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Elizabeth Zsargo

U1572715

Learning to read in the era of systematic synthetic phonics as prime: young children's views on their experiences

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Doctorate of Education

University of Huddersfield

September 2021

Liz Zsargo

"*What is the best way to teach a young child to read? No two people, it seems, agree on an answer*." (Chall, 1967, p. 1)

"*Grown-ups don't really know what it's like to be a child in day care. We children know. (Colley, 2010)That's why I have to tell you about it*." (5-year-old child quoted in Eide & Winger, 2005, p. 86)

Abstract

Systematic synthetic phonics (SSP) is mandated by the Department for Education (DfE) as the prime method to teach the early stages of reading to children in England. Over the past decade this approach has steadily increased in dominance through numerous government policy actions, such as: the introduction of a national phonics screening check (2012), an updated National Curriculum (2013), lists of DfE-approved SSP programmes (2010 & 2021), and updates to the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) School Inspection Handbook (2015 & 2019). This research uses a Bernsteinian analysis to argue that the state has created a new pedagogical singularity of phonics, often classified and enacted separately from reading. Furthermore, by taking control of the mechanisms of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, an inflexible model of the early stages of reading has been created, which is both instrumental and performative.

The study focuses on the views and experiences of children learning to read within this policy environment, dubbed SSP-as-prime. Data was generated through a series of activity-based interviews with groups of children in three schools, following them from Year One into Year Two. Using thematic analysis, the research concluded that children tended to view their phonics lessons as a distinct singularity, not seeing these as linked to reading. At the same time, children associated reading strongly with a phonics-based approach to text, in which the accuracy of decoding became the principal indicator of their success and competence. Children also seemed to be developing a primarily instrumental understanding of reading, with a focus on future outcomes. Children who experienced success with decoding were more likely to see themselves as achieving well in reading, with children who were slower in their phonics acquisition often seeing reading, at least in a school-related context, as unappealing.

It is further argued, however, that children may experience SSP-as-prime differentially based on a range of other factors including their home environment, personal dispositions, and the particular social and spatial contexts in which they find themselves. Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of development has therefore been used to complicate and develop the Bernsteinian analysis, demonstrating how children can, at times, resist, subvert or even appropriate the dominant discourse.

The study provides an original contribution to the debate with its focus on the views and experiences of children on learning to read in the era of SSP-as-prime, an area in which few studies exist. Furthermore the Bernsteinian analysis of SSP enactment and experience, elaborated through the lens of Bronfenbrenner, provides a new way of viewing the current policy environment. Possible consequences are highlighted and ways to mitigate these effects are suggested.

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Glossary of acronyms used

BERA	British Educational Research Association
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DfE	Department for Education
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
EYFS	Early Years Foundation Stage
GPC	Grapheme-Phoneme Correspondence
IFERI	International Federation for Effective Reading Instruction
KS1	Key Stage 1
KS2	Key Stage 2
NFER	National Foundation for Educational Research
NLS	National Literacy Strategy
NLT	National Literacy Trust
NRP	National Reading Panel
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education
ORF	Official Recontextualising Field
PIPs	Progression in Phonics
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PSC	Phonics Screening Check
PRF	Pedagogic Recontextualising Field
RCT	Randomised Controlled Trial
RRF	Reading Reform Foundation
SSP	Systematic synthetic phonics
SVoR	Simple View of Reading
UKLA	United Kingdom Literacy Association
Y1	Year 1
Y2	Year 2

Chapter 1: Introduction

Context of the research

Over the past two decades, the discrete teaching of phonics as part of early reading has steadily, and controversially, grown in prominence in schools in England. This has been mirrored in other English-speaking jurisdictions around the world, notably the United States and Australia (Bowers, 2020; Castles et al., 2018). Its rise is supported by a narrative in which an emphasis on phonics is presented as the answer to a supposed crisis in literacy. Its proponents suggest that 'progressive' teaching methods and 'whole language' teaching have blighted the learning of several generations of children (e.g. Gibb, 2017; McGuinness, 2004). This 'turn to phonics' can be seen as one manifestation of a wider turn to formal, so-called traditional approaches in schooling characterised by teacher-led direct instruction. The context for this turn is the spread of neoliberal performance metrics and age-based expectations on a global scale, with governments attending to such measures as a sign of national status and global economic competitiveness, both current and future (Soler, 2016). Within this context, in education, managerialist approaches and accountability structures have flourished, with the state playing an ever-more interventionist role in certain aspects of schooling, whilst espousing a rhetoric of deregulation and autonomy, such as that from the Department for Education (DfE) in England (DfE, 2010b; Lumby & Muijs, 2013).

In England, this has now reached a point where one particular type of phonics – systematic synthetic phonics (SSP) – is mandated by the state for children in Reception and Years 1 and 2 of compulsory schooling (ages 4-7). Furthermore, as will be shown, government has deliberately and explicitly used multiple levers of policy to achieve compliance from all schools (DfE, 2010b, 2021a; Ellis & Moss, 2014). The National Curriculum mandates the use of systematic phonics (DfE, 2014b). School inspections carried out by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) look for evidence that an SSP approach is being used (Ofsted, 2015, 2019c). Furthermore, a national assessment, the Phonics Screening Check (PSC), is carried out for all children at the end of Year 1, and any children who do not reach the required standard must retake at the end of Year 2 (DfE, 2018b). Recently, the DfE have published a "reading framework" document (DfE, 2021b) which further reinforces SSP as the prime approach and provides close and detailed guidance on how reading should be taught in primary schools. Even before the framework, this shift in the policy landscape had already resulted in significant changes to classroom practice in terms of a foregrounding of phonics teaching (Walker et al., 2015). Much more time and emphasis is now placed on phonics separately from other aspects of English or indeed, reading. Changes have been made to the pedagogical approaches used when teaching early reading, to the strategies children are

taught to use, to the books children are provided with to practice their reading, and to the ways in which teachers assess children's progress as readers (Bradbury, 2018; Carter, 2020b). This approach to early reading is sometimes referred to as phonics "first and fast" (DfE, 2010a, p. 2) or even "first, fast and only" (Lloyd-Jones, 2013, p. 65).

This array of ongoing policy levers focussed on one teaching method appears so great, and so specific, as to have effectively brought schools into a position where they must deliver highly mandated content, and only in a manner approved by government. Schools are strongly constrained, compelled and scrutinised in this area, perhaps uniquely compared to all other parts of the primary curriculum (Bradbury, 2018; Carter, 2020b; Ellis & Moss, 2014; Ofsted, 2019a). It could therefore be argued that government has used every possible lever of policy not only to influence but to embed and enforce this approach, pushing it beyond the usual "contingent and uneven uptake of policy" in practice (Heimans, 2012, p. 375). Government policy in relation to SSP-as-prime is not amenable to professional judgment in terms of enactment; rather, it is to be carried out exactly as specified in one of the DfE approved programmes (DfE, 2021a), and subject to scrutiny for compliance (Ofsted, 2019c) . Government policy is directly controlling the classroom in virtually every aspect of the teaching of early reading (DfE, 2021b). In this study the term 'state' is used frequently to reflect this widespread control and permeation of policy into detailed classroom practice. Thus, children's day to day classroom experiences in this area are directly and significantly determined from the centre; schools and individual teachers are compelled to be part of the state enactment of government policy.

Much has been written about the rise of SSP to its current prime position in English classrooms; an overview will be provided in the literature review. Few oppose the teaching of phonics as part of the teaching of early reading, but there are many who question the hegemony of SSP as *the* prime approach, or SSP-as-prime, which is the current position in English classrooms (Bowers, 2020; Torgerson et al., 2019). The perspectives of policy makers, academics and campaigners are well-represented in the literature, and consistent efforts have been made to seek and reflect the views of headteachers, teachers and parents (Clark & Glazzard, 2018). Few studies, however, have sought the views of those most notably affected by the policy; those of children. It is in this gap that this study is located, highlighting the views of young children aged 5-7 on learning to read in the context of SSP-as-prime.

The findings from this study make several contributions to the current literature. Firstly, it is shown through empirical qualitative study that the focus on SSP appears to be engendering a particular understanding of reading as decoding in the minds of young readers, and that

this has a number of ramifications for their view of themselves as readers. It is further demonstrated that a view of reading as a largely instrumental process is developing for many children. The theoretical framework of Bernstein is used as a primary lens to reveal and interpret the powerful structures operating in the current policy approach and the impact on classrooms and individuals. The work of Bronfenbrenner is used to challenge and complicate this narrative, however, demonstrating that possibilities remain for resistance and agency, notwithstanding the monolithic discourse of the state. Finally, the research methods themselves are worthy of note, focussing as they do on enabling the voices of children affected by the policy discourse to be heard. Use is made of the well-established Mosaic approach methodology (Clark, 2017), with a range of data collection tools combined innovatively over a period of time to understand children's perspectives in the face of state policy. The study is interpretive and aware of the limitations inherent in attempting to represent the views of children, but the findings are nonetheless illuminating and make an important contribution to the debate.

Research aims and questions

The aims of the research are therefore:

- To elicit and examine the views and experiences of young children (aged 5-7 years) with regard to learning to read using SSP as the stated prime approach
- To inform the debate about the relationship between SSP and the development of children as 'readers'.

These research aims have been operationalised through the following questions:

- In the context of SSP-as-prime, what are children's experiences and perceptions of learning to read and reading overall?
- How might these experiences and perceptions be shaping their development as readers?

A brief overview of the research strategy and project is provided within this introduction, after the next two short sections setting out important definitions: *What is systematic synthetic phonics?* and *What is reading?*.

What is systematic synthetic phonics?

Systematic synthetic phonics refers to an approach where children are explicitly taught the smallest units of sounds (known as phonemes) and the letters or letter combinations which correspond with each (known as graphemes). Children are then taught to 'decode' written text by sounding out one 'grapheme-phoneme correspondence' (GPC) at a time, before then blending or synthesising these together from left to right to make the word. So children would

learn the GPCs for, for example, ‘s’, ‘i’, ‘p’, ‘sh’, ‘ar’ and so on, and be able to then sound out each GPC and synthesise these sounds together to read words such as ‘sip’, ‘ship’, ‘sharp’ and so on. This process of learning individual GPCs in a defined order, and using them to decode words to read them (and sound out words to spell them) is at the heart of a synthetic phonics approach. The current English National Curriculum states that Year 1 children should be able to “respond speedily with the correct sound to graphemes (letters or groups of letters) for all 40+ phonemes, including, where applicable, alternative sounds for graphemes” (DfE, 2014b, p. 21).

The term ‘systematic’ refers to following a coherent programme within a school in which GPCs are introduced in a defined sequence using consistent strategies, with regular practice of previously learned GPCs and opportunities to apply in the context of both reading and writing. A systematic approach with daily, discrete phonics sessions was advocated by the highly influential Rose Review of the Teaching of Early Reading (Rose, 2006). In current practice in England, especially given the quantity of phonemes required to be learned securely by the end of Year 1, this means that most schools teach daily, separate phonics sessions (Walker et al., 2015). New GPCs are introduced at the rate of approximately one per day in Reception and Year 1.

It is often pointed out by those critical of the SSP-as-prime approach that, whilst evidence arguably exists for the effectiveness of a *systematic* approach to teaching phonics as part of early reading instruction, the evidence is much weaker in terms of the superiority of a *synthetic* approach (Torgerson et al., 2019). The two are often elided together in official documents even though they refer to quite separate aspects of the approach to phonics teaching (e.g. DfE, 2010b, 2021b; Ofsted, 2017; Rose, 2006).

Analytic (as opposed to synthetic) phonics was taught by many schools were prior to the current shift, but this is not currently approved by the state. In this approach, teachers use whole words as the starting point to teach initial sounds, letter patterns, rhyming patterns, final sounds and so on. In other words, children analyse words in order to learn strategies for reading them, which they can apply to other words as they become more knowledgeable (Cain, 2010). For example, an adult and children may read a text together, analysing some carefully chosen words to teach the related phonics knowledge. Children learn to see letters used in different ways within words and how this may affect the way they are read (Dombey, 2015). It could thus be suggested that because analytic phonics starts with words, it demonstrates to children that letter sounds combine to make meaning. The teaching of reading as a meaning-making process is arguably a key element of a balanced literacy programme, and is similar to the approach used in England prior to the turn to SSP (Davis,

2013b; Johnston et al., 2012). Like synthetic phonics, analytic phonics can be taught systematically through a sequenced programme (e.g. DfES, 1999), and it is this factor which seems to be significant in multiple studies (Torgerson et al., 2019; Torgerson et al., 2006). Reasons for the rise of synthetic phonics as the prime approach will be examined in Chapter Two.

What is reading?

A further elision frequently takes place between the words 'decoding' and 'reading', which it is important to note. For example, Nick Gibb, a longstanding advocate of SSP who held a ministerial position at the DfE almost continuously since 2010 until September 2021, frequently makes claims such as "a substantial body of evidence shows that systematic synthetic phonics is the most effective way to teach all children to read" (Gibb, 2015) and "[we] require schools to use phonics to teach children to read" (Gibb, 2017).

There are many definitions of reading and this reflects the fact that successful reading requires a wide range of skills to be orchestrated together. It is, however, generally accepted that proficiency at decoding the letters on the page and blending them into words is just one aspect (Castles et al., 2018). Even the National Curriculum states that reading has two dimensions, those of word reading and comprehension (DfE, 2014b, p. 15), and this is further reinforced in the recent DfE "reading framework" document (DfE, 2021b). This view is often expressed as the 'Simple View of Reading', first denoted as such by Gough and Tunmer (1986). Davis asserts that reading is a complex process "involving uncovering the *meaning* of the text" (2018, pp. 135, emphasis original) through a wide range of means including use of contextual, semantic, phonic and grammatical clues. Dombey provides an account of reading as both interactive and transformative, drawing on Bakhtin's view of reading as a dialogic process (Bakhtin & Holquist, 1981), and Bourdieu's emphasis on literacy as an element of cultural transformation rather than cultural reproduction (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). She suggests that the successful teaching of reading is a collaborative process between teacher, children and peers, where children are capable of active participation in the construction and production of knowledge (Dombey, 2010a).

However it is defined, reading is clearly complex and much more than a technical exercise in decoding letters. Furthermore, although explicit, intensive teaching of phonics has been clearly and unsurprisingly shown to improve children's ability to decode words, evidence that this then translates into long-term benefits in reading comprehension, fluency and motivation is much less robust (Machin et al., 2016).

Author positionality and standpoint

The author is a former primary teacher and Headteacher who has in the past held leadership roles in school in relation to early reading. My view was always that the teaching of literacy in school was an absolute priority, and this proved highly successful. When in practice, my position was supportive of the importance of including systematic phonics teaching in a careful balance with other elements of literacy teaching, within the context of a language-rich and literacy-promoting environment. Having also worked for a period of time at the Department for Education (DfE), during the period 2009-2014, when SSP was rising steadily up the policy agenda, the question of how the policy imperatives were created, communicated and received in school became of great interest. Working now as a lecturer in Initial Teacher Education (Primary), it is required and expected that SSP will be taught as the prime approach to early reading. I have therefore experienced the policy shifts first hand, and been part of the narrative in several ways. A long-standing interest in reading development, the impact of policy and seeking to understand children's experiences of schooling have come together to inform this project.

This multi-layered insider perspective informed and problematised the project in several ways. Although convinced of the importance of systematic phonics teaching as one part of the teaching of early reading skills, I experienced unease at the imposition, at state level, of this particular method. My experiences at DfE were of a single-minded commitment on behalf of government to ensure that SSP became the prime method used in school to teach the early stages of reading. The strength of both the rhetoric and the accountability levers associated with this policy seemed extremely likely to produce negative unintended consequences on the ground level in schools, a phenomenon which is well documented (e.g. De Wolf & Janssens, 2007; Jones et al., 2017). Furthermore, having spent a large part of my career in school, I was both curious and concerned about the impact that the policy may be having at school level and, more particularly, on the experiences of children learning to read.

My complex positionality therefore needed to be carefully considered in relation to this study. Becker seminally identified that researchers carrying out social research inevitably amplify the views and thoughts of people studied, when he asked the question "whose side are we on?" (Becker, 1967, p. 239). As he argues, participants may be "subordinates" within the wider social hierarchy of power (p240) and by giving credibility to their voices, researchers are likely to be accused of bias by those in more powerful positions, whose voices are generally dominant. Potentially problematic elements in the present study included my own experience as an implementor of government policy related to the use of phonics as a

teacher and school leader, and my role at DfE where I worked for a short time as part of a team effectively 'policing' the extent to which Initial Teacher Education (ITE) providers were embedding SSP within their courses. Indeed my current role in (ITE) as a teacher educator in which it is required to teach trainee teachers that "systematic synthetic phonics is the most effective approach for teaching pupils to decode" (DfE, 2019a, p. 14). However, my own interest and previous study in teaching reading meant that I have always able to bring a critical sensibility to these roles. As Dixon identifies (2011, p. 114), teachers can become experts at navigating successive government edicts whilst maintaining a commitment to elements they consider important.

Mercer (2007) helpfully identified positionality as a continuum with multiple axes, along which individuals can shift dependent on circumstances. In one sense, I could position myself as an 'insider' in terms of enacting government policy, part of the dominant discourse. My insider perspective of working at DfE, and witnessing the conception and deliberate enactment of policies designed to directly impact the classroom experience of all primary school children in England, fostered my interest in understanding how policy is used to impact practice. On the other hand, my insider perspective as a primary school teacher and ITE lecturer positioned me at DfE, to some extent, as an outsider, and drove the desire to go further with this research, and to understand the views of children themselves in relation to this policy. During the present study, I was an insider in the sense of being extremely familiar with the world of SSP policy and the primary classroom, and an outsider in that to the classes I visited, I was largely an unknown visitor. Indeed, I was an outsider to the lives of the children themselves and could only aim to get a "glimpse...that is inevitably partial and incomplete" (Kehily & Maybin, 2011, p. 280).

Becker concluded that "we must always look at the matter from someone's point of view" (p. 245). This perspective strongly informed the present study, given the conspicuously subordinate position of children in the field of education policy, and my desire to listen to and amplify children's voices and views. In carrying out this research, it has been important to acknowledge my own positionality and, therefore, to test and challenge my thinking to mitigate bias (Punch & Oancea, 2014). The 'insider' element of my researcher identity therefore further supported the deliberate decision to focus on children's voices as the most notably marginalised. The methodology used, and the theoretical frameworks employed, have been able to support this aim as the research has developed. I nonetheless acknowledge my role as a crafter and glosser of the research findings (James, 2007), in keeping with my interpretive approach, but I have also found unexpected outcomes, particularly in the differentiated ways in which children appeared to be experiencing the

policy enactment of SSP-as-prime. This has been a significant element in my own journey as a novice researcher, and has enabled the epistemological claim of the research to be strengthened. This will be discussed in Chapter Six: Methodology. Finally, my position as an insider in ITE allows the outcomes of this study to be used to make recommendations in this area and indeed to influence my own future teaching. This will be considered in Chapter 11: Conclusion.

Scope of the research

It is important to acknowledge that children's attitudes towards, and motivation to read will be influenced by multiple factors. Factors within school outside the scope of this research include the impact of individual teacher behaviours (Ellis & Coddington, 2013) and of wider classroom practices (Hanke, 2014). Home reading experiences have been shown to be particularly significant by numerous studies (e.g. Mol & Bus, 2011; Ozturk et al., 2016; Wiescholek et al., 2018), and this will be explored further in the review of the literature and, to a limited extent, in the data analysis. However, the area of interest in this study is that of children's schooled experiences of learning to read, particularly in relation to the teaching of, and through, SSP. The scope of this research is therefore focussed on the experiences of children in relation to this specific approach, and the potential impact this may have on their overall experiences of, and attitudes towards, reading.

Research strategy

In order to answer the research questions this thesis presents the results of a small scale, interpretive study carried out with 24 children from three schools. The data on which this thesis draws was generated through a series of small group interviews with the children over the period of a year, when the children were in Year 1 and Year 2 (aged 5-7). Each group of three to four children was interviewed three times over the course of the year. The strategy was based on the Mosaic Approach methodology (Clark, 2017) and thus the interviews took the form of multiple activities through which children could express their ideas in different forms. Fieldwork data was analysed and interpreted using Braun and Clarke's inductive, thematic approach (2013). Themes in children's responses were generated and these form the basis of the conclusions. A theoretical framework based on Bernstein, supplemented by Bronfenbrenner, informs the analysis. The main lens used is that of Bernstein's theory of educational transmission, known as pedagogic discourse (Bernstein, 1990, 2000), which is used to analyse the present policy approach to teaching early reading with SSP-as-prime. There was a need to develop Bernstein's framework, however, as Bernstein's main concern is with the education system itself and its relation to individuals. He does not, therefore, address the experience of the individual in any wider sense, nor propose other influences

beyond their experience of education. The bioecological model of Bronfenbrenner (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994) is therefore used as an additional, secondary lens, to critique Bernstein, to extend analysis of the data, and to further illuminate the experience of young learners in the era of SSP-as-prime.

Structure of the thesis

The thesis is organised into 11 chapters. Chapters 1-4 are the introduction and literature reviews: Part 1 – the 'Reading Wars', Part 2 – Voices in the Field and Part 3 – Current Situation and Children's Views. Chapters 5-6 discuss the theoretical framework and methodology, with data analysis and discussion across Chapters 7-10. The final chapter, Chapter 11, comprises a summary of findings and future recommendations. The review of the literature is divided into three sections for ease of navigation within this field and begins with an overview of the contentious journey to the current policy of SSP-as-prime.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature Part 1: The 'Reading Wars'

The best way to teach children to read English has long been fiercely debated, often characterised as the "Reading Wars" (Soler, 2016). The debate tends to run along the same major faultline, seminally identified by Chall (1967): should children learn to read primarily with an alphabetic code-emphasis, or with a meaning-emphasis. In other words, whether children should first be introduced to letters and sounds, and build up their ability to read from these building blocks – a 'bottom up', phonics-based approach. Or, on the other hand, whether they should first be introduced to meaningful whole texts, sentences and words, and learn to read mainly by engaging with these – a 'top down', meaning first approach.

This debate arises in part from the characterisation of the English language as a so-called deep or opaque orthography (Castles et al., 2018), meaning that the relationship between letters and sounds is not always consistent. Languages with shallow or transparent orthographies (such as Spanish) have a much more regular and predictable correspondence between the way that letters are spoken and written. This brings challenges to learners of English orthography and the suggestion that phonics should receive relatively less emphasis, with a focus instead on reading as a naturalistic process, akin to learning to talk. This is sometimes known as a 'psycholinguistic' approach where the desire to make meaning from the written text gradually drives the acquisition of a range of skills including recognition of whole words, letters and patterns, grammar, vocabulary, comprehension and so on (Goodman, 1996; Smith, 1979).

In England there has been a clear 'turn to phonics' gathering pace since around 1999, when the government issued 'Progression in Phonics' guidance (DfES, 1999). This has now led to the requirement to teach systematic synthetic phonics (SSP) in all state primary schools. Multiple policy milestones can be identified including: the Rose Review (Rose, 2006), the introduction of the Phonics Screening Check (PSC) (a national test for children in Year 1 of compulsory schooling) (DfE, 2010b), the explicit inclusion of SSP in the Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2012) and numerous other policy statements and actions (Ellis & Moss, 2014; Stainthorp, 2020). The application of multiple policy levers by government over a sustained period has resulted in a significant change in approach in primary schools to the teaching of early reading (Reid, 2018). The hegemony of discrete SSP as the prime method is becoming ever stronger as schools have to use this approved approach or face Ofsted censure, which can result in grave consequences for a school (Ofsted, 2017, 2019c). Recent papers frequently assert that there is now a general consensus about the importance of phonics in

learning to read (Beard et al., 2019; Castles et al., 2018; Duff et al., 2015). Indeed, the debate in England has largely shifted to discussion about the type of phonics used (Torgerson et al., 2019), its relative emphasis and impact in relation to the wider teaching of literacy (Bradbury, 2018), and associated policies such as the Phonics Screening Check (Clark & Glazzard, 2018). Alongside this, there are still some who challenge the interpretation of the scientific evidence used to justify the primacy of phonics, suggesting that none of the studies are strong enough to justify the wholesale policy imposition by the state, and other methods may be equally as effective (Bowers, 2020).

The field of writing around SSP continues to be strongly contested, and often polemical and polarised in nature. Proponents on both sides have accused each other of causing damage to children. Two titles from the same year sum this up neatly: “A monstrous regimen of synthetic phonics: fantasies of research-based teaching ‘methods’ versus real teaching” (Davis, 2013a) and the pro-SSP “Phonics and the resistance to reading” (Lloyd-Jones, 2013). Government claims that improving results in the PSC vindicate their approach and mean that “more children are becoming ‘confident, inquisitive and fluent readers’ ” (DfE, 2015), whilst presenting no firm evidence to show a link between the PSC and reading as a whole.

Government claims of a straightforward pathway between strong phonics knowledge in children and positive reading attitudes need to be tested as it is also possible that the conceptual separation of ‘phonics’ and ‘reading’ may have the opposite effect, with a detrimental impact on children’s concept of reading (Jackson, 2018). Children’s views are almost completely missing from the policy debate (Carter, 2020a; Clark, 2018). It is this gap where this research is situated, to identify children’s views on learning to read in the era of SSP ‘first and fast’ (DfE, 2010a).

In this review of the literature, the narrative will inevitably be incomplete and unable to reflect the complexity of classroom practice over the period described. This is a global debate in terms of English-speaking countries and some of the seminal literature originates in the US. The UK has also had, and continues to have, its own debate, which will be the main focus of discussion. I argue that the debate is almost always positioned at policy level and tends to be expressed in terms of extreme perspectives. This will be reflected in this review. Bernstein’s model of educational transmission therefore becomes highly germane to reveal the SSP-as-prime approach as a pedagogic discourse through which the power and control of the state is expressed (Bernstein, 1975). It remains the case, however, that perspective of children is almost entirely missing, and it is this perspective which will, therefore, be the subject of this thesis.

The debate in a nutshell: meaning-emphasis vs. code-emphasis

In Chall's seminal overview of the field in 1967, 'Learning to Read: The Great Debate' (already referred to in the introduction to this section), she proposed that all the controversy could "boiled down to" one question: "Do children learn better with a beginning method that stresses meaning or with one that stresses learning the code?" (Chall, 1967, p. 75). After a wide-ranging study over three years, which encompassed classroom observations, interviews, and an analysis of available empirical studies, she concluded the code-emphasis programmes result in most children learning to decode more quickly, but that many children also learn to read successfully with meaning-emphasis programmes. She added that no one method can work for every pupil, and that much depends on the skills of the teacher. Based on her findings, Chall suggested that the ideal scenario is for schools to include a code-emphasis teaching approach in the early stages (the first couple of years of formal reading instruction), whilst continuing to emphasise reading for meaning, and being alert to children for whom an alternative approach may be needed.

1960s – 1990s Meaning-emphasis in the ascendency

(Kim, 2008, p. 92) suggests that Chall was arguing against a "simplistic dualism" and based on the points above, Kim's argument convinces. A consensus did not result, however. In the late 1960s and 1970s Kenneth Goodman (in the US) and Frank Smith (in Canada) published highly influential books and papers arguing strongly for the whole-language approach. Smith proposed, for example, that "learning to read is akin to any other skill; there are perhaps some specialised exercises that one can take to iron out particular difficulties, but there is no substitute for the activity itself" (Smith, 1971, p. 209). He specifically advised teachers that phonics comes last in the act of reading unknown words (Smith, 1979, pp. 66-68), with the first strategy being to skip the word and the next to try to guess it – with the meaning of the whole text and the grammatical context of the sentence providing the required scaffolding in most cases to get the word correct, or for it not to matter that the word was missed out. Smith's view was that children could not, in fact, be taught to read, only helped to work out how to read by themselves: "Children learn to read by reading, so teachers must help children to read by making reading easy" (Smith, 1979, p. 137) – in other words, by helping children to understand the purpose of print, providing lots of opportunities to read engaging texts, being read to frequently, and having words read to them which they cannot yet read for themselves. This psycholinguistic approach was moving decisively into the ascendency in English-speaking countries, partly because it fitted very well with the progressive, child-centred, discovery-led education approaches becoming increasingly popular as reported, for example, in the Plowden Report (Central Advisory Council for England, 1967).

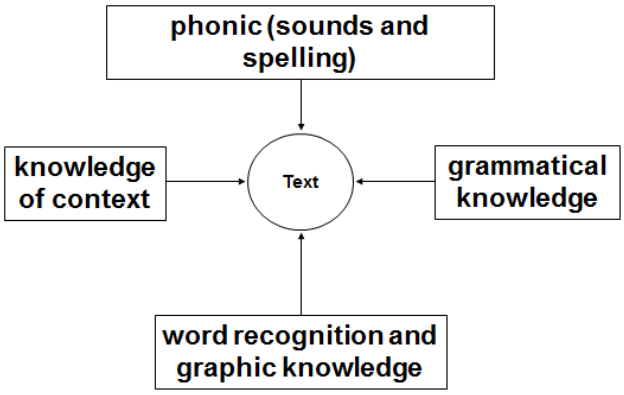
1995 onwards Neoliberalisim, 'crisis' and the turn to phonics

By the 1990s, however, a new wave of populist alarmism about children being unable to read had emerged. This was increasingly fuelled by the use of data about the 'performance' of individuals in standardised testing which was beginning to pervade all aspects of education (Soler, 2016). Connell (2013, pp. 101-102) links this with what she terms "the neoliberal cascade", seeing globalisation and marketization as having a profound effect on education. She argues that the neoliberal understanding of education is based around future workforce productivity and that as a corollary, market logic has taken a firm hold - instilled, for example, by local league tables, national testing, and international comparisons such as PISA surveys. In the USA in 2000, the National Reading Panel (NRP) consisting of a range of experts in the field of literacy research – reported that "findings provide solid support for the conclusion that systematic phonics instruction makes a bigger contribution to children's growth in reading than alternative programs providing unsystematic or no phonics instruction" (NRP, 2000, p. 2/92) but also that "systematic phonics instruction should be integrated with other reading instruction to create a balanced reading program. Phonics instruction is never a total reading program." (NRP, 2000, p. 2/97).

1997 -2010: New Labour, the National Literacy Strategy and The Rose Review

The 'turn to phonics', or more specifically to SSP-as-prime, in England is usually traced back to the Rose Review of Early Reading (2006), although in fact it can be traced back further than this. The National Literacy Strategy (NLS), introduced in 1997, made use of the so-called 'Searchlights' model, which was closely aligned with the previous, psycholinguistic set of approaches to teaching reading (Stainthorp, 2020). The Searchlights model was represented by the diagram shown in Figure 1:

Figure 1: Searchlights model



Source: National Literacy Strategy (DfES, 1998, p. 4)

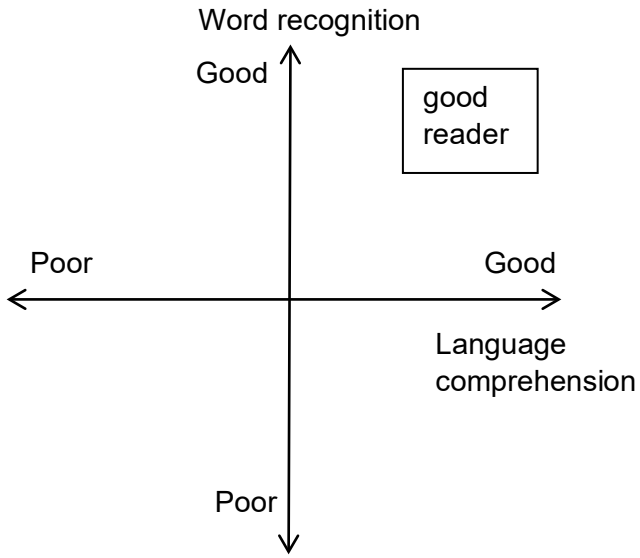
This model supported teachers using a range of strategies to help children to make sense of text: in essence, a mixed-methods approach. Just a year later though, in 1998, the NLS was seeking to place more emphasis on the teaching of phonics through the 'Progression in Phonics' (PIPs) guidance, suggesting that teachers often viewed such teaching "with suspicion" (DfES, 1999, p. 2)

In order to address this area of so-called 'suspicion', the NLS PIPs guidance promoted the idea of daily, discrete, direct whole-class teaching of phonics in Early Years and Year 1 for the first time, and proposed a systematic progression for teachers to follow. It did bring in some elements of synthetic phonics but also some analytic phonics. This approach gained criticism from both sides. Some critics (e.g. Wyse, 2000) argued that the research evidence was too weak to justify the NLS approach. Others, in particular those associated with campaigning organisation the 'Reading Reform Foundation' (RRF), asserted that the research evidence in favour of SSP was so strong that PIPs did not go nearly far enough. Furthermore, it was asserted by SSP campaigners that the searchlights model was confusing and promoted guessing rather than the reading of words (Hepplewhite, 2004) – a direct refutation of the meaning-led approach.

Political momentum had now been generated (Ellis & Moss, 2014) and the Independent Review of Early Reading, which came to be known as the Rose Review, was commissioned by the Secretary of State for Education. One question given to the review was: "What best practice should be expected in the teaching of early reading and synthetic phonics?" (Rose, 2006, p. 70) – thus privileging the position of phonics - and of synthetic phonics in particular - from the start in the way the remit of the review was framed.

In terms of recommendations, Rose went much further along the road to SSP-as-prime than the NLS had seven years earlier. As a result of Rose, the Searchlights model was replaced by the 'Simple View of Reading' (SVoR) model. The SVoR is often represented as a diagram (see Figure 2) and proposes that reading is a product of the ability to decode text and of language comprehension.

