# How does *Sound Discovery*® match up to "The Prototype" of a good literacy instruction programme?


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# Introduction

Diane McGuinness is a world authority on synthetic phonics. She is the author of "*Why children can't read".* London: Penguin Books (1998).

Diane has set a challenge to literacy programmes to see if they meet her exacting standards for providing the essentials of good reading instruction. In doing so she defined a "prototype" of what a good literacy programme should contain.

"The Prototype" is described as "the essentials of good reading instruction, based on what we know from the past about how writing systems (in general) should be taught, and what we know from the present about how a particular writing system should be taught."

# Analysis

The following is an analysis of how the Sound Discovery® system conforms to the essentials defined by Diane McGuinness.

- **"No sight words except for truly undecodable words".**

  Page 32 of the *Sound Discovery*® Manual acknowledges that a small percentage of words can be considered irregular. A list of 74 words is included for learning in a systematic way. Further information about decodable and undecodable words in the first 45 and subsequent 161 High Frequency Words in List 1 of the NLS is contained in the book *Sound Discovery*® High Frequency Words.

- **"No letter names"**.

  As the title suggests, sounds are the basis of the *Sound Discovery*® programme.

- **"A sound-to-print" orientation**. **Phonemes, not letters, are the basis for the code."**

  This is true for *Sound Discovery*®.

- **"Teach phonemes only and no other sound units."**

  Steps 1 to 3 are based purely on phonemes. In Steps 4 to 6, polysyllabic words are split morphologically (prefix, root word, suffix) and through different syllable types but these units are read and spelled according to the phonemes they contain. Step 7 analyses words into larger suffix chunks but the emphasis and teaching is on the sound of these chunks not on the spelling.

- **"Begin with an artificial transparent alphabet: a one-to-one correspondence between 40+ phonemes and their most common spelling."**

  This describes Steps 1 and 2 exactly.

- **"Teach children to identify and sequence sounds in real words by segmenting and blending, using letters. Don't do this in the auditory mode alone."**

  The visual symbol which represents the phoneme is introduced at the very outset of a *Snappy Lesson*. There is phoneme manipulation using visual phoneme cards, blending of real words, writing-from-dictation of sounds, of words and of sentences by segmenting. There is some oral blending supported by "robot arms" and some oral segmenting supported by "phoneme fingers" as an integrated part of the *Snappy Lesson* with younger children in the early stages of their literacy learning. However all students are made very well aware of the link between the sound and the visual symbol which is a "picture" of the sound.

- **"Teach children how to write each letter. Integrate writing into every lesson."**

  This is an integral part of the encoding half of the *Snappy Lesson*. Children are taught from the outset: good sitting, good looking, good posture for writing, snappy fingers/froggy legs/frog on a log for a good tripod pencil grip. White boards with a sun in the top right hand corner and phoneme lines where necessary are used extensively to scaffold learning. Start point and exit strokes are taught for each letter using the grouping for letter formation very similar to that used in *Jolly Phonics:*

  - ✓ "curly c" letters - c,a,d,o,g,q,f,s all face away from the "sun" and use an anti-clockwise movement starting from the one o'clock position
  - ✓ <e> and <z> start from the left and move to the right
  - ✓ all the rest of the letters start at the top.

  We have pronounced "death" to all "Mc Donald's hoops" for the letter "m" (which starts at the top) and to "naughty 6's" for the letter "b" (which also starts at the top).

  At the study school, there are few b/d confusions and cursive writing starts in Year 1 when exit strokes from the letter before are simply joined up to the start point of the following letter. Ligatures from the line are used as an entry into the first letter of each word from Year 1 also.

- **"Link writing (spelling) and reading to ensure children understand how the code works."**

  This is a central tenet of *Sound Discovery*® and one of the reasons that the *Snappy Lesson* was devised, with one half for decoding and the other half for encoding.

- **"Teach spelling alternatives (there's more than one way to spell this sound) not reading alternatives"**.

  Step 3 of the *Sound Discovery*® programme teaches spelling alternatives.

- **"Spelling should be accurate or, at a minimum, phonetically accurate".**

  The *Sound Discovery*® materials: words and sentences (and now texts are available from Ridgehill Publishing) are written to provide a transparent code. Hence the expectation is that reading and spelling-from-dictation should be 100% accurate.

- **"The final step is to introduce the entire advanced spelling code ..... a process that has yet to find its way into any reading programme."**

  Step 3 of *Sound Discovery*® uses the 42 basic spellings of the 42 phonemes taught in Steps 1 and 2 and teaches the most frequently occurring spelling alternatives of the advanced spelling code, an additional 60 of them, a total of 102 spelling alternatives..

## Conclusion

It can be seen that *Sound Discovery*® provides a "good fit" to Diane McGuinness's prototype of a good literacy instruction programme.

Results from the West Country and other schools would also appear to back this up. Fortunately there is a growing awareness nationally of the effectiveness of synthetic phonics.

New programmes and decodable materials are beginning to appear and are very welcomed. The research findings would indicate that *Sound Discovery*® can be considered with them as one of the most effective synthetic phonics programmes on the market.

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