

Early reading development



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The stages of early reading development begin with learning phonemes and graphemes and from this recognition of various words of the English language.

“ The sequence of teaching phonic knowledge and skills should be such that children should have every opportunity to acquire rapidly the necessary phonic knowledge and skills to read independently”

Rose (2006), Independent review of the teaching of early reading, paragraph 86, page 28.

The model below demonstrates the mechanism for early word recognition by using phonic rules of language and the memory of known words. However, as I often observe in class, pupils can read words but are often unaware of their meaning and so cannot fully comprehend or absorb knowledge from a text.(relates to Q10)

Children tend to develop comprehension skills by first building an expansive vocabulary of words and their meanings through repeated exposure (visual or auditory) to a wide range of words. By understanding words in context with one another the reader can understand the meaning of the text.

“ Comprehension occurs as the listener builds a mental representation of the information contained within the language that a speaker is using... the listener’s general knowledge and level of cognitive development will have a bearing on the comprehension of the message. To generate an accurate mental representation... the listener has to process the language and the concepts.”

Rose (2006), Independent review of the teaching of early reading, paragraph 61, page 88

In 1998 the Searchlights Model describing reading was introduced as a way of explaining how a reader processes and comes to comprehend a text. The Searchlights model was incorporated into the National Learning Strategies framework (relates to Q3 and Q15) and designed to provide a simplified way to understand the teaching of reading. It formed the basis for much of the theory of reading which was to follow.

Rose (2006), Independent review of the teaching of early reading, paragraph 2, page 73

The model indicates that a text is read by use of four areas of knowledge which act as searchlights to illuminate the text. However, the model indicated that all searchlights were of equal use and deficiency in one area would be compensated for by ability in another. Later findings indicate that both good language understanding and accurate word recognition are required if a reader is to understand the text.

Clay's model builds on and modifies the Searchlight model by identifying the four cues required for comprehension as phonological (the sound of the oral language), syntactic (sentence order), visual (graphemes, orthography, format and layout) and semantic (text meaning) (Clay, 1985; Clay and Cazden, 1990). Clay highlights that each of these cues are necessary to facilitate reading and understanding of text. Good readers have developed a number of strategies which focus on unlocking meaning of the text whilst

poor readers have very few strategies to cope and they tend to have a lack of integration with the text.

With the aid of an increasing pool of research into the cognitive processes of reading, the ‘ Simple View of Reading’ indicates the most recent description of understanding of a text.

There are two necessary components which must be fulfilled to allow a child to read;

Word Recognition (including understanding and pronunciation of words) and Language Comprehension (including understanding sentences and texts)

The two elements are interdependent and often facilitate the other e. g. word recognition does not guarantee understanding of those words (ergo nor the text), whilst comprehension is useless without word recognition.

Understanding sentences then provides the reader with context to recognise words which follow and subsequently the meaning of the text. The two components of reading have four outcomes in this model by Gough and Tunmer 1986.

Rose (2006), Independent review of the teaching of early reading, paragraph 31, page 81

This simple view of reading helps teachers to understand where there students are on the model and what strategies need to be applied to increase their capabilities in either or both areas to help them become good readers.

To develop word recognition skills the teaching of phonics is important. Synthetic phonics is taught because our written system is alphabetic, so to be able to read you must first learn the alphabet and the single or combination of letters sounds (spoken letters' sound). Children should then learn how to (i) segment words into their component sound to enable spelling and understand the meaning of words and (ii) the complementary process of blending sounds to read words in a process known as synthesis. Success here is clearly impacted by the child's recognition and understanding of the letters of the English alphabet and their corresponding pronunciation as a sound.

It is equally important to teach and repeat high frequency words which cannot be 'sounded-out' using phonics; this allows the word to enter the sight memory word bank.

To develop language skills, the best ways are through speaking and listening activities, so that students have an opportunity to hear and speak words and understand their meaning in the context of the discussion, increasing their vocabulary and language skills.

Considering the above, the Rose review 2006 provides a number of recommendations for best practise in teaching children to read which can be categorised into 5 main area (relates to Q14, 15), as follows;

Best practice...

The national strategies framework sets out guidance for the development of children's speaking and listening skills and should be used as a guide for

best practice should be expected in the teaching of early reading and synthetic phonics. Quality teaching of phonics would enable the student to develop the ability to decode and encode which is critical to reading and writing/spelling. Phonics work should be cross-curricular using all the strands speaking, listening, reading and writing. Cross curricular phonics teaching also aids students in accumulating a greater stock of words. The teacher must be able to assess progress and react accordingly to maximise the development of each child as an individual with individual needs.

The Early Years Foundation Stage....

