

An evaluation by the Department for Education (England)
of *Debbie Hepplewhite's Synthetic Phonics Training* one-day event for the
Oxford Reading Tree Floppy's Phonics Sounds and Letters programme

The following unabridged report is based on a one-day observation by a Phonics and
Early Reading Consultant for the DfE.

For more information on Debbie Hepplewhite's Synthetic Phonics Training events:
www.syntheticphonicstraining.com

| How the training conforms to the DfE CORE and TRAINING criteria | |
|--|--|
| Criteria | Evaluator's comments |
| <p>The training promotes high quality systematic synthetic phonic work as the prime approach to decoding print i.e. a phonics 'first and fast' approach.</p> | <p>The training strongly and unequivocally promoted systematic synthetic phonics as the prime approach to be used when decoding text. It also emphasised that this approach should be delivered in the context of a rich language curriculum. The model of the 'simple view of reading' was very clearly explained. Whilst the emphasis of most of the training was, appropriately, on teaching children to decode phonically, due acknowledgement was paid to the equally important aspect of comprehension. It was made clear that, through effective systematic synthetic phonics teaching, balanced by extensive language and comprehension development, young children will quickly achieve accurate, speedy and effortless reading and be in a position to carry this through into strong spelling and writing. Alternative, unhelpful reading strategies, such as those promoted in the earlier 'searchlights' approach to reading, were also discussed, and the reasons for their ineffectiveness clarified. A 'book by book' approach was strongly discouraged and reasons why reading and spelling should emphatically not be trusted to 'pot luck' were persuasively promoted.</p> <p>The role of phonics in learning to read was very helpfully related to the way fully literate adults continue to draw on phonics for crucial aspects of reading and writing.</p> |
| <p>The training promotes the expectation that children start learning phonic knowledge and skills using a systematic, synthetic programme by the age of five , with the expectation that they will be fluent readers having secured word recognition skills by the end of Key Stage 1.</p> | <p>These expectations are made very clear in the training which continually stressed the importance of children starting systematic synthetic phonics early, progressing quickly and becoming efficient, effective and enthusiastic readers by or before the age of seven.</p> <p>A systematic programme for achieving this, based around 'Floppy's Phonics' and supported by 'Phonics International', was fully explained and modelled during the training.</p> |

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>The materials and approach promoted are designed for teaching discrete, daily sessions, progressing from simple to more complex phonic knowledge and skills and covering the major grapheme/phoneme correspondences.</p> | <p>The training, at the request of the school, related directly to the 'Floppy's Phonics' programme, which provides detailed outlines for discrete daily lessons covering a full progression through all stages of phonics learning. Effective, fast-paced delivery of these was clearly and engagingly promoted by the trainer. <i>However, more emphasis could beneficially have been placed on the application of the phonics skills learned to the children's reading outside the dedicated daily phonics lesson.</i></p> |
| <p>The training demonstrates how children's progress is assessed.</p> | <p>Assessment was clearly and strongly addressed in the training. Regular assessment was recommended and several practical models/materials to support this were shown and discussed.</p> <p>The Year One Phonics Screening check was briefly discussed in a constructive and supportive way.</p> |
| <p>A multi-sensory approach is promoted so that children learn variously from simultaneous visual, auditory and kinaesthetic activities which are designed to secure essential phonic knowledge and skills.</p> | <p>The Floppy's Phonics programme introduced and demonstrated in the training constantly uses auditory, visual and kinaesthetic activity when introducing, revising and applying the sounds.</p> <p>It was, however, also very helpfully stressed that valuable time should not be spent on 'displacement' activities that do not strongly contribute to the learning of phonics and the development of reading.</p> |
| <p>Training demonstrates that phonemes should be blended, in order, from left to right, 'all through the word' for reading.</p> | <p>The crucial importance of blending and segmenting was explained and their importance reinforced throughout the training.</p> |
| <p>Training demonstrates how words can be segmented into their constituent phonemes for spelling and that this is the reverse of blending phonemes to read words.</p> | <p>These related and reversible processes are introduced and practised in every lesson of the 'Floppy's Phonics' programme from the very early stages. This sequence was fully explained and modelled by the trainer.</p> |
| <p>Training demonstrates how children should apply phonic knowledge and skills as their first approach to reading even if a word is not completely regular.</p> | <p>A helpful slide towards the end of 'Part One' of the training does explain how, after identifying known sounds, children should be helped to decode the 'tricky' part of the word so that they can then read the whole word by building it phonically. <i>However this aspect was, on this occasion, rather cursorily dealt with and it would have been helpful to place more emphasis on it, especially as many teachers may currently be in the habit of teaching 'tricky' words as whole-word 'sight vocabulary' rather than applying systematic synthetic phonics principles.</i></p> |
| <p>Training promotes that children are taught high frequency words that do not conform completely to grapheme/phoneme correspondence rules.</p> | <p>Very supportive advice was given on how to help children understand the spelling of their own names, especially</p> |

