Exploring Research, Policy and Practice in Early Literacy: Teach me where I am

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Abstract

There is evidence that a complex 'gap' exists between early literacy academic research and practice (Vanderlinde and Van Braak, 2010). Boundaries between research, policy and practice have become disjointed due to policymakers' increasing intervention in the early years curriculum, and the focus on synthetic phonics programmes (Ellis and Moss, 2014). Historic and current 'reading wars' have resulted in phonics now taking prime place in policy with the Science of Reading (SoR) movement being used in the public debate to advocate policies and instructional approaches that draw evidence largely from the cognitive perspective and the cognitive processes involved in reading (Shanahan, 2020). The most recent debate centres around how to meet the needs of individual children (Wolf, 2015) to address the ongoing problem of underachievement and issues of equality (Hall, 2003).

Framing the study around the sociopolitics of evidence-based practice (Clegg, 2005), and viewing early literacy through four perspectives (cognitive, psycholinguistic, socio-cultural and socio-political), this study aims to explore the complex relationship between research, policy and practice in relation to the teaching and learning of early literacy in classrooms. Specifically, it aims to gain insight into classroom practice and how far that practice relates to academic educational research and theories of learning. The study also captures the perspectives of children to further understand how they experience literacy in classrooms.

A case study was conducted using a mixed-method approach consisting of both qualitative and quantitative methods. The research took place in a Multi Academy Trust in the north of England where I am employed as a Teacher and Family Literacy Project Lead. 10 Participants took part in the study. A policy analysis of The Reading Framework (DfE, 2021) was conducted using Hyatt's (2013) Critical Policy Discourse Analysis Frame (CPDAF) in order to explore the evidence-base for this key policy in early literacy teaching. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 4 teachers and structured activities were conducted with 6 children, aged 3 to 7 years. Lesson observations were conducted of reading, phonics and writing lessons and the 6 children were observed in these lessons. Children's emergent literacy skills and knowledge were assessed using a number of assessment tools. Marking and feedback, and learning objectives were analysed in children's books.

Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) was used to analyse data with 4 main themes and sub themes evident in the data set: phonics, teachers' practices, teachers' perspectives and children's literacy experiences. The findings indicate that in policy and practice, there is a heavy focus on the

teaching of phonics; therefore, there is a need for a more research-based balanced approach to early literacy teaching, and specifically, for developmentally driven instructional approaches (Bear et al., 2020) which will better meet the needs of all children. The study discusses implications for research and practice and makes recommendations for research to help bridge the research-practice gap as well as making recommendations for teachers' early literacy practices (Paechter, 2003).

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List of Abbreviations

ARE - Age Related Expectations

BERA - British Educational Research Association

CPDAF - Critical Policy Discourse Analysis Frame

CVC – Consonant Vowel Consonant

DfE - Department for Education

EAL – English as an Additional Language

ECT - Early Careers Teacher

EIF - Education Inspection Framework

EEF- Education Endowment Fund

EYFS - Early Years Foundation Stage

FGA – Focused Group Activity

GPC – Grapheme-Phoneme Correspondences

ITT – Initial Teacher Training

KS1 – Key Stage 1

NELP - National Early Literacy Panel

NLS - National Literacy Strategy

NRP- National Reading Panel

OECD - Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

Ofsted - Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills

PSC - Phonics Screening Check

PIRLS - Progress in International Reading Study

PISA - Programme for International Student Assessment

PP - Pupil Premium

QPAS - Quick Phonological Awareness Screening

RCT – Randomised Controlled Trial

SATs – Standard Assessment Tests

SEN – Special Educational Needs

SES - Socioeconomic Status

SoR – The Science of Reading

SSP - Synthetic Systematic Phonics

SVR – Simple view of Reading

T4W - Talk for Writing

UKLA - United Kingdom Literacy Association

ZPD – Zone of Proximal Development

Chapter 1: Introduction: Setting the Scene

1.1: Introduction

The purpose of the study is to explore the complex relationship between research, policy and practice in relation to the teaching and learning of early literacy in classrooms. The study aims to gain insight into policy around the teaching of early literacy by conducting a policy analysis using Hyatt's (2013) Critical Policy Discourse Analysis Frame (CPDAF) in order to explore the evidence-base for the policy. It aims to gain insight into classroom practice, and how far this is research-based, particularly in relation to academic research. Further, by listening to the perspectives of teachers and children, it aims to gain an understanding of how they experience literacy in classrooms. A prominent aim of the study is for it to be useful, to be of practical use to teachers in classrooms, having impact in practice. This is important as research is about bringing about change: change for myself, colleagues, the wider trust and beyond (Clough and Nutbrown, 2002). In light of this, the study aims that the findings will add to the existing knowledge-base around early literacy, drawing out implications for practice, and seeking to be useful on a practical basis to schools (Paechter, 2003). Acknowledging that the area of early literacy is vast, the study focuses primarily on early reading, writing and spelling. Before providing the relevant background to the study, it is important to provide a discussion around definitions of literacy.

1.1.1: Definitions of Literacy

Davidson (2010) purports that defining literacy is a complex concept. Scholars argue for broader definitions of literacy (Alexander, 2008) whereas Goodman (Adams et al., 1991) contends that definitions of literacy are also linked with theories of how children learn. Indeed, tension exists between the different theoretical perspectives of literacy learning, and related changes in definitions of literacy over time (Street, 2013). More recently, scholars have emphasised the multi-modal and social definitions of literacy (Larson and Marsh, 2013) with Street (2013) arguing for literacy as a social practice. However, this contrasts with policy which tends to be dominated by the learning of isolated skills (letter-sound recognition, blending and segmenting), that translates into traditional and narrow conventions of reading and writing that are evident in traditional schooling (Street, 2013). Arguably, we need to move away from this anachronistic view of literacy in order to redefine literacy that focuses on cultural inclusion and relevance, and incorporates multimodal communication. Indeed, a more multifaceted definition of literacy considers the individual, subjectiveness and the context in which multimodal communication takes place, and allows access to new models of learning in the classroom that emphasise plurality, and adjust with context, text

and peoples' identities (Rowsell and Walsh, 2011). Rightly, the United Kingdom Literacy Association's (UKLA) (2024) definition recognises the multiple-perspective nature of early literacy. They state, "UKLA views literacy as a complex, multidimensional phenomenon; there is no single, all-encompassing theory that can fully explain early literacy learning" (UKLA, 2024 p. 1). This holistic view of literacy, which draws on different theoretical principles, considers literacy as a social and cultural practice whilst recognising its entangled relationship with language and communication (UKLA, 2020). Resonating with these broader and expanding definitions of literacy, this research study adopts a multiple-perspective definition that also recognises the complexities surrounding research evidence as individual scholars and institutions operate in the different theoretical perspectives with underlying associated assumptions and methodologies. Working with this definition of literacy, it is now necessary to present a discussion around the SoR, prevalent in the UK, and particularly in North America, in relation to what counts as 'evidence' regarding educational research.

1.2: Professional and Personal Context

1.2.1: Positionality

The study is framed around the theme of sociopolitics of evidence-based practice and epistemological assumptions which operate within theory to practice gaps. Assuming a critical realist position, the study contributes to a critique of evidence-based practice, whilst still valuing what 'evidence' contributes as it is understood in its alignment to clear theoretical arguments (Clegg, 2005). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) question if researchers can remain disinterested when their motivations, interests and backgrounds are tied up in their social histories; therefore, I acknowledge that key factors, such as the researcher's class, educational and professional background, faith, friendship and the roles they take on in life, are all part of the researcher's history and, therefore, cannot be value-free (Sikes and Goodson, 2003). In light of this, it is important to acknowledge that, as a researcher, I am positioned within the research and, as all researchers work from their value-ladened perspectives (Greenbank, 2003), it is imperative that I take a reflexive approach where personal characteristics such as honesty, trust and respect permeate the research (Pring, 2003). With this in mind, I now present a timeline of my teaching career, highlighting important research that has reinforced my values, influenced my theoretical viewpoint, and shaped my thinking and everyday practice in relation to early literacy learning and teaching in the context of national policy.

My interest in educational research began when I attended Initial Teacher Training (ITT) in 1994. It was here that I began to value the role of research in driving classroom practice. I read widely around the teaching of early literacy, research methods, and broader educational, social and political issues. Whilst engaging with the literature, I came across 'giants' in the field of education, engaging with texts written by Smith (1988), Meek (1988) and Goodman (1986), and becoming aware of the polarised debate that existed between 'phonics' and 'whole language' that also played out in the literature and media. Gentry (1982) and Bissex's (1980) research influenced my thinking around invented spelling, and Brown (1993) and Graves' (1983) extensive classroom research on the writing process approach resonated with me. Heath (1983), Tizard and Hughes (1984), and Sulzby and Teale's (1985) research about literacy learning beginning at home connected with me, and led me to Clay's (1991) important work on 'emergent literacy'. Waterland's (1987) book also connected with me. Her 'apprenticeship' approach to early reading, which advocated reading for meaning, autonomy and choice, the reading of whole texts, and social and collaborative learning, were elements of teaching reading that I valued. I also began to understand the different, and often conflicting, theoretical perspectives, and associated methodologies and methods in early literacy learning. Indeed, Waterland's (1987) approach was critiqued for its underemphasis on explicit structured phonics instruction. After reading research from differing perspectives, I began leaning towards the socio-cultural and psycholinguistic perspectives as it considered the individual, culture, context and meaning.

When I entered the classroom in 1998, I was keen to implement research into my everyday classroom practice. I observed many children displaying the different stages of spelling development in their independent writing that I had read about in several research studies. I also observed children displaying early reading behaviours when reading texts that I had come across in the research, such as finger pointing, using the pictures to retell the story, and remembering repeated phrases in order to 'read' the text. However, assuming my position as a teacher in the classroom, and following the national curriculum, I began to feel a tension between the academic research that I was reading, the national curriculum, policy and everyday classroom practice.

The outset of my teaching career coincided with the launch of the National Literacy Strategy (DfE, 1998) which advocated the 'Searchlights' model of reading. This model resonated with me as it valued what children bring to the task of learning to read, and placed emphasis on the use of the

three-cueing system where children use semantic, graphic and syntactical clues to read unknown words.

The strategy broke teaching down into text, sentence and word level, emphasised systematic phonics instruction, and promoted teaching 'shared reading' through the use of 'big books'. A year later, came the introduction of Progression in Phonics (DfE, 1999), which was a structured approach to teaching phonics with a recognition of the 5 phases of phonics development with Phase 1 focusing on phonological awareness – a pleasing recognition that was prevalent in the research about phonological awareness and its role in learning to read. As a practitioner, I was keen to implement this research into my everyday classroom practice. I drew on Brown (1993) and Gentry's (1982) work on how to support children's writing and spelling development. In practice, this meant treating children as 'writers' right from the outset, and responding to their writing, in a way that portrayed to them the important message about the function of writing preceding the perfect form. Gentry's (1982) five stages of spelling development were also evident in the children's early writing attempts, and I supported this development using appropriate strategies. I also drew on the work of Waterland (1987) and her 'apprenticeship approach', and incorporated daily reading sessions where I allowed children autonomy of their book choices, encouraged them to choose 'real' books in addition to the 'scheme' books that they were reading. In these sessions, I read alongside them in a comfortable and inviting space in the classroom whilst supporting each child's individual reading development, fostering a love of books together. However, it became apparent that these practices alone were not enough, and that children also needed to be taught explicit phonics skills alongside developing foundational skills and a love of reading. What was also apparent were the complexities of literacy learning in practice, and the stark realisation of how difficult it was to meet the individual needs of all children, and that some children were, despite my best efforts, struggling to learn to read and write like their peers. Observing that children arrived at the school gates with different early literacy experiences, I spent a great deal of time contemplating what effect this had on their ability to learn literacy in school. Again, these realisations caused a great deal of tension for me as a practicing teacher as I negotiated research, curriculum and policy in the classroom.

At this time, the standards agenda was gaining momentum, and I experienced this first-hand with the administration of the Standard Assessment Tests (SATs) which were published annually in League Tables. In practice, some children could not access the tests. Also, as their teacher, they did not tell me anything about the children that I did not already know. In such a high-stakes testing

culture, I felt a jarring recognition that I had little control and autonomy over certain aspects of my practice as a teacher. Understandably, feeling loyalty towards my school, and a will for it to perform well in the national league tables, I strived to ensure that children did well on the tests. Despite experiencing these tensions on a daily basis, I endeavoured to be the best teacher that I could be, continuing to negotiate research, policy and practice whilst, outside the classroom, the 'reading wars' continued to play out in the literature and media, and synthetic phonics began to take precedence in policy.

The gradual rise of synthetic phonics had been gaining momentum in the background in the form of: the Clackmannanshire Study (Johnson and Watson, 2004), the Teaching Children to Read (HCESE, 2005) report and the Rose Report (DfES, 2006), and then materialised in policy with the introduction of Letters and Sounds (DfE, 2007). With the introduction of the latter policy came the implementation of instructional synthetic phonics programmes in practice, which, I argue, did serve in ensuring a systematic approach to teaching phonics, as advocated in the research. However, in practice, I became acutely aware of the mis-match between instructional teaching methods advocated in national policy, and where children were presenting in relation to their literacy development when they entered school, possibly due to factors such as culture, context, language and home experience. This awareness of the complexities involved in literacy learning led me to explore why, despite children receiving the same school experience, a significant number of children were failing to learn to read and write in school. In 2010, I completed an MA in Early Childhood Education (ECE) at the University of Sheffield. Teaching early reading was the chosen topic for my research study, and the findings indicated that early reading should be viewed from multiple perspectives in order to meet the individual needs of all children (Shorthouse, 2010). Doing the MA also gave me an understanding of research methods, and the polarised debate between positivism and interpretivism, and associated methods; the findings furthered my interest in the complexities of literacy learning, particularly for children from marginalised groups. More recently, inspired by the work of Nutbrown, Hannon and Morgan (2005), my interest in how the home impacts children's abilities to learn literacy, led me to successfully apply for, and receive funding, to lead a three-year Family Literacy Project across the Academy Trust where I am employed. Leading this project was a constant reminder of the complexities involved in learning to read and write, particularly for children with different social backgrounds and early literacy experiences.

From 2010, whilst continuing to teach children across the primary age range, policy changes materialised with the widespread implementation of instructional phonics programmes alongside arms-length regulation implemented by the government in the form of policy levers: target setting and inspection (Hyatt, 2013). Specific policies introduced were: Phonics Screening Check (DfE, 2012), the National Curriculum (DfE, 2013), the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills' (Ofsted) Education Inspection Framework (EIF) (Ofsted, 2019), and The Reading Framework (DfE, 2021). Indeed, I have seen many policy changes over my career. Some I have welcomed, and others, I have resisted. There have been some positive aspects which, I argue, have improved the teaching of reading. For instance, research around the five components of effective reading instruction (phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension) have made their way into classrooms. Indeed, I engaged intensely with the academic research around these components, and was pivotal in implementing this research in my own school in my role of Literacy Lead. Recently, I wholeheartedly welcomed the 'Reading for pleasure' pedagogy making its way into policy and supporting children's interests, autonomy, volition and pleasure in practice. Arguably, the implementation of wide scale instructional programmes has had a positive impact in ensuring that phonics, an important part of learning to read, is being taught systematically. However, positioned both as researcher and practitioner, I see first-hand how policy is negotiated in practice by teachers, and the day-to-day challenges that they face in trying to meet children's individual needs. Furthermore, although teachers innately adapt the curriculum to meet children's needs, undeniably, teachers' classroom practices are governed by policy.

Now, after teaching children for 27 years, and having developed a critical understanding of the broader social and political issues involved in education, I am driven to dig deeper into early literacy teaching and learning, and seek teachers' and children's perspectives as the individuals inhabiting classroom spaces. Driven by the principle that early literacy should meet the needs of all learners (Hall, 2003), my research study aims to explore the complex relationship between research, policy and practice. This is in opposition to the 'one or the other way' philosophy that has led to a narrow view of literacy in schools, policy and educational research in England that sustains cyclical underachievement and social inequalities (Davidson, 2010). Also, in relation to methods, I argue that using only quantitative approaches when researching, the teaching and learning of early reading ignores the complexities of real-life classrooms and, more importantly, the personal contexts for the children that occupy these real-life spaces. Interestingly, in contrast, educational research relating to writing tends to employ qualitative methods, specifically case studies, and

observing children writing in real-life classrooms (Graves, 1983; Ross and Young, 2021). Arguably then, only by studying the teaching and learning of reading and writing in such spaces, using qualitative methods, can such complexities be understood. My study attempts to make a link between research and practice in relation to early reading and writing by studying these in real-life classrooms against the back-drop of national policy whilst attempting to allow children's voices to be heard (Clough and Nutbrown, 2007) by ascertaining their opinions about how they perceive that they are taught early literacy. A contextualised account of national policy now follows, beginning with the 'Science of Reading' (SoR) movement.

1.3: Early Reading and the 'Science of Reading'

Teachers in classrooms teach early literacy within the context of national policy and the complex 'gap' that exists between research and practice (Vanderlinde and Van Braak, 2010). More recently, Hanford (2019) exposed a divide between classroom practices and the SoR whilst Goldberg and Goldenberg (2021) blame the continuing debates in the SoR for teachers entering the teaching profession unprepared to teach. They refer to the competing control of the SoR and 'balanced' literacy teaching but argue that this only serves to perpetuate teachers' confusion and mistrust. Interestingly, this gap exists in other areas too as there is evidence of a gap in teachers' knowledge of phonological awareness (Philips, Clancy-Menchetti and Lonigan, 2008), and little evidence of how early educational settings support early writing development (Gerde, Bingham and Pendergast, 2015). One possible reason could be that teachers do not possess the knowledge of the developmental trajectory of how children acquire phonological awareness (Philips, Clancy-Menchetti and Lonigan, 2008).

Exacerbated by the SoR movement, the issue of 'evidence' for the implementation of phonics into policy has also become a contested debate within the literature. Owen, Watkins and Hughes (2022) remind us that, "Developing an evidence-base for educational provision can be an arduous journey" (Owen, Watkins and Hughes, 2017, p. 1). They suggest an evidence-building framework which makes the distinction between evidence-informed and evidence-based research. The former refers to pedagogic theory informing the development of an initial approach or intervention. This field-testing phase is then followed by the collection of empirical data to substantiate its effectiveness in a particular context. Growing evidence collected from studies, which establish positive impact on learner outcomes, contribute to developing evidence for the interventions – this is a precondition that then cogitates an intervention as evidence-based. However, in relation to evidence and policy,

Hyatt (2013) asserts that often evidence used in policy is based on quantitative research, viewed by some as indisputable with its underlying assumptions of positivism and objectivity with those in opposition regarded as inaccurate and lacking credibility. Despite such methodological issues relating to educational research, in relation to national policy, a scientific approach to research has been triumphant, particularly in the teaching of early reading with the introduction of phonics in policy in the materialisation of Letters and Sounds (DfES, 2007). Much of the 'scientific' research stems from the National Reading Panel (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000) published in 2000 suggesting the effectiveness of the five components of effective reading instruction: phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. These are seen as the "five pillars of instruction" (Cassidy, Montalvo Valadez and Garrett, 2010, p. 644). However, others contest the use of experimental scientific methods, namely Randomised Control Trials (RCTs), as the evidence-base for policy. Boyd (2000) argues that it is wrong to view RCT's as the benchmark for judging educational research, but the more recent SoR movement has gathered momentum, and exacerbated the view that only science counts as research.

1.3.1: The Science of Reading and Instructional Phonics Programmes

Largely drawn from the cognitive perspective, the SoR movement is used in the public debate to endorse policies and instructional practices based on the cognitive processes involved in reading (Shanahan, 2020), and has led to the wide-scale implementation of instructional approaches as advocated in policy. Indeed, Seidenberg, Borkenhagan and Kearns (2020) argue that these components lack a developmental account of how they are learned, and this is essential information for instruction. Furthermore, much of the recent research on reading is conducted using neuroscience (Seindenberg, Borkenhagan and Kearns 2021) and, although there is value in what neuroscience brings to our understanding of the reading brain, and the process of reading, as instruction is not part of the study, it provides no insight into instruction (Shanahan, 2020). He cautions against the translation of such research into wide-scale pedagogical phonics instructional application without the consideration of evidence from instructional experiments which are designed to test a particular instructional teaching method in a classroom setting. He also points out the gap that exists between the effectiveness of instructional approaches and successful large-scale implementation. Shanahan (2020) reiterates that, "Basic research has a role to play in reading science but can never be the final determinant of practice or policy; that should always depend on studies that directly evaluate the effectiveness of a practice or policy" (Shanahan, 2020, p. 244). A guiding principle in conducting research into reading should be that the research methods should

allow the research question to be investigated directly (NRC, 2002). The National Research Council (NRC) highlights that the only way to know if an instructional approach works is to try it out in the classroom, and measure the impact on student's learning (Shanahan, 2020). Further, Allington, Johnston and Day (2002) argue that teachers' professional knowledge and experience and inquiry into their own practice, coupled with the experience of the children, matter the most. Hoffman, Hikida and Sailors (2020) too, point out that the SoR ignores the voices of literacy teacher education researchers. They acknowledge the contribution that scientific research has made to the teaching and learning of early literacy, but assert there is a need to look beyond the science. This will allow for a more nuanced understanding of the scientific model, and its role in supporting evidence-based practice (Lemons et al., 2014), in order to capture the complexities of learning literacy in real-world classrooms (Hindman et al., 2020). Others agree that classroom practice must be systematic and rigorous, but not limited to the scientific paradigm (Erikson, 2005) that silences the voices of teachers (Dudley-Marling, 2005). It should also demonstrate the complexities of real-life classrooms that reflect the lives of the individuals who occupy these spaces. Within this context though, there has to be an acknowledgement that political forces have shaped instructional approaches, but there is a need to champion balance and compatibility across practice and research (Pearson, 2004). Harrison (2010) refers to this as a, "politically defined research agenda" (Harrison, 2010, p. 10) in which researchers operate. However, whilst delicate boundaries exist between research, policy and practice, research evidence also needs to be guided by an ethical framework in order to interpret the complexities of research evidence (Ellis and Moss, 2014). Furthermore, the issues around evidence are made more complex as methods are linked with different theoretical perspectives. Working within these theoretical frameworks, one is confronted by the issue of pluralism in methods and methodology. Indeed, scholars point out that researchers tend to work within their own perspective (Hall, 2010). However, we need to move away from research practice that leads to deficits in representation and from the 'gold standard' of methods, favoured by governments, and towards greater methodological diversity (Kerrigan and Johnson, 2019). Alternatively, early literacy learning should be researched and viewed from multiple-perspectives as opposed to 'this or that way' philosophy (Davidson, 2010). A presentation of the four main perspectives in early literacy learning will now follow, beginning with the cognitive perspective, which is the most dominant perspective in policy, research and practice.

1.4: Theoretical Perspectives in Early Literacy

There are four main theoretical perspectives in early literacy which offer definitions and perspectives on early reading. These are: cognitive, socio-cultural, psycholinguistic and socio-political perspectives. Crawford (1995) highlights that debates in early literacy research are symptomatic of the pedagogical positions of different theoretical paradigms, underlying assumptions, and researcher backgrounds, and interests. The historical context of the different paradigms and perspectives in educational research are important seminal considerations, and there exists a blurring of lines between the perspectives (Crawford, 1995) and historical tensions that exist in theory and methodology (Davidson, 2010). Largely influenced by the work of Hall (2003) in her book, 'Listening to Stephen Read: Multiple Perspectives on Literacy', the theoretical framework for the study is based around these four perspectives which reflect assumptions about the ways in which children learn to read, pedagogical positions and methodological issues. Although these perspectives do not operate in isolation (there is cross-fertilisation), the perspectives help in supporting our understanding of the way in which our youngest children are influenced by the discourse surrounding reading (Levy, 2011). The table below presents the four theoretical perspectives in early literacy along with its view of early literacy, based on related epistemological and ontological assumptions.

Table 1 – The four theoretical perspectives in early literacy

Perspective	**View of Early Literacy Learning**
Cognitive	● Focuses on understanding the cognitive processes involved in learning to read and write ● Focus on language processing including phonological awareness, vocabulary, fluency, decoding, word recognition and understanding word meaning ● Stage theory model - literacy skills develop through a series of stages ● Role played by memory and attention ● Involves metacognition and regulation of thinking ● Traditional phonics approach ● Advocates the Simple View of Reading Model
Psycholinguistic	● Recognises reading is complex – rooted in social, cultural and political practice

	● Draws upon linguistic processes: phonological, semantic, syntactic and morphological awareness ● Advocates 'real reading' of authentic texts - 'Real Book' approach ● Emphasises orthographic processing - understanding visual patterns in words ● Emphasis on meaning and language ● Make use of syntactic, semantic and graphic cues ● Advocates The Searchlights Model – three cueing systems to work out what texts say: phonics; word recognition/graphic knowledge; syntax and meaning
Social-Cultural	● Emphasis social and cultural contexts ● Emphasises social interaction in literacy development practices ● Emphasises authentic literacy activities ● Considers children's experiences, ethnicity and social backgrounds ● Values collaborative learning ● Advocates the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978) ● Incorporates critical literacies
Socio-political	● Considers social and cultural contexts and power discourses ● Highlights the role policy plays in shaping early literacy practices and outcomes ● Acknowledges Language and cultural diversity ● Advocates for social justice and challenges inequality ● Recognises critical literacies ● Views literacy as connected with ethnicity, gender, social class and disability

1.4.1: The Cognitive Perspective

The cognitive-psychological perspective aligns with the normative definition of 'print literacy' where literacy is taught and learned through instructional approaches by memorising the alphabetic code (phonics) - learned independently outside social and cultural influences (Davidson, 2010). Johnson and Watson (2007) provide a definition of synthetic phonics as the blending of grapheme-phoneme correspondences to read words, and then segmenting words into their component graphemes for spelling. The teaching of synthetic phonics dominates this perspective. Associated with this perspective is the more recent movement, The Science of Reading, used in the public debate to endorse policies and instructional practices based on the cognitive processes involved in reading (Shanahan, 2020). With its roots in Piaget's theory, within this perspective, stage model theory is prominent in the literature in relation to reading and spelling. A more detailed discussion of stage theory will follow in the relevant section.

1.4.2: The Psycholinguistic Perspective

Smith's (1988) notion of 'joining the literacy club' captures the essence of this perspective. In this perspective, the learning of literacy, drawing largely on Vygotskian (1978) theory, is viewed as a social activity which is influenced by language, memory and linguistic features (Smith, 1988; Moustafa, 1997), stressing reading as a quest for meaning through the use of authentic texts (Goodman, 1986; Meek, 1998). Linguistics, prominent in this perspective, is the scientific study of language and its structure, including sub-fields such as phonemes (speech sounds) morphemes (word formation), syntax (sentence structure), semantics (meaning) and pragmatics (language use in context) (Sinha, 2005). This perspective has been associated with the whole language approach advocating children use the three-cueing systems to work out unknown words and was associated with the 'Searchlights Model' prior to 2006. Historically, Goodman (1986, 1997) rejected the notion that reading was primarily a decoding process. He emphasised the wealth of knowledge and experience that children bring to reading and writing rather than being viewed as 'blank slates' responding to stimulus. There have been many historical and recent criticisms of this approach. Chall (1983b) argued that it ignores stages of reading development whilst scholars have questioned Goodman (1986) and Smith's (1971) view that fluent reading does not require attention to individual words. Additionally, evidence drawing on this perspective was also seen as weak as it was not rooted in empirical evidence (Meek, 1998). Further, there is consensus within the literature that teaching children the three-cueing system is harmful (Hanford, 2018), although others argue that there is no evidence of this (Shanahan, 2020). Still, Goldberg and Goldenberg (2022) assert that, whilst meaning

and syntax should be used to confirm the correct reading of words, teaching the 'three-cueing' is flawed, yet still embedded in teachers' practices (Hanford, 2019). Additionally, it is now recognised in the literature that linguistics, and phonetics, form the basis of literacy and teachers need specialist knowledge in these areas; therefore, insight from linguistics should inform investigations into programmes (Brooks, Beard and Ampaw-Farr, 2019).

Although these two perspectives have presented contrasting views on early literacy, they fail to acknowledge the complexities of reading; therefore, the two following perspectives acknowledge the social, cultural and political practices that add to the complexities of practice (Levy, 2011).

1.4.3: The Socio-Cultural Perspective

The socio-cultural perspective recognises the role of culture, and gives significance to the social nature of language and learning (Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1960), and shared social practices (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky (1978), a key contributor to this perspective, gave significance to the social nature of learning and language, valuing the role of culture. His theory, the 'zone of proximal development' (ZPD), also known as 'scaffolding', refers to the gap between the actual competence level and the potential development level. However, there exists a problematic relationship between the ZPD and scaffolding as some scholars argue that they are different. The ZPD is a broader concept that includes systems of social relationships, recognising what individuals bring to their interactions whereas scaffolding is concerned with development, fluency and mastery in the limited interactions between novices and experts (Xi and Lantolf, 2020). This perspective sees the individual in relation to individuals in social and cultural contexts, and values the cultural knowledge and experience that they bring. Language and literacy are viewed as cultural tools, and competency is achieved through participation in literate communities where family, school, peers and community are all factors which affect learning within a social-cultural approach (Hall, 2010). Within this perspective 'emergent literacy', a term coined by Clay (1991) in the 1990's, is prominent.

1.4.4: The Social-Political Perspective

It has to be understood that all of the specified perspectives operate within a socio-political context which assumes a position which is politically aware and attuned to power and equality (Hall, 2003), and meeting individual needs. This is a more contemporary perspective, where conceptualisations such as 'critical literacies' are supported (Comber, 2001), and which aims to examine the relationship between language practices, power and identities, people and customs, morals and

ethics, democracy, social justice and popular culture (Marsh, 2000). Comber (2001) highlights that critical literacy does not have a definitive definition, but that it aims to examine the relationships between language practices, power and identities, people and lifestyle, morals, democracy, ethics and social justice. This perspective then, in relation to equality and social justice, seeks to ensure that all children's needs are met regardless of background. This is particularly relevant in relation to such recent perspective pedagogy with the implementation of instructional approaches with highly scripted lessons akin to Letter and Sounds (DfE, 2007) and Read Write Inc (Miskin, 2021). Hall (2003) points out the highly prescriptive nature of the National Literacy Strategy (DfE, 1998) (NLS) back in 1998, and the difficulty of incorporating this into critical literacy practices. Indeed, nearly twenty years later, the curriculum is now significantly more prescriptive; therefore, it is now even more difficult for teachers to incorporate critical literacy practices into curriculum delivery (Levy, 2011). Using these four perspectives as a backdrop, a discussion of the 'reading wars' that have played out in the literature and the media (Harrison, 2004) will now follow.

1.5: Government Policy and Teaching Early Literacy: The Rise of Phonics

Politicians control of curriculum policy has resulted in the focus on the use of synthetic phonics programmes (Ellis and Moss, 2014). Indeed, the governments' choice of policy, recommended materials and funding has been shaped by powerful commercial interests (Clarke, 2016). However, since 2010, the government and Ofsted have asserted that synthetic phonics is the only method for teaching reading – claiming this is supported by research evidence. The table below presents a timeline of the key policies in England and how phonics has gradually gained momentum over the years, resulting in its current domination.

Tabe 2 – Key policies implemented in England, key features and critiques

Date	Policy Document	Description	Critique
1998	National Literacy Strategy (DfE, 1998)	*Provided a framework for teaching literacy which included learning objectives, teaching strategies and assessment criteria	*Rigid approach *One-size-fits-all approach *Lack of teacher autonomy *Limited impact on improving literacy standards

		*Daily hour of literacy at text, sentence and word level *Emphasis on systematic phonics instruction *Advocated The Searchlight Model	
1999	Progression in Phonics (DfE, 1999)	*Systematic structured approach to phonics teaching *Recognition of 5 phases of development with Phase 1 recognising phonological awareness *Teachers encouraged to provide differentiated instruction	*Neglected other aspects of teaching reading: comprehension, fluency and vocabulary *One-size-fits-all approach *No approach to teaching irregular words *Neglected whole language approaches that focus on meaning-making
2004	Clackmannanshire Study (Johnson and Watson, 2004)	*Suggested reading be taught through systematic synthetic phonics	*Challenges to design flaws employed in the study (Wyse and Goswami, 2008) and publication bias (Torgerson et al., 2019) and its capacity to provide insights about scalable improvements in attainment (Ellis and Moss, 2014)
2005	Teaching Children to Read (HCESC, 2005)	*Commissioned a large-scale comparative study to compare which method was best to teach early	

		reading: synthetic or analytic phonics	
2006	Rose Report (DfES, 2006)	*Concluded that synthetic phonics offers the majority of beginning readers the most effective route to becoming skilled readers and writers (Solity, 2020) *Recommended mandatory teaching of synthetic phonics	*The recommendation of the teaching of synthetic phonics in the Rose Report (DfE, 2006), is a political decision, not justified by research (Wyse and Styles, 2007)
2006 onwards		*Department for Education (DfE) reviewing and approving published phonics teaching schemes (Wyse and Bradbury 2022)	
2007	Letters and Sounds (DfE, 2007)	*Provided a detailed programme for teaching synthetic phonics adopted by the majority of schools in England *Adopted the 'Simple View of Reading' Model (Gough and Tumner, 1986)	
2012	Phonics Screening Check (DfE, 2012)	*End of Year One check to assess pupils' mastery of grapheme-phoneme-correspondences (GPCs)	*Teaching to the test in practice *Negative impact on ability grouping (Bradbury, 2018)
2013	National Curriculum (DfE, 2013	*Focus on synthetic phonics teaching	*Core of the Key Stage 1 English curriculum is now predominantly defined as word level work resulting

			from following synthetic phonics programmes (Ellis and Moss, 2014)
2019	Ofsted (Ofsted, 2019) EIF	*Inspecting schools to ensure teaching systematic synthetic phonics and use of phonetically decodable books in practice	*Ensured compliance to synthetic phonics teaching and the use of outcomes in the PSC as one of its means to judge schools' effectiveness (Wyse and Bradbury, 2022)
2021		*Government publishes and revises core criteria for effective SSP. A new validation process introduced 45 approved programmes on the website (DfE, 2023)	*No consideration of theoretical underpinnings of programmes.
2021	The Reading Framework (DfE, 2021)	Focus on teaching systematic synthetic phonics and fidelity to DfE's approved programmes	*Intensification of instructional synthetic phonics programmes
2023	The Reading Framework (DfE, 2023)	*Revisions to policy guidance on developing fluency, pupils who need most support, what skilled readers can do, organising and promoting books, developing a reading for pleasure culture, reading across the curriculum, and	

		leadership and management of reading	
2018	English Hubs (DfE, 2023)	*Established to provide support and training for schools to improve the teaching of phonics and early language skills, and to improve early language and literacy outcomes for children, particularly in areas with low literacy levels. *Focus on promoting systematic synthetic phonics instruction	*Centralisation and control *Heavily focus on phonics *Assessment and accountability measures are narrow – focus on PSC and national results (high-stakes testing)

The table serves in providing a brief historical overview of key policies in England, demonstrating the rise in phonics. Also evident in policy and practice is how the 'reading war' has, and still is, being played out.

1.5.1: The Reading Wars

Historically, 'polarised wars' have dominated the literature around the teaching and learning of early literacy, and international literature is littered with these debates, particularly in relation to early reading. The 'reading wars', fuelled by the media (Harrison, 2004), has very much become public property over the years with ongoing debates about the most effective teaching methods (Harrison, 2010). In early reading, similarities can be drawn between England and America regarding the debate between phonics and the whole language approach (Lewis and Ellis, 2006), but in the United Kingdom the debate was less vicious, akin to what Torgerson et al., (2019) call, "reading skirmishes" (Torgerson et al., 2019, p. 208). However, Nick Gibb (DfE, 2021), The Minister of State for School Standards, in his foreword for the key policy, The Reading Framework (DfE, 2021), states that, "we have moved on from the 'reading wars'" (DfE, 2021, p. 4), claiming that the evidence for phonics is indisputable. Indeed, it is now widely acknowledged among scholars that we need to move past the reading wars (Goldberg and Goldenberg, 2022) as teaching children phonics is

essential in learning to read (Lewis and Ellis, 2006), but not sufficient (Castles, Rastle and Nation, 2018). On the other hand, Goldberg and Goldenberg (2022) suggest that the reading wars appeared to have climaxed in 2000 with the National Reading Panel (NRP, 2000) findings suggesting the effectiveness of the five components of effective reading instruction: phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. However, despite the recognition of these five elements, phonics still dominates policy in England, and this is intensified with the growth of 45 commercial phonics programmes, approved by the government on their website (DfE, 2023). Arguably, State policy has led to commercial instructional programmes, which are highly sequenced and scripted programmes (Johnston, 2019), being delivered by teachers in classrooms. Clarke (2016) calls the powerful place of such commercial interest in influencing government policy disturbing. Further, as the policy guidance states that there must be fidelity to the programmes, teachers are not in a position to adapt them in order to meet the needs of individual children, or to consider cultural differences. Additionally, many of these highly-scripted programmes do not consider children's prior home and literacy and language experiences, and fail to appreciate the characteristics that a child brings to a reading task (Clarke, 2016). However, it is in classrooms where this entangled and complex relationship between research, policy and practice is played out, and where teachers engage and enact policy (Ball et al., 2011). Arguably though, such prescriptive pedagogy removes autonomy for teachers as they become deliverers and not creators of the script (Meyer, 2002). Indeed, teachers are in prime positions to contribute to educational research on effective teaching in the classroom, but are they consulted about policy decisions? Dudley-Marling (2005) states that, “Narrow conceptions of research that silences the voices of teachers diminish the entire teaching-learning enterprise” (Dudley-Marling, 2005, p. 130). Reasons for policy decisions will be argued in the policy analysis in chapter 3.

1.6: Research Questions:

1. What does policy analysis of The Reading Framework (DfE, 2021) reveal about the teaching of early literacy in England?

2. What are the tensions between teacher practice and policy?

3. What informs and shapes teachers’ literacy practices?

4. How do children experience early literacy at home and in school?

1.7: Structure of the Thesis

Chapter 2 - The Literature Review

This chapter positions the study within the broader research landscape. It presents recent and seminal research in early literacy framed around the four key theoretical perspectives that highlight past and present debates.

Chapter 3 - Methodology and Methods

This chapter provides a detailed description of the methods used in the study within the chosen methodological framework. A detailed justification of the methods employed are described which includes research design and context, methods of data collection and analysis, sample selection along with ethical consideration, and issues of reflexivity, reliability and objectivity.

Chapter 4 - Findings, Analysis and Discussion

The key findings, in relation to the research questions, are discussed in this chapter, highlighting themes in the data, and tensions and contradictions such as compliance and resistance. These themes are discussed, in depth, in relation to the relevant literature.

Chapter 5 - Conclusion

The final chapter addresses how the research questions have been answered whilst reflecting on the research process and limitations of the study. Implications for research and practice are discussed along with recommendations and possibilities for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review: Standing on the Shoulders of Giants

2.1: Introduction

This chapter presents the research literature linked to key elements of early literacy, and is framed around the four theoretical perspectives in early literacy: cognitive, psycholinguistic, socio-cultural and socio-political. However, lines are blurred between the perspectives (Crawford, 1995), and this is more noticeable in relation to early writing, as they are not as definitive. The discussion begins with a presentation of the cognitive perspective.

2.2: The Cognitive Perspective

2.2.1: Models of Reading

The Reading Framework (DfE, 2021) advocates the 'Simple View of Reading' (SVR) model, originally developed by Gough and Tumner (1986) which is explained as Decoding (D) x Language Comprehension (LC) = Reading Comprehension (RC). This model views decoding and comprehension as separate skills. It replaced the 'searchlights' model, represented in the National Literacy Strategy (DfEE, 1998), more aligned with the whole-language approach, drawing on the work of Clay (1975). The distinct difference between the two models is that one advocates decoding as the main strategy to read unknown words, and the other advocates that readers make use of three-cueing systems: semantic, syntactic, word recognition and graphic knowledge to make sense of the text which attributes each component as being of equal importance (Stainthrop, 2006). Stainthrop (2006) agrees with the SVR's emphasis on the use of letter-sound correspondence in becoming a skilled reader as opposed to the searchlight model which, she argues, attributed each component as being of equal importance. However, she does acknowledge that the model cannot be wholly accurate due to English orthography. Some scholars agree with the model's view of word recognition and comprehension being separate components (Harrison, 2004). However, Stuart, Stainthrop and Snowling (2008) argue the possibility that each of the four components of the 'searchlights' model actually contains essential complexities that can be reassigned to the two components of the SVR model. Nevertheless, although the model has helped in presenting us with a deeper understanding of reading comprehension, and in identifying and categorising children with reading difficulties, it does not recognise the multidimensional aspect of comprehension, such as its relationship to general cognitive-linguistic abilities (Catts, 2018). Indeed, Oakhill, Cain and Elbro (2015) highlight further the complexities of reading comprehension, reiterating the important role that memory and other cognitive skills play whilst pointing out the distinct differences between written and spoken language. They emphasise that, due to interactions between the two, both word reading and

language comprehension should be developed from the outset of learning to read. Wolfe (2015) supports this view: in her case study focusing on struggling readers, she found that phonic skills teaching and comprehension does not have to be mutually exclusive. Indeed, Georgiou, Das and Hayward's (2009) findings challenge the SVR model as they found that children demonstrated poor reading comprehension although they achieved average performance in decoding and listening comprehension. More recently, and more aligned with the searchlights model, Ehri (2022) advocates that children do use semantic and syntactic clues when reading in the context of books as children use 'orthographic mapping'. Arguably, the model in policy represents a very simple view of reading, and within the literature, there are many other more comprehensive models that demonstrate the complexities of learning to read. Indeed, Scarborough's (2001) model is more comprehensive for understanding the complex process involved in skilled reading. It represents the different skills and knowledge components: word recognition, language comprehension and background knowledge. Within these elements, it also recognises other important elements involved in each of the strands. The strands interact and develop progressively as children become more skilled readers.

2.2.2: Phonological Awareness

Phonological awareness refers to an individual's awareness of the sound structure, or phonological structure, of a spoken word, and is important in both word recognition and spelling development (Gillion, 2107). This awareness can be broken down into different multilevel skills within phonological processing and multi-linguistic knowledge. There is a strong relationship between phonological awareness and literacy development (Gillion, 2017), and there is consensus within the literature for the explicit teaching of phonemic awareness (Ehri, 2022) and a recognition of the significant contribution that phonemic awareness makes to reading acquisition (NRP, 2000). Phonological decoding is central to learning to read (Pritchard et al., 2016), and phonemic awareness plays a pivotal role as a predictor of individual differences in reading development (Melby-Lervag, Lyster and Hulme, 2012). Indeed, a lack of these skills is known to cause reading failure (Chall, 1983b). Stahl and Mckenna (2002) suggest that phonological awareness develops first from an awareness of syllables, onsets and rimes, to an awareness of initial phonemes, final phonemes, and lastly, vowels. Phonics is the learning of letter-sound correspondences and, importantly, the relationship between phonemic awareness and decoding is reciprocal not casual (Castles and Coltheart, 2004). Ehri (2022) suggests several tasks which involve acoustic and articulatory analysis of words where children identify initial sounds then progressing to more

complex tasks of adding and substituting phonemes. Supporting children to monitor mouth positions is particularly effective. Conversely, as opposed to teaching the alphabetic code through grapheme to phoneme correspondence to improve phonemic awareness, Vazeux et al. (2020) suggests teaching beginning readers letters-to-syllable correspondences as it enables phoneme units to be the mirror of the letter to become accessible. In opposition, Hammil (2004) suggests that the role of nonprint abilities such as phonological awareness may be overemphasised. However, despite both seminal and recent evidence of the importance of phonological awareness, it only makes a fleeting appearance in the appendices of the key policy. Furthermore, particular phonics programmes do not incorporate this element of learning to read into their instructional teaching.

2.2.3: Phonics

In relation to the evidence-base for the teaching of phonics, The Reading Framework (DfE, 2021) advocates the mandatory teaching of high-quality daily phonics sessions insisting on 'fidelity to the programme' in these sessions. It states, "The EEF considers phonics to be one of the most secure and best-evidenced areas of pedagogy, and recommends all schools use a systematic approach to teaching it" (DfE, 2021, p. 8) citing the, "convincing evidence" (DfE, 2021, p. 42) of the Clackmannanshire studies, and evidence from the National Reading Panel NRP in 2000 (NRP, 2000). The Clackmannanshire phonics intervention was conducted by Johnson and Watson (2004) who, in a comparative study, carried out a series of Randomised Controlled Trials (RCT). They concluded that synthetic phonics was more effective than analytic phonics, and consequently, this became the basis of evidence for national policy on the teaching of early reading (Letters and Sounds, DfES, 2007). However, Ellis and Moss (2014) question why the Clackmannanshire phonics intervention became the study most frequently cited to justify government policy as, in relation to these particular experiments, scholars have highlighted a number of methodological issues pertaining to the studies. This is evident in the criticisms of the 'Clackmannanshire Studies' with their design flaws (Wyse and Goswami, 2008), publication bias (Torgerson et al., 2019) and interpretation issues of the Simple View of Reading model (Wyse and Bradbury, 2022). Agreeably, the experimental research from the NRP (2000), and the NELP (2008), has contributed a great deal to our understanding of reading instruction. Shanahan (2020) concurs that this research provides the main evidence for the teaching of phonics: it contains around 100 instructional experiments that this type of teaching affects learning outcomes with some consistency and, therefore, confirming the effectiveness of the explicit and systematic teaching of decoding. However, in challenging the research on synthetic phonics, what is clear in the literature is evidence that it is the systematic teaching of phonics that

ensures its effectiveness, not the type. Torgerson, Brooks and Hall (2006), in their review of research studies, concluded that it is the systematic teaching of phonics that is crucial in learning to read and write. Indeed, Ehri (2022) also advocates for systematic phonics instruction, and there are now many commercial phonics programmes available, but their theoretical underpinnings, and evidence-base, are not necessarily made explicit on the government's website (DfE, 2023) - an area for future research perhaps. An example of an approach that does do this, however, is McGuinness's (2004) instructional programme, based on her research, that led her to develop a linguistic approach where children learn that sounds are the basis for the code, not the letters. More recently, Torgerson et al. (2019) point out that, despite the publication of two reviews of the evidence on phonics, there is still an existing uncertainty about the most effective approaches to teaching early reading. After their review in 2006, they recommended a definitive trial comparing the different approaches, but it was never undertaken. Following this, Torgerson et al. (2019) carried out a more recent 'tertiary' review which reviewed the systematic reviews, and conducted a meta-analysis of the evidence, concluding that evidence for phonics teaching is exaggerated. They also identified potential bias in relation to design and publication. When comparing the national curriculum to other countries internationally, Wyse and Bradbury (2022) found that, "England's national curriculum of 2014 represents an outlier" (Wyse and Bradbury, 2022, p. 42). In light of this, they call for individual countries to conduct programmes of large RCTs which adjust to local contexts that test different phonics approaches. Similarly, in their critical examination of research evidence, Wyse and Bradbury (2022) concluded that the government's policy decision for phonics is not based on research evidence that includes RCT's and longitudinal design. From the reviewed evidence, they suggest that phonics is more likely to be effective if it is implemented with children aged five to six, connected with reading of whole texts which includes decodable and real books with a focus on reading for meaning. Instruction should last no more than a whole school year with several lessons a week that last between 36 and 60 hours in total teaching time. This more 'balanced' approach will be discussed later in this chapter.

