

**UNIVERSITY CENTRE DONCASTER**

**BA HONS EARLY CHILDHOOD STUDIES TOP UP**

## **Does the Read, Write Inc. phonics programme support emerging literacy within Early Years**



Whilst completing my Foundation Degree at Doncaster University I developed a passion for child development and the theories surrounding the subject which then led to me completing the Top-Up BA (Hons) course. The degree provided insightful valid child development themes and opportunities for discussion with like-minded individuals. The period of study has been challenging but rewarding and will support by future career choices

## **Abstract**

All children deserve the opportunity of a rich learning environment which supports their development in literacy in order to improve future life chances, whilst creating a positive disposition to learning and challenges. Research has identified theories and pioneers which support the process of emerging literacy (Piaget, 1926; Vygotsky, 1978; Athey, 2007). This study discusses the findings whilst aiming to document the effectiveness of the phonics programme Read, Write, Inc. in response to the research question “Does the Read, Write Inc. phonics programme support emerging literacy within Early Years” The application of an action research methodology supported the researcher to identify areas of change, triangulation of data were achieved through parent questionnaires, childrens’ focus groups and staff interviews and analysed applying a grounded theory method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Non probability sampling were chosen for its simple selection process which aims to allow for a varied viewpoint (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2000). The research found that the phonics programme Read, Write, Inc. did not consistently support emerging literacy for children in early years. However findings indicate that a multiple-perspective to phonics is taught through a collaborative partnership approach with educators and parents. These finding have contributed successfully to this research project, which can be applied as a source for future discussions to implement improvements to practice.

## **Introduction**

The aim of the study seeks to explore the research question “Does the Read, Write Inc. phonics programme support emerging literacy within Early Years”. The study required eliciting views from an Early Years teacher, along with an Early Years practitioner qualified to level 3, four children and eleven parents from a foundation 2 setting situated in a primary school in South Yorkshire. The chosen methodology included focus groups, questionnaires and interviews. The study called for the interviews to be transcribed and analysed adopting a grounded theory method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

The study provided opportunities for educators, children and parents to share their views on the effectiveness of the Read, Write, Inc. phonics programme, and furthermore to provide an opportunity to reflect on current practice Findings

generated from the children's focus group allowed the children to speak freely (UNCRC, 1989) indicating that they enjoyed the sessions and developed increased confidence in their abilities. Response from parent questionnaires demonstrated a positive partnership approach with high levels of parental involvement through a shared care approach. The findings demonstrated that the practitioners favoured a multiple-perspective approach to phonics instruction through access to a rich enabling environment which encourages exploration underpinned by holistic pedagogical continuity. Chapter 1 commences with a review of the literature which provides the underpinning aspects on the fundamentals of phonics instruction, which include the foundations for formal learning and the benefits of early intervention to support future life chances for all children (Field, 2010) and (Allen, 2011). In chapter 2, the chosen methodology is discussed with justification supporting the methods. A discussion is presented within chapter 3 along with findings from research and finally, chapter 4 concludes by presenting recommendations from findings and the implications to current practice.

## **1.1 Supporting emerging literacy**

It is suggested that children's knowledge of their personal literacy experiences should be valued, as opposed to the desire to replace it with narrow models of what literacy is deemed to be. It is believed that the term 'emergent' implies that there is existing knowledge held, and this is further developed within the child in a gradual process due to the psycholinguistic desire to communicate (Chomsky, 1975; Hall, 2003). The advancement of print within the environment is considered demanding, encroaching on our existence from birth. Critics suggest it would be naïve to assume that children lack the ability to develop any thoughts on visual print prior to starting education (Goodman, 1980). Likewise, it is suggested that children are applying their knowledge of the world, together with their linguistic experiences to re-affirm purposefully the meanings inferred within pictures and text (Whitehead, 1990). These contrasting views appeared to have elevated the teacher status, implying that the instruction of literacy is a task delivered by a specialist. This opinion therefore placed little emphasis that literacy may be a legitimate process, derived from pre-

existing knowledge and understanding gained from pre-school experiences (Whitehead, 1990).

There is a presumption that when a child experiences literacy through the use of books it potentially creates a further desire to explore literature (Whitehead, 1990). The informal first encounters are considered relevant in creating sensory investigation opportunities where text can be explored further (Butler, 1979; Whitehead, 1990). Evidence suggests that during the playful exploration of books emotional associations with adults can be strengthened.



The migration of joy and sadness can be indulged, and threatening situations can be dispelled with reassurance, enriching the personal experience further (Wells, 1981; Lee, 2016). The involvement of sharing literature is considered valuable in aiding the development of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1996). It is further considered that sharing stories is an important factor in retrieving meaning from books which provides nourishment for the mind (Meek, 1987; Waterland, 1985; Bennett, 1991)

Children begin to see literature as a source of information which forms the nucleus of reference and whereby meaningful initiations are explored through the power of written language (Heath, 1983).

## **1.2. Foundations for formal learning**

However, it is argued that prescribed teaching, together with reading and writing conventions may hinder children's progress. Furthermore it is believed these restrictions diminish the desire for children to become literary explorers (Whitehead, 1990). It is considered that through the application of a nurturing approach early experiences support complex links between feeling and thinking. Furthermore it

results in enhanced interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences which aid the development for formal learning (Goleman, 1996; GRFS, 2008). Through increased opportunities where imagination is encouraged it is believed this supports a cumulative effect, assisting in the development of an elevated understanding of the world, and the responses that are made to support this (Whitehead, 1990; Bruner and Weinreich-Haste, 1990; Early Education, 2012; DfE, 2017).