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Training promotes fidelity to the teaching framework for the duration of the programme, to ensure that these irregular words are fully learnt.</p> | <p>where those names contain GPCs not yet learned in the programme.</p> |
| <p>Training promotes that as pupils move through the early stages of acquiring phonics, they are invited to practise by reading texts which are entirely decodable for them, so that they experience success and learn to rely on phonemic strategies.</p> | <p>The training did make appropriate and helpful reference to decodable texts and the slides and handbook refer teachers to the decodable readers that directly support the 'Floppy's Phonics' scheme.</p> <p><i>However, overall, the training did not sufficiently promote or explain the need to use entirely decodable text as children's early reading material beyond the discrete phonics lesson - that is in both their individual and group/guided reading.</i></p> <p><i>In order more fully to meet this criterion, more training time needs to be allowed for trainees to explore this aspect together with materials available to support it.</i></p> |
| <p>Training relates directly and wholly to the use of materials which meet the phonics 'Core Criteria'</p> <p>OR</p> <p>Training is generic; applicable to any of the programmes that meet the phonics core criteria.</p> | <p>The training related principally to 'Floppy's Phonics' with secondary reference to 'Phonics International', both programmes evaluated as fully meeting the core criteria.</p> |
| <p>Trainers have relevant experience of teaching children to read.</p> | <p>The trainer has extensive relevant teaching experience.</p> |
| <p>Training takes account of the trainees' existing knowledge and experience.</p> | <p>This is a full training programme and properly did not assume prior knowledge, although appropriate deference was always paid to the trainees' professional status and experience.</p> |

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Training secures teachers' knowledge and understanding of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - all the basic phonemes of commonly used English words (normally accepted as around 44 in number) - all the main grapheme representations of each of these phonemes as used in written English - how phonemes should be blended, in order, from left to right, 'all through the word' for reading - how words can be segmented into their constituent phonemes for spelling and that this is the reverse of blending phonemes to read words. | <p>Within the limits of the available time, teachers were very well briefed in understanding the phonic code at their own level, as well as learning how to teach it effectively. Good modelling was provided and practice given in identifying and enunciating the sounds correctly and in blending and segmenting.</p> <p>A helpful booklet of hand-outs was also provided to reinforce this learning and reference made to a very supportive handbook and charts from both programmes</p> <p>Before mastery is achieved, however, some trainees will need to practise further, hopefully with systems set up in the school to support this.</p> |
| <p>Teachers are equipped effectively to use the materials promoted to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - achieve each and all of the outcomes implied in the Annex A Criteria - use, adapt or supplement the materials to support children who begin to fall behind the expected learning schedule - Deliver them in an effective and engaging way | <p>There is every reason to think that schools that make the necessary commitment to this training, and follow it through assiduously, will be in a position to fully achieve the required outcomes and thus set and achieve the highest standards for their young children.</p> |

General comments:

This is excellent training. It gives clear, strong messages, fully supported with all the information, advice and modelling of practice needed to help teachers along the road to effective delivery of systematic synthetic phonics. It is presented with the expertise and conviction that come from substantial experience of effective practice. It meets all but two of the criteria very well indeed and is prevented from full compliance only by failing sufficiently to stress the importance to systematic synthetic phonics of learning 'tricky' words and of early readers practising with entirely decodable texts. Hopefully, this can easily and quickly be remedied.

The training visited fully met all but two of the agreed criteria. The remaining two were partially met. It therefore can be said to have met the criteria overall.

19.11.12