Live Webinar 1 – Monday 1st February 2021

Theme: **Matched Texts**

Original Tweet: What issues arise from the strong promotion, and pressure from inspection, of cumulative, decodable ‘matched texts’?

Is the promotion of ‘matched texts’ presenting as too purist and is it too purist?

**The crux of the matter**: Do people share a common understanding about the notion of ‘matched texts’, what these can look like, and the different ways they can support teaching and children’s learning?

Questions (in red) submitted by people registering for the live webinar:

How damaging is it to allow children to guess-read at the same time as being taught Letters and Sounds?

Allowing children to guess-read, even by default, is potentially very damaging. Part of the problem is giving the multi-cueing word-guessing ‘range of reading strategies’ legitimacy for actual *teaching* purposes, and for *wrongly guiding children’s reading* when we are asking them to read aloud books *independently* (all by themselves but with an adult audience). Research shows us that multi-cueing reading strategies when these amount to word-guessing from picture cues, initial letter cues, context cues often lead to the unknown printed word guessed *incorrectly*; the children take their eyes off the printed word instead of studying it and re-trying to decode; if they’re weak readers ‘reading on’ to ‘guess what you think the word might be’ is frequently ineffective anyway; if the wrong word is guessed, this skews meaning; phonics application is undermined; the ultimate ‘reading profile’ of the child is affected possibly for the long-term as a *guessing and word-skipping profile*.

Note: It is possible to gain the gist of a text (the meaning) with word-skipping (the unknown printed words) but *spoken* *vocabular*y cannot be increased of the new words if the reader skips them silently and does not give them at least an approximate pronunciation.

I think children need these, but not at the expense of giving them books for sharing with an adult.

This is largely a misunderstanding, no one has ever suggested in any way that decodable ‘matched texts’ for children is at the expense of sharing books with an adult. However, this is an issue for reading material going home. It could be that the range of reading material going home – some intended for ‘sharing with an adult’ - is diminished or stopped. This would be an undesirable consequence of teachers providing matched texts and *no other reading material* and this could well be happening in many schools. The way to address this is to talk to parents and carers about the need to share books with children (with guidance on developing vocabulary and language comprehension around the books’ themes), but also consider clear labelling about how the books are intended to be used within the home. This could be through education, labelling the books accordingly, or the best idea is for the school to have a stock of bookmarks to be used advisedly per child, for example: – ‘Read to me’, ‘Share this book with me’, ‘I can have a go at reading this book – help me where needed’. Advise parents not to tell their children to ‘guess the word’ and, instead, to help them read the word and simply tell them the word if necessary.

My main concern is the cost involved in having to replace existing reading scheme.

Don’t replace existing books without professional reflection on whether they are worth keeping for different uses and users. Could they be useful in school for specific learning intentions (for example: group reading, guided reading, specific topic content, enjoying the love of poetry or story, discussing different genres, supporting writing – character development, analysis of the book – the authors’ intent)?

Are they useful for some children and not others – slower readers, more able readers, language comprehension, vocabulary enrichment – in school, or at home?

If the existing reading books are already phonics-based, organise them to fit in with the schools’ phonics programme and ‘order’ of introducing the letter/s-sound correspondences. If necessary, the order of the existing reading books can ‘lag behind’ the order of the phonics programme – especially important for weaker readers and for home reading (when children and adults are tired – reading should not be overly challenging at home). Sort the phonics-based books into reading baskets labelled with the ‘order’ of introducing the school’s phonics programme in chunks of the code.

Promote ‘incidental’ phonics teaching for occasional letter/s-sound correspondences in the existing phonics series that has not been taught as yet – some children will be ahead of others anyway in many cases – so choose books advisedly for children as individuals.

Does the school’s phonics programme provide matched reading books as part of the actual core phonics programme? In this case use those books well as per the guidance of the programme and regard other reading material as supplementary to enrich children’s practice and reading experience. Again, as above, organise enrichment books sensibly, perhaps to lag behind the main phonics programme for example, and to enable wider reading practice at the same level of code.

This means that if a school has several series of decodable reading books, more breadth of reading can be provided beyond the content and books of the phonics programme.

If the school’s phonics programme has ‘plain’ matched texts for reading, writing and spelling purposes, the provision has already ensured the thorough use of ‘matched texts’ as part of the phonics *teaching and learning cycle*, and reading books become a complementary bonus to the programme. As above, organise sensibly as per the school’s teaching/learning intentions and for home reading – as required or preferred.

Interested in thoughts about book banding and reading schemes.

Book Banding was originally based on predictable and repetitive texts and not on cumulative, decodable ‘matched’ texts. If your school has a wealth of reading material, consider doing a collective ‘sort’ of it all in baskets labelled with the order of the letters/s-sound correspondences according to the main phonics programme. If you have good books that are really not suitable for independent reading, what about supported and guided reading in the class context (as above, for example according to topics in the wider curriculum, poetry anthologies, traditional tales and so on). The issue is to clearly identify which books are good for what – whether in school, or at home, or in school then at home.

In other words, regardless of book banding and colour coding, organise *beginners’* reading material according to the phonics alphabetic code introduction. With great phonics provision, however, most children should soon be able to read ambitiously and even self-teach – so don’t be in haste to throw everything out and demonise books without good reflection.

If some reading series offer *no real worth for teaching and learning intentions*, cut them up for art or use them to model how to illustrate children’s own writing – that is, supporting children’s drawing capability.

