

Module Three:

The Importance of 'Objective Assessment' and 'Equality of Conditions' for Phonics Provision

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Module Three: Part 1

a) Responses and findings arising from the statutory Year One Phonics Screening Check in England

To appreciate that word-level reading assessment should take place prior to *formal* assessment of reading comprehension of text-level material

Module Three: Part 1 continued

a) Responses and findings arising from the statutory Year One Phonics Screening Check in England

To be aware that even in England there is a significant divide in professional understanding, attitudes and beliefs about reading instruction and the role and findings of national assessment – as illustrated by the range of responses to the Year One Phonics Screening Check (introduced in England in 2012 by the Department for Education)

Module Three: Part 1 continued

a) Responses and findings arising from the statutory Year One Phonics Screening Check in England

To consider whether any objections to national assessment of reading are warranted

Module Three: Part 1 continued

b) Obtaining results from national information

To reflect on why it is important to be informed by large-scale snapshot testing of reading for national purposes
To consider what information is required, and why, and how best to collect that information
To understand the difference between objective testing and subjective assessment and when each is most fit-for-purpose

Module Three: Part 1 continued

b) Obtaining results from national information

To consider the advantages and limitations of national objective testing
To identify four possible levels of accountability and to examine whether the *Year One Phonics Screening Check* has been presented clearly enough as a multi-faceted tool for accountability on all levels

Module Three: Part 1 continued

c) No shared professional understanding

To understand why and how the findings of the *Year One Phonics Screening Check* and subsequent NFER surveys, commissioned by the Department for Education, reveal no *shared professional understanding* about reading instruction or interpreting children's results

Phonics and the detractors

- This module on assessment and equality of conditions is set in the context of England to illustrate some of the underlying attitudes towards phonics and towards government - as frequently highlighted in the media.
- England's scenario, however, reflects a wider picture of historic and current attitudes towards phonics provision and political intervention in English-speaking countries.

2012 Year One Phonics Screening Check

- DfE statutory phonics screening check
20 real words & 20 pseudo-words introduced in England, June 2012:
"The check focuses solely on decoding using phonics and confirms whether children have reached the expected standard by the end of Year 1, identifying children who need additional support from their school to catch up."

2012 Year One Phonics Screening Check

Many people and organisations object

- No media coverage for people or organisations in support of the check
- No critical analysis of advantages and disadvantages in their entirety

Phonics is flawed, don't you agree?

Section: letters (TES) (A Headteacher, August 2012)

" ... If it is true that the new curriculum will put into statute that children must be taught to read through phonics, I can see no option but to leave the profession I have lived and loved for 30 years because it goes against my principles and flies in the face of all my experience. I believe that the phonics test is flawed and is the result of people with their own agenda somehow having the government's ear ..."

Phonics is flawed, don't you agree?

"...it goes against my principles..."

It can be good to be principled – but principles about what exactly?

"...flies in the face of all my experience..."

But what **is** this person's experience – the letter suggests that it isn't SSP implemented fully. What has this person studied of the research and classroom findings?

"I believe that the phonics test is flawed."

In what way? A description would allow a response to the statement. **Is the phonics check flawed?**

2012 Year One Phonics Screening Check

Validity and sensitivity of the phonics screening check: implications for practice

Published in the *Journal of Research in Reading* (UKLA, May 2014)

Duff, Mengoni, Bailey and Snowling investigate ...

"... whether the check is a valid measure of phonic skill and is sensitive in identifying children at risk of reading difficulties"

2012 Year One Phonics Screening Check

What were the findings?

"The check was strongly correlated with other literacy skills and was sensitive in identifying at-risk readers. So too were teacher judgements of phonics."

2012 Year One Phonics Screening Check

Teacher judgements:

"With respect to teacher judgements of phonic skill, the number of children distributed across each phase was as follows: Phase 1 = 2, Phase 2 = 15, Phase 3 = 28, Phase 4 = 88, Phase 5 = 111 and Phase 6 = 47."

Note: Phases 2, 3 and 4 fall within a 'basic' code which might typically be expected as Reception content – not the end of Year One. Thus, 133 at Rec level, 158 at Year One+ level is **possibly a sign of less effective teaching from the 'representative' schools.**

2012 Year One Phonics Screening Check

Other ways to consider the information:

Is there any significance that **45%** of the children were assessed to be at L & S 'phases' 1 to 4 at the end of Year One (the 'simple code' coverage of pre-school Reception level)?

How do the York findings compare with the phonics results of other schools of similar intake **nationally**?

Do the results reflect the children's potential or the nature/content/effectiveness of the local teaching?

Does it matter? Discuss or reflect

2012 Year One Phonics Screening Check

Duff, Mengoni, Bailey and Snowling state:

"A survey of nearly 3000 teachers – conducted after the administration of the check but before its results – reported that 87% of respondents did not agree with the statutory implementation of the check and thought it should be discontinued (ATL/NAHT/NUT, 2012)"

"...also consider whether, given our findings, if [the check] is necessary"

2012 Year One Phonics Screening Check

"...also consider whether, given our findings, if [the check] is necessary" ...

