoned, as it was judged to be too radical for the traditional teacher population. The ultimate problem faced by the authors and editors is how to provide instructional guidance at the point of use. The questions, answers, and suggestions of modeling that run down the sides of the pages and across the bottom of the text are the point-of-use guidelines. What does the teacher say to the students before, during, and after reading? These decisions require professional judgments from authors and editors, not simply the transplanting of research ideas into a core reading program.

The other constraint on the development of a core reading program is money. Core reading programs evolve just like automobiles and word-processing programs, with each generation adding new features not seen in previous iterations. Each new feature costs money. So the inclusion of progress-monitoring assessments for oral reading fluency must be weighed against the cost of materials for ELLs. Management must judge the cost of these products against their likely revenue. One executive at a development house, who was a former editorial director at a major publisher, stated that publishers are “doing massive amounts of focus testing to make sure that their investment is going to be sound. It takes a lot of time until they feel they have gotten it right. You can't be wrong when you are spending $80 million.”

Given this complex picture, it is almost simplistic to argue that core reading programs are built on scientifically based reading research. There is too much reading research for all of it to make it into a program. Comprehension strategy techniques like transactional strategy instruction (Brown, Pressley, Van Meter, & Schuder, 1996) must compete with research on book clubs (McMahon & Raphael, 1997). Therefore, research is only one of several considerations used to determine the content and structure of a core reading program. Equally
important are the marketplace and teachers' wants and needs. If a program is too advanced, teachers will miss their old friends, and if a program is too conservative, it will not incorporate enough hot new ideas. Costs limit what publishers can put into a program. The aesthetics of graphic design and the need for some ideas to stand out limit what can be included in a lesson. Ultimately, the use of the phrase *scientifically based reading research* is a good marketing slogan, but it does not capture how core reading programs are designed.

**Refining a Prototype Lesson**

As the prototype for the lesson evolves, the author team is given various tasks to perform. They may write sample lessons, create lesson plan guidelines, and review developed prototypes. Ultimately, the editors, not the authors, produce a final lesson prototype for grades 1 and 4. The authors enter the development process again to critique the prototype lessons page by page and line by line. Many overnighted boxes appear on their doorsteps containing reading lessons that must be read and reviewed, often by the next day. One author described a six-hour telephone conference during which the prototype was examined line by line, feature by feature. The authors considered, are these the right callouts [embedded directions to the teacher], the right prompts that will get the kids to think more deeply about the text?

An author who has been involved with the development of core reading programs for 20 years believes that at this point in the development process, authors and editors should be beyond concern over what features are in a program, and instead should consider how well a feature works for the teacher. Authors should be asking themselves, what makes a good think-aloud? What makes a good postreading question? Once a prototype is approved, there is a final author meeting during which the prototype, the lesson, the language, and the details are given final approval. As one author put it, “We read every word, detail, and idea in the final lesson plan.” The prototype lessons and the specifications for all the lessons then go to the development houses where the writing will take place. What is apparent at this stage of the development is the great seriousness of the authors and their commitment to solving difficult curriculum-design problems. Authors are not simply translating a research protocol into a set of directions in a teacher’s edition. All that they know about reading research and reading instruction drive the decisions they make.
Selecting the Literature

At the same time, another critical component of the program, the literature, is being selected or written. An important concern in the development of a core reading program is the relationship between the skills and the literature—or more precisely, what leads. Most of the authors and editors we interviewed described a process in which the scope and sequence of the skills was laid down first, then literature was selected that facilitated the teaching of those skills. A few described a process in which stories were selected to fit within a theme and then the skills followed from the text. If a program has as its goal the development of knowledge from one selection to another, then organizing selections into themes is critical. However, if skill development is most important, then the literature is selected to fit the skills. Only by closely reading two or more programs will you be able to determine if the literature or the skills lead. From the multitude of literature selections, the choices are narrowed. What is clear is that publishers would prefer to use existing children’s stories and information books rather than commission new works. They can then market the program on the basis of authentic literature and not contrived selections.

The leveled and decodable texts are written by freelance writers, and each selection carries their name. This is an enormous writing task because a new core reading program contains over 600 separate titles, most of them commissioned. The freelance writers and illustrators who create these books work from specifications developed by the editorial team. In some programs and at some grade levels, topic or unit theme dictates the content, while at other times genre leads. These freelance writers are not award-winning children’s authors—although at one time, renowned authors Tomie dePaola and Maurice Sendak wrote for basal reading programs.

