



Early reading and phonics

(see also Early Years Literacy Education)

Phonics alone will not make successful readers; children need to develop a range of strategies to make sense of what they read.

Successful reading teaching:

- uses a balance of phonics and meaning-focused approaches
- creates high levels of engagement and pleasure in reading
- develops children's understanding of texts
- plays with language, stories and rhymes
- gives children plenty of experience of putting texts to use
- respects the experiences of language and literacy that children bring to school
- helps children to recognise themselves and their experiences in what they read.

Early reading/phonics

UKLA maintains that whilst phonics plays an important part in early reading, fostering pleasure through playing with words and enjoyment of text; developing sense; making of stories and rhymes; and respect for the experiences of language and literacy that children bring to school are also essential parts of successful teaching and learning of reading. This stance is supported by studies of effective classrooms on both sides of the Atlantic showing that the most successful instruction, from the earliest stages, balances phonics with attention to meaning, takes account of children's differences, including their interests and areas of expertise, and focuses on engaging them.

However, teaching early reading is contested ground, with education ministers in England holding the view that the best approach to teaching reading is through phonics alone and a phonics screening check has been imposed on 5 on 6 year olds in English schools to measure the effectiveness of this approach. While children's scores on this test have improved significantly since its introduction, tests of reading for meaning, taken a year later, have not shown any such improvement and this is perhaps a result of the restricted reading diet for many children in the early years. The picture is somewhat different in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

Of course, phonics plays a part in reading. But, while the English writing system is alphabetic, with letters (or letter combinations) representing speech sounds (or groups of speech sounds), correspondence to the written word is not always straightforward. This is exemplified when looking at common words, for example 'one' and 'two' show that phonics is not enough for word identification and indicate that context or other cueing strategies need to be used. Words sharing spelling patterns, such as 'rove' 'move' and 'love' don't rhyme. It takes something more than phonics to identify them, as Bearne and Reedy (2018) explain: children need to make connections between words they know and new words and to be taught sight vocabulary alongside the teaching of phonics (Bearne and Reedy, 2018:112). Encouraging children to draw on their knowledge of language patterns and subject matter aids both word identification and meaning-making.

Ellis and Smith (2017) represent reading as involving three different domains of knowledge or understanding: cognitive knowledge or skills, cultural and social capital, and personal and social identity. If children are to become capable and enthusiastic readers, all these domains of literacy learning need attention.

Sources

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Taylor, B.M. and Pearson, P.D. (2002) (Eds.) *Teaching Reading: Effective schools, accomplished teachers*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

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<https://reclaimingschools.org/2018/09/27/phonics-test-nick-gibb-fails-again/>

Classroom example

Teaching the /igh/ phoneme

A group of 4 and 5 year olds were taking part in a daily phonics session which was organised along the format of *Revisit, Review/Teach/Practise/Apply*. Although this format was followed and the session lasted some 20 minutes it was an active session with lots of reinforcement and fun. The teacher and children made use of ICT and the session was linked to a favourite story *Naughty Bus* which they had read as a class.

In pairs, the children started by hunting for words from the book that they already knew which were hidden around the corridor outside the classroom. When they had found a word they had to read it to a friend. Back in the classroom they had to match the word to the page in the book and repeat the word. The teacher then read the sentence to give the word a context.

Child 1: This word says 'the'

Child 2: No it says th /e/

Teacher: Yes that's a tricky word. Let's read the sentence from the book to help us ...

During the Teach part of the lesson, each child had a word which contained the new /igh/ phoneme. The teacher modelled how to say each word and then read the beginning of the book pointing out the words with the new phoneme as she went along. Using sound tins* the teacher recorded a word with the new sound and played it back to the children.

Teacher: Listen to the story and see if you can hear your word. When you hear your word, record it onto your sound tin.

She continued to read and when she came to a word with the /igh/ phoneme the children recorded the word onto their own sound tin and listened back to it to make sure they were saying it correctly.

They then had some more words with the new phoneme and made up new sentences as a group;

Child 3: Naughty bus got into a fight.

Teacher: What a lovely sentence. Can you hear the /igh/ phoneme everybody?

Child 4: Naughty Bus might have got into a fight.

Teacher: That's great; two words with the /igh/phoneme. I hope he didn't get into a fight!

*Small digital devices that record and play back speech, music or sound effects.

Children's book

Jan Oke (2005) *Naughty Bus*. Little Knowall Publishing. ISBN 978 0954792114

Henrietta Dombey and Sue Reid for UKLA

See also

UKLA bookshop www.ukla.org/shop

The Handbook of Teaching Early Reading: more than phonics
by Sally Elborn

English Language and Literacy 3-19: Reading 3-7 by John Richmond

English Language and Literacy 3-19: Reading 7-16 by Peter Traves

Teaching Reading: How To by John Richmond

Teaching Reading: What the Evidence Says
by Henrietta Dombey and colleagues

UKLA website www.ukla.org/resources

Reading Fact Cards

CLPE Reading and Writing Scales

both on: <https://ukla.org/resources/collection/professional-development>

Free resource: *Reading for Pleasure*

https://ukla.org/downloads/Reading_for_Pleasure.pdf

For information on OU/UKLA Reading for Pleasure groups go to:

<https://www.researchrichpedagogies.org/research/reading-for-pleasure>