Whilst the Year One phonics screening check may generally correlate with teacher assessments and standardised tests for identifying at-risk children, if teaching is potentially less effective, do more children flag up as at-risk, or **RESULT** in being more at-risk, in comparison with other schools providing very effective phonics teaching?

2012 Year One Phonics Screening Check

Note that these academics add their voice to the phonics screening check **detractors** whilst ignoring the issue of year-on-year **improvements** in children's national decoding results **since the introduction of the check**: 2011 pilot: **32%**, 2012 **58%**, 2013 **69%**, 2014 **74%**

Evaluation of the Year One Phonics Screening Check

- List the **various advantages and disadvantages** of the national Year One phonics screening check
- Schools not in England and not subject to the check: **Consider using it anyway** when it is provided online (free)!

Obtaining results for national information

What **type** of testing is **most fit-for-purpose** for a large scale snapshot of initial reading instruction ?

Obtaining results for national information

Identify **what information is needed, and why, and how best to collect that information**:



Objective: 'fair test'

- *same test
- *same conditions
- *same timing
- *snapshot
- *easy to repeat

Subjective: 'personal'

- *teacher assessment
- *very detailed
- *personal to the learner
- *requires 'moderation' to be seen to be 'fair'

Obtaining results for national information

- **Objective** – same test and same conditions (e.g. **simple word level**)
- **Simple to administer**
- **'Understood'** as a simple overview

Obtaining results for professional development

Accountability on four levels:

1. **Government**
2. **Local (or Education) Authority**
3. **School**
4. **Teacher**

Obtaining results for professional development

Accountability for whom?

Year One phonics screening check in England – has not been presented clearly enough as an accountability tool for the **three higher levels** – it has been presented mainly on the basis that it **informs individual teachers in their phonics assessment of their pupils**

Obtaining results for professional development

DfE: Guide to the collection of the Phonics Screening Check (PSC) data:

“The Phonics Screening Check data collection will provide information at school level via RAISEonline for schools to analyse their own performance; and at national and Local Authority level to allow schools to benchmark their children’s performance. National results will also be used to track standards over time.”

Obtaining results for professional development

Enables comparisons:

- national snapshot noting like-settings and groups
- trends from different programmes and practices
- looking at results ‘over time’

Enables Continuing Professional Development:

- a ‘**common understanding**’ of the **same test** facilitates shared professional conversation about the findings – from the **individual pupils’ results** to the **bigger picture**

Comments about testing

Teachers’ unions and teachers **protest about objective national testing** but their objections are not necessarily well-founded if **the tests are fit for purpose**

Test structures can remain the same, but the detailed content can change each year – **to avoid or reduce ‘teaching to the test’**

Teacher assessment is **subjective** and when used for **macro-scale snapshots** leads to the need for **‘moderation’**
Local Authority moderation: **unwieldy, expensive in time and money and fraught with potential disagreements**

Comments about testing

Is the Year One phonics screening check ‘fit for purpose’?

Validity and sensitivity of the phonics screening check: implications for practice (Duff, Mengoni, Bailey, Snowling, 2014):

‘We have shown that the new phonics screening check is a valid measure of phonic skills and is sensitive to identifying children at risk of reading difficulties. Its slight tendency to overestimate the prevalence of at-risk readers (as compared with standardised tests of reading accuracy and fluency) is arguably a favourable property for a screening instrument. We agree that early rigorous assessment of phonic skills is important for the timely identification of word reading difficulties.’

Comments about testing

An understanding of prevailing factors is always required:

e.g. Sheffield Hallam University’s **review of England’s Year One phonics screening pilot** revealed that **nearly three-quarters of the teachers still used ‘Searchlights’ multi-cueing reading strategies** contrary to guidance. This is despite official rejection of the ‘Searchlights’ model and the adoption of the ‘Simple View of Reading’ (since the Rose Final Report 2006)
NFER report May 2014, revealed a similar scenario.

Comments about testing

An understanding of prevailing factors is always required:

e.g. The 2012 & 2013 Year One phonics screening check **revealed surprises for some teachers**. Pupils who were thought to be some of the “**better readers**” did not decode the pseudo words accurately. **Why might this be the case?**

Discuss or reflect

Comments about testing

There is a **divide** in professional ‘**understanding**’:

- *Some teachers think this shows that the test is not well-designed because able readers will want to turn the pseudo-words into real words – ‘*to make sense of them*’.
- *The children have **already been told, however**, that these are nonsense-words. Their results indicate that they did not pay full attention to the graphemes from left to right of the words **or** could not blend the sounds efficiently enough.
- *Able readers should readily and accurately be able to decode simple words in a list **whether they are real words or pseudo words**.

Comments about testing

Do you think that children described by their teachers as ‘**able readers**’ should be able to decode pseudo words accurately such as these from the 2013 Year One phonics screening check?

fot keb gan ulp poth shan
veen quorg drap flarm lect
voisk quigh herks jorb zale
bluns skarld splot strabe

Note: The schools’ phonics programmes should have introduced the letter/s-sound correspondences included in these words.

