Sooner, Faster, Better Reading for All

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Strategies for Inclusivity in a Classroom Context

By

Diane Montgomery

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INTRODUCTION

It is a widely held view according to UNESCO that a period of four to five years is essential for the acquisition of minimum literacy. Literacy is the capacity to understand what is read with the same facility as if it were spoken. In England 84 percent of children are reported to achieve this target termed level 4 by the end of Key Stage 2 that is after 5-6 years education and is specific to their childhood level text. This book sets out to challenge the need for children to take so long to become fluent readers because evidence indicates that it could be possible in less than two years that is, by 6 to 7 years of age and generally by the end of Key Stage 1. Pupils in disadvantaged environments may still take a little longer than advantaged pupils. A few, the severe dyslexics who currently may not learn to read at all even with specialist help will also learn to read more easily.

Following the introduction of the English Schools National Curriculum in 1988 the Standard Attainment Tests over time identified a general failure to meet the target levels set for the different age groups. To address this the National Literacy Strategy and the daily literacy hour (DfEE, 1998) were introduced and Governments later claimed that these strategies had raised reading standards significantly. But research by Tymms (2004) showed that standards had not radically changed since the 1950s. Following this a Phonics First policy (Rose, 2006) was recommended and teachers in the early years claimed they now concentrated on phonics and word knowledge on a daily basis (Dockrell et al., 2016). However at the end of the Reception year children from disadvantaged backgrounds were found to be 11.5 months behind advantaged peers in reading and never caught up so they that were 20 months behind by the time they reached GCSEs according to Sutton Trust research (2013 and 2021). How 84% seem to reach the target levels can perhaps in part be accounted for by teachers becoming familiar with the items and teaching to the tests and perhaps the so-called ‘levels’ may also need reconsidering.

It is known from annual government statistics that 20% of pupils still leave school with poor literacy and numeracy skills. Most of them are not dyslexic and their poor reading is the product of one or more of the

following or exacerbated by it: -

- Poor quality teaching and learning experience
- Lack of system and order in teaching and learning
- Absence and illness during the early learning years
- Lack of reading culture in the home
- Lack of oracy and verbal experience in the background
- Hearing difficulties
- Visual difficulties
- Speech difficulties
- Slow learning capacity
- Lack of interest and motivation
- Have English as an additional language
- English not spoken in the home
- Have a reading disability (dyslexia)

As can be inferred from this list the contribution of oracy and wide experience influence reading and reading development considerably. A poor home and deficient environmental learning conditions likewise can contribute to reading difficulty and reading failure. The incidence of reading disability before the introduction of the National Curriculum was 4% and 9% in disadvantaged areas (Rutter et al., 1989), now it is 10% overall (British Dyslexia Association, BDA. 2023) and 18% among the disadvantagesd. This increase is not entirely accounted for by better diagnosis and understanding but more a product of limited definitions and interventions (Montgomery, 1997, 2007, 2017a).

The early chapters deal with learning to read and the rest of the book details strategies for develping fluency and comprehension in Key Stages 1 to 4. It is shown how the two neglected areas of spelling and handwriting can contribute to speedier reading success. Case examples and research studies underpin these topics and will help all teachers diagnose pupils' literacy difficulties and learn how to overcome them within their subject teaching areas.

In Chapter One an analysis of the historical record shows that in the past many children in UK schools learnt to read fluently by the age of 6-7 years and most before the end of Key Stage 1 even if they were from disadvantaged backgrounds. When these differences were analysed, it was found that several key factors were involved. In one major experiment it was the medium, the alphabet that was different and a modern version now

used in many schools is outlined with a minor structural update for the future.

In Chapter Two analysis of the reading 'wars' (Wyse et al., 2022) revealed differences in the relative effectiveness of the code versus meaning emphasis teaching methods. The data indicated a mixed methods approach would be best but the nature of the mix is crucial and is seldom achieved at present.

Analyses of the Mechanics in Chapter Three showed what were the most effective practices for mixed methods. But in addition, many children seemed to be doing a considerable amount of literacy learning by themselves almost despite the teaching methods to which they were exposed. Some were much better at this than others but not the dyslexics. The 'natural readers' method of 'self-teaching' (Share, 1995) by non-dyslexic beginners and its importance has generally been overlooked but how they self-teach is demonstrated so that it can be passed on to other learners. Its effects are then demonstrated with disadvantaged groups and dyslexics.

Chapter Four considers the ways in which spelling underpins reading development and how some structured attention to it actually promotes reading skills across the age ranges. The key features were to teach 12 basic spelling strategies and then 5 rules that unlock thousands of spellings and save endless rote learning of so-called 'letter strings' and GPCs (Grapheme Phoneme Correspondences). Primary and secondary pupils including dyslexics were shown to benefit from this knowledge and enjoyed becoming 'Spelling Detectives'.

In Chapter Five the nature of Reading Development, reading levels and reading comprehension are analysed. A range of strategies that can be used to promote them and problem-based learning in KS1 well into KS4 and beyond are discussed and exemplified in subject topic areas.

Chapter Six is on handwriting development and deals with the more subtle contribution that handwriting makes to learning to read. The simple transcription model of writing widely in use in English schools is shown to be holding back the progress of many children and a more complete pyramid model is presented. The research background on cursive from the outset and the strength of targeting fluency over legibility across the age ranges is examined. Although the majority of teachers favour print script and legibility first (DfE, 2021) it is shown to be disabling learners. To help

promote writing fluency seven interventions are illustrated that improved the general situation for struggling writers. The contribution of writing speed to academic success in secondary schools and at degree level is explained.

