

Systematic Synthetic Phonic Work

The remit for my 'Independent Review of the Teaching of Early Reading' (Rose, 2006) required me to make a judgement on 'what best practice should be expected in the teaching of early reading and synthetic phonics.'

For the avoidance of doubt this is what I wrote in the Review on that judgement:

'Having considered a wide range of evidence the review has concluded that the case for systematic phonic work is overwhelming and much strengthened by a synthetic approach, the key features of which are to teach beginner readers:

- *grapheme/phoneme (letter/sound) correspondences (the alphabetic principle) in a clearly defined incremental sequence*
- *to apply the highly important skill of blending (synthesising) phonemes in order, all through a word to read it*
- *to apply the skills of segmenting words into their constituent phonemes to spell*
- *that blending and segmenting are reversible processes.'*

Over the decade since the review was published there has been a growing body of research evidence on the efficacy of this approach. What is sometimes overlooked, however, is that reading and spelling are joined at the hip such that high quality, synthetic phonic work provides a strong platform for both.

More recently eminent researchers, such as Robert Slavin, have reminded us of the value of 'proven practice' and this, too, should be highlighted along with robust research.

An important message in my review was that phonics is 'essential though not sufficient' for covering all that is needed to become a fluent reader and writer capable of comprehending the meaning of text, which is the 'goal of reading', and composing comprehensible writing. Much of this is explored in the review under the 'Simple View of Reading'.

Given the importance of making sure that all children benefit fully from the best professional knowledge and practice on the teaching of reading, it is crucial for teachers to systematically apply the principles of synthetic phonic work and for schools to monitor the quality of their support for teachers in so doing.

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