



An Evaluation of Sounds-Write by the Department for Education

What follows is a report, unedited and unabridged, written by a Phonics and Early Reading Consultant for the DfE, after a drop-in visit to a day of one of our training courses, on 12th January 2012.

We believe that this gives a good indication of just how well Sounds-Write meets the DfE's requirements for a quality phonics programme.

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How the training conforms to the DfE CORE and TRAINING criteria	
Criteria	Evaluator's comments
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>The training strongly and consistently promoted systematic synthetic phonics as the prime approach to decoding print.</p> <p>The disadvantages of alternative strategies such as whole-word learning were exemplified and discussed.</p> <p>Trainees were also provided with written study materials that explained in detail why a phonics first approach was so important and beneficial.</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>These expectations were strongly and clearly promoted. The value and importance of the intended impending Year One Phonics Check was also well explained.</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>The materials in the Sound-Write programme are clearly designed for regular short, periods of discrete teaching. Effective delivery of these session was exemplified and explored in conscientious detail. Detailed, very supportive materials also accompany the training.</p> <p>In the Sounds-Write approach, the way in which sounds are initially introduced and the order in which this is done are sometimes somewhat different from other major programmes. However the overall content and intended outcomes are consistent with high quality systematic synthetic programmes and meet the DfE criteria.</p>
The training demonstrates how children's progress is assessed.	<p>Very helpful diagnostic assessments were introduced and explored in detail, together with appropriate progress measures and records.</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 importance of multi-sensory experience through all sequences of phonics learning and application was emphasised.</p>
<p>Training demonstrates that phonemes should be blended, in order, from left to right, 'all through the word' for reading.</p>	<p>This is an absolutely integral and essential element of every stage the Sounds-Write approach. Blending was strongly and properly linked to the accurate enunciation of phonemes and trainees were given demonstrations of this with follow-up practice.</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>Segmenting, including the reversibility of the blending and segmenting and processes, and its centrality to phonics learning and application was emphasised throughout.</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>It was fully demonstrated and explained how high-frequency words are cumulatively introduced through the programme, generally in the context of the recommended 'dictation' exercises. Learning is always through asking children to respond to the parts of the word they already know, and helping them with any 'tricky' sounds, so that they can still blend through the word. No 'sight word' learning is involved in the approach.</p>
<p>Training promotes that children are taught high frequency words that do not conform completely to grapheme/phoneme correspondence rules.</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>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 Sound-Write materials contain in-built decodable text at all appropriate stages. Additional materials such as the 'Dandelion Readers' (themselves evaluated as fully meeting DfE criteria) were also displayed and promoted.</p> <p>The problems and dangers of putting children into independent reading situations where they have no alternative but to learn words by sight were exemplified and discussed.</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>Yes.</p>
<p>Trainers have relevant experience of teaching children to read.</p>	<p>Yes.</p>
<p>Training takes account of the trainees' existing knowledge and experience.</p>	<p>This is a full training programme and properly does 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>The training is generally very secure in promoting appropriate knowledge and understanding of the phoneme/grapheme correspondences and the fact that sometimes the same spelling can represent different sounds, whilst the same sound can have different spellings.</p> <p>However one particular page of the material, that on p 17, headed 'Alphabet Code Knowledge', is slightly confused/confusing in this respect.¹ For example: 'c' and 'k', and similarly 'w' and 'wh', are listed in a way that might make them appear to be separate phonemes, rather than alternative graphemes for the same phoneme; double consonants are also listed with the same convention as their single consonant equivalents, although they are again grapheme variants not different phonemes. This confusion was <i>not</i> apparent in the actual training. It is therefore hoped that the training providers might reconsider the paper presentation of this material, and any other instances, in order to clarify.</p>

¹ Note from Sounds-Write: this is a valid point – there was an error on this page of our manual, which has now been corrected.

<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>Those who complete the Sounds-Write training should be in a strong position effectively to deliver teaching that will achieve the outcomes of the DfE core criteria.</p> <p>The training is also particularly strong in preparing teachers to support children who fall behind the expected schedule.</p>
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General comments:

The training visited met all the agreed criteria.

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