

Extracts from the Final Rose Report, March 2006

33. ...It was clear from responses to the interim report that some believed its recommendations ran counter to the view that 'children learn in different ways'. These views were often expressed as 'one size does not fit all'.

34. However, all beginner readers have to come to terms with the same alphabetic principles if they are to learn to read and write. ... Moreover, leading edge practice bears no resemblance to a 'one size fits all' model of teaching and learning, nor does it promote boringly dull, rote learning of phonics.

46. ...it is generally accepted that it is harder to learn to read and write in English because the relationship between sounds and letters is more complex than in many other alphabetic languages. It is therefore crucial to teach phonic work systematically, regularly and explicitly because children are highly unlikely to work out this relationship for themselves. It cannot be left to chance, or for children to ferret out, on their own, how the alphabetic code works.

49. ...children may appear, some would say, to be 'barking at print' without fully understanding what they are reading. Although this is often leveled as a criticism of phonic work, such behaviour is usually transitional as children hone their phonic skills. Given that even skilled adult readers may find themselves 'barking at print' when they are faced at times with unfamiliar text, it is hardly surprising that children may do so in the early stages of reading.

50. ...formality, in this sense, [planning and assessment] should not be confused with the formality that some early years educators see as a threat to child development, as if planning and delivery were one and the same.

51. ...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 (synthesizing) 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.

57. ...A common feature of the best work was that boys' progress and achievement did not lag behind that of the girls: an important outcome given the generally weaker performance of boys, especially in writing.

58. The multi-sensory work showed that children generally bring to bear on the learning tasks as many of their senses as they can, rather than limit themselves to one sensory pathway. This calls into question the notion that children can be categorized by a single learning style, be it auditory, visual or kinaesthetic.

82. There is some force in the view that, as they learn to master the alphabetic code, children should be given reading material that is well within their reach in the form of 'decodable books'...Using such books as part of the phonic programme does not preclude other reading...

89. ...there is ample evidence to support the recommendation of the interim report that, for most children, it is highly worthwhile and appropriate to begin a systematic programme of phonic work by the age of five, if not before for some children, the way having been paved by related activities designed, for example, to build phonological awareness.

92. The important point is that practitioners and teachers need to be willing, and have the wherewithal, to test the boundaries of children's readiness for systematic phonic work.

99. An early start on systematic phonic work is especially important for those children who do not have the advantages of strong support for literacy at home...

104. Important, too, is the boost to children's confidence, self-belief and attitudes to reading that is apparent when early phonic work is taught successfully within a language-rich curriculum...

115. ...However, the searchlights model does not best reflect how a beginner reader progresses to become a skilled reader.

118. These issues were raised by the summary evaluation of the first four years of the NLS [2002] when Ofsted concluded:

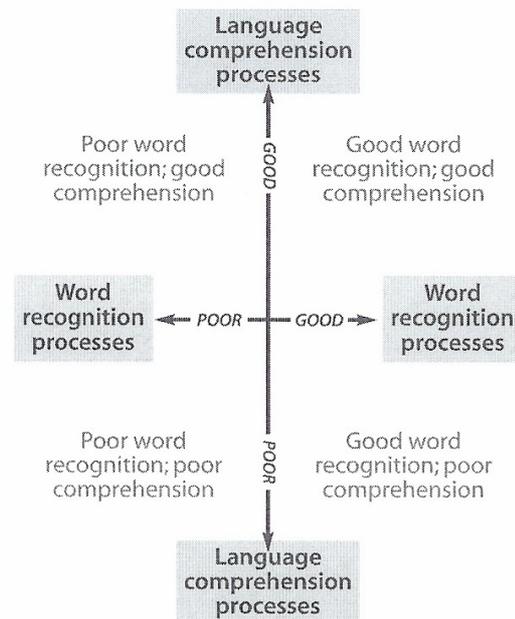
"The 'searchlights' model proposed in the framework has not been effective enough in terms of illustrating where the intensity of the 'searchlights' should fall at the different stages of learning to read. While the full range of strategies is used by fluent readers, beginning readers need to learn how to decode effortlessly, using their knowledge of letter-sound correspondences and the skills of blending the sounds together. The importance of these crucial skills and the knowledge has not been communicated clearly enough to teachers. The result has been an approach to word-level work which diffuses teaching at the earliest stages, rather than concentrating it on phonics."

