

CC, Secondary English Teacher (December 2018)

I have spent a month or two thinking about the training we had in October. I am still impressed by the erudite and clearly thought through teaching plans which were presented to us and all ready to be implemented-which I am already doing with my son. Thank you!

You made me really think about:

How it feels to struggle with reading... the use of 'Wingdings' the computer code was fascinating...you made me think about the use of word lists which are organised by letters instead of sounds and make no sound sense to the children: great, team, bread etc later spelt as 'grate', 'teem' and 'bred' when they write their own stories! Above all you made me realise what we are doing when we give them those tricky / high frequency lists for the children to memorise: come, could, would, when, because, there... which made us all so irate we could have just ripped them up into tiny pieces and stamped on them!

This 'teaching' and these lists are the moment that kids in Yr 1 start poking each other, kicking, seriously disrupting etc etc. They have been presented with something incomprehensible... literally a block to their learning and so it's also the beginning of a loss of faith in school and they begin to exclude themselves...but its real life: it's what is happening to our children.

I really like the list of different types of learner readers (p.48 of the Teachers' Handbook) as it speaks of 'everyman' - not only dyslexic or disadvantaged kids; it illustrates how reading / teaching struggles have far-reaching consequences for many categories of learner.

I liked you explaining how Diane McGuiness's work started and how it is ground-breaking because she turned things on their head - instead of dissecting reading difficulties she looked at how anyone DID manage to learn to read English, and used her analysis of the code itself as a structure for teaching.

I loved learning about the simple practical and interesting sorting of the sound/ee/ we did on Day 1 and how you explain to a Catch-up learner the complexity of spelling in a few fun activities. We watched a teenager with the Reading Age of 5.6 explain the activities he had been through with you- and obviously 'get-it'. It was brilliant! The sound sort exercise is almost genius... I think everyone finds these things so hard to explain to kids, and to themselves even! It is something so very particular and brilliant about this work - that you have looked clearly at these frustratingly difficult-to-learn aspects of reading and made the teaching lucid and explicit.

We know about the failure rate of boys in YOI, but do we know how many of our children go on to Secondary School not being able to access the secondary curriculum? And with some good tools these kids could be 'sorted out'. I think phonics looks easy (d-o-g... c-a-t etc) to the world out there... and it has become easy to me now ...but it's certainly easy to get it wrong too!

I know how secondary school teachers have their energy depleted, as how can it be anything other than a slog to deliver the secondary curriculum in a meaningful way,

when literacy is still at such a basic level for a number of their students in each class?

And then there is the 'minimalism of approach' – how it's unnecessary for any more resources to be bought - is both SRS's huge strength and what has held it back from being more widely accessed. Because SRS can be taken and used on a mud-floor in Africa, there are minimal commercial benefits for publishing companies to help you promote your work! Once a teacher has understood SRS they can use all the books already in the school and on the library shelves!

What I took away was that SRS encompasses a structured phonics programme integrated with teaching reading through real books. Having a schematised approach to teaching all the phonics needed for successful reading and spelling, which can be applied to any books, is incredibly economical and will release time and money for teaching other aspects of the literacy curriculum - eg. exploring language through the entire curriculum - debating, reporting, descriptive language etc. This will lead to huge gains for all children in all aspects of the curriculum!

Sorry to repeat so much which is so obvious, and which you made come so alive for us in the training you gave. I wish you luck with this amazing programme.