Some authors are involved in selecting the literature for a core reading program, and others are not. This varies from one publisher to another. At one publishing company, an author candidly revealed that he had no knowledge about how the literature was selected, whereas others in the same publishing company and at another house read every selection that was proposed for kindergarten through grade 3. Beyond fitting the literature to the skills, a cautious sense of audience and propriety drives the selection of the literature. It is unfair to call this self-censorship; rather, it is an attempt to put oneself in the place of the student who is reading this story in a public school classroom or a teacher who will be teaching this story. So stories about the death of a mother or persecution of African Americans are not included, in order to avoid painful emotional
responses from the students and awkward teaching moments. Authors who are experts on multicultural issues and child development have a voice in the selection of the literature by excluding stories that might cause undue stress for students and teachers. However, in our opinion, some texts lose interest as the amount of conflict is minimized. (We explore this issue further in the next chapter.) Reading selections in the student anthology and in the leveled books are then organized into broad themes. The value of these themes is also considered in the next chapter.

**Graphic Design**

Another part of the development process is graphic design. The graphic design of a core reading program is important for two related reasons. First, the overall attractiveness of a program influences its sales. In 1989, when World of Reading (Silver Burdett Ginn, 1989–1993) was developed, many people argued that its shimmering metallic covers with a three-dimensional look were influential in selling the program (Ramirez, 1990). People may have judged a book by its cover. Beyond aesthetic appeal, a core reading program is complex, and the graphic design of the product helps the teacher navigate through it. The teacher must easily understand the hierarchy of elements in a lesson. The program must be easy to follow, and the content must fit comfortably on the page. Too much print will overwhelm the reader, and too much white space will give too little direction.

The graphic design of the core reading program is worked out at the same time the initial conceptions of the lessons are determined. “Design and editorial go hand in hand; they work together; it is a delicate balance between design and editorial,” said one art director for a publishing company. The graphic design must reflect the philosophy that underlies the program. So several rounds of lesson templates are designed and reviewed by executives in editorial and marketing. The goal is an attractive and functional integration of text and graphic elements. Art directors may exert influence on writing by limiting the number of words on a page, and editors may direct graphic design by specifying the labels and headings that teachers expect. Graphic designers also select or produce all of the artwork in the program. They must meet the specific guidelines from the state frameworks that call for a certain percentage of African American, Hispanic, Asian, and Caucasian individuals in the photographs and illustrations. These guidelines also specify the number and types of people with disabilities
that must be pictured. To complicate matters even more, the parameters change from one state to another. So a program that sells in the Midwest will have a smaller percentage of Hispanics than one designed for California or Texas.

**Producing the Program**

After the lesson plan prototype is finalized, and the components are determined, the production of a core reading program shifts to development houses. It is at the development house, or with freelancers they hire, that the actual writing takes place. The first step for the development house is to secure a contract from the publisher. First, the publisher asks development houses to respond to a Request for Information (RFI). The publisher wants to know who will work on the project and what it will cost. Once the publisher is satisfied with the skills and cost-consciousness of the development houses, they will ask for a second round of proposals in which the development houses compete for the work. One development house executive said,

> Everything has become much more focused on cost than ever before. It’s really scary, from everybody’s perspective. Basically, if a publisher wants some innovation, cost is going to have a bigger influence on what goes into a program than it might have 10 or 15 years ago.

Development houses write teacher’s editions, leveled books, decodable books, workbooks, assessments—everything but the student edition. The publisher provides the development house with the prototype and a strict set of guidelines. From these documents, the editors or freelancers at the development house produce the content. A development house executive explained,

> If we at the development house were asked to produce the teacher’s edition, we would get a set of guidelines with a thorough explanation of each part of the lesson plan. There would be some type of skill, so we could articulate the progression of skills within a grade level and across the grades.

In some cases, a series of teleconferences is arranged between the editors at the publishing house and the editors at the development house. The development house strives to understand what the publisher has intended and proceeds by writing a series of lessons and then conducting their own internal critique, making sure that they got it right. Sometimes this is done in consultation with the managers and editors at the publishing company and sometimes it is not.
Once the editors in the development house are sure they understand how to write the lessons, the actual writing begins. The editors at the development house will regularly submit their work to the program managers and grade-level editors at the publishing company. The writing is downloaded into the lesson templates provided by the publisher. After the work is reviewed at the publishing company the editors at the development house work to incorporate the changes.