2.2.4: Stage Theory

In relation to early reading, there are several stage models – two prominent ones will be discussed here. Chall's (1983b) 6-stage holistic model explains the different stages that readers go through from infancy to adulthood. These are pre-reading, initial reading and decoding, confirmation and fluency, reading for learning the new and multiple viewpoints, and reconstruction. The other stage model, developed by Ehri (2005), is a word 4-stage model of the phases of development of sight

word reading and spelling. These stages (pre-alphabetic, partial alphabetic, full alphabetic and consolidated alphabetic) provide a framework which supports instruction. There is consensus within the literature that the sequence involved in the development of word recognition moves from logographic to alphabetic then to orthographic (Morris et al., 2003). Children beginning to read see the words as they would a picture. Then, once they begin to become familiar with the alphabetic principle, they use these sound values as important cues. After this, they gain the capacity to attend to individuals and groups of letters which enables rapid orthographic recognition of words (Hempenstall, 2004). More recently, there is evidence that beginning readers move through developmental stages as they obtain knowledge about the alphabetic writing system. These stages consist of, firstly, acquiring grapheme-phoneme knowledge and phonemic segmentation, followed by knowledge of syllabic and morphemic spelling-sound units (Ehri, 2020). Ehri (2022) acknowledges that on entry to school, children present with diverse needs; therefore, assessing children's stage of development serves in ensuring instruction moves them onto the next phase. Chall (1983b) also affirms that different stages of reading development require different instructional approaches, and similarly, Hempenstall (2004) suggests that paying attention to stage model theory can assist in grasping theoretical understandings of the reading process, therefore, supporting instruction. Additionally, Hempenstall (2004) reiterates that the most valuable aspect of the stage model is the ability to inform teachers in detecting delayed progress early.

2.2.5: Other Ways to Decode Words

More recently, researchers have provided new insights into how children learn to decode words. Ehri (2022) asserts that all words come to be read from memory with continual practice. She contends that this is done through 'orthographic mapping' where letter-sound, spelling, pronunciation and meaning connections allow words to be stored in memory, aiding automaticity. She explains the difficult process that children go through to achieve automatic word reading; drawing heavily on scientific studies, she affirms that there are four varying ways to read words. The first is from memory – automatically reading from memory by sight. The second strategy is decoding – by sounding out and blending the letters. The third strategy is by analogy – you recognise a word that you know has the same spelling pattern as the word that you are trying to read and, fourthly, from prediction – which works for words that are orally familiar coupled with the sentence context, and the use of letters help to predict the word. Having repeated this a few times, through practise, the spelling is then retained in memory, and connected to its pronunciation and meaning, forming one lexical word unit. On seeing the word again, the spelling activates a lexical match in memory.

Share (2004) refers to this as the 'self-teaching' mechanism which implies that opportunities for children to practise their reading is important. Indeed, the importance of 'practising' is suggested within the literature (Stanovich, 1986). This explanation of word reading is certainly more complex than the 'decoding all words' explanation offered in relation to phonics. Interestingly, in policy, orthographic mapping is not cited, but it is included in the training for RWInc. (Miskin, 2021). In opposition, Goldberg and Goldenberg (2022) advocate decoding as an efficient 'cue', and discourage teaching children to coordinate 'cues' from meaning and structure although they acknowledge that meaning, syntax should be used to confirm the correct reading of a word. Indeed, a hallmark of skilled reading is the ability to decode words speedily that is not dependent on context (Seidenberg, 2017). Conversely, in early years classrooms, Guo et al. (2012) found that a blend of teachers' well-planned use of materials, book corners and high-quality interactions are associated with gains in children's phonics knowledge.

2.2.6: Instructional Phonics Approaches

As instructional programmes are a hugely significant part of policy, research relating to the main components in some of these programmes will now be presented. Largely drawn from the cognitive perspective, the Science of Reading movement has led to the wide-scale implementation of instructional approaches as advocated in policy. Stainthrop (2020) affirms that, until recently, there was no national programme on teaching phonics, so the recent policy implementation has provided teachers with the necessary subject knowledge to teach phonics. The government provides a list of 45 approved systematic synthetics programmes (DfE, 2023), and these programmes have to go through a process of self-assessment in order to meet the core criteria set out by the government. However, what is missing on the government's website is the evidence-base for these programmes and their theoretical underpinnings. The components of the programmes will now be discussed in relation to their evidence-base, beginning with phonetically decodable books.

2.2.7: Phonetically Decodable Books

Phonetically decodable books are reading scheme books with restricted, controlled vocabulary that contain words that are decodable, and include a number of 'high frequency words' that are introduced gradually and repeated frequently (Solity and Vousden, 2009). In contrast, 'real books' contain characteristics such as natural language rhythms, narrative style, predictable language, meaningful illustrations, humour, patterns, tension, and familiarity – all of which contribute to a 'meaning-making' approach. Campbell (2021) points out that debates around books have habitually

focused on the use of decodable texts versus quality children's literature, and phonics versus comprehension.

The key policy, The Reading Framework (DFE, 2021), advocates the use of phonetically decodable books. It states that word reading is practised in the context of phonetically decodable books which enables children to only come across words with sounds that they are already familiar with, and allows them to practise reading in meaningful contexts which means they achieve success from the beginning. It also discourages beginning readers from using other strategies to work out unknown words, and states that books should not be 'banded' as this means using books from different schemes. The use of phonetically decodable books is also advocated by Read Write Inc (Miskin, 2021) in order to allow children to read already learned GPC's. This practice is certainly supported in the research with Ehri (2022), advocating that children practise decoding in the context of texts as this contributes to sight word learning. She claims that enabling children to practise reading and understanding text at their individual level, matched to their G-P knowledge, enables children to come across sight words with their spellings, pronunciations, meanings and roles in sentences that 'glue' together as one unit to be remembered. In practice, she advocates children reading aloud to hear the pronunciations of words to aid memory. However, Brooks, Beard and Ampaw-Farr (2019) point out that there is little systematic research into the content of schemes, and this is due to the gap between the publishing industry and academia (Hietert and Martin, 2002). Indeed, Brooks, Beard and Ampaw-Farr (2019) conducted research which centred on the linguist accuracy of published schemes, and found that just over half were found to contain linguistic errors which consisted of phonetic inaccuracies. Wyse and Bradbury (2022) also point out that there has not yet been a longitudinal RCT that has examined the effectiveness of real and decodable texts. This long-standing debate between 'real' and 'scheme' books, it could be argued, is driven by rhetoric rather than research (Solity and Vousden, 2009) as the debate exists within a socio-political context, and is played out by the media (Harrison, 2004).

There is research to suggest that there is no difference between 'real' and 'scheme' books. Solity and Vousden (2009), in a systematic study of the use of phonics in both real and scheme books, found that children needed to read both phonetically regular and irregular words, which were more frequent in 'real' books. More recently, Price-Mohr and Price (2017), in their quasi-experimental trial comparing interventions, found no more benefits from using decodable texts. In fact, positive benefits for poor readers were found from using both additional teaching methods (such as analytic

phonics, sight word vocabulary, and oral vocabulary extension) in addition to synthetic phonics, and also non-decodable vocabulary in instructional reading text. There is the argument that a heavy emphasis on decoding can have a detrimental effect on comprehension. On the contrary, Oakhill, Cain and Elbro (2015) suggest that there is no evidence that reading phonetically decodable books can result in children decoding at the expense of comprehension.

Moving away from the polarised debate, Chetham and Allor (2012) highlight the need for multi-criteria in early reading books as well as decodability and Solity (2020) advocates using an intervention that teaches reading through a systematic phonics approach and real books. He argues that it could be advantageous to teach a small number of sequenced GPCs which appear more frequently in real books as opposed to teaching a vast number of GPCs that do not appear regularly. However, also prevalent in the research is that children need to read regularly and widely in order to be exposed to thousands of analogies that enable rapid recognition and the storing of words in memory (Harrison, 2004). Imperatively, books must support children's motivation and engagement, and foster a love of reading. Solity and Vousden (2009) suggest that there are negative consequences of the use of reading schemes on enjoyment, motivation and perceptions of the reading process on lower-achieving pupils although they also purport that both real and phonetically decodable books have strengths and limitations. Levy (2009), in eliciting children's views, found that the use of scheme books can result in children having negative perceptions of themselves as readers, particularly for struggling readers. She found that the use of scheme books also contributed to children's definitions and purposes of reading, discouraging children from reading other books.

2.2.8: Mnemonics

Mnemonics are used in many commercial programmes to aid memory of the graphemes when teaching the phonemes. Ehri (2022) advocates letter-mnemonics, where letter shapes bear a resemblance to the object and have names beginning with that letter, e.g., Annie Apple (Weldon, 2021). Findings from a number of other studies reiterate the value in paired-associate learning, which connects the visual letter to the verbal letter label, and also for the positive effects on motivation and engagement when used in instruction (Silverzweig, Burley and Rothenberg, 2020).

2.2.9: Irregularly Spelled Words

Another contentious debate within the literature, is the learning of words that are not phonetically decodable, and how this is affected by English orthography and its implication for reading and writing (Kessler and Treimen, 2001; Treiman and Bourasssa, 2000). 'High frequency words' (HFW), sometimes referred to as 'irregularly spelled words', 'common exception words' or 'tricky words' are words that are not phonetically decodable. The Reading Framework (DfE, 2021) advocates that the teaching of 'common exception words' are taught in the same way (using phonics to decode) with children noting the exceptions of the sounds and tweaking pronunciations of these words. However, this guidance in policy fails to acknowledge the complexities around this issue in practice. Goswami (2005) points out the complexities of phonology in the English spoken language and the inconsistency of English orthography, particularly for smaller grapheme units, which relates to spelling because of the difficulties that these inconsistencies present for children. Share (2008) also points out the high degree of inconsistency between sound and spellings, and Spencer and Hanley (2004), in their study, demonstrated that orthographic depth has a substantial impact on the acquisition of spelling-sound knowledge in the early stages of learning to read. Richmond (2013), too, recognises the complexities of the English language and learning to read as he documents the shortcomings of phonics instruction from a linguist standpoint, arguing that the 40+ phonemes represented by a much larger, and not predictable, range of letters should be learned to be pronounced in other ways. Scholars agree that it is impossible to memorise these words by sight (McGuinness, 2004), and Ehri (2022) asserts that the reading of irregularly spelled words, such as *'said, the, was',* can be hindered by decoding. Teaching these words in isolation does not allow the meaning of the word to be activated. She advocates reading these words in sentences, in order to activate their meanings, and the use of phonetically decodable books that are tailored to the graphemes-phonemes that the individual child has previously been taught, and where the number of 'HFW' are also controlled. As children learn more sounds, word possibilities grow. Another strategy is to teach children to decode flexibly where they test alternative pronunciations until they come across a meaningful word, therefore, using semantic knowledge (Ehri, 2022). Ehri (2022) explains that some features of words can make decoding more difficult, such as stop consonants. Stop consonants in words are hard to pronounce individually without adding a schwa vowel which adds complexity to the blending process as it is difficult to say the sounds 't, d, p, b, g, j and k' without adding a vowel sound 'uh'. However, encouraging children to say the sounds separately, and to hold and connect sounds, helps with this (Ehri, 2022). Another strategy is to mark these words in the text to specify to the reader that a different pronunciation is needed (Silverzweig, Burley and Rothenberg, 2020). Indeed, the Read Write Inc (Miskin, 2021) programme does this.

However, like in policy, McGuinness (2004) insists that teaching children to decode these words is best practice. Again, this discussion highlights the complexities that are evident in the research which translate into practice. Further, although the complexities surrounding English orthography are acknowledged in the policy document, it does not recognise other elements, evident in the literature, around spelling such as the interdependence of morphology, etymology and phonology (Bowers and Bowers, 2017), and the role that etymology plays in forming spelling patterns which has nothing to do with letter-sounds (Richmond, 1013).

2.2.10: Implications for Practice

Aligned within the socio-political perspective, a more recent debate in the literature is between prescriptive phonics teaching and meeting the needs of individuals (Wolfe, 2015). Arguably, despite the evidence for the systematic teaching of phonics, instructional programmes come with a caveat as Wolfe (2015) highlights the consequences of prescriptive pedagogy for teachers in understanding effective pedagogy as it ignores individual differences, culture, interests and readiness to read. Consequently, for children who have not developed phonemic awareness prior to school, or who do not receive the appropriate instruction in the early stages of reading, this can begin, "a downward spiral of lesser achievement across the curriculum" (Hempenstall, 2004, p. 732). The development of emergent literacy skills, such as phonemic awareness and emergent comprehension, are vital in developing later reading and writing skills, and a lack of these can have detrimental effects on progress (Chall, 1983b). Sadly, there is evidence that initial slow progress cannot be readdressed by a developmental burst later on as, even a slight delay, tends to progress to major ones over a period of time (Stanovich, 1993). Such prescriptive pedagogy also has consequences for teachers as Meyer (2002) describes teachers as being held hostage by prescriptive pedagogy, where they are discouraged from using professional knowledge, which can translate into not enabling children's diverse needs to be met in the classroom. It can also serve in deskilling teachers (Wolfe, 2015), and Bradbury (2012) highlights the, "cynical compliance" (Bradbury, 2012, p. 175) present in practice for practitioners as they implement such scripted programmes. Furthermore, these highly scripted programmes are making their way into nursery settings, but there is evidence of resistance from teachers. Vines, Jordan and Broemmel (2020) reported that teachers were concerned by, "ineffective and boring" scripted programmes (Vines, Jordan and Broemmel, 2020, p. 713), and Campbell (2020) reported that early childhood teachers stated that they would never consider using a commercial phonics programme as they believed that children

learn letters and sounds incidentally. Teachers were against highly scripted commercial programmes as they perceived phonics instruction as an isolated skill–drill activity.

Consequently, because of the narrow focus on phonics, other elements that are vital in teaching early reading can be pushed out. Arguably, the cognitive perspective of phonics reduces the teaching of reading to the isolated learning of skills which gives less attention to other important factors which influence reading difficulties such as vocabulary, behaviour regulation, teacher knowledge, individual instruction and school factors (Clemens, Regan and Widales-Benitez, 2016). Campbell's (2021) pilot study explored how teachers were planning for phonics in a phonics 'first and fast' climate. Her findings suggest that there has been a recent shift in teachers' practices around shared reading and phonics instruction. Shared reading of picture book practices was diverse with little evidence that this was an integral part of the literacy programme in the settings. Additionally, Campbell (2021) reports that no one-to-one reading was observed in her study, and the quality of books offered to children was a concern, with some practitioners choosing books on the basis of length or availability. Consequently, teachers and researchers are now expressing concern that children may be disadvantaged by having to learn to read via any one particular instructional method (Watts and Gardner, 2013; Wedell, 2014). Indeed, Solity (2020), from the perspective of instructional psychology, highlights the design flaws and teaching methodology in many government-approved SSP programs, potentially contributing to pupils experiencing difficulties. Specifically, in relation to research evidence for phonics interventions for struggling readers, Shapiro and Solity (2008) warn that instructional psychological theory on interventions for children at risk, coupled with the content of literacy interventions, are the cause of difficulties in literacy. Furthermore, focusing too much on technical aspects of reading also has consequences for other aspects of reading, such as reading for pleasure in low socio-economic-status schools (Hempsel-Jorgensen et al., 2018). In light of this, Dahl and Scharer (2000) stress that the debate now needs to move to how best to support learners in diverse classrooms, and meet the needs of individual children (Wolf, 2015). Arguably then, pedagogical practices need to foster social and educational equality rather than perpetuate them as this only serves in marginalising other cultures, languages and experiences (Davidson, 2010). Alternatives to prescriptive pedagogy, from different theoretical perspectives, are offered as possible solutions in meeting the individual needs of all children. However, before the remaining perspectives are presented, it is important to highlight how teachers operate in classrooms in the context of national policy which is currently dominated by the cognitive perspective.

2.2.11: Teachers' 'Enacting' Policy: Accountability, Compliance and Resistance

In the context of national policy, teachers are the ones who implement scripted phonics programmes in classrooms. Interestingly, similarities can also be drawn with the current emphasis of the teaching of grammar in policy. Indeed, the White Paper (DfE, 2010) was the catalyst for the emphasis on the teaching of grammar with a focus on 'knowledge and concepts' in the National Curriculum (DfE, 2104) followed by the introduction of the spelling, punctuation and grammar test in 2011 (STA, 2016) for Year 6 children, recommended by the Bew Report (2011). These measures have accumulated in a dramatic emphasis on grammar in the National Curriculum from 2014 (Wyse & Torgersen, 2017). However, there is a, "significant and persistent mismatch between national curriculum policy in England and the robust evidence that is available with regard to the teaching of grammar" (Wyse and Torgersen, p. 1019). Despite this, the teaching of grammar remains prominent in the national curriculum from Year One onwards; therefore, Ball et al.'s (2011) notion of teachers as actors doing 'policy work' in schools - how policy is "enacted" (Ball et al., 2011 p. 625) can be seen in practice as teachers negotiate the daily teaching of phonics and grammar in their classrooms. Adding to this is the pressure of accountability that teachers face as they negotiate targets, evaluation and indicators (Ball, 2003), and this exemplifies the power and control that is employed by the government to ensure that schools are using approved policies. Consequently, such prescriptive pedagogy can lead to tensions in practice as teachers understand the importance of adapting their practice in order to meet children's individual needs. Bradbury's phrase, "cynical compliance" (Bradbury, 2012, p. 175) can be borrowed here to describe how teachers adhere to policy in practice, but there is evidence that teachers do adapt their teaching. Indeed, Vines, Jordan and Broemmel (2020) reported how teachers, ``flip the script" (Vines, Jordan and Broemmel, p. 713) in order to ensure that they adapted the curriculum in order to meet children's individual needs.

2.3: Socio-Cultural Perspective

2.3.1: Emergent Literacy

Research within this perspective relates to emergent literacy. Clay (1991) coined the term 'Emergent Literacy', and has written extensively on the subject, highlighting children's use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies that are involved in early reading. Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998) state that 'emergent literacy' consists of, "the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that are developmental precursors to reading and writing" (Whitehurst and Lonigan, 1998, p. 849). Justice, Bowles and Skibbe (2006) highlight the two main areas of emergent literacy development: print-concept knowledge and orthographic awareness. Print-concept knowledge describes children's

understanding of orthographic knowledge and written language such as the organisational properties of print – directionality, where English letters are read from left-to-right, and alphabetic knowledge. The second is phonological awareness, and there is much evidence to suggest its importance for later attainment. Indeed, providing early language and literacy environments in preschool classrooms are important for children's later school successes (NELP, 2008). Gerde, Bingham and Wasik (2012) state that early developmental writing is a critical emergent literacy skill that lays the foundation for children's later literacy skills and reading achievement. Further, emergent literacy skills prepare children for the task of learning to read, and support the progress from beginning to conventional reader (Whiteburst and Longian, 1998), and evidence suggests that children who have well-developed emergent literacy skills make better progress than those children who do not possess these skills (Storch and Whitehurst, 2002). However, despite the abundant evidence in the literature, emergent literacy is an example of Hyatt's (2013) 'silences' that exist in policy as there is no mention of 'emergent literacy' and its importance for later achievement in The Reading Framework (DfE, 2021). A presentation on the research on the elements of emergent literacy will now be presented.

2.3.2: The Roots of Reading - Early Reading Behaviours

Despite The Reading Framework's (DfE, 2021) failure to acknowledge emergent reading behaviours and the role that they play in developing early reading, there is an abundance of seminal research, and recent research, which provides insight into how children's early reading behaviours emerge and develop, and extensive research that this begins way before children attend formal schooling. Stage model theory is prominent within this perspective, and debates should make use of developmental stage models to teach reading (Semingson and Kerns, 2021).

2.3.3: Concepts of Print

The development of children's early reading behaviours is crucial in developing later skills, beginning with concepts of print, developmental behaviours and comprehension skills. Environmental print can scaffold children's literacy development (Neumann et al., 2012), and research about children's concepts of print have provided insights about how children develop this concept and what this means for practice. Concepts of print are developed through joyful shared reading experiences as these support children in developing an awareness of books and other forms of print (Cassano and Dogherty, 2018). Much of the research in this area is from the cognitive perspective. Morris et al. (1993) developed a 4-stage model for the development of the concept of print and word knowledge

which begins with beginning consonant knowledge, then the concept of a word in text, followed by the segmentation of one-syllable words into their phonemes and, lastly, word recognition. When reading, Flanigan (2007) states that understanding the concept of a word is a pivotal event in the development of a child's reading journey, closely linked to phonological awareness. In fact, finger pointing is an important milestone of early reading behaviour. The 56 children in Flanigan's (2007) study pointed to words according to the stress units or syllables. However, there was a tendency for children to get off track as they came across multi-syllabic words. Uhry (1999) demonstrated a relationship between invented spellings and finger-point reading. She found that letter name knowledge and phonemic awareness related to children's abilities in finger-point reading, specifically, children's knowledge of invented spellings, as this requires an awareness of the directionality principle. Initial and final phonemes also played a huge role. Ehri and Sweet (1991), in their laboratory study, found that different types of print knowledge facilitated different aspects of finger-point reading. Knowing how to read a few 'pre-primer' words first was important in reading new words in a text. Phonemic segmentation was also important for learning to point to words as they were spoken. Interestingly though, in relation to disadvantaged children, Justice et al. (2006) specifically examined print-concept knowledge of 'at-risk' children, based on their socioeconomic-status (SES), and found that SES and language largely predicted scores on print-concept measures, therefore, arguing the importance of developing these early reading concepts.

2.3.4: Comprehension

Paris and Paris (2003) point out that the balance of research and theory given to early comprehension skills is less than that given to decoding, and consequently, this unbalance reaches the assessment of early comprehension in classrooms. When reading with adults, children begin to comprehend the outer workings of reading before they learn to grasp the inner workings of the alphabetic code reference. Wrongly, emergent literacy practices can be pushed aside due to the perception that code-related skills are the most important aspect of reading. However, it is when these emerging strategies are not developed, the move to print-related strategies can be detrimental as children are not being allowed to develop interpretative skills which are vital for reading comprehension (Lysaker and Hopper, 2015). The Reading Framework (DfE, 2021) states that comprehension is not measured until children are reading fluently. However, Dooley and Matthews (2009) argue that the development of early reading comprehension strategies can potentially affect the development of later reading comprehension. Indeed, print exposure supported comprehension with a positive effect on later technical reading (Mol et al., 2008), and early writing

is predictive of later reading achievement (Quinn, Gerde and Bingham 2016). Arguably, literacy cannot be separated from making meaning, and from the beginning, reading is a meaning-making endeavour where children begin to develop early reading behaviours by making-meaning from the text (Wells, 1987). Indeed, meaning-making can be akin to 'emergent comprehension'. Dooley and Matthews (2009) define the term 'emergent comprehension' as children engaging in meaningful experiences, prior to conventional reading, which encourages the development of meaning-making strategies. Historical research from Sulzby (1985) provides an insightful classification framework that demonstrates how children's early reading is characterised as, initially, 'picture-governed' then moving to 'story-governed' as they appear to be treating the pictures as the print - the most important message which is informed by spoken and written language differences. More recently, Mol and Bus (2011) found strong correlations to print exposure in their study, and children, who were more skilled in comprehension, demonstrated improved technical reading with each year in school. Indeed, working with print can be seen as an extension of meaning-making as opposed to being viewed as distinctly different from the meaning-making children do when first engaging with books, and it is important that children develop more widely as meaning makers (Lysaker and Hopper, 2015). Furthermore, the books that children are exposed to early on is crucial for the development of early comprehension skills. This will be discussed in the following section.

2.3.5: Supporting Children's Emergent Literacy Development in Practice

Children's emergent literacy needs to be supported in practice. Holdaway (1979) was prominent in highlighting the importance of shared reading. Hindman, Wasik and Erhart (2012) define shared reading as the interaction between adults and children when reading and emphasise that it is key in developing early reading behaviours. It offers opportunities to develop alphabetic print and phonological knowledge, vocabulary building, learning the meaning of unfamiliar words and text structure and the development of early reading behaviours (Campbell, 2021). Unfortunately, shared reading, as an instructional approach, can lack validity because it does not offer an opportunity to 'test' children's phonological skills (Campbell, 2021). Wordless picture books offer abundant opportunities to develop these early reading behaviours and comprehension skills**.** Cunningham and Zibulsky (2014) provide a list of quality children's literature in their book which lend themselves to teaching aspects of emergent literacy, such as phonological awareness, salient print and inferential thinking. Crawford and Hade's (2000) data indicate that when children make sense of wordless picture books, they use meaning-making processes – not dissimilar to those used in print-based texts such as prior knowledge and experience, intertextual clues, multiple-perspective taking, story

language and playful behaviours that are all part of the process of reading. A recent study, which demonstrates the complex behaviour at play when young children 'read' wordless picture books, was conducted by Lysaker and Hopper (2015) which involved observational work of 'Maya', aged 6, reading a wordless picture book. The recording was transcribed along with recordings of the child's eye movements and gaze. Lysaker and Hopper (2015), whilst acknowledging that some of their findings could be their own interpretations of the child's behaviour, reported that Maya used both cognitive and metacognitive strategies when reading the picture book. These strategies – searching, cross-checking, self-correction and rereading are the same strategies used for comprehension in conventional reading. The researchers point out the teaching implications from their study of Maya, making the point that, rather than viewing the debate as binary (decoding v's meaning-making), it is plausible that children working with print can be viewed as an extension of early meaning-making. They argue that what children bring to the text should be celebrated, and that enhancing these early-print strategies is crucial in children becoming readers. Interestingly, 'shared reading' does not feature specifically in the key policy. It does, however, state the importance of children accessing good quality literature which certainly aligns with the research evidence. What it fails to do though, is to promote those early opportunities to develop emergent literacy skills. In fact, Read Write Inc (Miskin, 2021) holds back giving children books until they know many grapheme-phoneme correspondences, therefore, missing valuable opportunities to develop early reading skills and behaviours.

To summarise, from the evidence presented, there are many 'silences' that exist in policy in relation to the development of early literacy skills and behaviours. Despite the research evidence about stage model theory, and the importance of assessing children's stage of reading development to inform instruction (Ehri, 2002), many commercial programmes teach children at the orthographic word level regardless of where they are in their word reading development. The discussion now turns to the importance of children's home environments.

2.3.6: Children's Literacy Experiences in the Home

Within the socio-cultural perspective, culture is valued, and it is acknowledged how the home plays a huge role in how children learn literacy prior to starting school. Indeed, there is a plethora of evidence that early reading and writing begin way before formal schooling. Drawing evidence from qualitative methods during the 1980's, scholarly 'giants' were acknowledging that the learning of literacy begins in the home (Heath, 1983; Tizard & Hughes, 1984; Sulzby and Teale, 1985). There

also exists a plethora of evidence within the literature about the key role that parents play in nurturing children's emergent literacy skills in the home before they begin formal school (Ehri and Roberts, 2006). Indeed, interactions between parent and child can encourage the development of early literacy skills (Neumann, Hood and Neumann, 2009). Further, parent–child reading is related to greater vocabulary development and, depending on a positive socio-emotional context, parent–child reading is also imperative in nurturing the child's own motivation, which has significant long-term consequences for reading (Hood, Conlon and Andrews, 2008). Specifically, shared reading at home supports language development (Cline and Edwards, 2013), and Mol et al. (2008) affirm that 'dialogic' reading is more beneficial than just reading 'to' a child. However, once children begin school, sadly, the dominance of school discourse in reading can cause children to lose confidence (Levy, 2008) due to the emphasis on decoding and mastering reading scheme books (Levy, 2009). In light of this, Levy, Hall and Preece (2018) reiterate the importance of parents prioritising enjoyment when engaging in shared reading with their children. This evidence presented then highlights the importance of children's early literacy experiences before formal schooling begins, and the importance of fostering enjoyment. The attention now turns to the effect that children's early home experiences have upon literacy learning in school.

2.3.7: Children's Social Backgrounds

In the key policy, the importance of the home environment is recognised and emphasis is placed on children reading regularly at home. It cites the seminal study by Hart and Risley (1995), which highlights the close relationship between the differences in family environments and children's development, specifically the link between children's cognitive development and parents' socioeconomic status (SES). It references 'disadvantaged' children, and how their lack of rich language and text experience in the home affects their learning to read. Bernstein's (2000) theory of elaborated and restricted codes is relevant here in relation to children's language. His theory, which operates within a sociolinguistic framework, explores language structures in relation to social class and education. Elaborated code is associated with middle and upper-class speech, where language is complex, and with speakers using a richer vocabulary and grammatical complexities. In contrast, restricted code is related to working-class patterns of speech which is simpler, more succinct, and dependent upon shared cultural contexts. He argued that these codes are influenced by education, occupations and upbringing, and that there is a tendency that individuals from higher social classes can be skilled in both codes as opposed to the lower social classes who may be limited to using restricted code, particularly in educational settings. Disadvantage is widely recognised in

the research. Sadly, disadvantaged children who, by the age of 3, are more likely to have poor social profiles which affects their ability to learn (Sylva et al., 2004b). A child's social profile in the EPPE study (Sylva et al., 2004b) refers to factors such as social interactions, relationships, communications skills and engagement in social activities, and how they impact upon aspects of children's development. In fact, the effect of home learning activities during the preschool period continues to be evident in children's developmental profiles at the end of Key Stage 1. Interestingly, the impact of EAL is more reduced by the age of 7 in comparison to the strength of effect at the earlier ages of 3 and 5 (EPPE) (Sylva et al., 2004b). Conversely, the aforementioned study found that the home learning environment was only moderately associated with parents' educational or occupation level, and was more strongly associated with children's intellectual and social development than either parental education or occupation. In other words, "What parents do is more important than who parents are" (Sylva et al., 2004b, p. v). Indeed, a home environment that supports learning can counteract the effects of disadvantage in the early years (Sylva et al., 2004b). Parental engagement, regardless of the social background of the family, will increase the child's attainment by 15% (Desforges, 2003). Arguably though, the key policy purports a rather simple view of disadvantage. The Reading Framework (DfE, 2021) states that, "In short, reading can achieve something teachers and policymakers have been attempting for decades: to lesson or even eliminate the impact of early life disadvantage" (DfE, 2021, p. 4). Disputably, the concept of disadvantage is much more complex in practice, and current policy does not fully support disadvantaged children as it focuses too much on technical aspects of reading which has consequences for other aspects of reading, such as reading for pleasure in low SES schools (Hempsel-Jorgensen et al., 2018). Furthermore, Bernstein (2000) conveys how language can perpetuate social inequalities. He argues that the system favours those who are more skilled in elaborated code which can lead to inequalities in academic achievements. Indeed, Hempel-Jorgensen et al. (2018) found that teachers' understanding of reading resulted in them focusing on the proficiency of teaching which did not support children's volition and engagement. Undoubtedly, concepts of social mobility, inequality and disadvantage are much more complex in reality than how they are presented in policy and the government's use of policy levers will not automatically lead to better attainment and an end to inequality (Moss, 2010).

2.3.8: Reading for Pleasure

Within this perspective, the importance of engagement, motivation, responding to social and cultural context and developing individual children's reader identities (Ellis and Smith, 2017) is now widely acknowledged in the literature. Certainly, the SoR and a love of reading are indissolubly

linked (Moats, 2020). From an early age, joyful and engaging shared reading experiences are important for developing fundamental skills and knowledge. It is in these experiences that children learn the sounds that make up the alphabet, and that letters that are used to construct words connect print to language. Without these – it is much harder to make progress, develop motivation and a love of books, and progress as successful readers (Litwin and Pepin, 2020). Indeed, in relation to a reader's personal and social identity, engagement has been found to be a vitally important variable in reading achievement (Brozo, Shiel and Topping (2007). Stanovich (1986), in his seminal work, describes a reciprocal association between reading practices and achievement where the, "rich-get-richer" (Stanovich, 1986, p. 382) which reiterates the importance of children reading regularly. Cremin et al. (2007-08) makes the distinction between reading instruction and reading for pleasure. Reading instruction, oriented towards the standards agenda, focuses on learning to read, is teacher directed, and concerned with teaching decoding and comprehension skills. In contrast, reading for pleasure is concerned with volition and children's will to read and is child directed with a focus on creating lifelong readers and entitlement. Cremin's (2019) quote, "There is no question that the will to read influences the skill and vice versa" (Cremin, 2019, p. 5), aptly sums up the importance of supporting children's motivation and engagement in reading. Positively, this is also recognised in policy as the document makes reference to the OECD's report, 'Reading for Change: Performance and engagement across countries: Results from PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment)' (OECD, 2000), which describes the entangled relationship between cognition and motivation. Certainly, Bernstein's (2000) notion of competence pedagogy, which refers to an emphasis on producing learners who can demonstrate competencies with a focus on agency, is important here in order to contrast the possibilities for children to engage volitionally with learning. Pleasingly, The Reading Framework (DfE, 2021) recognises the importance of 'Reading for Pleasure', recognising that a life-long love of reading is crucial and acknowledging the importance of taking home books and shared book experiences. The discussion now turns to early writing.

2.4: Early Writing

2.4.1: Definition of Early Writing

Writing is a complex skill to learn (Graham, Harris and Santangelo, 2015) and the fundamentals of learning to write should begin early (Graham and Harris, 2014). Early writing can be conceptualised as being made up of three critical components - handwriting, spelling, and composing (Bingham, Quinn and Gerde, 2017).

2.4.2: Theoretical Perspectives in Early Writing

Unlike reading, it is difficult to apply the same theoretical framework to writing as it is not as prevalent in the literature. As Crawford (1995) explains, lines are blurred between the theoretical perspectives; therefore, the research fits broadly into the four perspectives, mainly the cognitive perspective but other components relating to the individual and culture, align with the other perspectives. What is evident in the literature though is the contrast between the research methods employed when investigating reading and writing. Quinn, Gerde and Bingham (2012) highlight that early writing research generally measures decontextualized written products separate to writing performance - a traditional cognitively-focused approach as opposed to a more socioculturally-focused approach that draws upon more naturalistic observational methods with a focus on writing performance (Quinn and Bingham, 2019). Before presenting research from the cognitive perspective, it is important to present evidence that challenges the long-held perception that early reading precedes writing.

2.4.3: Writing Precedes Reading

Research has demonstrated that reading and spelling are reciprocal: development in one area affects the other (Ehri, 1989). Indeed, early writing develops prior to formal schooling and precedes explicit teaching (Quinn, Gerde and Bingham, 2016). There is general consensus within the literature that early writing is a predictor of later literacy success (Aram, 2005; Hammill, 2004; Shatil, Share and Levin, 2000, 2000; NELP, 2008). In fact, joint writing activities have been found to be more effective than shared storybook reading (Aram and Biron, 2004). Specifically, writing supports the integration of children's emergent literacy skills and language which significantly supports later reading development (NELP, 2008), and is also a predictor of later reading achievement (Quinn, Gerde and Bingham, 2016). Furthermore, children's emergent writing in kindergarten later predicts decoding, spelling and reading comprehension in first grade (Shatil, Share and Levin, 2000), and is predictive of growth in letter knowledge (Diamond, Gerde and Powell, 2008). It is also a crucial skill for phonological awareness (Zhang, Bingham and Quinn, 2017). Further, children's own name writing plays a significant role in acquiring literacy (Treiman, Kessler and Bourassa, 2001), and representations of name writing largely reflects print-related knowledge (Welsch, Sullivan and Justice, 2003). Specifically, early spelling knowledge enables children to learn the principle of the alphabet needed for reading which can be taught in spelling instruction (Gentry, 2004). He states that, "It is more accurate to say that children learn to read by spelling" (Gentry, 2004, p. 11). However, despite this wealth of evidence, reading is much more prevalent in policy with the long-

held view that learning to read precedes writing; therefore, phonics programmes primarily focus on teaching reading first then spelling. This ignores the important role that developmental writing and spelling play before formal phonics instruction. Research evidence is now discussed in relation to early writing which, as referred to earlier, is presented loosely within the four theoretical perspectives.

2.5: The Cognitive Perspective

The term 'developmental writing', associated with the 'emergent literacy' movement, is an approach to writing which emphasises its function, whilst recognising the developmental nature of spelling, and supporting developing writers using scaffolding (Browne, 1993). The term 'emergent' and 'developmental' writing are used synonymously in the literature (Cabell, Tortorelli and Gerde, 2013). Like reading, researchers conceptualise the nature of early writing development in differing ways - stages or steps, and the research demonstrates that children's development of writing is done so in a predictable way (Zhang, Bingham and Quinn, 2017).

2.5.1: Writing Models

There are several cognitive conceptual models evident in the literature**.** Berninger (2009) suggests that early writing consists of three components: mechanics (the production of the physical marks on the paper), composition (the meaning children ascribe to these symbols) and orthographic knowledge (referring to children's written language about how language works). Similarly, Puranik and Lonigan (2014) reference three components in their model: conceptual knowledge, procedural knowledge and generative knowledge. Conceptual knowledge refers to children's understanding of how print works, directionality – that print (in English) goes from left to right across the page, the purpose of writing and knowledge about the function of print. Procedural knowledge refers to children's alphabetic knowledge, letter writing skills and spelling, and generative knowledge refers to children's understanding that the symbolic representation of letters makes meaning. These components, however, can be assigned to two components: transcription and composition which is recognised within the literature. The Reading Framework (DfE, 2021) also recognises both components of writing, although it fails to give them equal importance.

2.5.2: Transcription

2.5.2.1: Handwriting

There is advocacy for teaching handwriting and spelling directly as mastery of these transcription skills is important to allow the developing writer to free up cognitive resources to composing skill, such as generating ideas and construction of sentences (Graham and Harris, 2014). Certainly, handwriting is an important skill that needs to be taught explicitly and systematically. Graham et al. (2012) emphasises the importance of focusing on atomicity and fluency of handwriting in order to write quickly and effortlessly (Malpique, Pino-Pasternak and Valcan, 2017), and teaching it in the context of phonics instruction (Rowe, 2018). Indeed, there is consensus within the literature for a balanced approach to teaching composition and transcription (Daffen and Mackenzie, 2015; Graham and Harris, 2019).

2.5.2.2: Early Spelling: Invented Spelling

Children's natural language is the basis of spelling development (Bear et al., 2008). Indeed, seminal research, from Read (1986) proposed that children demonstrate spelling behaviour that is based on their knowledge of letter sounds through their aural analysis of how words are pronounced. When children experiment with spelling, it enhances their awareness of sounds in words, which then supports their phonetic awareness for reading (Goswami, 2000). Indeed, encouraging invented spellings are an important part of learning to spell (Gentry, 2000). Further, the importance of strategic individualised instruction that matches children's development which supports children's awareness of sound-symbol correspondences is important (Freppon and Dahl, 1991). Bissex (1980) collected data from studying her son's writing over a sustained period of time which forms the basis of her theory that describes distinct developmental spelling stages. Building on this research, Gentry (1982), using Bissexs' (1980) data from her case study, developed a five-stage spelling model, which he proposes has, "ecological validity" (Gentry, 1982, p. 318) as it portrays the everyday functions of what most children do in writing. Ouellette and Senechal (2008) demonstrated associations between invented spelling and measures of orthographic awareness and morphological processing. Their findings support the view that invented spelling is a developmentally complex and important early literacy skill that involves phonemic awareness, letter sound knowledge, other oral language skills and orthographic knowledge. Senechal et al. (2011) affirm that, "Invented spelling is an exploratory process that involves the integration of phoneme and orthographic representations" (Senechal et al., 2011, p. 917), and they advocate that invented spelling can support their entry into reading as children explore the relationship between oral language and written symbols. More recently, Oulette and Senechal's (2017) findings support a model in which invented spelling supports reading, alphabetic knowledge and phonological awareness.

2.5.3: Composition

Within the cognitive perspective, like with reading, there is evidence that writing development follows a predictive sequence, or stages. Drawing on seminal work, Cabell, Tortorelli and Gerde (2013) suggests that children's writing development follows a sequence beginning with drawing and scribbling where children begin to comprehend the functionality of print, demonstrating that they are grasping that writing is distinct from illustrations. At this stage they do not understand that writing is related to speech. The next stage is where children write letter-like forms and letters. These may or may not represent conventional letters, but appear as random strings of letters and numbers that do not represent spoken sounds in words. At this stage, children may repeat the letters that are in their names (Treiman, Kessler and Bourassa, 2001). Children may understand that the symbols carry meaning, but there is no speech-to-print connection and it cannot be read by adults. The next stage is where children begin to represent salient and beginning sounds in their writing, demonstrating that they are beginning to represent sounds in spoken language. Children in this stage are inventing spellings based on sounds heard in spoken language. Sounds represented may be the most salient ones, and the way that they feel in a child's mouth (Bear et al., 2008). Although children are beginning to understand the alphabetic code, they do not yet comprehend where words begin and end (Morris et al., 2003), and they do not use finger spaces in their writing. The last stage is where children use beginning and end sounds in their writing with finger spaces which demonstrates that they have a perception of the boundaries in words (Cabell, Tortorelli and Gerde, 2013). Initially, they do not represent medial vowel sounds in words (Bear et al., 2008), but then gradually move on to represent all the sounds they can hear in words.

Quinn and Bingham (2019) point out that there is less research on composing, with a tendency to focus on transcription. However, despite this recognised 'gap' in the research, the development of composing is an important component for early writing, and is related to pre-reading and cognitive skills (Quinn, Bingham and Gerde, 2021). Gentry (2004) reminds us that the function of writing precedes the perfect form, reiterating the importance of children understanding the meaning of writing first. Quinn, Bingham and Gerde (2021) argue that, even when early writers cannot write in the conventional way, they are developing composing related knowledge. They found that measures of language were predictive of composing and, as children became more focused on transcribing, their messages became shorter. In essence, children generated ideas that they knew that they could achieve based on their transcription abilities, suggesting that children's verbal productions are a representation of both their oral language and narrative ability. They claim that

this is also evidence that children draw on self-regulation when using more advanced transcription skills. Graham and Harris (2014) make the distinction between beginning and skilled writing in the way that they compose. They describe the beginning writer's composition as a quest to tell the reader what they know as they write their idea down on paper. The early writer cannot organise their writing and evaluate their idea, and so it presents as a list of topic-related ideas. Importantly, Brown (1993) reminds us that writing is an idiosyncratic process and warns that attending solely to transcription forces children to assume that the content is not important; therefore, it is vital to respect children's writing whether they can write conventionally or not (Bredekamp, 2011).

In relation to policy and early writing, again, a further example of Hyatt's (2013) 'silences' are evident as 'developmental writing' does not appear in the policy at all. The document ignores the plethora of evidence about early writing, and fails to recognise the developmental sequences that children go through as they begin to understand the function of writing. This begins with drawings, which again, fails to get a single mention. Studies demonstrate that these drawings are a fundamental aspect of children's early writing development as they allow them to create meaningful texts (Mackenzie and Veresov, 2013; Christianakis, 2011). There is no scope to discuss children's drawing in detail, but to acknowledge their importance as children's first attempts at writing and meaning-making. Unfortunately, for children in classrooms, national policy emphasises an instructional approach which focuses primarily on transcription, namely phonics, to teach early writing whereas evidence suggests a balanced approach to teaching composition and transcription in the early years. Zhang, Bingham and Quinn (2017) reiterate the importance of teaching both transcription and composition from the outset, and there should be no expectation that children write conventionally early on. They caution that it is important not to focus exclusively on transcription as this could make the writing less meaningful and enjoyable; therefore, early composing attempts should be supported whilst also supporting spelling and letter formation. Unfortunately, in policy, research about conceptualisations of writing (Purinak & Lonigan, 2014; Berninger, 2009) stages of writing development (Cabell, Tortorelli and Gerde, 2013), early composition (Quinn, Bingham and Gerde, 2021) and the importance of scaffolding children's individual writing (Cabell, Tortorelli and Gerde, 2013) do not feature. Although the importance of composition is acknowledged, the document reads that children cannot write independently until it can be read by others, implying that it has to look 'conventional'. There is also a heavy focus on dictation, stating that it is a vital part of the phonics session where children are given the opportunity to practise and apply their spelling, "without their having to think about what it is they want to say"

(DfE, 2021, p. 49). It adds that children may begin to write their ideas down, but writing at length may discourage their motivation due to cognitive overload; therefore, extra time for writing is not necessary at this stage. The idea of 'writing readiness' ideology is known as 'code-based teaching' (Quinn and Bingham, 2019) but, arguably, writing is more than just acquiring "the codes" (Johnston, 2019, p. 64) and assessing children in how far they can write like 'adults' (Daniels, 2014). This 'writing readiness' ideology, evident in policy, only serves to view children as, "transcribers and dictators" (Young and Ferguson, 2021, p.2) who must master transcriptional skills before they exercise their right to write (Young and Ferguson, 2021).