Figure 2: Simple View of Reading



Source: After Gough & Tunmer (1986)

Rose further recommended that phonics should be taught systematically and discretely as the prime approach to teaching early reading skills, starting by the age of five. Other aspects which were considered to be important were a “brisk pace” (p66), multi-sensory approaches, so-called ‘fidelity to the programme’ (i.e. choosing an approach and following it wholeheartedly and systematically) and strong teacher subject knowledge of phonic content and how to teach it. The report, echoing the NRP report in the US a few years previously, did accept that “phonic work should be set within a broad and rich language curriculum” (Rose, 2006, p. 70). It nonetheless represented a definite move away from a meaning-based, multi-methods approach which had been common in many schools; as the recommendations placed phonics far more front and central than before. Phonics could no longer be built into existing approaches but had to be both discrete and prime. A systematic review of randomised controlled trials was carried out by Torgerson, Brooks and Hall in the same year on behalf of the Department for Education and Skills (2006). This review found that there was no strong evidence for the synthetic version of phonics. Despite this, Rose claimed that “the systematic approach… is generally understood as 'synthetic' phonics”, and “offers the vast majority of young children the best and most direct route to becoming skilled readers and writers” (Rose, 2006, p. 4). A year later, DfES published a systematic synthetic phonics framework titled *Letters and Sounds* (DfES, 2007) which was adopted by many schools and continues to be widely used to the present time (Stainthorp, 2020). It should be noted that DfE approval has recently been withdrawn for this document, and schools are being ‘encouraged’ to buy into one of the newly accredited DfE list of comprehensive programmes (DfE, 2021a)

2010 onwards: SSP-as-prime

Ellis and Moss (2014) identify how various factors then came together, at this point, to move SSP-as-prime to centre stage in England. Campaign groups such as the RRF continued to lobby vigorously for synthetic phonics programmes, with the continued support of Shadow Minister Nick Gibb. When the Conservative-Liberal coalition took power in 2010, Gibb was then able, as Schools Minister, to ensure that SSP became mandated as the prime approach. This was accomplished via a number of different policy levers, including: the introduction of the national phonics screening check for Year 1 children from 2012 onwards; the stipulation in the new National Curriculum that children should be taught to "apply phonic knowledge and skills as *the* route to decode words" (DfE, 2013, p10, my emphasis); the insistence that teacher training institutions focus on SSP as the prime approach; the inclusion of an understanding of SSP in the updated Teacher Standards (DfE, 2012); and the offer of £3,000 of match funding to schools to spend on approved phonics programmes (DfE, 2010a). To be approved, programmes had to be both systematic and synthetic. Schools were encouraged to invest in so-called 'decodable' reading books to go alongside the new programmes. In other words, reading books containing only words matched to children's current level of phonic knowledge.

SSP-as-prime remains the position at the present time and government continues to increase the strength of the policy by any means possible. For example, in 2019, the updated School Inspection Handbook (Ofsted, 2019c) further foregrounded SSP. The Handbook specified that inspectors must look for staff who are expert in teaching SSP, that children are being taught to read using SSP from the start of Reception, and that purely decodable reading books are used. As already discussed, a new reading framework document has recently been published, which provides tighter guidance than ever on every aspect of the teaching of early reading. For example, teachers are now directed to teach phonics in a quiet space, not to use hands up, not to have children using whiteboards and pens on their laps, and to avoid highly decorated walls (DfE, 2021b, pp. 25; 50-53). Furthermore, the DfE has recently updated its list of 'approved' phonics programme using a stricter set of criteria, for example, that the programme must "be built around direct teaching sessions" and "provide sufficient decodable reading material" (DfE, 2021c, para. 2). It remains to be seen what, if any, change there may be in policy direction following Gibb's departure from the DfE in September 2021.

Having delineated current policy and its development, the next section turns to an overview of the lines of debate. This will set out various positions in relation to SSP-as-prime, and discuss the nature of evidence in the field.

Chapter 3: Review of the Literature Part 2 – Voices in the Field

Main groups of voices in the field

Broadly, it is possible to consider the current field as divided into three main groups of voices. Firstly, numerous papers emanating almost exclusively from departments of psychology. These are ostensibly neutral in ideological terms, reporting the results of studies and quasi-experiments into various interventions and approaches to teaching children to read, such as the highly influential and much-cited 'Clackmannanshire' research (Johnston & Watson, 2004, 2005). A number of meta-analyses of such studies also exist (Galuschka et al., 2014; McArthur et al., 2012; Torgerson et al., 2019). Taken as a whole, these do appear to provide evidence that the use of phonics-based strategies in the teaching of reading has an overall positive effect (Education Endowment Foundation, 2017b), although there remain many points of critique – an overview will be provided in this chapter.

The second main group consists of proponents of the approach which places SSP "first, fast and only" (Lloyd-Jones, 2013, p. 65). This includes both campaigners and policy makers as manifested in various government documents and related reports (e.g. DfE, 2010b, 2014a, 2018a; Rose, 2006). Nick Gibb, Schools Minister in an almost unbroken run since 2010 to 2021, stands out within the field as demonstrating a longstanding personal commitment to implementing SSP as the prime method for teaching children to read in the English education system (e.g. DfE, 2021b; Gibb, 2014, 2017).

Against this, in the third grouping there are many critiques of these policies, from a range of perspectives (e.g. Clark & Glazzard, 2018; Darnell et al., 2017; Ellis & Moss, 2014). This group includes advocates of a 'mixed method' or 'balanced' approach which almost always includes phonics as part of the whole (Dombey, 2015; Elborn, 2015), but includes other strategies too. Before these perspectives are considered in more detail, however, it is important to outline the manner in which debates tend to be conducted about this area, as this has an impact on the way in which this review has been carried out.

Nature of the field I – psychology-based studies related to learning to read

It has already been noted that most of the large-scale studies and meta-analyses focussing on the effectiveness of methods of teaching reading come from psychology rather than education. The advantage this brings, for this debate, is that they tend to be published in peer-reviewed journals and are very explicit about limitations and reliability. The difficulty is that, as Ellis & Moss (2014, p. 249) have cogently argued, education and psychology use "different lenses" which may produce different views of what is deemed to be effective and

why. They argue that: “psychology research…focuses far more attention on the sub-skill processing that takes place at the level of the individual pupil, rather than within the social space of the classroom” (Ellis & Moss, 2014, p. 250). Such studies do not tend to evaluate the implementation of teaching approaches as a whole, thus not examining questions such as the training given to teachers beyond that for the particular intervention, ongoing support and monitoring processes within the school, other literacy teaching and activities, the balance of the overall timetable (including the impact of spending additional time on interventions), the use made of support staff, and so on. This is not a criticism of the studies *per se*, it is simply an observation that the intentions are different. For this debate, it means that translating one type of research into another domain, which is often presented as entirely unproblematic by the proponents of SSP-as-prime, can in fact be fraught with difficulties.

Nature of the field II – education academics and practitioners – for and against SSP-as-prime

There is considerable peer-reviewed publication within the academy questioning the way in which evidence has been applied to policy (e.g. Gibson & England, 2016; Wyse & Goswami, 2008). Some argue strongly for a mixed approach, or one in which teachers are able to make decisions about the methods used based on their own assessment of the needs of the children (e.g. Clark, 2016b; Tse & Nicholson, 2014). Looking, though, for comparable material supporting the way in which the research studies on the use of phonics-based approaches have been applied to policy, and the use of SSP-as-prime, there are very few to be found. This does not mean that little is written; it is just the nature of the writing which is different, coming mainly in the area known as ‘grey literature’, to use the typology of Paez (2017), which attempts to take into account the rise in online writing. It is essential to include this in a full review of the topic because, quite simply, this is a substantial part of the field where influential opinions are being expressed and points argued. As Norcup (2015) has argued, dissenting voices outside the canon should become part of the narrative “to enable a freedom of ideological debate and publishing practise” (p62), as well as to truly represent the debates which are taking place within a discipline. Putting aside official policy documents and related reports, the literature directly supporting SSP-as-prime mainly consists of websites, blogs, contributions to web forums and non-academic papers and books (e.g. Hepplewhite, 2017; Lloyd-Jones, 2013; Nonweiler, 2014). Use is therefore made of these sources within the literature review. One final point - the waters are arguably further muddied because some of the most ardent advocates of rigorous SSP-as-prime are both advisors to the DfE and authors of commercial SSP schemes. They thus stand to profit financially from

making their case successfully (Clark, 2016a), which adds another strand of complexity to an already difficult to navigate field.

The present debate I: SSP-as-prime advocates and campaigners

SSP-as-prime advocates and campaigners are characterised by passion and a belief that the ways children have been taught to read since the 1970s are fundamentally flawed, and that as a result, children's education has been harmed. The position of this group – as manifested in the discussions of the Reading Reform Foundation and sister organisation the International Federation for Effective Reading Instruction (IFERI), related blogs and largely self-published papers - can be summarised as follows:

- a large and well-established body of research shows that SSP is the most effective way to teach children to read, and this has been the case for many years (IFERI, 2015)
- no other method should be used at all, because firstly, it is confusing and even harmful for children, and secondly, there is no need (Nonweiler, 2014)
- current government policy has not gone far enough because teachers are still using lots of other methods alongside SSP, and phonics teaching is of inconsistent quality (Hepplewhite, 2017, 2021b)
- it is the educational establishment which is at fault and which resists phonics at every turn, even when saying they do not (Lloyd-Jones, 2013)

This group contends that children should be taught using SSP-as-prime for approximately two years – in England roughly equating to Reception and Year 1 - and that other methods can confuse children or even, in some cases, harm their longer term development as readers. "…multi-cueing reading strategies are particularly dangerous for vulnerable groups of children…" (Hepplewhite, 2014b). Further to this – and controversially – this group believes that children should not read books independently which contain words they cannot yet decode. This has led to tales of children being "not even allowed books" until they have learned the required letters (Davis, 2013b, p. 9). It is so-called 'reading books' which SSP proponents believe should be entirely decodable, in order for children to be able to apply and habituate the knowledge they have learned in SSP sessions and to achieve a rapid feeling of success. Other books should only be read to them at this point (Godsland, 2011). SSP-as-prime advocates argue that children who are taught well enjoy phonics sessions and that children who can decode confidently are more likely to read for pleasure in the long term, not less (e.g. Gibb, 2017; Godsland, 2011; Nonweiler, 2014)

SSP-as-prime proponents also tend to be strongly supportive of the phonics screening check (PSC) administered to all children in England at the end of Year 1, when most children will be aged 6 (Hepplewhite, 2013). This consists of 20 words and 20 non-words (like 'mip' or 'blort') which children read, on a one to one basis, to a teacher. This is also controversial for a number of reasons: for example, the inclusion of non-words which, it is argued, can disadvantage able readers who tend to seek meaning (Reedy, 2013). SSP-as-prime proponents (e.g. de Lemos, 2014) tend to support it primarily because of the focus it places on ensuring that all children have been taught specifically to decode (non-words can ONLY be read by decoding), as well as because they consider it to be short, fun and light-touch and to provide useful information to teachers, schools, local authorities and to the government about the success schools are having in terms of teaching phonics.

The present debate II: 'Mixed-methods' or 'balanced' proponents

Those who argue against the current policy position of SSP-as-prime tend to state that they are not against the teaching of phonics; rather, the argument is instead for a 'mixed' or 'balanced' approach. This could be seen as most akin to the Searchlights model (DfES, 1998) as discussed earlier. Dombey argues, for example "the most effective phonics teaching places it in the context of making meaning from text" (2015, p. 44). She suggests following a systematic sequence for teaching phonics, but also urges teachers to be creative, to play with language and rhythms, to use analogies, pictures and contexts to share and engage with texts and above all for teachers to focus on reading as communication and as making sense of a wide range of texts. Drawing on Bussis, Chittenden, Amarel and Klausner she argues that learning to read is a process of learning to orchestrate different types of knowledge skilfully, cautioning, for example, that "a tick box approach will not produce fluent, perceptive and committed readers, nor will the rigid separation of word identification from comprehension" (Dombey, 2015, p. 42) and " a narrow conception of learning to read as primarily concerned with phonics may…restrict [children's] understanding of what reading has to offer" (p41).

Stuart et al. (2008), strong advocates of SSP, nonetheless emphasise the importance of developing children's language knowledge and comprehension alongside word reading skills. Davis, author of the 'Monstrous Regimen' paper about synthetic phonics, states "I am *not* attacking phonics. I *am* opposing the universal imposition of text decoding outside 'real' reading contexts" (2013a, pp. 562, emphasis original). Clark (2016b, p. 135) agrees that phonics is useful within a broad approach, but questions the evidence that phonics that phonics is "the one best method" and, furthermore, that synthetic phonics is more effective than analytic phonics. This is at the heart of many of the critiques of SSP-as-prime. Wyse

and Goswami (2008), for example, comprehensively critique the methodology of the Clackmannanshire studies which are cited by the government as providing evidence for synthetic (rather than analytic) phonics. They cite Togerson et al.'s meta-analysis of randomised controlled trials (RCTs) carried out as part of the Rose Review process (2006) which concluded that there was moderate evidence to support the effectiveness of systematic phonics instruction within a broad literacy curriculum, but that "there is currently no strong RCT evidence that any one form of systematic phonics is more effective than any other" (p10). A systematic tertiary review was carried out in 2019 and came to the same conclusion (Torgerson et al., 2019). Torgerson and Brooks commented in 2014 via the DfE 'Phonics Evidence Check web forum' that many of the studies used by SSP-as-prime advocates followed a weak experimental model (Torgerson & Brooks, 2014). Hepplewhite, responding, dismisses this issue, saying that it is 'detracting' from the need to deepen teachers' professional understanding and that further research is needed to understand why synthetic phonics is more beneficial (Hepplewhite, 2014a), whereas Nonweiler, also an SSP-as-prime advocate, simply asserts "I am certain that SSP is the best way to teach children to read, because of a combination of my own experience, anecdotal evidence, logic and published research" (Nonweiler, 2014, para.1). This issue of the research basis will be further explored in the next section.

Returning to the classroom context and the views of mixed-methods advocates, there are some further points which are made. One is that phonics may not suit every child – linked to this, an assertion that the state should not prescribe to teachers which methods to use, as this is a matter of professional judgement (Carter, 2020b). Davis sees issues around the prescription of an SSP approach for young fluent readers in particular, provocatively describing this as "almost a form of abuse" (Davis, 2013a, p. 570). Clark raises concerns that messages may be being communicated to children about the nature of reading and literacy that have more to do with decoding and less to do with communication and enjoyment; in other words, reading for meaning and pleasure (Clark, 2016a). The United Kingdom Literacy Association (UKLA) argues that an over-emphasis on phonics detracts from other important factors in children's learning to read such as pre-school experiences, a broad and rich literacy diet, and the need to 'turn children on' to reading through reading texts which engage them. Dombey, in a pamphlet for UKLA, speaks of the need to make "children fully aware of the joys of the written word" (Dombey, 2010b, p. 10) and contrasts this with what she terms the "thin gruel of a phonics-dominated approach" (2010b, p13). This viewpoint is supported by a number of more recent papers focussing on the negative and narrowing impact of the PSC on classroom practice (Atkinson & Glazzard, 2018; Bradbury, 2018; Carter, 2020b).

Clark also draws attention to concerns regarding the cost of the PSC, time in the curriculum given to decoding non words, and the impact of SSP on fluent young readers. Further concerns have been raised about the PSC including, for example, its lack of emphasis on phonological awareness (Glazzard, 2017a), its focus on decoding at the expense of comprehension (Glazzard, 2017b), and its content and validity (Darnell et al., 2017; Grundin, 2018)

The nature of research studies

As has been shown, both sides in the debate regularly describe their position as evidence-based, with a tendency to dismiss evidence put forward by the other side as flawed, weak, or ideologically-driven. Evidence is challenged with counter-evidence mixed with opinion pieces and studies which are highly variable in terms of quality and rigour. This short review cannot do justice to the vast amount which has been written on this topic. Some of the key reasons why the evidence is so contested are:

1. *It depends what you choose to study*. More large-scale studies – the type favoured by government - have been carried out in discrete areas such as children's alphabetic recognition than on whole classroom practice, a hugely complex area. Sub-skills are more commonly studied by psychology academics working in this field (Ellis & Moss, 2014). Galuschka et al. (2014) note that phonics instruction is the most frequently investigated reading intervention for children with reading difficulties, for example.

2. *It depends how you choose to study it*. Arguably, some approaches are more suited to experimental and quasi-experimental studies than others. Discrete phonics programmes or approaches are by their very nature possible to study discretely. Although it has not been common to carry out RCTs or even large-scale quasi-experimental studies in education (Goldacre, 2013), some studies have nonetheless taken place. It is much harder to carry out a specific study of a mixed-methods, balanced approach in which the entire rich and complex environment is considered to be instrumental. This does not mean that there is no evidence: quite the opposite. There are many studies and reports on effective teaching in reading (e.g. Blair et al., 2007; Clark, 2016a; Wray et al., 2000) but these tend to be based on qualitative enquiries rather than RCTs. Positivist, quantitative studies tend to be carried out in relation to sub-skills in reading like phonics.

3. *It depends what measures you think are valid*. Studies often cite improved reading test scores, for example, as evidence that a particular intervention has been

effective. However, an improved ability to decode in the short term may not lead to an improvement in reading in the longer term (Bowers, 2020). Furthermore, it has been suggested that children may be put off reading by a focus on technical processes. (e.g. Davis, 2018).

4. *Confirmation bias, or it depends what you already think.* Reutzel summed up the entrenched nature of the field succinctly when he commented, reviewing McCardle and Chabbra's 2004 book entitled 'The Voice of Evidence in Reading Research':

> Whether you agree or disagree with the contents of this book and its ideological position—that the scientific method holds the answers to the problems associated with the issues of reading failure in today's classrooms—one thing is for sure: You will not be disappointed by this book. Either you will find more to disparage as a critic or more to disseminate as a scientist. (Reutzel, 2006, p. 474)

5. *It depends on your lens*. Shannon (2008) argues that science can only take us so far in the debate about reading, pointing out that experimental psychology studies may not tell the whole story. He quotes William James, who said in 1901:

> You make a great, a very great mistake, if you think that psychology, being the science of mind's laws, is something from which you can deduce definite programmes and schemes and methods of instruction for immediate schoolroom use. Psychology is a science, and teaching is an art…(Shannon, 2008, pp. 72-73)

From the studies that do exist, however, there is a weight of evidence that does appear to demonstrate that systematic phonics teaching is of benefit to young children in the early stages of learning to read to secure reading accuracy and fluency. The benefits appear particularly significant for those children who may encounter reading difficulties. This is shown repeatedly through meta analyses of studies and narrative overviews of the field (Cain, 2010; Ehri et al., 2001; Snowling & Hulme, 2012; Stainthorp, 2020). Although children with dyslexia were not a particular focus in this study, it is nonetheless worth noting that the use of phonics-based approaches as interventions for reading difficulties have been widely studied and shown to have a positive impact on decoding skills (e.g. Galuschka et al., 2014). However, it is also apparent that much more is needed in the literacy curriculum for children to become successful readers, both for children with dyslexia and those without (Cain, 2010; Catts, 2018; van Rijthoven et al., 2018). In addition, repeated studies have failed to show an advantage for synthetic phonics over other types of phonics teaching (Bowers, 2020;

Torgerson et al., 2019), thus calling into question the imposition of this method via government policy.

Furthermore, a majority of studies have failed to find long term impact on reading comprehension ability, although this is extremely difficult to measure due to the multi-factoral nature of children's reading experiences (Krashen, 2018; Machin et al., 2016). This remains contested as some studies do appear to show a predictive relationship between competence on phonics and later reading comprehension (Duff et al., 2015; Johnston et al., 2012). Drawing on the PISA data from 2018, however, Bowers (2020) concludes the opposite. He points out that other English-speaking jurisdictions such as Canada and Northern Ireland gained higher scores than England, with no requirement to teach using SSP.

Double et al.'s recent analysis of data from the Phonics Screening Check, Key Stage 1 reading assessment and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) data suggests that continuing direct phonics instruction in Year 2 supports improved reading comprehension later on. (Double et al., 2019). The authors are careful to emphasise, however, that phonics should be taught as part of integrated reading instruction rather than as an isolated skill, building on numerous earlier studies. There are many important aspects to literacy development which require focus in schooling including the development of oral communication, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, writing, reading for pleasure, and reading as a shared experience (e.g. Cremin, 2014a; Gustafson et al., 2013; Rasinski et al., 2012; Young-Suk et al., 2014). It has long been widely accepted amongst both academics and teachers that good literacy instruction requires teachers to pay attention to all aspects, in a balanced and integrated way (Denton & West, 2002; Hatcher et al., 1994; Palmer, 2013; Pressley & Allington, 2015; Taylor et al., 2010; Wolf et al., 2009). Scarborough's 'Reading Rope' visual (Figure 3) famously captures some of the complexity of skilled reading:

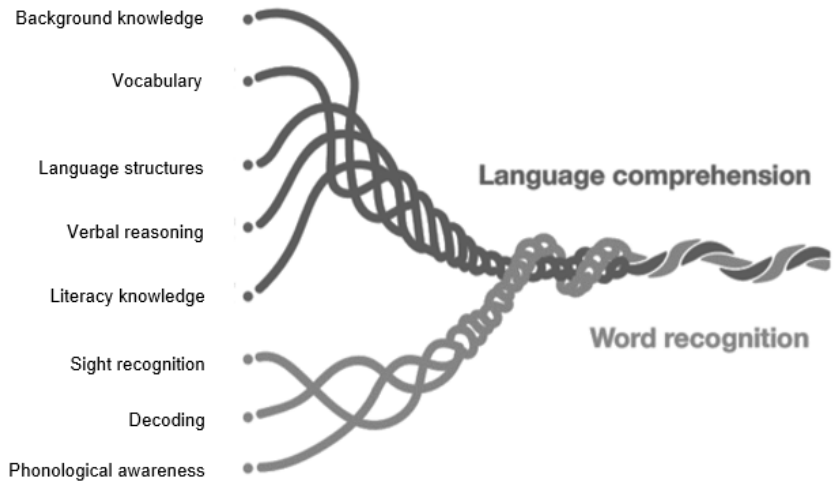


Figure 3: Scarborough's Reading Rope: the many strands that are woven into skilled reading (Education Endowment Foundation, 2017a)

Evidence relating to the significance of phonics as part of the picture does not, and cannot, detract from this. Despite this, as has been shown, current policy remains heavily skewed towards SSP as the single most important factor. The reading framework recently published by DfE does include welcome reference to other aspects including the importance of children's talk and the need for regular shared stories and poems (DfE, 2021b). The impact of this on classroom practice and on children's experiences remains to be seen, with the PSC remaining as a key performance metric. The final section of the literature review will therefore look at what is known to date about the impact of SSP policy on children's educational experiences.

Chapter 4: Review of the Literature Part 3 – Current Situation and Children's Views

What is happening in primary classrooms now?

The DfE commissioned an evaluation report from the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) (Walker et al., 2015) on the implementation of the Phonics Screening Check, and the impact of the check on teaching and learning in primary schools. Widespread changes to classroom practice were reported, including phonics being taught as a discrete subject, more frequent and longer phonics sessions, a faster pace, and more frequent checks and assessments. More recent classroom-based research echoes these findings (Bradbury, 2018; Carter, 2020b). The NFER report pointed out that although the national PSC results showed a year-on-year improvement on phonics attainment, there was no evidence, as yet, of any improvement to literacy as a whole. National PSC results did indeed climb steadily from 2012 (58% meeting the expected standard) to 2016 (80%). This is unsurprising as teachers were clearly putting much more emphasis on teaching children phonics and, arguably, preparing them to pass the test. Since then, however, the improvement has stalled and this figure has remained virtually unchanged (see Figure 4).

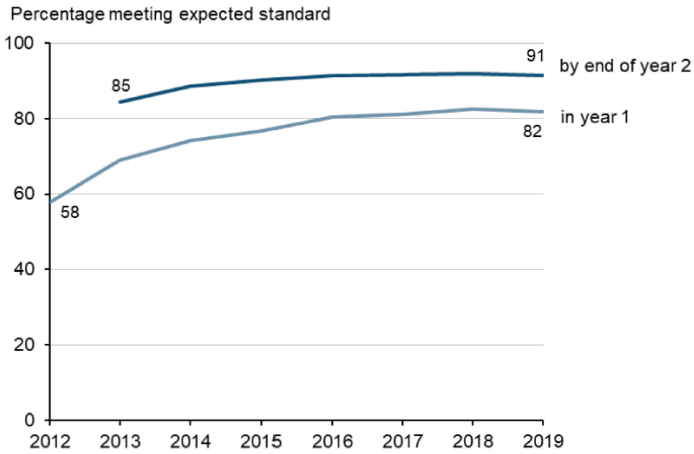


Figure 4: Percentage meeting expected standard in PSC, 2012 – 2019 (DfE, 2019c).

More significantly, the teacher assessment statistics for end of Key Stage 1 attainment in literacy have also barely shifted, with around 75% reaching the expected standard each year (DfE, 2019c). This suggests that SSP is perhaps not the 'magic bullet' its proponents might suggest, certainly considering the enormously increased emphasis in teaching practices in

infant classrooms caused by its wholescale imposition, with the accompanying cost (Bowers, 2020). Key Stage 2 attainment (as measured by standardised testing) has also stagnated, with a drop in 2019 to 73% reaching the expected standard, just one point higher than 2017 (72%) (DfE, 2019b).

SSP-as-prime advocates such Hepplewhite argue that this is because schools are still not teaching a pure or consistent enough form of SSP (Hepplewhite, 2017, 2021a). It is suggested that inadequate teacher subject knowledge and professional development are at fault (Flynn et al., 2021). The state is also following these lines, with every primary school inspection now including a mandatory 'deep dive' into the teaching of early reading (Ofsted, 2019c), additional, more detailed, guidance issued (DfE, 2021b), and 'encouragement' for more schools to purchase comprehensive, DfE-approved programmes with accompanying training (DfE, 2021a). Within the updated School Inspection Handbook (Ofsted, 2019c) there are seven statements giving guidance to inspectors about judging the quality of education in relation to reading. Five out of the seven are focussed on phonics, with SSP being specifically required. Only one statement relates to any other form of reading curriculum.

Along with the apparent lack of significant positive impact using the government's own measures, the potential negative effects of current government phonics policy have been examined by a number of authors. A disjunct between phonics and the wider teaching of reading is one such outcome which has been pointed out in multiple studies (Atkinson & Glazzard, 2018; Beard et al., 2019; Carter, 2020b). The performance-based model driven by the PSC has led to a rise of so-called 'ability' grouping in phonics, already known to be detrimental in a number of ways (Bradbury, 2018; McGillicuddy & Devine, 2020). Others have questioned the value of the SSP-as-prime approach and the PSC as a blanket approach for all children, suggesting that it may be less suitable for children who can already read well, or have particular learning needs (Glazzard, 2018; Price-Mohr & Price, 2018). Cain's wide-ranging overview of research concludes that, whilst phonics teaching is important, it only forms one part of reading instruction. The teaching of other aspects such as inference and knowledge of vocabulary, along with developing the motivation to read, are also crucial (Cain, 2010). Unfortunately the imposition of the PSC does appear to be having a distorting and narrowing effect on the curriculum (Carter, 2020b; Roberts-Holmes, 2015). This is a phenomenon which cannot be a surprise to government as it has been well attested and even discussed in recent Ofsted research (Jones et al., 2017; Ofsted, 2019b). As Ball points out, teachers who work within a performative system quickly learn expected behaviours and priorities, even when these may contradict their own values (Ball, 2017).

It was discussed in the introduction that there is no single, agreed definition of what reading is. The cognitive-psychological view, as seen previously, tends to focus more on the acquisition of sub-skills leading to an eventual understanding of written text: a linear, bottom-up process. A psycholinguistic approach, however, sees reading more as a complex, interactive undertaking involving making meaning from text using an array of interlocking and complementary skills. These might include letter, word and grammatical knowledge, hypothesis, inference, prediction and comprehension alongside general and cultural knowledge. This is more consistent with a top-down, meaning-led understanding of reading. Dixon (2011) and Parvin (2014) have both shown how schools and even individual teachers can emphasise different aspects of reading through the approaches that they take, which can in turn influence children's perceptions of what reading is. As discussed in the literature review, however, multiple policy levers in England have foregrounded SSP to such an extent that teacher agency has become limited. Bradbury's research with teachers, for example, has shown how some describe grouping in phonics as "a necessary evil" in the climate of high-stakes testing (Bradbury, 2018). Others appear to have internalised the view of reading (and writing) as a matter of process and proficiency rather than shared and social meaning-making (Hempel-Jorgensen et al., 2018). This is why the DfE's recent reading framework (DfE, 2021b) may be limited in its impact, as it says little of which teachers are not already aware, and provides no change in terms of the structures within which teachers operate.

Children's views on reading and the teaching of reading

Children's views on reading have been the subject of many previous studies, such as: the influence of parental beliefs and behaviours (Baker & Scher, 2002; Ozturk et al., 2016); the impact of classroom practices (Capper, 2013; Hanke, 2014); and the impact of teacher attention (Ellis & Coddington, 2013). Pertinent to this study, the relationship between reading attainment and attitudes has been explored from multiple angles. A reciprocal relationship between early success and positive attitudes in reading has long been noted, with many studies showing an association between children's reading attainment and positive attitudes to reading (e.g. Chapman & Tunmer, 1997; Clark & De Zoysa, 2011; McKenna et al., 2012; Petscher, 2010). These studies have often been conducted with slightly older children. However, McGeown et al. (2015) carried out a study with over 200 children aged 6-7, which found that the reciprocal relationship was evident from an early age. They suggested, therefore, that teaching should focus on reading enjoyment and nurturing positive attitudes, alongside the focus on reading skills. This supports the earlier findings of Morgan and Fuchs (2007), who suggest that the relationship between reading skills and motivation appears to be bi-directional, so teachers should focus on both.

Despite this, recent data from the UK National Literacy Trust (NLT) Annual Survey, which tracks the reading attitudes of children of nine years old and upwards, shows a decline over the previous three years in reported enjoyment, with only 47.8% saying that they enjoy reading (Clark & Picton, 2020). In the NLT survey of 2019, only 25.8% of children reported reading by choice in their own time (Clark & Teravainen-Goff, 2020). The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) monitors similar trends worldwide, with most recent data being from 2016 (Mullis et al., 2017). The link between reading enjoyment and achievement is again evident in this data, with self-reported 'very engaged' students also showing the highest average attainment internationally.

Stanovich (1986) used the concept of *Matthew Effects* to explore this reciprocal relationship. He posited the idea that children who acquire reading sub-skills faster (e.g. phonological awareness, vocabulary, use of context cures, knowledge of how text works) therefore access a far greater volume of text from an early age. They thus acquire more skills, have a stronger self-image as readers and are motivated to continue. The outcome of this will be that better readers continue to get better faster, and slower readers become disengaged, read less, and thus improve more slowly, leading to an ever-increasing gap. This relationship appears to have been confirmed by many studies since (e.g. Schiefele & Loweke, 2017; Schiefele et al., 2012; Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). Protopapas, Parrila and Simos (2016) dispute that the widening gap concept is empirically testable, given the numerous variables present in any longitudinal study of children's learning. They do acknowledge, however, that such a relationship exists and that to examine it further is likely to be fruitful. The present study is located in this area and appears to confirm this proposition, with a particular focus on children's experiences of learning to read with SSP-as-prime.

Reading and the home environment

As numerous studies have found, children's literacy attitudes and practices are strongly influenced by home reading experiences. Various aspects of this have been explored, such as attitudes to reading in the home (Baker & Scher, 2002), willingness of others in the home to engage with the child on the reading set by school (Earl & Maynard, 2006), the impact of being read to and others experiences with books within the home (Mol & Bus, 2011), and parental expectations in relation to literacy (Ozturk et al., 2016). The influence of parents' educational background and the number of books in the home has also been examined (Wiescholek et al., 2018).

Although the influence of the home environment is largely outside the scope of this study, there is nonetheless one important aspect to consider. Moje et al. (2004) explored how older children experience potentially differing discourses related to literacy practice in the home,

school and indeed peer environment. They suggest that teachers need to be aware of and value these, to bridge potential difficulties in learning. Levy further explores children's differing constructions of reading at home and at school (Levy, 2011), suggesting that some children of Nursey age are (three to four) are already aware of a dissonance. Children might bring one definition of reading from home encompassing meaning-making, sharing, narrative and interaction with pictures. They soon become aware, however, that in a school context 'reading' means being able to decode text. Dixon's research (2011) echoes this finding, showing how teachers' models of reading quickly become children's models of reading in the classroom setting.

Like Moje et al., Levy uses third space theory (Bhabha, 1994) to explore ways in which children, and potentially teachers, make sense of this disjuncture. Some children appear to accept this as a natural developmental process and look forward to the next stage of being a reader, creating a comfortable in-between space for themselves as developing readers, or readers-to-be. Others, however, experience this as a narrow and somewhat intimidating definition, constructing a self-view as a non-reader and struggling to see themselves becoming what they now see as a competent reader. Examples of such potential dissonance are discussed in this study (see data analysis).

Children and schooled literacy practices

Attention has been given to children's experiences of what is sometimes known as 'schooled' literacy (Levy, 2011). This posits that children are strongly influenced by both home and school reading practices and constructs, and that this is likely to influence their perceptions of reading. In the context of this study, the influence of schooled reading practices on children's conceptualisation of reading are of interest, and is discussed in the data analysis.

Levy's study with children in Early Years showed how reading often came to be seen as to do with decoding and as something 'hard'. Reception-aged children who could use pictures and prior knowledge to read books, often did not regard this a 'real' reading. Reading in school was often described by these children in performative transactional terms – being able to decode books from the reading scheme accurately, to an adult. In contrast, children of Nursery age tended to see reading much more holistically, with less focus on word-reading and more on pictures, interaction, meaning, and enjoyment (Levy, 2011).

Common schooled reading practices include the use of reading schemes, and so-called ability grouping for guided (group) reading, as well as for SSP teaching. These have all been previously shown to have an influence on children's views of reading, and of themselves as

readers. For example, Hanke (2014) showed how children engaged in guided reading sessions developed sophisticated understandings of expected literacy behaviours (such as reading fast) and social context (such as an awareness of ability grouping). Levy (2009, 2011) found that the use of reading schemes promotes an instrumental view of reading, with children focussed on their position and progress within the scheme. Furthermore, children often did not regard themselves as readers whilst they were working through the reading scheme, and some were discouraged from reading other types of books, stating that they could not read those. Their self-view as a reader or non-reader became tied to their proficiency in decoding text. McGillicuddy and Devine's research (2020) built on many previous studies about grouping by ability. They demonstrated that children placed in ability groups for maths and reading developed a fixed notion of hierarchy, in which the grouping created a sense of deficit and lower social and academic status for those in perceived 'low-ability' groups. Bradbury (2018) noted the growth in ability grouping in relation to phonics, linking this to her study showing this to the impact of overtly classifying and demarcating children in this way (Bradbury & Roberts-Holmes, 2017).

At the same time, studies have also shown some evidence that children are able to continue to interact with non-scheme books in meaningful ways, using pictures, discussion and a range of cues to build their understanding (Levy, 2011). This may only happen at home, if there is no space or opportunity for this within school. Hanke (2014) showed that children are sometimes able to resist the individualisation of reading promoted by schooled practices, seeing value in reading together with friends and supporting each other. Carter quoted a child who suggested that a toy character did not need to learn to read because he was "perfect how he is already" (Carter, 2020a, p. 55). This may suggest that some children are able to maintain or form more holistic views of reading (Levy, 2011), even where there is dissonance with schooled practices.