Early literacy requires adequate activities facilitated through a collaborative approach with parent and educator (Desforges and Abouchar, 2003; Slyva et al, 2004; Early Education, 2012; DfE, 2017). Analysis of research indicates that adults play a fundamental part in maximizing opportunities for semantic contingency to take place (Snow, 1991; Riley, 2006). The Rose Report (2006) reaffirmed the essential provision for oracy, highlighting that speaking and listening skills are fundamental for successful communication, and play a pivotal role in children's social, emotional and intellectual development (Whitehead, 1990; DfES, 2006; DfE, 2017). Further findings corroborate with Snow (1991) and Riley's (2006) view that children respond to adult interaction positively when enhanced reciprocal action exists. Therefore, effective pedagogy promotes a sustained shared thinking approach, whereby interaction supports discussion, promoted through challenge (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002; Slyva et al., 2004; DfE, 2006; CWDC, 2010; DfE, 2012; DfE, 2017). This provides equal interaction between both parties whilst reinforcing the aspects of language to underpin the semantics, morphology and syntax of language composition when meaning, reasoning and opportunities exist (Bloom and Lahey, 1978; Money and Thurman, 2002).

It is considered fundamental that children experience the sounds of patterned language whilst also providing opportunities to negotiate the social complexities of responding to language (Vygotsky, 1978; Clay, 1991; Nutbrown, 1994; Athey, 2007; DfE, 2017). Connecting meaning with emotion is crucial in forming hierarchal links from a pre-verbal, idiosyncratic experience to a world where the process of specific language phrases can be applied to support self-identity, furthermore supporting a bridge to the development of emerging literacy (Trevarthen, 1993; Saracho, 2012).

Theory suggests that when children become exposed to a wide range of literature early, and it forms part of play, it embeds the concept of the variety of ways literacy

can be applied (Wray et al, 1989; Christie, 1991). Play is considered the highest expression that occurs within child development as it creates opportunities for the free expression of a child's soul (Edwards et al, 1998; Clark and Moss, 2001; Thornton and Brunton, 2007). It is argued that within an enabling environment play underpins the refinement of advanced competencies. Therefore learning evolves allowing for the progressive stages of cognitive development to emerge. This in turn impacts positively, indicating increased self-esteem and enhances problem solving abilities, which reinforce the characteristics of a unique child (Piaget, 1926; Slyva et al, 2004; Miller and Pound, 2011; Early Education, 2012; DfE, 2017). It is considered that children are autonomously adroit at comprehending their experiences through the use of planning, co-ordination of ideas and abstraction to activate the competencies of meaning. An increase in self-confidence is enhanced when purpose is attributed, thus allowing for the child's voice to be heard, and creating opportunities for ideas to be processed underpinned by thought and action (UNCRC, 1989; Nutbrown, 2011). Children being able to represent meaning within their literacy compositions are fundamental, the achievements produced are an integral aspect of communicating their pattern of intention through words, symbols or mark making attempts (Sunderland, 2001; Fisher et al, 2010). This is strengthened when guidance and support is experienced through a sustained reciprocal approach allowing for active exploration to occur (Bowlby, 1988). Furthermore, it is suggested that when positive attachments are present children develop the assurance to explore, and become active learners whilst embedding new knowledge (Bowlby, 1983). Moreover, it is believed that the promotion of a positive learning triangle between educator and child develops increased well-being and self-belief. In turn this supports self-confidence within their own abilities and a positive attitude towards new challenges (Vygotsky, 1978; Bowlby, 1988; Geddes, 2006; DfE, 2015; DfE, 2017).

### **1.3 Synthetic Phonics Programme - (Read write Inc.)**

The teaching of reading within primary schools is arguably a process driven by political agenda in order to raise standards (DfE, 2011; DfE, 2012; DfE, 2013; DfE, 2014). It is argued that specialism within early years care continues to be undervalued, whilst being dictated by bureaucracy and economizing, and at the

same time failing to consult educators on their views (Clough and Nutbrown, 2007). It has long been the government's intention to increase literacy attainment following the introduction of The Education Reform Act (1988), together with the collaborative implementation of the national curriculum. (DfES, 1988; DfEE, 1998; Rose, 2006; DfE, 2015). Today, these statutory guidelines form part of an integrated approach which follow a clear set of common principles for all children from birth to five years of age (DfE, 2017). Through an embedded pedagogical approach supported by a non-statutory guidance, the statutory guidance sets the standards of development ensuring educators meet the provisions of an enabling environment, whereby learning and development are measured through assessments, against early learning goals (The National Archives, 2006; Early Education, 2012; DfE, 2017).



