Institute for
Effective Education
Empowering educators with evidence

Research Schools Network

Enhancing reading skills in young readers

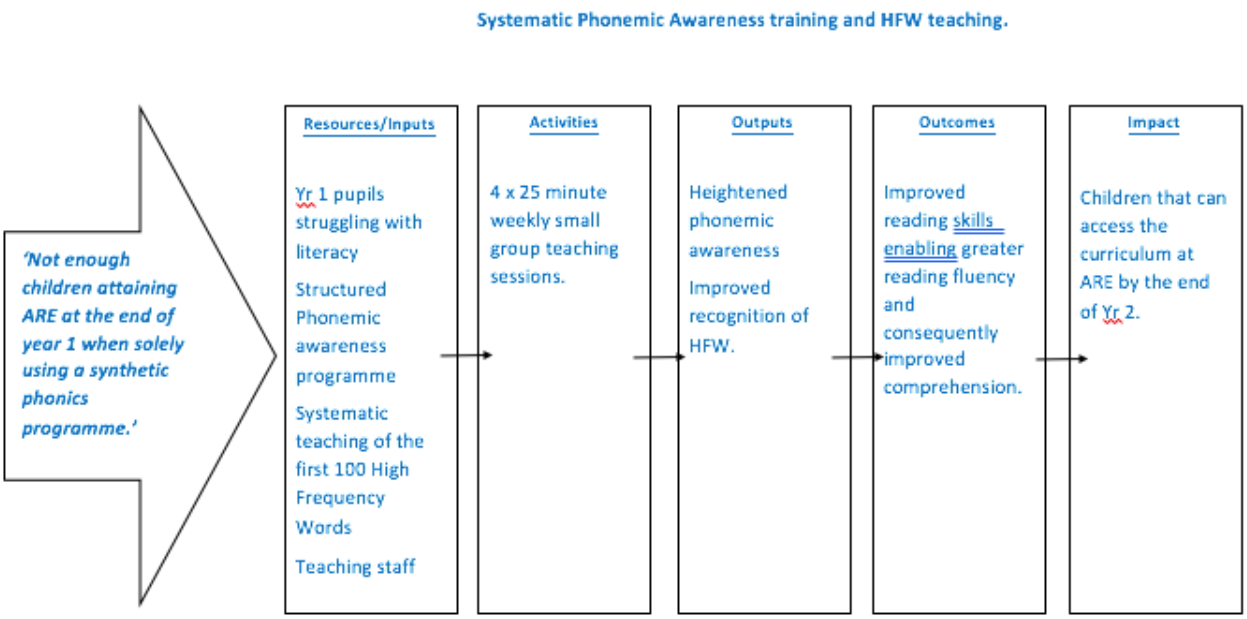
Garden Fields JMI School

Problem: What challenges do your school(s) have that need to be addressed?

We have noticed a recent trend of pupils entering our school in Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) with lower literacy skills than previous years. Many arrive with weak knowledge of rhyme and syllables and with weak alphabetic knowledge and few sight words known for reading. Speech and Language Specialists and Occupational Therapists suggest that younger children are not benefiting from sufficient exposure to rhyme, as traditional nursery rhymes are not being told as much by parents. Possibly more significant is the amount of time young pupils and parents are spending on tablets and smartphones, reducing the amount of natural conversation. The school has introduced Read Write Inc (RWI) as a literacy programme in EYFS and Year 1; however, we are finding increasing numbers of children may be able to pass the phonic screening check but are not attaining at age related expectations (ARE) in reading at the end of Year 1. RWI is a synthetic phonics programme that addresses phonological awareness at the phoneme level and has only a small amount of rhyme teaching. It does not include a rigorous teaching of high frequency sight words. The irregularities of the English language mean that a phonics approach will not enable a child to read many of our high frequency words. We are suggesting that a supplementary programme is necessary to work in parallel with RWI that includes explicit phonological awareness teaching and sight word teaching.

Innovation: How will the innovation help improve the problem you have identified and benefit teachers and learners?

The innovation entails the explicit, multisensory teaching of phonological awareness and sight words to supplement the synthetic phonics programme already taught to Year 1 pupils.



Existing evidence: What evidence is there that this innovation will improve outcomes?