One executive at a development house described clearly where the guidelines of the publisher end and the initiative of the development house begins. If the publisher's guidelines called for lessons on main idea, they would specify the focus of the lesson at each particular grade. What should the students know and be able to do? The publisher would determine the steps in the lesson—introduce, model, practice, apply—but “in terms of fleshing out those steps, it would be up to the writers.” The publisher’s guidelines would not specifically illustrate how to introduce and model a skill. The editors or writers in the development house craft the actual language. They would decide how a skill is modeled and how often. This is critical in the overall quality of the core reading program, because it is the language of instruction that guides the teacher. The development house would write the lessons, submit them to the publisher, and get feedback from project managers or grade-level editors. Then, the development house would incorporate the changes. It is not clear if this happens for every lesson or for just a sample of lessons. It is clear that the authors do not read individual lessons, as time does not permit it.

As we discuss further in Chapter 5, the actual language of a lesson makes the difference between a clear explanation and a muddled one. A clear explanation describes what skill will be taught, how the skill should be implemented, the process of instruction, why the skill is important, and when it should be used. Not all programs include all these elements; therefore, we believe that not all writers know to include them. Because core reading programs are produced in a relatively short time and by many different writers in more than one development house, authors do not have time to review much of what is actually written.

Note how we illustrated in Chapter 1 that the explicitness of comprehension lessons was stronger in the 1980s when editors at the publishing houses did more writing and authors reviewed more of their work. As the work shifted to development houses in the late 1990s and into the 21st century, the explicitness of instructional language declined. (You will see this decline more clearly
when we examine specific elements of core reading programs in Chapters 3, 4, and 5.) Whether this decline in explicitness or clarity is a function of changing instructional philosophy, lack of quality control, or both is hard to say. Modeling a skill or strategy explicitly makes the difference between a lesson that is based on research guidelines and one that is not (Dewitz et al., 2009).

It is important to stress that the people writing the lessons at the development houses, and the freelance writers hired by them, are often former teachers. One executive at a development house stressed,

These aren’t people you just pick up off the street. These are people who are former teachers, many with master’s degrees who have been in the business for a long time. You have a core stable of people who have taught kids to read or have been immersed in this kind of writing for a long time.

An author countered and said that many of the people who actually write the teacher’s manuals have little or no experience in an elementary classroom. The process of creating a core reading program is a widely distributed effort. Another senior executive at a development house, who was formerly the director of reading for a major publisher, believes that outsourcing has diminished the quality of programs.

The one other factor that diminishes the quality of core reading programs is time. Almost all the authors and editors we interviewed said that 20 years ago, publishers took 30 to 36 months to produce a new core reading program. Now the timeline has been compressed to 18 months or less. This compressed timeline has led to more outsourcing. The task of producing all the components of a core reading program is too large for any one development house. More material is created by development houses, and despite their skill and intentions, authors and senior editors review less of that material. Some authors who had worked on core reading programs for more than 20 years stated that in the past, they had been able to review almost everything that had been written. Now the press of time makes that impossible. What complicated the time problem recently was the juxtaposition of the California and Texas textbook adoption cycles. (California adopted in 2008 and Texas in 2009.)

The other recent change in the development of a core reading program is the increasing authority given to the development houses to create components of a core reading program with minimal or no review from the editors in the publishing house. One senior executive in a development house said, “One thing that development houses are being asked to do much more of these days is
what they call full-service work.” In this case, the development houses do more than just the writing and editing; they also do the design, layout, and production of the components. For example, a development house would have almost complete control over the creation of the practice workbooks with only minimal review by the publisher. The closest parallel to the development of a core reading program is the automobile. Ford or Honda is responsible for the design, but the components—brakes, transmission, windshield wipers—are made all over the world.