Children's views on SSP

A few studies have been published working in a similar space to the present research, mainly focussing on teachers' views, with some inclusion of the views of parents and, indirectly, those of children. Clark and Glazzard's enquiry (2018) into the views of Headteachers, teachers and parents on the Phonics Screening Check (PSC) showed that a majority in all three groups disagreed with at least some aspects of current government policy on the teaching of early reading. Headteachers and teachers expressed concerns about the narrowing influence the PSC had on the curriculum, due to the high-stakes nature of the test. Significant numbers in both groups felt that a broader view of reading, which they wanted to emphasise, was being pushed aside in favour of SSP teaching. Some teachers in

the enquiry noted that children were over-using phonics when reading and that other necessary aspects of reading such as reading for meaning and vocabulary development were receiving insufficient time and attention (Atkinson & Glazzard, 2018). A large minority of parents (93 out of 316) commented on perceived negative effects of the PSC on their child, with some hinting at an impact on wider reading. One parent commented the the PSC resulted in their child "not expecting books to make sense because of the over practice of nonsense/alien words" and another parent that their child "became convinced he was not a reader and no good, as he was one of the only ones who failed the test" (Bayley, 2018, p. 48).

Carter's recent paper (2020a), focusing on children's views of early reading in the context of the phonics screening check, found that many children seemed to see phonics lessons as an academic exercise, disconnected from reading. Where connected to anything, it was writing (understood as spelling), or reading in the sense of 'sounding out', or decoding. A few were able to express that decoding was a part of reading, but that more was also needed. Carter also found some confusion in relation to the pseudo-words found in the PSC, with pseudo-words becoming part of the SSP curriculum and some children seemingly expecting to find such words in books. Carter noted the apparent impact of the PSC, as a high stakes test, on the teaching of early reading, with comments from teachers including: "It's just so mechanised" "A lot of sounds to cram in" and "pounding them with the sounds" (Carter, 2020a, p. 55). Carter expanded on the views of teachers in a second paper (Carter, 2020b). The research found that many teachers felt a tension between their own practice and the teaching they felt they wanted to provide. For example, feeling driven by the accountability agenda to focus on phonics as a discrete body of knowledge rather than in the context of meaningful reading, going at a faster or slower pace than they would otherwise do, and explicitly teaching pseudo-words as part of test preparation. There were concerns from teachers about the impact that this would have on children's understanding of reading as concerned with communication and meaning-making.

This demonstrates the timeliness of the present research study as adding to the evidence base on the impact of the current policy of SSP-as-prime. It is crucial to attend to the way in which this approach may be changing the ways in which teachers and children perceive reading. The policy outcomes could be counter to that which is intended: children who are fluent, engaged and motivated readers.

Looking to Bernstein's Theory of Educational Transmission

This interplay between policy and experience was a major concern of Bernstein's, writing from the 1970s to the early 21st century (e.g. Bernstein, 1975, 1990, 2000; Bernstein &

Brannen, 1996; Bernstein & Diaz, 1984). Bernstein constructed a theory of the ways in which a state communicates its desired outcomes via the educational system, or its pedagogic discourse, and the impact that this may have on those being educated. The application of this theory to the current level of state control of the teaching of SSP-as-prime is the subject of the next chapter. Following Bernstein, the focus is primarily on the mechanisms of policy enactment and a critique of the ways these are played out in practice in the primary classroom. Developing Bernstein is also necessary, to consider children's views and responses to this policy. Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of development is therefore used to critique Bernstein's analysis and suggest a wider view of the impact of current policy.

Chapter 5: Using Bernstein's theory of educational transmission (with Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model of development) to analyse the enactment and experience of SSP-as-prime

Introduction: Bernstein and Bronfenbrenner

This chapter outlines Bernstein's theory of educational transmission and uses this as the primary lens to analyse the policy of the state in England to impose SSP-as-prime in the teaching of early reading. Bronfenbrenner's theory of bioecological development provides an additional lens to elaborate and complicate this understanding, particularly in relation to children's experiences of the policy.

The chapter firstly explores Bernstein's ideas, with a focus on concepts which help inform the present study. The concepts are introduced and explained as follows: the message systems which transmit formal educational knowledge; the classification and framing of these message systems; the pedagogic device and the role of recontextualisation, and finally the performance model of pedagogy. This is not a complete formulation of Bernstein's ideas, but a selective, pragmatically coherent set of those conceptualisations which have been most useful to describe and explain the current policy situation, and illuminate analysis in this research study,

Using Bernstein's ideas as a theoretical lens with which to analyse the teaching of SSP in England allows for the description of this policy and associated pedagogical practices in a new way, seeing them as part of a wider performance model within a retrospective/ prospective discourse. This in turn opens up an understanding of possible implications for the ways in which it is experienced by learners as instrumental and, potentially, over-controlled. Bernstein's model is subject to challenge, however, due to the focus on structure rather than individual experience. Use is therefore also made of the work of Bronfenbrenner, in particular his bioecological model of development. This develops and expands on the understanding provided by Bernstein's framework, given Bronfenbrenner's concern with individual experience and its relation to contexts. The chapter concludes with showing how, through a focus on the child in relation to policy (and other) contexts, Bronfenbrenner enables further interpretation of the data collected, and suggests avenues of future research. Using the lens of Bernstein, elaborated by Bronfenbrenner, therefore opens up new ways of seeing the policy context and the data gathered (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013).

Bernstein: an overview

The work of Bernstein (e.g. 1971; 1975, 1990, 2000, 2001) has been highly influential across a range of education-based scholarly activity and can be regarded as seminal (Moore, 2013). Bernstein's theory can be seen as providing a framework for understanding pedagogic structures and discourses. Bernstein was initially concerned with the links between educational transmission, language, power and social class (Bernstein, 1971, 1975), developing a theory of 'elaborated' and 'restricted' language codes to expose why he felt that working-class children were being placed at a disadvantage within the educational system. He continued to develop this work, moving from a focus on language to suggesting that pedagogic communication as a whole acted as a set of codes, embedded in what he termed the "pedagogic device" (Bernstein, 1990, p. 180), exercising semiotic control within schooling and society. By the time of his later work he had worked out the concept of the regulative power of the device much more widely, moving from a solely class-based analysis to pedagogy being used more generally as "a crucial medium of symbolic control" (Bernstein, 2000, p. xxv). This further developed into the concept of the "totally pedagogised society" (Bernstein, 2001, p. 365) in which the role of individuals is to meet the needs of the state in the context of technological revolution and the global economy: jobs rather than careers, skills rather than learning, training rather than education (Sadovnik, 2006). It is this later understanding which had been most influential in the present study. Bernstein's work – systematic and critical in nature - was directed towards uncovering mechanisms of control which he believed created or maintained disadvantage in the service of the state. His belief was that education should rather be to promote individual enhancement, inclusion and participation (Bernstein, 2000, pp. xx-xxi).

Although Bernstein has been subject to some noteworthy critiques, some of which will be examined, he was clear in all his writings that he did not see his theoretical discussions as either fixed or sufficient. As in the example above, he continued to develop his thinking in response to contemporary developments in policy, practice and research, and furthermore he argued that theory in itself was not his only goal (Bernstein, 2000; Muller, 2004). His stated aim was to develop a language of description which could be applied to empirical concepts, as well as opening up possibilities for not-yet-realised concepts by creating a theoretical grammar which could continue to offer new opportunities for development and application (Bernstein, 2000; Ivinson & Singh, 2018). Bernstein's work has been criticised for being overly structuralist and deterministic, tending towards a grand theory with the illusion of scientific precision (Gibson, 1984; Shilling, 1992). There are doubtless elements of this, often illustrated by his somewhat elaborate codes and diagrams (e.g. Bernstein, 1990, p. 31;

42). These were also critiqued by Pring (1975) for, in essence, stating the obvious in a complex way. The present study, as discussed in the introduction to this chapter, perceives Bernstein as a useful lens to analyse pedagogical structures, but as neglecting the role of the individual child as an agentic being within the structure. However, two important points can be made in response.

Firstly, the theoretical grammar has been demonstrated to be richly generative and, rather than providing a constraining edifice, it has been shown through numerous empirical research applications to be capable of finely-tuned analyses of real classroom, policy and other pedagogic situations (e.g. Ivinson & Duveen, 2006; Lim, 2017; Moss, 2018; Sanders-Smith, 2015; Singh, 2001; Wong, 2017). Secondly, Bernstein, although capable of dense theoretical explorations, also maintained a strong commitment to a constant interplay between theory and practice. He saw the theoretical language he was developing as needing to work on two levels, which he termed L1, the internal face, that of theoretical description and L2, the external face of empirical description (Bernstein, 2000, p. 133). L1 can also helpfully be thought of as 'explanation' and L2 as 'enactment' (Moss, 2001), and Bernstein believed that both were necessary and that each acted as a balance to the other. This commitment meant that Bernstein sought to link micro and macro contexts: "a theory of cultural reproduction has to be able, in the same theory, to translate micro into macro and macro into micro, with the same concepts" (Bernstein, 1990, p. 170). He acknowledged that his models only went so far and were focused on understanding the official rules of pedagogic discourse: "the perspective does not include the study of the full choreography of interaction in the context of the classroom…clearly, children do more than learn what is formally expected of them" (Bernstein, 1990, p. 7). This final statement is crucial and demonstrates the need for some development of Bernstein's work, in order to consider children's responses to the context in which they find themselves.

Bernstein worked with and supported many active empirical researchers who were investigating applications of his theories at a micro and macro level, and this work has continued after his death. Examples include: Holland's work on social class differences in adolescents (Holland, 1986); Singh's research on computer use in primary schools (Singh, 1995); Morais' study of science classrooms (Morais, 2002); Tyler's work on the 'information society' (Tyler, 2004); analysis of the US 'No Child Left Behind' Act (Sadovnik, 2006); interactions in an urban classroom in New York (Barrett, 2017); and examination reform in Singapore (Wong, 2017). The present study is a further contribution to the field.

The message systems of pedagogic discourse (or educational transmission)

Bernstein proposed that how a society decides what should be taught and assessed and how reflects "both the distribution of power and the principles of social control" (Bernstein, 1975, p. 85). He outlined the 'message system' through which he considered that formal educational knowledge was transmitted via pedagogic discourse which he saw as having three elements: curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation. 'Curriculum' refers to what is deemed to be valid knowledge; either by the state, a school or even an individual teacher, in other words *what* is taught; the content of education. 'Pedagogy' refers to what is deemed to be valid transmission of knowledge – or in other words, *how* it is taught; aspects like pacing, organisation, progression and so on. 'Evaluation' then refers to what is deemed to be a valid realisation of the knowledge on the part of the learner – so how learning is assessed, what successful learners is considered to look like, and the ways in which learners are permitted to demonstrate their knowledge.

Since the latest version of the National Curriculum was introduced in 2014 (DfE, 2014b), the teaching of phonics has been foregrounded, as discussed in the literature review, with the government-favoured version of phonics, SSP, being promoted and incentivised through various policy levers. Thus, what is deemed to be valid and important knowledge - *curriculum* - has been shifted by the machinery of state. As was further discussed in the literature review the method of transmission – *pedagogy* – has been radically altered within a few years with a move to discrete daily sessions and direct, systematic instruction divorced from the wider context of reading or writing meaningful texts (Walker et al., 2015). In terms of *evaluation*, specific and demanding 'age-related expectations' (so-called) within the curriculum for each year group, combined with the national PSC at the end of Year 1, leave no room for doubt as to what is deemed to be a valid realisation of knowledge on the part of the learner. Although the Early Years curriculum remains slightly less proscribed, government has nonetheless sought to drive the formula downwards within school (Ofsted, 2017) and the prospect of the PSC acts as a strong incentive through EYFS and Key Stage 1 within a high-stakes performance-oriented system.

Classification and framing

Building on his work on pedagogic discourse, Bernstein introduced his seminal 'coding' concept of classification and framing, exposing what he saw as the underlying structure of the message system (Bernstein, 1975, 1990). Classification is concerned with boundaries in knowledge; the extent to which knowledge is seen in separate categories or 'singulars' (like subjects such as 'geography' or 'physics'), and the strength or otherwise of the insulation between the categories. Strongly classified curricula (coded as +C) are characterised by a

separate subject approach, with few or no linkages between different discourses of knowledge; whereas weak classification (-C) might be seen in a topic-based approach where many aspects were arranged together more generically, or in 'regions' (such as humanities or engineering) (Bernstein, 1990, 2000). Framing refers to the way this knowledge is taught: how it is organised, how fast it is taught, in what order, and in which context. Strong framing (+F) indicates a situation in which the pace and order of learning is regulated and uniform, whereas where framing is weak (-F), learners may go faster or slower, or acquire knowledge in a different order; learners have a greater control over how they acquire the knowledge. As Bernstein said: "Strong framing reduces the power of the pupil over what, when and how he receives knowledge, and increases the teacher's power in the pedagogical relationship…strong classification reduces the power of the teacher over what he transmits" (Bernstein, 1975, p. 90). Strong framing is generally linked with a "visible pedagogic practice" (Bernstein, 2000, p. 14), with the role of the teacher being foregrounded. This is sometimes characterised, or caricatured, as the 'sage on the stage' as opposed to the 'guide on the side' model, in which framing is weak and pedagogic practice more invisible (e.g. Morrison, 2014). It should be noted that Bernstein clarified, in response to critiques of this work as overly binary (Gibson, 1984) that he viewed the concepts of classification and framing as modalities of regulation rather than dichotomies ; in other words, concepts to analyse the ways in which knowledge may be regulated and relayed or "constructed, institutionalised, distributed, challenged and changed" (Bernstein, 2000, p. 23).

To give an example, the Early Years Curriculum in England (DfE, 2014c) is organised into six 'areas of learning' with relatively porous boundaries, which lends itself to an holistic curriculum approach: classification is weak is most cases (-C). The National Curriculum (DfE, 2014b), on the other hand, is strongly classified (+C), arranged by subject, with each subject having its own purpose and content. The classification is particularly strong for the 'core' subjects of English, mathematics and science, and strongest of all for English and mathematics, where a large amount of content is prescribed for each year along with a clear set of age-related expectations; in other words, these subjects are also strongly framed (+F or even ++F for English and mathematics).

Going further, Bernstein suggested that there were also internal and external values which could be attributed to the codes (Bernstein, 1990, p. 100); so external classification (C^e), for example, could refer to that from outside agencies (as in the example above), whereas internal classification (C^i) could refer to organisational structures within a school or an individual classroom. External framing (F^e) comes from outside; external factors entering the pedagogic relationship between transmitter and acquirer (or teacher and pupil) to influence

decisions about pedagogic practice, progression, pace and so on. Internal framing (F^i) refers to decisions made within the pedagogic relationship itself; such as a teacher deciding to introduce concepts in a different order, or at a different stage for some of the learners. In summary, the elements of the message system of educational transmission can be analysed using these codes, formulated by Bernstein as $\pm C^{ie}/\pm F^{ie}$, and each element can vary independently of the others.

As was shown in the literature review, SSP has become strongly classified as a singularity; possibly the most singular of all subjects within a primary school. Using Bernstein's coding method, it could be classified as +C, tightly bounded and insulated from other areas of learning. The external classification, via the state, is clearly $+C^e$ as is evident through every policy document and decision, and schools have followed suit in terms of internal classification, resulting in $+C^i$. Similarly, external framing is very strong: prescribed progression and pacing leaving very little room for school or teacher autonomy, resulting in $+F^e$. The only element where some agency remained possible until 2019, it appears, was in the area of internal framing; a teacher could have decided to take a different approach and although they would remain subject to $+C^e/+F^e$, and highly likely $+C^i$, they could nonetheless frame learning differently for all or some of the children, providing the school were supportive of this. However, since the increased focus on the teaching of early reading in the renewed Ofsted framework (Ofsted, 2019c), external oversight of detailed classroom process has been tightened even further. Compared to fifteen years ago, when phonics was promoted and supported (relatively) benignly compared to the present time, the era of SSP-as-prime could now be characterised as $++C^e/++F^e/++C^i/++F^i$. In other words, very strongly classified and framed, both externally and, as a result, internally. This formula is based on the notion of modalities rather than dichotomies (Bernstein, 2000), seeing the possibilities of realisation on a continuum, as exemplified by the work of Sanders-Smith (2015). In other words, it is possible for aspects to be more, or less, strongly classified or framed. Using these ideas of Bernstein has allowed a new analysis to be carried out, mapping pre-2006 approaches through to post-2010, as shown in Table 1. This is an example of applying Bernstein's theoretical (L1) language empirically to describe a new situation (L2) (Moss, 2001).

Strength	Year	Reason
-C^e (weak)	pre-2006	Phonics taught as part of literacy teaching, via Searchlights model Daily phonics sessions first recommended via Progression in Phonics programme (1998), to strengthen the phonics element of Searchlights
+C^e (strong)	2006 – 2009	Rose Report recommended discrete daily teaching of phonics as the prime approach and moved from Searchlights model to Simple View of Reading (2006) *Letters and Sounds* published with structure and content of discrete daily phonics sessions accompanied by national training via Primary National Strategies (2007)
++C^e (very strong)	2010 onwards	Multiple initiatives including requiring Teacher Training providers to teacher SSP as a specific subject (2010/11 onwards), introduction of Phonics Screening Check (2012), updated National Curriculum (2014), updated Ofsted frameworks (2015 and 2019), DfE Reading Framework (2021)

Table 1: Change over time in the strength of external classification of phonics

Competence and performance models

Bernstein worked a specific example related to a competence and performance model of pedagogy which was relevant when first written in the 1990s and remains so today, perhaps even more so. (Bernstein, 2000, pp. 41-61). He contrasts the performance model with a competence model, so it will be useful to outline both to aid understanding. A competence model of pedagogy is seen as based in a social constructivist view of knowledge acquisition, with a relatively invisible pedagogic practice; the teacher's role being more "facilitation, accommodation and context management" (Bernstein, 2000, p. 43). It is seen as a 'competence' model because of its universality and non-hierarchical nature: all learners are able to be competent because classification and framing are weak, so learners have control over selection and pacing as well as use of space and time. Pedagogic discourse in this model will often be realised as thematic, regionalised or topic-based in terms of curriculum. In evaluation, particular visible outcomes are less important than inner development (sometimes formulated as deep learning), which may legitimately be demonstrated in a range of ways. In terms of pedagogy, the competence model requires considerable time and resource, with a high level of professionalism needed from the teacher to (often invisibly) orchestrate contexts and opportunities for learners who may be pursuing different paths, as well as to read the signs of learning in all their many forms. The orientation is 'in the present',

with the current moment of learning being the significant mode from the point of view of the learner.

The performance model, on the other hand is characterised by strong classification associated with a curriculum organised as singulars with highly specific rules regarding legitimate outcomes, and thus deficit if those outcomes are not achieved: “the mode of instructional discourse itself embeds acquirers in a disciplining regulation where deviance is highly visible” (Bernstein, 2000, p. 47). Framing is also likely to be strong, with a visible pedagogy, stratification, and a future orientation, striving towards a particular point. As this model is teacher-led rather than learner-led, autonomy in acquisition, or variation in selection, pace or sequence, is extremely limited. Bernstein suggested that because performance models are more prescriptive, less skill is potentially required on the part of teachers and so training costs could be reduced (Bernstein, 2000, p. 50). Interestingly, alongside the future orientation, Bernstein noted a tendency in the performance model to recontextualise “selected features from the past” (Bernstein, 2000, p. 68) to project a particular retrospective and prospective identity – in simple terms, harking back to a supposed ‘golden era’ to fuse traditional educational content with market-oriented pedagogic discourse; a retrospective/prospective identity (Beck, 2006).

Implications of a performance model

As previously mentioned, Bernstein’s own belief in the purpose of schooling was as a force for moral good, leading to individual enhancement, inclusion and participation (Bernstein, 2000, pp. xx-xxi). He critiqued the marketisation of education early on in the current era, saying, for example: “there is now a dehumanising of pedagogic discourse, brought about by inserting a market principle between knowledge and the knower” (Bernstein, 1990, p. 2). As was noted earlier, many researchers have taken up the challenge of empirical study based on Bernstein’s ideas, with one relevant example being Arnot and Reay’s study (2004) of teenage pupils’ experience of participation in learning in the context of a strongly framed, regulative discourse. In discussion groups, pupil views were elicited on areas such as the selection and organisation of learning and control over pacing. They found that pupils experienced strong framing differentially depending on gender and social background, with some perceiving it as an attempt to control, which led to their disengagement, and others as an annoyance because it meant the teaching was often too fast or too slow. Also telling was the strong focus by many pupils on learning as instrumental, with a focus on what you need for later life and a consequent devaluing of subjects seen as less relevant (according to the pupils), such as History or RE. This supports Bernstein’s assertion that “most performance modes…serve economic goals and are considered here as instrumental” (Bernstein, 2000,

p. 55) and “the emphasis on the performance of the pupils, and the steps taken to increase and maintain performance…is likely to facilitate a state-promoted instrumentality” (Bernstein, 2000, p. 61).

In relation to SSP, it is clear that a performance model is dominant in the SSP-as-prime approach, with strong classification and framing and an inflexible understanding of valid demonstrations of performance. Using Bernstein’s lens, it can be predicted that this model would lead to an instrumental view of reading and with disengagement of some pupils, who experience the strong framing negatively. This will be further discussed in the data analysis.

The pedagogic device and the role of recontextualisation

The focus of the ‘pedagogic device’, therefore, is not on the content of education as such, but rather on the pedagogic discourse: the ensemble of principles, procedures, rules and conventions which bound and determine the forms of educational transmission (Singh, 2002). This leads to the next important concept: recontextualisation. Recontextualisation, put simply, refers to the process of deciding what knowledge is important and how to communicate it; of appropriating pieces or fields of knowledge from the full array of what is available, and organising, focusing and reconstituting that for a new site and purpose (Bernstein, 1990, 2000). In the context of schooling this might mean, for example, taking the vast field of human endeavour and knowledge known as ‘science’ and selecting which concepts should be taught in school, and how. So pedagogic discourse has no content of its own (as science, for example, does), but it is rather the method by which any type of knowledge is converted for educational transmission. This does not mean, however, that it should be considered neutral. The process of recontextualisation is one of mediation and decision and thus, of regulation. As Ivinson and Duveen expressed it : “The pedagogic device regulates how knowledge is recontextualised as it moves from outside to inside the school” (2006, p. 110).

Official and pedagogic recontextualising fields

Elaborating the concept of recontextualisation, Bernstein proposed that this operated on different levels. He termed external decision and regulation (for example, by the state) as the ‘official recontextualising field’ (ORF) and internal, such as decisions made by schools and teachers, as the ‘pedagogic recontextualising field’ (PRF). He noted how in English schooling the period from the 1948 Education Act to the late 1980s was marked by a strong PRF in which schools made most of the decisions about what to teach and how, with the ORF relatively unobtrusive. From the 1988 Education Act onwards, when the National Curriculum was first introduced, through the introduction of statutory assessment tests,

National Strategies for literacy and numeracy, performance measures for schools and subsequent iterations of the National Curriculum, he viewed the ORF as becoming more and more dominant. Writing in 2000, Bernstein commented: “today, the state is attempting to weaken the PRF through its ORF, and thus attempting to reduce relative autonomy over the construction of pedagogic discourse and over its social contexts” (Bernstein, 2000, p. 33). In other words, recontextualising is an exercise of power and control, and the site where that takes place, or where there is the possibility of it taking place, therefore assumes critical importance in the pedagogic device, and has implications for the nature of the pedagogic discourse.

Bates (Ball, 1990; Bates, 2013) proposed that a fourth element needed to be added to Bernstein’s message system; that of ‘organisation’. Although Bernstein did not accept this, seeing the organisation as a “container” rather than a transmitter (Bernstein, 2000, p. 23), there is no doubt that within a school, the organisation is likely to determine some elements of the framing, and could indeed be seen as an element of the PRF (such as if children are taught in class groups or ‘ability’ groups, and whether to follow a particular scheme). This is severely limited, however, due to the strength of the external framing, particularly the prescriptive content of the national curriculum, the government list of ‘approved’ schemes (recently updated and tightened), and the high-stakes PSC at the end of Y1 with its accompanying discourse of “meeting the expected standard” (DfE, 2017, 2018b, 2021a). The result is that, as Walker et al. (2015) have shown empirically, the ORF of the state has achieved almost complete control of every aspect of the pedagogic device in relation to phonics, in the course of just a few years. This has been done overtly, through a strongly regulative application of the pedagogic device. Each of Bernstein’s ‘message systems’ has been used, deliberately, as a lever of policy. The potential agency of schools as organisations in this milieu can be read as restricted at best (Braun & Maguire, 2018). For individual teachers, operating within a performative school environment where professionalism has become technicised, managerialised and data-driven, agency appears as no more than a wafer-thin veneer overlaying the machinery of control (Carter, 2020b). This is not to deny, of course, the possibility of resistance and subversion (Singh, 2001), which leads to a significant critique of Bernstein’s thinking.

Critique of Bernstein’s structural determinism

As mentioned at the start, Bernstein’s theories can be criticised as over-emphasising structural determinism which can lead to a fatalistic view of cultural reproduction (Fernandes, 1988) or a lack of focus on the possibility of agency (Harker & May, 1993). Harker and May argue that the notion of code is inflexible and reduces individuals to the level of subject

rather than agents. In contrast, it has been suggested that when Bernstein's codes are applied, the flexibility and nuanced description which becomes possible is extensive, thus allowing application to a vast array of specific micro and macro sites (Ivinson & Singh, 2018; Moss, 2018). Moreover, the "strong grammar" of Bernstein's theories enables the researcher to "diagnose, describe, explain, transfer and predict" (Morais, 2002, p. 565&566).

Indeed, Bernstein subsequently theorised that "oppositional codes" may be generated and that "codes are sites of contradiction, challenge and change" (Bernstein, 1990, p. 111). Lim (2017) has taken up this theme, suggesting that as soon as a state espouses an officially-sanctioned discourse, non-official versions thereby come into being. Control creates the possibility of contestation. Supporters characterise Bernstein's work as a form of social realism (Moore, 2013), quoting his assertion that: "To understand…such control is probably more important today than at any other period. To know whose voice is speaking is the beginning of one's own voice" (Bernstein, 2000, p. xxv).. Thus, Bernstein considered that an understanding of the structures within and through which schooling operates would generate the conditions for agency. He admitted that his work was limited to a deep understanding of this particular set of processes rather than an overarching theory (Bernstein, 2000), but he hoped that others would take up the work of applying his theories empirically. It seems he saw the possibility of resistance and challenge as embedded within code theory as an inevitable corollary of understanding. In relation to SSP-as-prime, the work of resistance has been – and is being - vigorously undertaken by some academics, professionals and practitioners, as was discussed in the literature review. Children's acts of resistance are elusive and little-studied, with the thin agency of teachers being eroded yet further when applied to children. It may be, nonetheless, that an understanding of the pedagogic device and discourse will help to illuminate children's perspective on learning to read in the era of SSP-as-prime.

Bronfenbrenner: theory of bioecological development

In order, therefore, to further interpret this aspect of the study and to develop Bernstein's interpretive framework, Bronfenbrenner's theory of bioecological development is drawn on. Like Bernstein, this originated in work in the 1970s, and the initial focus of early work drew attention to the complex ways in which children live and interact within multiple contexts or 'systems'. Bronfenbrenner was interested in the interaction between public policy decisions and what was known about children's development. He sought to critique the way in which child development up to that point had been largely studied through laboratory-based experiments, ignoring the complexity of children's real-life lived experience (Bronfenbrenner, 1974). Bronfenbrenner's earlier work focussed on understanding the many factors in a

child's environment which he or she interacts with, often portrayed as a series of nested 'systems' around the individual. The 'microsystem' represents the immediate environment around the child (such as family, friends and school), the 'exosystem' is the wider setting (such as services, neighbours and community), and the 'macrosystem' refers to wider society and culture. Bronfenbrenner also suggested a 'mesosystem' which represents the interactions between the various aspects and layers of the systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1976).

In later work, the concept of the Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) model evolved (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). This suggested a simultaneous model of human development where many aspects interact together dynamically to influence outcomes. Bronfenbrenner suggested that: "human development takes place through processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interaction between an active evolving biopsychological human organism and the persons, objects and symbols in its immediate environment" (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994, p. 572). The PPCT model paid particular attention to the importance of relationships, characterised as "proximal processes" (the first P of PPCT) suggesting that these function as the "engines of development" (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000, p. 118). Furthermore, the role played by the individual in their own development was also acknowledged through the inclusion of person characteristics, the second P of PPCT. An individual with their own particular set of dispositions, identities, experiences, skills and knowledge will reciprocally interact with their environment in their own particular way, rather than being a passive object within their various settings. The C of PPCT refers to context, which largely mirrored the earlier work on systems. The T refers to time, which was included to show both stability and change within development, over a period of time. The diagram in Figure 5 shows a recent formulation of the bioecological theory in which proximal processes are represented as 'everyday activities and interactions', and context as 'environment'.

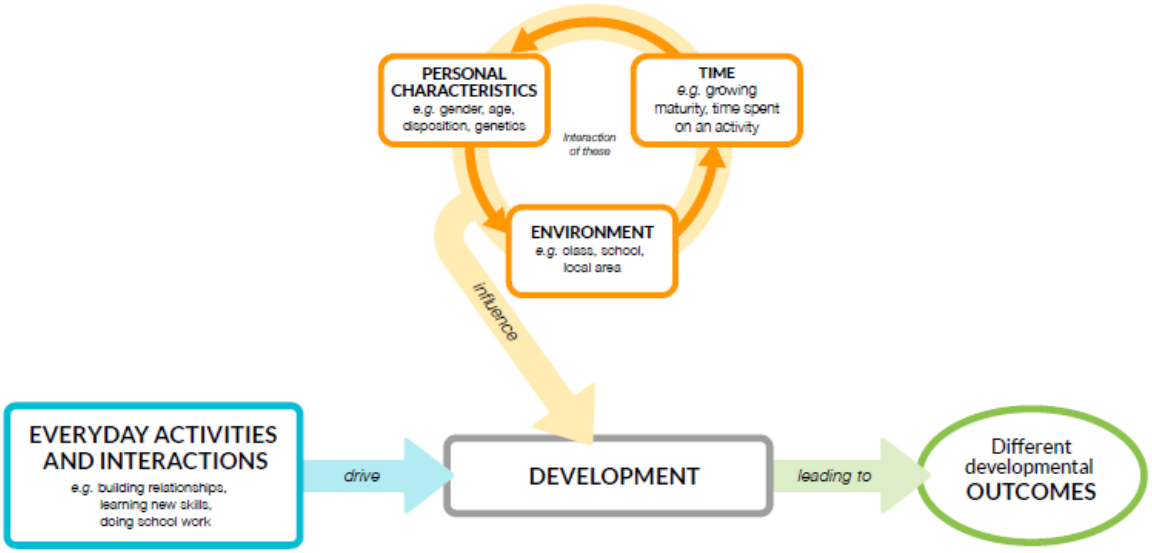


Figure 5: Summary of Bronfenbrenner's theory of bioecological development, showing key influences on children's learning and development (Davies & Henderson, 2020, p. 6)

Although in one sense Bernstein and Bronfenbrenner worked in different spheres and had different concerns, the two models, when used in dialogue, can nonetheless provide further insights. Applying Bronfenbrenner's model to children's experiences of early reading and SSP-as-prime develops Bernstein's theory, by drawing attention to factors beyond the pedagogic discourse which may influence children's views and outcomes. Bronfenbrenner's early work on system analysis (Bronfenbrenner, 1976) has some overlap with Bernstein's pedagogic discourse and pedadgogised society (Bernstein, 1975, 2001), although Bernstein made this his chief focus. Through Bronfenbrenner and his later development of his theory into a bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000), it can be suggested that children's personal characteristics and dispositons may also play a part, as may prior experience and natural changes over time. This allows for concepts such as individual views, agency, perhaps even resistance, to be considered in relation to schooled early reading. Addtionally, as discussed in the literature review, children are likely to be influenced by other aspects of their environment in relation to early reading such as home attitudes to reading, time spent with others reading outside of school-based activities, access to local library facilities, and so on. Although Bronfenbrenner considered the school part of a child's 'microsystem', he acknowledged the influence of the 'macrosystem' (e.g. the education system of a state) on this (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). The Bernsteinian analysis in the present study has demonstrated the high degree of influence and control the state is exercising over individual classrooms in relation to the teaching of early reading; thus, the

macrosystem has arguably overwhelmed this aspect of the microsystem in this area. The extent to which this is the case would be a fruitful area for further study. Bronfenbrenner's view of proximal processes as driving development (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000) is important to consider: proximal process will include the teaching of SSP-as-prime, but also wider factors such as relationships with teachers, peers, texts as so on. The specific detail of how each school implements its teaching of early reading could also be studied as part of proximal processes: relationships, groupings, and teacher attitudes could all be considered.

Much of this work is beyond the scope of this study, which has a close focus on children's views expressed on the particular schooled literacy practice of SSP-as-prime. As discussed in the literature review, a large body of research exists to demonstrate the importance of factors such as home support and family attitudes on children's development as readers. The apparent impact of an SSP-as-prime approach is a legitimate and valuable question in its own right, and it is Bernstein's model which primarily enables understanding and analysis of the nature of control being exerted over teaching practices and, therefore, on children's learning.

However, Bronfenbrenner's model serves to complicate the application of a Bernsteinian analysis. Lines can be drawn through the data from the SSP-as-prime approach to children's views (see data analysis), but the bioecological model serves as a useful counterweight, suggesting that this analysis illuminates only part of the picture, albeit a very important part. Thus, further avenues for study are suggested including a deeper understanding of the ways SSP-as-prime is enacted in school: Bronfenbrenner's proximal processes could be brought into dialogue with Bernstein's classification and framing theory in this example. Also of interest would be multi-factoral analysis of children's influencing factors on their journey through early reading including home environment and prior reading experience/skill (Bronfebrenner's personal characteristics, environment and time). As discussed in the literature review, the interaction between these factors and schooled literacy was examined by Levy (2011), and it would be timely to update this research in the light of the move to SSP-as-prime. Recommendations for further research are discussed in the conclusion to this thesis.

Chapter conclusion

The theoretical work of Bernstein provides a framework to analyse and intepret the schooled literacy practice of SSP-as-prime, and the outcomes it leads to. Bernstein's theory, although originating in the 1970s, has nonetheless been applicable to the current government policy

in England mandating the use of SSP-as-prime in the teaching of early reading. The creation of a pedagogic discourse around the imposition of SSP-as-prime, through the message systems of curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation, has been wholesale. Furthermore, via numerous policy levers, the state has strengthened the role of official recontextualisation, and thus weakened the pedagogic recontextualising field. This is manifest in strong classification and framing of SSP: taught discretely as a body of knowledge, using a defined pedagogical approach, and with clear expectations of children's progression through this knowledge to set age-related outcomes. In the performance model analysis, children are primarily seen as units of future economic worth and the pedagogic discourse can be predicted to reinforce, rather than disrupt, existing inequalities.

