

# Review of the teaching of early reading



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The Rose Report (2006) identified the elements that can impact children's reading ability and made recommendations as to how existing practice could be improved. This discussion will focus on the processes that should be followed in teaching children to become fluent and critical readers by the end of their primary school years.

One of the significant recommendations made by Rose was the restructuring of the 'searchlights model'. Although Rose praised the model to systemise phonics in schools, he did not believe that it demonstrated how a beginner reader progresses to become a skilled reader. It did not consider the changes in readers needs as they acquire a repertoire of words. Schatz and Baldwin (1986) also criticised this model stating that it distorted the view that phonic decoding and knowledge of printed words are optional searchlights.

Building from the searchlights model, Rose highlighted that there are two essential components of learning to read which are: word recognition and language comprehension processes. These are contained in the Simple View of Reading (SVOR), which stems from the work of Gough and Turner (1986). Rose suggested that these two processes are distinguishable but both essential in order to become fluent and critical readers. This model is depicted on the below diagram: According to Rose, skilled readers firstly secure word recognition skills through the application of phonics; which is a time-limited process. They do not rely upon other decoding strategies such as cues from different contexts. Once their reading becomes automatic, the balance between the two changes from 'learning to read to reading to learn'

for information and pleasure. Therefore the emphasis shifts to language comprehension processes.

‘ the goal of reading is comprehension and that skilled reading involves understanding as well as decoding text. In short, learning to read progresses to reading, effortlessly to learn’.

(p. 35, Rose, 2006)

## **Figure 1**

Source: Independent Review of the teaching of early reading, Final Report, Jim Rose, 2006, figure 2, page 77.

We shall now explore both processes in greater detail to ascertain the stages of early reading development and how children progress to become fluent and critical readers.

Rose highlighted that the teaching of synthetic phonics is the optimum route for beginner readers to become skilled readers. One of his key recommendations was that ‘ high quality phonic work’ should be taught systematically and independently as the key approach in the teaching of early reading. He defines ‘ high quality phonic work’ to be:

‘ a body of knowledge, skills and understanding that has to be learned’.

(p. 20, Rose, 2006)

The key features of this approach for teaching beginner readers firstly involves introducing the grapheme-phoneme correspondences in a sequential manner. This is where they associate the pure sounds with the

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corresponding letters. Children read by blending (synthesising) the phonemes in order with the corresponding graphemes; which is known as decoding. Then they use the skill of segmenting to spell the word whereby the words are separated into their constituent phonemes; which is known as encoding. Rose stressed the importance for beginner readers to understand that these processes are transposable and are provided opportunities to practice these skills. This enables them to consolidate their knowledge and to secure word recognition processes as efficient and effectively as possible.

‘ Children must understand the purpose of learning phonics and have lots of opportunities to apply their developing skills in interesting and engaging reading and writing activities’.

(DfES, Letter and Sounds, 2007: p. 3)

However, Bald (2007) stated that high frequency words are taught but not explained; therefore implies that phonics does not always work. On the other hand, if we consider Rose’s research on the word recognition process (see figure 2, below), children have to use a system to develop a bank of high frequency words based on irregular and eventually regular words that enable them to become fluent readers. This process reinforces how phonics is essential so that children can apply these skills when reading challenging texts and not simply relying on cues; which can hinder development.

Although this view highlights the necessity of using phonics and not clues to decode texts, sometimes pictures are important for some children to progress. From my school observations I have found that pictures are needed in conjunction with words for those children with EAL or SEN needs to

decode and understand text. The Oxford Reading Tree books are also used in many schools as they are based on familiar contexts and some do use the pictures for cues. This demonstrates that some children may require cues to develop their reading skills. Therefore during my practice I will need to analyse their needs to consider the appropriate pedagogical approaches (Q10, Q14, Q25a).

## **Figure 2**

Source: Independent Review of the teaching of early reading, Final Report, Jim Rose, 2006, figure 4, page 86.