To ensure long term academic success it is crucial that children master the skills of application and integration to become successful readers (Whitehead, 1990; Brock and Rankin, 2008; Finnegan and Warren, 2015). Acquiring the skills to read identifies five key areas that are fundamental for effective reading to occur: comprehension, vocabulary, phonics, phonics awareness and fluency, which are considered the main components to support the mastery of reading. It is considered that innate genetically programmed competencies support the extrinsic desire to explore, use and apply language (Chomsky,1957; Whitehead,1990) whilst gaining an awareness and appreciation of print, serving as a platform for future learning (Brown, 2014). In support of this, it is suggested that alliteration and rhyme are intimately connected in forming the skills to develop phonological awareness (DfES, 2004; Goshwami and Bryant, 2016). Exploring with sounds aims to develop the concept that all sounds are different, which supports the development of phoneme and grapheme correspondence whilst encouraging active listening skills through fun activities (DfES, 2004; Lewis and Ellis, 2006; Early Education, 2012; Whitehead, 2010; DfE, 2014). Therefore, developing the assimilation of new knowledge through

meaningful interaction offers rich language opportunities where vocabulary can be explored, (Piaget, 1926; Chomsky; 1957; Brofenbrenner, 1979; DfES, 2004; DCSF, 2008). This is underpinned by the principles of future learning and entwined within all areas of development (Early Education, 2012; Whitehead, 2010; DfE, 2014), whilst ensuring that effective literacy skills are attainable for all children, in order to become literate in today's contemporary society (Finnegan and Warren, 2015).

Consequently policies have informed educators to support the dominant use of a synthetic phonics programme as a prime focus in teaching children how to read, despite the acknowledgement of the complexities that surround the reading process (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2005; Goodman, 1993). Following research, the government declared their intention to support the commencement of a synthetic phonics approach. Divergent from the previous 'searchlight model' which highlighted weaknesses, and was criticised for requiring a competently resourced programme in order to meet the learning outcomes (DfEE, 1998; DfEE, 1999; Wyse and Styles, 2007). Despite the governments sample size being modest, the results highlighted the importance of embedding speaking and listening skills in order to support phonological awareness to increase reading abilities. Therefore a "first and fast" approach was advocated through the use of a synthetic process which relies on metalinguistic abilities to process sounds and how they are structured (Schuele and Boudreau, 2008). This approach was considered simplistic (DfES, 1988; Rose, 2006), therefore educators were advised to deliver short daily phonics sessions discretely.

Though many programmes exist, this area of research aimed to highlight how the Read, Write, Inc. phonics programme (Ruth Miskin Literacy, 2017) which supports emerging literacy for children in early years. The phonics instruction method is reliant on a systematic, mandated programme to teach the letter sound relationship in order to blend sounds together, to achieve full pronunciation of whole words (Meyer, 2002; Goswami and Bryant, 2016). However, the report was met with opposition indicating that the research lacked evidence to support a legitimised change to reading pedagogy. It was suggested that the report, and the systematic mandate had a confined view on the teaching of early reading, exasperated by a prescriptive and rigid process (Meyer, 2002; Wyse and Styles, 2007).

In addition, criticisms arose towards the governments' recommendations of a synthetic approach to phonics, implying that there is little opportunity for children to capture the interest of varying texts. It is also argued the approach lacks the ability to empower action, feeling and application of critical thinking skills in comparison to the use of real text (Goodman, 1993). It is further challenged that such rigorous methods such as the grapheme-phoneme phonic programme cannot be effective, leading to question the efficacy of such an approach due to the irregularities present in English orthography. Research suggests that the synthetic approach is conducive when applied to languages where the letter and its sound can be applied frequently (Goswami, 2005). Objections to the programme highlighted that a minimum of fifty percent of words within the English language are inaccessible via a pure synthetics approach (Johnson and Watson, 2004; Dombey, 2006). However, it can be hypothesised that the process of reading irregular words allows for an analytical phonics approach to be applied, which supports the visual orthographic process when irregular words are stored within the long term memory (Johnson and Watson, 2004).

The use of synthetic phonics has also raised criticisms regarding the ability to develop reading comprehension, stating the approach lacks definition. Critics argue, it cannot be assumed that successive comprehension will follow on from the learning of new sounds, which raised the question "is it considered reading when a child can call aloud the sounds of letters without applying comprehension?" (Meyer, 2002). What's more, it is suggested that the definition of real reading takes place when readers have an opportunity to study words through active exploration, allowing for the assimilation and accommodation of new information to be processed (Piaget, 1926; Smith, Goodman and Meredith, 1970; Meyer, 2002). Contrary to this belief, theory suggests that small children begin to internalise language they hear from adults, and new language is learnt in partnership with others. This cooperation between adult and child encourages early language and critical reasoning which provides the tools of language to connect with the structure of thought (Vygotsky, 1978; Whitehead, 1990). Successful educators aim to apply a phonics and comprehension process whereby the connections of the two components work together. This supports emerging literacy and understanding whilst providing a pleasurable experience through text exploration (Wyse and Styles, 2007).

Although it is believed that a basic competence in syntax and semantics is the prerequisite to support reading acquisition, theorists have highlighted the benefits of relying and applying semantic and syntax skills to deduce and comprehend meaning (Smith, 1973). The government continue to insist that systematic phonics within education is the most effective way to teach phonics. Therefore a pledge to tackle illiteracy through a reformed national curriculum aims to improve the commitment to social justice, ensuring all children become proficient confident readers regardless of their socio-economic background (Freeman, 2012; Finnegan and Warren 2015; Morgan, 2015; Standards and Testing Agency, 2016; DfE, 2017).