Parents should be encouraged to read with their child before their child enters EYFS. Phonics should be taught from the age of five and should be a multi-sensory approach which captures pupils' interests, is delivered in a motivating way by a competent pedagogue capable of reinforcing learning. Greater significance should be placed on word recognition and language comprehension as the key components of learning to read (as a development of the Searchlights model). The EYFS and the National Literacy Framework must work together to create a progressive continuous programme for delivery of phonics which is transportable throughout all years.

Intervention if a child struggles to read, including those with SEN....

If a child is experiencing reading difficulties, it is important to check whether they have a sight or hearing problem which makes learning more complex.

Provision of intervention should follow the Primary National Strategy three wave model for students with literacy difficulties. The first wave involves effective inclusion of all students with quality first teaching especially in phonics, wave 2 covers extra intervention to make sure that the student is working at age related expectations with small group intense phonics groups, wave 3 individual interventions make sure that students with extra needs are accommodated e. g. school action and school action plus. It is important to ensure that pupils are not excluded from the main learning goals and progress made during intervention sessions is maintained.

Strong leadership and management should be provided in tandem with high staff competency, in terms of subject knowledge and skills....

Head-teachers and staff should make sure that phonics is given a priority within the planning for early teaching to read; staff training should be compatible with this ethos. Staff training must make sure that the phonics programme is delivered to a high standard. To aid this, a head of literacy with specialised knowledge would be beneficial. Passing on knowledge in this way improves phonics teaching overall, is cost effective (due to a dilution of course costs) and allows a specific individual to monitor for consistency of phonics teaching.

Those who manage the school should be responsible for instilling an effective continual professional development programme for all staff. With phonics in mind they should oversee the consistency of phonics delivery and provide feedback to improve practice. Management must also monitor pupil progress

and instil teaching policy which benefits all pupils by ensuring that they are able to achieve realistic learning goals.

Furthermore, Rose suggests that initial teacher training should provide a demonstration of the need to focus on early-years phonics to bring about reading.

When observing phonics in my base school I have found that children are grouped by ability for all sessions, with smaller intense groups provided for EAL children. The planning and teaching is undertaken in line with the 'Letters and Sounds' resources in the following way (relates to Q25):

First you review and revisit the previous weeks' letters and sounds to ensure retention; sometimes the teacher will review the first 100 words using flashcards which the children race to read as many as they can in a minute.

Next a new sound is taught, the teacher models how to write the sound and explains the phoneme family (other letter combinations with the same phonetic sound).

Practise the new sound by first modelling the writing of a word using the subject sound and then instructing children to write different words which contain that sound.

Applying the sound just learned, the teacher writes a sentence (normally something funny) which pupils are asked to read and write their own if time allows. This provides an understanding of the word in context (process two of Simple View of Reading).

To bring about word recognition and comprehension - the key features of the Simple View of Reading - I have observed a number of methods in school;

Children are given reading books to take home and practise reading with parents; comprehension and reading accuracy are checked before a child is allowed to change their book. Children are also encouraged to actively use the library facility to take home an extra book they wish to read themselves. This is to encourage them to foster the attitude that being able to read brings many benefits.

Daily phonics lessons, taught according to the method described above.

Children are given spellings to learn which relate to the phonics they are learning about.

Guided reading groups are done regularly to teach the children how to decode and comprehend texts.

The children are encouraged to sound out words to find the phonemes when spelling and reading.

I have observed many sessions of phonics teaching which have been taught well by effective teachers. This has had a clear benefit to the children being taught and will allow them to become competent readers, an essential skill for success as an adult and fulfilment of the ECM goals which I should strive to satisfy for all pupils in my care. I will draw on the high quality teaching I have observed to provide such quality teaching. The simple view of reading provides a clear framework for success in teaching children to read.

Considering Gough and Tunmer's (1986) model in relation to a child's ability

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will allow me to modify my teaching to the needs of each child (relates to Q29). An on-going commitment to understanding research into the best ways for children to learn, and its effect upon best practice, will allow me to deliver teaching which caters for pupils for whom I am responsible. Unfortunately there has not been any indication from the current government regarding their opinion of and for Literacy teaching. With this in mind, I will carry on with the phonics that I have started to teach.

It is clear that I must plan Literacy sessions to include phonics lessons and build on the early learning provided by EYFS teachers. This should be undertaken in collaboration with parents as it is clear that reading from a very early age is most influential upon the child's ability to understand and grasp new knowledge i. e. a successful reader will find future learning easier. My planning and delivery must harness this ethos and the benefits of reading be highlighted to pupils. To allow pupils to gain this benefit, I must create an environment in which I can deliver content in an interesting way which captures the interest of pupils. This environment should also foster a welcoming feedback (relates to Q27) process to allow children to highlight areas where they are struggling and know that help will be provided; learning is best undertaken as a collaborative process by all involved.

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