2.5.4: Instructional Writing Approaches

In relation to early writing instruction, Cabell, Tortorelli and Gerde (2013) argue that preschool teachers receive limited practical guidance about the application of research about early writing and how to individualise instruction. With reference to Purinak and Lonigan's (2014) conceptualisation of writing as consisting of generative, conceptual and procedural knowledge, the most effective teaching strategy is to ensure practice that develops all three of these skills (Kaderavek, Cabell and Justice, 2009), and it is beneficial to teach skills, process and knowledge directly (Graham and Harris, 2016). In the classroom, Bingham et al. (2018) advocate making early writing experiences intentional and meaningful for children, using the metaphor of 'foregrounding' - proving materials and 'backgrounding' – using everyday experiences and interest, particularly during play, to write using scaffolding strategies. Gerde, Bingham and Wasik (2012), based on their qualitative research in classrooms, provide twelve research-based strategies for classroom practice**:** building writing into daily practice, accepting all forms of writing, modelling, scaffolding, encouraging invented spelling, children reading their writing whilst accepting all forms of writing, making writing opportunities meaningful, having writing materials in all areas, displays of theme-related words, encouraging group writing experiences and making writing a way to connect with families. Further, writing should also be recognised as a social activity where peer interaction supports the writing process (Kissel et al., 2011).

2.5.5: Spelling Instruction

There is a wealth of evidence that developmental spelling should be considered in spelling instruction. Vines, Jordan and Broemmel (2020) note the detrimental effect that scripted phonics programmes can have and, therefore, advocate developmental word study – which involves investigating features of words, such as short vowels and digraphs (Williams et al., 2009).

Furthermore, semantics are proposed as a relevant factor in learning to spell, supporting the view that orthographic learning involves the integration of phonological, orthographic, and semantic representations (Oulette, 2010). Other research has found meaning to be important too. The International Literacy Association (2019) suggests three principles for spelling instruction, with the first one emphasising meaning as a starting point. In contrast, although the key policy recognises that children spell phonetically, its emphasis is on teaching synthetic phonics for spelling; therefore, it fails to recognise the importance of encouraging invented spellings as an important part of learning to spell (Gerde, Bingham and Wasik, 2012). Bear and Templeton's (1998) research provides an alternative approach. They investigated spelling development and implications for instruction and they advocate word study that focuses on spelling patterns. Their research-based developmentally driven instructional approach 'Words Their Way' (Bear et al., 2020) focuses on word study that integrates phonics, spelling and vocabulary instruction where sound, structure and meaning are explored in meaningful contexts.

In relation to instruction, there is an argument for a balanced approach which includes instruction in standard spelling alongside the encouragement of invented spelling (Gentry, 2000). He advocates that, in practice, the function of writing comes before the perfect form, heeding practitioners to acknowledge children's invented spelling whilst teaching the function of writing. Gerde, Bingham and Wasik (2012) cite encouraging invented spelling as a strategy for supporting early writing, and Cabell, Tortorelli and Gerde (2013) argue for strategically individualised instruction which matches children's development, where children can be gently 'nudged' towards sound-symbol awareness (Freppon and Dahl, 1991). Such approaches, I argue, allows practitioners to move beyond the cognitive-psychological perspective as Gentry (2004) suggest, as they skilfully scaffold children's spelling development, teaching in the 'zone of proximal development' (Vygotsky, 1978), in the context of systematic spelling instruction which also takes account of the complexities of English orthography. It is now widely accepted that a systematic approach to teaching spelling is most effective (Treiman, 2018). Bowers and Bowers (2017) state that phonics is not enough, and that teachers need a deeper understanding of the English spelling system. Treiman (2018) agrees, stating that a systematic phonics approach provides a simplified version of how the English writing system works as spelling patterns are not taught. Indeed, spelling should incorporate visual aspects, meaning, analogy, phonemic awareness and orthography whilst taking account of children's development (Huxford, 2006), and include the interdependence of morphology, etymology and

phonology (Bowers and Bowers, 2017). The discussion now turns to the socio-cultural perspective in early writing.

2.6: The Socio-Cultural Perspective

Writing is recognised as a social activity where peer interaction supports the writing process (Kissel et al., 2011). Graves (1983) values the teacher as an active facilitator in children's writing development. Similarly, Gerde, Bingham and Pendergast (2015) argue that it is not enough to simply provide environmental support, such as writing materials and environmental print, and that it is the adult's role that is most important in providing modelling and scaffolding.

2.6.1: Scaffolding

Scaffolding is often used as a strategy to support children's learning. It is a term coined by Bruner (1976) and described as where instruction marches out in front of development (Vygotsky, 1978). In practice, scaffolding is a strong instructional tool that supports all three elements of early writing development: composing, spelling and forming letters. It also enables teachers to support individual children at their individual skill level (Quinn, Gerde and Bingham, 2016). Drawing on Vygotskian theory, (Vygotsky, 1978), Cabell, Tortorelli and Gerde (2013) advocates the use of scaffolding in order to support the next developmental steps for children's writing, from assisted to independent performance. They advocate the importance of teachers looking closely at children's individual writing in order to implement appropriate individualised instruction, suggesting observing the child writing first and collecting samples. They emphasise that, "each child's writing provides teachers with a window into what the child knows about print and sound" (Cabell, Tortorelli and Gerde, 2013, p. 652), and from here, the teacher can see the child's level of development and, therefore, scaffold within the particular child's instructional range. Despite this evidence within the literature, Gerde, Bingham and Wasik (2012) contend that few teachers understand how to scaffold in practice; therefore, it is imperative that early years' classroom teachers understand and use scaffolding appropriately as scaffolding strategies are related to children's individual academic development (Pentimonti et al., 2017). The amount of writing support, such as modelling and scaffolding, that children receive is longitudinally linked to children's writing at the end of pre-school (Bingham, Quinn and Gerde, 2017), again reiterating its importance in practice.

2.7: The Need for a Balanced Approach

From the evidence presented above, it is evident that research from different theoretical perspectives highlights the complexities of teaching early reading, and serves in understanding reading from a multi-perspective or a balanced approach (Torgerson et al., 2019). Indeed, the call for a balanced approach is evident within the literature. A balanced view, as defined by Wyse and Bradbury (2022), is a balance between the systematic teaching of the alphabetic code whilst focusing on whole texts and other linguistic features where balance is sought between teaching skills and comprehension using real books and reading scheme books. Wyse and Bradbury (2022) point out that the recent focus has been on three main orientations to the teaching of early reading: synthetic phonics, whole language and balanced instruction. They reiterate that almost no approach described as 'phonics first' excludes a focus on texts, and no approach described as 'whole language' excludes paying attention to letters and phonemes. Rasinki and Padak (2004) call for a balanced approach which includes phonics, word reading, fluency and comprehension whilst Castles, Rastle and Nation (2018) recognise the important role that phonics plays in learning to read but call for a balanced and developmentally informed approach, which includes an understanding of how the English writing system work. The EEF (2021) also advocates for a balanced approach to the teaching of early reading which supports a combination of systematic phonics instruction, fluency practice, instruction in vocabulary and comprehension.

Similarly, in relation to the teaching of early writing, there is a need for a balanced approach to composition and transcription (Zhang and Quinn, 2018) whilst providing both instruction in standard spelling alongside the encouragement of invented spelling (Gentry, 2000). Positively, consensus is growing amongst scholars for literacy to be viewed from multiple theoretical perspectives (Torgerson et al., 2019). Ellis and Smith (2017) have developed an assessment tool which embeds school literacy within three-knowledge domains: cognitive, cultural, social and emotional. This assessment tool, useful in practice, encourages teachers to deepen their understanding of the different theoretical domains and practice knowledge.

2.8: To Summarise

This chapter has served in answering research question two in relation to how informed the key policy is in relation to research evidence. It has also served in highlighting the complexities surrounding educational research and its relation to methodology. The evidence presented also reiterates the political nature of research (Nutbrown, 1996), and highlights researcher morals and values, as Harrison (2004) states, "there are ethical reasons for presenting the complexity of

educational research" (Harrison, 2004, p. 85). Evidently, The Reading Framework (DfE, 2021) largely draws upon evidence from the cognitive perspective, and, in practice, this means that the emphasis is placed primarily on the technical skills of reading. Further, historical perspectives in early literacy influence current policy and practice; therefore, policy makers and publishers should consider this perspective (Semingson and Kerns, 2021) and its implications for current research and practice as the legacies of seminal studies are vital in our current understanding of early literacy learning. Although policy now recognises 'Reading for Pleasure' pedagogy, there is still a wealth of research evidence that highlight the complexities of teaching early literacy that are excluded. Arguably, this provides policy makers with the simple solution that they seek to the complexities of teaching early reading (Hall, 2010). However, such a narrow view of literacy development, instruction and research only serves to preserve the cycle of underachievement (Davidson, 2010), and excludes children from exercising their absolute right, to borrow from Smith's (1988) book title, and 'join the literacy club'.

Chapter 3: Methods and Methodology

3.1: Introduction

The purpose of the study is to explore the complex relationship between research, policy and practice in relation to the teaching and learning of early literacy in classrooms. Specifically, it seeks to explore how far classroom practice is evidence-informed. In order to fulfil its aims, the study was guided by four research questions, presented below.

3.1.1: Research Questions:

1. What does policy analysis of The Reading Framework (DfE, 2021) reveal about the teaching of early literacy in England?

2. What are the tensions between teacher practice and policy?

3. What informs and shapes teachers' literacy practices?

4. How do children experience early literacy at home and in school?

This chapter begins by presenting the methodological framework used to situate the study. As methods are influenced by methodology (Dockett, Einarsdottir and Perry, 2011), it is important to provide a justification of decisions around methods and data analysis. This is followed by a detailed description of the methods employed, participant information and ethical considerations along with reflections relating to data collection and analysis.

3.1.2: Methodological Framework

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) remind us that educational research is immersed in competing views of social science – with two prominent and competing paradigms that assume different ways of looking at the world: the scientific and interpretive paradigms. Pring (2015) warns that these two paradigms do not have to compete as 'either/or' choices for the researcher. This, he argues, is a false dualism when, in fact, the world can be seen as both independent and part of the research. Such ontological and epistemological stances are concerned with the researcher's assumptions of social reality (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). In the context of this study, ontological assumptions take the view that multiple realities exist and see people as meaning-making beings who construct their own meaning. From an epistemological stance, behaviour is viewed as socially situated and context-related (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). Furthermore, from a theoretical perspective, the study aims to view literacy learning in practice through a multiple perspective 'lens'. As alluded to in an earlier chapter, there is a propensity for researchers to work, in isolation, in the

same disciplinary backgrounds. However, cross-fertilisation - researching from multiple-perspectives - can offer new insights into classroom practice. Taking this into consideration, it is important that the researcher's methodology is not driven by what Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005) call 'epistemological purity', but by their quest to answer the research questions and fulfil the aims of the study. It is also important to acknowledge that methodology is morally grounded (Nixon, Walker and Clough, 2003) and methods chosen by researchers demonstrate how they are influenced by ontological and epistemological positions, which consequently, reveals their underlying values (Greenbank, 2003).

3.2: Research Design

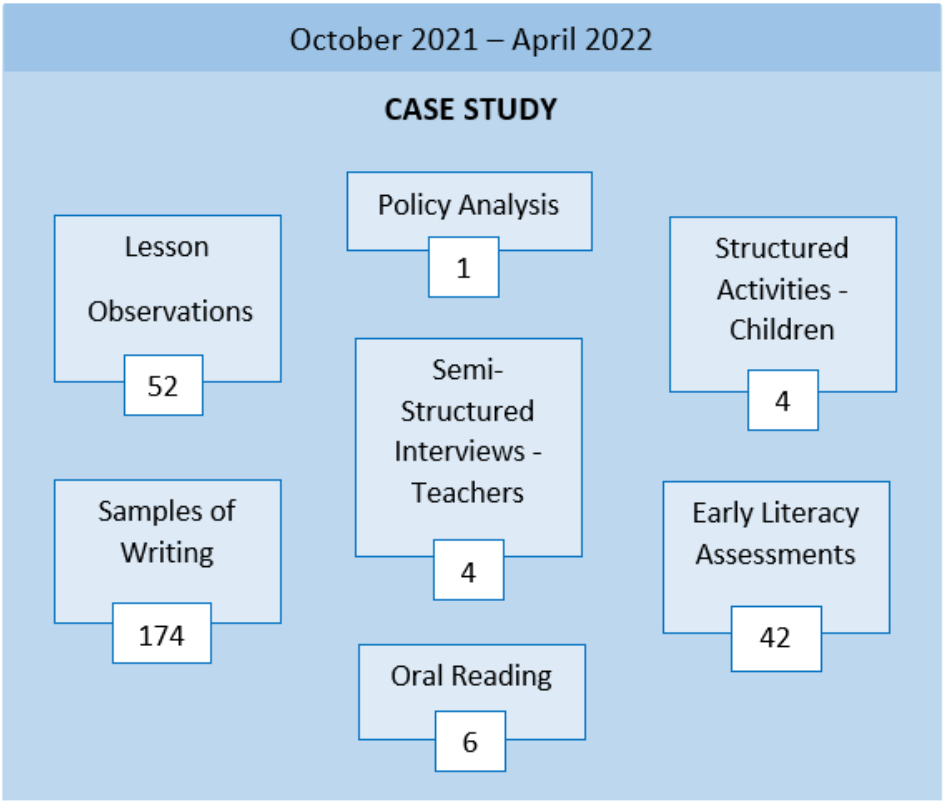
3.2.1: Mixed Methods

Both qualitative and quantitative methods can be used to understand the research problem, and mixed method approaches can blend both qualitative and numerical data (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018), and can help to understand complex social phenomena (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2005) as well as broadening and strengthening the study (Yin, 2006). Such post-positivist methodologies can provide an alternative to 'methodological pluralism' where researchers use either quantitative or qualitative methods (Wildemuth, 1993). Combining both quantitative and qualitative methods demonstrates my move beyond the purity of one research paradigm as I refuse to conform to the underlying assumptions of one particular paradigm (Onwugbuzie and Leech, 2005). Working within this 'third paradigm' allowed me to research both depth and breadth (Clough and Nutbrown, 2007), and choose the right method to answer the research questions by using both qualitative and quantitative methods. By not getting caught up in the polar position of 'this way or that way', I have been able to study real-life learning by looking through a 'multi-perspective lens' in order to see the complexities of early literacy learning in real-life classrooms.

3.2.2: Methods

Data collection methods are presented in Diagram 1 below. This gives an account of the methods used and the number of data collected for each method.

Diagram 1 – Data collection methods and number of data collected



Additionally, Table 5 provides information about how the methods were carefully chosen to answer the research questions.

Table 5 - Mapping research questions to methods

Research Question	**Method**
1. What does policy analysis of The Reading Framework (DfE, 2021) reveal about the teaching of early literacy in England?	Policy Analysis
2. What are the tensions between teacher practice and policy?	Policy Analysis Lesson Observations Teacher Interviews Early Literacy Assessments
3. What informs and shapes teachers' literacy practices?	Teacher Interviews
4. How do children experience early literacy at home and in school?	Children's Structured Interviews Early Literacy Assessments

A detailed presentation of the methods employed in the study will now follow.

3.3: Case Study

A case study was chosen for the research study in order to gain an in-depth perspective of the teaching and learning of early reading and writing in the classroom. It allowed me to gain a holistic view of early literacy learning using in-depth methods such as interviews and observations (Kroth et al. 2017). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) suggest that there is not a single definition of a case study, but that it includes multiple methods of data collection and analysis which allows individuals or institutions to be studied in their context, with real people in real situations. Yin (2013) describes a case study as an, "in-depth inquiry into a specific phenomenon … within its real-world context" (Yin, 2013, p. 321). Although challenging, a case study is favourable when investigating real-life contexts where the researcher has little control of events (Yin, 2013). It offers a rich, in-depth description of real people in real situations and the multiple realities that operate in such situations (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). Greig, Taylor and Mackay (2007) state that the concept of a case study is to make up a picture which, "says it all" (Greig, Taylor and Mackay, 2007, p. 145); therefore, a case study allowed me the opportunity to develop an in-depth understanding of the various factors that influence how literacy is approached in classroom settings, and how this connects to academic research. Rejecting the idea of a single reality, I recognise that there are multiple, multivalent realities that function within the complexities of a dynamic classroom setting (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018), and collecting both qualitative and quantitative data enabled triangulation of the data from several different perspectives, therefore, strengthening the data by reinforcing it from different strands of enquiry (Greig, Taylor and Mackay, 2007). Further, using a case study allowed me to take a holistic and in-depth approach (Kroth et al. 2017), using different and complementing methods. Specific methods used were a policy analysis, observations, semi-structured interviews with teachers, structured activities with children, collecting samples of children's writing and conducting early literacy assessments with the children. Each of these methods will now be presented after a detailed presentation of the research context and participant sample.

3.3.1: Research Context and Sample

The research was conducted in a primary school in a large city in the north of England. At the time of the study, the school had 286 children on roll: 43.3% of these were Pupil Premium pupils and the

number of children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) was 16.4%. According to the DfE (2024), Pupil Premium funding is allocated to schools for children who fit the following criteria:

> Pupils who are recorded as eligible for free school meals, or have been recorded as eligible in the past 6 years (referred to as Ever 6 FSM)
>
> Children previously looked after by a local authority or other state care, including children adopted from state care or equivalent from outside England and Wales.

These children are then termed as 'disadvantaged' based on their eligibility for Pupil Premium. The school is a primary school for children aged 3 to 11 years old. Nursery is located in a separate building. The school is part of a large Multi-Academy Trust which it joined in October 2017. According to the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD, 2019), the school is located in the most deprived decile in the United Kingdom. The research took place in four diverse classrooms occupied by children and teachers with different experiences, backgrounds and values. The data collection period lasted from October 2021 to April 2022.

3.3.1.1: Participants

The participants for the case study were chosen carefully over a period of four months, from July to October 2021. 'Willingness to participate' letters were sent out initially to parents and, where consent was received, children were then specifically chosen to ensure representation of gender, literacy experience, ability and EAL. This criteria is documented in Table 7. 6 children and 4 teachers took part in the case study. Although two of the children had English as an Additional Language (EAL), they both had a good functional understanding and use of English. The Year Two child also had a good grasp of academic language. When initial consent was gained, information was shared with participants about withdrawal. One of the children (Eve) left during the study so no data was collected for her after the 10th of December 2021. No request was made to withdraw data when myself and Eve's class teacher were informed that Eve was leaving the school.

The 4 teachers were chosen to participate in the research as they were teachers in the classes from nursery to Year Two; therefore, they would provide insight into literacy teaching in the four classrooms where the chosen 6 children were taught daily. Their participation would also provide a representative view of literacy learning from each class across KS1. Teachers were initially approached in person and invited to take part in the study with a verbal request. During this verbal

exchange, it was explained that, if they chose to participate in the study, more detailed written information would be provided. All 4 teachers were female (100%), aged between 25 to 50 years old, and all were White British (100%). Data from the Department for Education (DfE, 2024) suggests that these participants are typical of the demographics for teacher characteristics of gender and ethnicity as indicated on the DfE website. The data reports that, in this data collection period, 76% of teachers were female and 85% were White British. The teachers' experience ranged from 3 years to 20 years, and all of the teachers had taught Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and Key Stage 1 (KS1) throughout their careers. The teachers held a number of roles within the school: the nursery teacher was the EYFS Lead and the Year One teacher was the Phonics Lead.

An information sheet (Appendix B) was sent to the CEO of the Trust, and the school's Principal, to gain permission to conduct the study. For the children, at the end of the school year, in July 2021, an 'expression of interest' letter was sent out to the parents/carers of Nursery, Reception, Year One and 2 children to ascertain initial interest in their child taking part in the research study. Of the 102 letters that were sent out in July, 39 were returned by the 19th of October. The response rate was 38%. Letters were returned from 9 nursery children (5 boys and 4 girls), 8 Reception children (5 boys and 3 girls), 11 Year One children (5 girls and 6 boys) and 11 Year Two children (6 males and 5 females). After these 'expressions of interest' letters were returned, I studied the children carefully, and then chose 6 children from across the four classes in EYFS and KS1. An advantage of being an 'insider researcher' was that I knew some of the children well, having taught them previously. Also, as a Nursery Teacher in the school, I taught the participant from the nursery class during data collection. I purposely chose 3 boys and 3 girls in order that gender was equally represented within the study. I chose one child from Nursery, two children from Reception, one child from Year One and two children from Year Two. Of the 6 children, I chose children who presented as having a range of literacy and lived experiences, such as ability, background and ethnicity. Children's potential willingness to participate was also considered, and appropriate measures were put in place to ensure that 'quieter' children were given equal opportunities to contribute. During the activities, this meant ensuring children took equal turns to speak, and that all children were specifically asked to contribute to ensure their inclusion. Throughout the study, I was consciously aware of the implications of conducting 'insider research'. It was crucial that I considered my insider status and assumptions about the research context, acknowledging that it would influence the research (Rogers, Labadie and Pole, 2016). The teachers were colleagues and, as both professional and personal relationships existed between myself as researcher and the participants, issues relating to

power dynamics and bias were prevalent throughout the gaining of consent, data collection and analysis. This was particularly pertinent for the children as I had taught some of them directly. On the other hand, my familiarity with the children was viewed positively as this would have potentially encouraged them to be more relaxed around me. A number of measures were taken to ensure that these identified power dynamics were managed ethically. When speaking to the parents, children and teachers, it was made explicitly clear that they were under no obligation, to myself or the school, to take part in the study, and it would not affect my relationship with them if they chose not to participate. It was reiterated that they could withdraw from the study at any time. During the research process, participants were asked many times if they felt comfortable with the activities they were engaged in and if they felt comfortable to continue. These issues continued to be present throughout the writing of the study and will continue throughout later dissemination. As well as the inherent power dynamic that can exist between researcher and participant, having held positions of responsibility within the school, there was potential that my values and voice relating to early literacy practice would be present into the data. Admittedly, there was also potential for 'researcher bias' as I did feel a certain degree of loyalty to my place of work and wanted to present it in a positive way. Recognising these issues, I acknowledged that the role of researcher and teacher had the potential to become somewhat blurred, however, necessary steps were taken to limit the consequences of 'insider researcher'. A clear research design was employed in the study and methods were carried out systematically, and with rigour. This involved using triangulation across the data set and ensuring transparency when regularly debriefing participants about the research process. Robust ethics were employed before, during and after the study, and a reflective approach was taken throughout.

Detailed information about participants is presented in Tables 6 and 7 below.

3.3.1.2: Participant Information

3.3.1.3: Teachers' Profiles

Table 6 – Teachers' profiles

	Kelly	Sara	Laura	Joanne
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Female
Ethnicity	White-British	White-British	White-British	White-British
Teaching Qualifications	PGCE	BSC with QTS	PGCE	PGCE
Experience	Over 10 years	Over 20 years	Over 10 years	3 years ECT
Current class being taught	Nursery	Year Two	Reception/Year One	Reception
Age ranges previously taught	KS1/2	KS1/2	KS1	KS1
Other roles			Phonics Lead	

3.3.1.4: Children's Profiles

Table 7 - Children's Profiles

	Tess	Isaac	Eve	Ronnie	Noah	Alice
Gender	F	M	F	M	M	F
D.O.B	August 2018	July 2017	February 2017	June 2016	July 2015	May 2015
Ethnicity	White-British	Albanian	White-British	White-British	White-British	Russian
Pupil Premium	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No
Meeting Age Related Expectations (ARE) at end of 2022 in KS1 SATs and PSC	No	No	Left the school	No	No	No

3.4: Consent Procedures

3.4.1: Children

The issue of informed consent is complex with children. Indeed, Ungar, Joffee and Kodish (2006) affirm, from both an ethical and regulatory standpoint, that it is necessary to obtain assent from children in order to protect the child, promote self-determination and to encourage the ethical idea of respect for persons (Roth-Cline and Nelson, 2013). Roberts-Holmes (2005) states that, "informed consent is an ongoing process" (Roberts-Holmes, 2005, p. 68); therefore, throughout the study, I continued to negotiate consent with the children. Rogers, Labadie and Pole (2016) point out that informed consent centres on three principals: giving participants appropriate information about the research, ensuring that participants understand that participation is voluntary and that the participant has the competence to participate. The latter issue is complicated further as the participants are children under the age of 18. As this was the case, parents made the initial decision as to whether their child could participate in the research, consenting on their behalf. Gaining consent for the children followed this procedure. In January 2021, I sent an email to the CEO of the Trust, seeking permission to conduct the research. Consent was agreed, dependent upon successful ethical approval from the University of Sheffield. After this, I sought permission from the school, therefore, in practice, asking the school to act in 'loco parentis' for the children. Conversely though, it should not be assumed that consent by the school should be seen as consent for individual children (NCB, 2011). In light of this, both consent from 'parents as gatekeepers' and consent from individual children was sought. The 6 parents of the potential participants were given an 'Information Sheet' as gatekeeper (Appendix C) and a 'Consent Form' (Appendix D), and were asked to read the information carefully and then sign the consent form to allow their child to participate, acting as 'gatekeeper' for their child. At this point it was also explained that, as I believe that children should have a say in what happens to them, their child's consent would also be sought using an appropriate child-friendly consent form at a later date.

After receiving parents' consent, I spoke to each child participant individually to gain their consent. Each participant was invited to come and speak with me in a separate space from their classroom. In an age-appropriate manner, adapting my words carefully for each participant, I explained the purpose of my research study and what they would be asked to do. Appropriate and adequate information about the research, and the research process, was given to the children using a child-friendly technique - the 'read-aloud' (Rogers, Labadie and Pole 2016). I developed a 'read-aloud', an information sheet, written in child-friendly language with small pictures, that I read to the children

(Appendix E). At the end of the explanation, I asked the participants if they had any questions. None of them did. One participant did respond with a comment but this was unrelated to our discussion. The children then signed a consent form (Appendix F). During the 'read-aloud', I constantly checked the children's body language for potential signs of distress which could have been an indication that they were uncomfortable and wished to withdraw at this point. This is recognised by Rogers, Labadie and Pole (2016) who state that children may find it difficult to express their wish to withdraw. They suggest building in times during the research where children are given the opportunity to withdraw. 5 of the 6 children presented as content and happy with the consent process. However, one of the participants did present with some distress when I invited her to engage with me to gain consent. She was unwilling to engage, not explicitly stating 'no' but carrying on with her task and then becoming visibly upset when I asked her to join me. Admittedly, as frustrating as this was for me, I had to respect the child's wishes (Lancaster and Broadbent, 2003), and immediately explained to her that she did not have to come and speak to me, and that she could carry on with her task. It was neither ethical nor moral to continue to engage with the participant at this point. I spoke to the participant's parent, who had previously given consent for her child to participate, and we agreed that if taking part in the research would cause her child to become distressed, then it would be best not to continue. The parent agreed and withdrew her child from the research. I then sought a 6th participant – another female. I gained parental consent, and the participant was happy to give her consent following the aforementioned procedure. This experience reminded me that the issue of recognising children's rights to withdraw from research is complex and ongoing. The right to withdraw is difficult for young children to understand (Melton, 1983). This is particularly pertinent in a school setting as Melton (1983) affirms, "Children also do not have experience with having the right to refuse participation in school-based activities" (Melton, 1983, p. 45); therefore, throughout the research, I was constantly aware of this and remained vigilant to signs that children were not comfortable, indicating their wish to withdraw. Additionally, a number of measures were taken to address the existing power imbalance between myself, as researcher, and the children, as participants. The structured activities were conducted in spaces where children felt comfortable, and I dressed casually in order to give the impression that I was not in the role of teacher to enable the children to perceive the interaction as less formal.

3.4.2: Teachers

Many of the considerations that are pertinent to children also apply to adults; therefore, similar consent procedures were followed. Initially, teachers were approached individually, and the

research aims and purpose were explained verbally. As these teachers are my colleagues and have been for a number of years, they all knew that I was undertaking a research study in school, but this gave me the opportunity to explain about the research in detail. Whilst having these informal verbal introductions to my research, I was keen to articulate that I wanted them to see me as a 'researcher' and not as a 'teacher/former literacy lead' in school. I explained that these were two separate roles, and that I was not there observing in my former role as literacy lead, but as a researcher exploring literacy learning in real-life classrooms. In order to mitigate the pre-existing power dynamic between myself and the teachers, I took a number of steps, such as ensuring that the teachers saw me in the role of researcher as much as possible and conducting the interviews informally in a neutral setting. After the initial verbal exchange, written consent was gained. The four teachers were then given an 'Information Sheet' (Appendix G) and a 'Consent Form' to sign (Appendix H). Teaching Assistants went through the same process (Appendix I and J).

3.5: Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was sought and gained from the University of Sheffield in April 2021 (Appendix A). However, ethics goes way beyond a checklist (Nixon, Walker and Clough, 2003) and, specifically, ethics with children requires one to look beyond the minimal requirements (Rogers, Labadie and Pole, 2016). Moreover, Nixon, Walker and Clough (2003) point out that research is a, "thoughtful practice" (Nixon, Walker and Clough 2003, p. 87) which is morally grounded by methodology. Acknowledging that morals shape ethics, I have exercised reflexivity (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018), and endeavoured to be open and honest about my positionality and the potential influence I, as an 'insider researcher', may have on the data. Indeed, reflexivity is a, "strategy for quality control" (Berger, 2015, p. 219) and is affected by the researcher's social position and experiences (Berger, 2015). In light of these issues, I have taken a reflexive position throughout the study.

3.5.1: Confidentiality and Anonymity

Relating to consent are the ethical issues of confidentiality and anonymity which run prior, throughout and beyond the research study. Otter.ai (2024) was used to take audio recordings in interviews, children's structured activities and during children's oral reading of texts. These were recorded on my phone and transcribed immediately. All data was anonymised at the point of transcription, and audio recordings and transcriptions were deleted immediately after being transcribed. All data was stored anonymously and securely. Pseudonyms were used for the children and teachers in order to protect their identities and ensure confidentiality. However, Dockett,

Einarsdottir and Perry (2011) question if, as researchers, we can ever totally ensure anonymity. It is questionable as to whether contextual information could potentially reveal participant's identities. Certainly, this has to be acknowledged in the context of my study as participants could potentially identify themselves using contextual information. Further, Rogers, Labadie and Pole (2016) question how children's cultural heritages and societal richness can be reflected in the data if we disguise identities. Perhaps children want to be identified and researchers have to remain open to this possibility. There is then the issue of who actually owns the data and the long-term consequences of holding participants' data (Rogers, Labadie and Pole, 2016). Furthermore, interpretation of children's voices is also an ethical issue (Clough and Nutbrown, 2007). Importantly, these ethical dilemmas were considered throughout the study and addressed at the appropriate stage in the research. For example, using pseudonyms served in protecting the participants' identities whilst demonstrating respect for them and acknowledging their individuality. Pseudonyms also aided in making the narrative more personal, readable and relatable, and making the participants more distinguishable. Additionally, whilst ethical considerations have guided the course of the study, they will continue to run after the study and beyond its publication. Ethical issues of interpretation are also addressed in the data analysis chapter.

3.5.2: Power Dynamics

Implicit power relationships exist when conducting research with children. This is particularly relevant when conducting research in schools due to power dynamics and issues of conformity that already exist (Descombe and Aubrook, 1992) and, specifically, when the researcher appears to be in the role of the teacher (David, Edwards and Alldred 2001). This was pertinent for me as the children know me in the role of teacher; therefore, I had to be constantly aware of this power imbalance and take action in order to address it. I had to take the following steps to allow the children to see me as 'researcher' and not 'teacher'. At the outset of the research, I explicitly explained to the children that I was not doing the research as a teacher, but as a researcher who wanted to learn more about how children learn to read and write in school. I also dressed casually in order to appear less formal compared to how I dress when I assume my usual role of teacher in the school.

3.5.3: Researching with Children

Conducting the research with children added a more complex layer to the study. Indeed, Christensen and James (2008) indicate the complexities of researching with children in a contemporary context. Rogers, Labadie and Pole (2016) describe researching with children as,

"quite a bit of a bumpy ethical terrain" (Rogers, Labadie and Pole, 2016, p. 35), highlighting the tensions between protecting the rights of the children and hearing an authentic voice. Indeed, there is an emerging literature concerning the theoretical basis for the conduct of qualitative research with children as it enables the *voice* of the participant to be heard (Greig, Taylor and Mackay, 2007). Although my research does not claim to give participants a 'voice' in the sense that these scholars are expressing, my study sought to gain children's perspectives about how they perceive that they are taught to read and write in school, and the key messages that they receive both explicitly and implicitly. Christensen and James (2008) recognise that children have roles as citizens and consumers and effect social policy, and therefore, advocate the importance of having data about these citizens. Encompassing the belief that research with children should be participatory rather than something that is done to children (Nutbrown, 1996), I was keen to view the children as equal participants and employ methods that reflected this belief. However, it has to be acknowledged that researching with children is both morally positioned and political (Nutbrown, 1996), adding further layers to the research. Further, Nutbrown (1996) and Rogers, Labadie and Pole (2016) argue that educational research should also consider the 'rights' of children – something which I continually address throughout the chapter. I will now provide a detailed description of the methods employed in the research study, beginning with the policy analysis.

3.6: Policy Analysis

Considering this research explores practitioners' classroom practices, it is essential to look into how such practice is taking place within a specific policy context. Specifically, the policy analysis looks closely at the writing of the document and the evidence-base used to justify the policy.

The policy analysis answers the first research question:

1. *What does policy analysis of The Reading Framework (DfE, 2021) reveal about the teaching of early literacy in England?*

As the focus of the study is early literacy, the obvious choice of policy is The Reading Framework (DfE, 2021), as it is a prominent statutory policy relating to early literacy that directly influences classroom practice. Details of the policy are now presented.

3.6.1: The Key Policy: The Reading Framework (DfE, 2021)

The Reading Framework (DfE, 2021), relating to the teaching of early reading and published in 2021, has several aims. These are:

- to set out the research underpinning the different elements of the teaching of reading
- to provide practical support for high quality teaching and assessment, ensuring fidelity to the chosen phonics programme
- to serve as an evaluation tool for schools to evaluate and improve provision around the teaching of reading
- to support older children who are 'at risk' of reading failure due to not being able to decode well enough
- to help schools in working with parents to support reading

As the name suggests, the framework is primarily about reading, however, writing is included in the policy document, although not in as much depth as reading. Recently, there has been an updated version of the policy, The Reading Framework (DfE, 2023), which includes updated guidance on certain aspects of reading, although much of the guidance around early reading remains the same; therefore, the 2021 version of the policy remains the chosen policy for analysis due to the timescales in conducting the study.

3.6.2: Critical Policy Discourse Analysis Frame

Hyatt's (2013) Critical Policy Discourse Analysis Frame (CPDAF) provides a useful analytical tool to conduct a critical analysis on the key policy in relation to the teaching of early literacy and in relation to how 'evidentiary warrant' is presented in the key policy. Evidentiary warrant is part of the construction of policy and is concerned with the position that policy takes, based on empirical evidence. Hyatt (2013) asserts that evidence is not neutral. He also highlights the 'silences' that exist within policy, referring to what is excluded. The policy analysis aims to uncover these silences. These omissions, it can be argued, are due to the government's desire to present a simple view of literacy, based largely on the cognitive perspective (Harrison, 2010) and ignoring the complexities of reading (Harrison, 2004).

The frame was used to contextualise and deconstruct the policy at both 'macro' and 'micro' levels. At 'macro' level, the policy was analysed at semiotic and societal levels, by highlighting how policy

drivers are responsible for steering policy, and at 'micro' level, analysis took place by analysing linguistic features at the lexico-grammatical level by specifically looking at how grammar is used in the policy, particularly the use of verbs. Both these forms of analysis demonstrate how the author's (the government in this case) ideology and values shape social representations, and how ideology is legitimised and justified through power relations (Hyatt, 2013). Also evident is the role that political, accountability and evidentiary warrants, and policy drivers and levers play in steering national policy. These mechanisms are used to justify and legitimise policy in global, national and local contexts, which are intended to facilitate the implementation of policy as it is constructed and debated largely through language and semiotic modes (Hyatt, 2013). Firstly though, it is important to provide definitions of the mechanisms stated above. This is done in the table below.

3.6.3: Definitions

Definitions, provided by Hyatt (2013), in his CPDAF are presented in the table below.

Table 3 – Definitions of the mechanism in Hyatt's (2013) CPDAF

Warrant	**Definition**
Political warrant	Where policy decisions are in the public and national interest and what is seen as essential for creating a 'good society' (Inglis, 2004).
Accountability warrant	Relating to the government justifying policy decisions based on their claim to improve standards and outcomes.
Evidentiary warrant	This refers to the justification of a position based on research evidence. The credibility of this predominantly quantitative evidence is often portrayed as irrefutable with its positivist assumptions of objectivity (Hyatt, 2013).
Policy drivers	These are the intended goals or aims of a policy (Hyatt, 2013). Examples of these are social mobility and narrowing the literacy attainment gap.
Policy levers	Instruments which aid the process of policy steering in the public sector. Examples of these are target setting, inspection and funding (Hyatt, 2013).

The policy is analysed on a number of different levels, involving both linguistic features and policy drivers steered by political, accountability and evidentiary warrants. The table below explains this analysis in relation to the key policy.

Table 4 – Levels of policy analysis

Micro Level	**Macro Level**	
Linguistic Features	***Policy Drivers***	***Policy Levers***
● Lexico-grammatical language ● Factive verbs ● State verbs ● Intertextuality ● Interdiscursivity	● Overcoming disadvantage ● Social mobility ● Britain's place in global league tables	● Standards agenda ● School inspection ● Performance-related pay ● The mandatory teaching of systematic synthetic phonics ● Year One Phonics Screening Check (DfE, 2012) ● Ofsted EIF (Ofsted, 2019) ● English Hubs (DfE, 2023)

An analysis of some of the most prominent features now follows.

3.6.3.1: Micro Level Analysis

3.6.3.2: Linguistic Features

In the CPDAF, Hyatt (2013) identifies several linguistic features and language practices that are, "represented as common sense, inevitable and beyond challenge" (Hyatt, 2013, p. 840), which aim to condition society members to accept conventions. Indeed, in the key policy, there are a number of examples of lexico-grammatical language that appear to be used to construct convincing truths for the reader. This can be seen in the use of both 'factive' and 'state' verbs, which are used as powerful devices to project a conception of common sense that appeals to the reader. A number of

phrases which contain 'factive' verbs serve in convincing the reader that government policy is responsible for the positive impact upon reading standards. Indeed, Codd (1988) reiterates, "Policy is about the exercise of political power and the language that is used to legitimise that process" (Codd, 1988, p. 235). The following example, taken from the framework, is a good example of this as the powerful language used to legitimise the government's actions as 'truth' for the reader.

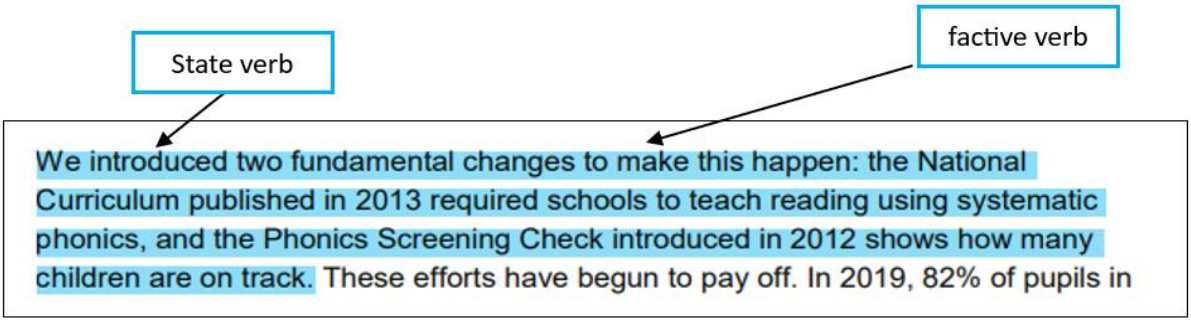


Figure 1 – Example of use of state and factive verbs in The Reading Framework (DfE, 2021, p. 4)

Another example from the policy, presented below, demonstrates how 'state' verbs like 'changed' and 'improved' are carefully used to convince the reader that the actions of the government - the mandatory introduction of systematic synthetic phonics - is the reason why Progress in International Reading Study (PIRLS) (McGrane et al. 2017) scores and standards in the Phonics Screening Check (DfE, 2012) have improved.

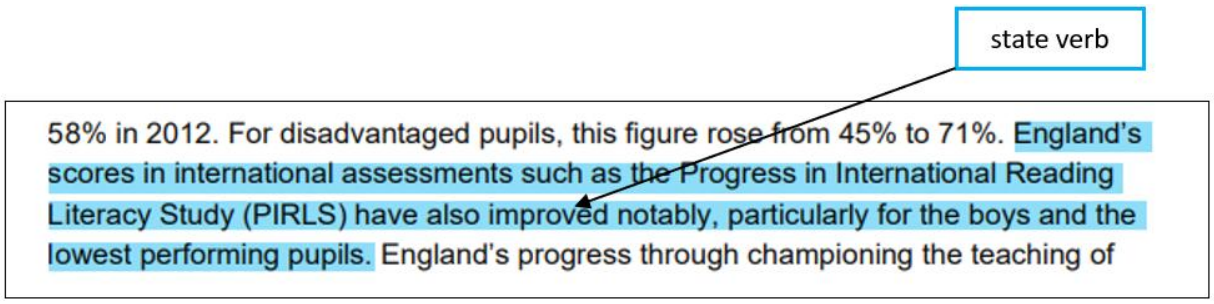


Figure 2 – Example of use of state verbs in The Reading Framework (DfE, 2021, p. 4)

There are further examples of these linguistic features intent on appealing to the readers' ideological values and common-sense judgements. Figure 3 below is an example of the author's use of simple tense in the key policy.

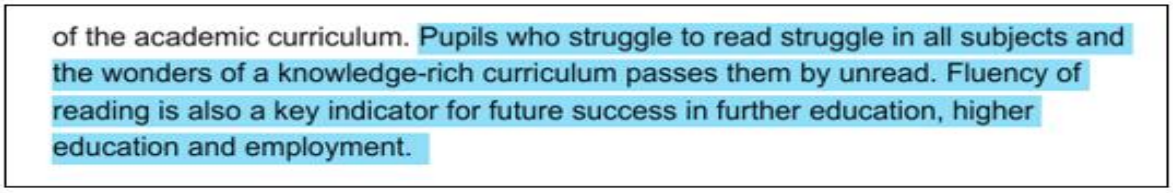


Figure 3 - Example of the use of simple tense in The Reading Framework (DfE, 2021, p. 3)

The government's use of simple tense in the above example not only demonstrates its attempt to portray the idea that reading is the key to future success for children, but it also serves to simplify the issue. In a last example in Figure 4, and there are many more in the text, the author uses the highlighted phrase to specifically evoke responses that appeal to the readers' ideological values. It does not do this overtly, but intentionally uses language that evokes a value judgement from the reader.

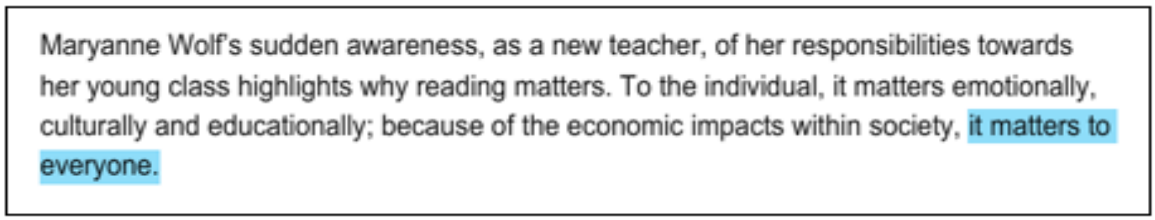

Maryanne Wolf's sudden awareness, as a new teacher, of her responsibilities towards her young class highlights why reading matters. To the individual, it matters emotionally, culturally and educationally; because of the economic impacts within society, it matters to everyone.

Figure 4 - Example of language used to evoke reader value judgements in The Reading Framework (DfE, 2021, p. 11)

The analysis now moves onto macro level analysis in the key policy document.

3.6.3.3: Macro Level Analysis

3.6.3.4: Policy Drivers

Throughout The Reading Framework (DfE, 2021), there is evidence of the use of political warrant where the government uses several policy drivers to justify and legitimise policy. As presented in Figure 3, these are the government's persistent goal of narrowing the achievement gap for 'disadvantaged' children, social mobility and national and international league tables. There are a number of ways that governments do this overtly as policy texts can be written in such a way as to evoke responses from the reader who possibly share the same ideological values (Hyatt, 2013). In the key policy, the economic and social argument, both for the individual, and for 'social good', is presented in numerous places. When referring to the importance of teaching early reading, the policy states, "To the individual, it matters emotionally, culturally and educationally; because of the economic impacts within society, it matters to everyone" (DfE, 2021, p. 11) which arguably appeals to the common sense of the reader (Hyatt, 2013), as it pleads to the readers' values and ideology. Arguably, no citizen would disagree with the concept of a 'good society'.

The notion of overcoming disadvantage is a pertinent policy driver which features heavily in the policy text. Again, this appeals to the readers' values in relation to equality and inclusion. In the foreword written by Nick Gibb (DfE, 2021), he attributes reading as being responsible for eliminating the impact of disadvantage although he does not offer a precise definition of disadvantage until later on in the document. This is exemplified in figure 3 below.

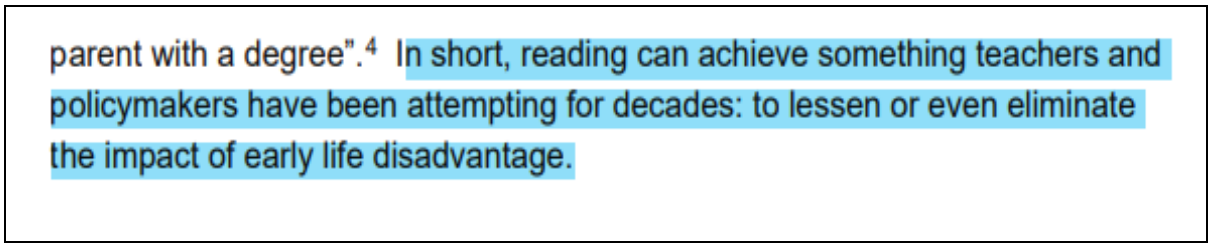

parent with a degree".[4] In short, reading can achieve something teachers and policymakers have been attempting for decades: to lessen or even eliminate the impact of early life disadvantage.