The Letter and Sounds (2007) document is based on the principles and recommendations of the Report, which follows a high quality phonic work programme. It identifies six phases in the teaching of systematic phonics. Phase one provides an emphasis on harnessing speaking and listening skills. From phase two, the teaching of systematic phonics commences which is usually a short activity that focuses on grapheme-phoneme awareness. Difficulty is graduated throughout the phases with the exposure of new letter sounds including digraphs, digraphs, and split digraphs through to phase six. As there are different representations of phonemes which sound alike such as; 'oi' and 'oy' children are prompted to consider the correct grapheme representation within their spelling; this was recommended by Rose. However, there may be some issues when children apply their phonic knowledge in writing if they come from a background with different colloquial accents. They may spell words incorrectly as a result of this; in a practical context, this will need to be managed sensitively (Q25c).

Rose has stated that high quality phonic work should encapsulate multi-sensory approaches and this is a dimension the Letters and Sounds documentation encourages. I believe that it is essential to use such techniques as it addresses the notion that children learn in different ways (Q15, Q17, Q25b).

‘ Phonic work for young children should be multi-sensory in order to capture their interest, sustain motivation, and reinforce learning in imaginative and exciting ways’.

(p. 70, Rose, 2006)

I have observed the teaching of phonics using the Letters and Sounds programme in Key Stage 1 (year 1) and in Key Stage 2 (year 3). In year 1, a whole-class teaching approach is implemented. The puppet ‘ Egbert’ was used to introduce new phonemes and to facilitate children’s engagement in word recognition exercises. In conjunction with this, magnets were used so that children could understand the process of segmenting and blending. In contrast to Key Stage 2, the children were grouped according to ability. During my practice, I would need to ensure that multi-sensory and pedagogical approaches are considered to enable a better learning impact for children (Q25b, d).

The government has recently unveiled plans to incorporate ‘ non-words’ such as ‘ zort’ into their proposed reading test for six year olds in order to check children’s abilities to use phonics to decode words. I believe this is an unnecessary measure; it can have an adverse effect as children are at that

stage where they are decoding words and developing comprehension skills.

Reedy from the UKLA notes:

“ the inclusion of non-words would be counter productive since most six-year-olds expect to make sense of what they read.”

(BBC news article, David Reedy, 2011)

Hall (2007) has criticised the synthetics approach based on the view that it restricts teachers’ pedagogy and flexibility. Nevertheless, I have seen schools adapt the teaching in order to meet the needs of their children. During my practice I will need to ensure that personalised approaches are used to be inclusive of all learners needs (Q19, Q25a, b).

‘ The problem with the Rose Review is that it reduces teaching to precisely what has to be transmitted into the heads of individual learners. Teaching becomes a set of recipes for delivering a curriculum into the heads of learners.’

(p. 89, Hall, 2007, cited in Gooch and Lambrith)

Rose emphasised the importance of assessment to track phonics progression in the four strands of language and is also a key feature of high quality phonic work. This is essential so that children can be stretched and challenged within their capabilities. This reinforces the message of having high expectations for all children, which I will need to embed within my practice (Q1).

‘ The Primary National Strategy should continue to exemplify ‘ quality first teaching’, showing how robust assessment of children’s learning secures progression in phonic work and how literacy is developed across the curriculum from the Foundation Stage onwards.’

(p. 70, Rose, 2006)

The Letters and Sounds phases which are not fixed, enable progression in phonics. Therefore teachers’ professional judgements and the use of assessment for learning are required to inform planning and teaching. In my base-school, general observations in phonics and the use of Assessing Pupils’ Progress based on the National Strategies guidelines are used to monitor reading abilities. Assessment is essential to ensure that children do not fall below age-related expectations. Throughout my practice, I will need to ensure that assessment for learning is used to inform my planning and pedagogy. By doing so, it will enable me to monitor children’s progression in phonics and consider the strategies that are required to continue their development (Q10, Q11, Q14)

Rose also stressed the necessity of developing children’s speaking and listening skills early on as possible so that they have a secure foundation in phonic work by the age of five. One of his recommendations was that:

‘ The forthcoming Early Years Foundation Stage and the renewed Primary National Strategy Framework for teaching literacy should provide, as a priority, clear guidance on developing children’s speaking and listening skills’.



(p. 70, Rose, 2006)

The revised documentation reflects this and the importance of children being exposed to a broad and rich language curriculum. The EYFS places greater emphasis on child and adult-led initiating activities that encourages speaking and listening opportunities. The framework also has a phonics element within the Communication, Literacy and Language strand to stimulate phonic awareness before the age of five.

