



**Phonics Use in Literacy
Instruction: When Intention and
Implementation Collide**

James W. Chapman, Keith T. Greaney, Alison W. Arrow
& William E. Tunmer
College of Humanities & Social Sciences
Massey University

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“Long tail” of literacy underachievement

Despite Reading Recovery (15-20% each yr)

RR supposed to reduce children with lit diffs

Not so!

Numerous attempts to reduce gap unsuccessful

No significant improvements in PIRLS:

2001:2006; 2001:2011; 2006:2011; **2017?**

Pedagogical Constructivism

Clay: multiple cues, sentence context, meaning

Letter-sound information used sparingly; last resort

Effective Literacy Practices Years 1 – 4 (MoE, 2003):

- Multiple cues; **predict unfamiliar words based on developing meaning**

Sound Sense: Phonics & Phonological Awareness (MoE, 2003):

- **Explicit instruction dismissed; children discover for themselves connections between phonics & reading**

Why Phonics?

National Reading Panel (2000) 5 “big ideas”

- Phonemic awareness
- Alphabetic principle
- Fluency
- Vocabulary
- Comprehension

First 2 especially important for beginning readers

Traditional phonics programmes intended to develop alphabetic coding skills

Too many letter-sound relationship in English for children to learn through direct instruction (300-400)

Phonics instruction:

Strategy for beginning readers to generate close phonological representations of unfamiliar words that gets them near enough to the correct phonological form that combined with context they can figure out unknown words.

Stowmatch; glove; castle; money

"The football hit him in the stowmatch."

Set for variability; "irregular" spelling-sound relationships induced from known words

Official instructional publications don't encourage phonics instruction involving explicit teaching of specific knowledge & skills that underpin reading acquisition.

Despite the official line we are often told:

"Of course schools include phonics as part of a balanced approach to literacy teaching!"

Teacher Knowledge & Literacy Instruction

Understanding basic structure of English language required to effectively teach reading skills

Teaching explicit decoding skills ineffective when teachers' knowledge of language constructs low

Many teachers lack sufficient knowledge of phonological skills, alphabetic principle & role of phonics instruction

Research Questions

1. To what extent do New Zealand schools use phonics programmes as part of normal literacy instruction?
2. What knowledge do New Zealand teachers have of the language foundations that underpin reading acquisition?
3. To what extent do teachers self-report the use of systematic and explicit word-level approaches when providing instruction on word identification strategies?

Method

2 similar versions of **phonics survey** via *Survey Monkey*

- 1st: 1,476 schools, upper Nth Is & Sth Island
- 2nd: 422 schools, lower Nth Island

Teacher Knowledge Survey (Binks-Cantrell, Joshi & Washburn 2012).

- 55 teachers participating in early stages of PLD workshops

Word Identification Teacher Prompt Scenarios

- 6 scenarios used by Greaney (2001)
- Exemplified 3 main types of reading errors
- Respondents to provide up to 3 brief narratives

Results

Phonics Surveys

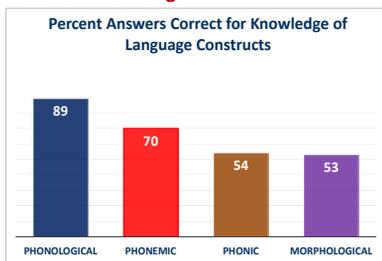
#1 45% response; #2 73% response

85%-90% respondents reported using phonics

Over 50 named phonics programmes mentioned

65% (#1) & 21% (#2) reported use of phonics “tightly integrated within regular reading programme. Other responses: “in addition” to programme; “when needed”

Teacher Knowledge



Word Identification Prompts

Analysed 1st of 3 prompts for each of 6 scenarios:

- Word-level; contextual; neutral



Conclusion

- Many teachers use phonics in reading instruction
- Many teachers may have insufficient knowledge of how to effectively use phonics instruction
- Relatively low levels of understanding of alphabetic principle, phonic knowledge
- Teachers self-reported tendency to use contextual or neutral cues for word identification prompts

Actions

- Nation-wide PLD to develop more effective word-level decoding teaching strategies & knowledge of language constructs
- Update or replace *Effective Literacy Strategies* to include contemporary scientific research findings on literacy teaching & learning
- MoE guidance on phonics programmes: not all are equal or research-tested.

Thank you!

j.chapman@massey.ac.nz