Figure 5 – Example of a policy driver in The Reading Framework (DfE, 2021, p. 4)

Social mobility is a prominent policy driver. Indeed, Friedman (2014) reminds us that social mobility appears to be the, "principal goal" (Friedman, 2014, p. 352) of governments through tackling the issues of disadvantage. When analysing the policy at 'micro' level, this principal goal of social mobility is an example of 'intertextuality' - borrowing from other texts, and 'interdiscursivity', which refers to the ways that such discourses interpenetrate each other. This is evident in how the government refers to 'social mobility' in other national policies - The White Paper (DfE, 2010) and Bold Beginnings (Ofsted, 2017). The argument about children overcoming disadvantage is referred to in The Reading Framework (DfE, 2021) where Nick Gibb states that, "being a highly engaged reader has the potential to allow a child to overcome their background" (DfE, 2021, p. 3). To support this argument, he references the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2021) report, '21st-century readers: Developing literacy skills in a digital world', and directly quotes the report in relation to the PISA data that demonstrates consistently the strong correlation between reading performance and engagement, which mediates the effects of gender or socio-economic status. The document also refers to children who are 'at risk' of reading failure, stating the correlation between failure to read and a dislike for reading and, therefore, reiterating the importance of children keeping up with their peers and providing these children with extra practice and support from the outset. Indeed, there is a plethora of research evidence about the correlation between engagement and achievement. Cremin's (UKLA, 2007-8) research linking motivation and skill, and Brozo, Sheil and Topping's (2007) work on engagement and reading achievement demonstrate this correlation. However, in the policy, it is argued that the government simplifies the issue rather than highlighting the complexities of reading failure. This simplification is also evident

in relation to how far good teaching can overcome disadvantage, and the issue of social mobility as discussed in the previous chapter. Attention will now turn to the use of policy levers in steering national policy.

3.6.3.5: Policy Levers

As stated earlier, policy levers are tools which aid the process of policy steering and, in relation to the teaching of early reading, it can be claimed that there are several policy levers which steer policy, at global, national and local level. Arguably, such policy levers serve as, "arms-length regulation" (Steer et al., 2007, p. 175), used by the government and its agencies, to implement policy (Steer et al., 2007). The policy levers will now be discussed.

Driven by the accountability warrant, the standards agenda**,** through which schools are held accountable via high-stakes testing**,** is used by consecutive governments to steer policy. Nick Gibb (DfE, 2021) refers to two key policies in the Reading Framework (DfE, 2021) that he champions as being responsible for the government in enabling the mandatory teaching of systematic synthetic phonics in all schools in England. These are the National Curriculum (DfE, 2013), which mandated the teaching of systematic phonics in schools, and the Phonics Screening Check (PSC) (DfE, 2012). The PSC, introduced in 2012, and designed as a quantitative measure, involves testing Year One children's abilities to decode forty words, including pseudo words, near the end of the academic year. Individual school results are published yearly by the DfE. Data from such high-stakes testing is presented numerous times in The Reading framework (DfE, 2021) in order to argue the effectiveness of systematic synthetic phonics teaching. This is evident in the example from the key policy below.

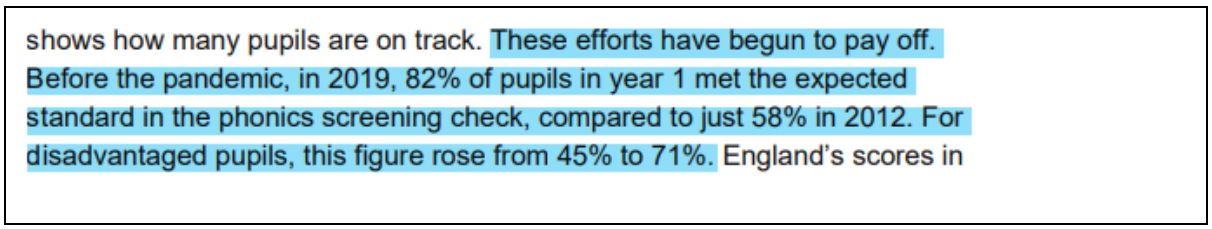

shows how many pupils are on track. These efforts have begun to pay off. Before the pandemic, in 2019, 82% of pupils in year 1 met the expected standard in the phonics screening check, compared to just 58% in 2012. For disadvantaged pupils, this figure rose from 45% to 71%. England's scores in

Figure 6 – Example of a policy driver in The Reading Framework (DfE, 2021, p. 4)

However, when measuring the long-term impact of the PSC (DfE, 2012), between 2017 and 2019, the percentage of pupils achieving an acceptable standard in reading and writing, in Key Stage 2 SATs, was never above 28%. Between 2017 and 2019, these pupils would have been in Year Two when the scores on the check were showing a rise; therefore, this brings into question the accuracy

and reliability of comparable data and the impact of the PSC on reading (Solity, 2020). Acknowledging that other factors can account for data, Solity (2020) argues that rhetoric around the long-term impact of synthetic phonics teaching is preventing research-based inquiry into the issue. Furthermore, prior to the introduction of the Reading Framework (DfE, 2021), Nick Gibb (Gibb, 2018) claims that the Year One Phonics Screening Check (DfE, 2012) has played a huge part in improving standards in reading. However, children's performance in the PSC in 2019 had decreased by 1 percent from 2018 (DfE, 2019). Conversely though, in 2023, 79% of pupils met the expected standard in the PSC in Year One, up from 75% in 2022 (DfE, 2023). However, scholars stress the negative effect the test has had in practice. In fact, Carter (2020) warns of the 'negative backwash' as assessment has become the curriculum, since teachers use the PSC as objectives rather than an assessment tool. Further, Darnell, Solity and Wall (2017) point out that decoding real words is also dependent upon vocabulary, not just phonics skills.

The evidence presented above is a prime example of the government's use of data as a tool of political power in policy as highlighted by Hyatt (2013). This can also be seen in the global context of international league tables. In the key policy, Nick Gibb (DfE, 2021, p.8) also attributes the scores in international league tables, the PIRLS (McGrane et al., 2017) data, to these two aforementioned policy measures. He states:

> *Data from the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLs) in 2016 also shows a significant improvement in the reading performance of boys in England (reducing the gap between boys and girls by 11 points since 2011), a finding that could be attributed to the roll out of systematic phonics programmes in England since 2010.*

However, in a detailed data analysis of international comparative data and national curriculum data, conducted by Wyse and Bradbury (2022), the correlation between the PISA scores and the national reading curriculum actually favours a less systematic phonics approach as opposed to the recent increased emphasis on phonics. Furthermore, the PIRLS and PISA data demonstrate a contradictory pattern in relation to international trends, which actually expose a positive correlation for children who were taught the first national curriculum with very little requirement of phonics teaching (Wyse and Bradbury, 2022).

Arguably, the standards agenda puts schools under enormous pressure to meet performance measures. Indeed, De Lissovoy (2013) warns against this use of data, highlighting that, "We live and are guided by the ideology of the score" (Lissovoy, 2013: 423), and Allen (2015) reminds us that data is a way in which the government ensures that schools are using the approved policies thus highlighting the increasing use of power that they exert over the teaching profession. Allen (2015) warns of the negative consequences of such neoliberal reforms, stating that policy levers that were designed to improve education for low-income families have had consequential effects, such as the pressures of accountability structures, a demotivated workforce and a teacher-recruitment crisis. She goes so far as to call these neoliberal reforms, "publicly humiliating" (Allen, 2005, p. 42). Allowing market forces to decentralise government agencies means that power has now been handed to a small number of organisations, namely, Ofsted, the Education and Endowment Fund and the Secretary of State (De Lissovoy, 2013).

Inspection is another policy lever which has been used to implement the prescriptive nature of national policy on the teaching of early reading. Ofsted is the school's inspectorate and monitors, and assesses, the provision in schools against the national standards through inspection on the 'quality' of education in maintained (State supported) education settings (Wood, 2019). However, in a number of key documents, such as The White Paper (2010) and Bold Beginnings (Ofsted, 2017) in recent years, there is evidence which suggests that Ofsted has been working to give phonics a high profile in policy. Bold Beginnings (Ofsted, 2017), a review carried out by Ofsted into how reception classes prepare children for Year One, highlighted the, "critical role" (DfE, 2017, p. 4) that synthetic phonics plays in learning to read and advocated a sharper focus on the teaching of reading during inspections. This recommendation materialised two years later in the new Ofsted Framework (Ofsted, 2019). Inspections now focus specifically on the teaching of early reading through conducting a compulsory 'deep-dive' which involves gathering evidence, in collaboration with leaders, teachers and pupils, in order to gather an evidence-base of the quality of the teaching of early reading (Ofsted, 2019) with the primary focus being on phonics. The framework also instructs that schools use phonetically decodable books. Even more recently, English Hubs (DfE, 2023) have been set up to offer support to local schools in order to improve the teaching of phonics, early language and reading in Reception and Year One. There are 34 hubs in England which aim to ensure that every child is successful in reading regardless of need, ability and background. However, these hubs could be viewed as a further example of, "arms-length regulation" (Steer et al., 2007, p.175) to ensure schools implement reading policy in practice.

3.6.3.6: Evidentiary Warrant

The government uses 'evidentiary warrant', as highlighted by Hyatt (2013), to justify the evidence-base for policy. However, Hyatt (2013) reminds us that, "evidence is not a neutral entity – it is the production of researchers' selections, omissions, and interpretations, and these decisions are imbued with value and embedded in ideology" (Hyatt, 2013, p. 839). In light of this, in relation to the evidence-base that informs The Reading Framework (DfE, 2021), the policy analysis involves looking closely at how research-informed the policy is in relation to the research literature. Literature relating to the teaching of early literacy has been presented in detail in the literature review, however, there are a number of points worthy of highlighting in this analysis. Referred to in Hyatt's (2013) framework as 'silences', there is a large amount of research evidence that is omitted from the policy. Further, the evidence-base for policy is drawn largely from the cognitive perspective, ignoring research in the other three domains. An obvious leading example of this is the mandatory teaching of systematic synthetic phonics. Arguably, this is due to the governments seeking simple solutions to complex problems (Harrison, 2010).

Regarding what is missing from policy, there is a plethora of evidence, both seminal and recent, around the importance of early literacy development that is largely ignored. In the Reading Framework (DfE, 2021), there is not one reference to 'emergent literacy', 'developmental writing' or 'invented spelling'. The Reading Framework (DfE, 2021, p. 18) affirms that:

> In learning phonics, children learn to spell familiar words accurately and how to form letters. When they can do this, and can spell any word in a way that is at least phonetically plausible, they can begin to write down what they want to say.

This statement focuses primarily on spelling and letter formation but fails to recognise the important stages of early writing and spelling development where children learn about the function of writing. Conversely, this policy decision could be attributed to the fact that individuals have been concerned that allowing children to spell as they hear will practise bad habits (Huxford, 2006). Huxford (2006) points out the age-old conflict between supporting children in following their natural development and restricting this to avoid confusion. Further, the policy places a heavy focus on transcription and at the expense of composition. The key document (DfE, 2021) emphasises dictation for our youngest developing writers, stating that it is a vital part of the phonics session where children are given the opportunity to practice and apply their spelling, "without them having

to think about what it is they want to say" (DfE, 2021, p. 49). The policy (DfE, 2021, p. 49) elaborates that children should:

> Respond to dictation from the teacher, practising writing words in sentences that include only the GPCs and exception words they have learnt.

This statement, advocating that children only use GPCs that they know, does not support their natural composition, and may potentially have the adverse effect of creating reluctant writers as children may be put off from experimenting with early writing due to the pressure that writing has to be 'correct'. Additionally, the document (DfE, 2021, p .50), as demonstrated in the quote below, completely dismisses early opportunities for children to learn about composition:

> *Before they can write independently in a way that can be read by others, they need to know:*
> • *what they want to say*
> • *how to identify sounds in words*
> • *at least one way to spell each of the sounds of English*
> • *how to form letters.*

The position that children cannot write independently until it can be read by others, implying that it has to look 'conventional', is very much contested within the research literature. Indeed, both transcription and composition should be taught from the outset with no expectation that children write conventionally early on (Zhang and Quinn, 2018). Furthermore, these omissions from policy have clear implications for practice, as there is evidence that children who have well-developed emergent literacy skills make better progress than those children who do not possess these skills (Storch and Whitehurst, 2002).

In the policy, there are many examples of the government adopting a simplistic approach to the teaching and learning of early literacy and ignoring the complexities presented in research and practice. Arguably, this provides the government and policy makers with the simple solutions that it seeks to the complexities of teaching early reading (Hall, 2010). There are several examples of this, but the most significant ones relate to models of reading, overcoming disadvantage, word reading, English orthography and the use of phonetically decodable books. These complexities will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.

In Summary

Analysis of The Reading Framework (DfE, 2021) has served in analysing policy at both 'macro' and micro' levels in order to uncover how the authors of the text use power relations to represent and construct ideological social worlds (Hyatt, 2013). Evidently, policy analysis also assists in highlighting the writing process of the document and demonstrates how government power, if legitimised, contributes to the, "engineering of consent" (Codd 1988, p. 235). Arguably, this appeals to the readers' value judgments as it uses a number of drivers and levers to justify the mandatory teaching of synthetic phonics and ensure its implementation in classrooms. Indeed, for those delivering policy, it is about the interpretation of policy in different contexts and ecologies, and how it is re-contextualised by and within institutions (Hyatt, 2013). It is at this local level, where research meets practice, where children occupy spaces in real-life classrooms, and where I argue, it is most important to ensure that all children are taught, using evidence-based practices that allows all children's needs to be met. Undeniably, concepts of social mobility, inequality and disadvantage are much more complex in reality than how they are presented in policy, and the government's use of policy levers will not automatically lead to better attainment and an end to inequality (Moss, 2010).

An account of methods conducted with children will now be presented.

3.7: Research with children

3.7.1: Lesson Observations

Observation was chosen as a method of data collection as more can be learned from observing children engage in real-life literacy than we can learn from experiments. Indeed, observations enable the researcher to look and listen for behaviour that helps to answer the research questions (Roberts-Holmes, 2005). Observing children naturally in the classroom enabled me to observe teaching and learning directly, allowing me to gain insight into classroom practice around literacy teaching. Specifically, in relation to teaching, observing lessons enabled me to relate classroom practice to the research literature. In relation to learning, observing children enabled me to gain insight into how they were learning. On the other hand, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) highlight that there are no neutral observations; therefore, as an 'inside researcher', I acknowledge my potential influence over the context in which I was observing. They highlight the value of covert participation in order to reduce reactivity. This was important for me as I wanted the children and teachers to act normally and did not want to influence their behaviour. However, Roberts-Holmes (2005) reports that it is difficult to be, "a fly on the wall" (Roberts-Homes, 2005, p. 103) as children

often approach and ask questions. Indeed, children did approach me during initial observations. However, after explaining to them that I was simply there to watch the learning in the classroom, they accepted this and did not respond to me as much during subsequent observations. Individual children were observed in whole-class phonics, reading and writing lessons. Children were also observed in the Nursery and Reception classes engaging in free-flow play where they engaged in literacy-related activities. These observations aimed to capture reading and writing in the authenticity of their settings by looking systematically at what occurs naturally in these contexts. Data collection took place between October 2021 to April 2022; therefore, lesson observations were conducted during this period. My availability, and what lessons were being taught on those days, determined what lessons were observed. Lesson observations were conducted on Mondays or Tuesdays. Overall, 54 observations of the 6 children were conducted during the data collection period. They lasted between fifteen to forty minutes depending on which lesson was being observed. The observations were unstructured, with field-notes being taken during the observations. I did design a formal observation sheet, but taking field-notes during the observations proved to be easier and more productive, as I was not constrained by pre-populated questions. Research questions were written onto recording materials to constantly remind me to focus on collecting data that related to these questions. During observations, notes were written about what the teacher and child were doing and saying, along with reflections relating to the literature. Children's behaviour was noted, specifically, their motivation, engagement and attitudes towards early literacy. Body language was also noted. Notes were taken that related to both composition and transcription skills when writing and, where possible, samples of the children's writing were collected afterwards. Pilot observations were carried out prior to data collection. This enabled me to check if my research questions were specific enough in practice and highlighted any ethical issues (Roberts-Holmes, 2005). It also enabled me to practise observation skills and become comfortable as I transitioned from 'teacher' to 'researcher' in my place of work.

3.7.2: Emergent Literacy Assessments

A number of emergent literacy assessments were carried out with individual children. These assessments helped to build up a portfolio of literacy development for each child. For some of the assessments, a quantitative score is presented. The assessments are documented in Table 8 below and copies of these are included in the appendices. Permission was sought to use the assessments from McKenna and Stahl's (2003) book (Appendix K). The QPAS (QPAS, 2014) was located online. Not all the elements of every assessment were used.

Table 8 – Emergent literacy assessments

Area of Early Literacy	**Assessment**
Phonological awareness and alphabetic knowledge	Quick Phonological Awareness Screening (QPAS)
	Dictation for Phonological Awareness
	Test of Phonemic Awareness
Alphabetic knowledge	Alphabet Recognition Chart
	Read Write Inc (Miskin, 2021) phonic assessments
Early reading	Book-handling Knowledge
	Picture Walk
	Emergent Storybook Reading Scale

3.7.3: Observing Oral Reading

Children were observed orally reading books. This enabled me to carefully observe how they engaged with the text and observe their decoding strategies, as well as ascertaining the children's comprehension of the text. Further, observing their eye movements would provide insight into how children engaged with the pictures when reading. Goodman (2015) promotes the concept of 'kid watching' for teachers who engage in in-depth observations of children's language and literacy constructions and then use this knowledge to adapt the curriculum in response to children's needs. Lysaker and Hopper's (2015) research methods were influential when designing my method for observing oral reading. They draw on the work of Owocki and Goodman (2002) and Clay (1993), who documented children's cognitive and metacognitive strategies during early reading of print. Drawing on these aforementioned methods, individual children were observed reading their book from the Read Write Inc programme (Miskin, 2021). There were no opportunities to observe the children reading 'real books'. I recorded how the child read the words: decoding using phonics (P), read by sight (S), error (E), self-corrected (SC), omission (O) and substitution (S). Alongside these, Clay's (2013) 'Running Records' - developed as part of the Observation Survey of Early Literacy Assessment (Clay, 2013), which used a method for representing oral reading accuracy, and identifying strategic reading behaviours such as self-correcting, rereading and meaning monitoring (Barone, Khairallah and Gabriel, 2019) - were used to develop my own recording sheet which

included phonic, syntactic and semantic cues (Appendix L). Decoding strategies were recorded on the sheet along with omission and substitutions.

3.7.4: Analysis of Writing Samples

Samples of children's writing were collected, mainly from books and writing done during self-initiated activities for children in the Nursery and Reception classes. 174 Pieces of writing were collected in total from the 6 children. Analysing children's writing provided insight in classroom practice and how writing and spelling were being taught. Spelling was analysed using Gentry's (1982) developmental stages. Other aspects of writing were analysed using Puranik and Lonigan's (2014) model in relation to conceptual, procedural and generative knowledge and Clay's (1975) principles of writing behaviour. Writing was also analysed quantitatively in relation to the lesson's learning objectives and teachers' feedback, as these provided direct insight into how early literacy was being taught and how children's individual writing was being supported in practice.

3.7.5: Structured Activities with Children

Interviewing children directly is the only way to understand their social worlds (Christensen and James, 2008); therefore, structured activities with children were conducted in order to gain insight into how they perceive they are taught to read and write in school, and how this relates to educational research. Interviewing children directly would provide insight about the key messages that they receive, both implicitly and explicitly, from the way they are taught literacy in their classrooms. In choosing appropriate activities to ascertain children's views, I considered Dockett, Einarsdottir and Perry's (2011) point - that there is an underlying assumption that children prefer 'child-friendly' methods - when, in fact, she refers to studies where children have shown a preference for adult orientated research methods, such as structured interviews. However, considering my knowledge of the participants, the decision was made to carry out child-friendly activities as I judged that they would respond better to these. My belief was that structured activities would get the best out of the children with their less formal approach whilst still considering the children as competent beings who may not need support in the way that adults assume they do (Rautio, 2013). I drew heavily on Levy's (2009) research design to design the activities, specifically adapting one of Levy's (2009) activities, 'Charlie Chick'. I used puppets to help to mediate discussion between the children and myself, choosing a variety of age-appropriate puppets that I thought would appeal to the children's individual interests. Using the puppets distracted attention away from me as a researcher (Levy, 2009) and teacher. I presented 6 puppets

to the children and invited them to choose one. The children enjoyed this and all chose a puppet that interested them. I then invited them to name their puppet. The children were then encouraged to take on the role of 'expert' and explain to the puppet how they learn to read and write in school. The puppet asked a number of questions, some very similar to those of Levy's (2009), such as 'What is reading?' and 'What is writing?'. These questions were asked to elicit the key messages that children receive from school about the purpose of reading and writing. 'How do you learn to read?' and 'How do you learn to write?' were asked in order to ascertain how children perceive they learn to read and write in school, and how this relates to educational research. The question 'What does it mean if you can't read?' was designed to ascertain children's views about what is valued about reading and its purpose, and 'Can you read and write?', 'Why/why not?' and 'Do you find reading and writing difficult/easy?' were asked to find out if they thought that school was meeting their individual needs.

Following the advice of Roberts-Holmes (2005), the structured activities were conducted in two groups: the three youngest children (nursery to reception) in one group and the older children (two Year Two children) in the other group. The youngest child, Tess, did not want to go to the main school building to be part of a group as it was unfamiliar to her; therefore, she did the activity on her own in the nursery building. Christensen and James (2008) also suggest restricted-age groups to prevent older children dominating the conversation. Considering the children's personalities, these smaller, age-restricted groups, gave the shy children the opportunity to speak, allowing more time for the children to answer whilst ensuring that older children did not monopolise the conversation. In order to allow the children to feel comfortable with the activities, an introductory activity was carried out with each of the groups where I asked the children about their interests in school. This served in allowing the children, and myself, to be comfortable with the activity, the resources being used and each other. Four structured activities were conducted during data collection. The decision was taken to conduct reading and writing activities separately for both of the groups as I anticipated that they may be too lengthy and tiring for the children to do them in one sitting. I explained that I would have my phone present to record their voices during the activity as I could not write down their answers quickly, and I believed that what they said would be important so I did not want to miss anything. After recording the introductory activity, I played a little of the recording back to the children in order for them to become familiar and comfortable with being recorded. All the children responded well to this and appeared to like listening to themselves. Once the activities got underway, they did not pay attention to the phone and seemed to forget about being recorded and

focused on the activity. I had a number of pre-written questions (Appendix M) for reading and writing, which I referred to throughout the activities. However, I also asked other questions which flowed from the children's responses, and I used prompts to encourage individuals to elaborate on particular responses. During the activities, I was able to check that the children were comfortable and look for signs of fatigue, or signs that they wished to withdraw, which I anticipated they would vocalise or present through their body language. In my role as researcher, and as a teacher, I was aware throughout the activities that I had a duty of care to the children, so their comfort and safety was ensured at all times. I regularly asked if they needed a drink or a toilet break and if they were comfortable with the seating arrangements.

3.8: Research with Teachers

3.8.1: Semi-Structured Interviews

Yin (2009) purports that for some case studies, the construction of reality provides important insights into the case, and that insights have more value if the interviewees are key persons in organisations. With this in mind, interviewing colleagues would provide valuable insight into classroom practice, in the context of the trust and national policy, and how this relates to educational research. 4 semi-structured interviews were conducted, varying in length from thirty minutes to over an hour. As an 'insider researcher', this method suited the existing dynamics between the participants and myself. As I work alongside the participants in a professional capacity, and I know some of them personally, it was decided that informal interviews would be appropriate. Indeed, Roberts-Holmes (2005) states that the semi-structured interview can be likened to a chat. When conducting interviews, Grieg and Taylor (2007) explain that the role of the researcher is that of 'prompter' whose job it is to guide, not control the interview, giving sufficient guidance to keep the interview on track but not controlling the way it develops. During the interviews, I had pre-written questions present (Appendix N) and worked through them in order. I asked each participant the same question in the same way, which allowed for more direct comparison when analysing the data – an approach more amenable to quantitative methodology (Greig, Taylor and Mackay, 2007). Participants gave responses that could be quantifiable and comparable during the analysis, allowing for generalisations to be made from the data. I also interjected with prompts and further questions to clarify a point, reiterate a response or to ask the participant to elaborate their response. Joanne asked for the questions prior to the interview to which I obliged. In hindsight, it occurred to me that I did not offer the pre-written questions to the other participants. This oversight was simply due to time constraints when conducting the interviews. Retrospectively, only giving one participant the

pre-written questions could have given her an advantage as she had more time to consider her responses; therefore, it may have been beneficial, and fairer, to give all the participants the questions beforehand to allow them time to prepare their answers. On the other hand, having the questions prior to the interviews could have had the adverse effect of giving participants too much time to think about their answers, and possibly, afforded them time to research their answers, rather than their answers evolving organically during the interviews.

3.9: Reliability, Objectivity and Validity

The challenges of reliability, validity, generalisability and interpretation were acknowledged and addressed throughout the research. Yin (2009) acknowledges that the case study may be criticised for having undesirable biases. However, the rich data provides empirical evidence that requires opponents to produce conflicting evidence rather than simply make alternative arguments. In relation to objectivity, it is questionable how far researchers can remain objective in the collection and analysis process. Arguably, the subjective nature of interpretivism means that it cannot be objective (Tooley, 1997). Interestingly, Eisner (1992) uses Newell's (1986, cited in Eisner 1992) distinction of ontological and procedural objectivity. He argues that ontological objectivity is impossible to achieve, but procedural objectivity is not (Eisner, 1992). In light of this, it was imperative that I exercised objectivity in the methods employed in the study. In mitigating the above challenges, triangulation serves in critically checking others perspectives and interpretations which can add validity to the study (Roberts-Holmes, 2005). In fact, Cohen, Manion and Morrison, (2018) point out that, "Triangulation is a powerful way of determining concurrent validity" (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, p. 265). Further, mixed methods triangulation draws on both normative and interpretive data (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018), therefore, ensuring reliability and validity of the data. Arguably, using mixed methods has allowed me to study the complexities of human behaviour from more than one standpoint as I have made use of both quantitative and qualitative data and, by not relying exclusively on one method, bias is less likely to distort my interpretation of the data (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018).

In addressing the challenges of generalisation, Yin (2013) points to the role of theory in seeking to make generalisations in case studies. The study's approach to data analysis was theory driven, using inductive analysis where it sought to relate the findings from the data to the literature. In this sense, it is possible to make generalisations from the data as they relate to existing theories. Still, there is an argument that findings from qualitative studies cannot be generalised (Wellington, 2000) due to

issues of interpretation, variables and subjectivity. Interpretivism makes the assumption that knowledge is socially constructed (Weber, 2004), making it susceptible to concepts such as subjectivity, interpretation, the role of meanings and bias (Clough and Nutbrown, 2012). However, the issue of interpretation is not simply associated with qualitative research (Clough and Nutbrown, 2012). In all methodology, data is collected, categorised and analysed from the researcher's theoretical perspective where it is impossible for perception and observation to be separated; therefore, research cannot be free from researcher values and judgements (Carr, 2000). By openly acknowledging that researchers always work from their value-laden perspectives (Greenbank, 2003), I accept that my values could have crept into the interpretation of the data. I acknowledge that this is an ethical problem (Clough and Nutbrown, 2012) where one has to stay true to the data and the 'voices' of the participants.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) further highlight other drawbacks of the case study, namely, the little control that the researcher has over such naturalistic contexts. Nevertheless, they advise that one has to accept that there are many variables when conducting a case study; therefore, I accept that many variables are at play in my research, specifically context, but I have been open about these variables, stating specific contextual information, thus acknowledging their effect on the data. Further, personal values such as honesty and integrity ensure a reflexive approach to the 'faithful' interpretation of the data (Clough and Nutbrown, 2012).

3.9.1: Limitations of the Study

During the study, I collected a vast amount of data. This was apparent in the time it took to process and analyse the data. Important and difficult decisions had to be made in relation to what could be included in a study of this scale. This means that I did not use the entire data set. Positively though, I collected a great deal of rich data that can potentially be used in future research projects. Also, as this is a small-scale study, it is acknowledged that the findings will be context-specific. On the other hand, it could be said that the findings are relatable rather than generalisable.

3.10: Data Analysis

3.10.1 Reflexive Thematic Analysis

As the analysis of the data set related to the research questions, data was analysed using both an inductive and deductive theory-driven approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006). A reflexive thematic analysis approach enabled data to be analysed inductively, and themes were generated from the

data and deductively analysed within the context of existing research. The research provided the lens through which the data was interpreted and analysed identifying the theoretical assumptions that informed the analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2021). However, thematic analysis cannot be conducted in, "a theoretical vacuum" (Braun and Clarke, 2021, p. 331); therefore, the inductive approach is grounded in the data as opposed to pure induction (Braun and Clarke, 2021). Braun and Clarke (2021) encourage researchers to use reflexive thematic analysis which means generating themes, as themes do not passively emerge from the data nor are they 'in' the data but are created by the researcher where data, analysis and subjectivity meet (Braun and Clarke, 2019). With this in mind, I acknowledge that I have generated the themes, and recognise my positionality and interpretation in this generation. Indeed, reflexive thematic analysis emphasises subjectivity as an analytical tool, allowing myself as an 'insider researcher', to engage reflexivity with theory. However, Braun and Clarke (2021) stress that researchers inevitably bring their own assumptions about what the data represents. Acknowledging this, the reflexive analysis has been conducted in a rigorous and methodical way that involved recording and systematising in a detailed manner to determine a credible process (Nowell et al., 2017). Table 9 below documents the six-phase process for data engagement, coding and theme development as advocated by Braun and Clarke (2021).

Table 9 - The six-phase for data engagement (Braun and Clarke, 2021)

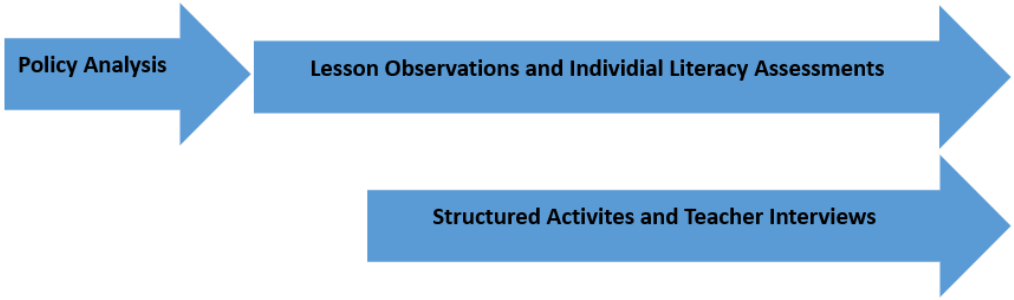
1	Data familiarisation and writing familiarisation notes
2	Systematic data coding
3	Generating initial themes from coded and collated data
4	Developing and reviewing themes
5	Refining, defining and naming themes
6	Writing the report

These 6-phases of data analysis were followed systematically and rigorously. This is exemplified in the analysis of the teachers' interview data (see Appendix O for Kelly's example) which documents the systematic analysis process, using colour-coding of codes in the initial stages of analysis. Additionally, the sequence of data collection enabled data to be interpreted across sets. The policy analysis was conducted first followed by lesson observations which were conducted alongside individual emergent literacy assessments. As these methods were conducted concurrently, the individual emergent literacy assessments enabled me to understand children's individual literacy development, and then observe how their development presented during lesson observations.

Emerging data from the aforementioned methods also helped to shape questions for subsequent methods - structured activities and interviews with teachers - and enabled me to acknowledge the inherent flaws within policy, such as its simplistic approach to the complexities of teaching early literacy and its overemphasis on phonics. Furthermore, acknowledging these inherent flaws, whilst interpreting the emerging data, helped me to reimagine a policy that considers multiple perspectives in early literacy learning, and pays greater attention to children's early literacy experiences in the home, and the effect this has on their ability to learn literacy in school. A policy which does this would be more effective in meeting the needs of all children.

The diagram below presents the different stages of data collection.

Diagram 2 - Different stages of data collection



A reflexive thematic analysis offers flexibility, and is appropriate for a critical realist construction of language, data and meanings (Braun and Clarke, 2013). In light of this, I kept a reflective journal throughout the duration of study. Reflecting upon these now, there are a number of reflections that are worthy of sharing. Relating to data analysis, I would describe this process as 'painful' at times. As themes do not emerge from the data (Braun and Clarke, 2019), a great deal of time was spent actively creating the themes from the data. This was a time-consuming process which meant re-visiting the data many times to create the final themes. Another reflection that I documented was the 'messiness' of data collection whilst simultaneously feeling a rush of excitement as I began creating themes informally in this early stage of data collection. I also noted a slight nervousness at the beginning of data collection and a desire to ensure that I conducted the research ethically, particularly as I was conducting the research with young children.

3.11: Summary

In this chapter, I have given a context for methodological decisions and provided a detailed description of the methods used in the research study. I have documented how participants were

recruited and how consent was gained whilst highlighting important ethical considerations. The next chapter will present a detailed analysis of the data, the generated themes, and a discussion of the findings that relate to the research literature.

Chapter 4: Findings, Analysis and Discussion

4.1: Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present the findings, analysis and discussion of the data in relation to the research questions. This begins with a reminder of the research questions, which have driven the analysis, followed by a presentation of the main themes and related sub-themes generated across the data set. A case study was used to collect the data which included a policy analysis, semi-structured interviews with teachers, structured activities with children, observations of literacy lessons, individual emergent literacy assessments, observations of individual children's oral reading, analysis of children's individual writing and an analysis of lesson learning objectives. The chapter presents the four main themes and a detailed analysis for each. This is followed by a presentation of the discussion of the findings with key discussion points.

Research Questions:

1. What does policy analysis of The Reading Framework (DfE, 2021) reveal about the teaching of early literacy in England?

2. What are the tensions between teacher practice and policy?

3. What informs and shapes teachers' literacy practices?

4. How do children experience early literacy at home and in school?

4.2: Themes

The table below presents the main and sub-themes.

Table 10 – Themes and sub-themes

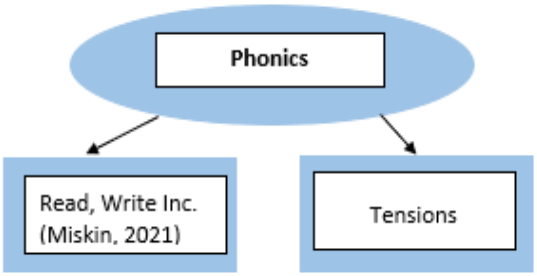
Phonics	**Teachers' Practices**	**Teachers' Perspectives**	**Children's Experiences of Literacy**
Instructional Approaches - Read Write Inc (Miskin, 2021)	Research in Practice	Tensions: Classroom practice and meeting children's individual needs	The value of Home Experiences
Tensions: Instructional approaches and meeting	Supporting Emergent Literacy in Practice	Contradictions	School Experiences

children's individual needs			
	Professional Learning	Autonomy, Resistance and Enactment	Reader-Writer Identities
	Heavy Focus on Transcription	The Need for a Balanced Approach	Autonomy and Resistance

The first theme is presented below.

4.3: Phonics

Diagram 3 – Phonics theme and sub-themes



4.3.1: Instructional Phonics Approaches

The school, as advocated by the trust, uses the Read, Write Inc. (Miskin, 2021) programme and, as this programme forms the basis of the school's pedagogical practice for teaching phonics, it is imperative that it is included in the analysis. Lessons were only observed for the reading element of the programme as the school did not, at the time of data collection, adopt the programme's writing element. Elements of the instructional approach are now analysed.

Observations of the Read Write Inc (Miskin, 2021) lessons confirmed a highly systematic and well-organised approach in practice. This involved scripted lessons, delivered by teachers and teaching assistants, which advocates the use of specific language and routines, resources and strategies. Fidelity to the programme is advocated and teachers are not encouraged to adapt teaching or move away from the script. Children are aware of the routines and expectations in the sessions. During the structured activities, children articulated their knowledge of the terminology used in the lessons, such as 'green words' and 'red words'. Green words are words that are deemed to be phonetically decodable and red words are not: they do not follow regular phonic patterns. These procedures

featured strongly in the children's responses in the structured activities. Children talked freely about 'Fred in your head', videos and cards used in phonics lessons. It is highly suggestible that the systematic approach has a positive effect on children's learning of GPCs, and this is evident in the children's individual assessments, which are presented later in the chapter.

When observing the delivery of Read Write Inc (Miskin, 2021), it was evident that three distinct groups were present in the children's responses to the teachers' presentation of individual graphemes on cards. Children were grouped and taught in lessons according to their performance on assessments, which measures their GPC knowledge and blending skills. The three groups consisted of a group that responded to the teacher's presentation of the card first (approximately 10 children), following this was the group that answered slightly after the first group (approximately 5 children) and, lastly, the third group (approximately 5 children) that did not respond at all. Isaac belonged to the second group where there would be a slight lag in his response as he appeared to copy the responses of the first group. Noah, like Isaac, was often off task during these sessions and disengaged. In one particular lesson, which involved the children doing 'Fred in your head', where children blend the sound in their head and then say the word out loud, out of the 8 words presented by the teacher, Isaac did not read any of the words independently; he nodded for one, did not respond to two words, read one incorrectly, copied the first group to read three words and mouthed the last word. He also yawned a lot throughout this observation, fidgeting and spending a lot of time not looking directly at the teacher. During this observation, Isaac's teacher tried hard to engage him in the lesson but it appeared difficult for her to fully engage him in the learning.

When children begin the programme, the emphasis is on learning the 46 GPCs quickly. They learn Set 1 sounds, learning a new sound each day, constantly reviewing previously learned sounds, and blending them to read words. Data from the study suggests that children differ greatly in their engagement in the programme and the progress that they make. Isaac was interesting to observe due to his scores on the early literacy assessments, which suggested he was just beginning to develop emergent literacy skills. I observed Isaac during one of these sessions where he was learning the GPC 'w'. During this session, he listened attentively at first, but this waned as the lesson progressed, and he began to yawn and fiddle with his legs, finding it difficult to sit still. During this whole class session, his responses demonstrated a slight delay, answering after the group of children who could name the sound immediately when the teacher presented the grapheme on the card. This demonstrates his reliance on the other children and indicates that he is struggling to remember

the GPCs independently. In another session, Issac was asked to orally blend the consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) word 'mat' and then use magnetic letters to create the word. He could not hear the final phoneme 't'. He then struggled to hear the last sound again when attempting to blend the word 'sad', and the final sounds of other words during this activity, therefore, needing support from the teacher. In another phonics lesson, Isaac struggled to orally blend CVC words. Again, he appeared unsure and reliant on his peers when responding to the teacher's instructions. He could not hear the medial sound in the word and match the correct phoneme to the correct grapheme. However, when observed 2 months later, there was some improvement in his ability to orally blend as he successfully blended the words, 'hug, bat, pen, dot, and sit'. Having said this, when he was observed later, on 23.03.22, when learning the GPC 'g', he still demonstrated his reliance on his peers - giving a lagged response when he was shown the grapheme cards. During this session, he did not fully focus on the teacher suggesting his lack of engagement in the activity. He could not hear the final sound in 'leg' so copied from the boy next to him. In contrast, Eve was more skilled in blending and segmenting during these sessions, suggesting that the programme was effective for her. In one of the phonics sessions, she knew all the sounds on the first page of the 'ditty' book, and was able to read the words, 'tum, yes' and 'that' automatically in the context of the book. The contrast between these two beginning readers demonstrates the difference in their abilities to learn phonics, possibly due to their socio-economic backgrounds and early literacy experiences in the home. This point will be elaborated on later. However, despite this contrast, there is no adaptation of the programme for Isaac, only daily interventions for him to continually revisit the sounds that he does not know.

The data suggest that some children are not making the connection between the learning of isolated technical skills and their application in reading, in books. When asked the question, '*What is phonics?*', Ronnie referred to the videos used in Read, Write In. (Miskin, 2021). He elaborated that, 'It helps you to don't forget the sounds' and added that he knows some sounds. When asked, 'Does phonics help you to read?', Isaac said, 'No,' and then elaborated, 'I don't know nothing.' When asked specifically if he could read a word, he said, 'Er, I read a word, I need, I need, I know the letters. d-a-p. dad.' This lack of connection, for Isaac, could be due to the fact that he is not yet allowed to have a book to take home because he does not know enough GPCs. Instead, he takes home a sound and sentence sheet to practise the sounds that he has learned in class. These sentences present as isolated and artificial. They do not afford Isaac the opportunity to practise his reading in a meaningful context and give him the opportunity to develop valuable text experience with books.

The programme uses phonetically decodable books for children to practise automatic and fluent word reading. Children apply decoding skills to read phonetically decodable words in sentences using a 5-day model. On day one, the text is introduced along with a new GPC, and new GPCs are taught and practised consecutively throughout the week. Fluency and comprehension work takes place throughout the week, involving partner and individual reading on each of the consecutive days. Specifically, 'partner reading' involves children practising with a partner, taking it in turns to read the text which presumably means that one child acts as an enabling adult whilst the other child reads. Children constantly practise reading the same sentences in order to ensure automaticity of word reading. Comprehension features a little at the end of the lesson where children answer oral questions about the text. During one of the lessons that I observed, Ronnie was able to read most of the sentences, demonstrating that this daily practice is effective. However, he did not engage fully for the duration of the activity and lost concentration a few times throughout. He showed a natural interest in the pictures whilst reading, and engaged with these for a while, demonstrating how important pictures are to children in the early stages of reading. However, Read, Write Inc. (Miskin, 2021) discourages children from using pictures when reading; they are taught to focus solely on decoding the text.

For the teaching of spelling, the programme focuses purely on teaching GPCs for spelling. The word is presented visually to the children and they orally sound it out using their fingers - representing each phoneme with one finger. They then write the word, then the teacher models the correct spelling; the children tick each correct grapheme and correct any that they have got wrong. When observing Isaac being instructed to spell the word 'peg', he could not hear the final phoneme of the word. Despite this, no account was taken of his spelling development, and he received the same instruction as his peers. Teachers followed the script precisely during my observations.

4.3.1.1: Tensions

There is a wealth of evidence from the children's individual literacy assessments, and from observing classroom practice, that suggests a tension between where children are developmentally and where they are being taught in the Read, Write Inc. (Miskin, 2021) programme. These assessments are presented below, beginning with a quantitative presentation of the assessments for some of the children, followed by a presentation of specific assessments for individual children along with samples of their writing. As Noah and Alice are more 'conventional' readers and writers, they did not undertake many of these assessments.

The table below presents data from two of the phonological awareness assessments. The children's scores indicate that Eve and Ronnie have more developed phonological skills whereas Isaac's are less developed. It is also noticeable that Eve is scoring higher than Ronnie even though she is in the school year below him.

Table 11 - Quantitative reading assessments undertaken with individual children

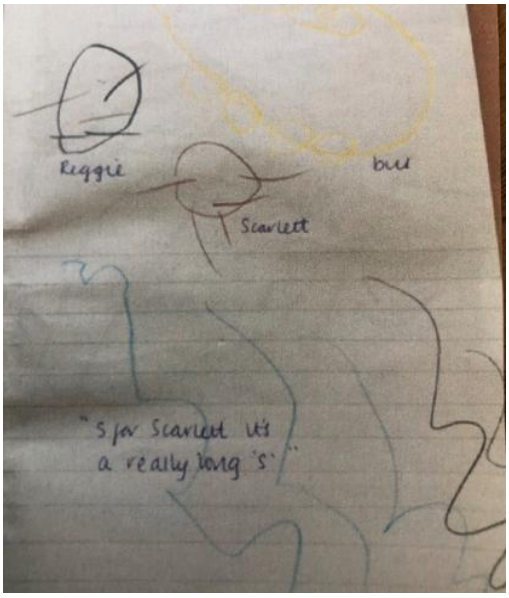
Participant	**Group**	**Alphabetic Recognition Chart**	**Test of Phonemic Awareness**
		Score	
Tess	Nursery	7/44	
Isaac	Reception	Test 1 - 13/44 Test 2 – 24/44	Test 1 - Blending – 1/15 Test 1 - Isolation – 0/20 Test 2 – Blending – 3/15 Test 2 – isolation – 3/20
Eve	Reception	37/44	Test 1 - Blending – 14/15 Test 1 - Isolation – 9/20
Ronnie	Year One	33/44	Test 1 - Blending – 10/15 Test 1 - Isolation – 13/2

4.3.1.2: Tess - Nursery

Tess has received some formal teaching through the Read Write Inc (Miskin, 2021) programme as the programme advocates implementation in nursery from Easter onwards. Her reading assessments indicate that she is at the very early stages of developing early reading behaviours and skills. She knew 7 out of 44 phonemes on the Alphabetic Recognition Chart, and she recalled these by linking the phoneme to the picture on the cards used by the teacher. She said the name of the object associated with the phonemes 'mountain for m', 'flower for f' and 'kangaroo for k'. This suggests that she was using mnemonics. Although for 'B' she said a familiar girl's name suggesting that she is linking the grapheme with personal meaning. Additionally, Tess receives daily phonological awareness instruction where she is beginning to show an awareness of initial sounds in words during these playful sessions. Tess enjoys being read to and is interactive in 'shared reading' sessions where she often makes comments about the story and answers comprehension questions

- some of which require her to use inference. When she read with me, she stated what was happening in the pictures. In relation to writing, she is producing wavy scribbles to represent writing. She is in the pre-communicate stage of spelling as she does not yet represent sounds in her writing. This is evident in the image of her writing presented below.

Image 4.1 – Sample of Tess' writing



4.3.1.3: Isaac - Reception

Isaac's scores on the Quick Phonological Awareness Screening (QPAS) are presented below. These scores indicate that his phonological awareness skills are not yet developed, particularly in relation to phonemic awareness and his concept of a word.

