

Sound Discovery®

A cost effective, evidence based approach ...

“No other programme tells you as clearly what you need to do.”

“The Snappy Lesson aspect is key...Easy to use... fantastic to see the children achieving and enjoying reading and spelling confidently... New skills learned through Sound Discovery® were applied in the wider classroom.”

Despite a huge investment of national funding into the teaching of reading, a worrying proportion of children and young people still struggle with literacy which limits their opportunities and employability.

Government advisor, Sir Jim Rose in his independent review of early reading (2006) said that, *“on present evidence, synthetic phonic work is the most effective systematic approach to teaching reading and spelling”*.

Ex-schools minister Nick Gibb expressed his vision about the future (2012), *“Through phonics we are ensuring all children learn the mechanics of reading early in their school career. Helping children to develop a love of reading and a habit of reading for pleasure every day is key to ensuring we have well educated and literate young people by the time they leave school.”*

However, although the principles of synthetic phonics are simple, educationalists often remain confused about how to deliver an effective programme in schools and in other organisations. Thus many students continue to be poorly taught resulting in failure, frustration and disaffection.

Sound Discovery® shows the way ...

The key to success is making the literacy teaching process as explicit as possible for busy teachers. *Sound Discovery®* is a clear, structured programme which is known for its simplicity and effectiveness. It is easy for teachers and teaching assistants to use and master. It is non-age-specific and can be used for first-time, slow-to-start and dyslexic students of all ages, including adults.

What makes Sound Discovery® an effective programme?

There is general agreement amongst users that its two greatest strengths are its unique teaching structure and its simple and logical phonic progression.

Snappy Lesson®: The teaching structure is called the *Snappy Lesson®*. It has a logical, memorable structure and is fast-paced and interactive. This keeps boys and students with concentration difficulties motivated, focussed and on-task. Staff are motivated by its simplicity and the enjoyment expressed by the students.

Phonic progression: The phonic progression was deliberately chosen to be simple and logical. The advantage of this is that teachers can recall the progression easily and be clear which words they can expect a child or student to read and write.

Benefits of the *Sound Discovery*® programme

Flexibility: It is adaptable to any age group or group size. It can also be used for individual tuition. Because the materials are not presented as fill-in workbooks, students who might otherwise fall behind can be given additional lessons at any stage. This means that all can succeed.

Emphasis on writing: Many other systems seem to get children reading but not spelling and writing confidently. *Sound Discovery*® has a clear emphasis on writing. It includes a handwriting strand to support the writing process and the use of modelled writing makes every stage of the writing process explicit.

Development of comprehension: Vocabulary and reading comprehension are developed in the programme through carefully written decodable stories and texts, bridging the gap between phonic skills and the wider literacy curriculum.

Cost effectiveness: Given current budgetary constraints, a significant advantage of the programme is that it can be implemented without a large initial expenditure. Many resources, including some of the reading materials are photocopiable for the individual school or organisation, making the programme highly cost effective.

Assessment and placement tests: These are quick and easy to administer. They yield essential information concerning an individual's stage of phonic development and enable individuals to be placed correctly on the appropriate step of the teaching programme. Users have identified these tests as one of the strengths of the programme.

Development and research base of *Sound Discovery*®

The programme grew out of the need to teach literacy to young people of all ages, including adults. A unique teaching structure called the *Snappy Lesson*® was developed following observations that much of phonics teaching in schools lacked focus and application. It was designed to incorporate all the phonic skills shown by research to be essential for literacy.

The *Sound Discovery*® programme was trialled by the author over a period of eight years following every child in whole classes from the beginning to the end of their primary education. Remarkable results were achieved with both boys and girls. No child from within the study was diagnosed with dyslexia and all the children in the study learned to read and write. These results were achieved regardless of potential barriers to learning such as gender, summer birthdays, social disadvantage or English as an additional language. The early acquisition of reading and writing skills is an essential first step towards improving social mobility.

This study (the Grant study) on the effectiveness of the *Sound Discovery*® programme in England and the Johnston and Watson study on the effectiveness of synthetic phonics teaching in Clackmannanshire were reported in the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee Report on *Teaching Children to Read* (2005). Further papers on the Grant study can be viewed via the web references at the end of the article, including an additional follow-up study.

Sound Discovery® has been used by Local Education Authorities as an intervention programme to raise literacy standards. Independent data collected by these authorities have shown significant gains in achievement and motivation.

The programme has been independently scrutinised by the DCSF (2007) and confirmed as satisfying all the criteria for a high quality synthetic phonics programme. The programme has also been assessed as meeting the revised 'core criteria' for an 'approved' programme by DfE (2011). The programme was judged to provide high-quality phonics work and was included in the match-funded catalogues of systematic synthetic phonics, products and training (2011, 2012).

Synthetic Phonics Ltd

Sound Discovery® is published by Synthetic Phonics Ltd, a specialist educational publishing company dedicated to the production of affordable resources for schools and other organisations with a need to develop literacy. The main resources include photocopiable manuals and complete lesson plans from the most basic steps to the most complex. The prepared lesson plans are invaluable for busy teachers and tutors and are suitable for any age group. Additional resources facilitate the application of phonic skills to reading comprehension and independent writing. A new resource supports the teaching of high frequency words through phonics. There is a handwriting strand.

Money Saving Packs provide all the essential core materials to teach the complete synthetic phonics programme and an additional-materials pack complements the core materials pack, providing additional materials to help learners apply their phonic knowledge and skills to wider literacy. Easy Starter Packs follow a sequential teaching path through the programme from the basic alphabetic code at the beginning, then 'moving on' to the advanced code and finally to extending phonics to complex polysyllabic words.

The company also provides training.

The Future

Sound Discovery® can be key in eliminating illiteracy and increasing social mobility. As children on the programme learn to read early, they improve their vocabulary and language and are able to use their reading to learn independently. They have greater access to the curriculum and are more motivated to engage with learning. This contributes to their emotional well being and to the outcomes of *Every Child Matters*.

Sound Discovery® provides a simple, achievable and cost-effective way to give children a flying start to their literacy. It can sustain their early gains and can support those children and adults who struggle with reading, writing and spelling. Used across Local Authorities it can raise national standards in schools and colleges. Used more widely it can benefit young people and adults in any organisation in which progress in literacy brings social advantage (e.g. prisons).

There are already educationalists available, experienced in the teaching, training and management of *Sound Discovery*® who are able to support and spearhead a wider initiative across the country and share their good practice. The goals of eliminating illiteracy, addressing social disadvantage and increasing social mobility are surely ones that we cannot afford to ignore.

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