



The recent history of government initiatives in the early teaching of reading’.

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Some publications:

1. **1988: *English for ages 5 to 11: Proposals of the Secretary of State for Education and Science and the Secretary of State for Wales*** (first part of the ‘Cox Report’, which formed the basis for the National Curriculum English Order): ‘Reading is much more than the decoding of black marks upon a page: it is a quest for meaning, and one which requires the reader to be an active participant....In their quest for meaning, children need to be helped to become confident and resourceful in the use of a variety of reading cues. They need to be able to recognise on sight a large proportion of the words they encounter and to be able to predict meaning on the basis of phonic, idiomatic and grammatical regularities and of what makes sense in context; children should be encouraged to make informed guesses.’
2. **1990: *English in the National Curriculum***: [at Level 2 – the expected level for 7-year-olds] ‘Pupils should be able to ... use picture and context cues, words recognised on sight and phonic cues in reading....Use a picture to help make sense of a text; ...use initial letters to help with recognising words.’
3. **September 1993: *National Curriculum Council Consultation Report***: [under the heading ‘Initial reading skills’] ‘**Level 2** pupils should be able to: ... use more than one strategy (phonic, graphic, syntactic, contextual) when reading unfamiliar words.’
4. **May 1994: *English in the National curriculum: Draft proposals***: ‘**Phonic knowledge** focuses on the relationships between print symbols and sound patterns. [Children] should be made aware of the sounds of spoken language, and taught how symbols correspond to those sounds. Opportunities should be given for:
 - listening to sounds in oral language to develop phonological awareness;
 - recognising alliteration, sound patterns and rhyme and relating these to patterns in letters;
 - considering syllables in longer words;
 - identifying initial and final sounds in words, including sounds which rhyme;
 - identifying and using a comprehensive range of letters and sounds (including combinations of letters, blends and digraphs), and paying specific attention to their use in the formation of words;
 - recognising inconsistencies in phonic patterns.
 - recognising that some letters do not always produce a sound themselves but influence the sound of others, e.g. final ‘e’, soft ‘c’.’
5. **January 1995: *English in the National Curriculum***: The wording was very similar to that in the May 1994 draft proposals.
6. **1998: *National Literacy Strategy Framework for Teaching***: ‘When pupils read familiar and predictable texts, they can easily become over-reliant on their knowledge of context and grammar. They may pay too little attention to how words sound and how they are spelt. But if pupils cannot

decode individual words through their knowledge of sounds and spellings, they find it difficult to get at the meaning of more complex, less familiar texts....At Key Stage 1, there should be a strong and systematic emphasis on phonics and other word level skills.

Pupils should be taught to:

- Discriminate between the separate sounds in words;
- Learn the letters and letter combinations most commonly used to spell those sounds;
- Read words by sounding out and blending their separate parts;
- Write words by combining the spelling patterns of their sounds.'

.... BUT there were also lists headed 'High frequency words to be taught as "sight recognition" words through YR to Y2' – and there was the 'searchlights' model.

7. **1998: National Literacy Strategy Framework for Teaching:** 'Shared reading provides a context for applying and teaching word level skills and for teaching how to use other reading cues to check for meaning, and identify and self-correct errors.'
8. **1999: Progression in Phonics:** 'The most effective phonics instruction teaches children to identify phonemes in spoken language first, then to understand how these are represented by letters and letter combinations (graphemes).' This emphasis was reflected in the balance of activities suggested in *Progression in Phonics*: seven activities involved just identifying phonemes in spoken words with no reference to letters, an eighth had two versions, one of which involved letters, and a further ten involved identifying phonemes in spoken words and representing them by letters. A total of 18 activities therefore stressed the identification of phonemes in spoken words; against this, only 6 activities involved any blending, and the blending aspect was not stressed in all of these. That accounts for 24 out of 28 activities – the other 4 involved practice just on grapheme-phoneme correspondences without blending or segmenting, or else practice on rhyming.
9. **2002: Early Literacy Support:** This was designed for children in Year 1 who were struggling. There was still a lot of emphasis on picture cues and context cues.
10. **August 2003: Sound Sense: The phonics element of the National Literacy Strategy** (Report by Greg Brooks on the DfES Phonics Seminar of March 2003): this included a recommendation to 'make it clear that, within the 100 most frequent words, only those that are irregular should be taught as sight words'.
11. **?Autumn 2003: DfES response to Brooks paper:** '...Ofsted report that some teachers ... teach the 100 most frequent words in English as though they were all irregular. Clearly there is further clarification needed here.'

This DfES response also accepted the need for more emphasis on blending: '... the NLS paper [for the 2003 phonics seminar] acknowledged that further activities to support children in learning to blend are necessary'.

12. **2004: Playing with Sounds: A Supplement to Progression in Phonics:** 'The high-frequency words listed in the back of the NLS *Framework for Teaching* are not intended to be taught by rote.... Many of these words are phonically regular and thus perfectly decodable. A proportion are irregular and practitioners teach these as "words with a tricky bit in". *Playing with Sounds* also included more emphasis on blending.
13. **April 2005: Teaching Children to Read** (the report of the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee on its inquiry conducted between November 2004 and February 2005): 'We therefore strongly urge the DfES to commission a large-scale comparative study, comparing the National Literacy Strategy with "phonics fast and first" approaches.' A study of exactly this type was not done, though the Early Reading Development Pilot was carried out and showed that phonics teaching could be speeded up. Jim Rose was commissioned to carry out a review. His interim report appeared in December 2005 and his final report was published in March 2006.

14. **March 2006: *Independent Review of the Teaching of Early Reading*** (Jim Rose's final report):
'Despite uncertainties in research findings, the practice seen by the review shows that the systematic approach, which is generally understood as "synthetic" phonics, offers the vast majority of young children the best and most direct route to becoming skilled readers and writers.'

15. **May 2007: *Letters and Sounds sent out to schools***. This is a synthetic phonics programme. It systematically teaches grapheme-phoneme correspondences and aims for a 50-50 balance between blending-for-reading and segmenting-for-spelling. It warns against the use of picture cues and context cues, and it stresses the importance of using decoding for high-frequency words – full decoding where possible, and partial decoding where words contain grapheme-phoneme correspondences which are rare or which have not yet been taught.