Table 12 – Isaac's Quick Phonological Awareness Screening (QPAS) assessment

Activity	Score	Analysis
Rhyming recognition – recognising rhyming pairs	2/5	
Rhyming production – thinking of a word that rhymes with a word	0/5	Giving meaning to words. Word association: bake – cooking.
Word awareness – how many words in a spleen sentence	1/5	Used a prompt. Could not remember the sentence. Could not separate the word. Did say a higher number for a longer sentence though.
Syllable awareness – clapping the syllables	3/5	Was successful in clapping shorter words. Words with 3 and 4 syllables he could not do.
Initial sound identification – hearing first sound in a word	2/5	Could hear the initial sound in CVC words only. Applied meaning to the word.
Final sound identification - hearing final sound in a word	0/5	Applied meaning to all the words.
Sound segmentation – hearing each sound, using blocks	2/5	
Sound blending – blending to read the word (orally)	1/5	Could hear 'top'. Hearing the last sound a lot.
Medial sound identification - middle sound of word	0/5	
Deletion task - words missing - first part	1/20	Repeated word Unfamiliar American words – baseball and railroad.

Further, Isaac's scores on the Alphabetic Recognition Chart indicate that, in nearly 4 months, he has made little progress with GPC recognition (Appendix P) as, at the end of this period of time, he only knew 11 more GPCs. Positively, the assessments for phonemic awareness indicate that Isaac has made a slight improvement in his scores. However, his low scores indicate that he is not demonstrating the ability to blend simple rime, cluster onsets and cluster rimes. He also missed out phonemes, when blending orally, although he did hear the beginning and end phonemes of some

words. He could not hear initial phonemes on some clusters. Both Isaac's assessments reveal that he could not isolate phonemes in words, and he often repeated the word rather than segmenting. Isaac's scores on the Quick Phonological Awareness Screening (QPAS) assessment demonstrate that he does not possess skills in phonological awareness at this stage. His scores were low on all of the elements of the test. His highest score was 3 on the 'syllable awareness' - one of the earliest skills in phonological awareness to develop. In the two 'Dictation for Phonological Awareness' assessments, Isaac did not attempt to write the first dictated sentence which suggests that he lacks early writing skills, such as being able to hold the sentence in his head and retrieve the correct letters when hearing the sounds in the words. He was also reluctant to have a go at writing, suggesting that he is not familiar with engaging in emergent writing. He drew a boy and a girl, and made his own meaning from his picture, indicating that drawings are his first attempts at writing. In the second assessment, nearly 4 months later, Isaac still could not dictate a sentence, although he did hear some of the first phonemes of the words and tried to write these down. He presented as fidgety, restless and reluctant to write. The Read, Write Inc. (Miskin, 2021) assessment, conducted on the 24.06.22, revealed that Isaac knew all of Set 1 letters, that is 25 GPCs. He also knew 6 'special friends' (two graphemes that make one phoneme, such as 'ch', 'sh' and 'th'), and he could read 4 words on isolated cards. He did not know any sounds in set 2, which contain vowel graphemes. In relation to the programme, Isaac is not making the expected progress at this stage in the academic year. The data presented suggests that Isaac's phonological skills are not sufficiently developed at this stage, yet he is being taught instructional phonics. Further, the assessments, and other evidence, indicates that he does not have a great deal of text experience which, arguably, has had an effect on the development of his phonological and phonemic awareness. When reading 'The very Hungry Caterpillar' by Eric Carle (Carle, 2001) (Appendix Q), Isaac commented on the pictures, paying no attention to the print. He was not sure of the names of the objects and he demonstrated no understanding of the plot. He had not read the book before. He had no previous background knowledge of 'metamorphosis' to aid his understanding. When reading a second book, he did not display any early comprehension strategies. He was not able to make accurate predictions or infer, and was not able to retell the story. On the 'Emergent Story Book reading Scale' assessment, he did begin to demonstrate a little understanding of the text. He labelled and commented on the pictures and began to make links between the pages. He also asked questions about the text, but did not understand the overall plot of the text and could not name basic foods in English. I had to tell him the word 'sausage' - demonstrating that he is still learning everyday words in the English language. Overall, he did not display many early reading behaviours, but did demonstrate an innate quest to

make meaning from the text. When asked where to begin reading, Isaac did point to the line of print on the first page, but this answer demonstrates that he did not yet understand the concept of directionality as he did not know where to start reading the print - from left to right. He also could not point to a word but could point to individual letters. A further assessment indicated that he still relies on the pictures heavily to tell the story, but he is beginning to show an awareness of print as he did recognise two GPCs – 'c' and 's'. This could be due to the direct phonics teaching that he is receiving.

In relation to writing, three samples of Isaac's independent writing, presented below in images 4.2 - 4.4, suggest that he is in the early stages of learning to write.

Images 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4 - Samples of Isaac's independent writing

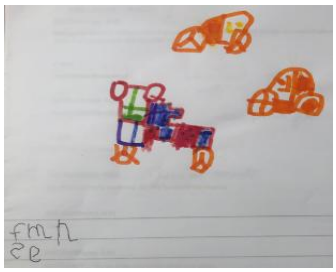
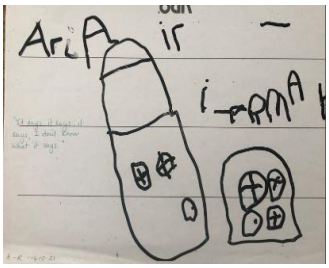
4.2	4.3	4.4
		

Image 4.2 demonstrates how important drawings are to him as Isaac spent a large amount of time drawing detailed representations of cars. When asked to write about them, he wrote a series of letters, writing two of them on the line underneath, demonstrating that he has not yet grasped the concept of directionality. He does not yet demonstrate alphabetic knowledge as his writing exhibits no grapheme-to-phoneme match. When asked what his writing said in image 4.4, he replied, "It says, it says, it says, I don't know what it says." This suggests that he is not yet ascribing meaning to his writing, although, when I asked what he had written in image 4.2, he responded, 'Mercedes' which indicates that he is beginning to ascribe meaning. All three samples of his writing demonstrate that Isaac's transcriptional abilities are not yet developed as he struggled to match the correct grapheme to the correct phoneme, or to remember the order of the phonemes whilst recalling what he was trying to write. He is not yet composing meaningful sentences. In relation to spelling development, using Gentry's (1982) stage model, Isaac is just moving into the semi-phonetic stage of spelling as he is just beginning to represent initial sounds in his writing. However, the data suggest that he is heavily supported by the teacher to do this.

4.3.1.4: Eve - Reception

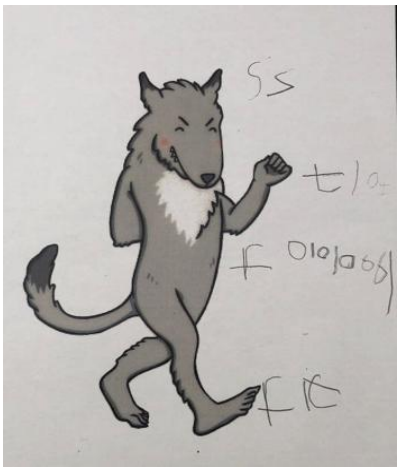
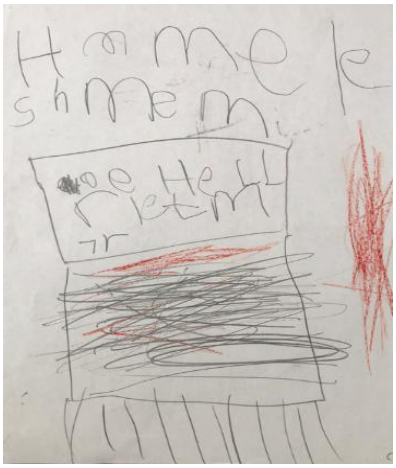
Eve's assessment scores indicate that she has well-developed phonological skills. She also scored highly on the Phonemic Awareness test. However, on the second part, she scored 0 out of 10 as she said the initial phoneme rather than the final one. This could be due to her misunderstanding the instructions of the test as other data indicates that she has good phonological and phonemic awareness; therefore, this was viewed as an anomaly. She scored highly on the Alphabetic Recognition Chart which indicates that she is learning formal phonics effectively. In the Book Handling Assessments, Eve demonstrated a good knowledge of how the texts work; she was also able to point to the front cover and point to where to begin reading - demonstrating that she has a good grasp of directionality. She understands the concept of a word and could point to individual letters. She also demonstrated finger pointing, and when pointing to the print, she displayed 'speech-to-print' pointing as she ran her finger underneath the line of text as she recited the words. She is not yet pointing to each individual word as she reads.

On the two occasions that I observed Eve reading a Read Write Inc (Miskin, 2021) book, she demonstrated that she was competent at automatic word reading, reading 22 out of the 23 words in the first book automatically and, in the second book containing 20 words, she read 8 words automatically and decoded 12 words using phonics. She made 7 errors when reading this book, some of these words were not phonetically decodable and she mispronounced the grapheme 'th'. Other errors included saying the wrong sound for the phoneme. She used semantic knowledge to read one of the words, demonstrating that, in practice, she was using other clues and she paid attention to the pictures when turning the pages. She could answer questions after reading the book demonstrating that she had a basic understanding of the text. Interestingly, the questions were all retrieval questions which provided no opportunity to develop other comprehension skills such as inference.

Surprisingly, on the Dictation for Phonological Awareness test, Eve stated that she could not do it and would not attempt to write. It is suggestible that this could be due to her not being used to being encouraged to engage in developmental writing, or because she is aware that her writing does not yet look conventional. As she would not write, it was not possible to get an idea of her independent phonemic awareness. In class, Eve is beginning to write independently, although she is not confident when doing this. Observations of her writing indicate that she has an awareness that her writing does not look conventional. Two samples of Eve's writing are presented in images

4.5 and 4.6 below. She demonstrates an understanding of the conceptual principle and directionality (Clay, 1975). She is in the semi-phonetic stage of spelling as she is representing initial, some medial, and end sounds in words.

Image 4.5 and 4.6 – Samples of Eve's writing

4.5 	4.6 

4.3.1.5: Ronnie - Year One

Overall, the assessments indicate that Ronnie demonstrates good phonological and phonemic awareness skills and knows many GPCs as indicated in the table below. However, it is interesting that Ronnie is a year older than Eve but only knows 3 more sounds. Further, he did not score as highly as Eve on the Test for Phonemic Awareness, indicating that he is not progressing as expected despite having been taught formal phonics for over a year. Although he scored on the QPAS assessment, his scores were low on the rhyme production test and identifying the medial sound of a word.

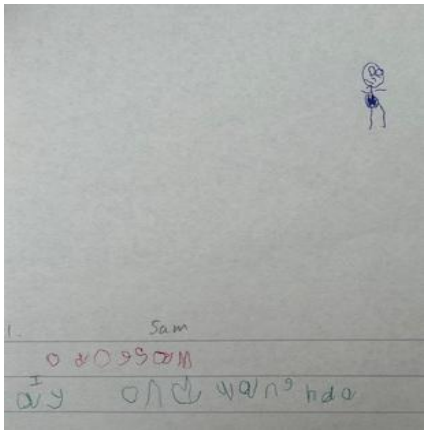
Table 13 – Ronnie's Quick Phonological Awareness Screening (QPAS) assessment

Activity	Score	Analysis
Rhyming recognition – recognising rhyming pairs	5/5	
Rhyming production – thinking of a word that rhymes with a word	1/5	Did word association – making meaning
Word awareness – how many words in a spleen sentence	4/5	Did not get the longest sentence
Sound blending – blending to read the word (orally)	4/5	Soup/scoop – added 'c'

Medial sound identification - middle sound of word	0/5	Gave initial and end sounds
Deletion task - words missing - first part	18/20	

Ronnie's 'Dictation for Phonological Awareness' assessment is presented below in image 4.7. Analysis of the test indicates that Ronnie finds the physical act of writing difficult. He is left-handed and holds the pencil awkwardly – a mixture of palmer grasp and pincer grasp. When writing the dictated sentence, he made some phonetic attempts at words - writing 'sam' for 'sam' and 'ay' for 'I'. He found it difficult to hold the sentence in his head, suggesting cognitive overload or a lack of practice at doing this. In dictated sentence 1 (image 4.7), there was no recognisable grapheme-phone match for any of the words, making it difficult to decipher the writing. It appears that he has written 'and' correctly, and that some of the letters that he has written may represent some initial sounds of the words. This indicates that, although Ronnie scored well on the tests, he is not yet able to apply his phonic knowledge to his independent writing. This could be due to him not having regular opportunities to write at his developmental level where he can practise both composition and transcription skills. However, the same test was repeated on 28.03.22 where Ronnie demonstrated a good knowledge of GPCs that he applied in his writing. In dictated sentence 1, he included all 30 phonemes with the exception of the 4 sounds in 'arms'. He spelled 8 out of the 13 words correctly and used spaces between words. In dictated sentences 2 and 3, he spelled 4 out of the 14 words correctly and 7 out of 13 correctly. This indicates that Ronnie has made some improvement with writing and spelling in 4 months, possibly due to systematic phonics teaching and regular writing lessons. However, he is still primarily a phonetic speller.

Image 4.7 – Image of Ronnie's Dictation for Phonological Awareness assessment



Dictated sentence 1: The dog saw Sam. He crossed the road and ran into his arms.

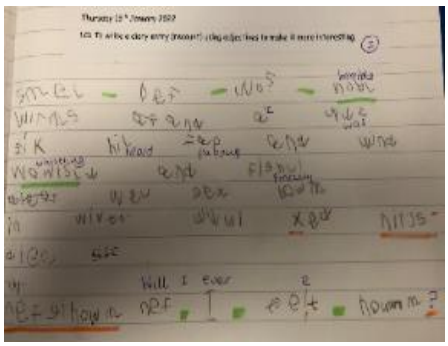
Dictated sentence 2: I ate a big slice of cake with some ice cream at the party.

Dictated sentence 3: Dad went to his job at the mill. He is working late today.

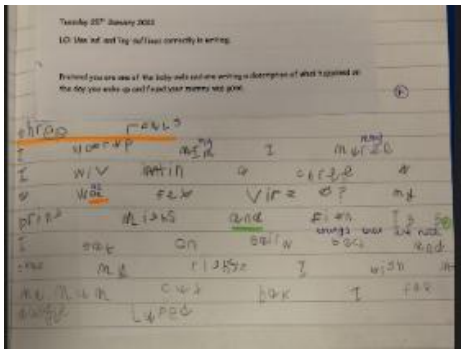
Analysis of Ronnie's writing, presented in images 4.8 and 4.9 below, and other data, suggest that, although he writes independently, Ronnie is a reluctant writer. He can compose phrases and simple sentences although his teacher reports that he misses certain words out of sentences which affects their overall meaning. Ronnie is in the phonetic stage of spelling as he can represent sounds in his writing. He spelt 'was' as woz' and 'me' as 'mee'. It can be difficult to make sense of Ronnie's writing due to how he applies his knowledge of GPCs in words and how he orders the words in the sentences. He is not yet using sentence punctuation. Ronnie finds the physical act of writing difficult and this can be seen in his handwriting.

Images 4.8 and 4.9 – Samples of Ronnie's writing

4.8



4.9



Ronnie was observed reading two Read Write Inc (Miskin, 2021) books using my recording sheet (Appendix L). In the first book, he was able to read 20 out of the 26 words automatically but could only read half of the 50 words in the second book. When reading the first book, he used phonics to read 10 of the words, which were phonetically decodable. He self-corrected (recognising that he read the word incorrectly and re-read it correctly) and omitted one word but continued reading - suggesting he was not fully comprehending the print as he continued even though it did not make sense. Whilst reading the second book, he sounded out two CVC words successfully and used the picture to read the words 'pink crab'. Ronnie made 7 errors, some of which were visual; he saw the 'b' as a 'p' and said a letter name instead of the sound. One error was related to the pronunciation of the sound in the word. He read 'nep' instead of 'nap' indicating that he was not paying attention to the medial sound. Ronnie displayed some understanding of the reading material and relied heavily on the pictures to support his retelling of the narrative. He walked back through the book to answer the retrieval questions. This data suggests that formal phonics instruction is having a positive effect on Ronnie's progress in word reading.

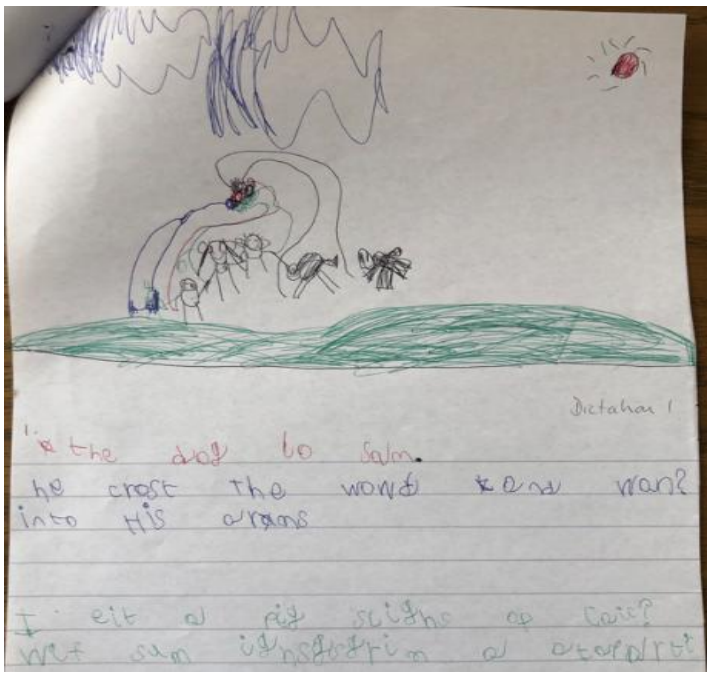
4.3.1.6: Noah - Year Two

Noah was observed reading one Read Write Inc (Miskin, 2021) book. Out of the 61 words, he read 38 automatically, sounded out 12, made 10 errors and omitted 1 word. Two of the errors were related to their pronunciation. He read 'carrot' as 'carrat' and 'packet' as 'pack-et' indicating that he is not linking the spelling of the word with its aural pronunciation. He read 'silly' as 'easily' indicating that he is paying attention to the visual aspect of the word. Noah demonstrated a basic understating of the text. Interestingly, when observing Noah complete a practice SATs paper, he used graphic knowledge (pictures) a lot as much of the text was not phonetically decodable; examples of these words were '*arranged, although, wouldn't* and *blue'.* He also used a syntactical clue to read the phrase 'much better now', which appeared to enable him to read the phrase naturally. He attempted to use phonics to decode 'much' and 'better', and then said the word 'now' as if he were familiar with the order of the words in this phrase. This suggests that he was drawing upon the syntactical order of the sentence.

Further, he needed lots of encouragement to use the print to answer the written questions, preferring to use the pictures. In relation to phonological awareness, although Noah is in Year Two, the 'Dictation for Phonological Awareness' assessment was undertaken in order to assess his skills

in this area of early literacy as the school's assessments demonstrate that he is not on track to meet ARE at the end of the school year. The test is presented below in image 4.10.

Image 4.10 - Noah's Dictation for Phonological Awareness assessment



The assessment indicates that Noah has a good grasp of phonics that he applies to his writing. He did miss out the verb 'run' in the first sentence - possibly as he could not remember or hear it. He heard the 'r' as a 'w', and could spell 11 out of 12 words in the first sentence and 4 out of the 14 words correctly in the second sentence. His spellings of the other words indicate that he is still spelling many words phonetically, such as 'parti' for 'party'. It is suggestable that, when spelling, he struggles with knowing which vowel phoneme to use - this is evident when he wrote 'eit' for 'eat' and 'caic' for 'cake'. Noah is a reluctant but independent writer. He can compose meaningful sentences and is beginning to use sentence punctuation with increasing accuracy. He is in between the phonetic and transitional stage of spelling as he can write many words correctly. However, this analysis indicates that Noah is still an emerging writer and that instruction needs to consider this.

4.3.1.7: Alice - Year Two

Alice was observed reading one Read Write Inc (Miskin, 2021) book. She demonstrated good automatic word reading as she read 202 out of the 212 words in the book correctly. She did not understand the word 'cliff' suggesting it was not in her everyday vocabulary. Interestingly, she did not pronounce words ending with the suffix 'ed' correctly, separating the 'ed' from the root of the word as she sounded it out. She did this with 5 'ed' words suggesting that she is purely applying

phonics and not taking account of the pronunciation. She displayed a general understanding of the text. Alice is a confident and enthusiastic writer. However, due to her learning EAL, she struggles with the grammatical aspects of writing, particularly in relation to tense. She is moving into the correct stage of spelling.

To summarise, the data presented above suggests that, for some children, formal phonics instruction is effective. However, the data also suggests that Isaac, Noah and Ronnie are still developing emergent literacy skills and behaviours, and the Read Write Inc (Miskin, 2021) programme takes no account of their individual literacy development levels; therefore, it is suggested that these children's needs are not being met entirely.

4.3.1.8: Discussion of Findings for Phonics

Key Discussion Points:

- **The effectiveness of instructional phonics programmes in meeting the needs of all children**
- **Instructional approaches do not consider children's emergent literacy development**

Policy is enacted in practice through the wide-scale implementation of instructional phonics programmes as a major component of teaching early literacy. The findings from the study indicate that the Read Write Inc (Miskin, 2021) programme is effective for some children as they demonstrate their ability to learn phonics effectively and apply their phonic knowledge and skills to their reading and writing. However, for children who present as having diverse early literacy experiences, such as learning a new language or a lack of positive early literacy experiences in the home, the findings suggest that the programme is less effective. Indeed, differences in children's language, related to social class, can serve in perpetuating social inequalities as teachers and schools inadvertently favour children who speak with elaborated codes (Bernstein, 2000). These children tend to use more complex and nuanced language, present with wider vocabularies and are adept at adapting language for different social situations. Further, Bernstein (2000) contends that 'performance pedagogy', the dominance of instructional discourse that favours children with more affluent language associated with academic discourse, can create barriers for children from marginalised backgrounds.

Although there is evidence of the effectiveness of the explicit and systematic teaching of decoding and its positive effects on learning outcomes (Shanahan, 2020), Dudley-Marling (2005) points out that claims for the effectiveness of programmes are based on the statistics of 'average students' which may not be effective for individuals in other contexts where variances exist. Further, Shanahan (2020) cautions against the translation of such research into wide-scale pedagogical phonics instructional application without the consideration of evidence from instructional experiments. Consequently, as such programmes lack evidence-base, this means that, in practice, they are ineffective in meeting the needs of all children. Indeed, this is a recent debate in the literature between prescriptive phonics teaching and meeting the needs of individuals (Wolfe, 2015). There is wealth of evidence from the children's individual assessments demonstrating that, for some children, their development is not supported within the instructional programme. Arguably, in practice, the findings highlighted the emergence of three visible groups in phonics lessons which is reminiscent of descriptions of children in Meyer's (2002) research paper evident in whole class phonics teaching; the children who know the answer, the children who echo the answer and those who are silent. Arguably, it is the silent children's needs that are not being met.

Teachers' qualitative comments in the interviews also suggest that, to some extent, the phonics programme is not meeting children's individual needs. Three out of the four teachers in the interviews used the phrase, 'one-size-doesn't-fit-all'. Indeed, this is a phrase often used in the literature. Teachers also recognised that meeting children's individual needs presented as a challenge in teaching early literacy. Joanne specifically stated that the spelling curriculum does not meet children's individual needs, as it is not matched to children's levels of spelling development. However, it is somewhat contradictory that, overall, there was a general consensus that the programme worked - enabling children to decode unfamiliar words. Teachers stated that formative assessments showed children making progress in their ability to decode and recognise GPCs. However, further contradictions emerged when Sarah and Laura stated that the programme worked for EAL learners and SEN children but then asserted later in the interviews that it did not. In relation to meeting needs, policy identifies these children as 'at risk'. Although there is evidence for the effectiveness of phonics interventions for children with SEN (Sermier et al., 2021), Shapiro and Solity (2008) warn that the coupling of instructional psychological theories of interventions and literacy intervention content are the cause of literacy difficulties. Specifically, Solity (2020) suggests that design flaws and teaching methodology in many government-approved SSP programmes potentially contribute to pupils experiencing difficulties. He argues that interventions should teach reading

through a small number of carefully sequenced GPCs and real books. This, he contends, represents a recognition of both sides of the reading wars debate - teaching phonics through real books.

Additionally, for Isaac, Ronnie and Noah, the findings suggest that, in practice, other aspects of reading are being neglected to focus on the technical skills of phonics. Indeed, teachers are acutely aware that it is these technical skills that children are going to be tested on at the end of the academic year, in the PSC, and this puts increased pressure on them to focus on these skills. Arguably, this is where the teachers are experiencing Ball's (2003) idea of "terrors of performativity" (Ball, 2003, p. 215); therefore, teachers have limited choice but to focus on these technical skills, as they apply policy in classroom contexts (Ball et al., 2011). Isaac, Ronnie and Noah also lack early comprehension skills and present with vocabulary deficits, possibly due to their lack of text experience, and for Isaac, his learning of EAL. This argument is supported by Clemens, Ragan and Widales-Benitez (2016) who argue that reducing the teaching of reading to the isolated learning of skills gives less consideration to other factors such as vocabulary, regulation of behaviour, instruction, teacher knowledge and school influences. This viewpoint also affiliates with the research conducted by Hempsel-Jorgernsen et al. (2018) who warn against focusing too much on the technical aspects of reading as it has consequences for children's reading for pleasure, particularly in low SES schools. Worryingly, Campell's (2021) findings detected a shift in teacher's practices where she found little evidence that shared reading of picture books was an integral part of literacy programmes, which is an important instructional strategy in developing oral comprehension skills. Arguably, data from the study suggests that the heavy focus on the technical skills of reading in practice, as a result of current policy, has pushed out other vital aspects of learning to read as phonics takes precedence.

There is a wealth of evidence from the children's emergent literacy assessments which supports the argument that the programme does not consider children's individual development needs. Specifically, Isaac's tests indicate that his phonological awareness skills are not well-developed which is, arguably, a reason why he is struggling with the programme. Parallels can be drawn to the extensive research that relates to this finding. Certainly, there is a strong relationship between literacy development and phonological awareness which is important in both word recognition and spelling development (Gillion, 2107). Phonological decoding is central to learning to read (Pritchard et al., 2016), and phonemic awareness plays a pivotal role as a predictor of individual differences in reading development (Melby-Lervag, Lyster and Hulme, 2012). Children who have well-developed

emergent literacy skills make better progress than children who do not possess these skills (Storch and Whitehurst, 2002). Furthermore, emergent literacy skills prepare children in learning to read and support progress from beginning to conventional reader (Whiteburst and Longian, 1998). In fact, a lack of these skills can cause reading failure (Chall, 1983b). For Isaac, the data indicates that he does not yet possess adequate blending and isolation skills - an important skill needed to decode (Ehri, 2022). Consequently, the findings suggest that, for children who have not developed phonemic awareness prior to school, or who do not receive appropriate instruction in the early stages of reading, it can begin, "a downward spiral of lesser achievement across the curriculum" (Hempenstall, 2004, p. 732).

Similarly, in relation to early reading behaviours, Isaac's assessments suggest that he is still an emerging reader, which has implications for instruction and progress. When reading a book, he treated the pictures as print and did not attend to the formal print. He did not display 'finger pointing' and did not understand the concept of a word. These findings are supported by several research studies, both seminal and more recent. Isaac's attention to the pictures, as opposed to the print, align with Sulzby's (1985) seminal research that characterises children's early reading as first 'picture-governed' before moving onto 'story -governed' behaviour. Indeed, 'finger pointing', an important part of early reading behaviour (Morris, 1993), and understanding the concept of a word, is a pivotal event in the development of a child's reading journey and closely linked to phonological awareness (Flanigan, 2007). Findings from the study also align with research about the children's reading development. Ehri's (2005) 4-stage word model of the phases of development of sight word reading and spelling were evident in the children's assessments and observations of their reading. Isaac's assessments suggest that he is in the pre-alphabetic stage of reading as he is not yet applying alphabetic knowledge to decode words. Ronnie and Eve are in the partial alphabetic stage as they are using their alphabetic knowledge to decode words and Noah and Alice are in the full alphabetic stage as they are able to generate plausible pronunciation by sounding out and blending. Arguably, this stage model also provides a framework that supports instruction (Ehri, 2005), but is largely ignored in instructional programmes. In relation to word reading, although Read Write Inc (Miskin, 2021) advocate practising decoding in the context of books, they do not encourage children to use other clues. However, data collected when observing children reading the Read Write Inc (Miskin, 2021) books, and Noah's reading of a SATs paper, indicates that they did draw on other strategies when reading, not just phonics. This aligns with research that children use semantic and syntactic clues when reading in the context of books - children use 'orthographic mapping' (Ehri, 2022) - and,

due to the complexities of English, symbolised by a later range of graphemes that are not predictable, words need to be pronounced in other ways (Richmond, 2013). This was certainly the case for Alice, who could not pronounce the suffix 'ed' when reading due to overuse of phonics decoding. Furthermore, the children used picture cues in all their oral reading – some more than others but they were certainly an important part of the reading process. Interestingly, Sara, who has taught for over twenty years, remembers the 'searchlight' model and is possibly still influenced by the model in her everyday classroom practice. She stated in her interview that she sees nothing wrong with children using pictures. However, there is agreement within the literature that a hallmark of skilled reading is speedy decoding that is not context-dependent (Seidenberg, 2017) and the use of other cues is discouraged (Goldberg and Goldenberg, 2022). On the other hand, Arizpe and Styles (2003) point out that reading pictures is indeed intellectual enterprise, yet this meaning-making strategy lacks status in school and is viewed as a step to 'real' reading (Millard and Marsh, 2001). Furthermore, research suggests that pictures give early readers pleasure as well as yielding challenges and reflection, but if books used in reading instruction emphasise decoding print, then reading literacy opportunities can be missed (Levy, 2009).

Regarding the development of early oral comprehension skills, the data suggests that, for children that have previously missed out, and continue to miss out on vital early shared book experiences in the home, and in school, the programme is less effective, as these children do not possess these important skills. These findings are supported within the literature. Early comprehension strategies, along with supporting the development of other early reading skills, are supported early on through engaging in adult-child-conversations during shared reading (Campbell, 2021). This encourages the development of meaning-making strategies which can potentially affect later reading development. Indeed, meaning-making can be akin to 'emergent comprehension' as defined by Dooley and Matthews (2009) as children engage in meaningful experiences, prior to conventional reading. Data collected from the teacher interviews and children's structured activities confirm that Isaac is not reading regularly at home and, therefore, missing valuable opportunities to develop early comprehension skills. Indeed, Lysaker and Hopper (2015) observed children using both cognitive and metacognitive strategies when reading picture books (searching, cross-checking, self-correction and re-reading) - the same strategies used for comprehension in conventional reading. Further, Cunningham and Zibulsky (2014) highlight how particular books lend themselves to teaching aspects of emergent literacy, such as phonological awareness, salient print and inferential thinking. Arguably, the development of emergent literacy skills through particular books is vital and, if

children are not accessing these books, then they are missing out on the vital skills that need developing before formal phonics skills teaching begins as well as missing out on opportunities to develop enjoyment and a love of reading. Importantly, Oakhill, Cain and Elbro (2015) advocate the importance of developing oral comprehension from the outset. Indeed, shared reading is effective in supporting emergent literacy development, such as concepts of print (Cunningham and Zibulsky, 2014). For Isaac, Noah and Ronnie, these skills were less developed when observing them read, and if they are not engaging with texts regularly, at home and at school, they are missing out on opportunities to develop early comprehension skills, and other skills, which can affect later reading comprehension (Dooley and Matthews, 2009). Without access to books and an enabling adult, they are being denied the 'social-cultural' experience of reading and the opportunity to develop important multiple reading cues in the context of reading books (Richmond, 2013).

In relation to early writing development, the three samples of Isaac's writing, presented in the findings section, demonstrate that he is in the early stages of learning to write. This assessment of his writing is supported in the literature. However, Read Write Inc (Miskin, 2021) takes no account of early writing development. The samples of Isaac's writing show that he is beginning to hear the salient sounds in words. Research evidence suggests that he is in the third stage of writing development (Cabell, Tortorelli and Gerde, 2013) as he is beginning to represent salient and beginning sounds in his writing – a demonstration that he is beginning to represent sounds in spoken language. He is not demonstrating that he comprehends where words begin and end, and is not yet using finger spaces (Morris, 1993). However, it has to be stated that Isaac's samples of writing are scaffolded by an adult who, during the observations, supported him a great deal with spelling, helping him to hear the sounds in the CVC words. Arguably, Isaac needs ample opportunities which allow practitioners to study his independent writing in order to elicit his print and sound knowledge, and to scaffold appropriately within his instructional range (Cabell, Tortorelli and Gerde, 2013), and which focuses too, on his composition. Image 4.2 of Isaac's writing demonstrates how important drawings are as he spent a large amount of time drawing detailed representations of cars. This is reflected in the research as children's drawings are a fundamental aspect of children's early writing development as they allow them to create meaningful texts (Mackenzie and Veresov, 2013). When asked to write about his drawing of the cars, he wrote a series of letters, writing two of them on the line underneath, demonstrating that he has not yet grasped the concept of directionality. He also demonstrates a lack of alphabetic knowledge as his writing exhibits no grapheme-to-phoneme match. He is not yet composing meaningful sentences but did ascribe meaning to his writing in

image 4.2. All three samples of his writing demonstrate that Isaac's transcriptional abilities are not developed as he struggled to retrieve the correct grapheme for the correct phoneme, or to remember the order of the phonemes whilst recalling what he was trying to write. These findings are confirmed in several early writing studies. Drawing on Puranik and Lonigan's (2014) model and the three aspects of writing (procedural, conceptual and generative), Isaac is lacking knowledge in all three aspects in his independent writing. Puranik and Lonigan (2014) reiterate that procedural knowledge takes time and that it is only when children write phrases and sentences beyond word level, do they truly understand this concept. Isaac is also not yet composing meaningful sentences – ascribing meaning to the symbols he is producing (Berninger, 2009). A perfect example of seminal research in practice is presented in image 4.3. According to Clay (1975), Isaac is demonstrating the 'copying principle' as he repeats his writing of the letter 'L' all over a single page, and again, he is not yet grasping the 'directionality' principle as he demonstrates no understanding that writing starts at the top of the page and goes from left to right. In relation to composition, similarities can be drawn between Isaac's writing and Quinn, Bingham and Gerde's (2021) findings about a connection between composing and oral language where measures of oral language are predictive of composing. Their four categories of composition suggest that children begin by orally communicating a response to a picture. Isaac did this when he drew the car in image 4.2. They also suggest that children generate ideas that they know they can achieve, based on their transcription abilities, suggesting that children's verbal productions are a representation of both their oral language and narrative ability.

In relation to Isaac's spelling development, judgments about this have been made from both his independent writing and from writing produced in formal teaching activities. In images 4.2 and 4.4, he is able to write recognisable letters but they have no grapheme-phoneme match. In images 4.11 and 4.13 (presented in Theme 4), he is beginning to conceptualise that letters have sounds and use these to represent the sounds in words. His spellings are abbreviated; one or two letters represent words, e.g., he writes 'sfu' for the words 'soft', and he writes the 'b' and 'a' in the word 'bad'. However, samples of Isaac's writing are heavily scaffolded during formal activities, therefore, they are not a true indication of his independent spelling ability. This will be discussed further in Theme 4.

Assessments of children's spelling development are confirmed in many studies. A selection of Isaac's writing suggests that he is just beginning to move into the semi-phonetic stage of spelling as he is

just beginning to hear sounds and apply them in his writing (Gentry, 1982). Gentry's (1982) extensive research on developmental spelling provides a framework for the five developmental stages that children move through: pre-communicative, semi-phonetic, phonetic, transitional and correct. This is supported in Cabell, Tortorelli and Gerde's (2013) research, as Isaac is only just beginning to represent salient and beginning sounds in his writing. Uhry's (1999) findings of a relationship between finger pointing, letter name knowledge, phonemic awareness and children's knowledge in invented spellings certainly aligns with Isaac's abilities. Samples of Ronnie's writing demonstrates that he is able to write words that represent the sound structure of words, for example, 'wos' for 'was' and 'kum' for 'come'. Interestingly, he spells the word 'me' as 'mee' which is a vowel phoneme learned through Read Write Inc (Miskin, 2021), and indicates that he is spelling by sound and not paying attention to the visual aspect of the word. He spells some words correctly, 'and, I, to, not'. Again, drawing on the research, according to Gentry's (1982) five-stage model of spelling development, Ronnie is in the phonetic stage of spelling. Arguably, this lack of consideration for children's development in instructional programmes has implications for practice. Indeed, there is a plethora of evidence within the literature on the value of supporting invented spelling in practice. Gerde, Bingham and Wasik (2012) advocate encouraging invented spelling as a strategy for supporting early writing, and Cabell, Tortorelli and Gerde (2013) argue for strategically individualised instruction that matches children's development, where children can be gently 'nudged' towards sound-symbol awareness (Freppon and Dahl, 1991). Importantly for practice, Bear et al. (2020), based on their extensive research, provide teachers with a developmentally appropriate alternative to the scripted nature of instructional programmes which involves identifying developmental stages and then providing instruction which strengthen the connections across spelling, reading and composing.

To Summarise

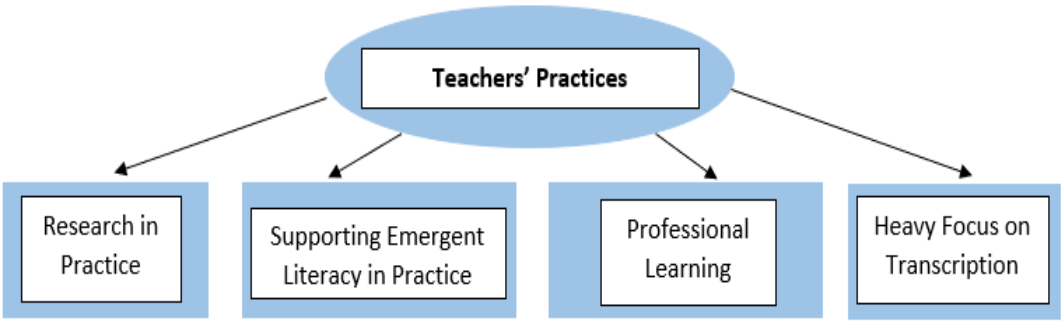
Taking these points into consideration, the findings from the study have important implications for practice. They strongly indicate that the instructional phonics programme is not meeting the individual needs of all children. Certainly, it is effective for some children, such as Eve, who is developmentally ready for the programme. However, it is not meeting the needs of children who have different early literacy learning experiences in the home, are learning EAL, and those children who have not yet had opportunities to develop emergent literacy skills or who are not engaging in regular reading with an interested adult. Further, the findings also indicate that these children are developing negative reader and writer-identities as they have an awareness that they are not

achieving like their peers. In light of this, the only way to ensure that all children's needs are being met, when planning appropriate instruction in practice, is to consider early literacy learning from multiple perspectives.

The second theme, Teachers' Practices, and related sub-themes is now presented below.

4.5: Teachers' Practices

Diagram 4 – Teachers' practices and sub-themes



4.5.1: Research in Practice

Teachers were questioned about their knowledge of the evidence-base that informs policy in relation to teaching early literacy. Responses indicate that practitioners lacked knowledge about this and that educational research was not made explicit in policy. Participant 1 admitted to having little knowledge. She hesitated:

> *I think, (sighs) I think not massively. This is where I expose myself as being … erm [Kelly interview]*

When asked if she is interested in, and seeks out educational research to inform her practice, she replied:

> *I can't say, I'm not, I am not. I am not one of these people who spends a lot of time reading educational publications or … I tend to be inspired more around the people I work with. So working alongside you, for example, you gave me, you pointed me in a lot of directions and given me ideas for things that I wouldn't have used before. Other people, you know, working*

with Karen, so I think working more alongside my peers has given me much more, has been much more influential than any books or articles of scholarly pieces that I've read. [Kelly - interview]

Her response hints at my role in supporting her practice and affirms the value that she places on learning alongside others in school contexts. Sara refers to commercial programmes and Ofsted. She states:

Yeah. So at the minute within our school, within our trust, (and nationally) yeah. We've got (nationally, as good as Ofsted), that phonics is a priority in schools and in primary schools. Within school we've chosen, adopted the 'Talk for Writing' (T4W) strategy. So we've had the flexibility there to be able to implement that. [Sara - interview]

When probed for a more detailed answer about the evidence-base for policy, she replied:

Yeah, I think in the past, obviously, where my role was different and you're involved more in senior leadership. I think we see more of the research evidence when I think like from the likes of the literacy tool, I'm trying to remember that one, that EEF, isn't it where you would see research evidence in terms of which interventions are successful on which approach. So I recognise that there is evidence out there that the phonics works and that erm. [Sara - interview]

This answer indicates that this practitioner is knowledgeable about government-related research as she cited the EEF. However, she is elusive about the research for phonics. Participant 3 openly admits not having knowledge of the evidence-base for policy. She states:

Not gonna lie no, no (laughs). I honestly don't know. [Laura - interview]

When asked if she would like to know more about curriculum decisions, she replied:

Erm, that's a good question, isn't it? I don't know. Maybe because I don't know. Is it because they spend a lot of time doing that part of the work? So they think that you don't need to do it. Yeah. Or I don't know. [Laura - interview]

In contrast, Joanne, the ECT, affirms her interest. When asked if research filters down into practice, she replied:

> *I just I think, I think it does actually, I think it does. I think I probably when I first started, I was more, especially when I was at Uni still sort of like involved in academia. I was probably I read upon on a lot you know, around maths, you know, particularly like when the Singapore style teaching came in, the bar models, that kind. [Joanne - interview]*

When questioned further about sources of educational research, she stated that it really was up to the individual to go out and seek it.

> *Yeah, I think it would, it would be something that I would, I would go out and seek as a practitioner, for me. Yeah, do I think there is a bit of a gap I think, classroom, some classroom teachers I think you can be so concerned with consuming national curriculum, but I think that actually, further to that, you know, why is that there? What I think that further research, I think you personally, independently, have to go out and then get that. [Joanne - interview]*

She also affirmed that she learned about educational research at staff meetings, as did Sara, who said that the trust also disseminated that information, but was not specific in naming any.

4.5.1.1: Supporting Emergent Literacy in Practice

The data suggests that emergent literacy is not being supported in practice, possibly due to it being missing in policy and because of the current policy emphasis on phonics; therefore, teachers have little choice but to enact policy (Ball et al., 2011), and are not able to exercise agency in how they teach phonics. These reasons will be discussed in more detail later in this section. Qualitative comments from the teacher interviews indicate that teachers have a little familiarity with the terms 'emergent literacy' and 'developmental spelling'. This is evident in the following quotes when they were asked if they had heard of the term 'emergent literacy'.

> *Yeah, that's the ... you know, like, started out in literacy isn't it, first. First sort of literacy things. [Kelly - interview]*

Yes, but I don't I couldn't talk to you about it, but I have heard of it. [Laura - interview]

Sara did present as having more knowledge of the term. She stated that it meant:

Yeah, erm, my understanding of that is that is just sort of the pre-reading skills that children have got before they become readers and before they become writers, so can we, the children in foundation. Are they conversing, and can they hold conversation? Are they recognising rhymes? Do they recognise that print holds meaning? [Sara - interview]

Interestingly, this practitioner also recognises that some children struggle in practice, although she does not elaborate on how she supports these children in developing emergent literacy skills. She states:

Making sure that you, your poorest learners, some of those children are really struggling. They're at the emergent sort of skills even in year two, that they're feeling confident to write, that they feel like a writer that, Oh, I love the way I can see that letter, that that's amazing that they feel proud of what they're producing, erm. [Sara - interview]

Similarly, when asked about the term 'developmental spelling', the teachers' responses indicated that some of them were familiar with the term. Laura stated that she had not heard of the term and the following response from Joanne indicates that she has not heard of either 'developmental spelling' or 'emergent literacy'. She states:

No, I'm not actually, heard of either of those. I may have as a term but no, I've not. I've not heard of it. (Okay) Have I had, that might have changed how I did things. [Joanne - interview]

Interesting, Joanne's response suggests that emergent literacy is a good thing that would have influenced her practice. Kelly and Sara know about the term 'invented spelling' as indicated in the following quotes.

Eer, I've heard of them. I don't know if I'm getting, I don't know if it's just from you (laughs) that I've heard of them or what ... I would think you know, invented spelling is like it says having a go, having a go thinking what a word would look like and matching it to its phonics sounds may be (sounding unsure), develop, developmental spelling, I would, that would be developed, developmentally age-appropriate attempt at spelling a word according to maybe what they've learnt already [Kelly - interview]

Nooo, would imagine that's more sort of emergent sp..., it's phonetically plausible attempts would be my thinking around what that would be. [Sara - interview]

As these quotes indicate, the teachers have knowledge of the concepts but, due to the overemphasis on phonics in current policy, and the fact that aspects of emergent literacy are not included in policy, it is no surprise that they are not prevalent in classroom practice. Regrettably, specific questions about phonological awareness were not asked in the teacher interviews, although the assessment data collected for individual children does provide valuable insight into their phonological awareness development.

