

The literacy landscape and social mobility [1]

When we teach children to read we are teaching not only the skill but also the human attitudes and assumptions about utility and personal reward which are characteristic of a reader. For this reason it is important that the teaching methods we employ bring pleasure and reward to children including those who are just beginning to make sense of the hieroglyphics on the page. Socially and educationally disadvantaged children who lack a culture of reading in their homes are particularly in need of our attention to the human aspects of reading. Reaching level three or four by the age of 11 will not lead to further progress but even to regression unless the children are growing as readers in the fullest sense and are personally motivated to read.

Government policy [2]

The link between policy and practice is at best tenuous, policy influences rather than directs. It is likely that a majority of primary schools will continue to embed the teaching of synthetic phonics within a more balanced approach. Our training and experience make us aware that there is no one panacea which guarantees that all children will become readers. It is our hope that Ofsted will judge schools' reading policies and practice on their merits and not simply on the basis of conformity with government policy.

Challenges and barriers [3]

The most serious challenge to continuity in the teaching of reading is within the transition between key stages two and three. This transition, coming at a time when many children are emerging as self motivated readers, is in general handled very badly. It is all too understandable, but nonetheless unfortunate, that the culture of secondary education is heavily conditioned by performance in public examinations at the age of 16. Insufficient attention is given in years seven and eight to the needs of children as readers, particularly those who have made a beginning to literacy but who remain in need of one to one or small group teaching as they move towards induction into the adult culture of reading. We share the Government's concern regarding the relative decline in levels of skill and motivation which too often occurs during the first two years of secondary school. It is suggested that the DfE Research division and HMI review the reading curriculum, timetable and homework policy of a representative group of secondary schools. The review should include an analysis of the range and quality of library provision.

References

1, Poorer children's educational attainment: how important are attitudes and behaviour. [Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2011]

Page 2

2, Reading by Six [DfE 2010]

3, Young people's reading and writing – an in-depth study focusing on enjoyment, behaviour and attainment. [National Literacy Trust, 2011]

How do pupils progress during Key Stages 2 and 3? [DfE Research report 096, 2011]