However, as discussed above, Bernstein acknowledges that his framework cannot do full justice to "the full choreography of interaction in the context of the classroom" (Bernstein, 1990, p. 7). Bronfenbrenner's model has therefore been used to elaborate the Bernsteinian analysis through a focus on some of the 'choreography' (although it is unlikely Bronfenbrenner would use such a term, suggesting as it does control rather than chance and complexity). Bronfenbrenner provides a structure to analyse children's individuality and agency in their responses to SSP-as-prime. Furthermore, Bronfenbrenner's work complicates Bernstein's analysis and suggests further avenues for research in relation to SSP-as-prime policy enactment.

The contribution of the present study is to focus strongly on analysis of the current policy context and children's views in relation to their schooled reading via SSP-as-prime. As has been shown, much has been written about the required approach to be taken by schools, and about the enactment of the SSP-as-prime policy. A methodological design was thus sought which would primarily enable children's voices to be heard, adding to the very small amount of prior work in this area. Chapter Six will introduce and discuss the methodological approach chosen.

Chapter 6: Methodology and Research Design – listening to young children's experiences through a 'Mosaic' approach

The previous chapter discussed the theoretical framework used in this study to interpret findings. This chapter will now consider the methodological approach and decisions taken in terms of method choice and data analysis.

Part 1 - Methodological Approach

Introduction and ethical approach

As the main empirical aim of this study was to find out about children's experiences of learning to read in the era of SSP-as-prime, the chosen approach was a children's voice study based on the Mosaic approach (Clark, 2017). This is an interpretive approach, using a range of data gathering instruments designed to play to the strengths of children, to piece together their views about aspects of their lives. Thus, the approach views knowledge as constructed and contingent. The underpinning ontology is built on the basis of children being regarded as beings in their own right (Leonard, 2016). Furthermore, it is founded on the twin assumptions that, firstly, children are able to express meaningful views about their own life experiences and secondly, that they have the right to do so (Fane et al., 2018).

Ethical considerations needed to be paramount given that this research was being carried out with a group of very young children. British Educational Research Association (BERA) ethical guidelines (2018) were followed in relation to all aspects such as informed consent, transparency, the right to withdraw and privacy. Going beyond these, however, it was endeavoured to adopt an ethically reflexive attitude and value-driven approach throughout (Bolshaw & Josephidou, 2019). This reflects ethics as relevant to every aspect of the research design from the outset (Alderson & Morrow, 2004; Greig et al., 2007) and during every phase of the research. The research thus aimed to take an ethical standpoint in multiple ways. In its conception, the aspiration was to seek the views of children on a topic of direct relevance to them and, it is hoped, contribute to a positive impact on children's future experiences. If, as has been argued above, children are able to and have the right to express their views, it is therefore ethically and morally imperative to enable them to do so (Colliver, 2017). In its design, consideration was given to issues of power, agency and representation. The methodology was chosen to place a range of children's voices, expressed through multi-modal methods, at the centre. It was critical to attend closely to

these voices and to find the best ways to listen as part of the data analysis strategy. These areas will all be further discussed in this chapter.

To note as a final point in this overview of the ethical approach taken, a decision was made to focus entirely on children's views, and not to seek the views of their teachers. As stated, this was chiefly to enable the views of a highly marginalised group to be heard. In addition, the researcher was aware of the sensitivity in schools around the highly scrutinised area of SSP, and thus it was important to state from the outset that no judgments were being made about teachers. There were times when teachers asked about what children had said in sessions, which required a diplomatic, very generalised response to maintain confidentiality (Christensen & Prout, 2002). Although the research was being carried out with the children it was nonetheless entirely dependent on school co-operation. As Solvason et al (2018, p. 595) propose: "research is not grounded solely upon the tools of data collection, it is based upon meaningful relationships and mutual trust" The original letter to headteachers requesting participation stated, as a reassurance: *The research is not aimed at making any judgments about teaching or teachers whatsoever. It is focussed strongly on children's views and feelings about reading and learning to read as a general idea, in the context of their whole lives (not just school).* This carried through into the research itself, in which it was not sought to question children or to analyse data to single out children taught by a particular school or teacher but rather to seek themes which cut across individuals and research sites.

Children as having the right to express a view

Taking this point first, it has been noted that children's voices are often missing from policy discussions and indeed that children have been systematically marginalised and excluded when decisions are made which affect their lives (Qvortrup, 1997). Darbyshire, MacDougall, & Schiller (2005) have described this as 'the paradox of the missing child'. It has already been seen in the literature review that children's views are entirely missing from policy documents and much research related to the teaching of reading. Ontologically, as the Bernsteinian analysis has shown, within reading policy children are regarded much more as 'becomings' than 'beings' (James, 2011). This is despite the UK government ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991, which states in Article 12 that children have the right to express their views in all matters affecting them, and to have these "given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child" (United Nations, 1990, p. 6). Lundy (2007) has suggested that this means that consulting children on matters of policy is not just good practice but a legal requirement, although it is also possible to see the Convention as asserting general principles rather than specific requirements (e.g. Lang, 2016). It is furthermore clear that concepts such as 'due weight' and 'in accordance with

…age and maturity' are open to considerable interpretation. Regardless, children in England have not been given any official opportunity to express their views on the way they are taught to read, despite the major changes in approach over the last 15 or more years.

Children as able to express a view

Moving now to this assumption, this research, in attempting to address this issue in a small way, takes as its starting point a belief in children's ability to express their views meaningfully. This assumption is situated in the wider childhood studies literature and debate about children as agentic constructors of meaning (e.g. Esser et al., 2016; Kraftl, 2013; Raithelhuber, 2016). There are a number of epistemological principles underlying this assumption, including: seeing children as experts in their own lives; as skillful communicators; as capable of reflecting on their experiences and environment, and of expressing ways in which they view their world (Fane et al., 2018).

The wider literature around this often traces a line back to at least the 1970s: Hardman, for example, was suggesting that children could be considered a "muted group" in terms of social study (Hardman, 1973, p. 86). James and Prout (1997) identified this as part of a shift in the study of childhood from a largely biological phenomenon to a social construction. They termed this a "new paradigm" (p. 7) which challenged prior views of children as irrational, following a universal and homogenous pattern of development, and being of interest essentially as adults-in-waiting: 'becomings' rather than 'beings' (James, 2011). The alternative paradigm elaborated by Prout and James posited childhood as a structural and cultural concept, highly variable for individuals as well as interconnected in multiple ways with other sociological concepts like gender, race and class. A key feature, which has been taken up in the theoretical framework and data analysis of the present study, was the view of children as "both constrained by structure and agents acting in and upon structure" (Prout & James, 1997, p. 28).

It is a view of children as agents – as having the capacity for both intention and decisive action – which underpins the epistemological claim of this research to be able to ask children what they think about a topic and receive a meaningful response. It is important to acknowledge that agency is a much-contested concept. Esser et al. (2016, p. 284) describe children's agency as "ambiguous", given that children will, quite literally, find themselves in a vast plurality of differing cultural, social, institutional and other contexts, as well as always, somehow, positioned within a "generational

order" (p. 283). Each of these concepts can be differentiated multiple ways even for a single child or for any sub-group of children, and as Esser et al. demonstrate, it can be questioned how children can position themselves as actors in their various contexts. Although early theorists in this area cautioned against a dichotomous approach (e.g. Prout, 2000; Shilling, 1992), this argument comes in a new wave of theory which is questioning afresh the so-called binary application of the concepts of agency and structure, arguing instead for a more nuanced and hybrid view (e.g. Kraftl, 2013; Raithelhuber, 2016). The relational aspect of agency is seen to be important in these newer attempts at formulation. Kraftl (2013) has argued that the strong emphasis on children's agency may have erased the diverse dependencies and connections which characterise children's lives. He suggests that consideration of "more-than-social relations" (p. 17) may help to move beyond a dichotomy between agency and structure and unpick "entanglements of biology and society" (p.14). Others argue that humans exist and act within complex "assemblages" of relations with the human and non-human world, and that agency can rather be viewed as the organic and inorganic world being in "productive tension" (Gallagher, 2019, p. 197). As Raithelhuber argues (2016, p. 96), "agency can only exist in interconnectedness and be brought about in relations". In other words, agency is not just about intention and action, but there must be something to *act upon* at the same time as being acted upon; actions do not take place in an individual vacuum. This concept is of relevance to the present study on several levels. Although, as has been asserted, children are able to express their views in meaningful ways, they are nonetheless doing so within a context of multiple entanglements, constraints, histories and materialities: the policy environment; the school setting; their own class approach; their experience outside school; their life experience so far, the presence of an unfamiliar researcher, the peer group within which the questions are being asked, their emotions and experiences on the day and in the moment – and other factors unknown.

The next sections will analyse some of these in more detail.

Policy context: children as acted upon

Contributions to this debates from a policy perspective are valuable because, as Ansell (2009, p. 202) has argued:

> Children are arguably much more (deliberately) acted upon from a distance than they are able to act (deliberately) on others (people or institutions) at a distance… Children may be able to act within and transform their perceptual

> space... However, children's lives are greatly affected by decisions, events and activities that take place at some remove from their own perceptual fields, in, for instance, national… policymaking.

Children are viewed in this study, as has been shown, as both actors and acted upon, as simultaneously agentic and dependent (Elden, 2012). Klocker's concept of "thick and thin" agency (Klocker, 2007, p. 85) is helpful here. This suggests that for any person, the ability to make choices and have options can be subject to constraints depending on the different structures, relationships and contexts experienced at a given time. So for example, children reading their own books at home are likely to have 'thick' agency – choice over what and if to read – whereas children's agency when it comes to phonics sessions in school is extremely 'thin'. Clearly the children's compliance with policy in the case of learning to read is mediated through its enactment by teachers (Heimans, 2012) and teachers may well experience their own agency as thin in the implementation of this particular policy. A dichotomous understanding - in this case children as either agentic or passive, or as ontologically separate from adults – thus appears profoundly inadequate. The theoretical framework used, combining Bernstein's structuralism (Bernstein, 1975, 1990, 2000) and Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of development (Bronfenbrenner, 1976; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000), enables this theme to be developed.

Listening to children's voices

The contribution of this research can therefore be seen as a 'children's voice' study in an area of current and contentious education policy. It is recognised that the concept of 'voice' is subject to many critiques (Facca et al., 2020; James, 2007): epistemological; ethical; or concerned with questions of presumed homogeneity, authenticity and stability. The most obvious challenge is to homogeneity – when the views of an individual are taken to represent those of a particular demographic or other group. Lomax (2012, p. 106), referring to research using children's voice, describes this as the "valorising of the all-knowing and all-seeing child". Mazzei and Jackson (2009) highlight ways in which this problem has been addressed by attempts to include multiple voices or to represent ever smaller sub-groups – perhaps compounding the original issue by suggesting that more voices lead to more authenticity. They go on to suggest that a deeper problem is the way in which 'voice' is presented as a stable and authentic, 'there' to be sought and found (2009, p2). This builds on Moore and Muller's trenchant critique

(1999), echoed by Facca et al. (2020), which questions the epistemological basis of knowledge claims based on 'voice', suggesting that voices simply reproduce the contexts and narratives within with they already operate and thus lack reflexivity and theoretical sustainability. Spyrou (2011) highlights particular issues with the use of children's so-called 'voice' in research. He draws on wider critiques such as the inability to suggest that voice is somehow authentic or directly representative of the views of a group or an individual (Canosa & Graham, 2020). Spyrou further suggests that researchers must be aware of the constructed and contingent nature of both the research contexts in which the voices are produced, and in the presentation of participant views.

Bearing all this in mind, in the present study there was a need to attempt to really listen, hear and understand what children were saying, described by Kind (2020, p. 49) as "the art of paying attention", and by Warming as "listening with all the senses" (2005, p. 55). For example, when asked to choose an emoticon to express views about reading, such as 'when I am reading my own books at home I feel…' Jack consistently coloured in all three faces: happy, in-between and sad (see Figure 6) During the activity, he was also singing 'happy and you know it', talking about a book with a tarantula in and telling me he liked spiders, and looking at (and loudly singing into) the recording device.

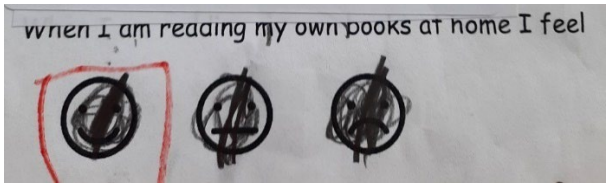


Figure 6 – see black colouring in (red selection is from a later date in Year 2)

In the moment, I thought that he was probably not that engaged with the activity and had just decided to colour in all the faces. However, on listening back to the recording and transcribing the spoken data, and looking at this alongside the emoticon colourings, a different and more complex picture emerged. At one point, Jack said "I feel all of them", at another point in the session "I don't really like my books...I do…" and then later "I do like reading, and I don't" adding "when I go to sleep I do like them, when I go to another sleep I don't, when I go to another sleep I really don't". It seemed that Jack may in fact have been expressing the contingency of his feelings about reading, making use of the 'simple' research instrument in a more sophisticated way than I had anticipated. This was an early session with the children, only the second I had undertaken, and this proved an important step on my reflexive journey. I was beginning to 'tune in' to

children's various modes of expression, reflecting on what I may have missed in the busyness of the group interview situation (Eide & Winger, 2005).

In a further example, children were asked to draw a picture of a time they had been happy reading. Emily drew the picture shown in Figure 7, which on first glance I thought may have been her reading with her teacher. I therefore asked her to tell me about her drawing and she explained that *I've drawed when I was sitting down on the chair that was so comfy I was reading the book…a sheep family…at home…with my mum.* Providing this explanation, she was smiling, with relaxed body language and seemed extremely happy to share, having previously participated but been relatively quiet up to that point in the session.

Figure 7: Emily's picture of 'A time I was happy reading'

As in the example with Jack above, this can again be seen as a sophisticated response to the task, comprising a detailed and highly specific drawing accompanied by explanation of what she was reading, where, when and who with. This can be interpreted as suggesting significant information about the elements of reading which Emily particularly values. The mode of the task itself – drawing - seemed to be enjoyed by Emily and to open up the chance for her to share in a way that she felt comfortable with. In addition, attending to her body language and tone of voice, and seeking further clarification from Emily, allowed me to hear and understand her own explanation of her thinking.

Power

The view of children as holding a marginalised position in society has been widely discussed in literature (e.g. Crivello et al., 2008; Darbyshire et al., 2005; Hardman, 1973, 2001; Prout & James, 1997; Qvortrup, 1997). Any research carried out with children must acknowledge and address this issue, although doing so is far from straightforward, as research situations seeking to foreground the voices of children may in fact reproduce and amplify that positioning through the generational, or institutional structures within which the research takes place (Teachman & Gladstone, 2020).

James' (2007) highlights the pre-existing adult-child power differential which adults may try to mitigate in various ways - Warming (2005) for example, describes her attempts to adopt the 'least adult role'; others ask children to help them, as adults, to understand more about their lives (Mayall, 2008); Alderson and Morrow (2004) discuss the need for adult researchers to be empathetic, warm and encouraging, as well as adopting an ongoing attitude of respect and interest in what children have to say about their lives.

However, authors such as Gallagher, Haywood, Jones and Milne (2010, p. 479) propose that the "messy, compromised position of…especially children in schools" means that it is not possible to step outside the power relations; children are so systematically othered and controlled that we must always have this in mind when carrying out research with child participants. Clearly many elements are controlled by adult researchers as standard; for example, the researcher usually sets the research topic and priorities and indeed the whole machinery of the research undertaking including timescale, methods and participants as well as subsequent interpretation and presentation. Although there are a few exceptions where researchers have attempted to act as facilitators to child-led research (e.g. Kellett et al., 2004), the vast majority of participatory studies involving children are as defined by Lomax (2012, p. 106) "highly managed encounters" which therefore have the potential to reinforce, rather than challenge, children's "schooled docility" (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008, p. 506).

So how is it possible to carry out participatory research using children's 'voice' in any meaningful way, given the range of critique arrayed to challenge this approach? Spyrou (2011) has called for researchers working in this field to be self-critical and reflexive in order to both acknowledge limitations and to reduce these where possible, to accept the messy and layered nature of the research, and to pay due attention to issues of representation. Each of these areas will be considered in relation to the current study.

Reducing limitations

One technique frequently mentioned is the need to allow sufficient time for work with children, especially younger children. This entails researchers planning studies so that closer and more trusting relationships can be built up, allowing deeper layers of children's thoughts to be shared over time. Clark (2010, p. 122) refers to this as "slow knowledge", gained over an extended period of research and engagement. This was one of the reasons in this study for choosing to engage with children periodically over a period of approximately 18 months, in order to build some small degree of familiarity and

trust (although it is important not to overstate this). “Slow knowledge” can be seen as a multi-dimensional concept; slow not just in terms of time but also modes of communication. Children may communicate more readily and effectively through methods other than direct question and answer – critiqued by Crivello (2008, p. 857) as “interrogatory interviews” . This may call for an immersive ethnographic approach or, as in this research, multi-modal activities to elicit discussion and expression on the same topics in different ways. Helavaara Robertson, Kinos, Barbour, Pukk, & Rosquist (2015, p. 1820) quote Magaluzzi’s term, “the hundred languages of children”, suggesting that researchers need to try to recognise “the various idiosyncratic and contexualised ways in which young children convey meaning”. Clark (2010; 2005, 2011) has formalised this multi-modal approach into the so-called ‘Mosaic’ approach, which has heavily influenced this research. In relation to this study, this led to the creation of a number of different activities which would approach the question of children’s views and feelings about reading in diverse ways. These will be further considered later in the chapter.

As has been shown, power differentials are a further serious potential limitation. A number of authors have noted that the presence of child peers can appear to help to empower children to communicate more confidently (Crivello et al., 2008; Lange & Mierendorff, 2009; Lopez-Dicastillo et al., 2012), and this was the main reason for the choice of group interviews in this study. Again, it is important not to overstate this – as has been noted, children in a school setting are in a position of multiple subordination despite being in groups of peers, and this has to be acknowledged when analysing the data. It is however possible for children to have ways of taking power from the researcher in a situation, ignoring or subverting research activities, sometimes taking the whole group in a different direction. There were examples of this in the present study, such as when one child became so interested in the voice recorder that he wanted to know how it worked, including examining and trying all the buttons in turn, and the group could only proceed once all children had tried its operation and listened to their own voices a number of times. As a former teacher I could have ‘taken control’ of this situation and insisted that the group focus on my activities, but I decided instead to let this play out despite it taking what was (to me) precious research time out of our session. As this was an active decision on my part perhaps I was still, in my own mind, somehow ‘in control’ – further illustration of how difficult it is to step outside one’s own history.

As a further important point, the presence of peers can also lead to group dynamics which can in themselves foreground or exclude particular perspectives or individuals

(Lomax, 2012; Stewart & Shamdasani, 2015). Gallagher (2008, p. 147) describes his feeling of being "an outsider enmeshed *within* complex pre-existing relations of power" [emphasis original]; this was noted in the present study too. In one group, a certain child appeared to hold a position of status and others would apparently wait until this child had answered before following suit with the same answer. In other instances children would comment judgmentally on another child's responses, e.g. "that's a boy book"; "are you only on blue?" resulting in the first child becoming defensive or withdrawn, or changing their answer. This well illustrates Gallagher's point that children's agency cannot be viewed romantically as purely "benign" (2008, p. 147), but needs to be seen in the complex context of power relations in any situation. I would usually try to intervene to 'protect' the child or children I saw as being subordinated in these situations – which was, of course, asserting myself as the person with power, the adult, acting as the arbiter – perhaps justifiably, perhaps not. Power relations are inevitable (Hammersley, 2017) and so perhaps should not be seen as inherently evil and oppressive, nor innocent and benign, but rather as actualities which just are; and are, in addition, shifting, unstable, and in need of acknowledgement.

Research as messy and layered

A number of researchers have challenged the view that studies will produce clear and tidy results and have indeed suggested that expecting and even embracing untidy, fluid outcomes is a more helpful approach (e.g. Gabb, 2009; Ingulfsvann et al., 2020). This is seen as being more reflective of the lived reality of interconnected human lives with their temporality, relational complexity and multi-layered richness. This perspective has informed this study and going further, I would agree with Spyrou (2011, p. 162) that reflexive research needs to accept "the messiness, ambiguity, polyvocality, non-factuality and multi-layered nature of meaning in 'stories' that research produces". It is acknowledged in relation to this research that approaching the same topics from multiple angles with more than 20 different children would produce many diverse perspectives and furthermore that the children, in attempting to consider the questions asked and make sense of their experiences would be likely to express a wide range of views on a spectrum from fixed to fluid, with feelings and meanings potentially shifting depending on context. This was indeed the case and this can be viewed as a strength of the approach rather than a weakness. Furthermore, in the course of research children engage with not just their individual and social contexts, but with a wider range of embodied meaning-making and interaction with the material world (Lomax, 2020). In this

research, this could be seen in children's interactions with books in particular, as will be discussed in the data analysis section. As Elden (2012) has argued, messiness and multidimensionality allows a fuller picture of lived experience rather than aiming for a triangulated 'true' portrayal: more insight rather than just 'more' (Darbyshire et al., 2005).

Issues of representation

The challenges discussed above lead to the central point; that of somehow representing in a useful way the views of children, whilst acknowledging the many problems with doing just that. As alluded to above, there is no intention to somehow access 'the voice of the child' – such a thing cannot be said to exist as a singularity. Any representation needs to be multivocal and to portray a range of views and even in this very small scale study the children involved cannot be seen as having "carried the burden of representation for childhood as a whole" (Kehily & Maybin, 2011, p. 269). The study is therefore viewed as particular and situated within its own temporal and spatial milieu, albeit with the potential to illuminate across a wider context.

Consent

From the start, following BERA ethical guidelines (2018), careful consideration was given as to the best way to facilitate informed and ongoing consent, to the extent that this is possible. Consent was sought from the schools' Headteachers and the participating children themselves, as well as their parents (see letters and information sheets in Appendices 1 and 2). Bourke and Loveridge (2014, p. 155) assert that "it is not possible to obtain fully informed consent from children given they are unlikely to comprehend the complex nature of the research and its (sometimes unanticipated) outcomes". It could, however, be argued that the same point applies to all research, and that the use of children as participants merely foregrounds this issue (Gallagher et al., 2010).

Attempting to provide children with some of the information and understanding they needed to decide was therefore one of the main reasons for the extended period of familiarisation before introducing the research and asking for volunteers (Rodriguez-Carrillo et al., 2020). At the end of the first term, a short session was carried out with the whole class, reading them a story before asking them, in general, about reading. It was then explained that I would like to find out more about what they thought, and that if any of them would like to help me, I would be returning to school to do some activities with them – I showed them two of the activities. Volunteers were not sought at that point, but

a letter and information sheet was left with their teacher, to give out at the end of the day to any children who were interested (copy in Appendix 2). Children then took it home to look at with their parents or carers, and returned the signed slip to school (signed by both the parent/carer and the child). Out of each class of 30 or so, between four and seven children returned signed slips. Despite this, keeping in mind the compromised position of children in school as well as in relation to their parents and carers, (Dockett & Perry, 2011; Gallagher et al., 2010), this could only be considered the first step towards informed consent – ongoing information and negotiation of consent was also required. In keeping with the BERA principle of ongoing consent (2018), children were reminded what they were doing the start of each session and asked if they still wanted to take part. During the session, it was important to remain alert to possible changes. For example, when the bell went for play some children asked if we were carrying on. In this instance, I gave children the option to either continue with the activities or go out to play. The way this was phrased was important; as children needed to know that they had permission to dissent (Bourke & Loveridge, 2014). Using as open a tone as possible, I said, 'You can choose either to go out to play or carry on doing this'. In one group, three chose to go out at this point and one stayed to finish, in keeping with the principle of being able to withdraw consent at any time (Smith & Coady, 2020).

Privacy and confidentiality

Data was recorded, transcribed and held securely and confidentially, and all participants were allocated a pseudonym which has been used throughout this thesis. Sometimes, however, situations would occur in the course of the research involving divergent sets of values which required a decision on an ethical response (Beach & Eriksson, 2010; Sparrman, 2014). For example, on one occasion a child (Dylan) appeared upset by a comment made by another child. The comment appeared innocuous, but it appeared from Dylan's body language that he was not very happy, and he immediately followed up by asking if the session was nearly finished. I told him it was and gave him the option to go back to class straight away. He said that he wanted to continue but then a few minutes later he did not want to write in the next activity. I therefore sat with him, scribing for him, chatting with him about his ideas and aiming to end the session in a positive way; he was soon relaxed again and participating fully. This resulted in a dilemma about breaking confidentiality, but I decided that after the session that it should be passed on to the teacher that Dylan may have been upset at one point as a duty of care, without sharing any specifics about data. This was even though by this point Dylan

appeared happy again, and in fact had never openly admitted to being unhappy – I nonetheless felt I could not fully make the judgement that he was not upset, as I did not know him well enough. Furthermore, the potential solution of asking Dylan for permission to share seemed to carry the potential of additional upset. The teacher simply commented that there was occasionally some rivalry between these two children – who were usually good friends – and that she would keep an eye out. This example illustrates the complexity which can be involved in ethical reflexivity – the principles of 'do no harm' and confidentiality came into conflict in that episode, and a quick decision was needed about the most ethical way to respond: an "ethical dilemma" (Christensen & Prout, 2002, p. 485)

Part 2 – Research Design

With the issues discussed so far in this chapter in mind: messiness; contingency; polyvocality; power relations, ethics and a search for understanding (however partial), the next section now turns to discuss the methods chosen for this research project. Principles and theoretical underpinnings will first be discussed, before a detailed presentation of the methods and specific fieldwork techniques used.

Mosaic Approach

As has been stated, the research method owed much to the principles of the 'Mosaic' approach (Clark, 2017; Clark & Moss, 2011). This offered the opportunity for multiple techniques within one project, as well as being very suitable for use with young children. In the Mosaic approach researchers aim to listen to young children, using a "mosaic" of different approaches to data gathering, with "tools that play… to the participants' strengths" (Clark & Moss, 2005, p. 103). As stated earlier, children are viewed as experts who are able to speak with authority about their views and experiences (Kinney, 2005) and the aim of the research is "knowledge creation rather than knowledge extraction" (Clark & Moss, 2011, p. 4) The Mosaic approach draws on Magaluzzi's concept of the 'hundred languages' of children (Clark, 2017), which highlights children's capacity to express themselves in a rich variety of ways such as drawing, singing, gesture and movement to name but a few. The Mosaic approach recognition of 'slow knowledge' and its application to this research has already been discussed. Not all aspects of the Mosaic approach were used in this study; most notably, a decision was taken to base the analysis on the views of children alone, rather than children, teachers and parents, as is often the case on Mosaic studies (Clark, 2017). This was because in the chosen topic, it was the views of children which were most conspicuously absent, with a number of studies having been carried out into the views of

parents and teachers. It was felt that the age of the children and the methods used were such that a 'mosaic' picture of the children's experience could be pieced together. Further than this, the key aim of this study was to foreground the experiences and views of children in relation to SSP, therefore it was decided in this instance to prioritise talking to a larger number of children across different schools, rather than a study of children, teachers and parents.

Devising the research methods: principles

The principles formulated to devise the research approach and instruments, based on the Mosaic approach and other methodology considerations discussed above, were therefore as follows:

- Principle 1 (P1): Diverse sites and multiple groups

Bearing in mind the critiques of seeking a homogenous 'child's voice' in voice research, it was decided to speak to a range of children for this study. As discussed above, being a child intersects with multiple other identities, such as race, class and gender (James, 2007). It was therefore decided to seek a range of children from more than one school, in areas with differing socio-economic and demographic characteristics, whilst still keeping the project manageable as an individual researcher. The study was therefore carried out over three schools: one in an area of social deprivation with a high population children who spoke English as an additional language (EAL), one in a white British working class area of very high social deprivation, and one in a mixed, more socially advantaged area. The range of children within each school was governed by the numbers who both volunteered and were able to obtain parental permission in each case, and this varied between schools. In total, across three schools, 25 children volunteered to take part, with 23 continuing through to the end of the study (the other two had left their school).

- Principle 2 (P2): Slow knowledge

As a researcher not based within a school, I would be carrying out this research as an unfamiliar figure to the children. The time available and the access constraints (such as children's very busy and highly regulated school timetables), meant that a long-term ethnographic study would not be a suitable or practical choice for my research questions. It was therefore decided to use a longitudinal approach including a familiarisation phase (one school term) during which I went into classes multiple times as a 'helper', for example, supporting with phonics lessons, reading with individual children and, finally, reading a story to the class. Three further visits were then arranged over the next year, meeting with the

same children each time, which allowed the children to gain some measure of familiarity with me (Harcourt & Conroy, 2011).

- Principle 3 (P3): Group interviews

Children were interviewed in small groups of three or four, rather than individually. This was intended to at least in part, mitigate the generational and institutional power differential, as well as helping the children to feel more comfortable and relaxed in the presence of familiar peers. Perhaps it helped a little with both areas, although there is no doubt that children were very much responding to me as an adult (e.g. waiting for my instructions) and some continued to use socialised school-type behaviours (such as putting up their hands in response to questions), even though they were encouraged not to. Children probably felt more comfortable with their peers there as well (Lopez-Dicastillo et al., 2012), but the group situation also introduced, as was discussed above, elements of power dynamics between children which doubtless influenced responses (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2015).

- Principle 4 (P4): Activity-based interviews

Following the Mosaic approach, the aim was to provide multiple activities of different types which would encourage children to talk and express their views (Clark, 2011; Colucci, 2007). These included answering questions, using emoticons, drawing and writing, among other things. The activities were chosen to reflect the type of stimuli the children would be familiar with in day to day classroom situations in Year One and Year Two, using short, focussed tasks with a degree of flexibility in response, and no requirement to talk if they chose not to, although this was rare (Lomax, 2020). In each case, the talk around the activity was recorded and it is the talk which has provided the main dataset for analysis, supplemented by the drawn, chosen or written artefacts. Thus the activities can perhaps best be viewed as prompts or scaffolds for thinking, talking and meaning-making (Winstone et al., 2014). Furthermore, the use of different types of activities was intended to support different children to express themselves, using the 'hundred languages of children' concept. Children who may not respond easily to direct questions may instead, when engrossed in an activity, be willing to describe and explain what they are doing (Helavaara Robertson et al., 2015).

- Principle 5 (P5): Spiral structure

The question of how children 'feel' about phonics, reading and learning to read was approached in multiple ways, returning to these same areas repeatedly over the three sessions using different fieldwork tools. The aim of circling round the questions in this way was to allow all children to find an activity which would help them to express their views (Horgan, 2017). It was also hoped that different aspects of the children's thinking might

emerge with different approaches – so, for example, one child, on direct questioning, claimed to 'like reading because it helps me learn' – a confidently given but potentially 'schooled' answer. In another activity the same child looked at pictures of figures in different emotional states and was able to identify 'me reading at home with mummy' 'me reading my school book with the teacher' 'me learning phonics' and 'me reading by own book on my own' by pointing to different figures. Thus, it was possible to build up a more nuanced picture of that child's views using a multi-modal approach (Lomax, 2020).

Based on these principles, the fieldwork approach was devised. This will now be explained in detail.

Devising the research methods: fieldwork phases

A five-stage process was used for the fieldwork, which can be seen in Table 2.

Phase of fieldwork		Term	Activity	Purpose	Data generated
Phase 1	Familiarisation	Summer 2017	Regular volunteering in each participating Reception class, reading with children individually and in groups, and supporting in phonics sessions.	For the children and teacher to feel comfortable with me as a classroom presence (part of access strategy). For me to gain an initial overview of the teacher's general approach to teaching SSP/reading.	Field notes – on general approach to reading and SSP-as-prime in classroom and on children's participation
Phase 2	Introduction	late Summer 2017	Reading and discussing a story with the whole class in each school. Explaining the study briefly to the children and that I am looking for volunteers. Children had the chance to take home information leaflets and consent forms.	Aiming to gain 'informed consent' from volunteer children and their parents, to the extent that may be possible.	Field notes on children's interaction and responses

Phase 3	Group interviews Set 1	Autumn 2017 – first half	Seven activity-based group interviews held across the three schools with the 25 volunteer children – now in Year 1. Two to four children per group.	Eliciting and discussing views, mainly around reading in general	Voice recordings of each activity-based interview (later transcribed) Activity outputs: emoticon responses, blob tree responses and drawings of themselves reading
Phase 4	Group interviews Set 2	Autumn 2017 – second half	Second set of seven activity-based group interviews held in each school with the remaining 24 children.	Eliciting and discussing views, around reading in general, learning to read and SSP	Voice recordings of each activity-based interview (later transcribed) Activity outputs: Unfinished picture responses
Phase 5	Group interviews Set 3 Return to the field	Autumn 2018	Further set of activity-based group interviews held with the remaining 23 children – now in Year 2.	Further elicitation of views now the children are slightly older and beyond the main phonics input 'Bringing the mosaic together' – dialogue, reflection and interpretation with the children	Voice recordings of each activity-based interview (later transcribed) Activity outputs: Unfinished picture responses, updated emoticon responses, instructions on 'How To Read'

Table 2: Overview of fieldwork

In terms of the principles laid out above, this approach enabled a range of children from different schools to be involved, within the capacity of a sole researcher (P1: diverse sites and multiple groups). It allowed children to become a little more familiar with an outsider researcher over repeated interactions (P2: slow knowledge) and to feel, it is hoped, reasonably comfortable in a group with their classmates (P3: group interviews). It also allowed a fuller picture to be built over time as slightly different activities were used on each occasion, approaching the research topic in diverse ways (P4: activity-based interviews). The findings built over time, with space for me to reflect between each research episode and to devise new activities, building on the children's responses in previous sessions (P5: spiral structure).

Sample

It has already been discussed that as this is an interpretive, small scale study, with no claim of generalisability. It was therefore not an aim to seek a representative sample (Cohen et al., 2018). Nonetheless, there was a clear aim to achieve variation within the sample. In line with the Mosaic principle P1: 'diverse sites and multiple groups', three schools were approached based on their contrasting demographic characteristics (as described above), so that element of the sampling was purposive. The schools were all partners in initial teacher training, therefore known professionally to the researcher, but not on a personal basis.

In order to achieve multiple groups in each site there was a need for a minimum of 18 children, six from each school. In the end the largest school produced more volunteers so that school had three groups of four children, a second school had one group of four and one of three, and the third school had two groups of three (P3: 'group interviews' principle). The numbers could have been reduced by selecting only some of the volunteers to take part but with the wish to involve as many children as possible as well as guarding against loss of some participants over the longitudinal study, it was decided to include all those children who had volunteered.

As volunteers, the children taking part were self-selecting. There may, therefore, be an inherent bias towards children who are more interested or confident in reading. Furthermore, as parental consent was required, the children in the sample may have parents with a higher degree of interest and involvement in their education than across the general population, which may in turn have a positive effect on the children's reading both in terms of attitude and ability (Ozturk et al., 2016).The final sample can be seen in Table 3.