Delivered daily the Read, Write, Inc. programme focuses on systematically teaching new phonemes and the association to its grapheme. Through the use of a picture hook which relates to the new sound being taught, alongside the encouragement of Fred talk. The key focus is on the blending of sounds orally, together with the reversible process of segmenting. This supports the decoding of words, with an emphasis on the relationship between letters and the sounds it makes. As per recommendations the read, Write, Inc. programme encourages the teaching of the first 30 sounds through short daily sessions (Rose Report, 2006; Ruth Miskin Literacy, 2017). Words which are not decodable are referred to as red words or sight words and are taught alongside new sounds. It is suggested that the taught red words are then held within a child's orthographic store to support the use of recall for words which are not phonically regular (Wilby, 2008; OUP, 2017; Ruth Miskin Literacy, 2017). One-to-one tutoring is encouraged for individuals who require additional support focusing on a mnemonic approach to embed single letter sounds. Following this, the progression of the blending and segmenting of sounds through the use of sounds buttons and oral talk is taught (Ruth Miskin Literacy 2017). It is suggested that children will learn to develop a successful reading strategy for themselves. However, it is claimed that children who lack advantages within their home environment, which lead to low attainment benefit significantly when an approach such as this is applied (Wilby, 2008; Ruth Miskin Literacy 2017)

Throughout the programme a child's phonics knowledge is tracked frequently. Continual assessments aim to ensure children are successful in demonstrating their ability to decode real words, and non-words. This is to ensure children accomplish the statutory phonics screening test, delivered at the end of year 1 (Standards and

Testing Agency, 2016; DfE, 2017). However, recent research indicates that changes to the new curriculum have created barriers to children's learning due to lack of knowledge held by teachers on how to improve children's literacy skills. Therefore educators have acknowledged the importance of investing in continuous professional development to meet the expectations, regardless of their teaching specialism (Clark and Teravainen, 2015). Nevertheless, since its commencement in 2012 it is considered that the number of children passing the skills tests has increased each year. Despite this, results indicate that the gap in attainment persists for children from a socially-economic disadvantaged background (DfE, 2015; Gaunt, 2016). With this in mind it is hypothesized that standardised assessment are another example of dictatorship by government, consequently, educators believe this does little to promote diversity (Gaunt, 2016). Critics highlighted that an outcomes driven curriculum fails to reflect the capabilities amongst children and their ability to learn. Educators believe that the affirmation of teaching principles should be applied as a play based pedagogy, opposed to a prescriptive guidance with little democratic space (Bruce, 2001; Moyles et al, 2007; Brock, 2012; Standards Testing Agency, 2016). Nevertheless, whilst educators have attempted to comprehend policy changes to the curriculum (DfE, 2017) it is parents and campaigners who have reacted obstinately to the additional pressure placed on young children. In light of this, criticisms have arisen that a culture of over testing prevails, conceiving further anxieties and trepidation for children (Furedi, 2016; Martin, 2016). There have been prudent pedagogic debates surrounding the rigorous regime of measuring progress within the education system. So much so, it is considered that the education system has become so increasingly focused on measuring progress that it fails to cultivate children's interest in reading (Furedi, 2016). Furthermore, it is argued that assessments place constraints on professional judgement and undermine children's learning. In further agreement critics highlighted the benefits of attainment scrutiny, and claimed that educational health checks are necessary, stating that the short term stress is irrelevant to attain positive results (Martin, 2016). Ofsted chief rejected arguments from parents and educators with claims that rigour and structure is necessary. Stipulating that, the assessment process underpins the high aspirations required to improve social mobility, in order to improve standards and prevent children from falling behind (Coughlan, 2016; Harris, 2017).

## 1.4 Early intervention

It is argued that it is unlikely to eliminate underachievement through any one particular method. It is considered that many facets are responsible in supporting early language acquisition (Wade, 1990) It is considered that there is a 'golden age' when learning to talk (Bishop and Adams, 1990), therefore it is vital that early years educators apply the strategies in recognising when early intervention is required (DfE, 2004; DfE, 2012; DfE, 2013)

In order to develop a strategy to support the entrenched under achievement within education, recommendations arose to establish a policy underpinned by a rigorous methodology that has led to the commitment of increased involvement, as opposed to engagement (Bennett, 1987; DfE, 2004; Field, 2010; Allen, 2011). The issues of cumulative risk has identified the risk factors placed on emotional and behavioural issues arising from stressors impinged on families, the greater the stressors accumulates to poorer outcomes (Rutter, 1998; Appleyard et al, 2005; Field, 2010; Allen, 2011). Evidence suggests environmental variables greatly influence a child within the formative years (Brofenbrenner, 1979; Sylva et al, 2004; Eisenstadt et al, 2014), quality experiences linking to regenerated social behaviour create reactions to stimulation received (Gerhardt, 2004; Field, 2010; Bradshaw and Holmes; Allen, 2011; NSPCC, 2012). Furthermore, corroborative data illustrates that children living within an impoverished environment show decreased cognitive abilities. Therefore, indicating the proximate influences are significant to development, which becomes increasingly challenging to amend during maturation (Brofenbrenner, 1979; IOE, 2004; Neaum, 2010).