How to find appropriate texts for appropriate ability levels? Is there a way of working out the level?

Assess this according to the child’s ability and capacity to read. Books also need to be age-appropriate – so some children may well be able to read more challenging texts but that’s not always best for the child and often more challenging texts technically are not age-appropriate for young precocious readers. Sometimes it’s an idea to provide a child with different levels of challenge for their reading material – an easier one and a more difficult one (more ambitious vocabulary, smaller font, far more pages). As children really do become ‘readers’ in the full sense, they can read more broadly – but from the school’s perspective, organise the breadth of these books by year – so it doesn’t get overly complicated. Even if a Year 3 child can read Year 5 books, ensure there is plenty of rich reading for the Year 3 child in the Year 3 stock of books rather than dip into the Year 5 books. In any event, this means teachers and children in the same year can talk around the same books and share their responses to the content.

If Year 5 children are struggling to read the variety of books for Year 5, ask a couple of things: Is there a wide enough variety of books to cater for the range of reading capacity amongst the Year 5 children? Are the teachers teaching reading well enough for all the children – what is the general standard in Year 5? Consider self-esteem – if some children in Year 5 are weak readers, don’t ask them to fetch books from the Year 3 store of books! Instead, make sure you provide simpler books in the Year 5 selection.

I need more characters! Multi-cueing books are too difficult and too easy at the same time.

Books designed for multi-cueing strategies are wide and varied in their content. Sometimes it is really obvious that they need to go in the bin, so bin them (or use them for cutting up). Others may be useful in different ways and if supported by the adult – not for asking children to read them aloud ‘*independently*’. It is the reading *independently* that is central to the damage of multi-cueing word guessing, whether via direct teaching or causing multi-cueing by default (that is, the child has to guess because the child is not equipped to decode the words via applying the code and blending route).

As above, don’t avoid providing reading books from several publishers – don’t feel pushed into just one publisher with the identical ‘order’ of introducing letter/s-sound correspondences of the core phonics programme. On the contrary, variety is good – just use sensibly and be brave and professional if you face criticism from advisors and/or inspectors. Be clear in your use of your books – for *what purpose* (teaching/learning intentions), for *whom* (which children for what purpose), for *where* (in school, at home, both), and *when* (what point in teaching reading, in the wider curriculum, in the evening for practice and enrichment).

Extending book band readers, how can we deepen year 2 readers rather than just push them through the levels.

As above, possibly identify a stock of books per Year band, and have plenty of books for free choice and for the planned curriculum, and for strugglers, decodable reading material if necessary to enable them to build fluency and confidence. Schools can have books designed to be read ‘in order’ (levels, banding, matched phonics texts) as well as books that are just great books. There is no reason why the levelled books cannot be provided along with any other books – they’re all just ‘books’ when all said and done. Key is that the school’s organisation around books is manageable, varied and rationalised – and all staff members are trained in phonics provision and have a good understanding of the *Simple View of Reading* (Gough and Tunmer, 1986, and adopted in England since the Rose Review in 2006) and the dangers of multi-cueing word-guessing to help them reflect on the provision of their books and their range of purposes.

Concerns around how best to match text to children as they get older.

As above.

How fluently should we expect children to read decodable texts?

Very – if they get sufficiently good phonics provision with matched plain texts and/or reading books, per every correspondence introduced, with plenty of time for practice and revision. This is another topic, though, *looking at the pace of introducing the letter/s-sound correspondences*, *how much time* is devoted to every child getting sufficient application and practice of matched texts (books and plain texts) – so this dips into the topic of *reflecting on the realities of phonics provision* and further reading practice. Many children can be good readers of more-or-less matched texts by the end of Reception/Primary 1 and free readers by the end of Year 1/Primary 2.

Transition from passing Y1 Phonics Screening Check to whole Y2 comprehension!!

There isn’t a transition from phonics to comprehension. Even at the earliest stages of a phonics programme – for word to text level – children should be able to comprehend words and texts they’ve decoded if they understood them if spoken. The significant transition is the point at which the child can take off and more or less manage any age-appropriate reading material that is beyond the planned phonics teaching (for example, the child can *modify pronunciations* on decoding to discern the real target words) – supported by the child’s general level of comprehension. As adults (parents/carers/teaching professionals), we should always have developed children’s comprehension of types of books, authorial intent, the plot, type of book, and so on) – this isn’t a transition. The notion of transition from phonics for beginners and comprehension is, arguably, a flawed notion that even some phonics proponents promote. ‘You learn to read then you read to learn’. You should be developing language comprehension, knowledge and understanding of the world, empathy for others, implied concepts, from the outset (as part of child-care), this is what book-reading supports from the earliest ages (reading to the child), plus conversations with children in the home and at school, then we introduce the notion of different types of books (genres).

Children will find their own point of beginning to read more widely and self-teaching. Be alert for this development per child, and facilitate it with flexibility and your observations of capacity of every child to read more widely.

Interested to know which texts you would recommend

Any and all of quality, generally decodable, reading book schemes for beginners and strugglers – just organise them sensibly - and all other quality books.

I am interested to hear others views on this.

Requests submitted for the future:

How to use the fabulous Debbie Hepplewhite's chart.

I love any chats/inputs on the place of and importance of Phonics.

More phonics courses please.

I just love talking about phonics and teaching children to read so I would be delighted to be part of any related discussion.

Writing progression.