School	School characteristics	Number of children	Girls	Boys	English as an Additional Language (EAL)	Non-EAL
Oldtown	Low deprivation and low EAL	7	3	4	2	5
Newtown	Area of deprivation, high EAL	6	2	4	4	2
Hightown	Area of deprivation, low EAL	12	6	6	1	11
Total		25	11	14	7	17

Table 3: Sample of participants

Thus the sample, although purposive and self-selecting, did nonetheless achieve a breadth in terms of demographic characteristics although, as noted above, these may have been children pre-disposed to feel more positively about reading.

Activities used in interviews

It is important to provide some detail of the activities used in the group interviews, as these form a key element of the methodological approach and it is on the success (or otherwise) of these that epistemological claims for this study are based; in other words, what Howe (2003, pp. 40-41) has termed the "overall warrant" of the research. As has been mentioned, the activities often seek to encourage the children to talk about similar areas but using different approaches (P4: 'activity-based interviews'). In the next section, these will be explained in some detail. Alongside the description of each activity, a brief evaluation of its effectiveness as a research instrument will be included. A set of interview activity schedules and proformas can be seen in Appendices 3-6.

Choose a book (Session One and Session Two)

This fairly open 'warm-up' activity was used as an opportunity to observe the children interacting with books as well as a basis for discussion. A selection was presented of children's fiction and non-fiction books (Session One) or school reading scheme books (Session Two). Children spent some time for looking at the books, reading them individually or together – whatever they chose to do. This was followed by some discussion about why they had chosen a particular book, what sort of books they liked reading the best, and so on. Their choices and comments were of interest, as well as the ways in which they chose to interact with the text, for example, did they appear to primarily 'decode' – so using phonics as their main approach – or did they seek to bring meaning to the text in more multi-faceted ways? This draws on the concepts discussed earlier that children make meaning in relation to material as well as social and individual context (Lomax, 2020). This activity was successful in several ways. Firstly, children talked with confidence and expertise about their views on the books. Secondly, the focus in the initial part of the session was on the books and each other rather than on me, which did appear to help the children to relax. Finally, in relation to the research topic, a marked difference was indeed apparent in how children approached their school reading books and the so-called 'real' books (Atkinson, 2016). This will be further discussed in the data analysis.

Show me how you feel (Session One and Session Three)

Children used emoticons – happy, sad and neutral faces – to complete various statements e.g. 'When I am reading my school book at home I feel…' or 'When I am doing phonics at school I feel…'. This was followed up by asking them to explain why they had given that response. Their responses were returned to them in Session Three (the following year) and children were asked how they felt now, and to explain, including any changes in attitude. Initially children were asked to use small emoticon fans to 'show me' their chosen face but using this method, it proved difficult to capture data for each child accurately and quickly. A switch was therefore made to using a printout of different faces, and children circled the one they chose (Figure 8). Children appeared to have a confident understanding of how to use emoticons to express their feelings, and some indeed wanted to circle two faces (with explanation) to demonstrate an additional nuance.

Figure 8: Show me how you feel activity using emoticons

Blob People (Session One)

Blob people pictures (Figure 9) are designed to be non-specific in terms of age, gender or ethnicity and are sometimes used to help children express emotions through identification with the figures, who are shown with different positions, postures and expressions (Wilson & Long, 2009). It was necessary to spend some time looking at and discussing how children thought the various blob people might be feeling, before asking some specific questions such as *How do you feel when you are reading at home? – show me which blob person you are like then. How about when you are reading at school? How about when you are doing phonics?* In each case children were asked to explain their choice. This was designed to complement the emoticon activity as it was less interrogative and involved an element of 'distancing': children were able to identify with the figure rather than simply describing their own feelings (Boddington et al., 2014). This did appear to be the case and children made some distinctive choices along with some very insightful comments.

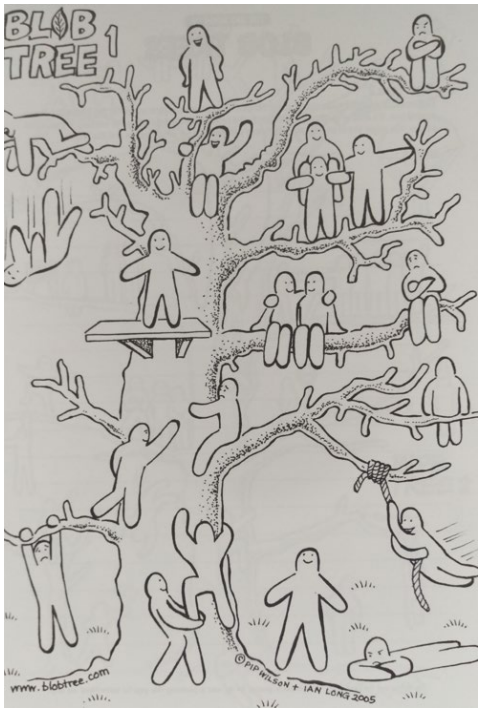


Figure 9: Blank Blob Tree

Draw a picture of yourself reading (Session One)

In this activity, children were asked to draw a picture of a time when they had been enjoying reading. As they drew, they were invited to talk about where it was, when it was, what they were reading, and so on, and either they wrote this down, or had their words scribed. This was intended to be a positive way to end the first session and also to find out what, in the minds of the children, might be deemed a positive reading experience: home- or school-based, individual or social, and so on. As Coyne et al. point out (2021) children may choose to draw something they wish to happen and thus all responses were accepted. Children all enjoyed this activity and generally entered into it with gusto, and all were able to offer some commentary as to the content of the picture, thus giving an insight into its meaning for them (Darling-McQuistan, 2017).

Toy animal game: Pickle and Boo (Session One and Session Two)

This activity was based on the Motivation to Read Profile (MRP), a measurement tool widely used in studies of attitudes to reading (Malloy et al., 2014). The Profile usually takes the form of a written questionnaire and interview and is suitable for children aged 8 to 12. In this adaptation, based on an activity from Baker and Scher (2002), children were introduced to two stuffed toys with differing attitudes towards reading and phonics – one positive and one negative (Figure 10). They were asked to say which one they were most like e.g. Pickle likes phonics sessions in school but Boo doesn't – who are you more like? Statements related to

enjoyment (e.g. Pickle likes to read; Boo doesn't like to read), value (e.g. Pickle thinks phonics helps us to learn, etc.) and perceived competence (e.g. Pickle thinks s/he is good at reading), and in each case the children placed their name card next to the toy they thought they were most like. Children were then asked to explain why they had made that choice. It was hoped that this activity would provide information about these dimensions of children's reading motivation (enjoyment, value and perceived competence).

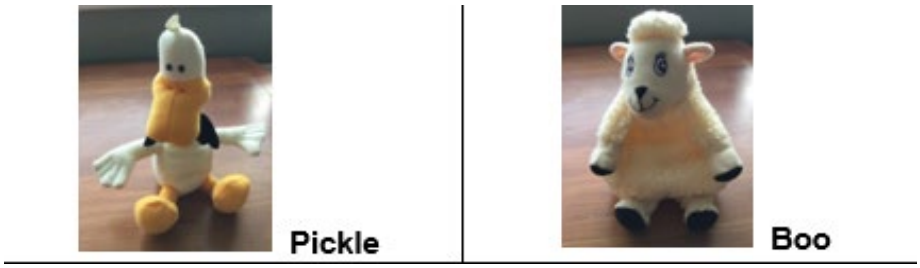


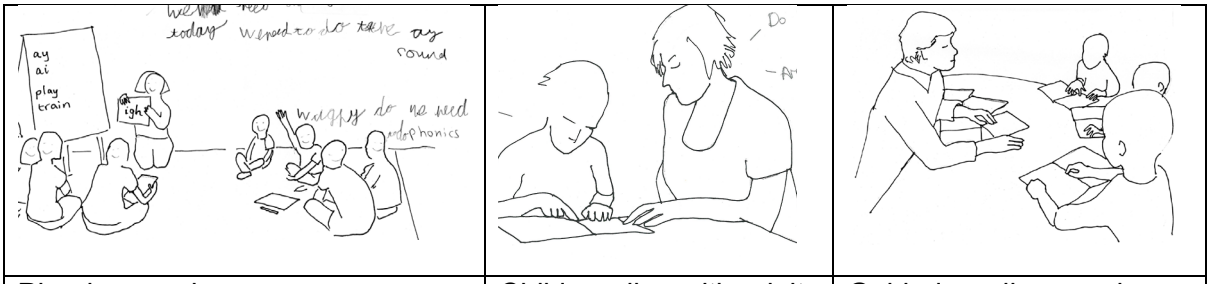
Figure 10: Pickle and Boo

This activity needed a little adaptation as the research proceeded. It was initially introduced in Session One for a single question, as a small trial to see whether it would work with children of this age group. It was intended to use the MRP 4-point Likert scale approach, with children saying they were a lot like Boo, a little bit like Boo, a little bit like Pickle or a lot like Pickle. This proved too complex and some children were interpreting as 'I like Pickle a lot', for example. So for Session Two, when there were a number of questions to cover with Pickle and Boo, it was simplified to 'Are you more like Pickle, or more like Boo?', adding 'Do you agree with Pickle, or do you agree with Boo?' for clarity. Even so, one child said that she was like Boo because she didn't like being read to, then when asked to expand further, she explained that she liked blue, not red. The instrument was therefore largely successful once simplified, in that children were encouraged and often able to offer justifications for their decisions, but with some reservations. Overall, despite some difficulties, the use of Pickle and Boo did allow children to express views on their reading motivation in a structured and age-appropriate way.

Unfinished pictures (Session Two and Session Three)

The group was shown basic outline pictures of a class-based situation – deliberately designed not to show any particular expressions (Figure 11). The first situations, used in Session Two, depicted a phonics lesson, and an adult reading individually with a child. The picture used in Session Three showed a guided reading session with a group of children in school. This is based on a 'graphic elicitation' technique as described by, for example, Hanke (2014), which asks children to respond to a visual stimulus by imagining themselves into a situation, thus forming a bridge between an abstract concept and a concrete situation.

Open questions were then asked to prompt discussion – what do you think is happening here? What might they be saying? Thinking? Children's ideas were written around the picture as they discussed, either by themselves or via scribing. This activity was intended to help provide a concrete support for children to express what they themselves might be thinking in these situations. Some children entered into this activity with good understanding, whereas with some groups the concept appeared either too abstract or not interesting. In some groups children were therefore given their own individual pictures to complete, in others it was completed together as a group, and in one group it was soon put aside. Children appeared more engaged with this activity in Year Two (once older). Despite not engaging all children consistently, it nonetheless provided some fruitful data.



Phonics session	Child reading with adult	Guided reading session

Figure 11: Unfinished picture

Instructions for How To Read (Session Three)

In the final activity of Session Three, the children were told that Rusty, the dog puppet who had attended to each session to 'help', did not know how to read. Children were therefore asked to write some instructions for Rusty, telling him how to read. This is similar to 'explaining to a puppet' activities used in other research studies with children (Coyne et al., 2021). The intent of this activity was to find out what the children understood by 'reading'; so would they focus mainly on decoding, or on the pictures or understanding the text, or a combination, for example. This activity was successful in terms of logistics as by this stage of Year Two most children could write independently or could be supported by scribing if they chose. The instructions written by the children were indeed revealing, as will be seen in the data analysis.

Discussion

As has been shown, not all the activities were completely 'successful' in the sense of all children responding as anticipated. Some activities worked well with one group and not at all with another. Some groups were chattier and more willing to work as a group, whereas

others were more reticent. Some children were focused and engaged in the activities and others wanted to take things in another direction. External factors played a part too – such as a class lining up for PE and wanting to talk to the participant children, or the bell ringing for playtime. As Darbyshire et al. (2005, p. 430) suggest, research with children can be particularly unpredictable and requires great flexibility from a researcher. To sanitise this is unhelpful to other researchers and thus to future research with children. Overall, the use of multiple approaches to the same set of questions appeared to be productive as this enabled children to respond in different ways and at different points in the process and, it is proposed, could lead to deeper insight. Children were able to respond both linguistically and, at times, non-linguistically, with different modes supporting each other (Lomax, 2020). This is in keeping with the principles based on the Mosaic approach. Whilst there are clearly multiple complexities and limitations, as has been discussed, these methods nonetheless enable children's views to be heard in relation to their experiences of learning to read in the context of SSP-as-prime – a set of voices which have, until now, been largely absent.

Part 3 - Analysis strategy

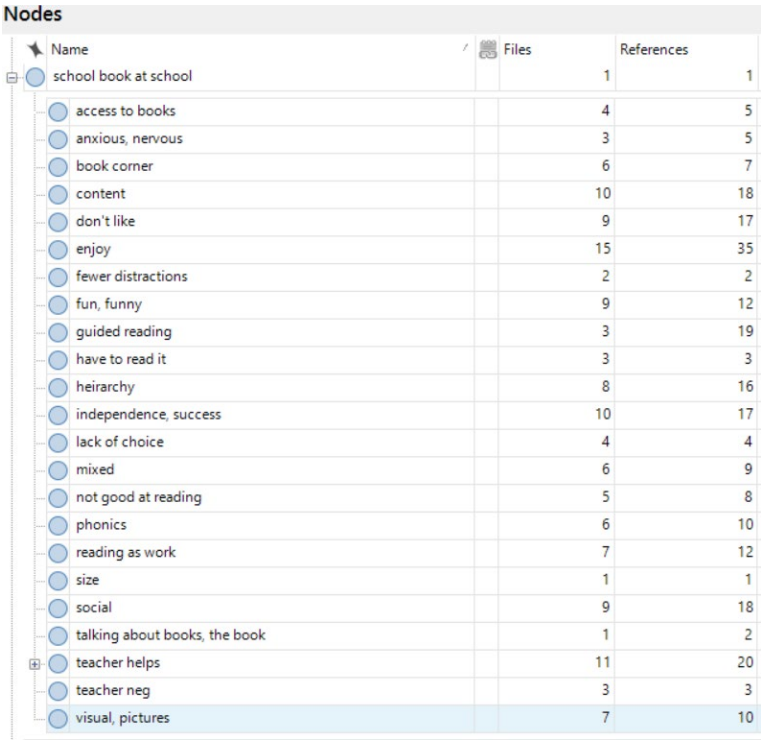
Thematic Analysis

Having collected the data, inductive, thematic analysis was used to interpret the data, with successive rounds of coding and refinement as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). In order to ensure a systematic approach, Braun and Clarke's 'six phases' were used, although as they acknowledge, the phases tend to overlap and interweave in practice (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Phase 1: Familiarising yourself with your data Each group interview was transcribed by the researcher, as soon as possible after it had taken place. An example transcript can be found in Appendix 7. Before and during the transcription process, initial reflections were noted down as they occurred, in the form of field notes or reflective journaling (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Each transcription was also read at least one more time in the early stages to check for sense and accuracy, and further notes on points of interest were made. The transcripts were then uploaded to the NVivo qualitative analysis software platform, with consistent naming conventions and codes allocated for each participant.

Phase 2: Generating initial codes Descriptive coding began, which in these initial stages meant re-reading each transcript start to finish, identifying and labelling (coding) each element of the data line by line (Jackson & Bazeley, 2019). At this stage there were many similar or overlapping codes, with no specific naming convention, such as 'social', 'positive', 'mechanics' or even 'interesting, not sure where to put'. Pieces of data were often attached

to multiple codes. Little attempt was made at this stage to seek patterns across the data, although responses were separated into where children were talking about different types of reading-related activities such as reading their school book at home, or phonics sessions. Beyond this, it was a fairly flat system of coding at this stage (see extract in Figure 12). Notes continued to be made as thoughts occurred.



Nodes

Name	Files	References
school book at school	1	1
access to books	4	5
anxious, nervous	3	5
book corner	6	7
content	10	18
don't like	9	17
enjoy	15	35
fewer distractions	2	2
fun, funny	9	12
guided reading	3	19
have to read it	3	3
heirarchy	8	16
independence, success	10	17
lack of choice	4	4
mixed	6	9
not good at reading	5	8
phonics	6	10
reading as work	7	12
size	1	1
social	9	18
talking about books, the book	1	2
teacher helps	11	20
teacher neg	3	3
visual, pictures	7	10

Figure 12: First stage coding

Besides the transcripts, there were also several other data sources, such as the children's drawings of 'A time I was happy reading'; the children's handwritten 'Instructions how to read', and the collated emoticon, Blob Tree and Pickle and Boo data. Each of these alternative data sources had acted as a "springboard" (Clark, 2017, p. 25) for children's talk and reflection, all of which was included in the transcripts and therefore coded. However, the drawings themselves were also coded (by hand) alongside the record of children's talk about the drawings, recognising that the drawings themselves may contain additional points of interest not mentioned verbally by the children (Angell et al., 2014). The 'Instructions how to read' were typed into the transcripts and coded as part of these, but also kept, to refer to in their original handwritten format as analysis proceeded. The collated emoticon, Blob Tree and Pickle and Boo data added a small amount of quantitative information which was useful as an overview of the dataset (Spyrou, 2011). The emoticon data also added a longitudinal element. This will be further explained in 'Phase 5'.

Phase 3: Searching for themes This phase moved from a descriptive to an analytical approach, in which data was interpreted through being grouped into consolidated codes, forming the basis for potential themes. For example, 'social' was moved to be part of a larger code termed 'environment'. The use of the NVivo platform meant this process was straightforward and data could be easily moved around in various ways, although the hard copy transcripts were still frequently used alongside NVivo. The hard copies provided the context of the coded sections and enabled an overview to be maintained. This was useful, in part, due to the very scattered nature of the data throughout the transcripts. As the same questions had been approached through a number of different activities and on different occasions, evidence of children's views could be found in many places, and not always directly (Colley, 2010). For example, the emphasis on the procedural aspects of how reading is organised in school often cropped up in passing, not only when it was being asked about. This phase could be likened to 'data condensation' as discussed by Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2020). In this process the data itself is not reduced but rather focussed, simplified and abstracted. Using this approach, similar data was brought together and the number of categories gradually reduced as codes became sub-codes of other, more overarching codes. At this stage, some coding was also changed as it became clear that some data would be better coded differently, or could now be included in one of the new categories.

Actually moving from higher level codes to themes, however, proved considerably more difficult. Colley (2010) describes her own search for the "golden key" and her subsequent realisation that this does not exist. In this research, the move from code to themes was very challenging and involved several false dawns. It was important to keep referring back to the research questions, as there was a very large amount of data, and many leads which could have been pursued. Much time, thought and discussion was needed to settle on the final themes. There is no claim that the analysis strategy chosen represents a single 'best' way, or that it enables every point made by the participants to be explored in detail. As discussed earlier, neither can it be held to accurately and fully represent children's views in a straightforward way (Lomax, 2020). Rather, it is a strategy which is appropriate, congruent with the methodology overall (Morse & Richards, 2002), and leads to some tentative answers to the research questions. This will be further discussed and illustrated under the next two phases.

Phase 4: Reviewing themes At this stage, simple mind maps were used to assist thinking about patterns in the data, trying out different ways of organising thematically. This phase went through several cycles as the most helpful way to interpret the data was sought. It was

characterised by “the messiness and the dilemmas” inherent in qualitative data analysis, as identified by Bathmaker (2010, p. 205). The steps from close working with the data itself, to interpretation and theorising, were hard. An early map had plotted the data in terms of different responses in relation to phonics lessons, or to reading books provided by school, or their own books at home, but it remained difficult to see patterns in the responses in this way, and some data which appeared significant, did not fit within this analysis. In another example (shown in Figure 13), initially much of the data had been coded as ‘positive’, ‘negative’ or ‘mixed’ in terms of children’s feelings about various aspects of reading, and one thematic map had these two aspects as key nodes. When testing this thematic analysis against the dataset, however, it became evident that this did not do justice to other aspects of the children’s talk. For example, there were comments about why they felt they were learning to read, or how they were being taught, which were also telling in terms of analysing their views. This, therefore, eventually became just one of three overall themes in the final analysis, eventually termed ‘*affective*’ (or ‘how we feel’). Two further overarching themes in the children’s responses were therefore deemed to add to the analysis of children’s experiences of and views on learning to read in the era of SSP-as-prime: ‘*descriptive*’ (‘what we do’) and ‘*affordative*’ (‘why we do it’).

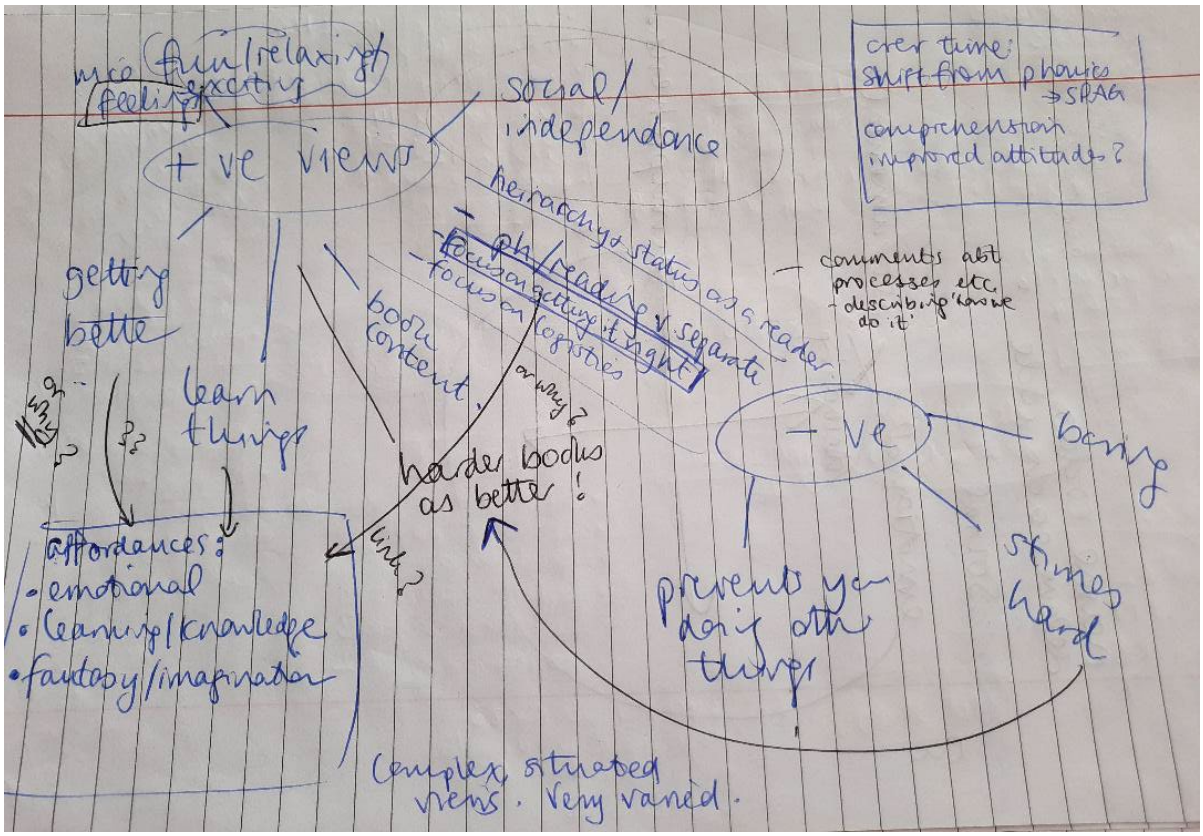


Figure 13: Early attempt at thematic map

Phase 5: Defining and naming themes A map was created to reflect those new themes (a representation of this map can be seen in Table 4), and data was re-organised again within NVivo to reflect this (see Appendix 8). At this stage, all the data within each theme was read again to check the coding and make any further adjustments. This process confirmed that these themes 'worked', as most of the data fitted coherently within them. The earlier coding around 'phonics lessons' 'reading in school' and 'reading at home' and around 'positive' and 'negative' remained as important sub-codes within each of these themes, to allow the possibility of distinguishing differential attitudes to various aspects of reading. The table below (Table 4) shows the final themes along with sub-themes and linked coding, and the number of instances identified for each code/code cluster, organised by theme. The following table (Table 5) shows the main findings under each theme, linked to the research questions.

<table>
<tr><th colspan="4">Final Thematic Map</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Overarching themes</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Descriptive

What we do</td><td>Affordative

Why we do it</td><td>Affective

How we feel</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Sub-themes and linked coding (number of instances of each code in brackets)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Reading as decoding (D) (121)</td><td rowspan="2">- 'Schooled' reading context (73D, 39M)
- Other reading context (11D, 47M)
- Context unspecified (37D, 23M)</td><td>Learning (44)</td><td>Sense of competence/lack of competence (195)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Reading as meaning making (M) (109)</td><td>Future Success (3)</td><td>Like/ dislike content of the book (155)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Phonics-as-a-subject (78)
• Linked to reading (9)
• Linked to writing (37)
• Linked to both (3)
• Unspecified (25)</td><td>Emotional reward (11)</td><td>Context of reading (social, spatial, temporal) (45)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2"></td><td>Fantasy/imagination (4)</td><td>Choice/lack of choice (42)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2"></td><td>External reward (3)</td><td></td></tr>
</table>

Table 4: Final thematic map indicating number of identified instances of each code

Key findings for each theme with links to research questions RQ1: In the context of SSP-as-prime, what are children's experiences and perceptions of learning to read and reading overall? RQ2: How might these experiences and perceptions be shaping their development as readers?		
Descriptive *What we do*	Affordative *Why we do it*	Affective *How we feel*
Children's concept of reading may differ according to context, with schooled reading seen as having closer correlations with the act of decoding and with procedural aspects. Other conceptualisations of reading are also evident, although children tend to focus more strongly on an understanding of reading as decoding (RQ1&2)	Children mainly expressed that reading is for instrumental purposes linked to learning (RQ1&2)	Being a successful reader is linked to competence at decoding text: good readers 'get it right' (RQ1)
Children show a strong awareness of 'phonics-as-a-subject' but often seem to see it as conceptually different from reading (and more closely linked to writing) (RQ1)	Reading for pleasure or emotional reward is mentioned by children, but much less often (RQ1&2)	Children who perceive themselves as competent at decoding text often reported more positive feelings about reading, those who did not often reported more negative feelings (RQ2)
		Feelings about reading were also associated with the content and context of the reading experience (RQ1)

Table 5: Key findings for each theme with links to research questions

Phase 6 Producing the report As the thesis developed, the narrative of each theme became fully worked out, with supporting evidence provided in each case. Links were made to the literature review and to the research questions, and the theoretical framework both informed the analysis, and was challenged by it. It became apparent that Bernstein's theoretical framework supported and enlightened much of the analysis, but that the perspectives of children challenged and complicated this work. Thus, at this stage the additional lens of Bronfenbrenner was used to approach the data, which provided new insights, as will be discussed in Chapter 10.

Example of the development of a theme from the initial code

Phase 2: Generating initial codes

On initial hearing and reading of the data, one of the categories noted was 'mechanics'. At this stage, this did not link to any other code, and this was used this to put any data where children were talking about what they did when they were reading or doing phonics lessons. Examples included: *He's saying that, he knows how to spell it* (Ava, HT2B) and *You just like sound out, just cover up the first bit, and then you cover up the second bit* (Ethan, HT3C) This was initially regarded as fairly incidental data, perhaps not closely liked to the research questions being asked. Nonetheless, it was deemed important to code all data; at that stage it was not possible to know what would be relevant (Silverman, 2014). In addition, as Spyrou (2011) suggests, time is needed to understand potential layers of meaning in children's statements.

Phase 3: Searching for themes

In Phase 3, as described above, the data begun to be consolidated into broader categories. At this stage, the main focus was still on the 'feelings (affective)' data, with the 'affordative' theme being identified on further analysis. There remained a number of categories of children's talk about reading which did not fit this theme. The 'mechanics' code was one of these, as well as children's talk about the perceived affordances of reading. Other examples were 'procedural' (to do with reading groups, changing reading books and so on) and 'environment' (talk related to where, when and with whom reading took place, for example). So at this stage, 'mechanics' still sat outside the main thematic analysis.

Phase 4: Reviewing themes

On re-reading the data within the 'mechanics' code several times, it began to be evident that seemingly incidental comments such as *We read, we read properly and we need to read, we don't change page, we have to sound the word out* (Idris, NT1B) *You need to read it all (*Ryan, NT2B*) You have to…if you put your finger on it, then you'll know what word you're*

on…and then you sound it out (Madison, OT1A) actually provided important information about children's experiences of reading and SSP and, at times, indications of children's developing conceptualisations of 'reading'. Other codes did the same, such as 'procedural' and 'hierarchy' (about who was on which stage of the reading scheme, for example). Similarly, children made comments about what they did in their phonics lessons which were suggestive of their constructions of phonics-as-a subject. These therefore came together to form the final theme, 'descriptive', within which analysis was carried out to infer children's views on what constituted successful reading and on children's perceptions of phonics-as-a-subject.

Chapter conclusion

This chapter has outlined the overall methodological approach and methods used, along with an overview of the data analysis strategy. The aim of this has been to establish the overall warrant for the research (Howe, 2003) through explaining the steps taken to construct knowledge from the data collected, which will be discussed in Chapters 7-10. Morse & Richards (2002, p. 32) argue that achieving "methodological congruence" is key, meaning a fit between the research questions, the methods chosen, and the analytical approach used. This underpins the idea of research validity, in other words, a study achieving what it sets out to show, in a way which is credible and convincing.

To return to the introduction to this chapter, the study is based in an interpretive paradigm, with an understanding of knowledge as constructed and contingent (Elden, 2012). The assumption of children as able to express their views was made explicit at the outset, and limitations of research with children discussed in detail, along with measures to mitigate these. The overall methodological approach, and specific research methods, were carefully selected to enable a polyvocal, multi-modal study based on the Mosaic approach (Clark, 2017). The data analysis strategy then built on this approach by a systematic application of Braun and Clark's (2006) stages. As with the methodology, adaptations were made to seek a closer fit between the research questions and the approach taken.

It is clear that the researcher is present and active every step of the way from the inception to the outcomes of the study and that this will have had an impact on the questions asked, the methods chosen, the nature of the analysis and the presentation of the outcomes; in short, the entire undertaking. As mentioned in the introduction, it is vital to acknowledge my role as the crafter and glosser of the study and its 'findings' (James, 2007), rather than claiming that through listening to, selecting, presenting and analysing children's voices, there is somehow access to an unadulterated authentic truth. The question is whether this is a sign of epistemological weakness (Moore & Muller, 1999) or

in fact, potentially, epistemological strength. As many have noted (e.g. Gallagher, 2008; Kellett et al., 2004; Spencer et al., 2020) it is futile to suggest that as researchers we can step outside our own beliefs and histories or the power structures within which we and our research participants exist. What is possible is to acknowledge these aspects and to maintain a belief that individuals – including young children - can, nonetheless, express thoughts about their lives and experiences that are worth listening to. Gauntlett and Holzwarth (2006, p. 82) refer to this as an ”optimistic and trusting” approach, suggesting that people are still able to express ideas and theories about their lives, and are not entirely constrained by the situation in which they find themselves. This corresponds with the view in this study of children as able to generate ideas about their lives with some expertise and agency, despite the many curtailments within which they operate. In other words, although the research methodology and analysis may be imperfect, they are nonetheless what we have, and were chosen with care and intent. Proceeding with a spirit of optimism and hopefulness, combined with caution, the study has, it is hoped, produced outcomes worth considering. It is this which leads to a claim of epistemological strength: as a researcher working with an interpretive approach, the outcomes of this study should be regarded as an understanding I have constructed with involvement from the participants, firmly situated within its own context: physically, socially and temporally (Hughes, 2010, pp. 41-42), as well as politically. This does not suggest there is a truth to be uncovered; so not ‘knowledge’ but ‘an understanding’ or perhaps, ‘my understanding’ of children’s perspectives. The next chapter will examine this interpretation in detail.

Chapter 7: Data Analysis and Discussion I: Introduction and Theme 1

Introduction

Children's experiences are analysed via Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2014) thematic analytical approach using three different perspectives: descriptive (what reading is); affordative (why we read), and affective (how we feel).

The themes form the basis for the next three chapters, and thus enable the two main research questions to be answered:

1. In the context of SSP-as-prime, what are children's experiences and perceptions of learning to read and reading overall?
2. How might these experiences and perceptions be influencing their development as readers?

Key findings

A key finding, as will be shown in relation to each theme, is the prevalence in children's views of reading of the concept of decoding, especially in relation to 'schooled' reading contexts (such as reading school reading books or reading with a teacher). Two longstanding, different concepts of reading were discussed in the literature review: reading for meaning (top down), and reading as decoding (bottom up), as identified in Chall's seminal work (Chall, 1967). This is a recurrent theme in this data analysis, as the dominant discourse of the bottom-up view in policy evidences itself in children's perceptions, sometimes leading to dissonance in their ideas about reading. This analysis will show how children frequently consider successful reading to be linked to successful decoding, with an emphasis on the need to 'get it right'. Correlating with this, children's view of themselves as readers often appears tied to their success with decoding. Those children who see themselves as stronger decoders often see themselves as good readers and develop more positive attitudes over time, whereas children who find decoding harder may tend to become more negative. Despite this, children's perception of 'phonics-as-a subject' often seems to be conceptually separate from reading – the two are not necessarily seen as linked. Furthermore, a strongly instrumental view of reading apparently predominates at this young age: reading is more commonly seen to be for learning than for other reasons, such as pleasure or relaxation.

Overall approach

As each theme is discussed, links are made to literature and Bernstein's theoretical framework (Bernstein, 1975, 1990, 2000), to illuminate and interpret the findings. A

concluding chapter in the data analysis section harnesses both Bernstein's framework and Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000) to further illuminate the findings.

Raw data from the activity-oriented interviews with children is presented throughout, using pseudonyms and the format shown in Table 6 for attribution. Selected extracts from field notes are also used. Where numbers are given in support of claims, the overall number of the sample is 24 children.

School	Session A (September/October 2017)	Session B (November 2017)	Session C (October/November 2018)
Hightown – Group 1	HT1A	HT1B	HT1C
Hightown – Group 2	HT2A	HT2B	HT2C
Hightown – Group 3	HT3A	HT3B	HT3C
Oldtown – Group 1	OT1A	OT1B	OT1C
Oldtown – Group 2	OT2A	OT2B	OT2C
Newtown – Group 1	NT1A	NT1B	NT1C
Newtown – Group 2	NT2A	NT2B	N/A

Table 6: Interview attribution format

School	Participant pseudonyms
Hightown	Jack, Harry, Ethan, Alex, Scarlett, Logan, Zoey, Ava, Fleur, Duana, Brea, Harlen
Oldtown	Alfie, Tyler, Madison, Sofia, Emily, Anand, Jude
Newtown	Aaliyah, Dylan, Mariam, Ryan, Idris

Table 7: Participant pseudonyms

Background to the analysis

It was clear from time spent in school and discussions with teachers and children that the state-endorsed approach to the teaching of SSP was evident at classroom level. This accords with findings from other studies (e.g. Carter, 2020b; Walker et al., 2015). All children were receiving daily phonics lessons, as a separate subject. All three schools taught SSP as the prime approach to reading, following similar principles, down to children often referring to the same reading scheme books, or describing the same procedures when they discussed phonics in school. They were not identical (for example, two schools used so-called ability grouping when teaching SSP whereas one used a mixed group approach), but in general they were much more similar than different.

