

Section 1 – Introduction

During my placement in School X, I was given the opportunity to teach English to the year five class. It became apparent during these lessons that some of the children were having difficulty with spelling. The Majority of the lower ability students in particular were consistently spelling word incorrectly, and this was leading to lower attainment levels when they were assessed. It was particularly evident in words that contained some of the phonemes that children are taught in phonics. After conversation with my class teacher, it was decided that these children would benefit from phonics interventions and from that my action research question came into fruition; can daily phonics interventions help raise the spelling attainment of lower ability KS2 students. For my professional development, these interventions would provide be with a greater depth of knowledge in phonics, something which I had begun to develop during my placement in year 1-11 would also cultivate a more research focus practice in my teaching, allowing me to better assimilate the results of assessments and interventions into my practice and allow me to better see the effects of certain teachings on the learning if my students. In the following essay, I will discuss the current standing of phonics in the National Curriculum, and review what the literature has to say about the effects of phonics generally, and in Key Stage 2. I will go on to discuss the methodology of my interventions and present the findings of the study. Finally, I will discuss the meaning of the findings, the impact they have on my future practice and the learning of the children, and also discuss any issues that have arisen from either the collection of the data from the study or the implications of the findings.

Section 2 Literature Review

Since the Rose Report (2005), phonics has been one of the stalwarts in education and in teaching young children to read and write. The report stated that through the use of phonics, the majority of children were given the platform in which they could become skilled in reading and writing (Rose, 2005). While there is some debate to the types of phonics schools should use, and its' over-all effectiveness, phonics is an important part in the curriculum, with all children in year one having to take part in the 'phonics screening check' (DfE, 2016). In the following section I will discuss the role of synthetic vs analytical phonics, and its place in Key Stage 2.

Synthetic vs analytical

When teaching phonics, there are two types that schools tend to use; synthetic and analytic. In analytic phonics there is an emphasis on letter sounds, but these are mainly those at the start of words, and children would be shown a list of words 'sharing common initial letter sounds' (Johnston and Watson 2014, p.3), for example 'b' would produce words such as bag, bill, bog. Because of this, children would have a vague idea of letter sounds and would learn the spelling of words on a 'holistic basis' (Johnston and Watson 2014, p.3). In synthetic phonics however, the focus is much more about blending different letter sounds in order to create the whole word. Children are encouraged then to figure out the pronunciation of unfamiliar words by using known letter sounds. In this way the learning is more active and allows children to better develop their skills in reading and writing (Johnston and Watson 2014,). Johnston, McGeown and Watson's five-year study into the effects of synthetic vs analytic phonics (2011), showed that generally, the group that was taught via synthetic phonics attained higher levels in spelling, reading, and writing than those

they merely learnt how to spell words through the process of rote learning. The effects of rote learning on spelling has been explored by Glanzer (1962), Montague (1953) and Frith (1980) and it may have been that by doing these test three times the children remembered the spelling for some of the words, rather than used the phonological knowledge that they had acquired.

Another issue lies within the recording of the findings, with the data being wholly quantitative. The very nature of quantitative data means that the focus is on numbers, for example how much progression did the children make, or how many more correct answers did they get compared to the first test. This type of data, and this is indeed particular to my findings, often focuses on the 'how' and not the 'why'. (Muijs,2004). Looking at the numbers in my findings make it impossible to understand why the children performed better, rather we can just simply make the correlation between improving scores and the phonics session.

As well as this I feel that the selection process for the pupil was flawed. This is because one of the students was already at a high level in terms of spelling attainment, achieving 72% on their first test. The child in question was picked because in class they are regarded as being low ability for English. However, by using word that came from years 3 and 4, words that they were likely tested on previously, the child was already at a high enough level to suggest that they shouldn't be included in the interventions, particularly as they made good progress over the four week, their involvement may compromise the validity and reliability of the findings.

Finally, I feel that the group size and length of study, and the arguments presented above, compromised the generalisability of my study. By only picking four students