125. Each dimension and its development [of the concepts of word reading and language comprehension] must be understood by practitioners and teachers. They need to be brought up to date with research and development of word recognition skills...

130. Apart from teaching phonic work systematically and discretely for short periods of time, the best practice also took advantage of opportunities to reinforce aspects of phonic knowledge and skills throughout the curriculum. The most obvious examples of this were when teachers encouraged children to apply their developing decoding and encoding skills to the reading and writing of fiction and non-fiction in work across the curriculum...

228. ...The lessons judged by HMI to be at least good (and, occasionally, outstanding) were characterized by:

- clear objectives...
- consolidation and revision of previously taught phonic knowledge and skills
- multi-sensory approaches to support learning...
- clearly directed questioning, very good assessment, feedback and praise
- a good, often, brisk, pace to the teaching and learning, unhindered by extraneous activities which often slow the pace of the lesson and waste valuable lesson time
- efficient organisation and management...
- opportunities for children to work in pairs...
- adults' excellent knowledge of the phonic content to be taught and their skills in teaching it, including clear and precise pronunciation of the phonemes...



Extracts selected and edited by Debbie Hepplewhite, May 06, for training purposes.

See www.syntheticphonics.com for further information and practical resources for assessment and teaching.

The searchlights model

113. ...phonic work is a body of knowledge, skills and understanding that quite simply has to be taught and learned.

116. ...skilled readers do not rely upon strategies to read words, as they have already developed the skill of word recognition [*through a phonic route*].

They may use knowledge of context and grammar, which are conceived within the searchlight model, to assist their understanding of the **text** but, crucially, they would still be able to decode the words if all contextual and grammatical prompts were removed.

Therefore, a model of reading which encourages switching between various searchlight strategies, particularly when phonic work is regarded as only one such strategy, all of equal worth, risks paying insufficient attention to the critical skills of word recognition which must first be secured by beginner readers.

117. ...if beginner readers, for example, are encouraged to infer from the pictures the word they have to decode this may lead to their not realising that they need to focus on the printed word. They may, therefore, not use their developing phonic knowledge. It may also lead to diluting the focused phonics teaching that is necessary for securing accurate word reading.

Thus, where beginner readers are taught habitually to infer the word they need from pictures they are far less likely to apply their developing phonic knowledge and skills to print.

During the course of the review, several examples were seen of beginners being encouraged to infer from the pictures the word they did not immediately recognise from the text. This was done well before they had sufficient time to decode the word and, if necessary, check, adjust and re-try after their first attempt.

Children's reading

235. As well as observing teaching, HMI judged how well the teaching fostered children's confidence in applying the knowledge and skills they had been taught when they were reading independently.

236. Children who had been taught, at an early stage, to blend the sounds in words were able to apply their phonic knowledge to tackle words they had not seen before. In this example, a child in Year 1 with English as an additional language read a book from a commercial scheme. HMI wrote:

She reads at a steady if not entirely fluent pace. She blends sounds confidently and is not put off by words which would be very challenging for many pupils in the first half-term of Year 1. She reads with little hesitation and without miscues: 'Mum freaked out at first but she got me one' and 'We let the sheep sleep in the kitchen'. She is unafraid of tackling fairly complex words she has not seen before. She also has good knowledge of phonically irregular words that she can read on sight.

237. In contrast, in the schools which did not emphasise sufficiently the skills of blending sounds, children were not able to apply the phonic knowledge they had learnt. They knew the individual letter-sound correspondences, but were not able to sound these out in words and then blend them together to read. In this example, an average-attaining boy in Year 1, with English as his first language, attempted to read his 'reading book' from a commercial scheme. HMI wrote:

This pupil knows the letter-sound correspondences for most of the 26 letters of the alphabet, but he reads by a whole word method. Occasionally he tries to use his phonic knowledge too, but he rushes at words, using his knowledge of the first letter only. For example, he reads 'was' instead of 'went'. At times he leaves words out and continues from memory without self-correcting, to the extent that at one point he reads 'it' for 'everyone'. He does not know vowel digraphs; when asked what sound 'oo' makes in 'pool', he says 'o', even though he has just read 'pool' correctly (presumably by using the pictures or the context).

Extracts selected to highlight the necessity of teaching the simple and complex alphabetic codes thoroughly and the skill of blending (synthesising) as the main strategy to decode words. See also the Reading Reform Foundation website www.rrf.org.uk and www.dyslexics.org.uk for RRF responses and the history of the reading debate.