**New Programs and Revisions**

A new core reading program is created approximately every seven to eight years, according to the adoption cycles in California, Texas, and Florida. In the interim, publishing companies produce revisions to update their copyrights. Some states can only purchase core reading programs with a recent copyright, so programs must be revised. The second factor that drives a revision is user feedback. Teachers may find it difficult to get through a particular part of the program, and this will drive a change in content or graphic design. Authors are typically not involved in these revisions, which are often mostly cosmetic changes. Because cost is always a factor, publishers will seek to change as little as possible but still conform to the legal requirements for a program to achieve a new copyright. Rewriting a student edition is costly because it also demands an equivalent rewrite in the more complex teacher’s edition. Therefore, the 2001, 2003, and 2005 editions of the Macmillan/McGraw-Hill reading program, for example, have very similar literature selections.

A revision is much less extensive than a new core reading program. A revision involves changing 5% to 10% of the content. The reading selections and leveled books are rarely changed, but the teacher’s edition may be updated. When Houghton Mifflin produced a new copyright in 2005, the major change in the program was a stronger emphasis on small-group instruction in the teacher’s edition, but the scope and sequence of skills and the reading selections stayed virtually the same. At times, a revision will include a few changes to the student edition, but the changes are typically modest.
PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

We present this picture of how core reading programs are developed to illustrate a few important understandings. First, the creation of a core reading program is not an author-driven enterprise that merely translates research into practice. Authors have an important role to play, but their roles are not greater than those of marketing executives, editorial directors, art directors, and executives at development houses. When you examine a new core reading program, don’t think that the author you just heard speak at a reading conference actually wrote the lessons you will be using. One author candidly stated that the creation of a core reading program has more to do with advertising than it does with reading research.

Second, core reading programs are driven by scientific reading research and market research. As the lesson plan is created, everyone at the table is competing for space on the page. For example, the university-based authors are trying to get their expertise in ELL instruction, comprehension instruction, and differentiation onto the page, but they must compete with teachers who are looking for familiar ideas and who are uncomfortable with some of the newest ideas. The wants of teachers and researchers must also conform to the curriculum frameworks of the major adoption states. All these ideas must fit within a graphic design that is pleasing to the teachers and the curriculum directors who spend only an hour or so with each product as they review new core reading programs for adoption.

Third, the quality of core reading programs is influenced by the manner in which they are produced. Compressed timelines, complex products, and outsourcing to development houses affect quality. Everyone we spoke to—authors, editors, and executives in development houses—talked about the pressures of producing a core reading program. Many spoke to the changes in the publishing industry, as large multinational companies bought out independent publishers and the financial experts gained more and more control. More work is outsourced, less work is reviewed within the publishing company, and still less is reviewed by the authors. Cost has had an increasing influence on production. From the perspective of several authors and editors, quality control has declined and the few remaining programs have become more homogenous. One executive in a development house, who has

(continued)
PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER (cont’d)

worked for all of the major publishers, believes core reading programs have lost their unique instructional elements. At one time, Ginn and Company (later Silver Burdett Ginn) was noted by the publishing field for their in-house expertise in reading, particularly under the guidance of James Squire and their other authors, and for the knowledge of their sales staff. From the perspective of several people we interviewed, the process now has more to do with marketing and less with producing a strong educational product. Yet, our interviews clearly suggest that the influence of authors varies from one company to another.

Perhaps the most distressing trend is the increased consolidation of the publishing companies. In 1991, Chall and Squire lamented that the number of basal publishers was down to 12 from a much larger group. Today only four companies produce core reading programs: Pearson Scott Foresman, The McGraw-Hill Companies, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, and Zaner-Bloser. The formidable barriers of high production and marketing costs prevent small companies from entering the field. The larger companies maintain their dominance by carefully meeting state standards and lobbying state adoption committees (Sewall, 2005). Once their product is adopted by California, Texas, or Florida, the larger companies can control the field. Yet, in meeting the curriculum and content standards, the programs become increasingly homogenized (Watt, 2007).

Authors and editors behind a core reading program are serious professionals working under multiple constraints to produce a product that will sell and provide support to classroom teachers who seek to create strong, independent readers. They try hard to ensure that research-based practices are included in core reading programs, but the broad label of “scientifically based reading research” may be a misnomer. Core reading programs are instructional tools, and in the hands of skillful and thoughtful teachers, they help produce students who read well and like to read. One author summed up the process by saying, “I think the political reality is such that compromises are made so that the program is on the state approved list. Unless the program is on the list, we can't sell the book, and I can't influence practice.”