Recommendations from government encourage increased collaboration from parents and agencies as a necessity in order to tackle the emotional instabilities that exist amongst vulnerable families (DfE, 2004; IOE, 2004; Cheminais, 2009; Marmot, 2010; Field, 2010; Allen, 2011). An augmented partnership approach has created a heightened focus on narrowing the intergenerational gap within illiteracy (Freeman,

2012; Finnegan and Warren, 2015). This aims to endorse a decisive shift towards early intervention to tackle the academic inequalities of children from poorer societies. Through the acquisition of these vital competencies it is suggested that cognitive skills are recognised in succession with improved social skills (Palmer, 2006; Field, 2010; Allen, 2011; Department for Communities, 2012; All Party Parliamentary Group, 2015; Finnegan and Warren, 2015). Research indicates that a child who demonstrates limited vocabulary may find it difficult to access challenging text (Finnegan and Warren, 2015). Moreover, a child who has difficulties recognising the sounds of words may struggle to decode words, and experience difficulties using language as a social tool in later years (Catts, 1993; Nation and Snowling, 1998).

### **Chapter 3 Research overview**

The criteria for analysing qualitative data must be governed by legitimacy whilst ensuring the chosen methodology of analysis is fit for purpose, at the same time remaining focused on the action research project which seeks to answer the question “Does the Read, Write, Inc. phonics programme support emerging literacy in early years?” (Cohen et al, 2000). Whilst it is suggested that there are numerous methods when analysing qualitative data, the choice should not be arbitrary (Cohen and Holiday, 1996; Cohen et al, 2000). A ‘grounded theory’ approach (Glasser and Strauss, 1967) was chosen to undertake analysis of the data, it is considered that

grounded theory is driven from the data allowing for further analysis. This serves to establish the theory without being forced to adapt to comply with existing theories; as the theory is rooted from the original data (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000). Therefore triangulation of the data involved seeking patterns from the methods applied, then examining the data for causal links and connections in order to apply meaning to the responses received (Arksey and Knight, 1999; Cohen et al, 2000). In order to preserve the authenticity of the data received analysis of the data were presented through the use of coding and graphs to define categories and detect frequency of themes (Coleman and Briggs, 2002; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011), allowing for contextual complexity to be explained whilst seeking the cause and effect.

## **Research Findings**

### **3.1 Effective use of provision**

The first theme emerging from the findings identified the high quality provision the setting provides. The findings indicate that an enabling environment is supported through the effective use of provision whereby children's emerging literacy is promoted, supporting the views of Brown (2007). These encounters with literature serve to promote and encourage further exploration of text as highlighted by Butler (1979) and Whitehead (1990) within the literature review and also underpin current policy (DfE, 2017) (See Appendix 7 and 8).

*“That’s why we have lots of literacy resources in the provision, lots of different print and letters all around”*

*(Practitioner 1: Line 22-23)*

*“We have fun talking about the characters and settings and things they all enjoy, we have less fussing and they listen lovely, more than they do at other times, I guess its cos we stop regularly and share ideas to make it an enjoyable experience, I think that’s important that we all come together and enjoy it, I love it too and I’ve always done it that way cos I feel they get so much from it”*

*(Practitioner 1: Line 105-110)*

This supports the playful approach where opportunities to explore text are encouraged, and foundations for formal learning are supported through the retrieval of information. It further aids an understanding of the world through fantasy and story-telling, drawing from own experiences through imaginative play as defined by Wells (1981) and Lee (2015). Increased exposure to patterned language provides opportunities to refine their abilities impacting on children's confidence and self-worth further supporting cognitive links to underpin their individual characteristics as viewed by Goleman (1996) and Athey (2007).

However, whilst both practitioners interviewed spoke openly and positively with regards to the use of the provision to support the Read, Write Inc. phonics sessions the researcher identified a lack of understanding of the programme by practitioner 2.

Practitioner 2 raised concerns that the children lost interest due to the phonics sessions being repetitive when responding to question 7 (see Appendix 9).

*"It's like repeating it over and over"*

*(Participant 2: Line 43-44)*

As a result of this response to question 7 it highlights gaps in the practitioners' understanding, as when delivering the programme it relies on an embedded practitioner knowledge to ensure repetition is encouraged to assimilate new knowledge, as underpinned by Piaget's theory of cognitive development Piaget (1926). Furthermore, a practitioners' fundamental role is to provide opportunities to reinforce meaning to support language composition, and maximising occasions where foundations for formal learning can be enhanced as referred to in the literature review (Money and Thurman, 2014; DfE, 2017).

Discussions with practitioner 2 and child R indicated that access to all areas of the provision is restricted (see Appendix 7 and 9) which goes against the views of Wells (1981), as highlighted in the literature.

*"We go outside in afternoon cos we busy in mornings and then I can help ok"*

*(Participant R: Line 24)*

*“They enjoy looking for sounds when we go outside in the afternoons and they play games”*