4.5.1.2: Professional Learning

Evident in the qualitative comments from teachers were responses which indicate that teachers learn about effective practice in school settings. Joanne explained that:

No, I think I got more on placement, I picked up a lot from observing some really good, good high-quality teachers of literacy, but sort of like, like theories and research… [Joanne - interview]

The concept of learning in practice, specifically learning from others, was also vocalised by other participants. Kelly, a close colleague of mine, stated:

I am not one of these people who spends a lot of time reading educational publications or, I tend to be inspired more around the people I work with. So working alongside you, for example, you gave me, you pointed me in a lot of directions and given me ideas for things that I wouldn't have used before. Other people you know, working with Katie (pseudonym)

so I think working more alongside my peers, has given me much more, has been much more influential than any books or articles of scholarly pieces that I've read. [Kelly - interview]

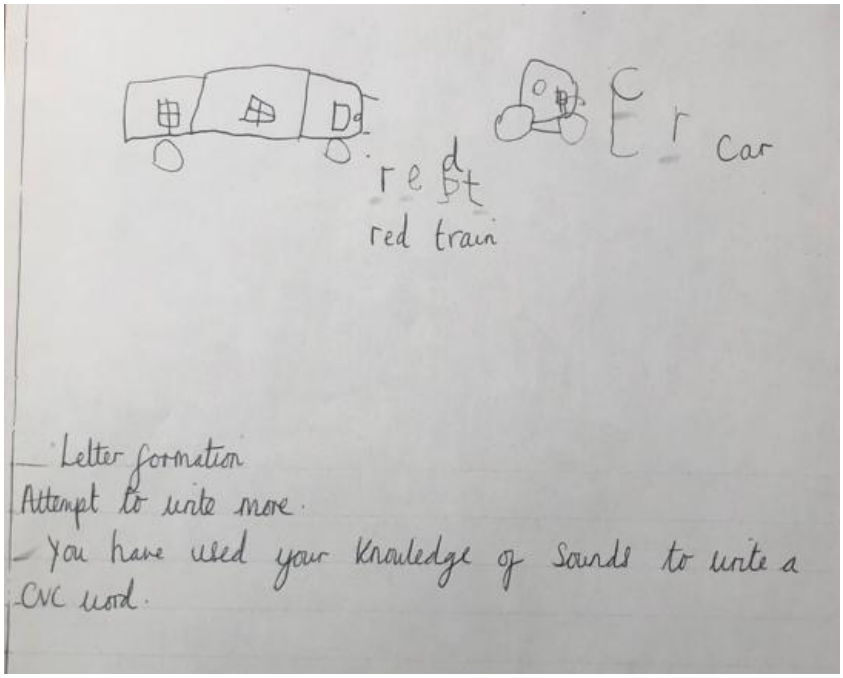
These answers confirm how important Continued Professional Development (CPD) is for teachers and how they learn from each other in practice: working alongside colleagues and engaging in professional dialogue.

4.5.1.3: Heavy Focus on Transcription

Across EYFS and KS1, writing was taught through a mixture of whole class teaching, Focus Group Activities (FGA) and Free-flow writing - specifically in EYFS, where children choose to access writing opportunities in the classroom environment. A FGA is a teacher-directed small group activity, usually 4 – 6 children, with a specific learning focus. For the reception children, these FGAs were formal, with a predetermined lesson objective, focusing on spelling as the children wrote in books. Samples of Isaac's writing from these FGA are presented in images 4.11 and 4.13. No observations were conducted of the children engaging in writing activities that focused on children's interests and composition in these FGA sessions, although this does not mean that they were not taking place at other times. In contrast, in nursery, FGA's involved children having 'writing journals' and being given autonomy over their writing choices. First, they were invited to draw a picture and then encouraged to 'write' about it at their developmental level. Children enjoyed drawing at their developmental level; drawings were important to them and they engaged enthusiastically. Lesson observation data, and samples of writing from children's books from the reception class, suggest a heavy focus on transcription, specifically using phonics to spell. Again, it is highly suggestible that this is due to the heavy focus on transcription in policy and is another example of teachers 'enactment' of policy as they interpret and translate policy in practice (Braun, Maguire and Ball, 2010). For Isaac, such an approach does not consider his writing and spelling development. His independent writing suggests that he is working within the semi-phonetic stage of spelling, and although he knows many letter sounds, he is unable to recall the corresponding grapheme in order to write it down without scaffolding from the teacher. On the other hand, it could be argued that Isaac needs this scaffolding in order to recall the GPCs. In these FGA's, he is being encouraged to mostly write labels, CVC words, rather than sentences which could potentially have an effect on his understanding of the function of writing. This approach appears to be developing only his procedural knowledge with detriment to his conceptual and generative knowledge. When observed in several of these lessons, he was not encouraged to compose his own sentences and 'have a go' at his developmental level but was

directed to write words, and label, with an emphasis on spelling. However, again, it may be that the focus on composition was done at other times during the school day and that I simply did not observe it. The image below demonstrates how the teacher, during the FGA, makes lines to represent all the sounds in the words for Isaac to write, although his spelling development may determine that he is not yet able to 'hear' the medial sound. Additionally, the messages that children receive from instructional approaches about writing are also important and can affect motivation and engagement. If Isaac is not getting the important message about the function of writing first, the heavy focus on spelling may be to the detriment of his composition.

Image 4.11 – Sample of Isaac's teacher-directed writing



Data collected from lesson observations and an analysis of learning objectives and teacher's written comments in the children's books, suggest an overemphasis on transcription in practice - again due to the heavy focus on transcription and grammar in policy. This aligns with the findings from the policy analysis where a heavy focus on transcription was evident in the key policy: The Reading Framework (DfE, 2021). What is also evident is the contrast between nursery and the later classes, and how the heavy focus on transcription and grammar has not yet permeated practice in nursery, in this context. For Tess, in nursery, there was no specific learning objective, as the teacher was aware of her writing development and what she needed to provide in order to support this. The teacher afforded Tess autonomy over what to write about and this was important for her motivation to write. The table below presents the analysis of learning objectives in children's books.

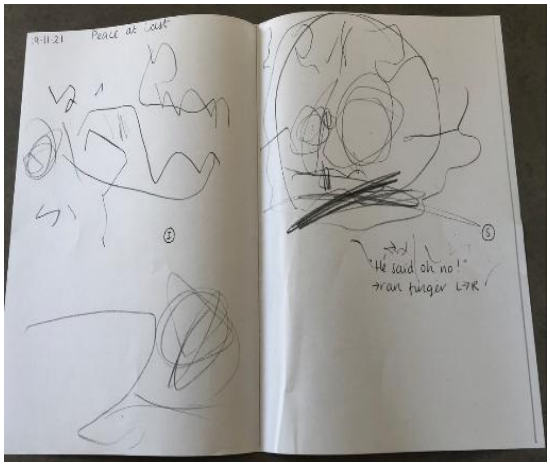
Quantitative data, highlighted in green, exemplifies the heavy focus on grammar, particularly in Years 1 and 2.

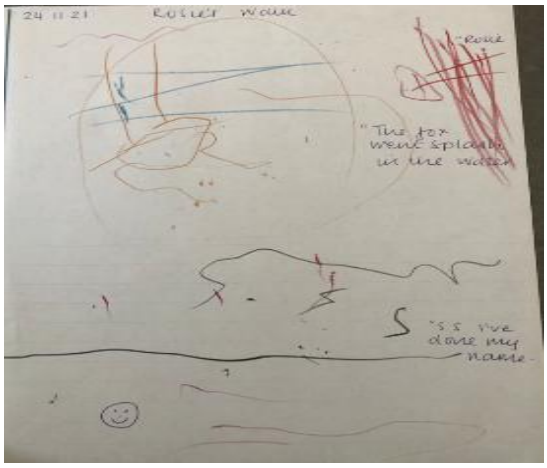
Table 14 – Analysis of learning objectives in children's books

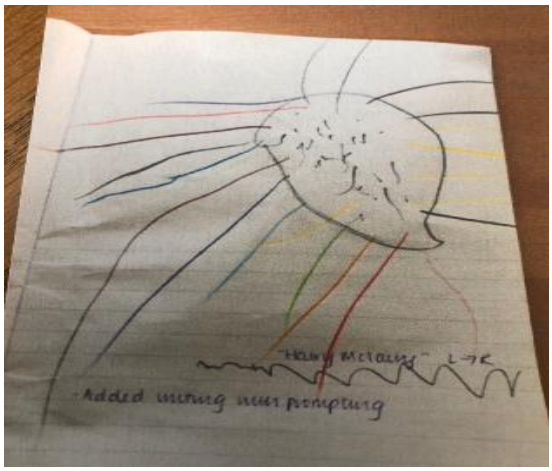
Participant	**Tess (Nursery)**	**Isaac (Reception)**	**Eve (Reception)**	**Ronnie (Y1)**	**Noah and Alice (Y2)**
Unrelated Objective		1 - draw	1		
Comprehension		1	1	7	22
Vocabulary		1	3	0	0
Grammar				16	81
Punctuation				3	18
Sentence Construction				2	3
Writing Process				9	3
Spelling				5	3
Total Objectives		**3**	**4**	**43**	**135**

Evidence from children's books echo this analysis. The focus of teaching in classes beyond nursery suggests a heavy focus on transcription and grammar, as advocated in policy. The reception class teacher, where formal phonics instruction begins, did focus more on transcription during the observations whereas the nursery teacher focused more on the content and meaning of writing. Samples of Tess' writing in image 4.12 below demonstrate where she is in relation to her writing development. She is producing drawings to tell a simple narrative and ascribing meaning to her writing. The teacher's responses indicate that she has responded verbally to Tess' writing and then made some written comments, for her reference, about Tess' development. This is evident in the comment, 'ran finger L to R' indicating that Tess is beginning to understand directionality. The teacher understands how to 'nudge' Tess to the next step in her writing development.

Image 4.12 – Samples of Tess' early writing

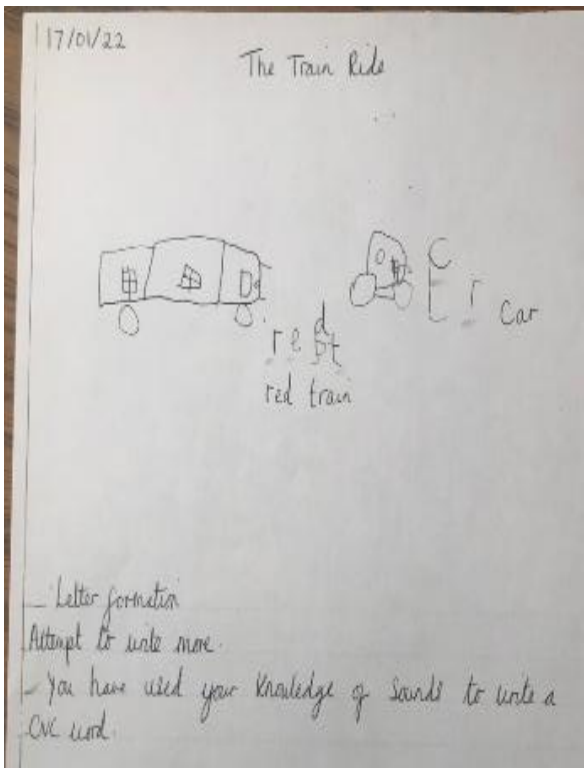


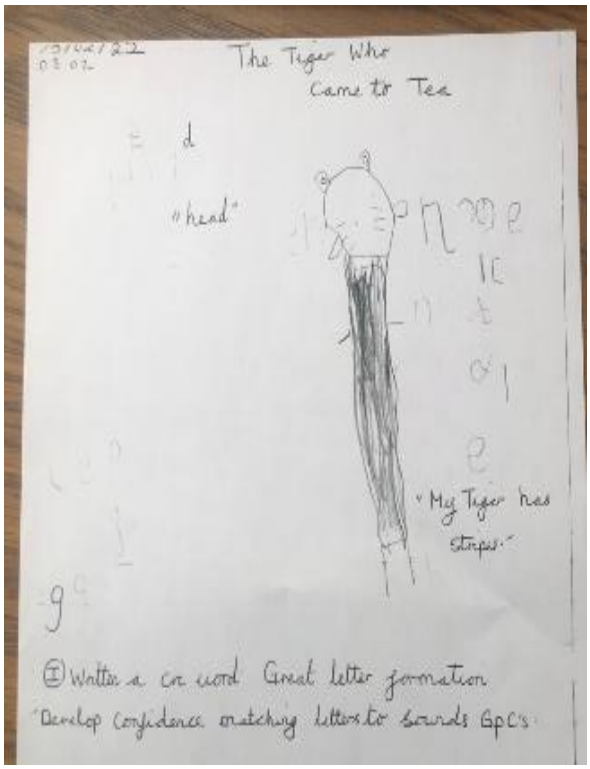


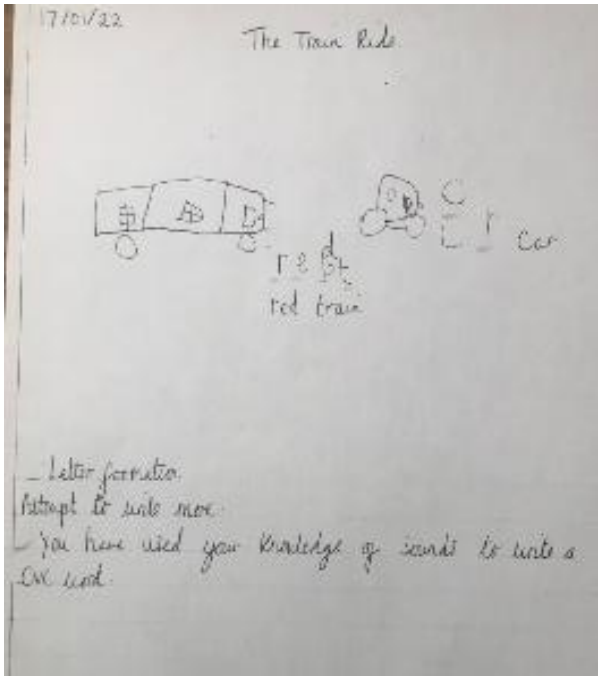


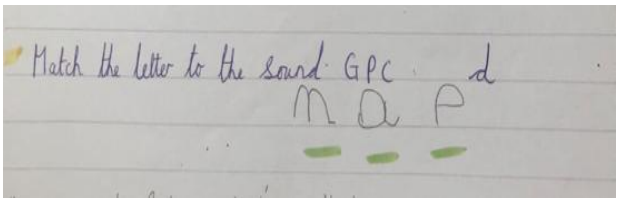
In contrast, arguably due to practice being driven by policy and high-stakes testing in the reception, year one and year two classes, the learning objectives and focus of teaching suggests a heavy focus on transcription, and on grammar in Years 1 and 2. The 4 examples of Isaac's writing in image 4.13 below demonstrate the focus on transcription in FGAs as the teacher responds with comments about his letter formation and spelling of CVC words. His teacher actually stated, "I think he's got this phobia because I think he's so consumed with phonics." [Joanne - interview]. This comment is then indicative of the overemphasis of phonics in practice and the detrimental effect it is having on Isaac. Further, it is also indicative of the teacher's compliance in enacting this overemphasis in policy, in practice, even though her quote recognises the negative effect on Isaac.

Image 4.13 – Samples of Isaac's teacher-directed writing









In Ronnie's writing in Year One, the learning objectives all focus on grammar and spelling, and this is consistent for the other 33 samples of writing collected for him. His writing demonstrates that he is just beginning to write simple meaningful sentences, yet the focus of the teaching is still on the formal teaching of grammar as prescribed in policy. When the children were asked if they found writing difficult or easy, Ronnie replied that he found it hard because he has 'orange' whilst pointing to the teacher's comments. This appeared to suggest that Ronnie is not entirely sure about the

purpose of feedback from the teacher. Specifically in Year Two, the learning objectives and success criteria are heavily focused on grammar. This is not a surprise considering that this is a year group where end of year data is scrutinised by different stakeholders; therefore, teachers are well aware of the need to ensure that children can use grammar effectively in their writing as prescribed in the national curriculum.

Qualitative comments from the structured activities with children further indicate an overemphasis on transcription, specifically phonics, in practice - again due to its heavy focus in policy. The table below presents a sample of the children's quotes in response to questions that they were asked. The highlighted text indicates where their responses include a reference to phonics.

Table 15 – Children responses during structured activities

Question	**Response**
How do you learn to write?	"You learn to write by sounding out."
How do you learn to write sentences?	"You do Fred in your head."
How do you learn to spell?	"You learn to spell by sounding out."
How do you learn to read?	"Sounds help you read." "Sound out to read words and then to understand."
What do you do if you come to a word that you can't read?	"Sound out if you can't read a word."
Why do you learn to read?	"People need to read to get better." "Read sounds to read and get better." "You're a good reader if you know the target sounds." "Reading is about reading sounds and sounding out."
Why do you learn to write?	"Writing is about words, pictures and letters." 'It's about letters and writing letters and tricky words.' "Teachers and family read my writing."

4.5.1.4: Discussion of Findings around Teachers' Practices

Discussion Points:

1. **Teacher's knowledge about emergent literacy and implications for practice**
2. **Heavy focus on transcription in practice**

The findings indicate a gap in teachers' knowledge in relation to research and practice due to factors that teachers have little control over. This complex 'gap' that exists between research and practice is echoed in the literature (Vanderlinde and Van Braak, 2010). Qualitative comments from the teacher interviews suggest that, to a large extent, academic research relating to the curriculum is not made explicit to teachers. All 4 of the teachers were not able to name any specific research relating to early literacy, and their responses suggest that academic research is not readily accessible to them. Joanne, who is an Early Careers Teacher (ECT), was enthused about research as she recalled wanting to learn about research relating to literacy teaching during her ITT but vocalised that she perceives it was the subject she was taught the least. She adds that her training was a year's course and, therefore, there was a sense of 'cramming it into a year'. This finding is supported by Clarke (2020) as she acknowledges that there has been a narrowing of literacy courses in ITT with such a heavy focus on phonics. Interestingly, the other 3 practitioners struggled to remember any specific research being taught in ITT due to timescales, but it needs to be acknowledged that this does not necessarily mean there were not taught any – it could simply be a matter of lack of recall. None of the teachers appeared knowledgeable about where to source research, again suggesting that academic research is not accessible to teachers. These findings are mirrored by Vanderlide and Van Braak (2010) who found that researchers voiced that they mainly disseminate their results through publications in practitioner journals but found that these journals are not well known by school leaders and teachers. Indeed, researchers in this study vocalised that their research is assessed in terms of output and impact, therefore, missing the dissemination of their results to practitioners.

In light of this, researchers need to rethink dissemination activities (Vanderlide and Van Braak, 2010). A significant finding from the study was the consensus that practitioners learned from others, specifically more 'experienced' practitioners in practice, in classrooms. In the interviews, Kelly named myself as one of these practitioners; therefore, I acknowledge my role as 'insider researcher' and its potential impact on the study's findings. However, Flessner (2012) who, in his study, temporarily returned to teaching a class alongside his researcher role, reiterates the important role of 'insider researcher' involving practitioner inquiry. He advocates researchers working with classroom practitioners, to gain more alignment with what they see in research, in order to narrow the research-practice divide.

A significant finding from the study indicates that although the teachers had heard of terms relating to emergent literacy, they were not familiar with academic research in this area. However, as stated

earlier, it has to be acknowledged that this could largely be due to the omission of 'emergent literacy' in policy. Indeed, national policy in England has a history of not recognising 'developmental writing' (Huxford, 2006). Data also indicates that, due to the current policy context, teachers are not in a position to focus on emergent literacy in practice, particularly as children move beyond the EYFS. These findings are associated with a number of research studies. Graham, Gillespie and McKeown (2013) affirm that teachers are more likely to be skilled in teaching writing if they understand how writing develops. Indeed, in the lessons I observed, and evidence from children's books, it is evident that teachers are obliged to focus heavily on transcription, mainly spelling, from reception onwards, and grammar in years 1 and 2. In contrast, the academic research suggests that children need opportunities to develop composing related knowledge, such as generating ideas (Gerde, Bingham and Waisik, 2012) and having autonomy over writing in order to support the development of conceptual knowledge (Puranik and Lonigan 2014). However, although a heavy focus on transcription was evident across the data set, it does not mean that children were not being given the opportunity to develop other aspects of writing at other times.

In relation to supporting children's early writing in practice, 'scaffolding' is prevalent in the research literature but little evidence of it being used to support early writing and spelling development was seen in practice. To reiterate, this is possibly due to the omission of developmental writing in The Reading Framework (DfE, 2021), and, therefore, teachers do not have the opportunity, beyond the nursery class, to scaffold children's emergent writing in practice. Indeed, few teachers understand how to scaffold in practice (Gerde, Bingham and Wasik, 2012), which could prevent children from being 'nudged' towards sound-symbol awareness (Freppon and Dahl, 1991) within the context of authentic writing. Indeed, a few examples of scaffolding were observed in Nursery. On one occasion, during a FGA, children were invited to draw a picture and encouraged to 'write' at their developmental level, focusing on composing meaningful sentences. The nursery teacher talked about the function of writing as being important, and all the teachers acknowledged the important role that adults have in supporting early writing. Certainly, the function of print precedes the perfect form (Gentry, 2004). Admittedly, my views about the importance of 'function' have been shared with practitioners whilst working in my role as Literacy Lead in the school; therefore, my voice can be heard in some of the practitioners' responses. Importantly, in order to ensure reflexivity in my approach to data analysis, this needs to be acknowledged. Additionally, the nursery teacher's encouragement of children' drawings is reflected in the research as children's drawings are a

fundamental aspect of children's early writing development as they allow them to create meaningful texts (Mackenzie and Veresov, 2013).

A further example of the findings aligning with the academic research literature is around the relationship between reading and writing, and specifically which children learn first. The consensus amongst 3 of the teachers was that children learn to read first, then write. Only one of them believed them to run concurrently. It is suggestible that teachers hold these views as policy focuses primarily on the teaching of reading first, then writing, through systematic synthetic phonics. However, these views contrast with academic research. Indeed, the relationship between reading and writing is a complex phenomenon but there is now growing evidence to suggest that early writing develops prior to formal schooling and precedes formal teaching (Quinn, Gerde and Bingham, 2016). Writing is a critical emergent literacy skill that lays the foundation for children's later literacy skills and reading achievement (Gerde, Bingham and Wasik, 2012) and (NELP, 2008). Furthermore, in the research literature, it is acknowledged that there exists a reciprocal relation between reading and writing - but they are not fully integrated in research and practice (Graham, 2020). Clearly, this is an area that requires further research.

Findings from across the data set indicate a heavy focus on transcription in practice and can be attributed to the heavy focus on transcription in policy. These findings are reflected in the research literature as there is evidence from a number of studies highlighting the current heavy focus on transcription in practice (Bingham et al., 2018). The general perception from teachers was that the current curriculum places a heavy focus on phonics which translates into the large amount of time spent on phonics in practice. However, all teachers recognise other important aspects involved in learning to read and write. Kelly recognises the need to promote a love of reading before teaching the technical skills. She used a useful swimming analogy to explain that children need to experience enjoyment and love of reading before being taught the technical skills of phonics. This viewpoint is heavily supported in the literature in relation to the 'Reading for Pleasure' pedagogy (Cremin, 2019). Indeed, Litwin and Pepin (2020) advocate the importance of joyful and engaging shared reading experiences in developing fundamental skills and knowledge for reading as well as offering the opportunity to connect print and language. They argue, without these, it is much harder to make progress. The heavy transcription focus was also evident in the teachers' responses to children's writing, arguably due to policy prescription. Worryingly, Bingham, Quinn and Gerde (2017), in their study, examined teachers' practices in the classroom through observation, and found a heavy focus

on transcription - a focus on rote skills, such as letter formation and writing and spelling. A further study by Bingham, Quinn and Gerde (2017) mirrors the study's findings as teachers reported strategies for developing handwriting with few naming strategies that support children's composing, writing for meaning, or supporting letter-sound knowledge in contextualised writing activities. Certainly, handwriting is an important skill that needs to be taught explicitly and systematically. Graham et al. (2012) emphasise the importance of focusing on automaticity and fluency of handwriting in order to write quickly and effortlessly (Malpique, Pino-Pasternak and Valcan, 2017) and (Rowe, 2018) advocates teaching handwriting in the context of phonics instruction. However, it is important to focus on both transcription and composition from the outset (Zhang and Quinn, 2018), and the heavy focus on transcription should not be to the detriment of composition and children's perceptions of themselves as writers, and their motivation and enjoyment of writing. Interestingly, the heavy focus on transcription in policy could be attributed to the view that children's writing has to look conventional. The idea of 'writing readiness' ideology is known as 'code-based teaching' (Quinn and Bingham, 2019). However, writing is more than just acquiring "the codes" (Johnston, 2019, p. 62) and assessing children in how far they can write like 'adults' (Daniels, 2014). This 'writing readiness' ideology, evident in policy, only serves to view children, as Young and Fergerson describe as, "transcribers and dictators not as writers" (Young and Ferguson, 2021, p.2).

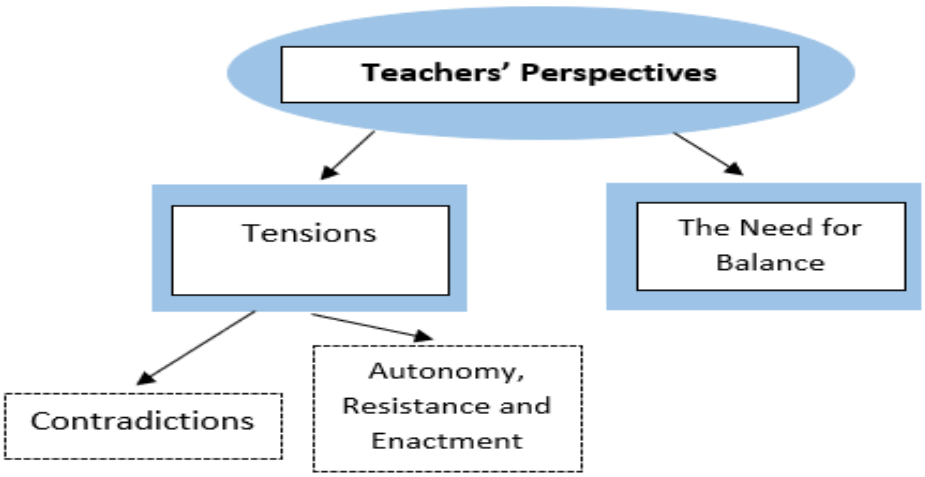
To Summarise

The findings suggest that, indeed, teachers are, "policy actors: doing policy work in schools" (Ball, et al., 2011, p. 625) as they translate policy in their classrooms. The heavy focus on transcription in policy is mirrored in practice. Teachers have little choice but to conform in delivering the curriculum as they are fully aware of their accountability in the context of the standards agenda in which they operate. Consequently, omissions from policy in relation to emergent literacy, coupled with the failure to make academic research in this area more accessible to teachers, contribute to the explanation as to why there is such a heavy focus on transcription in practice.

The theme, Teachers' perspectives, is now presented along with sub-themes and sub-themes related to these.

4.6: Teachers' Perspectives

Diagram 5 – Teachers' perspective and sub-themes



4.6.1: Tensions and Contradictions

Teachers' qualitative comments highlight a number of tensions and contradictions within the data. Some of these contradictions were revealed in relation to the teacher's views about the Read Write Inc (Miskin, 2021) and meeting children's individual needs. All three of the teachers, who implement the programme in practice, stated that it does work, citing the application in reading and writing as a positive aspect. However, Laura and Joanne did say that it appears not to work for SEN and EAL children. Specifically, Joanne believes that the use of mnemonics is somewhat confusing for children with EAL as they do not know the meaning of some of the pictures relating to the grapheme/phoneme. Laura discussed how the programme was not working at all for a child with Autism as he refused to accept that two graphemes made one sound and continued to disengage with the programme. However, in contrast, Sara stated that she believes that it does work for EAL children, specifically referring to a 10-year-old child for whom the programme is having a positive effect. However, later in the interview, she acknowledges the difficulties that EAL learners face in terms of language comprehension in learning to read. She states:

> *Children understanding vocabulary is a huge part of it, particularly our children that are EAL and those with limited vocabulary at home. [Sara - interview]*

Although the 3 teachers did rate the programme overall, they did vocalise the following concerns: children do not have access to a book until they have mastered the first set of sounds, they have no autonomy in choosing books and assessment simply addresses decoding ability and how many words a child can read in a minute - measuring automatic word reading and not comprehension. Sara added that, 'The books are so dry' *[Sara - interview]*.

4.6.1.1: Autonomy, Pressure and Resistance

Lack of autonomy in their literacy teaching practices were vocalised by teachers in the interviews, suggesting a tension between teachers' values and their autonomy in being able to adapt the phonics programme. Sara vocalised the ineffectiveness of a 'one-size-fits-all' approach, stating her desire to provide something pre-programme for children, specifically referring to developing children's appreciation of rhyme and blending skills, providing authentic text experience and ensuring that children understand the function of print before formal phonics teaching. Other participants echoed this view, reiterating that the programme should take account of where children are in terms of emergent literacy development. All participants strongly advocated that children develop a love of books before being taught the technical skills of reading. The teachers also felt strongly that something pre-programme should be in place for EAL learners in order to support spoken language and emergent literacy before they embark on formal phonics programmes. Sara referred to developing children's emergent literacy skills and ensuring children understand that print holds meaning, and Joanne voiced the importance of developing children's motivation and engagement in reading and writing. Joanne specifically refers to adapting the programme in the following quote:

> *But I also think, phonics programmes, I do, as much as I see. I see the success with children but I almost wish you could take a phonics programme, and then I know you can adapt them as a class teacher, but at the end of the day, there's still a programme that systematically you have to follow and deliver it the same, I almost wish you could just pick the bits apart and deliver it for that child because some children are so ready for it. [Joanne - interview]*

Sara acknowledges that Noah needs something beyond the one-to-one interventions he is receiving, but has not got the capacity to implement an appropriate bespoke intervention. Laura vocalises that it is not possible to adapt the programme. She states:

I mean, the RWI programme is very rigid, and I don't feel like we've got any kind of input on that. It is what it is and you don't change it. [Laura - interview]

She is well aware of her roles as teacher and phonics lead in a climate of high-stakes testing, stating:

Whereas now they're recognising so many more words through that and as you track them, you can see we've put this fluency in because so many children are not where they need to be. And it's not the phonics. It's not the sounds that they don't know because yeah, they're going to pass the phonics screening, like 83% of the Y2's have passed the phonics screening, but there's only 45% expected to pass the SATs in reading, because they can (Y2) yeah, they can decode the words. But they're just robotic, too slow. They've got no fluency. So in the SATs, they're not getting to the end, and they, losing meaning anyway, even if they got to the end, they're not understanding. [Laura - interview]

This quote demonstrates awareness of her role in ensuring children pass the PSC, but also acknowledges her understanding that reading is much more than decoding words; comprehension is also important.

4.6.1.2: The Need for a Balanced Approach

When teachers were asked about the most effective way to meet children's individual needs, their qualitative comments suggest they believe that adapting the curriculum is most effective. They named adaptive teaching and implementing bespoke interventions. Further, their responses indicate that they desire a more balanced approach to the teaching of early literacy. Sara said that she believes that phonics is the backbone of teaching early reading, but stated that:

I think phonics is an important part of what we need to do with children, but not in isolation, and not, it needs to be part of a balanced approach. [Sara - interview]

Specifically, participants vocalised that teaching reading is about moving 'beyond phonics'. Laura shared that she is passionate about phonics but children need other things too. She believes it to be the 'backbone' of early literacy teaching, but attention has to be paid to comprehension early on. Joanne believes that children need enthusiasm for reading and a love of books alongside phonics.

Also evident in the teachers' qualitative comments was the recognition of the complexities of teaching early literacy and the need to exercise a degree of flexibility in whatever approach is taken. All of the participants talked about the teaching of early reading and writing being made up of different components. Joanne specifically talked about contrasting theories and how, as a practitioner, you can work out which theory of learning works for which child. All 4 of the teachers expressed the view that 'one-size-does-not-fit-all' in relation to teaching early literacy. This phrase was specifically used by 3 of the 4 teachers:

> *And I think that's it with literacy because it's not just, you know, one-size-fits-all every single child will, will get things differently. [Joanne - interview]*

> *Erm (sigh) I was trying to think of how to sum this up but I just believe that, that there's not one-size-fits-all. [Sara - interview]*

> *And I don't think that every child learns in the same way and I think you need to know your class and be able to put in the bits that you know, that they need, and take out the bits that are irrelevant for them and a waste of learning time. So yeah, I don't yeah, you can never say one one approach fits all can you? [Laura - interview]*

Spelling was an area highlighted as complex. Joanne specifically vocalised the complexity and confusion around teaching spelling. Adding to these complexities is the recognition that children's early experiences, parental support, engagement, motivation and volition all have an effect on children's literacy learning in school. All 4 of the teachers vocalised the importance that children's early literacy experiences have on their ability to learn to read and how this plays out in practice. Sara, noting that, although Noah is participating in daily one-to-one phonics interventions, she believes that he needs more exposure to reading books. She affirmed:

> *I think it's very difficult to meet all of the children's needs because we have 28 children. They're all at different abilities. They all have different home experiences. So no, I think there's always more that you can do. I do think, I think that the phonics approach that we've invested heavily in, it hits and supports a majority of children, will allow them to become readers, but you need the other aspects on board. I do feel still though, that other children like Noah would perhaps benefit from more one-to-one, a different kind of like I*

say, just sharing books, reading books. If we had more time in a smaller group. [*Sara - interview*]

Meeting children's individual needs was important to teachers. Acknowledging the pressure that they feel to ensure children pass tests was also prevalent in their responses - again, not a surprise given the high-stakes testing climate in which these teachers operate daily.

4.6.1.3: Discussion of Findings from Teachers' Perspectives

Discussion Points:

1. **Tensions: Classroom Practice and Meeting Individual Needs**
2. **The need for a balanced approach**

Findings indicate that practitioners are aware that they have little or no autonomy in relation to the phonics curriculum but they follow the programme as directed. These findings concur with Bradbury's (2012) argument of, "cynical compliance" (Bradbury, 2012, p. 175) and reflect Meyer's (2002) findings in his critical analysis of one teacher's classroom practice where the teacher describes being held hostage by the scripted teaching of phonics. However, despite being compliant, some teachers did state that they had developed bespoke interventions in order to meet individual needs. Specifically, Laura discussed adapting Read Write Inc (Miskin, 2021) in order to meet the needs of a boy with SEN as he simply could not access the interventions. However, this is not advocated by the programme as it insists on fidelity. The findings align with a number of studies in the literature. Laura's resistance is an example of policy enactment as practitioners interpret, respond and apply policy in specific contexts (Ball et al., 2011). Evidently, all 3 teachers, who use the programme, did vocalise that they adapt it to some extent, even if it is only a slight adaptation, such as using whiteboards rather than books. This is consistent with Coburn's (2005) findings that practitioners interpret policy through their own values and existing knowledge. Further, Laura's quote referring to SATs emphasises her awareness of accountability for teachers. Indeed, for practicing teachers, accountability is an everyday pressure as they respond to targets, evaluation and indicators (Ball, 2003), and these exemplify the use of power exerted over practitioners, by governments, to ensure that schools are using the approved policy (Allen, 2015). Moreover, Ball (2003) points out that, in this culture of productivity and calculation, some practitioners rise to the

occasion whereas others have to, “set aside personal beliefs and commitments and live an existence of calculation” (Ball, 2003, p. 215).

The view that the teaching of early reading should incorporate a balanced approach was significant in the findings. Interestingly, teachers did not define what they meant by a ‘balanced’ approach. However, in the literature, Wyse and Bradbury (2022) assert that researchers have made a case for balanced instruction (Hall, 2003; Wyse and Jones, 2001) which draws on multiple perspectives. It is, therefore, suggestable that a balanced view would incorporate multiple perspectives or orientations within the teaching of early literacy. This view is echoed by the EEF (2017) who name three key recommendations for improving literacy in Key Stage 1 - one of which is to use a balanced and engaging approach to develop reading, which integrates both phonics and comprehension skills. Pertinent in the findings, in the teacher’s qualitative comments, are vocalisations about theories and practices which derive from the four theoretical perspectives: cognitive, psycholinguistic, social-cultural and socio-political. Indeed, Joanne vocalised that she is aware that there are contrasting theories and that these play out in practice, and this aligns with Davidson’s (2010) view that instructional theories can be integrated to form a more balanced approach to teaching early literacy. Certainly, within the research, it is now recognised that reading is made up of different skills, and there are reading models, other than the ‘Simple View of Reading’ presented in policy, which provide a comprehensive view of reading. The ‘Scarborough Rope’ (Scarborough, 2001) represents the different skills and knowledge components involved in the reading process: word recognition, language comprehension and background knowledge. Indeed, there is also consensus in the research about the need for a multiple perspective approach (Hall, 2010). Ellis and Smith’s (2017) assessment tool is a comprehensive example of the multiple perspectives that are involved in learning to read. They encourage the use of a visual tool, a Venn diagram, which encourages teachers to deepen their understanding of three theoretical domains: cognitive, cultural and social and emotional. They argue that literacy learning is inseparable from families, homes and communities whilst acknowledging the need for cognitive skills development, in context, and recognising that individual’s personal and social identities matter (Moss, 2011). What is also noticeable in the findings of the study, and widely recognised in the research, is the advocation of ‘reading for pleasure’ and the use of ‘high quality books’. Indeed, the OECD’s (2000) report describes the entangled relationship between cognition and motivation, and Cremin’s (2019) extensive work on the importance of reading for pleasure is vital here.

Interestingly, teachers' views about a balanced approach did not relate to early writing, and the data suggests a heavy focus on teaching transcription in practice. However, the need for a balanced approach to teaching early writing is evident in the literature. Certainly, Zhang and Quinn (2018) reiterate the importance of teaching both transcription and composition from the outset, and that handwriting and spelling should be taught in the context of meaningful writing opportunities. Young and Ferguson (2021), too, advocate a multiple dimensional approach to the teaching of writing which incorporates strengths from different orientations.

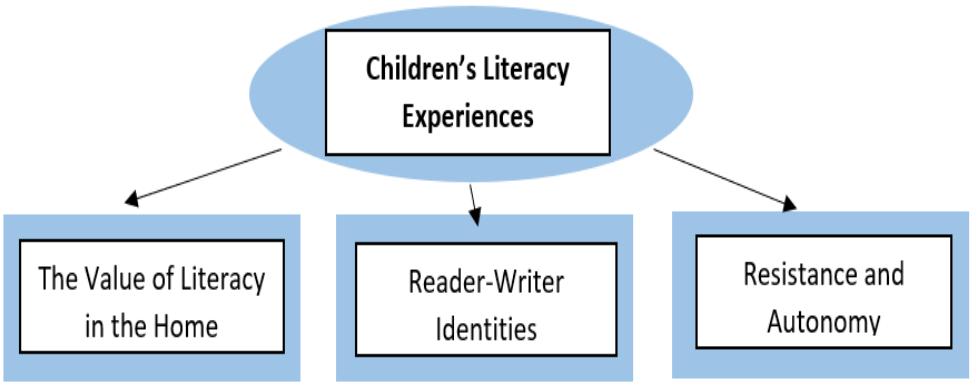
To Summarise

The findings indicate tension for teachers in practice as they strive to meet the needs of all the children in their classrooms. Clearly, tension is evident when teachers' personal values steer them to be responsive to children's individual needs, but sadly, due to the prescriptive nature of policy, they are forced to deliver prescriptive programmes that do not give enough consideration to minority groups, such as EAL learners, children with SEN, and children with diverse early literacy experiences. Further, all teachers recognise the important role that a child's early literacy experience in the home plays in shaping literacy ability and how they then access school literacy. Importantly, the findings strongly indicate that teachers acknowledge the complexities of literacy learning in practice and consider children's motivation and engagement as key factors that relate to attainment. In light of these challenges, they vocalise the need to move beyond a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to early literacy teaching and learning.

The final theme and related sub-themes are now presented.

4.7: Children's Literacy Experiences

Diagram 6 – Children's literacy experiences and sub-themes



4.7.1: The Value of Literacy in the Home

The data suggests the vital role that children's early literacy experiences play in the development of their literacy skills and that home is the primary place to learn these skills. *A*ll the teachers vocalised the importance of the home environment and how, '*It has a huge impact on children*' [Sara]. Reinforcing this view, Kelly asserted:

> *By the time children come to us at 3, we can give them some of those experiences but can't replace what's already gone on in [the home]. [Kelly - interview]*

Joanne answered:

> *Yeah, it's more, I think sometimes you could stand all day delivering this content to children but I think whatever's gone off, whatever goes off when they go home, whatever interactions they have, I think that will ultimately shape it all. [Joanne - interview]*

The importance of rich language experiences in the home, which support vocabulary development, and its impact on learning to read, was also recognised. Indeed, Eve's teacher attributes the success of her reading ability to the rich conversations that she experiences at home with her parents. In contrast, Joanne stated that, for EAL children, their limited vocabularies have a huge impact on them learning to read. Engaging in reading at home was also valued highly by the teachers. Laura reiterated the importance of children reading regularly at home in order to develop background knowledge - a skill needed for comprehension. Sara attributed the success of Alice's reading to her reading regularly at home. In contrast, when discussing Noah's reading, the same teacher said that:

> *He won't be getting that at home. So we need to create that in the classroom. [Sara - interview]*

This viewpoint is echoed by Joanne. She expressed that, when she sends books home, she knows that certain children will not practise reading them with an adult.

Children were questioned about their access to books and engagement in reading at home. The table below summarises the children's responses.

Table 16 – Children's responses indicating access to books at home

Question	Yes	No
Do you have books in your house?	Alice Ronnie Tess Isaac Noah	
Do you have somewhere to keep your books?	Alice - bookshelf Ronnie - wardrobe Noah - cupboard	Isaac Tess
Do you have a bedtime story?	Alice Tess - sometimes	Isaac Noah Ronnie
Do you visit the library?	Alice	Tess Ronnie Isaac Noah
Do you read (regularly) with an adult at home?	Alice Eve	Tess Ronnie Isaac Noah

3 out of the 6 children could name their favourite book, suggesting a degree of engagement in reading at home. However, the children's responses indicated that the books that they named were books that had previously been read to them in class. Tess named the book that had been read to her in nursery that morning, and Isaac appeared to be confused as to whether the book that he named was a book or a video. Alice talked enthusiastically about the Tom Gates books. These have been recommended by her teacher and it appears that this has inspired her to request they be bought by her parents for her to read at home. When the children were asked about reading habits at home, 2 out of the 5 reported reading regularly at home: Eve and Alice. Isaac's answers were somewhat confusing as he initially said that he read at home. He stated:

Em, I read. I read stories because I play with cars and and I read stories at home, at home because I play with my cars with my brothers. And they do they just, they just be, they don't ever play, if I say with me, they don't play. [Isaac – structured activity]

His second response was somewhat contradictory to his first response as he now states that he does not read. The following quote demonstrates how he then became distracted. He said:

I don't read but at home, my daddy, my, and me, my mom. And they, they do have they they get black teeth because they have to go to doctors. [Isaac – structured activity]

These conflicting responses from Isaac could possibly be due to the underlying power dynamic present between myself as teacher/researcher and him, as participant. He may have been aware of the school's expectation that he should be reading at home, and this may have affected his response to the question. However, other data confirms that Noah, Isaac and Ronnie do not read regularly at home. Noticeably, the children that reported reading regularly at home are the children that display more advanced emergent literacy skills, are making the most progress in school literacy assessments and are on track to meet Age Related Expectations (ARE) at the end of the academic year.

Children were asked about their access to books and their reading habits at home. Alice stated:

I read Toto. I read the harder books. I'm very super hard. A little bit of English books, but lots of Russian books. [Alice - structured activity]

She elaborated that she reads at home and her Mum reads to her. These responses suggest that books are valued in her home. In contrast, Noah did not name any books and Ronnie stated:

I don't read them because I like playing with toys. [Ronnie – structured activity]

Interestingly, Noah said that his parents helped him with reading as opposed to saying that they read 'with' him, indicating that he may simply be practising reading his school book to get better at reading rather than reading books for pleasure. The findings suggest a contrast between the children's text experience and their progress with reading, as the children who reported reading at home presented as having more developed oral comprehension skills.

The importance of providing children with text experience and fostering enjoyment was also evident in the teachers' responses. Kelly provides a fitting analogy to illustrate her point that children should be immersed and engaged in books and 'reading for pleasure' before they formally learn the technical skills involved in learning to read. She stated:

> *Phonics has, phonics is important, I always, I always think about it as I use the analogy of swimming, of learning to do anything really, if it's a brand-new thing. If a child wasn't, was not used to the water, so they've not had the experience of splashing in the water, of getting water on their head, of getting covered in water and the joy of water and being wet. You couldn't give that, you couldn't teach them to use their arms in a breastroke fashion in water, because they wouldn't have already immersed in water, but they'll never be able to swim if they just carry on playing in the water and being immersed in water because they need the skills to swim. [Kelly - interview]*

Sara agrees with this line of argument, stating that:

> *And without that, the enabling adult working on all the semantic stuff, and you just start on the phonics, you know, for those individual children if they've had none of that richness at home, and then they just go, here's your phonics. Had you had all that. [Sara - interview]*

Children were asked about where they keep books at home. Isaac instantly referred to the book that he takes home from school. He said:

> *I would put it in my car. And it was in my car because, I need an I have to put it in my car because I forgot to take it out. We, we always forgot to take things out. [Isaac – structured activity]*

His response possibly suggests that his book is left in the car a lot, therefore, he is not reading regularly at home. When probed further, Isaac said that he did not have books anywhere in his house, and Ronnie stated that he keeps his books in a wardrobe. Noah initially said that he kept his books under his desk downstairs then he changed his answer to a cupboard downstairs. The answers suggest that Isaac may not have access to books at home but that Noah and Ronnie do, and they

store them in different places, not necessarily on traditional bookshelves. Alice stated that she visits the library – an indication that she engages in literacy practices in the home.

The children were asked if they had a bedtime story. Their responses are presented below. Alice did not respond to this question.

Table 17 - Children's responses about bedtime stories

Participant	**Response**
Isaac	Um, no, I only just sleep.
Ronnie	Sometimes.
Noah	No but I sometimes, I hope we do.

Again, the responses give an indication as to what family literacy practices take place in the children's homes and how books are valued. For the 3 boys, their responses suggest that they are not read to regularly, they do not have a regular bedtime story and that books are not easily accessible. However, it may be that they engage in other multimodal family literacy practices at home.

Similar findings were evident when children were questioned about access to writing materials at home. The table below presents their responses.

Table 18 – Children's responses in relation to access to writing materials at home

Participant	**Response**
Alice	I have so many pencils and so many colour papers.
Ronnie	Yes. I keep them in my box.
Noah	I write pictures and things for my mum and dad and yesterday, yesterday night I did a painting and em, before, after tea, after painting, but, when it was dinner I think before dinner, and we had and my mum got me some colouring pens. (DS-wow) And, em, we used some.
Isaac	Nope No. My papers are gone. So there's no more left because I spend them all…and then we don't know where are they. I think they're on the bin. I'm mad with that, I'm actually mad.

4.7.1.1: Reader - Writer Identities

The findings indicate that reader and writer identities, developed from a very young age, are paramount in supporting learning to read and write. Children were asked questions to elicit how they felt about reading. Their responses are presented in the following tables.