This is unsurprising given the national focus on phonics teaching heavily promoted by multiple policies since the Rose Report (2006). For example, the National Curriculum in England (DfE, 2014b), which all schools in the sample followed for English. Furthermore, all schools must administer the Phonics Screening Check (PSC) to all children in June of Year 1, and again in Year 2 for those who do not meet the expected standard (DfE, 2018b). In addition, schools' compliance with the SSP-as-prime regime is further assessed via the Ofsted Framework, which, as discussed in the literature review, now has a heavy emphasis on 'early reading' with a requirement for schools to use SSP-as-prime from the start of Reception onwards. At the time of the fieldwork the previous framework (Ofsted, 2015) was in force, which referenced 'phonics' rather than SSP, with the National Curriculum describing, but not naming, SSP (DfE, 2014b).

Theme 1: Descriptive - what is reading? *"We can't read! We can only read in reading books but not in this…"*

The main findings in relation to this theme were as follows:

- Children's concept of reading may differ according to context, with schooled reading seen as having closer correlations with the act of decoding and with procedural aspects. Other conceptualisations of reading are also evident, although in a schooled context, children tend to focus more strongly on an understanding of reading as decoding
- Children show a strong awareness of 'phonics-as-a-subject' but often seem to see it as conceptually different from reading (and more closely linked to writing)

What is reading?

The main evidence for this part of the discussion comes from: observing children reading different types of books; children's pictures of themselves reading, children's instructions to a puppet character about 'How To Read', and comments made in general discussion across other activities.

Across the 20 group interviews held, children appeared to use the term 'reading' in a range of different ways. The contexts discussed included reading at bedtime, reading with loved ones, reading school reading books (at home or at school), in the reading corner, having books read to them in school or at home, 'guided' reading in class and other reading lessons. The actual conceptualisation of reading seemed to differ dependent on context. Within the data there were instances where it was possible to identify that children were talking about a specific context, and where there was an indication of their conceptualisation in that instance (such as a focus on decoding, or on making meaning in a broader sense –

see examples below). The numbers of examples identified in the data for each can be seen in Table 8.

Table 8: Number of instances identified in the data of children's conceptualisations of reading as linked to context

	Reading as decoding – focus on phonics, letters, sounding it out – 'narrow' view	Reading as more than decoding e.g. making meaning through words/ pictures/ story context etc., pleasure, finding out – 'wider' view	Total number of instances
'Schooled' reading context e.g. reading school reading book at school or at home, guided reading, class reading lessons	73	39	112
Other reading contexts e.g. reading own books at home, reading with friends	11	47	58
Context unspecified	37	23	60

Madison's view of reading as meaning making, in the context of reading her own books at home, was explained with particular clarity:

> (Talking about reading *The Tiger Who Came to Tea* at bedtime) *When I was a baby…I looked at the pictures, I couldn't read the words but I still readed it and I said a bit about it instead of saying the words…now I can read it, now I don't have to use…but I do kind of because to make it help you to see what it means* [Madison, OT1B]

Madison is demonstrating a sophisticated understanding of reading as making meaning in interaction with a text; in her view decoding is a part of this, but reading is a wider process. Ethan appears to hold a narrower view of reading in this example, explaining that:

(Context unspecified) *I don't normally read I just look at the pictures…because that helps you know what's going on in the story* [Ethan, HT2C]

However, later on in the same session, he says:

E: *I don't normally read in school. Only if you've finished your work you're allowed to read. Me and Brea normally do that don't we Brea? You can just choose whatever book you want*"

B: *You can choose a dinosaur book as well* [Ethan and Brea, HT2C]

Although it is not possible to know, this exchange may hint at Ethan using 'read' to refer to an experience which is social and based on the content of the book as much as decoding the words. Other comments from children describing reading in different contexts included some which seemed to show a broader concept of reading as a socio-cultural experience, such as reading with friends in the book corner or having books read to them.

Discussing reading with friends in the book corner: Sophia suggests that her fantasy play experience with her friends, which explicitly does not involve phonics, can be characterised as reading:

S*: I like reading with my friends…in the book corner… because my friends are kind...we play teachers…well we take in turns to be the teacher. [N] goes first because she likes to be teacher, I'm next and then [N] is last…we do it [read the book] all the time, but we don't do phonics…cos I keep forgetting to do it* [Sophia, OT1A]

Ethan and Harry, seeing a book I had read to their class as part of the familiarisation phase of the research, characterised this as a shared reading experience we had had together:

E & H: *We read that book! We read that book!* [Ethan and Harry, HT1A]

On the other hand, some comments seemed to suggest a more restricted view of reading developing, based on other aspects of children's schooled experiences.

Explaining guided reading, Alfie focussed on the procedural elements:

A: *You read with a grown up…you're like, in a group…you get turns, like, one person reads and then when they've finished one page then it goes to another person* [Alfie, OT1C]

Whilst Idris emphasised the need to read "properly" in a guided reading session:

I: *We read, we read properly and we need to read, we don't change page, we have to sound the word out* [Idris NT1B]

This emphasis on reading correctly was echoed in Jude and Anand's discussion of a picture of a teacher reading with a child:

J: *I think the teacher might think you need to start all over again*

A: …*cos he readed it wrong* [Jude and Anand, OT2B]

There were further comments which hinted at children taking on a narrower competency-based view of reading, based more closely on the act of decoding, and having an impact on their general views of reading. One child, having enjoyed, commented on and discussed various illustrations and facts in the *Sharks* book at length with his friend, then said: *"We can't read! We can only read in reading books but not in this…*" [Jude, OT2A]. Dylan chose *The Elephant's Umbrella* and spent some time looking at and commenting on the animals in the book, talking about the story and identifying his favourite part, before commenting "*I'm not reading I'm looking at the pages*" [Dylan, NT1A]. Ava's comment suggested a technical expertise aspect to reading which she felt confident with: "*I like reading books cos I'm really really good at every book and I get to read with other people cos not a lot of people are good*" [Ava, HT2C]. Mariam also suggested there was some expertise involved, but felt more negatively about this, commenting that "*I don't like reading every book, because some of the words are hard"* [Mariam, NT1A]. Likewise, Ethan referred to a technical aspect, saying: "*Because my mummy helps me read and I really like my mummy helping me cos if I get stuck with the letters, my mummy just says to me"* [Ethan, HT2A]. Sophia seemed to be experiencing some cognitive dissonance in relation to her concept of reading. She initially commented that "*I like reading, because I like making stuff up…when I don't know the words, I make up stuff to put in the story*", but then went on to say: "*I can't read properly when I'm not reading my favourite book at my grandma's. I don't know how to read the rest*" [Sophia, OT1A]. Having initially shown a wide concept of reading as meaning making in interaction with a text, Sophia then seemed to identify this as not reading "properly", echoing Idris' use of this same word, linking legitimate use of the term 'reading' to sounding out the words.

When asked to draw pictures of a time when they were happy reading, only one child (Scarlett) drew herself reading a school book, and that was depicted as shared with her mother, thus foregrounding the social experience of interacting with the text, as well as the text itself. Out of the other 20 children who took part in this activity, 13 chose to portray themselves as reading a specific 'real' book (such as *Red Riding Hood*, *Room on the Broom*

or ‘my superhero book’), and the other seven did not specify the book. Aspects such as the content of the book, who they were with and where they were, were discussed by the children, with no child choosing to focus specifically on decoding. Other than Scarlett, children did not appear to focus on any aspect of ‘schooled’ reading. The next piece of evidence examined perhaps helps to illuminate this data further.

When observing children reading, children displayed very different reading behaviours depending on the type of book, perhaps again demonstrating some contextually-based dissonance. When presented with reading scheme books, almost all of the children focussed almost entirely on decoding the text; only four out of the 24 children engaged with the book in any other way (e.g. looking at the pictures or talking about the story. This demonstrated the ‘bottom-up’, SSP-based approach to reading categorised by Chall (1967) and now promoted and expected by the state (Ofsted, 2019a). Most children’s approach was to select a book, open at the first page, and go immediately to the text, proceeding to decode largely to the exclusion of any other interaction. This is illustrated by the extract from field notes shown in Figure 14, which is representative of the children’s behaviour in the same activity in all seven sessions:

Responding to school reading books – engagement as decoding

For the whole of this section the other children are avidly sounding out and blending, out loud, to read their books in the background - I haven’t told them to do this, but this is the way they are responding to these books. I actually have to cut in and stop them if I want to discuss the book. In the case of school reading books most of the children do appear to enjoy reading them but they display reading behaviours very different from those used with ‘real’ books. They go straight to the words, and sound out and blend them assiduously. There is far less engagement with the pictures – although there is some – and less general discussion. Children read individually, out loud… They are much less talkative about these books and don’t have a lot to say in response to any questions…the engagement seems to be about the decoding [field notes: HT2B, Nov 2017]

Figure 14: Extract from field notes – responding to school reading books

In contrast, when presented with non-reading scheme or ‘real’ books (children’s fiction and non-fiction books), all children spent time on each page looking at the pictures, with most

spontaneously talking about the characters and the content, and generally engaging in talk about the books, as well as reading them. Others around them sometimes became involved; it then becoming a shared, seemingly enjoyable, experience. Two children out of the 24 read their chosen book quietly themselves, looking across the pages (in contrast to the 'out loud' text-focussed decoding seen with the school reading books). An extract from field notes related to a group with a non-fiction book called *Sharks,* shown in Figure 15, illustrates this. Again, this is representative of the same activity in each of the seven sessions.

Responding to 'real' books – engagement with content and meaning
Alfie is focussed on the content of his book – he is going through and pointing out pictures to Tyler when I am not talking with them directly. Both of them are telling each other 'facts' about the sharks based on the pictures e.g. 'that is a tiny one'. He is clearly gaining meaning from the book although he makes no attempt to decode any of the words at this point. Both boys are completely engrossed and engaged [field notes: OT1A, Sept 2017]

Figure 15: Extract from field notes – responding to 'real' books

These two extracts illustrate quite starkly the two different concepts of reading, for meaning and as decoding, or bottom-up and top-down. They show how interaction with school reading scheme books foregrounds a different approach to reading for children, which may be linked to competency-based, technicist conceptualisations.

Reading as a procedural activity and predominantly based on decoding

Despite the fact that children were having a range of reading-based experiences in school, it was the acquisition of the knowledge needed for decoding, and the reading scheme with its hierarchy and processes which appeared frequently in their responses about school-based reading.

All groups were keen to talk about the class processes related to reading: reading seemed to be viewed from a procedural perspective, with references to having to read a certain number of times per week at home, or on certain days in school:

> M: *so we split into groups and we read and if we get gooder then we go on to a different stage, and if we don't then we just stay in our stage* [Madison, OT1C]

F: *and sometimes, if we don't read a book that we should read at home, on Friday, if we don't read three times or maybe four times, you won't get a sweet and we'll just have to read them at school, in the afternoon* [Fleur, HT1C)

I: *After lunch in the afternoon we do guided reading…then we start reading to them, and when we've read we stop…when the teacher says, they tell you when to go, so when you go in the guided reading, when you start your guided reading, they tell you where to go* [Idris, NT1C]

This echoed the findings of Levy in her study of young children's views of reading (Levy, 2011). Opportunities for reading non-reading scheme books in a school setting were seen as more restricted when the children moved from Reception to Year 1, and this was even more the case by the time they were in Year 2. Harlen commented, for example, that he never got the chance because "*I don't finish my work in time*" [Harlen, HT1C] and Ethan and Duana discussed that "[Ethan] *We don't often do it, we do it when we've..* [Duana, joining in] *done work*" [HT2C]

Children's talk during other research activities contained many references to learning 'sounds', 'sounding it out' and even technical phonics terms such as 'split digraph' – around 50 instances were found in the data. A few examples are given here. When asked to speculate on what each might be saying in an unfinished picture of a child reading with a teacher figure (Figure 16), examples of responses were:

Av: *They say 'sound it in your head'* [Ava, HT3B]

Aal: *The teacher might be thinking 'He's very good at reading'…She might be thinking, the teacher, if he's so good at his sounding out…the teacher might be saying the words have split digraphs..* [Aaliyah, NT1B]

Talking about reading more generally, some examples of comments were:

Z: (written) *you look at the words and sawend* [sound] *them* [Zoey, HT3C]

R: *Read all the words*

LZ: *You have to read all the words. And how do you do that?*

R: *Sound them out* [Ryan, NT2B]

E: *He might be missing a word out because I think he needs a sound mat* [Emily, OT2B]

M: *Sometimes I don't know what the words mean…we just sounds it out* [Mariam, NT1C]

Dylan said that he liked his home books better *"because they've got better sounds"* to which Aaliyah added, pointing to a phonics display: "*He means these, all those sounds*" [Dylan and Aaliyah, NT1B]

Returning to the unfinished picture (Figure 16), there was only one possible 'teacher' comment mentioned by the children related to any specific aspects of reading other than decoding: one child mentioned looking at the blurb, and no suggestions related to the teacher discussing the meaning of the text.

Figure 16: Blank 'unfinished picture' of teacher figure reading with child

When providing instructions for 'How To Read', most children referred to decoding or 'sounding out' as the only or main strategy (13 out of the 19 who completed this activity). For example, Scarlett wrote "*you can read the letters and use your hand to split it up*" [Scarlett, HT3C], Anand "*sound out the wurd. Concentrate when you are reading*." [Anand, OT3C], and "*sound out the words*" [Alfie, OT1C].

An incidental discussion which arose when children were reading also reflected the emphasis on decoding. Any other strategies, such as looking at the pictures to help or thinking about the meaning of the text, were not mentioned.

LZ:…can you actually explain to me how you read? What are you doing?
A: Um, concentrating…
D: And saying those words
LZ: So how do you know what the words are in the books?
D: cos we learned them in Reception
A: and, you sound them out
LZ: Do you? Is that how you read?
A: yes - that is i and that is n so you just go i-n in, like that"

[Dylan and Aliyah, NT1B]

This reflects the approach supported by government materials such as *Letters and Sounds* (DfES, 2007) and commercial SSP schemes like *Read Write Inc* (Ruth Miskin Training, 2020), which were used in the participant schools. There were some indications of an awareness of making sense of text in other ways, such as looking at the picture cues (Elborn, 2015), which were far more likely to be used when children read 'real' books. However, as seen in children's comments cited, there was sometimes a tendency in a school context not to consider this as 'reading'. As Jackson (2018) suggested was possible, the skill of decoding seems to be conceptually separated from reading for meaning. In summary under this theme, children's view of what reading was, particularly in relation to school reading books and other schooled reading experiences, indicated close correlations with decoding. In contrast, when reading non-reading scheme books or engaging in less teacher directed activities, children demonstrated very different behaviours and used a range of ways to make sense of the text.

Phonics as separate from reading

At the same time, although reading was enacted mainly as decoding, many children seemed to see phonics-as-a-subject as conceptually different from reading. In the data there were 37 instances of children seeing their phonics lessons as linked to writing, nine of children making links to reading, and only three instances of linking to both. This mirrored Bradbury's findings (Bradbury, 2018) from her study with teachers, and Carter's study with Year 1 children (Carter, 2020b), as discussed in Chapter Four. As the data shows, children were less likely to see the connection between reading and phonics-as-a-subject, either seeing the latter as more about writing, or as just about letters and words, not reading.

In conversation at Oldtown school, two groups of children were asked whether they thought phonics was the same as reading, and had the following exchanges:

LZ: Ah right. Is phonics the same as reading?
Both: No…
A: It's different, it's way different.
J: Because books have got like so much words and phonics don't, because it's just a word [Anand and Jude, OT2B]

LZ: Is phonics the same as reading?
Both: No!...

S: cos you do different things, you don't read normally
LZ: You don't read?
S: No
T: A little bit…like you read some words, sometimes we read and we write on our whiteboards…in guided reading it already has the words so we don't have to write them [Tyler and Sofia, OT2A]

In this study, various phrases were used by children to describe their phonics lessons, which mirrored observed practice and often focused on bottom-up, sub-skills activities. These included references to learning letters, sounds and 'tricky' (exception) words. For example, "*learning really hard new letters…writing on whiteboards*" [Alex, HT1B] and "*reading [tricky] words what are new*" [Tyler, OT1C]. For some children, the idea of writing in phonics lessons was at the forefront "*you get to write new words*" [Sofia, OT1B]. In terms of specific activities mentioned these were mainly flashcards, actions, whiteboards and pens, and sometimes playing games. For example, "*Whiteboards and pens…we just write words and sentences*" [Fleur, HT2B], and "*doing the actions*" [Emily, OT2B].

When children were asked to speculate on what might be going on in an unfinished picture of a phonics lesson, comments again reflected this standard approach. Some comments (22 instances) were made about procedural aspects of the lesson, such as "*all being good, being silent*" [Dylan, NT1B] and "*saying the words on the board*" [Mariam, NT1B]. Some comments (19 instances), however, were more specifically related to phonics, often speculating on the possible thoughts of the children. These included some positives, such as "*I can spell that really well*" [Zoey, HT3B] and "*I know all the sounds*" [Alfie, OT1B]. Some children suggested less positive thoughts including: "*I'm struggling to know what the word is*" [Ava, HT3B] and "*I don't know my sounds yet*" [Sofia, OT1B]. Some comments were simply factual in tone: "*The teacher's showing the kids how to spell igh*" [Duana, HT2B] "*We need to do the ay*" [Tyler, OT1B], "*they are putting their hands up because they know all these letters"* [Emily, OT2B]. Children's emphasis on acquiring the knowledge for decoding here is evident, foregrounding the 'bottom up' approach to reading.

It was notable that children often viewed phonics as mainly concerned with writing, rather than reading. Some children (like Tyler in the examples above) hinted at a connection between the two, but for most, the two seemed to be seen as separate activities. The 'How To Read' activity discussed above showed that children did *apply* phonics directly to reading, when enacting schooled (reading scheme-based) reading. Conceptually, however, the children seemed to see them as somewhat separate.

As Carter (2020a) pointed out, this may well be welcomed by proponents of SSP-as-prime, being seen as evidence that teachers are focussing on the sub-skills of phonics as a necessary stepping stone to later fluent reading and comprehension (DfE, 2021b; Gibb, 2015). Children's emphasis on decoding in schooled reading may also be seen in the same light. However, as discussed in the literature review, many other skills are required for successful reading and it is in the act of bringing these skills together that children become readers (Hayes, 2016). Moreover, there is some evidence that although specific phonics teaching does improve phonics ability, it is phonics incorporated into reading teaching which has the most impact on reading ability (Double et al., 2019; Hatcher et al., 1994).

Using Bernstein as an interpretive framework: pedagogic discourse and recontextualisation

Using Bernstein's lens of the pedagogic device (Bernstein, 2000) may be helpful to interpret these findings. Bernstein suggested that the pedagogic device focussed on pedagogic discourse and recontextualisation, as described in Chapter Five. Pedagogic discourse does not refer to the content itself, but to the means by which other discourses, such as linguistics or phonetics, are appropriated and focused for and within an educational system. In other words, decisions which are made about what is important, and how it should be focused, structured, sequenced and evaluated. Pedagogic discourse is the process by which "expert knowledge becomes school knowledge", and it is far from a neutral process. In the case of reading, pedagogic discourse has now created a new subject, known as Phonics or SSP. In earlier pedagogic discourse this was part of reading, and this was the context in which children would become aware of, and learn (but probably not name) phonics. Recontextualisation then refers to the enactment of the process; how that discourse is mediated into the classroom context through the three aspects of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment (Bernstein, 1975).

Thinking about these three aspects, it can be seen how children's experience is bounded on all sides with all three elements effectively controlled by the state. Bernstein termed this the 'official recontextualising field' (ORF). The ORF is that which is mandated by the state. Bernstein further proposed that recontextualization also happens at a school level, via the 'pedagogic recontextualising field' (PRF), and this was certainly the case in this study. The *curriculum* is closely defined via the National Curriculum (ORF) but beyond that, all of the schools followed DfE-approved materials in terms of curriculum content and progression (PRF). This element is not compulsory but given the mandatory requirement for a systematic approach coupled with the close scrutiny from Ofsted, most schools have chosen to follow this route (Walker et al., 2015). In the same way, these schemes provide a *pedagogy*, with

lesson structures, classroom organisation, resources, methods and activities all set out (PRF). Each of the schemes also provides an *assessment* structure (PRF) and, of course, all Year 1 children, whether in maintained or academy schools, must complete the PSC, a national assessment (ORF).

Bernstein termed this a message system and indeed this research seems to support this view. This message appears to have been received by schools and teachers, as the level of compliance has shown (with Ofsted requiring this, they have little choice). Furthermore, the message being heard by children appears to be that phonics knowledge and decoding are the most important elements in school-based reading, and that learning more letters and progressing through the reading scheme are the essence of learning to read. This is the message provided by the recontextualising work of the state (the ORF), transmitted via curriculum, pedagogy and assessment down through schools (the PRF) into the experience of individual children. Even though teachers spoke about developing a love of reading and range of literacy activities, the form of reading activity which most children seemed to see as reading in a school setting, was reading their school reading books. To them type of reading was very often based on – or even synonymous with - decoding. Furthermore, the lack of opportunity perceived by the children to do any reading outside of the prescribed reading books is likely only to strengthen this message.

Interestingly, former Schools Minister Gibb, in multiple speeches, often references the importance of developing other aspects of reading such as fluency, vocabulary and reading for pleasure (Gibb, 2015, 2017). These elements are also part of the National Curriculum, the Ofsted Framework, and now the DfE Reading Framework (DfE, 2014b, 2021b; Ofsted, 2015). At the same time, many teachers remain committed and enthusiastic to develop children as readers, despite a deluge of policy initiatives, an overcrowded curriculum, and often deeply felt tensions between their professional judgment and compliance with policy (Bradbury, 2018; Braun & Maguire, 2018). It seems, superficially, as though the state and schools are in agreement – so what is the issue? I would argue, using Bernstein, that superficial, rhetorical messages from the state get lost against the backdrop of the deep messages which are being delivered via the pedagogic device. These messages are delivered most strongly through assessment and accountability mechanisms, in this case, the PSC and Ofsted. A growing number of papers identify ‘unintended consequences’ of the PSC (e.g. Bradbury, 2018; Carter, 2020b), with impact on both curriculum and pedagogy. At the same time, to take the new Ofsted inspection handbook as an example, guidance on early reading contains five statements on phonics and only one mentioning other aspects of reading (Ofsted, 2019c). As no other aspect of reading is foregrounded in this way at this

stage, it seems inevitable that this will have an impact on teaching practices and that other aspects may receive less emphasis. Hepplewhite (2013) suggests that "it is up to every teacher to make sure that this is not the case" but this fails to take account of the context of the performative pressures felt by school and teachers, as outlined by Ball in his seminal paper (2003). In addition, as has been shown in this study and others (e.g. Carter, 2020b; Powell, 2014) teachers may experience very limited flexibility to plan and organise the teaching of reading according to their own judgment, due to the strong external and internal classification and framing. Teacher's own agency is likely to be extremely limited, given the strength of the ORF over the PRF.

Using Bernstein as an interpretive framework: classification and framing

Continuing to use Bernstein's ideas as a lens, his seminal concepts of classification and framing are also relevant here (Bernstein, 1975, 1990). Bernstein saw these as the underlying structure of the message system. As explained in Chapter Five, classification refers to the boundaries which are placed between domains of knowledge. The stronger the classification, the more defined the boundaries. Framing is concerned with the pace, sequence and organisation of the way the specified knowledge is taught. With weaker framing, teachers and pupils have more autonomy to make such decisions. With strong framing, these are pre-defined. Further, classification and framing can be internal (defined by the school or classroom, via the PRF) or external, via the ORF. It was postulated in Chapter Five that the era of SSP-as-prime could be characterised as $++C^{e}/++F^{e}/++C^{i}/++F^{i}$, using Bernstein's formulation (Bernstein, 2000). In other words, very strongly classified and framed both externally and internally.

It is clearly the case that external classification and framing is exceptionally strong with regards to phonics, more so than any other curriculum area. The research shows that internal classification is also strong, in line with other studies in the same area, with all schools providing discrete phonics lessons and children seeing phonics and reading as conceptually separate areas. At the time of the fieldwork, there may have been a little flexibility with internal framing, although very little, due to the fixed timing of the Phonics Screening Check. In fact, as was seen, each school followed a set scheme mapping the sequencing, following the pacing and organisation as promoted (and now required) by the state.

Links to previous studies

Some of the findings were similar to those in previous studies and not necessarily specific to learning to read in the era of SSP-as-prime. One example would be the children's strong

interest in, and knowledge of, their own and others' respective positions within the reading scheme, for example:

> *M: So we split into groups and some people are on the big stages and some are on the little stages*
> *A: Me and Tyler are on the same stage and Sofia's just one behind us*
> *T: We're going to go on to stage 10 aren't we?*
> *M: and what we do is we split into groups and we read and if we get gooder then we go on to a different stage, and if we don't then we just stay in our stage*
> *S: or we go downer* [Alfie, Tyler, Sofia and Madison, OT1C]

This reflected the findings of Hanke (2014), who found that children were aware of and sensitive to the idea of ability grouping for guided reading. Likewise Levy (2009), found that the reading scheme had a strong influence on both children's view of themselves as readers, and of reading itself. However, SSP-as-prime has now added another layer of influence on top of that previously found, in two ways. The first way is that now, alongside ability grouping for guided reading, children may also find themselves grouped by 'ability' for daily phonics lessons, as this study and others have found (Bradbury, 2018). This leads to them being very aware of their perceived proficiency in phonics, as shown in the findings. The second is that the reading schemes themselves have now also become largely geared towards the teaching of phonics. The consequence of this is that success in progressing through the reading scheme has become wholly dependent on success at learning phonics.

Summary of Theme 1 findings – What is reading?

In summary, it has been suggested that children have a strong awareness of phonics as a highly classified and specific area of learning, most strongly linked with writing rather than reading. Children rarely articulate any connection between their learning in phonics lessons and the concept of reading. At the same time, when children read, they display very different forms of enactment depending on whether they are engaged in 'schooled' reading or other types of reading. When reading a school reading book, children focus almost entirely on the act of decoding. When reading other types of books, children interact much more widely to make meaning of the entire text, but do not necessarily characterise this consistently as reading. Even if teachers consider that they are promoting reading for enjoyment and meaning - a top-down approach – the message that the children are hearing about what counts in reading, in a schooled context, seems to be different. As the next two themes are explored, these conceptualisations will be further developed.

Chapter 8: Data Analysis and Discussion II: Theme 2: Affordative – why we read "*it's really important because you can learn your letters and sounds*"

The main findings in relation to this theme were as follows:

- Children mainly expressed that reading is for instrumental purposes linked to learning
- Reading for pleasure or emotional reward is mentioned by children, but much less often

The strongest thread identified within this affordative theme was children's thinking that their reading and work in phonics would lead to learning, knowledge and, in some cases, future success. This is based on instances in the data when children were identifiably talking about why they read, where the data breakdown was as shown in Table 9.

Why we read	Number of identified instances
Learning (to get better at reading/get it right)	21
Learning (wider sense or non-specified)	23
Future success	3
Emotional reward (e.g. enjoyment, relaxation etc.)	11
Linked to fantasy/imagination	4
External reward	3

Table 9: Why we read: identified data instances

This echoes the language of government press releases related to phonics such as "aiding future learning" (DfE, 2018a) and "the knowledge and skills they need to get on in life" (DfE, 2016). This could be seen as coincidental. It could also be interpreted, via the lens of Bernstein, as evidence of a particular view of education and schooling being transmitted from the state down through schools and teachers, into the lives and perceptions of children.

Interestingly, this appears to differ from older findings in the National Literacy Trust 2005 survey on children's reading habits and preferences, which showed that the strongest reason given by primary school children for reading was that "it's fun" (Clark & Foster, 2005). Learning/ future success featured in responses in 2005, but in second place to 'fun'. In the present study, the two reasons came the other way around. Since then, as discussed, much

has changed in the teaching of reading. In this study, reading for reasons of emotional reward or fulfilment was mentioned, but was not as prevalent as reading for learning, as can be seen in Table 9.

Learning and future success

Sometimes (21 instances) children expressed that reading and phonics helped them to get better at reading and phonics, as in Fleur's comment in the title of this section: *"it's really important because you can learn your letters and sounds"* [Fleur, HT2B]. Idris, asked what he thought about reading his school books at home, thought that this would help him to 'get it right':

> *I: … when you keep reading it at home, and you have to read it at school, you'll get the words that you don't know, that are tricky, you'll get them right if you read it at home…*[Idris, NT2A]

Echoing this, succinctly, was Ava's response to Pickle and Boo, saying that reading "*helps you learn the words*" [Ava, HT3B] These responses all reflected the view that reading helps you to get better at reading, with the emphasis on decoding. Reading correctly, or 'getting it right', was a recurrent idea.

Other children explained that they liked reading, or thought it was useful, because it helped them to learn about other subjects, or to learn in general (23 instances). Children suggested that reading could help you to find out about animals, tadpoles or "*what we're supposed to do and not supposed to do*" [Duana, HT2A]. Aaliyah commented:

> *A: I like reading and it makes me learn…we learn more things when I read my school books* [Aaliyah, NT1B]

Zoey saw a long-term benefit:

> *Z: If you have any babies when they grow up and they will be in nursery and want some books you will read it to them and then they'll learn to read and that's it* [Zoey, HT3B]

There were also a few (three) examples of children talking about wanting to read particular books to learn specific things. Although this was less common, this could nonetheless be viewed as an assertion of agency and control over their reading choices – this will be further discussed in Chapter 10.

There were just five children who explained in Year 1 why they thought were learning phonics. They tended to refer to writing (five instances) rather than reading (two instances), as has been discussed. Madison suggested it helped "*with writing and with learning and your writing*" [Madison, OT1B]. Duana suggested that by "*writing different sorts of words…we can learn if they're real words and not real words*" [Duana, HT2A]. This appears to be a reference to the 'alien' words used in the Phonics Screening Check, suggesting that these are being taught as part of the phonics curriculum. By the time of the second session in Year 2, however, Madison expressed that it helped her with her reading. She said that she learned phonics "*so we can get better at words and just so that you can know the words better when you get them in your book"* [Madison, OT1C]. She was one of very few children who made a connection between phonics and reading: four children out of the 24 across all the sessions.

The emphasis on learning knowledge, decoding, and getting things right can again be seen in these comments. In summary, where children articulated why they were doing phonics and reading, the reasons were most often related to 'learning', as seen above, and this was often (but not always) linked with the concept of decoding. Eleven responses related to intrinsic emotional benefits, which will be discussed in a later section, but learning appeared to be seen as the main reason.

Using Bernstein as an interpretive framework: performance model of pedagogy

To help illuminate these findings, Bernstein's performance model of pedagogy, as explained in Chapter Five will be used. A performance model of pedagogy is, according to Bernstein, a future-oriented, teacher-led model, characterised by strong classification and framing. It is a model based on knowledge transmission and acquisition, rather than construction. Bernstein also suggested that in such a model, legitimate outcomes were highly specified and thus, deviance was both possible and highly visible (Bernstein, 2000). In this model the three 'message systems' of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment are again identifiable (Bernstein, 1975). It has been widely discussed, as referenced in the introduction to this study, that education policy in England is, in common with many internationally, shaped by a neoliberalist agenda with an emphasis on accountability and performance outcomes (e.g. Ball, 2017; Braun & Maguire, 2018). This same future- and performance- orientation was seen in many of the children's comments about why they were both reading, and learning phonics, such as:

"[reading] helps me to learn, because…you get better" [Madison, OT1B]

"[phonics] is making me do my work better" [Zoey, HT3C]

"I like [phonics] because the work is hard…because, you like, get smarter" [Jack, HT3C]

Closely specified legitimate outcomes have a further consequence within the performance model, which is that "deviance is highly visible" (Bernstein, 2000, p. 47). In the case of SSP, this is realised most strongly in the form of the PSC, as well as through so-called age-related expectations and state-sanctioned schemes of work. As Bernstein noted, strong framing in particular will very likely result in some children being unable to meet the pacing expectations. This will result in the need either for a "repair system" or a relaxation of the pacing requirements. As Bernstein argues, "either strategy results in a stratification of acquirers" (Bernstein, 1990, p. 74). This is exactly what has happened in relation to SSP-as-prime with children often placed in ability groups, and the requirement for children to re-take the PSC if they do not reach a certain level in Year 1. The performance model carries inherent within itself the possibility of lack of performance, or deficit, and this will be further discussed in Chapter Nine, under the affective theme. Children are clearly very aware of the expectation that they will 'get it right' in relation to phonics, even if they do not see this is in relation to the PSC, as in Duana and Idris' comments:

"*When I'm doing phonics, it gives me new sounds and then I can use them in my writing. And then if I for example got a word wrong, then I found out the proper sound, then I'd be able to spell it right"* [Duana, HT3C].

you'll get them right if you read it at home…[Idris, NT1C]

A further feature of performance models, as seen by Bernstein, is that they are usually focussed on economic outcomes. In relation to this, it is relevant to explore another aspect of official recontextualisation in relation to SSP-as-prime. Bernstein (2000, p. 65) suggests that a feature of a state's "official knowledge" (or ORF) is the formation of "prospective pedagogic identities" (p. 67). These identities are those projected as legitimate and appropriate by the state for its pupils as future citizens. However, Bernstein identified the tendency to select and recontextualise selective 'golden age' perceptions of the past and project these into the prospective identity. The implication is that if only things could be done as they used to be, the future will be better, both for the individual and the state (Beck, 2006; Bernstein, 2000). This is more than the creation of a narrative, however, but a way of managing change, including economic change, to secure the future. The emphasis is on "prospective identities…[based on] performances which have an exchange value" (Bernstein, 2000, p. 68).. For the state, the purpose of this prospective identity is, ultimately, "to defend or raise

economic performance" (Bernstein, 2000, p. 67). Applying this to the education system the state will seek to secure the desired prospective identity, using the selected retrospective features, by controlling "both *inputs* to education and *outputs*" (Bernstein, 2000, p. 68, original emphasis). Using this construct to illuminate the era of SSP-as-prime is again revealing, as will be discussed in the next paragraph.