*(Practitioner 2: Line 52-53)*

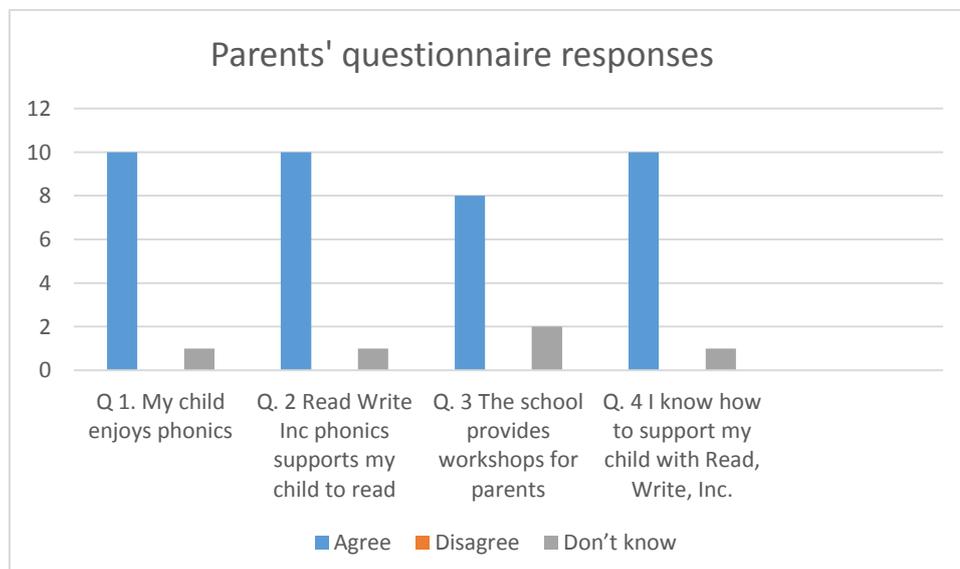
It is considered that restrictions on play and exploration can have a negative impact on the development of early literacy (Vygotsky, 1978; Garda and Pellegrini, 1985). It is therefore the theory of Froebel (1840) and Isaacs (1930), (Nutbrown and Clough, 2014) that children are active learners and unrestricted opportunities for free play aids the development of cognitive links to emerge whilst supporting the characteristics of a unique child (Early Education, 2012; DfE, 2017).

Through analysis of the data, and responses from parents it highlights the success of an effective provision alongside the Read, Write, Inc. phonics sessions in supporting children’s’ phonic awareness. Responses to question 2 showed an overwhelming response from 10 of the 11 parents agreeing that the Read, Write, Inc. phonics programme supported their child to read (see Appendix 10 and 11).

*“My child is reading full words and less sounding out”*

*(Participant 2: Q8)*

Furthermore 10 of the 11 participants responding to question 1 stated their child enjoys the Read, Write, Inc. phonics programme in school which is further corroborated by 2 of the 4 children who indicate they have fun during the sessions (see Appendix 7, 11 and 12).



Responses from children (see Appendix 7).

*“I Love it, you can play games with Miss B, and it’s funny,”*

*(Child K: Line 19)*

*“Miss hides pictures and then we see it and it’s funny”*

*(Child L: Line 20)*

This is further substantiated by findings highlighted within the literature review by Lewis and Ellis (2006) who concur that phonics is fun when a playful method is applied through the exploration of language. Furthermore, findings from the practitioner 2 interview underpins the benefits of an effective pedagogical approach to meet the needs of the child as highlighted within current teaching standards (NCTL, 2013: DfE, 2017), (see Appendix 9).

*“Children learn when they are having fun”*

*(Practitioner 2:Line 50-51)*

### **3.2. Current practice**

Evidence of up-to-date practice is identified through the use of effective scaffolding, whereby extended learning occurs to support children’s literacy development through the application of the Read, Write Inc. phonics sessions (Vygotsky, 1978; Clark and Moss, 2001; Thornton and Brunton, 2005). When responding to question 7 findings identify the practitioners skills in differentiating to maximise performance, providing increased opportunities for practitioners to support a child’s learning, underpinning Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development technique (1978), (see Appendix 8 and 9).

*“we split into ability groups to differentiate so they are learning within their abilities”*

*(Practitioner 2: Line 43-44)*

*“We split into two groups anyway and we still have big groups and we have to differentiate loads”*

*(Practitioner 1: Line 92-93)*

However when analysing responses to question 9 the findings indicate that the practitioners apply different strategies alongside the Read, Write, Inc. phonics sessions in order to support low attainment. (see Appendix 8 and 9).

*“If I didn’t have elements of letters and sounds in my sessions the children wouldn’t sit for 40 minutes as it needs to be active learning, engaged learning with full child involvement”*

*(Practitioner 1: Line 88-90)*

*“that’s why we change it and make it fun with games and stuff like that”*

*(Practitioner 2: Line 31-32)*

However, in this case the findings presented here refute claims made by Ruth Miskin (Ruth Miskin, 2017) and Wilby (2008) that children with low attainment benefit significantly from the Read, Write, Inc. phonics programme. It is interesting to note that both practitioners’ share the view that personalising the approach is more successful in meeting the needs of the child. This view is further corroborated within the literature by Goodman (1993) who challenges the benefits of a synthetic phonics approach due to the lack of opportunity to explore real text.