Table 19 - Children's responses documenting their feelings about reading

Participant	**Response**
Ronnie	Difficult.
Debbie	You find it difficult? Yeah. Which bit do you find difficult?
Ronnie	*(Hesitating)* I don't know.
Debbie	Do you like reading Isaac?
Isaac	Erm, no.
Debbie	No. Why not?
Issaac	Because I don't know.
Debbie	You don't know. Do you like it? You know when you do your sounds and you?
Isaac	Yeah.
Debbie	Yeah. What about when Mrs H reads books to you, do you like that?
Isaac	Yeah.
Debbie	Okay, what about learning your sounds? Is that a thumbs up or thumbs down?
Isaac	Thumbs down *(whispers)*
Debbie	Okay, why is it thumbs down?
Isaac	Because well, yes (changed his mind)
Debbie	No, that's up to you. I'm just showing you the thumb. It's what you think. So the sounds is a thumbs down.
Isaac	Yes.
Debbie	How do you feel about reading? Do you like reading?
Noah	I like I like to get better at reading.
Debbie	Why do you think you need to get better yet?
Alice	Very better reading because I don't read it now.

The younger children's responses suggest that they find reading difficult and in particular, Isaac finds phonics difficult. For the older children, Noah and Alice, the conversation demonstrates their

awareness of their abilities and their reader-identities. Some of the answers demonstrate a dislike for the act of reading, perhaps because they find reading difficult and they are not getting a great deal of pleasure from it, which could be having an adverse effect on their motivation to read. This dislike could possibly be associated with their prescribed diet of books and teaching methods. Indeed, Sara did state that the Read Write Inc (Miskin, 2021) books are boring. Similar responses were found for writing, as indicated in the table below.

Table 20 – Children's responses documenting views about writing

Debbie	How do you feel about writing? Do you feel it's good or do you feel it's ...?
Ronnie	*Shakes his head.*
Debbie	You don't like it?
Ronnie	No.
Debbie	Why don't you like it?
Ronnie	Because ... *(hesitating)*
Debbie	Is it because it's difficult Ronnie?
Ronnie	*(Nods)* Yeah.

Ronnie did share earlier in the activity that he liked drawing pictures, indicating that pictures are important to him. However, the observation data suggests that children draw less in writing lessons as they move to older age classes. Children were questioned to ascertain perceptions of themselves as readers. These are presented in the conversation below.

Table 21 – Alice's responses documenting perceptions of themselves as readers

Debbie	Are you a good reader?
Alice	A little bit.
Debbie	What makes you a good reader? How do you know?
Alice	I read the targets, all of the targets on page one.
Debbie	Okay, so why did you say just a little bit?
Alice	Because sometimes, I speak in Russia and I come with a little bit of English and say in Russian. *(Okay.)* Very better reading because I don't read it now.
Debbie	Noah, are you a good reader?

Noah	Well, I'm just starting to read.

The children's responses suggest an awareness of the need to improve their reading. Interestingly, Alice actually used the word 'target' to refer to the words in the front of the Read Write Inc (Miskin, 2021) books which the children have to read before embarking on the story. When the children were asked if they wanted to tell me anything else about reading, Noah was keen to share his response in the table below.

Table 22 - Noah's response about reading

Participant	**Response**
Noah	Well, I tell everybody.
Debbie	Tell everybody what? What do you want to tell us?
Noah	I love reading but sometimes I get mixed up.
Debbie	What about that test that you did today? How did you feel about that?
Noah	Good, but I'm not gonna tell nobody.
Debbie	What, about that test?
Noah	I've got a girlfriend. *(Whispers)*

Noah's response suggests that he is aware of his reading ability and that he did not perform very well in the practice SATs that he completed that morning. I observed him doing this test and he really struggled to access it. His attempt to explain away his struggles as getting mixed up suggests that he possibly feels embarrassed about this. He uses distraction to steer me away from the conversation, whispering that he has a girlfriend, possibly self-preservation. In contrast, Alice knows that she is doing well with learning to read although she is aware that she needs to get better at reading. Noah and Alice were aware of their peers' abilities in the class. They both named the same child as being the best reader but articulated that they had not heard him read - they just know he is a good reader. This is possibly something that they have picked up on from the teacher. To summarise these findings, Noah, Isaac and Ronnie are aware that they are struggling with learning to read and write like their peers.

4.7.1.2: Resistance and Autonomy

Findings indicate that children displayed some resistance to teaching methods and have little autonomy in certain aspects of the literacy curriculum. This was evident when children were questioned about volition in the books that they read.

Table 23 - Children's response about volition in relation to reading materials

Participant	**Response**
Debbie	So do you have a choice in what books you read at home?
Noah	And yeah, yeah, but it's really difficult to choose because they're all bad.
Debbie	Why are they bad?
Noah	But there's some what, and because they're not real or of some of them that are only little books. But don't take that long. But there's long ones, what em, what would take ages and I don't like them until I get big.
Debbie	Okay. Do you have a choice in what books you read in school? Do you get to choose a book?
Alice	Yeah. And I will buy Tom Gates' book and Big Dog Rules.
Debbie	Okay, what about you Noah? Do you get a choice in what you read in school?
Noah	Not yet. cos I have to bring my book every day, my bookbag and I keep on forgetting it.
Debbie	So do you choose a different book as well?
Noah	Er, sometimes I bring it, books for my phonics group

The responses suggest that children who are making more progress with reading have more autonomy in relation to book choices and possibly read more widely. When they begin the programme, all children are given a Read Write Inc (Miskin, 2021) scheme book that matches their knowledge of GPCs but it is not known if children are encouraged to take home other books. Noah indicates that the books at home are bad. It is not clear why he has this belief but he makes the observation that they are not 'real' books and refers to their size. It is suggestable that he may feel overwhelmed by reading the longer books. He also shares that he cannot choose a book as he keeps forgetting to return the books that he takes home. In contrast, Alice stated that she did have a choice in what books she reads in school and elaborated that she bought a book recommended by her teacher, indicating the important role that teachers play in supporting the 'reading for pleasure' pedagogy.

Noah displayed some resistance during one-to-one reading interventions. Whilst observing him in one of these interventions, he presented as disengaged, asking, 'How long are you gonna do it for?' - clearly becoming frustrated. At the end of the session he announced, 'Everybody's taking me and I get bored.' He hesitated slightly when using the word 'bored' which suggests that he may have been aware of the underlying power dynamic between myself as researcher/teacher, and him, as participant and realised that it may not be appropriate to say that something is boring in school. He then proceeded to announce, as he possibly felt powerless, 'When I'm 18, I won't have to come to school again,' in an attempt to assert some control over the situation. Similar to writing, the children's responses indicated that they do not generally have autonomy over their writing choices.

4.7.1.3: Discussion of Findings for Children's Literacy Experiences

Discussion Points:

1. **Home is a primary place for literacy learning**
2. **Importance of supporting children's reader-writer identities**

The data demonstrates a consensus amongst practitioners that home is an important contributing factor in children's literacy learning and development in school, particularly in relation to social interactions, spoken language and vocabulary. The findings also suggest that teachers recognise the impact that parental engagement and support have on children's progress in school. This was pertinent in relation to the children's parents engaging in reading with their child at home. The view that literacy learning begins in the home is well-documented in the literature (Heath, 1983; Wells, 1987; Tizard & Hughes, 1984; Sulzby and Teale, 1985; Hall, 1987). More recently, the study's findings build on Rindermann and Baumeister's (2015) findings which suggests that the quality of education given by parents is crucial. Interestingly, the data points to a contrast between the children that have access to books at home, if they practise reading regularly with an adult, and their literacy progress and attainment in school. Indeed, lack of parental engagement for some children in the study aligns with findings which suggest that children's attainment can increase, if parents engage with their children's education, regardless of the social background of the family (Deforges, 2003). Teachers indicated that they believe that children's prior home experiences present the biggest challenge in meeting children's individual needs and that parental support, and children's engagement and motivation in literacy learning, have a significant effect on how children learn literacy in school.

Strongly indicated in the data, was the view that the act of practising reading is important for children to make progress, and the important role that parents play in supporting their child with practising reading at home. This view is supported in the literature. Indeed, children need to read regularly and widely in order to be exposed to thousands of analogies that enable rapid recognition and the storing of words in memory (Harrison, 2004). Stanovich (1986) describes a reciprocal association between reading practice and achievement where the, "rich-get-richer" (Stanovich, 1986, p. 382). Reading regularly is vital for children if they are to progress with reading. However, as advocated by the Read Write Inc (Miskin, 2021) programme, Isaac is not permitted to take home a book until he knows all the set 1 sounds. Instead, he takes home isolated sentences to practise which consist of previously learned GPCs, for example, 'kick the mud', 'run in the mud', 'sit in the mud' and 'grin in the mud'. Arguably, as these sentences are artificially constructed to allow for specific GPCs to be used, they do not allow the reader to make full use of syntactic and semantic clues needed for decoding (Ehri, 2022). Further, this lack of access to books could potentially be having an impact on Isaac's progress, particularly in relation to oral comprehension skills, by not affording him the opportunity to practise reading in the context of books.

Findings reveal that a heavy focus on transcription and the technical skills of reading, particularly for children who are struggling with learning to read, can have a negative effect on their reading identities. These findings reflect the findings in Levy's (2009) research about how struggling readers view themselves negatively. The study's findings also build on Levy's (2009) findings as the study has taken place in the current context of national policy which now has a heavier focus on phonics. Certainly, there is a plethora of recent research which aligns with the findings about the impact of children's motivation and engagement on reading. Cremin's (UKLA, 2007-8) research about the link between motivation and skill echoes the study's findings. She profoundly reminds us that, "There is no question that the will to read influences the skill and vice versa" (Cremin, 2019, p. 5). Also relevant here, is the OECD's (2000) report which describes the entangled relationship between cognition and motivation. Further, in relation to a reader's personal and social identity, engagement has been found to be a vitally important variable in reading achievement (Brozo, Shiel and Topping, 2007). Undoubtedly, the children who are struggling with reading (Isaac, Ronnie and Noah) are less motivated and engaged in reading.

To summarise

The findings demonstrate that, disturbingly for some children, they already, at a very young age, have negative reader-writer identities. Isaac is aware that he is not able to learn letter sounds at the same fast pace as some of his peers, and Ronnie already has a dislike for writing. Sadly, the underlying messages that children receive about their progress with reading, coupled with a lack of motivation and engagement in literacy learning, could steer them to believe that it is their fault that they cannot learn within these scripted programmes. In actual fact, the fault lies at the instructional level. The findings illustrate how the 6 children arrive daily at the school gates and present with diverse literacy experiences which have implications for literacy learning in school. For children like Eve, who is an English speaker with lots of text experience, learning formal phonics is appropriate for her. However, for Isaac, who is still learning English and does not read regularly with an adult at home, he is struggling to learn phonics. Crucially, once children enter school, how they are supported at home is paramount. When learning any new skill, practice is key and it can be detrimental for children if they are not afforded opportunities to regularly practise reading and writing with an interested adult in the family home. Considering these challenges, we need to look beyond the school gates and work with children and families in ways that ensure that schools meet the needs of the diverse communities that they serve.

4.8: Concluding Comments

In presenting and discussing the key themes from the findings, this chapter has highlighted the heavy focus on phonics in policy, research and practice that is played out in classrooms in the form of instructional phonics programmes that do not consider children's developmental needs, early literacy experiences and culture. It has drawn attention to the tensions that exist for children and practitioners as policy is enacted in classrooms whilst highlighting the importance of other factors which affect children's literacy learning in school. Importantly, it underscores the complexities evident within the teaching and learning of early literacy in relation to research, policy and practice. Revisiting the notion that research should have utility (Paechter 2003), the final chapter will now consider implications of the findings for research, policy and practice.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1: Introduction

The purpose of the study was to explore the complex relationship between research, policy and practice in relation to the teaching and learning of early literacy in classrooms. The study aimed to gain insight into policy around the teaching of early literacy by conducting a policy analysis using Hyatt's (2013) Critical Policy Discourse Analysis Frame (CPDAF), and to explore the evidence-base for the key policy - The Reading Framework (DfE, 2021). It also aimed to obtain insight into classroom practice and how far this is research-informed, and gain the perspectives of teachers and children to provide insight into how they experience literacy in school. It was also a personal and professional aim that the study would have utility, and that the findings could potentially be disseminated to be of practical use to classroom teachers. Indeed, conducting research should carry a moral commitment to improvement of some kind, whether it is adding to the sum of knowledge or positively influencing the experiences of students and teachers (Sikes and Goodson, 2003). As Vanderlinde and Van Braak (2010) point out, practitioners do not find 'descriptive' research useful. They appreciate research that can be applied practically; therefore, it is imperative, for me both as a researcher and a practitioner, that the findings of the study be of practical use in the classroom, and have a positive effect for children. Positively, recommendations for research and practice that have emerged from the study are evidence of such utility.

This final chapter concludes by revisiting the research questions and discusses how the study has answered them whilst presenting the key findings that relate to each of the questions. This is followed by reflections and limitations of the study. Attention then turns to the study's contribution to knowledge, adding to existing knowledge and making an original contribution, and then recommendations for practice and future research.

5.2: Research Questions

The study addressed the following research questions:

1. What does policy analysis of The Reading Framework (DfE, 2021) reveal about the teaching of early literacy in England?

2. What are the tensions between teacher practice and policy?

3. What informs and shapes teachers' literacy practices?

4. How do children experience early literacy at home and in school?

Each question will now be presented with an explanation as to how they were answered along with related key findings.

1. What does policy analysis of The Reading Framework (DfE, 2021) reveal about the teaching of early literacy in England?

This question was addressed using Hyatt's (2013) Critical Policy Discourse Analysis Frame (CPDAF) which provided a useful analytical tool to conduct the critical analysis on the key policy - The Reading Framework (DfE, 2021). Analysis of micro and macro-linguistic features found that policy drivers, prominently social mobility and overcoming disadvantage, steer policy, and a number of instruments are used by the government to also steer policy: target setting, inspection and funding (Hyatt, 2013). The findings from the analysis also reveal the heavy focus on transcription in policy. Further, Hyatt's (2013) mechanism of 'evidentiary warrant' also demonstrated that, whilst the policy draws on educational research relative to some elements of phonics and instructional phonics programmes, there are many 'silences' that exist in relation to what is missing from academic research in relation to early literacy. This is pertinent in regard to 'emergent literacy' and the acknowledgment of the complexities of teaching early literacy which considers multiple perspectives. The findings suggest that academic research is largely ignored in policy as it predominantly cites research that is conducted in organisations linked to the government, such as the EEF and Ofsted. This is not to say that this research is not respected and valued, but that the inclusion of wider academic research should be considered.

2. What are the tensions between teacher practice and policy?

Specifically, teacher interviews, lesson observations, the children's early literacy assessments and an analysis of lesson objectives were employed in the case study to answer this question. The findings revealed tensions in relation to teachers delivering scripted phonics programmes and their responsiveness to meeting children's individual needs. Contradictions were also uncovered concerning teachers' views regarding whether such programmes meet the needs of individual children, namely children with SEN, EAL learners and those who have diverse early literacy experiences. Both teacher compliance and resistance were evident in the findings as teachers adhered to the scripted programmes although some individuals admitted to adapting it in order to meet the needs of particular children.

3. What informs and shapes teachers' literacy practices?

Teacher interviews were effective in eliciting teachers' knowledge and views about their literacy practices. The findings indicated that teachers' practices are primarily shaped by policy and, specifically, the dominance of phonics in current policy. However, findings also suggest how teachers' practices are shaped by personal and professional experience and values, and how these are negotiated and enacted in classrooms in the context of policy. For all 4 practitioners, the desire to meet the needs of all children steers everyday classroom practice.

4. How do children experience early literacy at home and in school?

Structured activities with the children answered this question. Eliciting their views provided insight into how they perceive they experience literacy at home and school. Lesson observations, analysis of writing books and the early emergent literacy assessments also revealed something about their experiences. Predominantly, findings indicate that children perceived reading and writing to be primarily about phonics and that this affects their reader-writer identities and, importantly, children's early literacy experiences in the home shaped their dispositions and abilities to access literacy learning in school.

It has to be noted that although the study was able to answer the research questions, it also served in reinforcing that a number of broader complex questions remain unanswered. Questions such as 'What is the most effective way to teach early reading and writing?', 'What is the most effective way to teach phonics?', 'How do we meet the individual needs of all children?', 'How do we narrow the attainment gap?' and 'How do we best support disadvantaged children in practice?'. These are questions that have dominated research, policy and practice for decades, and continue to do so. Further, as the findings highlight the complexities surrounding these questions, it is no surprise that these remain unanswered. In light of these ongoing complexities, the debate around the most effective way to teach early literacy will continue in practice, research and policy.

5.3: Reflections

A number of professional and personal reflections are worthy of discussion. In relation to methods, there are a number of actions that, with hindsight, could have been done differently. In the teacher interviews, it would have been useful to pursue particular lines of enquiry that could have resulted in more in-depth answers to some of the questions such as the ones relating to developmental spelling. Additionally, early findings suggested that the instructional phonics programme was not meeting the individual needs of some children as it did not consider their emergent literacy

development. Reflecting upon this, choosing all 6 participants from the reception class, when children are introduced to the formal phonics programmes, could have provided interesting data about the effectiveness of the programme for a wider representative sample of children.

In relation to personal reflections, the development of my thinking during the EdD journey has been profound and has evolved in a number of ways. I have developed knowledge and skills as a researcher which will support me in future research. I am now more knowledgeable about research design and methodology, and specific methods used in the study, and I fully understand the importance of ethical considerations and their implications for conducting research. In relation to analytical skills, I am now able to analyse, interpret and draw conclusions from data, and I am more adept at engaging critically with the research literature. During my EDd journey, I have experienced the troublesome 'liminal space', followed by a transformative state of learning which has resulted in a shift in ontology and subjectivity (Land, Rattray and Vivian 2014). I have also gone through a significant personal and professional transformation; the journey has been defined by periods of uncertainty and challenge followed by moments of clarity as I have navigated the journey from student to scholar. I am now clear about the position that I take in relation to different aspects of educational research. From an ontological standpoint, and moving away from 'methodological pluralism' where researchers use either quantitative or qualitative methods (Wildemuth, 1993), in future research I will ensure that the research design is driven by the research questions. Regarding the nature of learning, the EDd journey has reminded me of the complex nature of learning and the need to view literacy learning as more than an internal cognitive process to one that incorporates other theoretical perspectives. Having said this, I fully understand that children need to learn phonics but that it is 'what' type of phonics which remains a contested debate. Coming to the end of my six-year EDd journey and looking to the future, the growth in my knowledge in my chosen area has grown vastly, and I now possess the skills needed to enter the academic field. What has not changed, however, is my position in relation to critical ontology. I am still very much driven by social justice, and I am committed to conducting research that examines power structures and inequalities within the education system.

5.4: Limitations of the Study

Although the study met its aims, I am aware that the study has limitations. As the study is a small-scale study, with a relatively small sample size, it can be argued that findings from qualitative studies cannot be generalised (Wellington, 2000). However, the findings are relatable. Further, using a

mixed-method approach enabled me to collect both qualitative and quantitative data which allowed for triangulation across the data set (Greig, Taylor and Mackay, 2007; Yin, 2008). Furthermore, although not necessarily a limitation, positioning myself as an 'inside-researcher', acknowledging my positionality and how the data is open to the effects of my 'interpretation', needs to be acknowledged. However, exercising reflexivity has served in adding validity and reliability to the findings as well as ensuring a systematic and rigorous approach to data collection and analysis. Indeed, Mosselson (2010) recognises that reflecting on positionality and ethical responses can enhance research and, in fact, make it more valuable.

5.5: Contribution to Knowledge

The findings from the study contribute to the knowledge-base in early literacy in two ways. The inductive approach to data analysis demonstrated that the findings aligned with many pre-existing studies in the research literature, and the 'Multiple Perspective Framework' that I have developed, suggests an original contribution. These contributions will now be presented.

5.5.1: Existing Academic Research

As presented in the previous chapter, the findings align with many research studies in relation to different aspects of early literacy teaching and learning. Specifically, as indicated in the literature, the findings suggest a gap between research, policy and practice which has clear implications for all stakeholders, particularly for children and teachers. Further, the findings highlight what is omitted from policy, specifically in relation to aspects of 'emergent literacy'. Arguably, this omission is potentially why 'emergent literacy' practices are not prevalent in classrooms beyond nursery, and can go some way to explaining the gap in teachers' knowledge about how to best support emerging readers and writers (Graham, Gillespie and McKeown, 2013), phonological awareness (Philips, Clancy-Menchetti and Lonigan, 2008) and scaffolding children's writing in practice (Gerde, Bingham and Wasik 2012). From the outset, the study has built on seminal research as the legacies of seminal studies are vital in our current understanding of early literacy learning (Semingson and Kerns, 2021). It is hoped that the study will raise the profile of emergent literacy and its place in early literacy instruction - particularly in relation to developmental spelling and writing. Furthermore, it is hoped that the findings will persuade stakeholders (policymakers, schools and practitioners) that 'developmental writing' should no longer be viewed as the 'poor relative' of early literacy. Indeed, all stakeholders should know its value in practice, and it should obtain its rightful place in national policy. Undoubtedly, research evidence about the importance of encouraging invented spelling to

support alphabetic and phonological awareness (Oulette and Senechal, 2017) and how children's emergent writing supports decoding, spelling and reading comprehension (Shatil, Share and Levin, 2000) is something that policy makers, schools and teachers should be knowledgeable about as encouraging children's emergent writing can support literacy instruction.

The importance of the home environment and its effect on literacy development and learning was a key finding and aligns with both seminal and existing research. The findings echo the literature which suggests that this happens in two areas: children's prior literacy experiences in the home and parental support once they attend school. Some of the children reported limited home literacy experiences, and quantitative measures employed in the study showed where children are in relation to emergent literacy development. These findings have clear implications for children in classrooms as instructional phonics programmes do not consider children's emergent literacy development. They also reiterate the importance of supporting children's early literacy skills and behaviours in the context of meaningful literacy experience in order to develop an enjoyment of reading and writing before teaching the technical skills; therefore, 'pedagogies of poverty' that exist in schools with low socio-economic status (Hempel-Jorgensen et al., 2018) need disturbing if all children's needs are to be met – particularly those from marginalised groups.

Findings also highlight the importance of children's early text experience and its vital role in developing emergent comprehension skills (Dooley and Matthews, 2009). In not meeting children where they are, there are clear implications for progress and attainment, and the effect on reader-identities. In light of this, action to address such inequalities should begin at policy level which should seek to work closely with families in order to support children's early literacy development – a key recommendation of the study presented later in the chapter.

As a final point, undoubtedly the findings contribute to the ongoing debate around the 'reading wars' (Harrison, 2004). Notably, a prominent finding from both teachers' perspectives and children's experiences demonstrated, consistent with findings in the literature, an overemphasis on phonics in both policy and practice. The domination of phonics in policy also highlights a number of consequences for teachers as mediators of policy in practice. As teachers see the need to be responsive to children's individual needs in classroom contexts, these highly-scripted programmes can strip teachers of their professional autonomy in adapting the curriculum. Tension, resistance, and Bradbury's (2012) "cynical compliance" (Bradbury, 2012, p. 175) were all evident in the findings

as were evidence of teachers, in Vines, Jordan and Broemmel's (2020) words, vocalising how they, "flip the script" (Vines, Jordan and Broemmel, 2020, p. 713) as they admitted to adapting their teaching in the privacy of their own classrooms. Also evident are the views of scholars who recognise the central role that phonics plays in learning to read, but who also stress the need to move beyond phonics to see what else children need in order to become expert readers (Castles, Rastle and Nation, 2018). Indeed, there was a consensus amongst the teachers for a more balanced approach to teaching early literacy which is echoed in the literature (EEF, 2021; Wyse and Bradbury, 2022). Agreeably, we do need to move past the reading wars (Goldberg and Goldenberg, 2022). Solity (2020, p. 124) aptly sums up current policy, stating:

> The rhetoric surrounding 50-plus years of the reading wars has been characterised by a swinging pendulum that has favoured at different times phonics or whole language but has now swung firmly in favour of SSP in England.

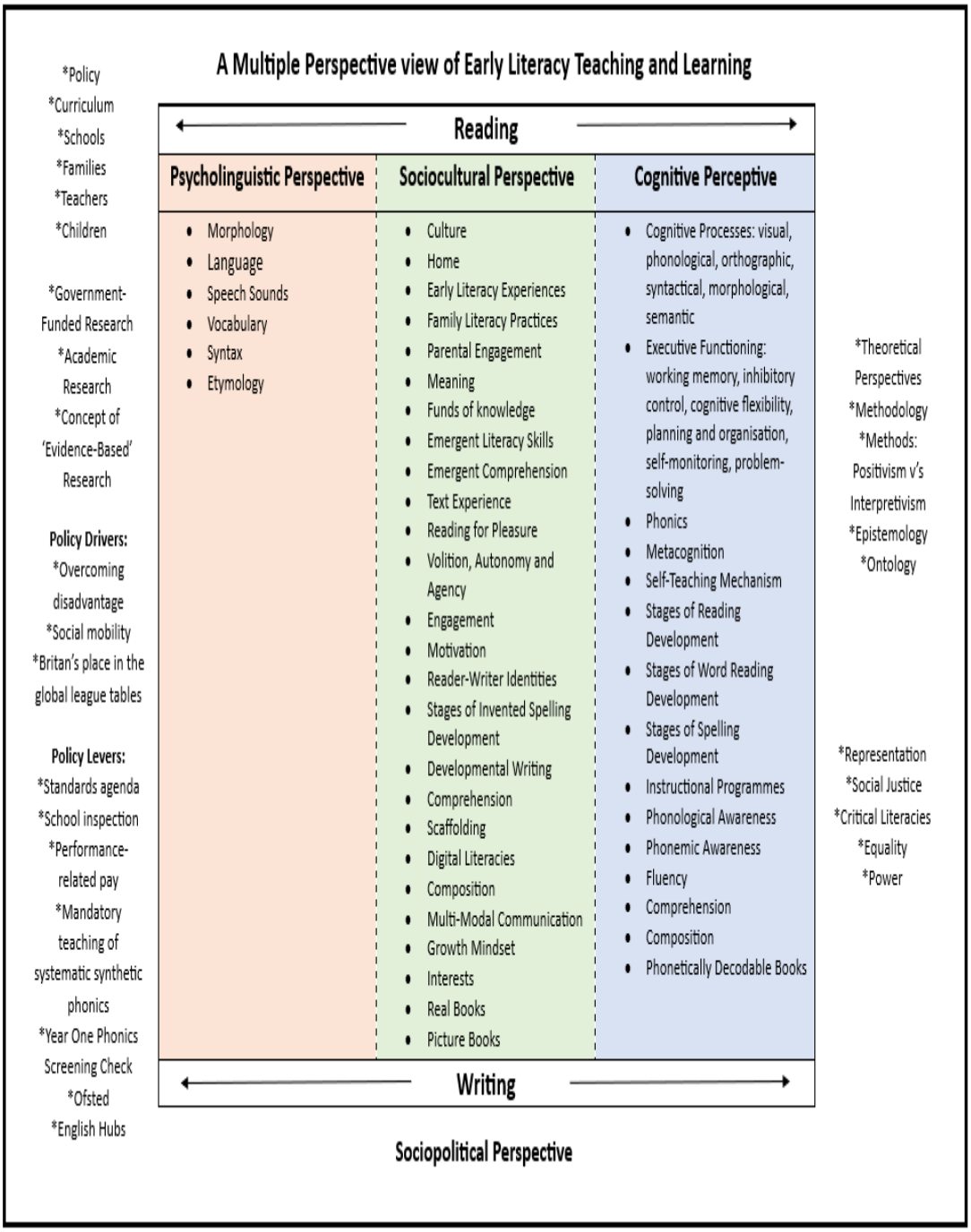
Evidently though, the 'war' still rumbles on in academia, the media and social media, and in schools and classrooms. Despite phonics taking its prominent place in policy, and driving the implementation of instructional programmes in practice, the debate is still ongoing around the effectiveness of instructional approaches and successful large-scale implementation (Shanahan, 2020). It, therefore, then remains to be seen if, in the future, the pendulum will swing back in favour of a more balanced approach. I sincerely hope that it does.

5.5.1.1: Original Contribution - A Multiple Perspective Framework for Early Literacy Instruction

As a subsidiary aim of the study was to ensure utility (Paechter, 2003), the findings have assisted me in developing a Multiple Perspective Framework, presented in Diagram 7 on the following page, which is designed to be used directly with schools and practitioners. The framework illustrates how the three perspectives (cognitive, sociocultural and psycholinguistic) sit within the socio-political perspective and highlights the complexities involved in teaching early literacy by presenting the different components involved in early reading, writing and spelling within the sociopolitics of evidence-based practice (Clegg, 2005) and policy enactment. The framework is intended to be used as a conceptual, analytical and reflective tool when working alongside practitioners, at the point of practice, to guide professional discussion. The template provides a frame for professional discussion with practitioners in order to deepen their understanding of multiple theoretical perspectives in early literacy and corresponding methods and methodologies, therefore, enabling them to view the

holistic nature of literacy learning whilst highlighting the complexities evident in practice. Additionally, the framework can also be used as a planning tool to support practitioners in planning for individual children, particularly for those who are struggling with literacy learning. In practice, it aims to move beyond a 'one-size-fits-all' pedagogy to allow for a more balanced, individualised instructional planning approach which is more responsive in supporting practitioners to meet the needs of individual children. In linking theory and practice, a practical example of its use would be using the framework to discuss a child who is struggling with learning phonics. The template would guide the discussion around the child's existing emergent literacy skills, and other factors listed, and how these could potentially affect the child's ability to learn formal phonics, leading the teacher to take action and make an individualised plan to support the child in class. A further practical example would be a discussion around a young child who does not engage in mark-making. This would require a guided discussion to unpick current practice around writing instruction whilst discussing the child's writing and spelling development and interests. Appropriate instructional changes could then be implemented including personalised strategies to support the child.

Diagram 7 - A Multiple Perspective Framework for early literacy instruction



5.6: Implications for Research and Practice

5.6.1: Key Recommendations for Research

The study's findings suggest a number of actions which seek to address the existing gap between research, policy and practice that align with existing research in this area.

5.6.1.1: The Key Role of Teachers in Educational Research

Teachers were not consulted about the PSC (Clarke and Glazzard, 2018) and this policy decision has affected teachers' practices to a great extent. Dudley-Marling (2005, p. 130) affirms the importance of teacher voice in research. She states:

> Teachers should not be reduced to 'conduits' of scripted lessons. Teachers matter, not only in terms of student achievements in individual classrooms, but also as potential contributors to the knowledge base on effective teaching. Narrow conceptions of research that silence the voices of teachers diminish the entire teaching-learning enterprise.

Arguably then, teachers are crucial to educational change (Datnow, 2020), and no matter how well intentioned and planned a 'research-based' curriculum is, if it is 'done' to teachers then it will not have the longevity compared to approaches that teachers believe in (Goldberg and Goldenberg, 2002). Dudley-Marley (2005) highlights the importance of teachers' professional knowledge and experience, and their knowledge of individual children, which are critical factors in inquiry into their own practice. Indeed, Vanderlinde and Van Braak (2010) propose that 'professional learning communities' or a 'design-based model' serve in enabling more cooperation between researchers and practitioners. In their study, they found scepticism from teachers about the value of educational research, and contended that researchers' questions were not of practical use, as well as technical and complex language, used by researchers, as presenting a barrier. Teachers wanted research that can be applied practically. Unquestionably, both teachers and researchers have a vital role to play in working reflectively in schools and communities (Dudley-Marling, 2005); therefore, it is vital that teachers are involved in action research. In light of this, I recommend that teachers, school leaders, policymakers, advocates and researchers should work together in order to break down the divide between research and practice (Goldberg and Goldenberg, 2022).

5.6.1.2: The Need for a Multidisciplinary Approach to Educational Research

Due to the complexities surrounding educational research that the study has highlighted, it is a recommendation that researchers work together in a more interdisciplinary way in order to better understand the complexities of the teaching of early literacy in the classroom. Critical educational research can provide a more comprehensive account than the opposing interpretivist and positivist paradigms by considering the political and ideological context of educational research (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2018). Spear-Swerling (2007) argues that what the field needs is a more cross-disciplinary and multi-perspective approach that seeks to bridge the research-practice divide. Indeed, cross-fertilisation to support practice and research directions (Hall, 2010) is vital; therefore, I call for methodological diversity (Kerrigan and Johnson, 2019), and the use of research from all four theoretical perspectives, to inform national policy. Acknowledging the positive contribution that RCTs make to research, it also has to be recognised that the government's favoured use of scientific methods are limited in their potential of serving the everyday interactions between students and teachers (Dudley-Marling, 2005). In fact, Lemons et al. (2014) point out that samples and populations used in RCTs change over time, and they call for a more nuanced understanding of counterfactual models and their role in establishing evidence-based practice. Indeed, Lingwood et al. (2020) points out that many sub-populations do not participate in research - particularly those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Further, there needs to be better understanding of how evidence is used to inform policy and literacy instruction beginning with a shared understanding by all stakeholders of the subtle difference between evidence-based and evidence-informed research. Collectively, we need to look beyond the science; therefore, I call for the government to recognise the value of qualitative methods as, if we are to understand how writing and reading becomes relevant to children, then we have to study them in the life spaces that they share with other children, in the multi-layered view of classrooms as opposed to global consciousness that rushes to make generalisations based on studies of western, often privileged children (Dyson, 2013).

5.6.1.3: Research Models and Context

In relation to research models, I suggest that models, more relatable to school and classroom contexts, should be considered. Joyce and Cartwright (2020) argue that an evidence-based education model should not be based on what works in RCTs but on what works in local contexts; therefore, I push for policymakers to recognise that the communities that particular schools serve continue to be diverse, serving different cultures, and call for policy to recognise local contexts. In such local contexts, there is value in action-research projects where action researchers allocate time

to the process of transforming research-based knowledge into practical actions, in cooperation with practitioners, as an integral part of the research project (Wahlgren and Aarkrog, 2021).

5.6.1.4: Evidence-Informed Instructional Programmes

I recommend that instructional phonics programmes are more robustly researched in real-life classroom contexts. The current advocacy of the widespread large-scale implementation of such programmes is what Shanahan (2020, p. 240) calls the:

> …danger of attempting to move directly from basic research findings to the formulation of public policy or to the widespread adoption of particular instructional practices without direct, rigorous, and repeated evaluations of the ability of those insights to improve instructional practice.

In truth, the problem with educational research is that when something does not work out completely, the field fails to work out what did not work, or why a particular component did not work, then fix that particular component and measure it again (Beck, 2010). However, Klein (2007) argues that there is value in conducting a 'premortem', generally applied to projects in business and medicine, but can have utility in education (Goldberg and Goldenberg, 2022). The 'premortem' assumes project failure, therefore, members work to find plausible reasons for the failure so that improvement can be pre-empted. This begs the question: how do we know if a policy is working? Is it simply a matter of measuring data generated from children's assessments? I argue that it is much more complex than this in practice. Moreover, proven programmes work in the hands of expert teachers who modify or alter them (or abandon them) based on ongoing assessment of the individual needs of children (Allington, Johnson and Day, 2002). What is needed is research that is conducted in classrooms and relates to the effectiveness of these programmes in practice (Goldberg and Goldenberg, 2022).

5.6.1.5: Policy Collaboration Involving all Stakeholders

Findings from the study have raised questions as to where pedagogy should be governed - by instructional standards or professional autonomy (Shanahan, 2020). As the findings indicate, the standards agenda primarily steers policy decisions (Hyatt, 2013). However, it is not appropriate for consecutive governments, and education ministers, to have direct power and control over curriculum and pedagogy. Political control over education research and policy should be handed

over to an independent body where all stakeholders, including policy makers, teachers and researchers, work together to progress towards policy and pedagogy that is based on robust research evidence – a reading reconciliation (Wyse and Bradbury, 2022).

5.6.1.6: Future Research

The findings from the study have generated several ideas for future research in different areas of early literacy. I am especially interested in the relationship between school and family literacy practices and ways to support families, particularly those from low SES backgrounds. Indeed, Van Steensel et al. (2011) reiterate the need for further research into how programmes that support families are carried out, and how programme content and activities are undertaken by parents and conveyed to them. Further, the theoretical underpinnings of phonics programmes are an area that needs more exploration in order to disentangle the evidence-base for these programmes. Most importantly, conducting action research alongside teachers in settings, particularly in the area of emergent literacy, is paramount in supporting researchers and teachers to work together, and in building professional learning communities that help bridge the existing gap between research and practice.

5.7: Key Recommendations for Practice

5.7.1: Emergent Literacy Practices and Teachers' Knowledge

My recommendation is that emergent literacy should make its way back into policy to ensure its recognition and implementation in practice. This would serve in reinforcing its importance for teachers in classrooms in order to address the 'gap' in their knowledge found in the study. The dissemination of emergent literacy research, through a training and coaching model, is one way to support teacher's knowledge of emergent literacy in practice.

5.7.1.1: A Multiple Perspective View of Early Literacy Teaching and Learning

In order to provide a more balanced approach in practice and meet children's individual needs, particularly those from different social backgrounds, I recommend that early literacy teaching and learning should be viewed from multiple-perspectives. The current prescriptive nature of policy with its 'phonics first and fast' approach makes it increasingly difficult for practitioners to use their professional judgment in the classroom (Clarke, 2016) and leaves little room for practitioners to apply adaptive teaching. Indeed, the perennial problem of underachievement and issues of equality need to be addressed in order to comprehend how the needs of all children, including marginalised

groups in society, should be met (Hall, 2003). As demonstrated earlier, my multiple-perspective framework serves as a practical tool which supports practitioners to view early literacy learning in the classroom more inclusively and holistically.

5.7.1.2: Policy and Practice: Importance of Children's Home Experiences

Children's home experiences should be considered when planning early literacy instruction. The findings from the study strongly suggest that children's experience of literacy in the home affects literacy development and attainment in school; therefore, supporting all children, and in particular, disadvantaged children has to begin with supporting families. As Nutbrown, Hannon and Morgan (2005) argue, reducing inequalities has to begin by addressing learning in families. Furthermore, the findings from the (EPPE) study (Sylva et al., 2004b) aptly remind us that what parents do with their child is more important than their SES; therefore, interventions that endeavour to support parents in supporting their children with early literacy are needed. Indeed, family intervention programmes that encourage emergent literacy have a greater effect when they involve families and not just children. Conversely, meta-analysis demonstrated variable effect sizes which are lower for disadvantaged children (Hannon, Nutbrown and Morgan, 2020) and in Hannon, Nutbrown and Morgan's (2020) study, using a long-duration, low-intensity model, literacy gains for the children continued for mothers with low educational levels. In light of these findings, it is important then to consider the type of intervention. Indeed, promoting parents' involvement in their child's literacy, through specific literacy activities, is more effective than simply parents listening to their child read (Senechal and Young, 2008). As mentioned in the first chapter, for the past three years, I have led a funded Family Literacy Project which has involved school practitioners visiting the homes of children who are classified as Pupil Premium (PP) to work alongside parents in a facilitator role to support them with early literacy activities based around the ORIM framework (Hannon, 1995: Hannon, Weinberger and Nutbrown, 1991). Both qualitative and quantitative data from the project's reports suggest that it had a positive impact on children's attainment and progress in relation to early literacy development and in increasing parents' confidence and knowledge of their child's literacy development and strategies to support them in the home. Drawing on this evidence, and other evidence of the value of family literacy interventions for disadvantaged children (Hannon, Nutbrown and Morgan, 2020), and home interventions (NELP, 2008), my recommendation is that governments find ways to enable schools to support families. Indeed, I strongly recommend that supporting families with early literacy should be included in government policy. Only recently, the government has funded settings in England a grant of £1,200 for quality-assured training to support mental

health (DfE, 2024). Taking into account the government's perennial drive to tackle disadvantage, I strongly recommend that the government make funding available to support families with early literacy learning. Arguably, concepts of social mobility, inequality and disadvantage are much more complex in reality than how they are presented in policy, and the government's use of policy levers will not automatically lead to better attainment and an end to inequality (Moss, 2010). I argue that supporting families in this way is part of the solution to tackling disadvantage.

5.7.1.3: Developmentally-Driven Instructional Phonics Programmes

Considering children's emergent literacy development in instructional phonics programmes would help to support in meeting children's individual needs in practice. The findings from the study demonstrate that children struggled to learn formal phonics if they had not yet developed sufficient skills in phonological and phonemic awareness, did not understand concepts of print, and were not afforded the opportunity to develop early reading behaviours through early text experience. Indeed, children who have well-developed emergent literacy skills make better progress than those children who do not possess such skills (Storch and Whitehurst, 2002); therefore, I recommend that children's instructional programmes are developmentally driven (Bear et al., 2020). Further, teachers should be able to use their professionalism and afforded opportunities to, "flip the script" (Vines, Jordan and Broemmel, 2020, p. 713) and adapt teaching in order to meet children where they are developmentally. For teachers in the classroom, there is a danger that they have a duty to impose external standards rather than responding to the needs of children and families. Encapsulating the latter statement, Pearson (2003) aptly states, "To establish their curriculum, they will look over their shoulder rather than look their students squarely in the eye" (Pearson, 2003, p. 15). Moreover, rather than focusing heavily on the technical aspects of teaching literacy, teachers need to be supported to reconsider what teaching needs to be in order to interrupt 'pedagogies of poverty' that exist in schools with low socio-economic status (Hempel-Jorgensen, 2018). Ladson-Billings' (2014) concept of culturally relevant teaching is important here; therefore, reading needs to rebalance instruction for low-income families and should be based on empirically supported pedagogical principles in schools serving both low and high-income students (Cummins, 2007).

5.6: Concluding Thoughts

As Clough and Nutbrown (2007) affirm, "Research which changes nothing – even if this is 'only' the researcher – is not research at all" (Clough and Nutbrown, 2007, p. 162). Conducting this study has certainly changed me as a practitioner and a researcher but, most importantly, I want to ensure its

future utility, for children, teachers, schools and communities. After all, they have been the driving impetus for doing the research. I will now seek to disseminate the findings of the study in order to make a difference for schools and communities. I will seek ways to support schools and communities with family literacy interventions, and work alongside teachers, in the diverse classrooms that they occupy every day, supporting them to apply research in practice. It is hoped that the Multiple-Perspective Framework that I have developed can support teachers to view and understand the landscape of early literacy learning from different theoretical perspectives and their corresponding epistemological positions. This, I argue, allows for a more responsive approach to classroom teaching that considers children's early literacy development and better meets their individual needs.

As a final thought, I am, once again, inclined to return to the 'reading wars'. I conclude that we need to get past our history (Seidenberg, 2017) and not continue to get caught up in the 'this-way or-that-way' discourse. For the majority of children, explicit phonics instruction allows them to make better progress than receiving no or unsystematic phonics instruction (Torgerson et al., 2019), but instruction should be pedagogically sound (Brooks, Beard and Ampaw-Farr, 2019). Nevertheless, as Vaughn and Fletcher (2021) point out, there are still some rather large holes in our collective knowledge when it comes to educational research. They aptly state that we know a great deal about what components of reading development are associated with outcomes, such as phonemic awareness and phonics being essential for beginning readers, but what we need to know more about are the 'how' to teach the different components of early reading to a class of children with diverse learning needs. There needs to be a recognition that reading needs to be taught from multi-perspectives rather than, to use Rosen's (2006) quote, "sledge-hammering political intervention into a matter that needs flexibility, subtlety and humanity" (Rosen, 2006, p. 123). What all stakeholders need to do is to work together to ensure that the best research-informed evidence makes its way into the classroom. Until we all work together to achieve this for all children, and break the cycle of underachievement, the reading wars will rumble on.

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Appendices

Appendix A – University of Sheffield Ethical Approval Letter

The University Of Sheffield.

Downloaded: 18/06/2024
Approved: 27/04/2021

Debbie Shorthouse
Registration number: 180131114
School of Education
Programme: EdD

Dear Debbie

PROJECT TITLE: Research into Practice: How do young children learn literacy?
APPLICATION: Reference Number 037992

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 27/04/2021 the above-named project was **approved** on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

- University research ethics application form 037992 (form submission date: 31/03/2021); (expected project end date: 20/12/2022).
- Participant information sheet 1087133 version 3 (31/03/2021).
- Participant information sheet 1087132 version 4 (31/03/2021).
- Participant information sheet 1087131 version 2 (23/02/2021).
- Participant information sheet 1087130 version 3 (31/03/2021).
- Participant information sheet 1087135 version 2 (23/02/2021).
- Participant information sheet 1087134 version 2 (23/02/2021).
- Participant consent form 1087140 version 1 (09/02/2021).
- Participant consent form 1087139 version 1 (09/02/2021).
- Participant consent form 1087138 version 1 (09/02/2021).
- Participant consent form 1087137 version 1 (09/02/2021).
- Participant consent form 1087136 version 1 (09/02/2021).

If during the course of the project you need to deviate significantly from the above-approved documentation please inform me since written approval will be required.

Your responsibilities in delivering this research project are set out at the end of this letter.

Yours sincerely

Katherine Runswick-Cole
Ethics Admin
School of Education

Please note the following responsibilities of the researcher in delivering the research project:

- The project must abide by the University's Research Ethics Policy: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/research-services/ethics-integrity/policy
- The project must abide by the University's Good Research & Innovation Practices Policy: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.671066!/file/GRIPPolicy.pdf
- The researcher must inform their supervisor (in the case of a student) or Ethics Admin (in the case of a member of staff) of any significant changes to the project or the approved documentation.
- The researcher must comply with the requirements of the law and relevant guidelines relating to security and confidentiality of personal data.
- The researcher is responsible for effectively managing the data collected both during and after the end of the project in line with best practice, and any relevant legislative, regulatory or contractual requirements.

Appendix B – Trust and School Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet – School and the Trust

1. Research Project Title:
Research into Practice: How do young children learn literacy in real-life classrooms?

2. What am I being asked to do?
Children and teachers are being invited to take part in a research project. Before they decide whether or not to participate, it is important that they understand why the research is being done and what it involves. Please take time to read the following information carefully and so that you fully understand what teachers and children are being asked to do. Please don't hesitate to ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Thank you for reading this.