Unsurprisingly this did not arise in children's talk, but in the policy discourse, the selection of features from the past to justify and promote a narrative is explicit. In a speech entitled *The Importance of Phonics* (Gibb, 2015), then Schools Minister Gibb admiringly quotes the seminal 1950s book *Why Johnny Can't Read* saying:

> "Do you know that the teaching of reading never was a problem anywhere in the world until the United States switched to the present method around about 1925?...ever since 1500 BC people all over the world - wherever an alphabetic system of writing was used - learned how to read and write by the simple process of memorising the sound of each letter in the alphabet" (Flesch, 1955)

Gibb further suggests that the UK followed suit with similar outcomes, moving away from systematically taught phonics to using 'progressive' teaching methods including the 'look and say' approach; both frequent targets for Gibb's censure (e.g. Gibb, 2014, 2015, 2017). The suggestion of a crisis in reading is staggering in both its lack of context and its disregard of the truth and can only be explained on political and ideological grounds. In fact, US and UK literacy rose steadily throughout the twentieth century (Roser & Ortiz-Ospina, 2018), regardless of developing research and prevalent methods in the teaching of reading. Hynds (2007) has convincingly shown how political 'spin' was used in relation to SSP at the time of the Rose Review, and Gibb's speeches continue in the same vein. As mentioned previously, it remains to be seen if Gibb's departure will signal a change in tone.

In terms of the prospective identity, Gibb is again explicit. A direct line is drawn, in multiple speeches and press releases, between 'passing' the PSC and a successful economic future, whilst evoking a glorious heritage. His 2017 speech entitled '*Reading is the key to unlocking human potential*' exemplifies this (Gibb, 2017). Phrases like "building a Britain fit for the future" sit alongside reading "introduc[ing] us to the great heroes and anti-heroes of the ages" and "Through the canon, we are invited into the conversation of humankind". Those who (Gibb claims) resisted SSP-as-prime "are responsible for stifling human potential and negatively affecting the life chances of countless children". Using Bernstein's model, we can identify the use of retrospective features to create prospective identities. The performance required of children is that of learning phonics and the legitimate expression of that

knowledge is through reaching a certain mark in the PSC. In order to achieve this, the state has taken control of the *inputs* – the curriculum and pedagogy – and the *outputs* – assessment, as enacted in the PSC, as well as subsequent key stage tests.

Returning now to the data, children did not, and would not be expected to, reference the retrospective features. However, as discussed at the start of this chapter, a future orientation was commonly expressed in their responses within the affordative theme. Ava's comment is a further illustration of this prospective pedagogic identity, in line with that expected by the state:

> *A: Because if you didn't know your sounds then you wouldn't be able to write anything! And if you wanted to be a police officer, you have to pass a test, and you wouldn't be able to write anything for your test.* [Ava, HT3C]

Through the lens of Bernstein, this could be viewed as "state-promoted instrumentality" (Bernstein, 2000, p. 55).

Other affordances and a caution

A minority of instances identified other affordances such as fun, relaxation or pleasure (see Table 9). This challenges the determinism implied in Bernstein's model and indicates the need for additional nuance in the analysis, recognising the complex and multiple assemblages of which children are a part. This theme will be discussed in Chapter 10.

It is possible that children who talked about reading for learning were responding in a 'schooled' way given that the interviews were taking place in school. Perhaps children considered that 'learning' was the 'correct' answer, or the answer which would be valued by teachers (Hempel-Jorgensen et al., 2018). Children did sometimes start the first interview extremely positive about all aspects, and then give what may have been more relaxed responses later on. However, it nonetheless seems worthy of reflection that infant school-aged children should speak more about reading for learning/future success than for enjoyment, whether this is what they actually think, or whether this is what they believe that their teachers value the most. A range of studies has established that children of infant school age tend to be those who enjoy reading the most, and who are most likely to read for pleasure. (e.g. Clark & Teravainen-Goff, 2020; Merga et al., 2018). This tends to decline as children get older, so it is within this age group that extremely high enjoyment levels could be expected and should be encouraged. The Annual Literacy Survey from the National Literacy Trust extended its scope in 2019 to children aged 5-8 for the first time, and found that 76.3% of children in the age group reported that they enjoy reading in their free time, with 78.5% seeing themselves as good at reading. At the same time, 30% said that they only read if they

have to (Teravainen-Goff, 2019). The sense of compulsion was reflected by some of the comments made by children in this study, as will be discussed in Chapter 9.

Summary of Theme 2 findings – Why we read

This study found that many children emphasised that reading is for learning, appearing to take an instrumental view of why they were learning to read (Hempel-Jorgenson et al., 2018; Bernstein, 2000). With some, this was about the importance of learning their phonics and 'getting it right', with others, reading or learning more generally. For other children, it was about moving into future roles as a parent or a worker. An instrumental view was far more frequent than other affordances such as emotional reward, although this did still feature.

We have already referred to concerns about this instrumental view arising as a result of the focus on performance through all aspects of the pedagogic discourse. As suggested earlier, the message being disseminated by the state is coming through schools and teachers via this discourse, apparently influencing children's understanding of reading. Paris and McNaughton (2010) warn of the dangers of this approach for superficial learning, as children may focus more on the performative aspects rather than developing intrinsic motivation. The next chapter will focus on the third theme: how children feel about reading.

Chapter 9: Data Analysis and Discussion III: Theme 3: Affective – how we feel: "*I like reading and I don't like reading*"

The main findings in relation to this theme were as follows:

- Being a successful reader is linked to competence at decoding text: good readers 'get it right'
- Children who perceive themselves as competent at decoding text often reported more positive feelings about reading, those who did not often reported more negative feelings
- Feelings about reading were also associated with the content and context of the reading experience

Before looking at the findings thematically and in detail, it will be useful to present the data associated with the emoticon activity which was carried out twice, a year apart. Table 10 presents this data, which gives an overall sense of children's responses:

Table 10: Analysis of emoticon responses and changes over time – collated. (NB totals may differ as not all children responded to every question)

Activity	Session date (Aut = Autumn)	☺	😐	☹
Reading my own books at home	Aut 2017 (Y1)	19	2	0
	Aut 2018 (Y2)	19	2	2
Reading my school book at school	Aut 2017 (Y1)	12	2	3
	Aut 2018 (Y2)	14	4	4
Reading my school book at home	Aut 2017 (Y1)	5	8	3
	Aut 2018 (Y2)	9 (1 of these clarified 'school library book only, not reading book')	6	7 (same child specified 'school reading book' here)
Doing phonics at school	Aut 2017 (Y1)	11	4	3
	Aut 2018 (Y2)	11	5	3

This data suggests that reading real books, outside of a school setting, was, and remained, the most popular activity out of the those discussed. In contrast, reading school books at home was the least popular activity. Children often seemed to regard this requirement as an imposition on their free time, when they wanted to be able to do other activities. Some experienced the requirement as a stress, saying they did not have time. Others commented that their adults at home did not do it the same way as teachers did, or that adults did not read their school books with them at home. Interestingly, moving from Y1 to Y2, more children in the sample came to like, or dislike, this activity, suggesting that their feelings became more entrenched one way or the other.

Reading school books at school also remained relatively popular; children generally seemed to enjoy the positive individual or small group time with their teachers. However, when tracking the changes over time for individual children (see Table 11), it did appear that a significant minority had become either more, or less positive about this activity.

'Doing phonics' was slightly less popular overall than reading, with about half the sample feeling positive about it in each case. Again, these were not always the same children; a few felt less positively than previously a year later, and a few felt more positive.

Table 11: Tracking changes in attitude of individual children, Autumn 2017 to Autumn 2018

	More positive	Same	Less positive
When I am reading my own books at home I feel	3	14	4
When I am reading my school book at home I feel	8	5	4
When I am reading my school book at school I feel	8	7	6
When I am doing phonics at school I feel	3	11	5

This data is a pertinent reminder that children's experiences and perceptions differ, and that each child will bring their own combination of predispositions, attitudes and circumstances to an exercise such as this. Constructivist approaches to learning (e.g. Corsaro, 1992; Piaget, 1955; Vygotsky, 1978) foreground this aspect. For example, Corsaro's work on children's interpretive reproduction of knowledge focuses on children's interaction with, and response to, cultural routines. This theme will be picked up towards the end of the analysis when

evidence of children's agency and resistance in the face of overwhelming state control is examined. Furthermore, as discussed in the methodology chapter, talk does not provide a transparent window into the minds of others (Kehily & Maybin, 2011), and reported emotions may be influenced by many factors. However, in line with the principles of believing children to be expert in their own lives, this data is nonetheless illuminating. When thinking about what may be influencing their feelings, the surrounding talk in this and other activities, which will now be exemplified through the thematic discussion, may suggest some possible factors. Instances in the data where children expressed feelings linked to a specific factor are summarised in Table 12.

Table 12: Reasons associated with children expressing positive, negative or mixed feelings about reading

	Type of feeling		
Reasons expressed	Positive	Mixed	Negative
Sense of own competence/lack of competence ('getting it right' or not)	113	26	56
Content of the book/text (liked/disliked)	108	6	41
Context of reading (home/school, alone/with others, at a time of own choosing or not)	76	19	45
Choice/ lack of choice over what and when to read	12	3	27

Sense of pride in success or frustration/worry over lack of success

One defining factor in how children feel about reading appears to be their own sense of competency as a reader. Bernstein's performance model of pedagogy (Bernstein, 2000) offers an explanation for this view. Children often showed either a sense of pride in success or frustration/worry over lack of success. As shown in Table 12, there were 195 instances in the data of children linking positive, negative or mixed feelings to their perceived sense of their own competence. This is supported by the findings already discussed in the descriptive theme, where it was identified that children seemed to view reading in this context, as competency-based, closely linked to decoding. Children who saw themselves as acquiring phonics knowledge and were able to then apply this to their school reading books seemed to feel good, and enjoy the learning, because they were 'getting it right' (113 instances). These children tended to speak more confidently about their reading, or to enjoy it more consistently. This is Scarlett discussing a school reading book based on the SSP approach, stating that she enjoyed reading it because she could read it, appearing to take enjoyment in her success:

LZ: And what did you think about Dig Dig Dig?
S: I like it
LZ: Why do you like it?
S: Cos I can read it well [Scarlett, HT3B]

On the other hand, when she began find this approach harder, negative feelings began to arise. Scarlett had enjoyed doing phonics when I visited in Year 1, but when asked to respond using emoticons in Year 2, she circled the sad face:

LZ: Scarlett, are you all right to explain? So, you've said that you don't like doing phonics?
St: Cos it gets more harder and harder
LZ: Mmm, how do you mean?
S: Cos every time we move up it gets even harder and harder and harder
LZ: What's hard?
S: [whispers] Everything [Scarlett, HT3C]

Like Scarlett, children were more likely to express negative feelings arising about phonics, school reading, and sometimes even wider reading, when they did not perceive themselves to be successful at learning phonics (56 instances). For example, Ethan considered that he was not good at phonics saying: *"I don't know how to do the tricky letters"* and his general view was *"I really don't like doing reading"* [Ethan, HT1B]. These findings seem to support

those in many previous studies about the links between children's reading development and motivation to read (e.g. Teravainen-Goff, 2019). In the literature review so-called *Matthew effects* were discussed (Stanovich, 1986). This suggest that children who are successful, are more motivated, read more, and thus may become even more successful, sometimes known as the "virtuous circle of reading" (Pfost et al., 2014, p. 206) or "rich get richer, poor get poorer" (Stanovich, 1986, p. 382) At the same time, children who are less successful read less, and so make less progress, leading to a widening gap in achievement as time goes on. It was discussed in the literature review that motivation to read is multi-factoral and furthermore, that Matthew effects are both contested and difficult to prove empirically (Protopapas et al., 2016). However, Morgan and Fuchs (2007), did find a consistent correlation between reading skills and reading motivation in their review of studies. Morgan and Fuchs suggest that such correlations, which may start as small, may "'snowball' or increasingly influence each other in such a way as to lead to long-term reading failure" (p. 178). International surveys such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) provide further evidence of this link (OECD, 2002, 2010).

The success/ lack of success theme was the most dominant overall in children's responses about how they felt, which is perhaps is unsurprising given that children, as discussed in the previous section, seemed to perceive 'learning' or 'getting better' as the main reason for reading. Further, success was associated with getting words right (as also seen in the previous section), knowing more letters and words, being able to reader harder words. In other words, success was generally perceived to mean being able to decode correctly. Lack of success was usually linked to getting stuck or needing help with words. On the positive side, children who were experiencing success learning to read with SSP-as-prime, often felt confident as a result. In the Pickle and Boo activity, Duana commented that she was like Pickle (who was labelled as 'good at phonics'):

> *D: Because when we're doing the sounds aw for claw people say ow but I know it says claw and then the teacher says thank you!* [Duana, HT2B]

In the same activity she also said that she liked doing phonics, explaining:

> *D: I like doing phonics because, I know the sounds and some people say it after me and then I get to write them down, then I can remember all what the sounds mean, and if I'm struggling with a word and I need a letter then I can just go through my phonics in my head and then I can find the right word! And that's why I like phonics.* [Duana, HT2B]

Duana's positive self-view is clearly linked to her confidence in her proficiency with phonics,

and she is also aware that she is more proficient than others in the class. She also consistently reported that she liked reading, including school books, finding reading "interesting" and "fun". Harlen and Brea, on the other hand, placed their names by Boo, saying that they didn't like doing phonics, and during the emoticons activity, they discussed that they sometimes did not feel happy in phonics when they got things wrong [Harlen and Brea, HT2A]. When it came to the Pickle and Boo question about whether they thought they were good at phonics, both put their names in the middle, with both commenting "sometimes I get it wrong and sometimes I get it right". Doing the same activity, thinking about whether she liked phonics, Madison said: "*I don't like phonics because you have to do dictation and I always don't get it right. Sometimes when, um, when, and um, when I do phonics, it kind of makes me a bit – happy – and a bit sad*" [Madison, OT1B]. It seems clear that children have a sense of their own perceived proficiency in phonics.

At another point in the activity, Pickle had a sign saying 'I like reading' and Boo had one saying 'I don't like reading. Ava reflected the perceived centrality of decoding when she placed her name in between the two and we had the following exchange:

A: Because I'm sometimes like Pickle and sometimes like Boo…
LZ: When are you like Pickle?
A: When I like reading
LZ: and what makes you like it?
A: When they're easy easy words
LZ: Ok, and what makes you not like it?
A: When they're really really hard words [Ava, HT3B]

Anand shared in the Pickle and Boo activity that he did not think he was good at reading "*Because sometimes I read words wrong"* [Anand, OT2B]. Dylan commented that "*I always feel sad because I get stuck*" [Dylan, NT1A] and Mariam said she sometimes did not like reading "*Cos some of the words are hard*" [Mariam, NT1B]. Mariam was very negative about both reading and phonics. In the previous session she had stated that she "hated" reading, saying "*Hard work, reading, for me*" and "*Every day I try and I can't do it*" [Mariam, NT1A]. In relation to phonics, doing the blob tree activity, she circled the figure shown in Figure 17, explaining:

M: Because I don't like phonics at all
L: Why not?
[pause]

Figure 17: Blob tree figure circled by Mariam in relation to phonics

M: Sometimes I like it and sometimes I don't
L: ok. Can you tell me a bit more about that?
M: [sighs] Because, when the teacher's told us to do something hard…

This was all despite the fact that, at the start of the first session, she had spent time reading, talking about and apparently enjoying *The Rainbow Fish*. Aliyah put an in between face when asked how she felt about phonics in the emoticon activity, explaining "*because, sometimes I get things wrong*" [Aliyah, NT1A], going on to say "*they're just scared when miss writes on the board…when I write it I just write it and miss just says write it properly now"*. The meaning is not fully clear but it does seem evident that there is an expectation, from both child and teacher, to 'get it right'. Looking at the unfinished picture of a phonics lesson, Sofia suggested a child might be thinking "*I don't know my sounds yet*" [Sofia, OT1B]. She had also coloured in the sad face for phonics herself, and selected an unhappy looking picture from the Blob Tree for both phonics and reading at school (see Figure 18). This is despite her other responses showing she felt very positively about reading 'real' books, both at home and at school, with friends (for example when playing in the reading corner).

Figure 18: Sofia's response on the Blob Tree activity when asked how she felt about phonics and reading at school.		Phonics
		Reading a school book at school

When thinking about reading in a schooled sense, and phonics, she, and quite a number of others as seen, appeared to feel pressure to have a certain level of decoding knowledge and to 'get it right'. Even though children may have engaged confidently and happily with texts in a range of ways, and be able to discuss stories and non-fiction books, this very particular form of reading (knowing letters and decoding words) seemed to be at the forefront of their minds. They seemed conscious of their own (perceived) proficiency level in phonics. If they

were not good at decoding, they seemed to feel unhappy about this and consider they were not good at reading and to enjoy reading less. Children's view of themselves as readers appeared to be (at least in part) constructed by schooled "notions of correctness" (Truman et al., 2021, p. 231). The potential to start a cycle of negativity in terms of reading is clear.

Using Bernstein as an interpretive framework: performance model and a discourse of deficit

Looking now more closely at the 'deficit' side of the equation using the lens of Bernstein's theoretical framework, a 'performance' model of pedagogy carries an inherent concept of deficit (Bernstein, 2000), as mentioned in the previous section. Where learning is strongly framed, with legitimate outcomes explicitly defined, it becomes possible for learning to fall outside the framing, or for outcomes deemed illegitimate to be achieved. As seen in Table 12, some of the children appeared to be feeling a sense of deficit expressed as 'getting things wrong' or 'finding things hard', with a number of the sample reporting that they felt less positive about reading and/or phonics by the time of the second session in Year 2 (see Table 11). Some, on the other hand, had gained in confidence and felt more positive, as the emoticon data showed. This was often associated with 'getting it right' and 'knowing the sounds'. Although no children mentioned the PSC, this is nonetheless a clear part of the discourse of deficit associated with phonics. Official Standards and Testing Agency guidance scrupulously avoids the words 'pass' and 'fail', referring instead to pupils "achieving the expected standard" (STA, 2019). Nonetheless, ministers refer to a 'pass mark' (e.g. Gibb, 2017) and such terms are commonplace in the media (e.g. Whittaker, 2019), and in both teacher and parent parlance (Atkinson & Glazzard, 2018; Bayley, 2018). As discussed in the literature review, Clark and Glazzard's enquiry in relation to the PSC found that parents whose child had been negatively affected by the PSC, did not enjoy reading, did not reach the expected level or could not read well at the time of the check, were more likely to disagree with both the check and overall government policy on the teaching of reading. Comments included "he failed so he said he was thick!" and "became convinced he was not a reader and no good, as he was one of the only ones who failed the test" (Bayley, 2018, p. 48). As has been shown in the findings of this study it is likely that although the children may feel the results of the PSC particularly directly, it is likely that the whole edifice of policy promoting SSP-as-prime may be contributing to these feelings of deficit.

Part of this edifice is the growth in so-called ability grouping in phonics, evidenced by the findings of a DfE report by Walker et al. (2014) and Bradbury's study (2018). In line with this, in this study, two out of three schools in the sample had decided to group children by 'ability' for the teaching of phonics. The impact of ability grouping on children's views of themselves

as learners and consequent engagement has been widely researched, as well as the tendency of ability groups to define and even exacerbate differences in attainment (Hattie, 2008; Marks, 2016). McGillicuddy and Devine (2020, p. 569) argue that such practices are far from neutral, with children in 'lower' groups associating with words such as 'dumb', 'stupid' and 'ashamed' and those in higher groups with 'good' 'happy' and 'proud'. As noted in the discussion on findings, classroom practice has long been to group children in terms of school reading book levels, at least since the advent of the national 'Literacy Hour' in 1998 (Machin & McNally, 2008). Even before that, schools have used hierarchical reading schemes over many years (Chall, 1967). The difference now is the layering of this practice on to phonics as an additional discrete subject and the exclusion of other reading strategies, so that a child's reading attainment, and associated self-image as a reader, is almost entirely dependent on this single element of decoding. Levy identified that this process was in motion in her study (Levy, 2011). She found that children as young as nursery age were beginning to view reading as the ability to decode print, and consequently some were losing confidence in themselves as readers. As the entire regulative pedagogic discourse has significantly intensified since then (using Bernstein's framework, 2000) this is only likely to have become more pervasive.

Sense of enjoyment/lack of enjoyment, boredom

The second sub-theme within the affective theme, looking at how children feel, will now be considered: sense of enjoyment/ lack of enjoyment, boredom. As has been shown, it is not possible to entirely separate out the themes as there is crossover between them. However, children did also sometimes talk about more positive or negative feelings towards reading for a range of other reasons besides decoding proficiency. This theme pulls the other reasons given together. These included: the content of the book itself (155 instances), the context in which reading took place (140 instances), and the extent to which they felt they had some choice over what and when to read (42 instances in the data). Key features which contributed to positive feelings, alongside the feeling of success, were content the child connected with; and, in particular, books which were perceived as fun or funny. These elements seemed to be strong motivators in making children want to read and view it as a pleasurable activity.

This theme mirrors findings from previous research (e.g. Clark & Foster, 2005; Clark & Rumbold, 2006), with over 80% of children aged 5 to 8 saying that they had a favourite book (Teravainen-Goff, 2019). In the literature review, reasons why reading for pleasure could be deemed important were discussed, as well as factors which are known to make reading

pleasurable. Reading for pleasure is important to children too, although this study suggests it may now have been overtaken by reading for learning/success as the main perceived reason for reading. It is true that this cannot be definitively attributed to the advent of SSP-as-prime. As was clear in this study and others, children have increasing competing demands on their time even out of school, particularly in relation to technology (Clark & Teravainen-Goff, 2020). For example, Harlen commented: "*I want to play on my tablet or my DS, but I have to read my book"*. [Harlen, HT1C]

The content of the book itself was the next most common reason mentioned by children for feeling positive about reading, after being successful at reading (McGeown et al., 2020). In terms of the content of the book, many children had their own preferences; dinosaurs, magic, princesses, football, superheroes and animals were all mentioned. A few children talked about enjoying reading non-fiction books. When it came to content they did not like, again this was individual. Harlen said "*I only like the books that are fun books I like…I like some of the books at school like the spider book at school*" [Harlen, HT2B] and Ava, asked about reading the school books, commented that she sometimes didn't enjoy them "*Cos they're all different ones and they're not all princesses*" [Ava, HT3B]. In this theme, agency was expressed much more strongly. Even though the children were receiving a standardised diet of teaching and reading books, they still expressed clear preferences for subjects and types of books of interest to them.

Linked to this, children often talked about having favourite or familiar books, perhaps which they owned themselves. Sometimes they could retell the stories in these books, and were keen to do so. Alex chose *Sharks* from a selection of real books, explaining he had chosen that one *"cos I have it at home and I love it"* [Alex, HT1A], and Ava drew a picture of herself feeling happy reading 'The Cat Book' saying "*That's the cat book, I like reading the cat book…it's a grumpy cat that doesn't want to do anything…he stays on the, he stays on a windowsill and it lays in a pot. And that's a picture of the cat*" [Ava, HT1C]. It is of interest that the book Ava depicts is not a princess book, although she previously said that she did not like school books because they were not all about princesses. It is possible that she was, in fact, expressing a more general resistance to school books, preferring to read her own.

In the preceding quote from Ava, she talks about (and recreated in her drawing) one of the pictures in the book. Pictures in books were also perceived by children as a pleasurable part of the experience. When children chose and shared real books in the first session, much of the time and discussion was around the pictures. Logan explained that he liked the 'rainbow petals' in *The Rainbow Fish* book [Logan, HT3B]. Zoey brought in a favourite book from

home, *Dinosaurs Love Underpants* and said that it was her favourite "*because I like the picture on the front"* [Zoey, HT3B]. In other activities, children sometimes also referred to pictures as helping them to understand what was happening in the story. In his instructions to the toy dog Rusty telling him 'How To Read', Jude wrote "*Rusty can look at the pichers*" [Jude, NT2C]. This represents a further act of agency and resistance, being contrary to the SSP-as-prime discourse, in which children are not supposed to use the pictures to help them read the book.

Conversely, when children looked at '*Read Write Inc*' reading scheme books (Ruth Miskin Training, 2020) which were mostly text and contained only black and white line drawings, some were not keen. Ava commented "*it looks weird when it's just all black and white"* [Ava, HT3B] and Fleur said: *I like school books, but I don't like that one and that one and that one because they're too dark and you can't really see them"* [Fleur, HT2B]. Children rarely chose to read these in the session, preferring in this activity to pick Oxford Reading Tree books which were brightly coloured with attractive pictures.

Many children said that they liked fun or funny books, sometimes (but not often) also mentioning school reading books in this context. For example, Aliyah said "*I like all the books [that] have funny things in*" [Aliyah, NT1A]. Ethan explained that he had chosen *Dirty Bertie* to read "*Cos it's so fun*" [Ethan, HT1A], and Alfie, drawing a picture of himself happy reading, said: "*It's a shark book…it's funny, the shark is in jail*" [Alfie, OT1A]. Emily, when asked about school reading books, commented that "*reading books are fun*" [Emily, OT1B], with Brea saying: "*I like reading school books when we take it home and read them…I get the funny ones*" [Brea, HT2A]

On the other hand, where children perceived the books to be boring, they felt negatively about reading them. Children occasionally talked about not liking a specific book at home, but usually when the word 'boring' was used, it was in relation to school reading books. For example Ryan, commenting on the unfinished picture of the child reading with a teacher, suggested that the child might be thinking he wanted to stop reading because it was boring. A little later in the same session, during the Pickle and Boo activity, Ryan said he did not always like reading his school books, because some of them were boring, and Mariam agreed [Ryan and Mariam, NT2B]. During a general discussion, some of the children expressed this as follows:

A: I like school books.
S: I just like the school books that are the ones... I like the school library ones.
LZ: The school library ones. But not the ones in your book bag?

S: I don't like…
T: Because they're not fun.
LZ: They're not fun?
T: No..
M: No [Alfie, Tyler, Sofia and Madison, OT1A]

The sense of 'having to do it' on a regular basis was clearly also associated with negative feelings, as this comment from Ethan exemplifies: *"it's always boring, I always have to do it!..". [Ethan, HT1A].* It seems that where an element of agency was permitted, such as choosing a book form the library, children's enjoyment of reading increased.

However, it is important to temper this with the difference in children's responses when they were asked about reading their school books in school, and at home. Their feelings were often different, despite the same books being involved. Children were more positive, overall, about reading their school books when in school, often seeming to enjoy the social aspect of reading with an adult or with their friends in guided reading. Also mentioned in relation to this was that the teacher helped them to read if they got stuck, and gave encouraging comments. Along with a number of others, Ryan said that he liked reading his school book at school but not at home. When asked why this was, he said this was because reading at home was "*boring*" and "*because I need to read it every day*" [Ryan, NT2A]. Quite a few children mentioned that when they were at home, they would rather be doing other things, such as wanting to watch television, be on their laptop, play with their toys or outside – this will be further examined in the context section, below. It seems that not wanting to read school books at home has a number of components: needing to do this regularly, seeing it as in competition with other, preferred activities, not having the same type of support as in school and, in some cases, the content of the book itself.

Turning now to phonics, children also had views about what made this enjoyable, or less so. The numerical data above appeared to show that more children enjoyed phonics lessons than didn't, but not overwhelmingly so. Some children said that they really enjoyed phonics lessons, for example: "*Because it's fun*" [Brea, HT2A and Idris, NT2A]; "I like doing letters" [Scarlett, HT2A]; "*Phonics is good…because we do reading these sounds…they're fun*" [Dylan, NT1A] and "*I really LOVE IT*" [Fleur, HT2A]. When asked why they had responded positively, Emily said that she loved doing the actions [Emily, OT2B], and Jude and Dylan both said they thought it was easy [Dylan, NT1A and Jude, OT2B].

We saw in the previous section that Duana said that she liked learning new sounds in phonics to help her with her writing. Logan and Fleur explained why they enjoyed phonics:

I like doing phonics because we get to learn tricky words and that helps me when I'm actually reading books, I actually know the tricky words now [Fleur, HT2B]

I like reading sounds and I really like learning sounds and so that's why I've put it as really happy [he has circled the face lots of times with ever larger circles] [Logan, HT3C]

Some children expressed more mixed feelings, such as Alex, who put his name in between Pickle and Boo and said "*I like it and I don't like it*". When asked to explain further, he said that he "*really liked learning hard new letters*", but that he did not like writing on whiteboards and then having to rub his work out when he was "*doing really good*" [Alex, HT1B]. Harlen said he did not always like phonics, saying "*sometimes it's a bit hard*" and "*sometimes I get it wrong and get it right*" [Harlen, HT2B]. There is a strong link here with the first theme; success or the perceived lack of success leading to positive or negative feelings about the subject. Jude and Dylan's comments about phonics being easy appear to echo this.

On the other hand, some children expressed negative views about phonics, for a range of reasons. As was discussed in the previous section, some children considered it hard and so had negative feelings for that reason. Other children said that they felt it was long, or boring. Alex coloured in the 'inbetween' emoticon when asked about phonics, saying: "*in between, sometimes I don't like it…because…sometimes it's boring*" [Alex, HT1A]. Ethan stated that he hated phonics because "*it's always long*" [Ethan, HT1A]. Aliyah, looking at the unfinished picture of children doing a phonics lesson suggested they might be thinking "*when are we going to play…because their phonics is taking so long*" [Aliyah, NT1B]. Children who were more negative towards phonics more often talked about the writing aspect, rather than the reading, in a negative way. For example, Tyler said "*it's always boring because we have to do dictation...I don't like dictation*" [Tyler, OT1B], and Fleur commented "*Sometimes it's not hard and sometimes it's a little bit hard cos we have loads of stuff to do and it kind of hurts my fingers*" [Fleur, HT2A].

Choice over activity or book/lack of choice over activity or book

It has been shown that children are more likely to feel positively about reading when they feel some sense of choice or control over which book to read, or when to read it (Reedy & De Carvalho, 2021). For Bernstein, as discussed, the extent to which learners have control within a pedagogical setting is a matter of framing (Bernstein, 1990). Comments from the children indicated that they experienced matters related to reading in school as strongly framed; for example, on the lack of time they were able to spend in the reading corner, or on their school reading books. When, occasionally, the library was mentioned, this was much

more positively, and children seemed to experience this as weakly framed, being able to choose their own books. It seemed that where children could, they were finding space and opportunities for agency. I will return to this theme in Chapter 10.

Ava echoed this sentiment, choosing two contrasting Blob Tree figures to represent her feelings about different types of reading. She was asked specifically about reading at school and chose to circle two contrasting figures (see Figure 19):

> *LZ: Ava how come you're putting your name there and there? [A has marked two contrasting figures, one very happy and one definitely not happy!]*
> *Ava: Because I sometimes don't like reading and sometimes I do*
> *LZ: So is this when you're reading your school book, that you have to read [I hover my finger between the two, A taps her pencil on the fed up looking figure]*
> *A: Yes -and this is the one that I don't* ***have*** *to read [her emphasis, tapping the happy looking figure]* [HT3A]

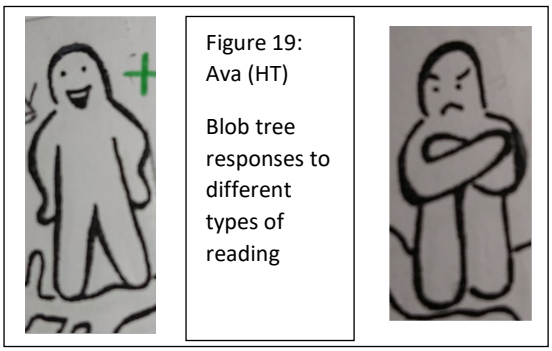


Figure 19: Ava (HT)

Blob tree responses to different types of reading

That an element of choice leads to greater engagement is no surprise. It is widely accepted that being able to make meaningful choices in reading is motivational to children and can increase engagement (Guthrie & Davis, 2003; Willingham, 2015). However, Flowerday, Schraw & Stevens (2004) suggested that interest may actually be the most important element, and the reason why children appear to be more engaged with books they have chosen. Clearly the two constructs are likely to be related but as Clark and Phythain-Sence (2008) suggest, support to make informed choices based on an interest in the text may be important. Interestingly, in this study, content was mentioned as a positive more frequently than choice over which book to read, perhaps indicating that most children were happy to read reading scheme books they were given (in the school context, at least), as long as they found them interesting and engaging. This reflects the findings of Flowerday et al. (2004) and McGeown et al. (2020).

Choice over when to read is more difficult to interpret. We have seen how children felt they had very little free-choice reading time in school. There were some comments from children

talking about enjoying, for example, reading at bedtime. This could perhaps be associated with social aspects of reading which will be further explored below. Many of the comments were negative, however, and were related to children experiencing reading as a task they had to do, whether at home or at school, particularly in relation to their school reading books. Levy showed in her study of children's use of reading scheme books (Levy, 2009) that children tended to believe reading scheme books to be instruments to teach them to read. It could be that reading the school book at home feels like an unwelcome intrusion of school for some children into what they deem to be their free time – certainly some of the comments indicated this. The area of reading school books at home has been little-studied from a child's perspective, and this may provide a useful area for further study.

Being 'boring' or enjoyable' was often linked with agency; with the feeling of choice and control over what and when they were reading. This most often came up in a negative context, with children explaining that they did not like reading school books for this type of reason. For example, Harlen, when asked about reading at school in the emoticon activity, coloured the in between face. He then explained it was:

H: Because…because I like reading and I don't like reading.
L: So, you like reading and you don't like reading? When do you like reading?
H: Erm at choosing time…
L: Ok and when do you not like reading?
H: Erm…erm, at learning time.

Later on, when drawing his picture of a time he was happy reading, Harlen spoke about a spider book he had enjoyed in the class reading area in Reception. He commented that he liked the book: "*because it were more fun…because I wanted to read it…*" [Harlen, HT2B].

Children sometimes seemed to link positive views about reading with the ability to choose which book to read, or when to read it. This again picks up the theme of children enjoying reading more when they felt a stronger sense of agency. For example, when talking about reading at home during the Pickle and Boo activity, Madison commented: "*when I do my homework I don't like to do my reading when I really want to go off and watch tv*" [Madison, OT1B]. A year later during the emoticon activity, Madison specified that she enjoyed reading the school library book, which she had chosen, when at home. However, she was clear that she still did not enjoy reading her school reading book at home. She said that she enjoyed reading her own books at home, naming a couple of favourites and saying: "*when it's bedtime my mum always lets me choose a book and I really like to choose them kind of books*" [Madison, OT1C]. A few other children also mentioned that they enjoyed choosing

books from either the school or (in one case) the local library.

Few comments about choice in relation to phonics specifically were made, suggesting that this is a strongly teacher-directed activity in which children have little, if any opportunity to exercise agency. The talk around the unfinished picture of a phonics lesson certainly suggested this. However, some of children's talk did relate to agentic acts within the phonics session, or perhaps, more specifically, acts of resistance. Children in one group thought that the unfinished picture of a phonics lesson depicted children writing on their whiteboards. Jack commented "*he's not doing any…he might get told off, and he scribbled, he scribbled, he scribbled on his work*" [Jack, HT1B]. Other children thought that the children in the picture might be wondering when it was playtime, or thinking about their dinner. This demonstrates that even though children might be "*being good…being silent*" in phonics [Dylan, NT1B], there is still space for non-compliance. Likewise, Tyler suggested a child might be thinking "*Why do we need to do phonics?*" [Tyler, OT1B]. This theme of agency and resistance will be further developed in the next chapter.

