



## Exploring children's difficulties with language and literacy

### *Reading intervention*

#### **Narr:**

Glynnis Smith is an Educational Consultant who has been actively involved in the implementation of the reading intervention programme in several North Yorkshire primary schools.

#### **Glynnis:**

The Reading Intervention program originated in Cumbria and it's very much based on a reading recovery model. Dr Peter Hatcher developed the program in Cumbria, and he moved to the University of York, and North Yorkshire got involved in the program, as a result of a partnership between the local authority and the University. The program is a fairly intensive ten week program so it fits very well into a term. It's very much targeted, hopefully, at younger children and schools are asked to identify those children who are not making sufficient progress in literacy, who are not gaining literacy skills at Key Stage 1, and to target the program to those children, so we're looking at very much the lowest 2% of school populations who haven't really got started on reading by the end of Key Stage 1.

We have a four day training program for the people who come to deliver the program; most of these are teaching assistants. We provide them with a lot of background knowledge, particularly about how children learn to read, about the development of phonological awareness, and many of those teaching assistants, particularly by the end of the training feel very empowered and a lot more knowledgeable than when they started the training program, and I can remember one TA quoting to me as she left the room after the four day program, "I think now I have the right materials for the right children". It does build confidence. A lot of teaching assistants say they feel very empowered by it. Not only does it give them huge positive feedback because they can see the progress children make very quickly on the program but it is something that they have ownership of in schools because it's their program, they're very much responsible for assessing the children, for delivering the program to the children, and for supporting often the children back in the classroom where they can see the benefits.

It's not directed at any specific disorders, it's just picking up those children who really haven't got started on reading, and schools are accountable for the learning of children so they are usually tracking children's progress right through foundation state and identifying those children who aren't making good progress, and haven't really started to read, and haven't developed their phonology, and reading intervention is basically a program that brings together reading and phonology, and that's why it is so effective.

The importance of phonology is that unless you are able to decode those symbols on a page and translate them into phonemes, then the task of reading is virtually impossible. You need to be able to know the structured English language in the sense of recognising the letters on the page, making the translation between that letter, the grapheme, and the phonemes, so that children can then blend those phonemes together to make words.

The program is very structured in that it contains both reading and phonology, and some writing, so children will always start the program off by reading a book that they've already previously read where they know virtually all the words – we term this reading an 'easy' book. They then move on to reading a book at what is called 'instructional' level where they should know most of the words, they should know about 90% of the words, so the instructional book provides a small level of challenge, but not too sufficient that the child can't read it. During that reading of the instructional book the teaching assistant will be taking a running record which will actually inform them of where the child might be struggling, and what might be a teaching point for further on in the program. They also then move on to working on

phonological activities including learning sight words, learning new phonemes, blending and segmentation skills, and also doing activities from the book that Peter Hatcher wrote, which is an essential part of the program, called 'Sound Linkage', and that is extremely good for getting children to tune in and listen to phonemes and to actually do activities of an oral nature, rather than something that requires them to sit and write. We also ask children to write at some point during the session, and it's usually called 'writing a sentence', possibly two sentences, and at the very end of the session, they then are introduced to a new book because the book that they have just read at instructional level hopefully they've read sufficiently well that it's now become an easy book for them, so they get an introduction to a new book. So there's quite a significant amount of reading within the program, and a significant amount of phonology, and there is linkage between the two.

I have to say that anecdotally the children enjoy the program immensely and I think it would be hard to actually identify any aspect of the program that worked better than any other because the program gives lots of feedback, it enables children to build their confidence, that children are challenged but not challenged so that they are out of their comfort zone, and it's small steps of progress so children do enjoy the program immensely, in fact for many of them the end of the program is a very difficult moment. One person described it to me a bit like a bereavement, that they've had lots of attention, they've made lots of good progress, and suddenly it comes to an end so we've had to, in terms of the local authority, look at ways of supporting that child to continue making that progress after the end of the intervention and to actually maintain their self esteem.

The programme has been very successful - in North Yorkshire we've had very good success. There's sound impact measures that we can look at in terms of reading progress and writing. In 2006/2007 on average children made ten months' progress in reading over the ten weeks of the program, so it's very much accelerated progress that we're looking for in terms of these children.