3. What is the study's purpose?
The purpose of the research project is to explore how educational research meets practice in real-life classrooms in relational to literacy learning. The study seeks to further understand how all children learn literacy in real-life classrooms and how classroom practice about how children learn to read, write and spell is influenced by educational research. The study will last for 3 months where data will be collected in school. The research is being conducted as part of a Doctorate degree.

4. Who has been chosen to participate in the research?
EYFS and KS1 teachers and Literacy Leads from across the trust have been asked to participate in the research by completing an online questionnaire. EYFS and KS1 teachers and 6 children from the classes in one specific school will be asked to participate in a case study.

5. Do they have to take part?

Taking part in the research is voluntary. It is up to individual participants to decide whether or not to take part. If they decide to take part, they will be given an appropriate information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form), however, they will be able to withdraw from the research at any time, for which they do not have to give a reason, without any negative consequences. It has to be noted though that, if participants do withdraw, whilst they can withdraw from any on-going or future data collection, their data cannot be removed from the study beyond this point. It will be removed within 5 years after completion of the study.

6. What will participants be asked to do?

Phase 1 - On the 12th of April an online questionnaire will be sent to EYFS and KS1 teachers and Literacy Leads across the trust which will seek to elicit their views on how they teach literacy and how this relates to educational research. The questionnaires will be available to complete online for three weeks up until the 3rd of May.
Phase 2 - During the period of September to December, I will be carrying out a case study in one school. I will conduct the research on Monday and/or Tuesday where I will spend time in each of the classes, from Nursery to Year Two. I will observe the children closely as they engage in literacy activities and lessons, read with individual children, take field notes and collect samples of children's writing.

In this time, I will also be conducting interviews with teachers who have consented to participate in the research. These interviews will focus around classroom practice in the teaching of early reading, writing and spelling and how this reflects educational research. The 6 children who are participating in the study may also be discussed during these interviews. Teachers will also be given the opportunity to keep a reflective journal.

7. How will the interviews work?

Child Interviews – The interviews for children will take place in the school setting with myself (the researcher).

Teacher Interviews - The interviews will take place in the school setting with myself (the researcher).

The interviews, for both sets of participants, will be a semi-structured interview which means that I will have a set of pre-prepared questions to ask them, however, participants will also have the opportunity throughout the interviews to talk about issues that are pertinent to them and elaborate on these. If there is scope, there may be a possibility that I interview the parents of the 6 children participating in the study to elicit their views on their children's literacy learning at home and school. They may also be asked to share examples of literacy activities that their children undertake at home.

8. How will the interviews be recorded?

Participants will have a choice as to whether they wish their interview to be recorded using audio audibly. In giving consent, participants are agreeing permission for me to record the interview using audio media. This will enable me to transcribe the interview at a later time which will then be stored electronically on my personal OneDrive which is password protected. The audio recordings of the interview will be used only for analysis. No other use will be made of them without participants' written permission and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.

9. What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

There are no disadvantages or risks in taking part in the research. My research aims to explore how children learn literacy in real-life classrooms which, inevitably, means that I will explore teaching. My research is not meant to give the impression to practitioners that I am doing formal lesson observations – it is exploratory and, therefore, I will not be making judgments about practice, just exploring practice to see what I can learn about the link between educational research and practice.

10. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

There are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, however, with the potential dissemination of the research, it is hoped that 'taking part in the research will have benefits for participants and other practitioners across the trust in gaining a deeper understanding of how young children learn literacy. It will give myself, as researcher, and practitioners, opportunities to engage in professional discussion about classroom practice and educational theory and how all children can be supported in learning literacy.

11. Will participants' participation be confidential?

After reading the Information Sheet, if participants agree to participate in the research, they will be asked to give informed consent by signing a Consent Form, stating that they are willing to consent to take part in the research. As I view 'consent' in research as an ongoing process, I will check verbally that all participants remain willing participants throughout the research.

All the information that I collect about participants during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential and will only be accessible by myself. Field-notes from observations, audio transcripts, interview transcripts etc. will be stored by myself manually in a locked safe and, electronically, on a personal OneDrive which is password protected. This collection and storage of data will adhere to GDPR guidelines. I will collect limited personal data about participants and will use pseudonyms in the writing up of the research, including its potential publication. However, I am aware of the possibility that the research might provide possibilities for the identification of individuals but will take the necessary steps in order to prevent this from happening by not highlighting context-specific information.
It also has to be noted that, if participants wish to be named in publications or reports on the research findings, they will be given the opportunity to do this when information about the project is shared.

12. What is the legal basis for processing participants' personal data?
According to data protection legislation, I am required to inform you that the legal basis I am applying in order to process your personal data is that 'processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest' (Article 6(1) (e)). Further information can be found in the University's Privacy Notice https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general.'

13. What will happen to the data collected, and the results of the research project?
The data that I collect (interview transcripts, field-notes, notes from reflective journal, samples of children's work, audio recording and transcripts) will be stored manually by myself in a coded safe, and electronically, on a personal OneDrive which is password protected. All data will be anonymised so individuals cannot be identified. In the writing up of the research and possible publication, pseudonyms will be used in order to protect individual identities. During the writing up of the research, I may contact participants for their views on whether I have represented their views/thoughts accurately in the data. A copy of the research study will be available from the University of Sheffield upon its completion.
The data will be stored manually and electronically for 5 years after the publication of the research, after which it will be destroyed. However, due to the nature of this research it is very likely that other researchers may find the data collected to be useful in answering future research questions. If this is the case, I will ask for participants' explicit consent for their data to be shared in this way.

14. Who is organising and funding the research?

The research is being undertaken as part of doctoral study and no external funding is involved.
15. Who is the Data Controller?

The University of Sheffield will act as the Data Controller for this study. This means that the University is responsible for looking after your information and using it properly.
16. Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This project has been ethically approved via the University of Sheffield's Ethics Review Procedure, as administered by the Department of Education.

17. What if something goes wrong and participants wish to complain about the research?

If participants wish to make a complaint about any part of the research study, such as treatment by the researcher or an adverse event, then, in the first instance, they should contact myself. However, if they feel that their complaint has not been handled to their satisfaction, then they can contact the Head of Department, who will then escalate the complaint through the appropriate channels. If the complaint relates to how personal data has been handled, they can contact The University of Sheffield Data Protection Officer dataprotection@sheffield.ac.uk. Further information about how to raise a complaint can be found in the University's Privacy Notice: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general. Further, if they feel that their complaint has not been handled to their satisfaction, then they can contact the Information Commissioner's Office.

18. Contact for further information

If you have any questions about my research study or would like to obtain further information, then please contact me, in the first instance, or my supervisor.

Finally, a huge thank you to you for your permission in allowing me to conduct my research study in the trust.

Appendix C – Information Sheet for Parents as Gatekeepers

Participant Information Sheet – Parent (Gatekeeper)

1. What am I being asked to do?
Your child is being invited to take part in a research project. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

2. What is the project's purpose?
The purpose of the research project is to explore how children learn literacy in classrooms and how this links to educational theory. The study will last for 3 months, beginning in September 2021, where data will be collected in school and from yourself.

3.Why has my child been chosen?
Your child has been chosen to participate in the research because they attend the school where I am doing the research.

4. Does my child have to take part?
No! Taking part in the research is voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether or not you wish your child to take part. If you decide that you want them to take part you will be given this Information Sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a Consent Form for them). You can still withdraw permission at any time without any negative consequences. You do not have to give a reason. Your child will also be asked to give their permission, using an age-appropriate form. Please note, however, that if you do withdraw your child from the research, whilst you can withdraw from any on-going or future data collection, their data cannot be removed from the study once the data have been anonymised and included within a large dataset.

5. What will happen to my child if they take part? Will them taking part in this project be kept confidential?
During the period of September to December 2021, I will be carrying out a case study in school where I will be observing your child as they engage in literacy lessons. I will also chat to your child in school about how they learn to read and write. These interviews or 'formal chats' will take place in school. Myself (the researcher) and your child (as the participant) will be present for the interview. In giving consent, you are agreeing for me to record these interviews on audio media which I will write down afterwards. I may also ask you to collect and share with me any literacy activities that your child does at home.

All the information that I collect, known as data, about your child will be kept strictly confidential and will only be accessed by myself. I will store the anonymised data in a coded safe and, electronically, on a personal OneDrive which is password protected. This is in line with GDPR guidelines relating to the storing of the data. I will collect limited personal data about your child and use pseudonyms (a made-up name that your child has chosen) in the writing up of the research. Having said this, I am aware of the possibility that the research might provide possibilities for the identification of individuals but I will take the necessary steps in order to prevent this from happening by not highlighting context-specific information. Please note that, if you or your child wishes to be named in the research findings, then they or you can inform me at this stage.

The anonymised data will be stored electronically until the research is published or up to a maximum of 3 years, after which it will be destroyed.
A copy of the research study will be available from the University of Sheffield upon its completion.

6. What is the legal basis for processing my personal data?
According to data protection legislation, I am required to inform you that the legal basis I am applying in order to process your personal data is that 'processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest' (Article 6(1) (e)). Further information can be found in the University's Privacy Notice https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general.'

7. Who is organising and funding the research?
The research is being undertaken as part of doctoral study and no external funding is involved.

8. Who is the Data Controller?
The University of Sheffield will act as the Data Controller for this study. This means that the University is responsible for looking after your information and using it properly.

9. Who has ethically reviewed the project?
This project has been ethically approved via the University of Sheffield's Ethics Review Procedure, as administered by the Department of Education.

10. What if something goes wrong and I wish to complain about the research?
If you wish to make a complaint about any part of the research study, in the first instance, please contact myself. However, if you feel your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction, then you can contact the Head of Department, who will then escalate the complaint through the appropriate channels. If the complaint relates to how your personal data has been handled, you can contact The University of Sheffield Data Protection Officer dataprotection@sheffield.ac.uk. Further information about how to raise a complaint can be found in the University's Privacy Notice: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general. Further, if you feel that your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction, then you can contact the Information Commissioner's Office.

11. Contact for further information
If you have any questions about my research study or would like to obtain further information, then please contact me, in the first instance, or my supervisor.

You are advised to keep a copy of the 'Information Sheet' and the 'Consent from'.

Finally, a huge thank you to you for agreeing for your child to take part in this research.

Appendix D – Parents as Gatekeeper Consent For

Research Study Consent Form – Parents as Gatekeepers

Please tick the appropriate boxes	**Yes**	**No**
Taking Part in the Project		
I have read and understood the project information sheet dated DD/MM/2021 and the project has been fully explained to me. (If you will answer No to this question, please do not proceed with this consent form until you are fully aware of what your participation in the project will mean.)	☐	☐
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	☐	☐
I agree for my child to take part in the project. I understand that taking part in the project will include them being observed participating in literacy activities in school, being interviewed and examples of their work being collected by the researcher.	☐	☐
I understand that them taking part is voluntary and that I can withdraw them from the study before September 2022. *(After this date, it will not be possible for their data to be withdrawn from the research as it will have been anonymised and included within a large dataset, therefore, their data cannot be removed from the study beyond this point.)* I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part and there will be no adverse consequences if I choose to withdraw.	☐	☐
How my information will be used during and after the project		
I understand my personal details such as name, phone number, address and email address etc. will not be revealed to people outside the project.	☐	☐
I understand and agree that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. I understand that I will not be named in these outputs unless I specifically request this.	☐	☐
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	☐	☐
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers may use my data in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	☐	☐
I give permission for the examples of my child's literacy learning, audio recordings and transcripts and notes from observations that my child provides to be deposited on a password protected PC that belongs to the researcher so it can be used for future research and learning.	☐	☐
So that the information you provide can be used legally by the researchers		
I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials generated as part of this project to The University of Sheffield.	☐	☐

Name of Participant [printed] Signature Date

Name of Researcher [printed] Signature Date

Appendix E – Children's 'Read Aloud' Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet for Children
(To be read to the child where appropriate)

What is research?
Research is a way of finding out answers to questions when we don't know enough.

Why are you doing this research?
I am doing this research to find out more about how children learn to read, write and spell and I would like to know how you learn to read, write and spell in school.

Do I have to take part?
No! You don't have to take part if you don't want to. After we've read the Information Sheet, you can talk to your mum, dad or carer before you decide. If you don't want to take part, just say no. It won't make a difference to anything that happens in school.

What will happen if I take part?
1. If you'd like to take part, I will ask your mum, dad or carer to sign their name on a form to agree that they'd like you to take part. I will also ask you to sign a form to say that you agree to take part.
2. I will then come into your literacy lessons in school and look at your writing and read with you. I may also ask you some questions about your learning. This is called an interview. I will make a recording of the interview.

How long will it take?
I'll be working in your classroom from September until December.

Will anyone know what I say in the interview? Will anyone see my writing? Will anyone hear me reading?

I will be the only person to listen to the recordings. Once I've listened to them, I will write down what you've said and store it on my computer. The writing that I collect from you will also be stored on my computer. They will be stored safely with me. I may share them with other researchers. After this, I will write about what I have learnt. When I do this, I will not use your name. You will be able to choose a pretend name. This is so that anyone who reads it will not know exactly who you are.
What if I don't want to do the research anymore?

Just tell your mum, dad, carer or teacher at any time. Even if you've started answering questions in the interview or working with me in the classroom, you can still stop any time.
What happens to what you find out?

I will write about what I find out in what is called a thesis which is like a book that will be read by others at the University of Sheffield. In the future, I also want to write a book and write for magazines to share what I find out with as many people as possible.
If you have any questions, please ask your mum, dad or carer, or myself.

Thank you for giving me your time to go through this information with you.

Appendix F – Children's Consent Form

Research Study Consent Form – Children

Please tick the appropriate boxes	Yes	No
Taking Part in the study		
I have read and understood the study information sheet dated 06/10/2021 or the study has been explained to me by Mrs Shorthouse. (If you will answer No to this question, please do not answer any of the other questions.)	☐	☐
I have been able to ask questions about the study.	☐	☐
I agree to take part in the study. I understand that taking part in the study will include being interviewed using audio recording and watched in lessons in school. I will also be asked to share my writing and drawings.	☐	☐
I understand that my taking part is my choice and that I can stop taking part from the study if I choose. I do not have to give any reasons why I don't want to take part and Mrs Shorthouse will stop doing her research.	☐	☐
How will what Mrs Shorthouse finds out be used?		
I understand my name will not be used when Mrs Shorthouse writes what she has found out. If I want my name to be used, Mrs Shorthouse will do this.	☐	☐
I understand and agree that Mrs Shorthouse may use the words that I've said but not my name.	☐	☐
I understand and agree that other researchers may see what I have said in my interviews and may see my learning from lessons. They will have to agree to not use my name like Mrs Shorthouse has done.	☐	☐
I understand and agree that other researchers may use what I have said in my interviews and what Mrs Shorthouse has collected from lessons in reports, books and magazines. I agree that my name will not be used in any books, reports and magazines.	☐	☐
I give permission for my reading writing and drawings, my interview recording and notes about my reading and writing that I have given to be stored on Mrs Shorthouse's computer so it can be used for future research and learning.	☐	☐
So that the information you give can be used properly by the researcher		
I agree to give copyright for the information that Mrs Shorthouse has collected to The University of Sheffield.	☐	☐

Name of Participant [printed] Signature Date

Name of Researcher [printed] Signature Date

Appendix G – Teachers' Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet - Teacher

1. Research Project Title:
Research into Practice: How do young children learn literacy in real-life classrooms?

2. What am I being asked to do?
You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether or not to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please don't hesitate to ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

3.What is the project's purpose?
The purpose of the research project is to explore how educational research theory meets practice in real-life classrooms in relation to literacy learning. The study seeks to further understand how all children learn literacy in real-life classrooms and how classroom practice about how children learn to read, write and spell reflects educational research. The study will last for 3 months where data will be collected in school. The research is being conducted as part of a Doctorate degree.

4. Why have I been chosen?
You have been chosen to participate in the research because you are a teacher of early literacy in school. 6 teachers and 6 children in school have been invited to participate in the research by participating in a case study.

5. Do I have to take part?
Taking part in the research is voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this Information Sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a Consent Form) and you can still withdraw at any time without any negative consequences. You do not have to give a reason. If you wish to withdraw at any point, then please contact me. Please note, however, that if you do withdraw from the research, whilst you can withdraw from any on-going or future data collection, your data cannot be removed from the study once the data have been anonymised and included within a large dataset.

6. What will happen to me if I take part? What do I have to do?
During the period of September to December, I will be carrying out a case study in school. I will be in school on Monday and/or Tuesday carrying out my research. I will spend time in each of the classes, from Nursery to Year Two, observing the children closely as they engage in literacy activities and lessons, reading with individual children, taking field notes and collecting samples of children's writing. I will only focus on the children for whom parents' have given their consent for their child to participate. In this time, I will also be conducting interviews with teachers who have consented to participate in the research. These interviews will focus around classroom practice in the teaching of early reading, writing and spelling and how this reflects educational research. You will also be given the opportunity to keep a reflective journal.

7. How will the interviews work?
The interviews will take place in the school setting. Myself (the researcher) and yourself (as the participant) will be present. The interview will be a semi-structured interview which means that I

will have a set of pre-prepared questions to ask you, however, you will also have the opportunity throughout the interview to talk about issues that are pertinent to you and elaborate on these.

8. Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?
You have a choice as to whether you would like to be recorded. In giving consent, you are agreeing for me to record the interview using audio media. This will enable me to transcribe the interview at a later time which will then be stored electronically on my personal OneDrive which is password protected. The audio recordings of the interview will be used only for analysis. No other use will be made of them without your written permission and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.

9. What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?
There are no disadvantages or risks in taking part in the research. My research aims to explore how children learn literary in real-life classrooms which, inevitable, means that I will explore teaching. My research is not meant to give the impression that I am doing formal lesson observations – it is exploratory and, therefore, I will not be making judgments about practice, just exploring practice to see what I can learn about the link between educational research and practice.

10. What are the possible benefits of taking part?
Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that ′taking part in the research will have benefits for participants in gaining a deeper understanding of how young children learn literacy. It will give myself, as researcher, and you, as practitioners, the opportunity to discuss classroom practice and how we can support all children in learning literacy.

11. Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?
After reading this information, if you agree to participate in the research, you will be asked to give informed consent by signing a Consent Form. As I view research as an ongoing process, I will, throughout the research, continue to check verbally that you are still a willing participant.
All the information that I collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential and will only be accessible by myself. Field-notes from observations, audio transcripts, interview transcripts etc. will stored by myself manually in a coded safe and, electronically, on a personal OneDrive which is password protected. This will adhere to GDPR guidelines relating to the storing of the data. I will collect limited personal data about you and use pseudonyms in the writing up of the research and its publication. However, I am aware of the possibility that the research might provide possibilities for identification of individuals but will take the necessary steps in orders to prevent this from happening by not highlighting context-specific information. Please note that, if you wish to be named in publications or reports on the research findings, then please inform me at this stage.

12. What is the legal basis for processing my personal data?
According to data protection legislation, I am required to inform you that the legal basis I am applying in order to process your personal data is that 'processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest' (Article 6(1) (e)). Further information can be found in the University's Privacy Notice https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general.'

13. What will happen to the data collected, and the results of the research project?

The data that I collect (interview transcripts, field-notes, notes form the reflective journal, samples of children's work, audio recordings and transcripts) will be stored manually by myself in a coded safe, and electronically, on a personal OneDrive which is password protected. All data will be anonymised so individuals cannot be identified. In the writing up of the research and possible publication, pseudonyms will be used in order to protect individual identities. During the writing up of the research, I may contact you to for your views on whether I have represented your views/thoughts accurately in the data. A copy of the research study will be available from the University of Sheffield upon its completion.
The data will be stored manually and electronically for 5 years after the publication of the research, after which it will be destroyed. However, due to the nature of this research it is very likely that other researchers may find the data collected to be useful in answering future research questions. I will ask for your explicit consent for your data to be shared in this way.

14. Who is organising and funding the research?
The research is being undertaken as part of doctoral study and no external funding is involved.

15. Who is the Data Controller?

The University of Sheffield will act as the Data Controller for this study. This means that the University is responsible for looking after your information and using it properly.

16. Who has ethically reviewed the project?
This project has been ethically approved via the University of Sheffield's Ethics Review Procedure, as administered by the Department of Education.

17. What if something goes wrong and I wish to complain about the research?
If you wish to make a complaint about any part of the research study, such as treatment by the researcher or an adverse event, then, in the first instance, please contact myself. However, if you feel your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction, then you can contact the Head of Department, who will then escalate the complaint through the appropriate channels. If the complaint relates to how your personal data has been handled, you can contact The University of Sheffield Data Protection Officer dataprotection@sheffield.ac.uk. Further information about how to raise a complaint can be found in the University's Privacy Notice: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general. Further, if you feel that your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction, then you can contact the Information Commissioner's Office.

18. Contact for further information
If you have any questions about my research study or would like to obtain further information, then please contact me, in the first instance, or my supervisor.

You are advised to keep a copy of the 'Information Sheet' and the 'Consent from'.

Finally, a huge thank you to you for agreeing to take part in this research study.

Appendix H – Teachers' Consent Form

Research Study Consent Form – Teacher

Please tick the appropriate boxes	**Yes**	**No**
Taking Part in the Project		
I have read and understood the project information sheet dated 06/10/2021 or the project has been fully explained to me. (If you will answer No to this question, please do not proceed with this consent form until you are fully aware of what your participation in the project will mean.)	☐	☐
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	☐	☐
I agree to take part in the project. I understand that taking part in the project will include being interviewed using audio recording and being observed (informally) during literacy lessons and sharing examples of my planning and (possibly) a journal.	☐	☐
I understand that my taking part is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study before September 2022. *(After this date, it will not be possible for your data to be withdrawn from the research as it will have been anonymised and included within a large dataset, therefore, your data cannot be removed from the study beyond this point.)* I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part and there will be no adverse consequences if I choose to withdraw.	☐	☐
How my information will be used during and after the project		
I understand my personal details such as name, phone number, address and email address etc. will not be revealed to people outside the project.	☐	☐
I understand and agree that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. I understand that I will not be named in these outputs unless I specifically request this.	☐	☐
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	☐	☐
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers may use my data in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	☐	☐
I give permission for the interview audio recording and transcripts, transcripts from lesson observations, samples of literacy planning, and possibly, journal notes that I provide to be deposited on a password protected PC belonging to the researcher so it can be used for future research and learning.	☐	☐
So that the information you provide can be used legally by the researchers		
I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials generated as part of this project to The University of Sheffield.	☐	☐

Name of Participant [printed] Signature: Date:

Name of Researcher [printed] Signature: Date:

Appendix I - Teaching Assistant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet – Teaching Assistant

Research Project Title:
Research into Practice: How do young children learn literacy in real-life classrooms?

1. What am I being asked to do?
You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether or not to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please don't hesitate to ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

2. What is the project's purpose?
The purpose of the research project is to explore how educational research theory meets practice in real-life classrooms in relation to literacy learning. The study seeks to further understand how all children learn literacy in real-life classrooms and how classroom practice about how children learn to read, write and spell reflects educational research. The study will last for 3 months where data will be collected in school. The research is being conducted as part of a Doctorate degree.

3. Why have I been chosen?
You have been chosen to participate in the research because you are a teacher of early literacy in school. 6 teachers and 6 children in school have been invited to participate in the research by participating in a case study.

4. Do I have to take part?
Taking part in the research is voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this Information Sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a Consent Form) and you can still withdraw at any time without any negative consequences. You do not have to give a reason. If you wish to withdraw at any point, then please contact me. Please note, however, that if you do withdraw from the research, whilst you can withdraw from any on-going or future data collection, your data cannot be removed from the study once the data have been anonymised and included within a large dataset.

5. What will happen to me if I take part? What do I have to do?
During the period of September to December, I will be carrying out a case study in school. I will be in school on Monday and/or Tuesday carrying out my research. I will spend time in each of the classes, from Nursery to Year Two, observing the children closely as they engage in literacy activities and lessons, reading with individual children, taking field notes and collecting samples of children's writing. I will only focus on the children for whom parents' have given their consent for their child to participate. In this time, I will also be conducting interviews with teachers who have consented to participate in the research. These interviews will focus around classroom practice in the teaching of early reading, writing and spelling and how this reflects educational research. You will also be given the opportunity to keep a reflective journal.

6. How will the interviews work?
The interviews will take place in the school setting. Myself (the researcher) and yourself (as the participant) will be present. The interview will be a semi-structured interview which means that I

will have a set of pre-prepared questions to ask you, however, you will also have the opportunity throughout the interview to talk about issues that are pertinent to you and elaborate on these.

7. Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?
You have a choice as to whether you would like to be recorded. In giving consent, you are agreeing for me to record the interview using audio media. This will enable me to transcribe the interview at a later time which will then be stored electronically on my personal OneDrive which is password protected. The audio recordings of the interview will be used only for analysis. No other use will be made of them without your written permission and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.

8. What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?
There are no disadvantages or risks in taking part in the research. My research aims to explore how children learn literary in real-life classrooms which, inevitably, means that I will explore teaching. My research is not meant to give the impression that I am doing formal lesson observations – it is exploratory and, therefore, I will not be making judgments about practice, just exploring practice to see what I can learn about the link between educational research and practice.

9.What are the possible benefits of taking part?
Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that ′taking part in the research will have benefits for participants in gaining a deeper understanding of how young children learn literacy. It will give myself, as researcher, and you, as practitioners, the opportunity to discuss classroom practice and how we can support all children in learning literacy.

10. Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?
After reading this information, if you agree to participate in the research, you will be asked to give informed consent by signing a Consent Form. As I view research as an ongoing process, I will, throughout the research, continue to check verbally that you are still a willing participant.
All the information that I collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential and will only be accessible by myself. Field-notes from observations, audio transcripts, interview transcripts etc. will be stored by myself manually in a coded safe and, electronically, on a personal OneDrive which is password protected. This will adhere to GDPR guidelines relating to the storing of the data. I will collect limited personal data about you and use pseudonyms in the writing up of the research and its publication. However, I am aware of the possibility that the research might provide possibilities for identification of individuals but will take the necessary steps in order to prevent this from happening by not highlighting context-specific information. Please note that, if you wish to be named in publications or reports on the research findings, then please inform me at this stage.

11. What is the legal basis for processing my personal data?
According to data protection legislation, I am required to inform you that the legal basis I am applying in order to process your personal data is that 'processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest' (Article 6(1) (e)). Further information can be found in the University's Privacy Notice https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general.'

12. What will happen to the data collected, and the results of the research project?

The data that I collect (interview transcripts, field-notes, notes form the reflective journal, samples of children's work, audio recordings and transcripts) will be stored manually by myself in a coded safe, and electronically, on a personal OneDrive which is password protected. All data will be anonymised so individuals cannot be identified. In the writing up of the research and possible publication, pseudonyms will be used in order to protect individual identities. During the writing up of the research, I may contact you to for your views on whether I have represented your views/thoughts accurately in the data. A copy of the research study will be available from the University of Sheffield upon its completion.

The data will be stored manually and electronically for 5 years after the publication of the research, after which it will be destroyed. However, due to the nature of this research it is very likely that other researchers may find the data collected to be useful in answering future research questions. I will ask for your explicit consent for your data to be shared in this way.

13. Who is organising and funding the research?
The research is being undertaken as part of doctoral study and no external funding is involved.

14. Who is the Data Controller?
The University of Sheffield will act as the Data Controller for this study. This means that the University is responsible for looking after your information and using it properly.

15. Who has ethically reviewed the project?
This project has been ethically approved via the University of Sheffield's Ethics Review Procedure, as administered by the Department of Education.

16. What if something goes wrong and I wish to complain about the research?
If you wish to make a complaint about any part of the research study, such as treatment by the researcher or an adverse event, then, in the first instance, please contact myself. However, if you feel your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction, then you can contact the Head of Department, who will then escalate the complaint through the appropriate channels. If the complaint relates to how your personal data has been handled, you can contact The University of Sheffield Data Protection Officer dataprotection@sheffield.ac.uk. Further information about how to raise a complaint can be found in the University's Privacy Notice: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general. Further, if you feel that your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction, then you can contact the Information Commissioner's Office.

Contact for further information
If you have any questions about my research study or would like to obtain further information, then please contact me, in the first instance, or my supervisor.

You are advised to keep a copy of the 'Information Sheet' and the 'Consent from'.

Finally, a huge thank you to you for agreeing to take part in this research.

Appendix J – Teaching Assistant Consent Form

Research Study Consent Form – Teaching Assistant

Please tick the appropriate boxes	**Yes**	**No**
Taking Part in the Project		
I have read and understood the project information sheet dated 06/10/2021 or the project has been fully explained to me. (If you will answer No to this question, please do not proceed with this consent form until you are fully aware of what your participation in the project will mean.)	☐	☐
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	☐	☐
I agree to take part in the project. I understand that taking part in the project will include being interviewed using audio recording and being observed (informally) during literacy lessons and sharing examples of my planning and (possibly) a journal.	☐	☐
I understand that my taking part is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study before September 2022. *(After this date, it will not be possible for your data to be withdrawn from the research as it will have been anonymised and included within a large dataset, therefore, your data cannot be removed from the study beyond this point.)* I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part and there will be no adverse consequences if I choose to withdraw.	☐	☐
How my information will be used during and after the project		
I understand my personal details such as name, phone number, address and email address etc. will not be revealed to people outside the project.	☐	☐
I understand and agree that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. I understand that I will not be named in these outputs unless I specifically request this.	☐	☐
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	☐	☐
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers may use my data in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	☐	☐
I give permission for the interview audio recording and transcripts, transcripts from lesson observations, samples of literacy planning, and possibly, journal notes that I provide to be deposited on a password protected PC belonging to the researcher so it can be used for future research and learning.	☐	☐
So that the information you provide can be used legally by the researchers		
I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials generated as part of this project to The University of Sheffield.	☐	☐

Name of participant [printed] Signature: Date:

Name of Researcher [printed] Signature: Date:

Appendix K – Email Granting Permission to use Early Literacy Assessment

Dear Debbie,

One-time non-exclusive world rights in the English language for print and electronic formats are granted for your requested use of the selections below.
Permission fee due: No Charge
This permission is subject to the following conditions:

1. A credit line will be prominently placed and include: the author(s), title of book, editor, copyright holder, year of publication and "Reprinted with permission of Guilford Press" (or author's name where indicated).

2. Permission is granted for one-time use only as specified in your request. Rights herein do not apply to future editions, revisions or other derivative works.

3. This permission does not include the right for the publisher of the new work to grant others permission to photocopy or otherwise reproduce this material except for versions made by non-profit organizations for use by the blind or handicapped persons.

4. The permission granted herein does not apply to quotations from other sources that have been incorporated in the Selection.

5. The requestor warrants that the material shall not be used in any manner which may be considered derogatory to this title, content, or authors of the material or to Guilford Press.

6. Guilford retains all rights not specifically granted in this letter.

Best wishes,
Angela

Guilford Publications, Inc.
370 Seventh Avenue, Suite 1200
New York, NY 10001-1020

Appendix L - Example of Recording Sheet

Analysis of Reading Strategies

Book	
Total number of words in book	

Word Reading

Cognitive				Syntactic Clue	Semantic Clue				
Automatic reading of the word	Phonics – sounding out the word	Analogy	Graphophonic – visual and phonetic	– order in which English arranges words in a sentence – rules and conventions	background knowledge/meaning	Re-reading	Picture clue	Textual clues – style and structure	Biographical clues – physical form of book

Miscues (errors)		Analysis
Actual Word	Word Read (error)	

Comprehension

Retrieval question & Answer	Inference question	Evaluation question

Appendix M – Questions from Children's Structured Activities

Structured Activities with Children – Questions/Question Prompts

1. Reading

Puppet (PJ Mask/Paw Patrol Character for EYFS and Marvel Character for KS1)

Subject	**Question**
Warm-up – ask directly to children	What do you like doing at school? Do you have a favourite book? Can you read? Are you a good reader?
Purpose - Ask for puppet	Can you tell … why do people need to read? Can you tell … what it means if you can't read?
Instructional approaches	Can you tell … what is reading? Can you tell … how do you learn to read? Can you tell … what is phonics? Can you explain to … why you do phonics lessons? Can you tell … who is a good reader in your class/? What makes them a good reader?
Instructional Approaches	Can you tell … when you reading in school? *(Ask further prompts – what do you do? Who helps you?*
Texts	Which book do you think … would prefer/like to you read? Why? Which book do you think your teacher would want … you/the puppet to read? Why? (*Present a scheme and a non-scheme book*).
Strategies	Can you tell … what do you do when you come to a word that you can't read when you're reading? Do you ever do anything else? Can you explain how … understands the story/what they're reading?
Individual needs/instructional approach	If … was finding it difficult to read, how would you help them? How does your teacher help children who are finding it difficult to read?

Home – image the puppet went to your house and did what you did	Can you tell … what books do you read at home? Can you tell … if someone reads to you at home? Who? Siblings? Can you tell … if you have a bedtime story? Can you tell … if you have books in your house? Can you tell … where you keep your books? Are they on a bookshelf? Can you tell … if you visit book a library/bookshop?
Interests	Can you tell … what kind of books you like to read at home? Why?
Feelings/choice	Can you tell … how to you feel when reading? Do you have a choice in what books you read in school/at home??

2. Writing

Subject	**Question**
Warm-up – ask directly to children	What do you like doing at school?
Unpicking writing/instructional approaches/likes/dislikes	Can you tell … what writing is? Can you write? Are you a good writer? Why? Can you tell … how you learn to write? Can you tell … how you learn to make up sentences? Can you tell … how you learn to spell? Can you tell … how you learn about words like nouns and verbs? How does this help your writing? Can you tell … how you write letters? Can you tell … what your teacher says about your writing? Can you tell … what kind of writing you like to do? Can you tell … who is a good writer in your class? What makes them a good writer?
Purpose	Can you tell … why people need to write? Who reads your writing? Why? Can you tell … what it means it you can't write?
Meeting needs/Instructional approaches	If … was finding it difficult to write, how would you help them? How does your teacher help children who are finding it difficult to write?

Home – image the puppet went to your house and did what you did	Can you tell … if you write at home? What do you write? Who do you write for? Does someone write with you at home? Who? Siblings? Can you tell … if you have paper and pencils to write with in your house? Would … see other people in your house writing? What? Why?
Feelings/choice/interests	Can you tell … how to you feel about writing? Do you like writing? Why/why not? Can you tell … if you have a choice about what you write about in school/at home?

Appendix N – Teacher Interview Questions

Questions	What do I want to find out?
PERSONAL DETAILS	
1. What class do you currently teach? **How many years have you been teaching?** **What age ranges have you taught in your teaching career?** **What roles have you held during your career?**	Experience of participants Any difference in knowledge/practice of theory/research with teachers who've taught longer?
QUALIFICATIONS	
2. What qualification do you hold? BEd QTS PGCE	Any correlation in reference to research with different qualifications Length of course etc.
ITT and Educational Research	
3. What theories/educational research do you remember from ITT in relation to reading and writing? **Further prompts** - Are there any particular theories/research that influences your practice from your ITT? Is there any particular individual that you learned about that has influenced your practice? Why?	What theories/research ITT teach Reference to particular 'giants' and individuals in the field Theories that are relevant in national policy Teachers' beliefs – theoretical orientation
READING	
4. How do you believe that children learn to read? **Further prompts –** How do you teach … phonics/shared reading/guided reading/reading for pleasure/fluency/vocabulary etc. What is your preferred way of teaching reading? Why? Which aspects do you feel are the most important? Do you follow a particular curricular/programme? What are the features of that programme that work/don't work?	Theory/research examples/instructional approaches Theory/research behind the programme

What are the benefits/ challenges of teaching in this way? Any principles that are important to you when teaching reading?	
WRITING	
5. How do you believe that children learn to write? **Further prompts –**How do you teaching composition/spelling/handwriting/grammar? What is your preferred way of teaching writing? Why? Which principles do you feel are the most important when teaching writing? Do you follow a particular curricular/programme? What are the features of that programme do you believe work/don't work? What are the benefits/ challenges of teaching in this way? **6. Have you heard/what do you know about invented spelling/developmental spelling?** ***Have you heard of the term emergent literacy?*** *If yes, what do you know about them? Where did you hear about them? How/Do you use these in your classroom practice?*	Theory/research examples/instructional approaches Theory/research behind the programme Do teachers know about developmental spelling/invented spelling? Is/how is the theory of developmental spelling used in practice?
MEETING INDIVIDUAL NEEDS	
7. How do you assess children's individual needs when teaching reading and writing? **Further prompts** - How do you support struggling writers/readers/spellers/children who are having difficulties learning phonics/language and communication difficulties? What are the challenges for you, as an individual teacher, when meeting children's individual needs?	Theory/research relating to assessment/what's valid? Policy - testing Meeting individual needs Underachievement Pedagogies of poverty Children's prior early experience
ASSESSMENT	
8. How do you assess reading? **Further prompts –** why do you assess/who for? **7. How do you assess writing?** **Further prompts –** why do you assess/who for?	How do these assessments fit into theoretical frameworks? Cognitive/social-cultural etc. Why we asses/who is for?

READING AND WRITING CONNECTION	
9. How do you view the connection between reading and writing? ***Further prompts –*** *What does this look like in practice?*	Teachers' views on connection between reading and writing
NATIONAL POLICY and EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH	
10. What is your understanding of policy in relation to the teaching of reading/writing/spelling/grammar? **Further prompts** - How do you think that policy shows evidence of research? How do you know about relevant research and 'what works' in relation to the teaching of early literacy? Where does this come from?	Knowledge of research/theory relating to policy How policy shares research evidence
PROFESSIONALISM	
11. How would you sum up your beliefs and values surrounding the teaching of early literacy? **Further prompts** - Are you influenced by any particular theory/programme/research/individual in your everyday practice career? What/why/how?	Valued and beliefs of practitioners References to particular research and individuals What drives/influences individual teachers
Are there any other comments that you'd like to make?	

Appendix O – Example of Analysis of Kelly's Interview Transcript using colour-themed coding

Example	Codes	Themes	Themes
	ITT: • Can't remember anything from ITT • Cohort that missed subject knowledge in English – being taught grammar	*PGCE – 1 year	*can't remember anything about ITT
DS 8:48 And can you tell, Can you tell? Can you tell the difference in terms of the progress that children make if they have those differences when they present? Through? K 8:58 I think so. Yeah. In my in my experience of being in schools, and especially in schools where children don't always necessarily get those experiences. Yeah, it's, it's glaringly obvious.	**Influenced:** • Not influence by anyone • As a teacher, draws heavily on experience as a mum/parent • Experienced a 'love of books' as a child • Importance of home for fostering a love of books • Importance of books in the home and being read to • Was read to every night as a child • Carried on this love of books for her own children • Books in different rooms in the house • Home environment really important • Talk is valued in the home – use of language • Children need experiences to talk about	*Draws heavily on home experience as a child *Experience a love of books in the home *Love of books *Books are important *Talk in the home is important	Home environment is really important Experiencing a love of books in the home Importance of talk in the home Family literacy Practitioner draws on her experience as a child

	Reading in nursery • Books are really important • The power of stories • Making books • Making meaning • Uses swimming analogy – engagement is being immersed in the water and then explicitly teaching the technical skill of swimming. Can't do the technical skill if haven't been immersed in the water. • Need a mixture of pleasure and skill when learning to read	*Making books *Stories – reading to children in school *Making meaning important *Need immersion and engagement in literacy before explicitly teaching the technical skill (phonics) – swimming analogy	Making books Reading aloud Emphasis/focus on meaning Engagement then skills (swimming (analogy)

K 13:14 And it would be just the same immerse them in that writing. Give them a reason to want to write. Give them different tools to write with different ways of doing it in big ways and small ways. make them want to write, you know, from babies, they want to make maps don't they in certain ways and then feeding that into practising with the phonic skills and running alongside so that they've got the tools that they need to be able to write. K 15:30 Yeah, but like you say you're not just doing the skills. You got to learn how to read the signals how to do all that other stuff, not just drive the car	**Learning to write:** • Refers back to her experience of writing name – practising lots with mum – being given the tools to write (phonics) • What happened in her early experiences, she now does in her practice • Writing for a reason is important – authentic literacy, e.g. birthday card • Modelling writing • Authentic reasons to write • Value and praise efforts of all children • Uses learning to drive analogy • Early experience is important	*Drawing on rich home experience *Reason/purpose for writing – authentic *Modelling writing *enabling adult – value and praise efforts of All children	Practitioner draws on her experience as a child Purpose/reasons to write Modelling writing Enabling adult

	Invented spelling: • Believes she heard the term from me • Having a go at spelling • Developmentally age-appropriate spelling attempt • Think of a word and matching it to its phonics sound	My influence? *having a go * Developmentally age-appropriate spelling attempt – matching word to sound	Developmentally appropriate attempts at spelling Spelling by sound Having a go
	Emergent Literacy: • First sort of literacy behaviours	*early literacy behaviours (pre-reading skills)	Early literacy behaviours Pre-reading skills

	Meeting individual needs: • Getting parents to support children at home • Support with experiences to write about and **skills** • Implying that it's something 'within' child and not down to instructional approaches • Natural to get parents on board to support – connecting home and school • Violation • Children's interests • These children are difficult to engage in writing • Give them something that interests them to write about – what they love • Children can catch up if it's not too late • Need motivation and engagement and **skills alongside**	*parental support *Motivation & engagement ***skills to write** • Violation • Children's interests • Support with experiences to write about	Importance of parental support Need to be taught skills Motivation, engagement and interest Violation Need experiences to write about

	Talk for Writing: • Likes 'text mapping' • Uses small worlds to retell stories • Visualising the story is good • Younger children find it difficult to innovate and think of ideas	• 'text mapping' • Retelling stories using small world • Visualising story Young children find it difficult to innovate and think of ideas	text mapping' Retelling stories using small world Visualising story Young children find it difficult to think of ideas
	Connection between reading and writing: • Interchangeability • use of books to link to writing • children need to know that writing can come without a story – other genres	• books	Books are the connection – intertextuality Interchangeability
	Which come first: • run con-currently (not quite sure) – referring to home experiences • Changed her mind, used to think reading with singing, rhyming and repetitiveness of early stories • children do writing in the natural environment – look for patterns • Refers to home experiences and child's first writing, e.g. using spaghetti	• run con-currently • changed mind - used to think reading due to singing, rhyming and repetitiveness • Child's first writing in the home	Run – concurrently – both at same time Values of writing at home – family literacy

	National policy: • Doesn't know much – feels exposed for not knowing • Mentioned Dr Julian Grenier – introduced to him by EYFS Lead • Not aware of any research that influences policy • Not looked at or been pointed towards references to research – they aren't there	• No knowledge – feels embarrassed • Academic through Trust • Not being interested in looking	Teachers have little or no knowledge Dr Julian Grenier Not looked
DS 29:18 Because that's, you can apply that and it's ... K 29:20 And it's there, it's there in front of you can see it.	**Influenced by:** • Influenced by peers • Named myself and another colleague • Doesn't have time to read educational publications • Find working alongside peers more influential than any books/articles • Wants more practical ideas – you can see it • Experience is important – ideas from the classroom • Learning form others is more important than what's been read	• influenced by peers – more influential than books/articles • my influence • lack to time to engage with research • would like more practical ideas • values experience	Influenced by peers Lack of time to find research Wants practical ideas Values experience

	Beliefs and values: • Home is really valued • Experience as a mum is valued • Doing literacy together – making it fun • Building relationships with children is important • Compare it to a family – snuggling up • Home learning comparison – authentic literacy, e.g. birthday card	• Values home • Experience – mum • Doing literacy with children – fun • Relationships with children are key • Family literacy	Values home experiences – family literacy Personal experience as a child heavily influenced practitioner Relationships – key with children

Appendix P – Isaac's Alphabet Recognition Chart

Emergent literacy Assessment			
Alphabet recognition chart – 5.6			
30.11.21		28.03.22	
Letter	**Analysis**	**Letter**	**Analysis**
B		B	
d		d	∝
x	name	x	∝
m	∝	m	∝
v	∝	v	∝
c	g	c	∝
r		r	∝
s	∝	s	∝
l	1	l	∝
f	∝	f	Second attempt
J		J	l/leg
z		z	∝
G	c	G	name
q	p	q	p
e		e	∝
M	∝	M	∝
R	name	R	∝
h	n	h	∝
j	∝	j	∝
L	∝	L	∝
b	p	b	∝
A	name	A	name
F	∝	F	name
g		g	∝
H		H	j
n	m	n	h
j	Second attempt	j	∝
p	∝	p	∝
T		T	d
Y		Y	c
a		a	d
g		g	∝
Q		Q	w
u	∝	u	∝
N		N	name
w		w	∝
E	f	E	G - name
k		k	∝
t		t	∝
o	∝	o	∝
a		a	p d

I	∝	I	∝ name
D	∝	D	b
Y		Y	c
Analysis			
• Knew 13/44 • Said names		• Knew 24/44 • Said names • Knew 'I' • Doesn't know many more in 4 months	

Ap

Appendix Q – Isaac's Book Handling Knowledge

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">Book-handling knowledge – 5.2</th><th>Themes</th></tr>
<tr><th>19.11.21</th><th>28.03.22</th><th></th></tr>
<tr><td>Show me the front of the book – pointed to back
Where do I begin – pointed to picture page
Show me where to start. Which way do I go after that?
Pointed to bottom line to the right and then pointed to the top
Point to it while I read – pointed to the picture
Show me the first part of the story – pointed to the words on the last line
Show me the last part of the story –
Pointed to a picture
Where do I start reading? left before right – pointed to the same page
No concept of punctuation
Point to it while I read –
Pointing underneath.
Continued to tell the story from the pictures
No understanding of lower and uppercase
Could show two letters but not one and two words
Could show me the last letter of a word. Couldn't show me a capital letter</td><td>**Show me the front of the book** – first pages
When do I begin? Telling the story from the pictures
Show me where to start? – telling the story from the picture. Turned the page and said, "These are the words." Also stated that "s is for sun and c is for caterpillar."
Point to it while I read - no
No concept of first and last</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">**Analysis**</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">• Differentiating between picture and words – pointed to words – showing interest
• Still focused on the pictures
• not yet understanding the concept of a word
• using mnemonics
• Not made much progress between assessments
• Lack of background knowledge
• Not a familiar text</td></tr>
</table>