Comments about testing

Why is it considered to be fair to use pseudo words for assessment?

Why do you think learners need to be able to read pseudo words accurately?

Comments about testing

See: Debbie Hepplewhite’s direct response to David Reedy’s suggestions expressed in the ‘*Teach Primary*’ magazine, April 2013: ‘*The Great Debate – Is it time to ditch the Y1 Phonics Screening Test?*’:

“It is apparent that the teaching profession in England does not share a common understanding of the role of phonics in the teaching of reading or assessing reading. I consider that this is such an important issue, I am responding directly to the points raised by David Reedy in his section of the ‘debate’ in the ‘Teach Primary’ magazine where both of us contributed a different perspective...”

Comments about testing

- *The **existence** of the Year One phonics screening check has **enabled teachers to discuss the outcomes because everyone has used the same test**.
- *The discussions themselves reveal ‘**understanding**’ (or ‘**misunderstanding**’) which then contributes to ongoing professional development.

This is **WORK IN PROGRESS** for us all.

Comments about testing

*Results from The British School of Costa Rica:
English is the second language, SSP is the teaching approach:

"In November 2013, we decided to try the phonics screening with our Early Years 2 students (end of year 1)...we hired a UK teacher who was not working at the school...out of the 69 children only 8 did not get the 32 points [88%]. We were extremely proud of both our teachers and students."

[England, June 2013, national average result: 69%]

Phonics screening check evaluation NFER Research report, DfE May 2014

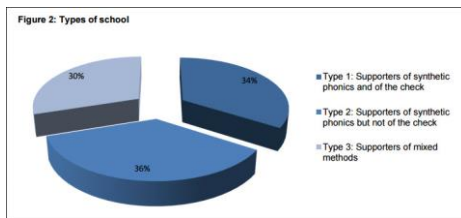
National Foundation for Educational Research:

Types of schools:

- **Type 1 (34% of sample):** Supporters of synthetic phonics and of the check
- **Type 2 (36% of sample):** Supporters of synthetic phonics but not of the check
- **Type 3 (30% of sample):** Supporters of mixed methods

Phonics screening check evaluation NFER Research report, DfE May 2014

Page 61:



Phonics screening check evaluation NFER Research report, DfE May 2014

HOWEVER p.61:

- **Type 1 (34% of sample): 80% of respondents** supported *"teaching of a variety of methods for decoding"*
- **Type 2 (36% of sample): 93% of respondents** *"support a variety of methods of decoding"*
- **Type 3 (30% of sample): 97% of respondents** teach *"phonics alongside other cueing strategies, rather than 'first and fast'"*

Phonics screening check evaluation NFER Research report, DfE May 2014

These findings in the NFER report suggest that there may only be a small percentage of teachers who pay **full** attention to the research and to the **detail** of official guidance.

Phonics screening check evaluation NFER Research report, DfE May 2014

How different are the three types of schools in reality when:

- **All schools probably teach systematic synthetic phonics to an extent**
- **We do not have accurate information about which teachers in all 3 types of schools still rely on, or promote, multi-cueing guessing strategies**

National results in England

- NFER report implies that teaching in England is not necessarily **based on** high-quality, content-rich, Systematic Synthetic Phonics:
- “...**more often than not the core programme used was Letters and Sounds**” page 8

Note: 1) Letters and Sounds requires equipping and supplementing – incomplete & resourceless
2) Many teachers not following the underpinning SSP guidance – explicitly: **no multi-cueing strategies**

Dr Grant’s paper, May 2014

Longitudinal Study from Reception to Year 2 (2010-2013) and Summary of an earlier Longitudinal Study from Reception to Year 6 (1997-2004)

The Effects of a Systematic Synthetic Phonics Programme on Reading, Writing and Spelling - with whole classes of children who started with the programme for first-time teaching in Reception (aged four to five years) and received small group teaching with the same programme for catch-up as required

Dr. Marlynne Grant
Chartered and Registered Educational Psychologist

Dr Grant’s paper, May 2014

Dr Grant writes in her report – page 2:

‘In spite of the government initiatives to raise literacy standards through synthetic phonics, the ... NFER ... reported the following evaluation findings in 2013 and 2014 about the teaching of phonics and the attitudes towards phonics in schools. There is a “wide misunderstanding of the term ‘systematic synthetic phonics’”.’

Dr Grant’s paper, May 2014

continued...

‘About 90% of literacy coordinators “feel that a variety of different methods should be used to teach children to decode words”. “Many schools believe that a phonics approach to teaching reading should be used alongside other methods”. “Teachers in general have not yet fully adopted” DfE recommended phonics practices.’

Dr Grant’s paper, May 2014

continued... *‘In other words, despite the government initiatives for schools in England, the situation has still not been achieved in which all children are receiving the best start to their literacy. Nor are all struggling learners receiving the most effective teaching for intervention. The implications are that literacy standards may not be raised as expected and that **some vulnerable children may continue to struggle to learn to read.**’*