Chapter Seven on handwriting difficulties, 'the Cinderella of special needs', shows how disadvantage and low achievement can be widely caused across all the age ranges even by mild Developmental Coordination Difficulties (DCD) and at the extremes by coordination disorders. The level of milder difficulties in disadvantaged areas was found to be 20% higher than in advantaged ones but was reduced by targeted interventions across the age ranges in ordinary classrooms. This leaves just 1 to 2% who will need assistive technology or a scribe from the outset.

Even amongst the gifted, undiagnosed early handwriting difficulties lead to underachievement in schools worldwide (Silverman, 2004; Berninger, 2008) and later at degree level (Connelly et al., 2005). It is shown how most of these issues could have been resolved much earlier by attending to the ergonomics in relation to literacy. However, the longer it is left the more difficult it can become to modify established unhelpful motor habits and programmes. This chapter shows how subject teachers as well as SENCos can address such legibility and fluency issues.

The final section 8, the Appendices, offers copy pages on strategies and mediations for implementation and change that have been shown to work and that have contributed to speedier and easier literacy acquisition and development for all.

There are however several over-arching issues that seriously affect what is undertaken as research and teaching in the area of literacy beginning with the definition of the topic. In becoming literate and researching it almost all the attention is given to reading as the basic skill when writing will be shown to be a significant component in its development. Writing, when viewed from an adult's perspective especially an academic's, can mean it is seen as a simple single route. If an idea needs to be written it is transcribed by hand (or tapped by fingers) and directly spelled from a lexicon without need of conscious thought. Knowledge of the complex processes in the development of spelling and handwriting skills and how they are united to express ideas tend to be overlooked or forgotten unless a person has had some difficulty with either of them or studied them as learning difficulties.

Another issue is in policy-makers' limited experience of teaching theory and methods and a reliance on narrowly focused RCTs (Randomised Controlled Trials) modelled on medical research, and keyword literature searches to investigate it, both are failing learners. This is because research targeting such designs has weaknesses. This is especially when analysing the complex behaviours dealt with by educators such as in teaching and learning, and reading and writing. Good teaching for example involves competence in 5 domains of interpersonal and cognitive skills (Montgomery, 2017c). These are in addition to competence in subject knowledge that has been the main focus of the National Curriculum and resultant teacher education and professional training since 1983 when governments began to assume control of education.

Another problem is that the insistence on 'recent relevant research' reinforces the custom and 'best' practice that is currently observable in schools but is not necessarily what should be going on. Good teachers are able to make any system work however flawed it may be although it can be to the detriment of too many learners and delay their progress. In England a flawed system is in operation and has given rise to a long tail of underachievement and makes us less successful than other countries in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Studies (PIRLS) for tests of 9 to 10 year-olds in 57 countries; and Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) for 15 year-olds.

In 2023, an improvement to 4th place in PIRLS (2021 data) from 8th position in 2016 after Singapore, Hong Kong and Russia was reported. It has been claimed as a significant improvement due to the introduction of a phonics assessment. However the English score (558) was down a few points whereas the top scores of Singapore and Hong Kong went up significantly; Russia, in third position went down significantly as did all the scores of the other countries. What these data reflect is the effect of Covid-19 restrictions on pupils' literacy achievements and the distance learning capabilities and provisions of the various countries. Not unexpectedly in this respect Singapore and Honk Kong were well ahead of the field and England did better than the rest. It also suggests that English pupils were capable of taking more responsibility and independence for their learning than many in other countries. This is perhaps due to the more open and less didactic nature of the teaching methods in the UK as opposed to the didactics reported by Martin Skilbeck, (1989) for the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in Europe; and by Belle Wallace and Gillian Erikson (2006) for countries worldwide.

Because of the regular success of particular countries in topping the PIRLS and PISA league tables such as by Finland, Germany, Hong Kong and Singapore, policy–makers have been induced to press for the adoption of teaching methods and systems used in those countries but these education systems are not comparable to the best traditions of the UK nor suitable for its population or its orthography.

Overall, in this book it is concluded that the current top-down Department for Education (DfE) Guidance Frameworks need to be revised and a bottom-up model, for a literacy curriculum considered, that follows pupils' skills progression and identifies what individuals need next. If teachers took these matters in hand and followed the 7-point plan summarised in the Epilogue it would not cost more in time or money nor need legislative change, we just need to get on with it.

Underpinning the advice given in this book has been the assessment of freeform **w**riting. This 'writing window' shows us what the students at all levels actually know of reading in terms of accuracy and comprehension as well as the subject topic the texts introduce and it is more important to know this i.e., what they have learnt rather than what we think we have taught them.

CHAPTER ONE

THE ALPHABETIC MEDIUM, THE ENGLISH ALPHABET

Introduction

Most languages have one symbol for each sound, and are termed 'regular' e.g., Spanish, Finnish, German, Italian, Turkish and Arabic. This makes learning to read simpler and more straightforward. This is despite the fact that both the sound and its symbol are abstract perceptual units. English however has 44 sounds and only 26 symbols and is thus only about 40% regular, it is regarded as an 'opaque' language. As a result, morphemics (meaningful units) and etymology, the origins in the history of the language e.g., in Latin, Greek, Norse, Celtic, Anglo-Saxon and Norman French, are also important. This complexity makes it harder for beginners to learn to read and it generally takes them longer. In contrast the German language uses 31 of the same alphabetic symbols for its phonemes e.g., the 26 letter sounds, plus umlauts on three vowels 'a, o, u', to change their sounds, plus digraph 'sc' and trigraph 'sch'.