In response to Q.9

*“Our method is to embed the sound not just so they know it visually but so they can spot it in a book and different texts and then be able to apply it in their writing so they can see how the sounds work and how it looks when they are writing it”.*

*(Practitioner 1: Line 96-99)*

*“I will model a sentence so they can see it in context and we read it and read it to develop comprehension”*

*(Practitioner 1: Line 101-102)*

Furthermore in response to question 9 practitioner 1 shares the view of Smith (1978), that an understanding of semantics and syntax supports the basic skills of emerging literacy, whereby speaking and listening is fundamental and should form part of the teaching strategy. Although this view concurs with the Rose Report (2006)

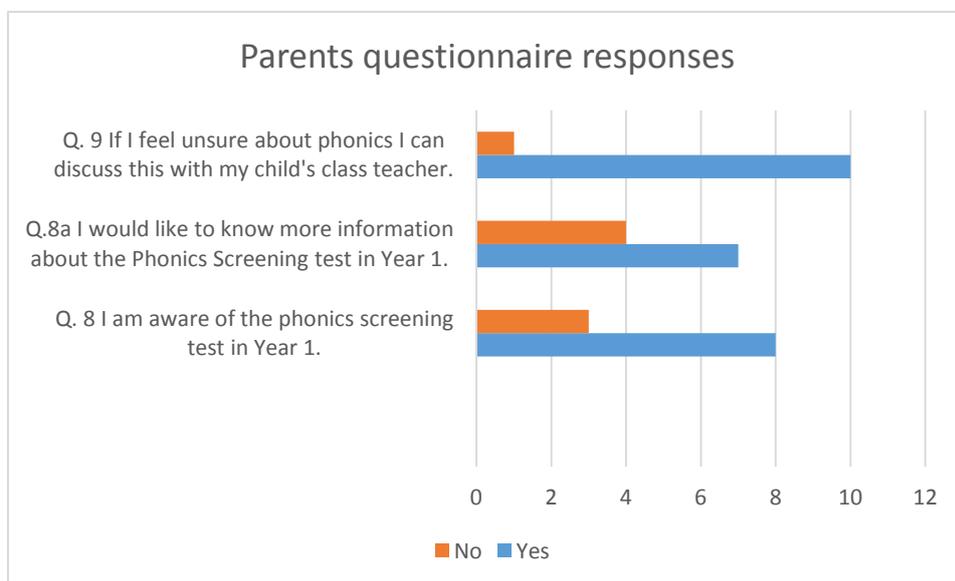
which highlights the importance of embedding speaking and listening skills, it contradicts the simplistic view of a first and fast approach through the delivery of short sessions (DfES, 1988; Rose, 2006). Practitioner 1 emphasis that without changing the programme children have to sit through considerable lengthy phonic sessions where interest is lost due to lack of engagement, practitioner 2 shares a parallel view when responding to question 3 (see Appendix 9).

“if they can sit and listen for a long enough, the sessions can be long and the children switch off”.

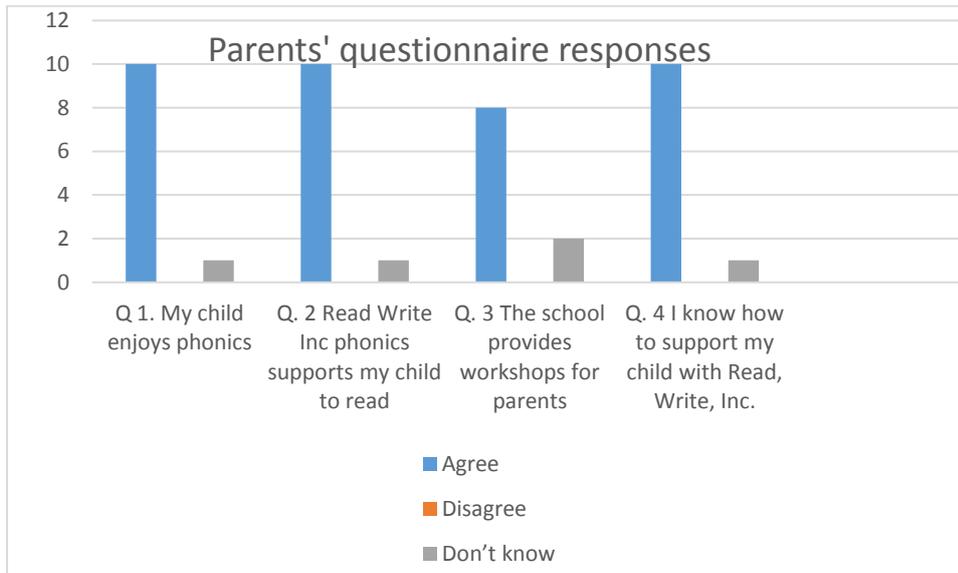
*(Practitioner 2: Line 14-15)*

### 3.3 Parent Partnership

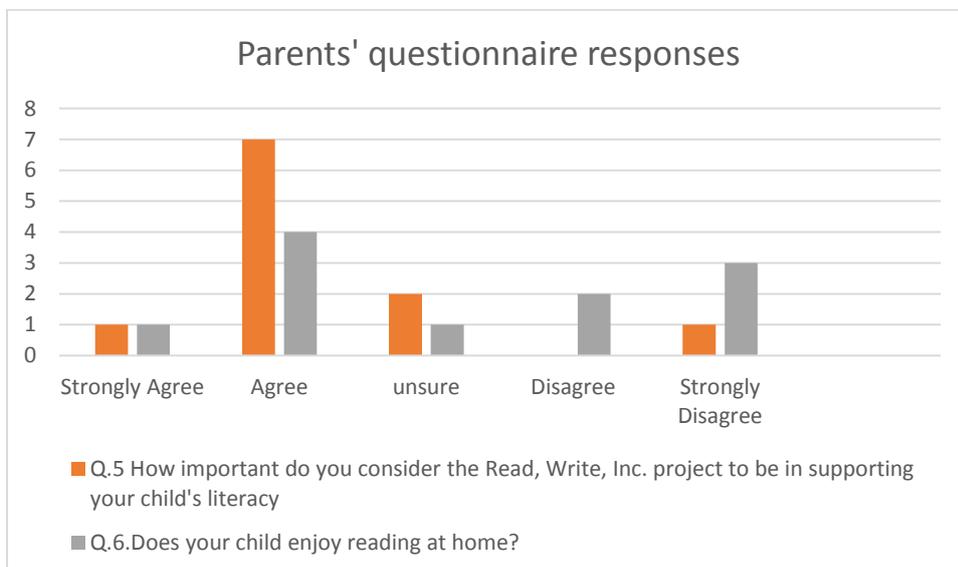
Findings suggest that positive parent partnerships are in place, evidence of supportive relationships between all parties exist due to parents having access to regular communication with practitioners. The setting encourage the parents to share information and an open door policy is maintained through a cumulative care approach.