From my experience within Foundation, the use of rhymes, stories and other play-based activities are encouraged so that children can build their stock and understanding of words. Questions are also used to scaffold their learning and comprehension development (Q14, Q25c). This also supports Rose's recommendation that pre-reading activities and promoting a language rich curriculum are important to secure a good start in phonic work and develop the four language strands too. This is more important for those who do not come from a background that are not supportive or fosters positive attitudes to literacy. In my base-school, there are numerous children who come from such backgrounds. The school is encouraging stronger parental links as they recognise the influence they can have on their literacy development; which is an aspect I will need to incorporate in my practice. One programme they are running is an adult literacy programme so they can be supportive of their children's literacy developments too.

We shall now discuss language comprehension which is the other essential component in the SVOR in order for children to become skilled readers.

According to Rose:

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‘ Comprehension occurs as the listener builds a mental representation of the information contained within the language that a speaker is using’.

(p. 88, Rose, 2006)

Rose highlights how the above is the same to understand written texts, which can be explained diagrammatically as informed by his research:

Source: Independent Review of the teaching of early reading, Final Report, Jim Rose, 2006, figure 4, page 89.

The practical implication concerning this, as noted by Rose is that if children are initially securing word recognition skills then they need to read texts that are within their comprehension capabilities so they can comfortably interpret meaning. Most schools have staged books for children such as the Oxford Reading Tree editions. This enables the text to be pitched correctly to children so that they can progress at a suitable rate.

Language comprehension is usually developed through promoting rich speaking and listening environments. From my Key Stage 1 observations, I have seen the use of ‘ Chatterbox’ which is an early introduction to comprehension. Five different words are usually shown in a week and are repeated in different contexts to facilitate children’s understanding. I have found this to be a useful strategy to enable children to be engaged with exploring the concept of new words. Furthermore, I have found certain sessions to focus on developing comprehension such as shared reading activities. This has been strengthened where talk partners have been used so that children can feedback to each other. I have observed this to be most

effective when the higher ability support the lower ability peers or those with SEN or EAL needs; this is an aspect I will need to incorporate into my teaching to harness a positive learning impact (Q8, Q19, Q25a, d).

The SVOR enables us to understand that there are four different types of readers (figure 1). It also reinforces Rose's message that:

' Different kinds of teaching are needed to develop word recognition skills from those that are needed to foster the comprehension of written and spoken language'.

(Appendix 1: p77, Rose, 2006)

This will have implications for teaching strategies. Shared, guided or one to one reading all provide opportunities to enable both the word recognition and language comprehension processes to develop; ensuring that there is a clear focus. From my base-school observations, I have seen the use of guided reading to develop children's comprehension skills based on their similar needs. I would also need to use assessment to track progression and see which pedagogical approach will be most effective in ensuring children to become skilled readers (Q7a, Q14, Q8).

Intervention is sometimes required for those children falling below the age-related expectations. ' Every Child a Reader' is a programme that helps children with significant literacy difficulties; I have seen this in action to mitigate the literacy attainment gap. There are also strategies in place so that children can settle back within their classroom environment so that they can continue to progress; which is a recommendation made by Rose:

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‘ Given that intervention work will be necessary...work must be sustained and built upon when they return to their mainstream class’.

(p. 76, Rose, 2006)

It is evident that the Rose Report has greatly influenced the teaching of reading within our primary schools and the progress children are making as a result of high quality phonic work. Although some disadvantages have been discussed, it is still believed that the teaching of synthetic phonics and utilisation of the SVOR are the effective means for ensuring that children become to be fluent and critical readers by the end of their primary years. Strong Head Teacher support is also required to raise reading standards.

The Report has provided me a greater insight into the complexities of children’s reading and that a structured phonics programme supported by a broad and rich language curriculum is essential for children to progress from beginner readers to skilled readers. To develop my practice in light of this, I will need to ensure that; I work in accordance with the school’s phonics programme, create rich reading environments and work with parents too.

I will also need to use assessment to inform my planning and pedagogy to ensure that children progress in phonics. Most importantly, I will need to create a learning environment whereby children not only become skilled readers but enjoy reading for pleasure and have a passion to explore a range of books.

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