Various schemes have been invented to try to simplify the acquisition process in English such as phonics and colour coding. Nellie Dale was generally credited with the introduction of phonics in the UK in her book *On the Teaching of English Reading* (1899). It replaced the mediaeval ABC Spelling system established in the monasteries. There was plenty of earlier data for her to draw on but she made a careful analysis of the most appropriate order for the introduction of sounds. Her children listened to stories, discussed pictures and were encouraged to talk, all innovative practices then. She also invented games and exercises for them to pick out letter sounds in text. In other words, she had understood the need for what was later termed 'phonic readiness' and also the need for regularising. Another of her innovations was to introduce four colours to aid sound recognition:

- Black for voiced consonants * Blue for unvoiced consonants
- Red for vowels * Yellow for silent letters.

Her system predated *Words in Colour* (Gattegno, 1962) with its 41 colours. Two other significant experiments to regularise the English alphabet showed that learning to read can be speeded up for all children. The first was i.t.a. the "initial teaching alphabet" by Sir James Pitman (1961) which he developed from the 19th century *Erhardt System* by Sir Isaac Pitman (1847). By 1970 i.t.a. was used in over 3,000 primary schools in the UK, US and Canada and 33 Local Authorities in England had expressed an interest in joining the project. At conferences films of 6 year-old children reading fluently demonstrated its effectiveness (NUT Conference, 1964). A second system was the application of i.t.a. principles as 'Jolly Phonics' by Sue Lloyd (1993). Whereas i.t.a. introduced new alphabetic symbols and looked odd to adult readers Jolly Phonics used the traditional symbols.

The initial teaching alphabet

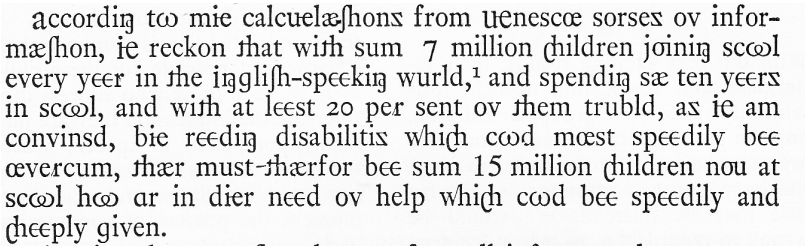

Figure 1.1 Some i.t.a. text written by Sir James Pitman (1965) p. 167

Pitman shows in the above example from his report that although the reader is not trained in i.t.a. it is still readable with a little concentration.

John Downing (1964) undertook a series of detailed studies of the annual results of i.t.a. from participating schools. A typical example in his research was that after one year of teaching with i.t.a. 33% of 4 and 5 year-old pupils had learned to read 50 words or more on the Schonell Reading Test whereas only 1% of controls had done so with traditional orthography. This difference was maintained annually across the reading ranges with each new intake (cited in Pitman, 1965, p. 168). A score of 50 words on the Schonell test (1970) for example gives a Reading Age of 10 years, so that at the end of the kindergarten year one third of the children

on i.t.a. (N=792) had achieved this and only 1 % of controls (N=1,246) had done so.

Infant teachers' remarks on i.t.a. Vera Southgate (1970 p. 21 and 22):

> "There is much more reading for pleasure. Poorer children are using the library corner more'.
>
> "The book corner is now a favourite occupation, an activity that it used not to be'. 'Children feel on top instead of struggling".
>
> "These children read anything they can get their hands on"
>
> "Backward children don't get that defensive attitude"
>
> "There are fewer children who don't like reading or who are worried about their reading than formerly although there may be the odd one. The shutters don't go down when a child meets a word he does not know. He'll try it"
>
> "Now, when the teacher is talking to the head teacher or a visitor, children take out a book and really read – even the children in the Reception class. It was not like that with t.o.' (traditional orthography)"
>
> "Children can get on and help themselves. Formerly when a teacher had heard a child read, she sent him to his seat and hoped he would read on his own. Now the teacher knows that the child will go on reading because he can'"

They were reading and writing fluently much sooner e.g., at 6 years old. Transfer to reading traditional orthography (t.o.) was easy but spelling took a little longer and some i.t.a. might be mixed in for a while. Teachers who did not teach i.t.a. themselves and parents did not like the look of it and it was eventually discontinued.

2. Jolly Phonics

Sue Lloyd was an experienced teacher using i.t.a. and phonics and saw the benefits of a simplified alphabet system and designed Jolly Phonics (1993). Similar results for reading accelerated by i.t.a. were obtained using Jolly Phonics (Johnson et al., 2005) in their Clackmannanshire study. Its 42 symbols are grouped into 7 sets with 6 symbols to learn in each group per week as in the list below in Figure 1.2.

A wide number of schools have adopted Jolly Phonics and are very pleased with the results. Most of the children find it much easier to learn to read by using it and learn the combinations very quickly e.g., within 42 days. This is because of the predictable and regular relationships between sounds and their symbols. By comparison the traditional alphabet requires the rote learning of at least 138 different most frequent phonic patterns and their symbols (Stakes et al., 2000) or 461 GPCs-grapheme-phoneme correspondences (Solity, 2018).

