

All Children can learn to read, spell and write with Sound Discovery®

By Dr Marlynne Grant
Chartered Educational Psychologist

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Introduction

Professor Rhona Johnson and Dr Joyce Watson brought the term “synthetic phonics” to prominence recently with their Clackmannanshire study in Scotland. In England, Dr Marlynne Grant (Educational Psychologist) and Trudy Wainwright (Advanced Skills Teacher) have conducted similar research with synthetic phonics from 1997, tracking children from ages 4 years in Reception to 11 years at the end of Key Stage 2.

The English study used a synthetic phonics programme called Sound Discovery®.

The Sound Discovery programme was designed for all ages and to include slow-to-start and dyslexic pupils. The programme with its fast pace progression is delivered through a multi-sensory method of teaching called the Snappy Lesson® which is based on psychological learning theory. The success of their research is achieved by these two elements working together: the fast pace progression and the Snappy Lesson.

Sound Discovery and Snappy Lesson have been commended in the recent House of Commons Education and Skills Committee Report, “*Teaching Children to Read*” and the Ofsted document, “*Reading for Purpose and Pleasure*”.

The English research used whole classes of pupils, about 90 new pupils each year, and about 700 pupils were involved. Base line assessment showed that the children started school with very low language and social skills. Some children had Statements and there was a wide range of special education needs, e.g.:

- Very low intellectual ability or IQ, some severely so: below the 1st Percentile
- Dyslexic and dyspraxic profiles
- Language and communication difficulties
- Autism and Asperger’s syndrome
- ADHD and attention deficits
- Physical and sensory difficulties
- Behaviour difficulties
- Down’s syndrome

Since working with synthetic phonics, the research found that no pupils in the school required a Statement for dyslexia. Whatever their Special Educational Need or background, virtually all the children learned to read and write. Further observations were made about the learning of the children. There was:

- No gender issue, boys did as well as girls
- No race issue, children whose first language was not English and children from different ethnic groups did equally as well
- No social class issue, children on free school meals and looked-after children did as well as other children

- No summer birthday issue, children with summer birthdays did as well as older children
- No writing issue, writing was a strength, particularly boys' writing.

How was this achieved?

The alphabetic code of 40+ phonemes was taught in seven weeks in Reception, and the teaching extended throughout Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 to cover the whole phonic progression. Reading, writing and spelling were developed through the Snappy Lesson and modelled writing

Results of the English Study

Each year, after just 12 weeks of teaching, whole cohorts of ninety Reception children were about 12 months ahead of actual age for both reading and spelling. By the end of Reception the children were about fifteen months ahead for reading and spelling. This early advantage was sustained through Key Stage 1 to the end of Key Stage 2 as is demonstrated by the results in the table below.

Table of Key Stage 2 English SATS Results in 2004 for the Study School using Sound Discovery Compared with Overall Results in England

	Level 5	Level 4+	Level 3	Level 2 and below
Study school	65%	94%	6%	0%
England	27%	78%	15%	7%

The table above compares results in the study school with national results. In the study school, no child achieved below Level 3B for English in the KS2 SATs. 94% achieved government expectations for 11 year olds and 65% achieved government expectations for 14 year olds.

The wider implications of this research

By teaching synthetic phonics through the Sound Discovery programme from the age of four years, schools can expect to raise standards and virtually eliminate the “tail of underachievement” which has been a persistent part of national statistics for too long.

These results are exciting. The gift of literacy is life changing, giving all our children the very best start to their education and to their lives. This impacts on their motivation, their self-esteem and their behaviour. We can then truly build a better future.

Case study

John started synthetic phonics at age 5 years, after the rest of his class, as he was very ill in Reception. His MRI brain scan showed significant brain damage and his cognitive assessment showed he had severe learning difficulties (BAS II: Verbal Ability: 0.2 Percentile; Non-Verbal Reasoning: less than 0.1 Percentile). His Statement of Special Education Needs also mentioned his fine and gross motor co-ordination, attention, language and short term memory problems. John struggled with learning from the start. When encouraged to blend b-u-s by pushing phoneme cards

together he was likely to say “pig”. John received Snappy Lesson interventions in a small group of about 6 pupils throughout Key Stages 1 and 2. In Year 4 he was able to read the sports page of the family newspaper fluently and he could write coherently. In Year 6 he achieved Level 3B in his KS2 English SATs. At year 7, he transferred to his local Comprehensive school attending mainstream classes. He was followed up at age 12 years. He had made 18 months improvement in reading and spelling since his Y5 Annual Review. He was able to read and understand the class homework instructions including words like “expression” and “facial” and his teacher praised his understanding of words like “tone”, “texture” and “profile”. John is holding his own in mainstream classes but there is little doubt that without synthetic phonics he would have gone to a special school

For more information about synthetic phonics, Sound Discovery and Snappy Lesson:
Telephone: 0117 962 2670, or visit our website www.ridgehillpublishing.com