Andrew Davis (2013) argues against the sole use of synthetic phonics as a tool to teach reading. He states "synthetic phonics, with its accompanying phonics 'check', fails, at least in its pure and exclusive version, to take account of the true character of reading, and of the gulf between reading and mere decoding." In reference to the phonic screening check he argues that the skills it attempts to check are actually blending skills rather than reading skills. This would explain why children can pass the phonic screening check yet not be reading at age related expectations. Wyse and Goswami (2008) make the point that "The phonological complexity of syllable structures in English, coupled with the inconsistent spelling system, mean that direct instruction at levels other than the phoneme may be required in order to become an effective reader." The full importance of phonological awareness on reading and spelling is discussed by Goswami and Bryant (2016) in their book *Phonological Skills and Learning to Read*. Their research emphasises the importance of rhyme, alliteration and onset and rime. Awareness at the word and syllable level precedes awareness at the phoneme level. Finally, the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF, 2017) in their Improving Literacy in Key Stage One Guidance Report state: "Both decoding and comprehension skills are necessary, but not sufficient, to develop confident and competent readers…If pupils are not making expected progress it may be that they are not engaged … and require a different approach that motivates them to practise and improve." We believe our intervention will address this.

Yvette Zgonc (2010) argues that phonological awareness, sight word recognition, combined with

a systematic, explicit phonics programme and integrated with a literature and language-rich environment provides the best chance to be reading fluently by the end of Year 4. Providing struggling readers with intensive Phonological Awareness instruction 15-20 mins a day has been shown to result in considerable gains (Ball and Blachman 1991; Byrne and Fielding-Barnsley 1991, 1993, 1995).

Research question or hypothesis: What effect will the intervention, implemented for how long, with which pupils, have on what outcomes?

What impact does explicit phonological awareness training and the teaching of sight words, in addition to a synthetic phonics programme, delivered over a 3 month period, have on reading attainment and phonological awareness for Year 1 pupils who are reading at least 6 months below their chronological age and/or have below average phonological processing and production skills compared to similar pupils taught using a synthetic phonics programme alone?

Method: Include sample, design, measures, intervention, process evaluation, and analysis

Sample/ participants

There are 90 Year 1 pupils in the school. Every pupil will be assessed using PM Benchmarking. The top 20% as scored on the Benchmarking will be removed from the sample. The remaining 80% will be assessed using the Phonological Assessment Battery: Second Edition Primary (PhAB2). These assessments will be carried out by an independent teacher. The PhAB2 includes 9 subtests which assess children's phonological processing, their ability to perceive, analyse and manipulate phonological segments and also to assess their phonological production skills.

Any pupils who are assessed as falling in at least one of the following categories will be part of the research sample:

- Standardised score below 85 on at least three subtests of the PhAB2,
- PM benchmark reading age at least 6 months below their chronological age.

Approximately 45 Year 1 pupils are expected to meet the inclusion criteria outlined above.

Parents will be asked to give consent for their child to participate in the project and for their data to be used. We will explain that the intervention will be for half the school year, so that those pupils in the waiting list control group can then have focused/intensive teaching over the second half of the year. The intervention will be delivered to half of the identified pupils in a small group,

with a maximum of 8 pupils, or smaller if the budget allows. The remaining half of pupils who meet the inclusion criteria will form the control group.

Design and assignment to condition

Pupils who meet the inclusion criteria (outlined above) will be randomly allocated to either the intervention group or the control group.

Measures

Over a three-week period prior to the intervention commencing, pupils will be assessed using PM Benchmarking and the Phonological Assessment Battery: Second Edition Primary (PhAB2). The same testing will be carried out during the three-week post intervention on the pupils from the research sample. The PM Benchmarking will give a reading age and the PhAB2 will give 9 standardised scores for the different aspects of phonological awareness.

The PM Benchmarking and the PhAB2 will be conducted by teachers with no other involvement in the evaluation. They will not know whether pupils are in the intervention or control group, to ensure there is no bias when carrying out the assessments.

Intervention

The intervention aims to teach phonological awareness and reading of sight words.

Delivered to: small groups of 1:8 or smaller if budget allows. In the EEF Guidance Report Improving Literacy at Key Stage 1 it does specify that small group teaching can sometimes be more effective than 1:1 if the quality of teaching is high.

Delivered by: trained independent teaching assistants working in a different year at the school who do not work directly with any of the children in the sample.

Training: will be given by Inclusion Co-ordinator (INCO, Level 5 qualification in specific literacy difficulties) and Specialist Teacher (Level 7 qualification in specific literacy difficulties) to staff involved in the intervention.