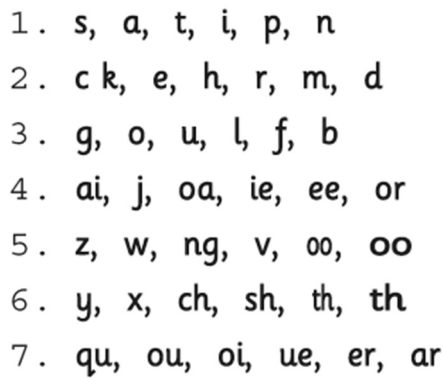

Figure 1.2 The Jolly Phonics 42 symbols introduced over 42 days

In the Government commissioned review (Rose 2006) Jolly Phonics was endorsed as a good Phonics First approach. However, it is also a system in need of an update as in the next example.

3. Regularising the alphabet today

The first letters to teach are i, t, p. n. s. They are selected here on the basis of their frequencies (Fry, 1964) in 3000 words in Elementary English and also by their history of use in the early dyslexia programmes by Anna Gillingham and Bessie Stillman (1940, 1956) anglicised by Kathleen Hickey (1977) after seeing demonstrated it at the Scottish Rites Hospital in the US.

- Consonant frequencies: T 670; N 600; S 340; P 330.
- Vowel frequencies: I 600; E 430; A 380; O 200; U 180.

Although other consonants have higher frequencies than S and P such as R 500; M 450; D 420; L 340 they are not so useful for initial word building. With i t p n s it is possible to spell 25 single syllabled (CVC) words and write little 'stories'. Initial and end blends can also be taught as well as how to deal with 'irregular' words such as (pint) when the capital letter I, and its name are added. Once the process is underway the pupils will start to build in new letters and make their own words by self-teaching (Share, 1995), or implicit learning (van der Craen, 2016) and orthographic mapping (Ehri, 2005).

The teaching order needs to begin with i t p n s - in, it, tip, nit, pit, tin, sin, tint, pint and pInt, spin, pins, spit etc. then building some non-words ipt, nist, spint etc. The codes are CVC, CCVC, CVCC, and CCVCC.

Vowel sounds and their names should be taught because this permits the second or long vowel sound (name) to be tried when the short vowel sound does not make sense as in 'pint' and 'pInt'. Once the initial set has been learnt the teacher can introduce more. The letters suggested next are A and D as in TRTS (Cowdery et al., 1994) order below.

Teaching Reading Through Spelling (TRTS) dyslexia programme order:

- **i I t p n s**
- **a A d e E l o O b**
- **f v u U c (k) g r**
- **m j k oo h th th**
- **w wh x z q qu**
- **sh ch ph**

Update summary of the 44 proposed regularised sounds and symbols

- The 5 vowel sounds – short sounds a e i o u (5)
- The 5 vowel names A, E, I, O, U – long sounds (5)
- The 6 digraphs sh, ph, wh. ch, th and **th** (voiced) (6)
- The 2 diphthongs (ahoo)– 'ou' (round, sound) and ow (how now brown cow) and (oiy)_'oi' as in boil, spoil, toil and oil; 'oy' as in boy, toy
- The long and short sounds of 'oo' a) tool, school, pool; and b) book, took, look (2)
- The semi-vowel 'y' as 'I' in spy, fly at the end of one-syllabled

words and ‘ee’ at the end of other words as in story, pony and ‘i’ as in mystery in the middle of words (1)
- Digraphs qu- and –ng.

Add all the regular consonant sounds (21) keeping b and d, and n and m separate. Total 21 + 21 +2 sounds.

In a detailed analysis of the use of the introductory teaching sounds the phonemes (Cochrane et al., 2022) show that most teaching schemes today advocate six initial sounds “satpin” and how the order originated. However, the phoneme “a” should come after i.t.p.n.s. because it introduces the vowel digraph, a complexity too soon before word building has been established.

High frequency words such as *and,* and *the* should be taught as whole writing units. The best handwriting format is ovoid with joining see LDRP cursive as in Chapters 6 and Appendices 1 to 8 with the reasons for teaching the cursive form from the outset and especially for dyslexics. A set of the 12 introductory lessons for i t p n s is detailed in the Appendix 8F Copy pages.

4. The Early Years Foundation Strategy (DfE, 2014)

The programme is divided into 5 phases but each can cause problems for the pupils as follows in the critique.

DfE. Phase One: ‘Identify sounds in the order in which they occur in words’.

Comment: We know from the research of Liberman et al (1967) that this is not possible unless we can already spell them. A single syllable such as ‘cat’ cannot be split ‘by ear’ because the separate phonemes are shingled on top of each other in speech. Only the initial sound with its slightly higher burst of energy might be detected, the onset. Illiterate adults can clap syllable beats but not phonemes in a syllable. Dyslexics and controls clapped syllable beats but were unable to identify the sounds in order unless they could already spell the words or could feel the consonant order in their mouths (Montgomery, 1997a). They needed attention directed to this clue.

Tip 1. Find where in the mouth consonants can be felt for ease of identification e.g., Practice when introducing ‘t’ ‘p’ ‘s’ ‘l’ ‘d’ and ‘m’. The

feel is the only concrete clue connecting the abstract sound (phoneme) with the abstract letter (grapheme).

DfE. Phase Two: "Teach one set of letters per week in the order that make the most possible CV, VC and CVC words".