Findings suggest that home learning is supported amongst parents when responding to question 4, with 8 of the 11 respondents indicating that they know how to support their child with Read, Write Inc. phonics home learning (see Appendix 11 and 12).



It is believed that informed parents make a difference (Desforges and Abouchar, 2003), positive encouragement from adults and parents lead to increased social, emotional and metacognitive dispositions through a beneficial partnership approach, as underpinned by Field (2010) and Allen (2011). Supporting phonological awareness is promoted further through shared reading activities with nearly 46% of parents expressing their child’s enjoyment of reading at home (See Appendix 12) This enriches a child’s experience of books and maximises new opportunities to explore text, and encourage learning to evolve through exploration of new language as highlighted within the literature (Wells, 1981; Vygotsky, 1978; Athey, 2007; Goswami and Bryant, 2016; DfE, 2017).



Evidence from a parent, practitioner and children highlight the increased confidence that has been experienced during access within the provision and attending the Read, Write, Inc. sessions (see Appendix 7, 8 and 11).

*“I feel they get so much from it and it shows cos they are more confident and then they*

*use what they know independently”*

*(Practitioner 1: Line 110-112)*

*Parent states “child is better with sounds and also improved confidence”*

*(Response to question 10 from  
questionnaire 7)*

*“When I was in nursery and I was zero then I got big and put my hand up and now I can do it”.*

*(Child L: Line 55 responding to  
question 10)*

Findings suggest that information regarding phonics screening test are passed onto parents with 8 out of 11 advising they are aware of the test (see Appendix 8 and 11)

*“We had a meeting at the start of term to tell parents about phonics and they all got a pack explaining how it works and about the screening in year 1 and stuff like that”*

*(Practitioner 1: Line 30-34)*

The findings suggest that practitioner 1 encourages a positive collaborative learning triangle with parent and child (Geddes, 2006), together with an enabling environment to encourage and embed literacy through the application of a varied pedagogical, meaningful approach, a view which is shared by Goodman (1993), Goswami (2005) and Meyer (2002). Findings indicate that pedagogical practice is underpinned equally with education and care, as opposed to encouraging a results driven

environment (Van Leare et al, 2012) as supported by the views of Furedi (2016) and Martin (2016). This further fuels the argument that the delivery of phonics instruction forms part of process instigated by political agenda, with the aim to increase literacy attainment as highlighted within the literature (Rose, 2006; DfE, 2015) without prior consultation with educators (Clough and Nutbrown, 2007).

## **Chapter 4 - Conclusions and Recommendations**

Evidence from the literature indicates that the delivery of a successful phonics programme requires an environment where children have access to quality provision to embed foundations for formal learning (Butler, 1979; Thornton and Brunton, 2003). When exploration is encouraged, whilst being supported by an enabling adult, it suggests that learning phonics is a social-cultural experience that requires positive adult and child engagement (Meek, 1982). Main findings demonstrate an effective provision whereby opportunities for new learning and exploration are encouraged, although restrictions on outdoor learning are in place. Evidence of a collaborative ideology underpins the practitioners practice, however findings from practitioners indicate that they do not wholly support the Read, Write, Inc. programme, and therefore amend their phonics sessions to meet the needs of the children through a multiple –perspective approach supported by (Hall, 2003), a view which is opposed by policy (Rose, 2006). This approach promotes a wider perspective on the teaching of phonics which highlights the benefit to existing practice, whereby children are encouraged to access a provision which enables exploration and also encourages reflective practice and analyse practitioner attitudes (CWDC, 2010; Lindon, 2010; Richie, 2015).

To conclude, the findings indicate that the Read, Write, Inc. programme (Ruth Miskin Literacy, 2017) is not consistent in supporting the development of emerging literacy, these findings however are only relevant to this particular study.

### **Recommendations**

- Investigate practitioner's views on outdoor learning in order to promote an increased understanding on the benefits of an inclusive outdoor provision,

which stimulates the development of gross and fine motor skills to aid emerging literacy.

- Provide more information to parents on the phonics screening assessments and what this means for their child, which includes increased ways to support their child at home.
- Findings to be disseminated to staff to encourage discussion of how the teaching of phonics can be applied consistently in the future.
- Collating views from practitioners from Year 1 would be advantageous in order to assess their effectiveness of practice on delivering the programme prior to the formal screening assessments.
- Complete a comparative study of the programme within similar settings to further develop the study.

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