Resources: lesson plans which are consistent in format will be shared with the teaching assistants delivering the intervention. Whilst the programme ‘Phonological Awareness, Assessment Tools and Strategies’ (Zgonc, 2010) will be used as a framework, additional activities and tasks will be used to supplement this. Peter Hatcher’s ‘Sound Linkage’ will also be used as appropriate (Hatcher, 2001). The first 100 high frequency sight words will be used and taught through various games, and initial consonant blends explicitly taught. Apps on tablets would be used with consideration (as this is a familiar learning tool, moderated use could be beneficial). The majority of resources will be produced in-house. Additional resources may be

bought if specific to the content. The sequence of teaching will be confirmed post assessment to ensure the learning starts at a place appropriate, and relevant, to the children in the sample.

Participant's Experience: 25 minute sessions will be delivered four times a week for 12 weeks in a dedicated learning space. This intervention will be used during class guided reading carousels, although the children in the intervention group will receive their teacher-led guided reading session on a Friday.

Control group: will have the usual class led activities. They will be in a separate classroom, to minimize chance of contamination.

Process evaluation

Pre and post intervention questionnaires will be given to parents, class teachers and TAs, asking about their perceptions of the pupil's ability, attitude and behaviour towards reading: within the intervention and beyond. Likert scales will measure responses to appropriate questions.

Pupil voice interviews will be conducted with all children involved in the research which may give some insights. These will be carried out by the external teacher while carrying out the PM Benchmarking assessments.

Discussions will be held with those who taught the intervention to identify how easy/difficult the programme was to deliver. These questions will be asked by the independent assessor who is carry out the pupils assessments.

Observations will be made of both the intervention and the control group during the timetabled sessions.

Data analysis

Both the PhAB2 and PM Benchmarking will give quantitative outcome data which can be analysed and direct comparisons can be made between the two groups. PhAB2 will provide standardised scores, PM Benchmarking with give the months of progress pupils have made. Whilst we cannot calculate statistical significance due to the small sample size we will calculate the effect size, and also the average progress of the intervention group and the average progress of the control group.

Further analysis can come from comparing responses to the questions using a Likert scale. The analysis will be carried out by the specialist teacher who has a psychology background.

Conclusion: What will happen if your innovation improves outcomes, or not? What are the limitations of your evaluation?

Potential Limitations

Potential limitations, and actions taken to address these, include:

- Staff fidelity to the programme. Fidelity could be increased by a cluster of staff, trained together to develop a peer support network, delivering the programme. The two teaching assistants delivering the programme can support each other; regular observations and meetings will take place.
- Staff absence. More staff than are necessary to implement the intervention will be trained.
- Pupil engagement. Through observations and meetings, we would identify any delivery methods that aren't successful and they can be amended to re-engage the pupils.
- Timetabling issues. SLT have made a commitment to timetable a non-negotiable slot.

Implications

If the results are positive then the intervention would be implemented for every Year 1 class and be made part of the school's literacy policy. A comparable intervention could supplement the teaching of Read Write Inc in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

If the results were negative we would have to consider an alternative intervention.

References and further reading

Ball, E. and Blachman, B. (1991). Does Phoneme Awareness Training in Kindergarten Make a Difference in Early Word Recognition and Developmental Spelling? *Reading Research Quarterly, 26, 1, 49-66*.

Byrne, B., & Fielding-Barnsley, R. (1991). Evaluation of a program to teach phonemic awareness to young children. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 83*, *4, 451-455*.

Byrne, B., & Fielding-Barnsley, R. (1993). Evaluation of a program to teach phonemic awareness to young children: A 1-year follow-up. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 85*, *1, 104-111*.

Byrne, B., & Fielding-Barnsley, R. (1995). Evaluation of a program to teach phonemic awareness to young children: A 2- and 3-year follow-up and a new preschool trial. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 87*, *3, 488-503*.

Davis, A (2013). *To read or not to read: decoding Synthetic Phonics.* Impact No 20, The Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain. https://doi.org/10.1111/2048-416X.2013.12000.x

Davis, A. (2014). *Reading lessons: why synthetic phonics doesn't work.* First published 4th March 2014. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/teacher-network/teacher-blog/2014/mar/04/reading-lessons-phonics-world-book-day

Education Endowment Foundation (2017*). Improving Literacy in Key Stage One*, London: Education Endowment Foundation.

Goswami, U. and Bryant, P. (2016*) Phonological Skills and Learning to Read (Essays in Developmental Psychology)*. Abingdon, Routledge.

Hatcher, P. (2001). *Sound Linkage: Integrated Programme for Overcoming Reading Difficulties*. Wiley-Blackwell, New Jersey.

Wyse, D. and Goswami, U. (2008). Synthetic Phonics and the teaching of reading*. British Educational Research Journal, 34, 6, 691-710*.

Zgonc, Y (2010) *Phonological Awareness: Assessment Tools and Strategies*, Peterborough: Crystal Spring Books**.**