Comment. Teachers reported that many pupils especially the disadvantaged found this impossible. It is a rote memory task again if they have not found the articulatory connections.

Tip 2. Instead, teach them to listen for the difference between open CV and closed syllables CVC e.g., to, no, fro, o-pen, ba-con, lo-tion, use the long vowels (CV), and CVC the short vowel structures e.g. cat, dog, man, top.

"Teaching sets"

- Set 1: s, a, t, p (at, sat, pat, tap, spat)
- Set 2: i, n, m, d
- Set 3: g, o, c, k
- Set 4: ck, e, u, r
- Set 5: h, j, f, ff, l, ss

Comment: These 'Sets' after line one are mainly arbitrary collections. The order of letters suggested bears no relation to the difficulty children might have in using them to build or decode words and the confusions that are made between similar shaped graphemes such as 'n' and 'm' and 'b' and 'd' and 'p' together.

Tip 3. Teaching the l-f-s rule would be more helpful than just memorising double consonants e.g. after a short vowel sound double l f and s in single syllables: - all, well, tell, ill, pull; tiff, off, boff, mass, bass, lass then later the 9 or so exceptions: - pal, nil, yes, bus, gas, if, this, thus etc. by using all of them in two sentences

Tip 4. Teaching when 'c', 'ck' or 'k' are used for the sound (k) in words is more useful than just memorising the words in which they occur. (cat, cup; tick, pick, pack; look, took, take)

Tip 5. Teach the two-vowel rule. When 2 vowels go walking the first one usually does the talking e.g., listen to-boat, road, coat, load, tail, sail, snail, teach, reach, lead, meal.

DfE. Phase Three: “Teach the rest of the sounds and graphemes in 12 weeks and all the letter names if not already known”.

Comment: This is not a structured and cumulative approach. It is too fast for many learners and encourages rote learning rather than thoughtful learning. Letter names need to be taught for names and sentencing in freeform writing, plus singing and alphabet order games for later dictionary work.

DfE. Phase Four: “In the last 4 weeks of Reception, practice all the GPCs (Grapheme-Phoneme Correspondences - sounds) learned so far.”

Comment: In other words, check and rote-learn them. There are 461 different ones and 64 that occur most commonly in children’s books.

Tip 6. They need to be trying to use them in freeform story writing from the outset then the teacher would be able to see what they know and what each child needs to learn next.

DfE. Phase Five: “Throughout Year 1, teach the last of the GPCs not yet taught and alternative spelling patterns for sounds”.

Comment: There is no justification given for these so-called ‘alternative’ spelling patterns. The use of the word ‘patterns’ reflects a visual emphasis and is a reminder of an earlier popular approach involving rote learning of random ‘letter strings’.

Tip 7. The English language is built on more than phonics and can be made more regular by a handful of useful rules that govern thousands of common spellings such as are detailed in Chapter 4 and outlined below.

1. The four suffixing rules – ADD, DOUBLE, DROP CHANGE.

Drop, Double and Add are the most powerful to begin with e. g.

a. DOUBLE-HOP (CVC). Short vowel sound, closed syllable. DOUBLING rule – when adding a suffix double the final consonant - hop-p-ing, putting, running, bedding, sitting, In polysyllables - rudder, potter, kipper, cutter, little, bubble.

b. DROP-HOPE (CVCe). Long vowel sound denoted by silent ‘e’ in closed syllables. DROP silent ‘e’ and just add the suffix – hop - ing, riding, hoped (So-called ‘magic E’ rule making the vowel say its name).

c. ADD-TEST (CVCC) Short vowel followed by double consonants simply ADD suffix – test-ing, rushed, missed, rusting, posted, lasting, faster. In a dialect change in south of England from short to longer /ar/ sound the ADD rule still applies.

d. CHANGE-PAY change 'y' to 'i' for past tense paid; say to said; and lay to laid most other words have not made the transition e.g., stay-ed; play-ed.

2. The l-f- s rule. Tip 2 above

3. The two-vowel rule. Tip 5 above.

4. Introduce some common final stable syllables:- e, g. –le; -ly and -tion (shun)

Even in Reception, children enjoy thinking and problem solving in relation to spelling and reading more than rote learning and they gain more from it. They enjoy becoming 'Spelling Detectives' (Montgomery, 2014) and learning how to become self-teachers as their knowledge develops.

i) For example, play the, 'I- Spy something beginning with '?' game. This encourages phoneme awareness. Potential dyslexics can fail at this and therefore be identified. Disadvantaged children may come to it slowly therefore give MAPT training (see Chapter 6 and Appendix 8).

ii) For a problem-solving example: Explain that letter 'c' has no sound of its own it borrows from its friends. Sometimes it has its 'soft' sound (s) and sometimes it has its 'hard' sound (k). Ask them to generate some words that begin with the letter 'c' e. g. city cat crab come came cup clue cycle clap cyst circle crop ceremony circus calm crib.

In pairs ask them to make a rule for when c is made 'soft' and when it is 'hard'.

Give a clue if necessary e.g., put all the 'soft' c words together and make the rule.

Conclusion

Regularising the alphabet to make 44 symbols to represent the 44 phonemes in English using traditional orthography is a simple process.

Any individual teacher or school can do it and it remains within the Early Years framework. It will speed up reading acquisition for Reception / Foundation learners and adults in EFL programmes. It will ease their difficulties and reduce the literacy gap for the disadvantaged and the dyslexic. Southgate's and Downing's researches showed it would also improve early spelling development and creative writing (composition). This means that sentence level work such as grammar and punctuation will make more sense much earlier.

The most important thing to remember is that English is not to be regarded as a badly organised phonic system that needs simplifying so that it is modelled on phonically regular languages like Italian and Turkish. It is a **morphemic system** based on a phonic structure. In other words meaning governs English spelling and has its roots in the rich history of the language.

Changing to a regularised medium will change the early reading predictive indicators and this was illustrated in research with 114 Finnish children by Lerkkanen et al., (2004). Finnish children start school at the age of 7 years and learn to read very quickly because it is a regular language. They were tested at regular intervals over the next two years and it was found that **letter knowledge** and listening comprehension were the best early predictors of reading ability. Whereas initial word reading skills and listening comprehension were highly associated with the development of reading comprehension. The implications of these different components need to be taken into account when determining teaching methods such as choice of code emphasis (phonics) methods or meaning emphasis (Look and Say) methods and these will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

THE READING TEACHING METHODS

Introduction

In comparison with spelling teaching history of over 1,000 years using one main rote method, reading has a history just over a century long. Over this short period different teaching methods for reading have been evolved and tested. In different periods one method has been preferred over another and become dominant, the 'reading wars' (Wyse et al., 2022). There are two main routes to reading, (Coltheart, 2005) the auditory and the visual and they give rise to the two main methods.

Reading teaching by auditory methods usually refers to a system of teaching using phonetics or phonics from the outset and throughout a programme. It is described as a 'code emphasis' method. This is in contrast to visual methods that use whole words, whole sentences and paragraph recognition alone usually termed 'meaning emphasis' methods. Most reading teachers in current times use some mixture of the two techniques but the best mixture or the most effective is not always in evidence.

Reading takes place in a social and cultural context and is built upon an understanding of the spoken word. Thus, it is important that when children begin school, they have spoken language and a good understanding of a wide vocabulary or failing that are able to develop it in the Reception year. The limited language experience of many disadvantaged children can put them at a double disadvantage in school learning. At the age of 5 years when UK children begin school it is expected that they will have a vocabulary of at least a thousand words and will be able to use and understand all the syntactic structures and tenses in common use. Unfortunately, what is evident is that these expectations are more typical of children from advantaged backgrounds but the less advantaged will not meet them. They will have a more limited experience of spoken language, a simpler vocabulary and more limited knowledge of its semantic and syntactical

aspects. A few will have no language and communication skills and yet may not be on the Autistic Spectrum or have Specific Language Impairment.

During reading tests, brighter children with learning difficulties such as dyslexia tend to be better at guessing from context and score higher on comprehension than on accuracy skills. Their good guessing can conceal their reading difficulties until they begin to fail to achieve the standards expected of them. It can also prevent them from qualifying for the remedial support they need.

1. Reading Phases

Reading can be roughly divided into three overlapping phases, a learning to read or acquisition phase, a developmental phase leading to reading fluency and then a final critical reading phase. Two sets of ability underlie these phases, one is the technical or mechanical skill and the other is comprehension. Reading without comprehensions has been described as ‘calling out words’ or ‘barking at print’. Some very slow learners for example can learn to read fluently but fail to understand much of what they read.

Most children appear to be able to learn to read by any teaching method as long as it is structured and systematic. But some methods are more efficient and effective for the English language than others in that acquisition and development of fluency are easier and quicker.

2. Self-teaching, ‘natural readers’

In word-filled and enriching environments some children arrive at school already able to read without actually having been taught. It does not appear to be dependent on having a high ability but it does confer many learning advantages in the early years and beyond. They used to be called ‘natural readers’ and now ‘self teachers’ and also ‘implicit learners’ (van der Craen, 2016).

The self-teaching theory of reading development was proposed by David Share (1995). His idea was, that once learners had established their knowledge of sound and symbol correspondences, successful identification (decoding) of new words in the course of children's independent reading of text enabled them to recode them back into the spoken language form. His studies and earlier those of Gentry (1981 and 1982) overlooked the issue of

how self-teaching can also occur in the preschool period prior to infants being taught any basic alphabetic and phonic skills as in the case of Faye below.

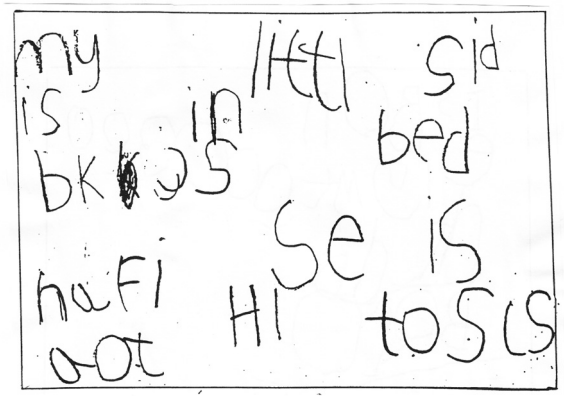

Figure 2.1 Faye age 5.1 years.

In Figure 2.1 above Faye has been under a month in the Reception class in a disadvantaged area, she has had no pre-school tuition. She writes, *'My little sister is in bed because she is having her tonsils out'.*

What children can write unaided they can also read (Clay, 1986) and a strong relationship was found between spelling and reading even when spellers were found, not made--that is, found in classrooms in which spelling is not taught (Richgels, 1995). How some children such as Faye can teach themselves will be shown later.

3. Code emphasis methods - phonics

This is sometimes called phonetic method and was evolved from the mediaeval ABC rote spelling system (e.g., a–e–i–o-u; ba–be–bi–bo–bu; etc. and fa–fe–fi fo–fum!). Because it was difficult to see how chanting the names of the letters contributed to learning to read words fluently sound values gradually became more important.

Basic phonics as in 'the cat sat on the mat' is the essence of traditional phonics regimes in that they began by teaching the letter sounds sometimes in key groups or in a few schemes in alphabetical order. The children then 'learnt' to segment words, initially single syllables into their component

letters c-a-t ‘cat’. They learnt to read words with similar structures and they copy wrote them. As can be envisaged the technique gives rise to stilted and limited text for about six months whilst the mechanics are being learnt. It is also very tedious for quick learners.

Unfortunately, the method was and still is subject to errors for example we cannot split syllables by ear; or when the sounding out includes the intrusive schwa or ‘uh’ sound as in ‘ku-ah-tuh’ ‘cat’. There are also difficulties in blending even if the sounds are properly expressed as in ‘c-a-t’ to ‘ca-t’ that to adults seems logical but to beginners and dyslexics ‘c-at’ is easier and was termed the ‘onset and rime’ method (Bryant et al.,1985).

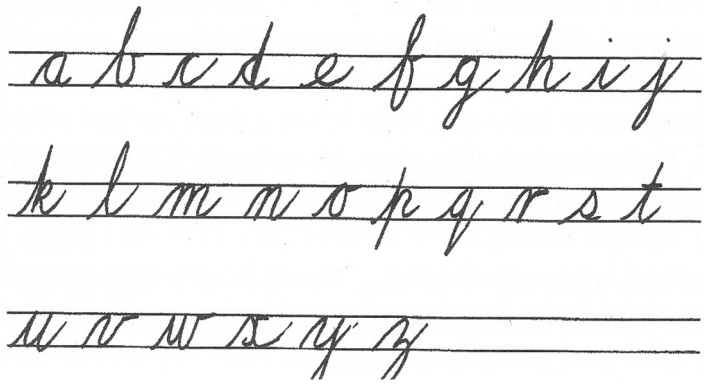

Figure 2.2 Example of Civil Service Hand

In the period up to the 1940s the phonic system for teaching reading was dominant in UK schools and by then was accompanied by extensive copy writing using Civil Service Hand, a running joined (cursive) ovoid form taught from the outset as in Figure 2.2 above. It replaced an older slower system termed Copperplate used by printers to etch the copper plates used in printing without lifting the etching tool from the surface (see Figure 4.1b. in chapter four).

i) Basic phonics. This involves sounding out each letter in a regular word and then blending them to say the word and then spell it e.g., c-a-t, d-o-g, s-a-n-d as advised in DfE documents. Unfortunately, the technique quickly breaks down when over-generalised and confronted by ‘rope’ and ‘home’, ‘come’ and ‘said’ and the intrusive ‘schwa’- ‘Ruh-oh-puh eh’ rope, heard

locally on a school outing to the riverside quay. It is also not possible to do unless a child can already spell the word as pointed out in chapter one.

ii) Analytic phonics - decoding. This method is confined to reading strategies. When confronted by text the child is taught to guess the word from its initial sound, the context in the sentence (syntax), its meaning (semantics) and any picture clue. The method was often later supported by systematic letter-sound teaching using the popular Letterland (Wendon, 2003) initially termed the Pictogram system.

However what teachers generally did was introduce a sound and its clue word or story through Letterland for reading; teach the graphemes in shape groups e.g., 'c, a, o, d' for writing and then use copy writing of news for spelling. All of these introduce different letters (graphemes) in the different contexts. Although it works with most beginning learners who eventually grasp the ideas, it hampers the disadvantaged and fails dyslexics who cannot overcome their specific disability in this manner. This lack of structure and integration of the three skills of reading, spelling and handwriting can slow down the development of literacy in all learners.

iii) Synthetic phonics. This system applies particularly to constructing spellings from their sounds. It is usual to group the letters in order of frequency of occurrence in children's books. Government guidelines (DfE, 2014) recommend teaching the letters a, t, p, i, n, s first ('satpin' Cochrane et al 2022) and was the first set used in the Clackmannanshire research study. This study by Johnson et al., (2005) compared spelling and reading progress at the end of Primary 2. 300 children were given 16 weeks training for 20 minutes each day in one of three programmes:

1. Synthetic phonics to blend letters for spelling words
2. Analytic phonics to decode words for reading
3. Analytic phonics and phonological awareness training.

At the end of the programme the synthetic phonics group were about 7 months ahead of the other two groups and 7 months ahead of their chronological age in reading. They were 8 to 9 months ahead of the others in spelling. Contrary to expectation the synthetic phonics group was also able to read irregular words better than the other groups, and was the only group that could read unfamiliar words by analogy. The conclusion also was that during the synthetic phonics teaching they were learning and developing transferrable skills that the other methods were not providing for their groups. What progress might have been made if the phonics had begun

in Reception alongside whole word work? Surely 28 hours of any such drill is too much for teachers and pupils and it will be shown that it is really not necessary to do this to achieve the benefits of synthetic phonics.

4. Meaning emphasis methods – Look and say

i) Whole words. The teacher presents a whole word on a card or the white board and after 10 or more pairings in different situations the child is expected to have learned it as a sight word. Research showed that it took more than 40 pairings for most pupils to learn words by this method (Barbe, 1965). The teacher first engages with the children in developing speaking and listening skills and reads stories to them and talks with them about the stories and their own experiences to develop the necessary vocabulary. Picture storybooks were introduced with the key words and links were made between them. Flash cards with the key words on them were introduced and each child would have a word tin containing the words they were learning. They then took them home to practice.

After repeated pairings of the word with its image the children are expected to be able to read the story text in the first Reader (reading book) to the teacher or Learning Support Assistant (LSA) perhaps with some help. The *Rainbow Readers* for example were also colour coded and graded to help the teacher and learner in this process. The sounds of the letters in this scheme were not introduced until the child had sight knowledge of about 50 words. In some classrooms sounds were not taught at all even after the initial 50 words period nor in Years 1 and 2.

ii) The sentence method. This used the sentence as the unit of meaning and contextual clues were emphasised for deciphering unknown words. Only a few schools used this method alone in Elizabeth Goodacre's 1967 survey but increasing numbers of teachers began to adopt it as it was promoted as a whole language approach.

iii) The whole language approach. This is often called the 3-Cue system. The pupil is confronted by a storybook suitable for the age group and is encouraged to work out what it is about. The accompanying pictures give some clues and these are discussed. The sentences describe what is in the picture and may be read to the child leaving the key word for the child to supply and study the word in the text. The sentence is read to the children, they 'read' the sentence back and so on. The sentence may be supplied by the pupil and written by the teacher and is read back by the child. Making meaning is the emphasis.

The problems that arise as a result of this technique is that it distracts attention from word structures, the letters and their order that beginning readers use to understand text. Committed teachers could make it work but the usual number of pupils with dyslexic and other difficulties continued to fail.

iv) The three-cueing system. From 1964 Kenneth and Eleanor Goodman began tape-recording poor readers in order to analyse the mismatch between what the text said and what they read aloud. The mismatches were termed 'miscues' (as opposed to 'errors'). Miscue analysis is simply an observation of the patterns and strategies used by the poor reader to process the text. In a detailed analysis Goodman (1967) noted their attempts and the cues that they used to arrive at the meaning of text. He noted if they were using picture clues, story context and/or syntax to predict the text. His miscues analysis led him to define learning to read as a psycholinguistic guessing game that should be encouraged over any phonics approach. He was supported in this by Frank Smith (1971-1988) who toured the UK promoting the method.

For Goodman, accurate word recognition was not necessarily the goal of reading. The goal was to comprehend text. If the sentences were making sense, the reader must be getting the words right, or right enough. These ideas soon became the foundation for how reading was taught in many schools and Goodman's three-cueing idea formed the theoretical basis of an approach known as 'whole language' so that by the late 1980s it had taken hold throughout America. With Frank Smith's encouragement many schools in England followed soon after.

It did not occur to these early researchers that the 3-Cues strategies the poor readers used might be because they lacked sufficient phonic knowledge to help them penetrate the meaning of the text.

v) Real books. Reading schemes in the 1970s and 80s in the UK had assumed much less significance and schools used several schemes or none at all. The real books approach became popular in some quarters. Teachers would colour code the reading levels of their storybooks or allowed children to select their own books at any level of difficulty and read them with the teacher, the 'real books' approach. Difficult books in which the teacher read all the text to the child demonstrated the need for another selection and the pupil learned to select down the difficulty gradient by judgments about the extent of text and the size of print. As can be inferred this technique embodies Look and Say and was demanding of both teachers and pupils

vi) Dual Coding Method This is implicit in many Look and Say schemes. It involves presenting words (verbals) alongside their images of various kinds such as pictures, diagrams and photos (visuals). The various tasks are to present a sequence of pictures that the pupil has to name and explain. Sequences can be put out of order in time line tasks to be named and correctly ordered.

The association between word and meaning presented visually and explained establishes the connections in the word memory and meaning store (lexicon) and gives some time to it. But in presenting the word on its own amongst similar words and words that cannot be pictured it is difficult to see how this helps decoding although it may be more fun and more motivating. The current manifestations of the Lindamood-Bell Learning Process (2018) using visualisation and verbalisation strategies reports 25% improvement phoneme awareness in reading in the experimental schools over controls in similarly disadvantaged areas (Title 1 schools). What this means is that in one year with 112 hours of such lessons, reading progress would be 3 months more advanced than amongst controls. Other methods shown later give much larger effect sizes.

5. Pattern processing in early Look and Say methods

Perceptual studies showed that the eye and brain both perform a features analysis on any input because the retina is an outgrowth of brain tissue (Farnham-Diggory, 1978). Tank recognition studies (Allan, 1965) showed that naïve subjects after doing jigsaws of a range of tanks were able to identify them very easily and much better than subjects shown pictures and told the main features of the separate tanks.

This suggested potential similarities in the perceptual processing of words in attempting to read by Look and Say. The questions were, what were the relevant features in children's visual learning of words and could they be taught by the jigsaw method to identify and learn them? What were the features that made up words and their letters? Some, the early learners appeared to scan the words correctly from left to right but others did so from right to left. If they fixated on the last letter when the teacher said the word then it would make it difficult to learn to read it. If they fixated as some did on a particular letter such as the 'k' within a word this would not help either especially if they were expected to play the game 'I spy something beginning with-'. What was the 'beginning' of a word for them? Did they even know the meaning of 'beginning'?