Summary of Theme 3 findings – How do we feel?

Children's feelings about reading often seemed to correlate with their perceptions of their competence as readers, linked to knowing letters and decoding correctly. Over the period of the research, children's feelings seemed to become more entrenched one way or the other. Differences were noted, however, in respect of different types, and sites of, reading. The most popular reading activity was children reading their own books at home, and the least popular was children reading their school books at home. Children felt generally more positive about reading school books when in school.

Unsurprisingly, the content of the book itself, and the extent to which a child had chosen to read it, were also evident as factors which made children feel more or less positive about reading. Some children had familiar or favourite books, which appeared to generate much pleasure. Children clearly had some reading experiences which sat outside the edifice of schooled reading and SSP-as-prime. Although this type of talk about reading was not dominant, it was nonetheless evident, and so it is important to attend to this in the analysis. Bernstein's framework has been helpful up to this point, but now further development and elaboration is needed to illuminate these aspects of the data. The next chapter will therefore draw on the work of Bronfenbrenner as a further, supplementary framework.

Chapter 10: Data Analysis and Discussion IV: Complicating and resisting: Bringing in Bronfenbrenner

Introduction

The previous three chapters have used a Bernsteinian analysis to describe and explore the enacted policy context of SSP-as-prime on a micro-level, and the impact of this on children's perceptions of reading. Some evidence has been found, however, of agency and even resistance, so there is a need to complicate the Bernsteinian view. Bernstein himself acknowledged that this was needed. He argued that it is only by describing the situation as it is, that understanding can be gained, leading to "effective choice, effective challenge" (Bernstein, 2000, p. 210). He saw his work as a set of tools, or a grammar, to analyse and understand education. However, he also recognised, as mentioned earlier, that "children do more than learn what is formally expected of them, and teachers do more than teach what is formally expected of them" (Bernstein, 1990, p. 7). Arnot and Reay (2004), using a Bernsteinian theoretical framework, note and explore a tension between external structures and children's own agency. This supports arguments by those such as Esser et al. (2016) and Raithelhuber (2016), discussed in the methodology, that children's agency is often contingent on the contexts in which they find themselves. As James and Prout argue, children are both constrained by, and act within and upon, structure (1997).What becomes of interest, therefore, is how children act and react within the constraints of their experiences of learning to read in the era of SSP-as-prime, where agency is 'thin', to use Klocker's analogy (2007).

In this study, to draw out the impact of context and to provide a way of interpreting children's varied responses, Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of development (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, 1977; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000) has been brought into dialogue with Bernstein. Using Bronfenbrenner's theory as a lens, there is some evidence that children are able, at times, to resist, ignore or disrupt the overall messaging. This chapter explores some examples. It is revisited how children may perceive that they read for reasons other than learning, and also shown that the social and spatial context in which reading takes place is seen as significant by children, referring to data shown in Table 12. Furthermore, some evidence is presented of children demonstrating agency and even resistance.

Reading as emotionally rewarding: *"it really touches me, and I like it…"*

As has been discussed in the thematic analysis, particularly under the affordative theme (Chapter 8), sometimes children's responses related to some type of intrinsic emotional reward and enjoyment as a reason for reading, rather than reading to learn. Examples included saying that reading helped them to relax, made them laugh or gave them opportunities for fantasy and play. Sofia, for example, commented that:

> *S: I like reading, because I like making up stuff* [Sofia, OT1A]

And, on another occasion:

> *S: Cos it makes – so when I'm upset my mum tells me to read a book and it makes me calm* [Sofia, OT1C]

Anand chose a familiar book to read in the interview session and when asked why he had chosen it, said:

> *A: Because…it's funny…[laughing] when there was a grumpy fish, then he was gonna eat them, then all the tadpoles were running fast* [Anand, OT2B]

As mentioned under the affective theme, some children perceived reading as a way to find out about topics of interest, and to see this as enjoyable rather than purely instrumental. For example, Fleur said:

> *F: I like reading and it shows you about um animals near there or funny stuff and I like funny stuff and also um it teaches you about maybe animals and I actually like the animal books cos it teaches about like ducks or elephants…*(Fleur, HT2B)

Madison, discussing her favourite books, explained that they helped her to relax:

> *M: The Tiger Who Came to Tea and Christopher Nibble…because they make me happy when I go to bed and they make me fall asleep* [Madison, OT1B]

There were relatively few examples of this (15 instances), so it remained a minor theme, but all reveal alternative views on early reading to challenge the dominance of reading as instrumental. Sofia's first comment, about making up stuff, can be seen as particularly subversive given the emphasis on children being able to read accurately for themselves

rather than “guessing words when asked to read books independently which include words with alphabetic code beyond their code knowledge” (Hepplewhite, 2015, p. 1). Recent government guidance on books in classroom ‘book corners’ has now tightened this further, suggesting that “Teachers might consider displaying only the books that have been read aloud to children”, stating that children can then either retell the story, or re-read it for themselves (DfE, 2021b, p. 34). Children are not to use the rich illustrations in picture books, for example, as the basis for imagination or fantasy. Sofia, however, hints that at home, reading is valued for its emotional sustenance. Drawing on Bronfenbrenner’s lenses of PPCT (Proximal process – Person – Context – Time) can provide one way of interpreting this. For Bronfenbrenner, ‘proximal processes’ related to the influence of relationship: “a transfer [exchange] of energy between the developing human being and the persons, objects and symbols in the immediate environment” (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000, p. 118 & 125). It could be suggested that Sofia is receiving positive messages from her mother about the value of reading, which are then reinforced with feelings of comfort in relation to the object of the book itself. Furthermore, Sofia’s reading context – the C of PPCT - evidently includes not only the messages from school/state, but from home as well, with the home messaging perhaps challenging that received at school. Bronfenbrenner terms interactions between different aspects of a child’s microsystems (in this case, school and home) as a ‘mesosystem’ (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, 1977), and suggests that the joint impact of influences needs to be considered.

Madison’s decision to name particular books – both her own books, at home, and Fleur’s challenge to instrumentalism, both provide examples of exercising agency and choice in relation to reading. Again, as with Sofia, it is possible to trace proximal/relational exchanges (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000) – the books themselves, the secure location (Madison’s reference to going to bed), the feeling of happiness or fun.

Ava’s comment was interesting and suggested that she may have a view of reading as helping her to find out more about the world, but that was something she experienced as emotionally rewarding:

> *A: Cos it experience me…it really touches me, and I like it. It gets to me and I really like it.”* [Ava, HT3A]

This perhaps hints at the second ‘P’ of Bronfenbrenner’s PPCT, relating to personal characteristics. Perhaps Ava is a person who naturally enjoys reading – or perhaps it is a product of the other processes identified, such as proximal/relational and context. Such questions are outside the scope of the present study, but Ava’s words nonetheless

demonstrate the need to allow Bronfenbrenner's perspective to illuminate and challenge some of the determinism of Bernstein.

Social context: *"I like reading with my friends..."*

Social aspects of reading were mentioned as important by many children (42 instances). This has long been recognised as a key factor in children's engagement, when reading is viewed not just as a matter of decoding proficiency. Rather, it is a socio-cultural practice which views reading as varied and situated, with experience being contingent on multiple factors (Cremin, 2014b). Paris and McNaughton (2010) show the importance of participation in a community (or communities) of reading, where reading is valued and supported, as a factor in long-term engagement. This clearly reflects Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, in which children's development is seen as influenced by multiple processes and contexts (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). This view appears to have been very much borne out by the findings in this study. For example, children's drawings referenced a range of factors. A strong theme from the drawings was the importance of social interactions with friends and parents/carers.

When asked to draw a picture of themselves when they were happy reading, roughly half of the depictions were of reading with either a parent figure or with one or more friends, with the other half drawing themselves reading alone. No child chose to depict a time when they were reading with a teacher figure (although this was spoken of positively in other activities). Reading with friends was invariably spoken about with warmth, for example, Sofia explained that she and her friends liked to read together (see Figure 19).

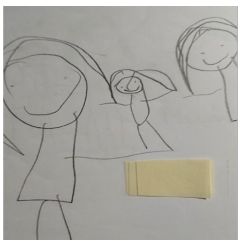


Figure 19: Sofia's drawing 'I like reading with my friends in the book corner' (OT1A)

S: I like reading with my friends
LZ: Where do you read with your friends?
S: In the book corner [in Reception] [Sofia, OT1A]

The theme of finding reading with parent figures a supportive context cropped up in several activities and with many children. For example Alex said: "*When my daddy reads with me, and my mummy, it really helps me*" [Alex, HT1B]. Anand (Figure 20) drew a picture of himself and his mother reading 'The Gruffalo' (Donaldson, 2016):

Figure 20: Anand's drawing of him and mum reading the Gruffalo (OT2A)

In the Blob Tree activity, Harry was asked how he felt about reading at home. He chose to circle a figure with its arm around another figure, looking happy. He explained as follows:

H: Because I like reading and cuddling…
L: Who do you cuddle when you're reading at home?
H: Daddy and mummy [Harry, HT1A]

Figure 21: Harry (HT) Blob people selection for reading at home

For Mariam and Aliyah, being with other people was deemed important. When they were asked to complete the emoticon activity, both circled the 'in-between' face for reading their school book at home, but the 'happy' face for reading the same book at school:

A: It's really boring
LZ: When you read your book at home it's boring? But it's not boring in school?
A: Yeah because it's only me reading!
M: Yeah! I only read by myself at home, in my room
A: Because I feel happy because everyone else is with me!
M: yeah!
LZ: At school?
A and M: Yeah! [Mariam and Aliyah, NT1A]

And Mariam reiterated this later when completing the blob people activity:

LZ: Ooh Mariam you look happy there [standing under tree looking happy], how come you've circled that one?
M: Because I like reading at school
LZ: Do you? What do you like about it?
M: Because I like reading with the teacher
LZ: Ooh, why do you think you like that?
M: Because it's fun [NT1A]

Figure 22: Mariam blob people response to 'reading at school'

Mariam referred here to enjoying reading with her teacher and this was also mentioned, or alluded to, fairly frequently. Scarlett chose a very happy looking picture on the Blob Tree to represent herself reading at school, explaining it was "*because I'm happy when I work with my teacher*" [Scarlett, HT3A]. When doing the 'unfinished picture' exercise showing the teacher and child reading together, the comments were mainly positive or neutral. Children suggested that teachers might be mainly saying words of encouragement or offering help, and thinking that children were doing well, or doing good phonics. Some suggestions for what the children might be thinking included looking at what was happening in the pictures, thinking they were doing well, and just reading the words. One child, however, suggested that the teacher might be saying "*Get on with your reading*" and that the child might be thinking "*Why do we have to do our reading?".* He then also suggested the child might be thinking "*I like my reading because it's fun, cos we get to read new stories*", perhaps hinting at his own mixed feelings about reading at school, which his other responses also indicated [Tyler, OT1B].

Through children's talk, the importance of reading relationships within the classroom and with their teachers came through (Powell, 2014). These seemingly benign assertions are at odds with the current policy discourse – focussed on individual proficiency - and hint at the children's continuing desire for, and assertion of, agency in terms of their contexts for reading. Bernstein's pedagogic discourse analysis (2000) stands, but children seek to appropriate and, at times, subvert this, through their assertion of their personal dispositions and their desire for social reading (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000).

Interestingly there was also a theme of some children enjoying and wanting to read on their own. Sometimes this was seen as evidence of being more grown up, in the sense that they were now able to read without help, as in this example, from the Pickle and Boo activity, when Madison was not sure if she liked being read to: "*Because, cos I can read myself and*

I'm a big girl so I can read myself now" [Madison, OT1B]. Logan said: "*Because I don't want my mum to do it with me, I want to do it by myself because I can do it by myself*" [Logan, HT3A]. This could be interpreted as an assertion of agency whilst at the same time positioning themselves as successful readers within the values of the prevailing pedagogic discourse. Or could this be a manifestation of the solitary-as-social as described by Cremin (2014b), where the act of reading itself, even if carried out alone, is primarily about making meaning and is surrounded and supported by cultural and interpersonal connections (Bronfenbrenner's proximal processes (2000))? The former may seem a more likely explanation in the current context, but Bronfenbrenner's lenses serve as an important counterbalance to a monolithic interpretation, showing how children are influenced by other message systems besides the 'official' one.

Where the reading takes place: spatial context *"on the chair that was so comfy…"*

Children's perceptions of reading were also connected (17 instances) with where the reading took place, echoing Bronfenbrenner's focus on the influence of context (1976). In the 'draw a picture' activity, just over half depicted themselves at home, with the rest being in school – mainly in the reading corner/area, and reading a 'real' book. Examples of statements associated with the drawings were:

> *I've drawn me reading a book with Aaliyah…when we was in Reception…in the reading corner…Little Red Riding Hood* [Mariam, NT1A]
> *I've drawed when I was sitting down on the chair that was so comfy I was reading the book…a sheep family…at home* [Emily, OT2A]
> *It's a story when I was in a caravan* [Jack, HT1A]

When reading at home, a frequent theme was the other calls on children's attention. These can be interpreted as examples of Bronfenbrenner's mesosystem model, with children's experience being influenced by multiple microsystem contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Just a few examples include:

> *Cos I like reading and sometimes I don't like reading cos I want to be on my laptop and watch my telly, cos I have a big screen tv now in my room [Ava, HT3A]*
> *I only read it on holidays because I go school, and mosque, so I come back late so I can't read, so I read on holidays [Idris, NT2A]*
> *[I don't like reading] when I'm at home, because I don't get more time to play outside [Tyler, OT1B]*
> *I don't get time [to read] because I have so much stuff to do… Karate, Jujitsu, Piano, gymnastics…[Brea, HT2C]*

I don't normally read books at home because I play Fortnite [Alfie, OT1C]

A couple of children identified specifically that being in school provided a more conducive content for reading, for example, Alex commented that in school he couldn't play on his Xbox, which made him feel happier about reading [Alex, HT1C]. It was discussed earlier that children appeared to feel more positive about reading their school books in school, than they did reading them at home. The wish to be doing other things may provide at least some of the reason for this.

Certainly, children seemed to see school and home as quite different arenas for reading. It is possible that the very strong framing at school contributes to this, to use Bernstein's language (1975). Arnot and Reay, in their study of secondary school pupils (2004), used a Bernsteinian lens to study how children experience strong framing differentially. Some experienced the regulative discourse of framing as a place to negotiate and work within, particularly those children where the school and home promote a similar narrative. Children where the home location provides a different narrative, however, may experience a disconnect with strong framing at school. Levy (2011) notes a similar phenomenon, in her study of young children as readers. She identifies how children may experience a continuity or a disruption depending on whether the discourses about reading in the two sites were similar, which can in turn influence children's views of themselves as readers. To turn Bronfenbrenner's lens on this, it could be suggested that whether the contexts of the school and home microsystems provide a similar narrative, or not, may influence children's development as readers (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Within the current policy climate this disruption may even have a positive impact, as, for example, with Scarlett. In Year 1, Scarlett mainly enjoyed reading and phonics. By Year 2, although Scarlett increasingly did not seem to see herself as a confident reader in a school context in she still enjoyed reading her own books at home, perhaps feeling that this was a different type of activity. Children's views, like those of adults, are complex, individual and subject to change depending on a range of factors. the impact of Bronfenbrenner's fourth aspect of the PPCT model – that of Time – can be more clearly seen (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). Scarlett felt more negative towards schooled reading over time, with various factors and experiences seeming to have led to this such as a perceived lack of success and other calls on her time.

Agency: resistance, dissonance and appropriation

Some children's views of themselves as not good at decoding, and resistance to reading, echoes Moss' account of a study of school-based reading in children aged 7-9 (Moss, 2018). Moss identifies how boys deemed to be weak readers, in particular, resisted or found strategies to avoid activities which were designed to support their reading development, such as spending less or no time on the text, and more time on discussing the images and subject matter.

Scarlett (discussed above) seemed to be experiencing some dissonance between her experiences of reading at home and at school (Levy, 2011). However, her positive feelings about reading at home and about the shared experience of reading seemed to be maintaining her engagement, for now. She clearly had a range of familiar books at home which she was able to discuss in detail in terms of both the stories and the illustrations, and her pleasure in the agency she felt in choosing, reading and talking about these books was evident.

In the present study other glimpses of children's agency are evident. For example, a number of children were able to express definite preferences for particular books or types of book, such as 'ones with sounds' or 'superhero books'. Alex spoke about enjoying looking at his dad's "*building books*" and wanting to be able to read them [Alex, HT, 6.11.17].

Some children talked about avoidance tactics for reading at home, such as leaving their school books in the car or at Grandma's house. Others, when asked what children might be thinking or doing during a phonics lesson, talked about looking at other children's work, or (as seen) thinking about playtime or what was for dinner.

At times children also appropriated school reading to meet particular needs they felt. One child commented "*I like reading when I'm in the car because then I've got more time to talk and say what I like about it with my mum*" [Madison, OT1A], perhaps indicating that she used this strategy to gain a chunk of quality time with her parent, not feeling rushed. Some children, who spoke about having few or no books at home, valued any opportunity to read. Funny reading scheme books were particularly prized and remembered, for example "*the donkey one*" or "*the spider book*", which were mentioned more than once. At such times, children seemed to seize upon school reading for their own purposes – having fun, in this case – challenging the instrumental pedagogic discourse of the state.

Through this analysis, it is evident that children are more than passive recipients of a policy. Returning to the previous discussion on agency in the methodology can inform an interpretation. Children are clearly acting within and in-relation-to a range of entanglements,

be these with the human aspects of their world (e.g. family and friends) or the non-human aspects (e.g. books). Raithelhuber's concept of interconnectedness (2016) is evident. The monolith of SSP-as-prime looms large, and yet some capacity for unruliness tenaciously remains (Truman et al., 2021). The current pedagogic discourse surrounding SSP-as-prime is undoubtedly extremely powerful, perhaps in an unprecedented way in English primary education. Bernstein's theoretical grammar has enabled this to be exposed and the impact of the discourse at the micro-level of the classroom, and on individual children's views and experiences, is clear. This is still playing out in English classrooms, and the long-term impact is yet to be seen. However, Bronfenbrenner's lenses, drawing attention to other influences and messages, have complicated this narrative, demonstrating that children are more than empty vessels to be filled. Through children's own proximal/ relational exchanges, their own dispositions, the ecology of micro- and macro-systems which they inhabit over time, it has been shown how agency, resistance and subversion may appear constantly in the cracks.

Chapter 11: Conclusion – summary of findings and future recommendations

Conclusions have been based on the findings for each theme and the links to the research questions, as identified in Table 5 (shown again below).

Key findings for each theme with links to research questions RQ1: In the context of SSP-as-prime, what are children's experiences and perceptions of learning to read and reading overall? RQ2: How might these experiences and perceptions be shaping their development as readers?		
Descriptive *What we do*	Affordative *Why we do it*	Affective *How we feel*
Children's concept of reading may differ according to context, with schooled reading seen as having closer correlations with the act of decoding and with procedural aspects. Other conceptualisations of reading are also evident, although children tend to focus more strongly on an understanding of reading as decoding (RQ1&2)	Children mainly expressed that reading is for instrumental purposes linked to learning (RQ1&2)	Being a successful reader is linked to competence at decoding text: good readers 'get it right' (RQ1)
Children show a strong awareness of 'phonics-as-a-subject' but often seem to see it as conceptually different from reading (and more closely linked to writing)	Reading for pleasure or emotional reward is mentioned by children, but much less often (RQ1&2)	Children who perceive themselves as competent at decoding text often reported more positive feelings about reading, those who did not often reported more negative feelings

(RQ1)		(RQ2)
		Feelings about reading were also associated with the content and context of the reading experience (RQ1)

Table 5: Key findings for each theme with links to research questions

The next two sections will reflect on the findings in more detail, framed in response to the two research questions. The first research question addresses 'what' the data show the children's perceptions of the situation to be, and the second addresses 'so what?'; in other words, the apparent and potential implications. This approach has been taken in order to foreground attention to the voices and views of children in the conclusion to the study, in line with the original aims.

Research Question 1: In the context of SSP-as-prime, what are children's experiences and perceptions of learning to read and reading overall?

Data demonstrated that children's experiences of learning to read and reading were multi-faceted. Children spoke of experiences reading at home (alone or with family), or with friends. They spoke of multiple sites for reading, for example: at home, in bed, at Grandma's, in the car, in the reading corner at school, on the carpet at school. In terms of schooled reading, they spoke about guided reading lessons, whole class reading lessons, reading individually with a teacher or other adult, and reading their school books in class and at home. Analysis and interpretation of the data suggested children appeared to foreground different aspects of reading, dependent on the context. In contexts related to reading 'real' books, or 'free choice' reading at home or at school (such library books, or spending time in the reading corner with friends), children were still more likely to describe or demonstrate 'wider' reading behaviours. These included aspects which could be associated with an understanding of reading as making meaning from the text such as drawing on pictures and the wider context of the text to understand it, or reading a book for pleasure or to find out about a topic of interest. Many children definitely valued a social aspect to reading and particularly referred to times when they had enjoyed reading with another person (Cremin, 2014b). However, they also perceived that both at school and at home they had less opportunity to engage in this type of reading over time. In contrast, when describing or enacting 'schooled' reading such as reading school reading books at home or at school, reading with a teacher, guided reading or other reading in class, children were much more likely to portray a 'narrow' view of reading, in which decoding accurately was the

predominant approach. Correlating with this, accurate decoding was linked to competence and success in reading, with children speaking of 'getting it right' as being important in reading. Children's views of what a successful reader is, and whether they themselves are successful as readers, appeared to reflect this, as seen in other studies (e.g. Hempel-Jorgensen et al., 2018). At the same time, most children did not see the work they were doing in their phonics lessons as closely linked to reading. They were strongly aware of phonics-as-a-subject, but where they made links to wider literacy, these were far more likely to be to writing.

In parallel, the data showed that children seemed to perceive learning and future success as the main reason for reading, both in terms of getting better at reading itself, and to learn or achieve other goals. A dominant view of reading was as instrumental (Bernstein, 2000; Levy, 2011), in which affordances based on or linked with learning were seen as predominant. Alongside this, some children did still recognise other purposes for reading and seemed not to be entirely shaped by the hegemonic discourse of SSP-as-prime. Mention was made of reading for emotional fulfilment or as a socio-cultural experience, or even hints of exercising agency through appropriation of schooled reading, resisting the prevailing discourse (Truman et al., 2021), but this was a minor theme by comparison.

Research Question 2: How might these experiences and perceptions be shaping their development as readers?

The experiences and perceptions described above appeared to be having an impact on children's development as readers. The perception of reading as predominantly an instrumental, technical, competency-based activity came through the data analysed under each of the themes. Children's views of the purpose of reading appeared to be strongly instrumental, oriented towards future goals rather than for pleasure in itself (Bernstein, 2000). The affective theme demonstrated most clearly the ways in which this perception of reading may be shaping children's development as readers. The 'narrow' view of reading – linked to accurate decoding, competence and performance – appears evident in children's views of what constitutes reading, whether or not they enjoy reading, and whether or not they view themselves as 'successful' readers.

Children appeared to construct reading using a performance model (Bernstein, 2000): good readers get it right (in terms of sounding out); getting it wrong is equated with being a less good reader. Children knew what was expected in terms of their phonics achievement and where they were positioned in relation to this, experiencing it as strongly framed (Bernstein, 1975, 1990). Children who perceived themselves to be competent at phonics and decoding often reported more positive feelings about reading; in other words, they were more likely to

perceive themselves as successful readers. On the other hand, children who did not see themselves as proficient in decoding were more likely to report feeling negatively about reading. In addition to this, 'reading school books at home' was increasingly not liked by the majority of children in the study. The reasons for this may be complex, and would benefit from further study, but this is nonetheless worth considering as this widespread practice may be having an overall negative effect on children's attitudes to reading over time.

There does remain variation in the picture; alternative messaging and wider influences on children's development may play a significant role for some (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). Some children appeared to be experiencing dissonance in their views of reading, enjoying reading their own books at home, for example, but sometimes distinguishing this from reading 'properly', i.e. reading as accurate decoding. There was evidence that some children seem able to separate their conception of school reading, and their own reading, and thus maintain engagement in their own books, even if they were not feeling confident about their progress with decoding (Levy, 2011).The concept of reading accurately or 'properly' as being closely correlated with decoding was certainly well established. The children's perception of decoding leading to being a successful reader means that this narrow understanding of reading is only likely to strengthen, again in line with a performance model (Bernstein, 2000; Levy, 2011). Potential further impacts include ongoing reinforcement of a deficit model for those children who do not see themselves as successful decoders, leading to a negative spiral of resistance and avoidance in relation to reading (Morgan & Fuchs, 2007). In this study, children's views did appear to become more entrenched over time, either positively or negatively. This is worthy of reflection considering the age of the children, and given that a positive relationship exists between reading for pleasure and educational success (Mullis et al., 2017)

In conclusion, having listened to and analysed the children's voices and looking at the findings across all themes and in relation to both research questions, learning to read in the era of SSP-as-prime is undoubtedly shaping aspects of children's development as readers. Although there was evidence in the data that children do retain some capacity for agency, and that children may be differentially affected dependent on their wider contexts and experiences, it is nonetheless clear that the current policy is significantly shaping children's early reading experiences, and that this may have ongoing consequences.

Given these conclusions, consideration needs to be given to recommendations to mitigate the more negative consequences of the SSP-as-prime policy on children's development as readers. Only in this way is it possible to show that children's views about their own experiences have been attended to. The recommendations fall into three main areas:

recommendations for policy; for classroom practice and for teacher professional development.

Recommendations for policy

As has been shown, government policy currently promotes a narrow view of reading, and it is evident in the classroom that children are taking on this view. As discussed, Government rhetoric may include reference to reading for pleasure, but curriculum, pedagogy and accountability measures all militate against this receiving equal emphasis. Policy therefore needs to shift to promote and value wider aspects of reading to the same extent as SSP. This could include rebalancing the accountability regime in terms of Ofsted inspection framework, so that wider reading receives equal scrutiny. The PSC could be brought into line with Key Stage 1 SATs testing from 2023, as a non-statutory test to inform teacher assessment used as and when schools choose to do so. This would immediately mitigate the currently high-stakes nature of the test with its distorting effect on the early school curriculum.

In parallel with this, Government should provide equal promotion and support for other aspects of reading, as has been the case for SSP. This could include match funding for schools, in line with that given for the purchase of new SSP schemes, potentially to be used to fund school libraries or other reading provision chosen by the school.

Finally in this section, Government should ensure that research and evaluation of policy enactment in education includes the opportunity to listen to the voices of those most closely affected. Government should focus on using a range of participatory methods to ensure that children are able to contribute regularly to such work.

Recommendations for classroom practice

In schools, care needs to be taken to balance the strong messaging in favour of SSP, with an understanding of reading as a wider, socio-cultural practice with multiple facets. Teachers could do this in a range of ways. Timetabling is one important aspect to consider. As children are spending significant time each day on SSP and school reading activities, based primarily on decoding, schools need to ensure that dedicated, quality time is also given to engage with real texts in a variety of ways. This could include story times, shared reading activities, and quality library provision. Ensuring all children have access to the class reading area is a further priority, as is protecting these opportunities as children progress through school and the curriculum becomes more crowded. Furthermore, teachers need to recognise and demonstrably value children's varied engagements with texts, to mitigate the narrowing messages associated with activities such as a strong focus on decodable texts.

Teachers should also consistently link learning in phonics to wider reading, so that children understand the purpose of this learning and how this knowledge can support them when reading. This would further enable teachers to present phonics as an important part of reading, but alongside other skills such as vocabulary and grammatical understanding, and an appreciation of how stories and other texts are structured, which all support the reader to make meaning from the text.

As a final recommendation based on the findings in this study, teachers should consider the focus and purpose of 'reading school books at home'. For example, the focus could be on a story book or non-fiction text to share together, rather than a decodable phonics-based book to further practice decoding. This aspect would benefit from further study to establish what would be most effective to support children in their development as readers.

Recommendations for teacher professional development

In order for teachers to be equipped to enact the above recommendations, a strong focus needs to be placed on teacher professional development. Teachers need be supported to understand the issues, and their important role in providing children with a broad, rich and balanced reading curriculum experience. This includes through Initial Teacher Education, the Early Career Framework, and subsequent Continuous Professional Development.

Teachers need to be supported to understand their position as role models and the ways in which children understand pedagogical messaging about what is valued within the classroom; in this instance, the purpose of reading. Teachers need the opportunity to reflect on how to retain a balance on all aspects of reading and understand the potentially negative effects of the SSP-as-prime policy, so that they are able to avoid or ameliorate these within their own practice.

Within this, time needs to be dedicated to developing teachers' understanding of the development of reading as a wider concept, providing depth and breadth in teachers' own conceptualisation of reading. Teachers themselves need to develop a strong philosophy of reading as knowledge, skill and lifelong enrichment in the broadest sense, and to have the tools to communicate this to children and to set up all aspects of their class to reflect this (timetabling, provision, curriculum and so on, as discussed above). Only with this deep understanding are teachers able to maintain a broad approach to reading, regardless of changes in government policy. Teachers need to be supported to draw on all their skill within the highly bounded and technicised SSP-as-prime discourse to inspire and enthuse children to read, and to become readers.

Recommendations for further study

As has been discussed, even after so many years of SSP-as-prime, and even as it tightens further with a renewed Ofsted framework (Ofsted, 2019a), the state still considers that SSP is not being taught as it should be. This has resulted in a new Reading Framework (DfE, 2021b), setting out requirements for all aspects of classroom practice in relation to the teaching of reading. Flynn et al. (2021) argue that teacher subject knowledge needs development whilst Beard et al. (2019) show that many DfE-approved phonics programmes are linguistically flawed. At the same time, as Clark and Glazzard's 2018 survey showed, almost half of teachers disagree with the policy of SSP-as-prime, and significant negative washback effects are emerging from the imposition of the PSC (Bradbury, 2018; Carter, 2020b). Meanwhile, the lockdown precipitated by the Covid-19 pandemic, with the reduction of 'schooled' experiences of literacy, has led to a bounceback in terms of children's enjoyment of reading (Clark & Picton, 2020). This is an area of debate, therefore, which continues to be both live and politically charged. Whilst much is written, there remains a pressing need for further study on the developing enactment of SSP-as-prime in schools, and its impact on children and teachers. Important questions to answer include:

- How is state policy on SSP-as-prime being understood, enacted and considered in schools in 2021 and beyond, at both a classroom and a leadership level?
- How is this balanced with other aspects of the teaching of reading and literacy as a whole?
- What are the differential experiences of particular groups of children (such as children with limited access to reading outside of a schooled context, or children who are identified as confident early readers)?
- What are the longer-term impacts on children's views of reading, and of themselves as readers?
- What is the role of the home as a site of learning in the SSP-as-prime narrative, and what should it be?

Within all of these, there should remain a focus on child's voice as at least one element. This study (like others cited) demonstrates that this is possible to achieve in a meaningful way. Ethically and morally, therefore, it is imperative to do so.

Reflection on positionality

As discussed in the introduction, my own history and interests have significantly shaped the choice of study topic, and the choice to focus on children's voice within this. As a developing

researcher, some important points of reflection and learning have emerged over the course of the study.

Analysing the data was a particular point of challenge: there seemed to be so much and it seemed very scattered and disparate, consisting of responses to a range of tasks rather than reflections. I quickly realised that children held a range of views and that sometimes these appeared contradictory. The nature of the data led to the need to infer or interpret what the children seemed to be saying. I experienced a sense of anxiety that I would misrepresent the children due to my own particular positionality, or my inability to understand what they were saying to me. It was through this reflection that I came to more fully understand the meaning of the interpretive paradigm in research. Ultimately, as the researcher, I decided which words of the children to include, and which to leave out. I chose how to corral them into themes, so therefore which points would be amplified and which muted. As James argued, "the author inevitably glosses the voices of children as part of the interpretive process" (2007, p. 265). In making these decisions, I attempted to do so with integrity, driven by the enquiry I was undertaking and the honest desire to hear what children were saying (Colley, 2010), as discussed in the methodology. I ensured that all children's comments were coded (as previously described), so that the focus was not only on certain parts of the data. To aid the interpretation and to avoid confirmation bias, I also carried out numerical analysis of instances of coding alongside the qualitative investigation. Although this remains a qualitative study, the numerical analysis nonetheless adds credibility to the claims. It enabled the claims to knowledge to be tested in terms of showing which elements in the children's talk were the stronger themes in terms of frequency. This process also enable additional elements to be identified in children's talk which complicated my initial analysis and revealed ways in which children respond differentially to policy and practice.

However, it remains the case that it must be acknowledged that I was ultimately 'on the side of' the children, to use Becker's phrase referred to in the introduction (Becker, 1967, p. 239). Chase et al (2020) reflect on how standpoint ultimately shapes the knowledge generation undertaken in research and this is evident in my study. I was seeking to provide a means for the muted group of children, those most affected by the SSP policy, to become part of the debate. It Is this which underpinned my decision-making process, constantly referring back to the research questions and the data itself, to see how the children's comments spoke to the questions posed.

One of the principles of the Mosaic approach, which formed the basis for the methods used in this study, is that it aims to generate "knowledge that challenges dominant discourses about whose knowledge counts" (Clark, 2017, p. 18). Part of the ethical and moral drive of

this thesis was to create knowledge in the gap that exists about children's views and experiences of SSP-as-prime. For the work to be "worth doing" (Alderson & Morrow, 2004, p. 21) it must ultimately lead to recommendations for action as a result of the findings, for policy but also in the classroom and in teacher professional development including Initial Teacher Education.

Contribution to knowledge

This study has contributed to knowledge by focussing on the views and perceptions of children in relation to the key Government policy of SSP-as-prime. Children's voices have been attended to using an innovative combination of data gathering methods, based on a Mosaic approach. Through a small-scale, qualitative and interpretive study, it has been possible to focus on and listen to the voices of children themselves about their own experiences. This has enabled identification of some of the ways in which this messaging is being heard and embodied by children, to suggest some possible implications of these messages for the development of those children as readers, and to make recommendations to mitigate actual or potential negative consequences.

The study has principally used Bernstein's theoretical model of educational transmission (Bernstein, 1975, 1990, 2000) as a framework to analyse how the present approach to SSP-as-prime results in powerful messaging to children and their teachers about what counts in reading. The analysis also drew on the lenses of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994), to complicate and expand this narrative, and understand how some children experience SSP-as-prime differentially, although this area needs further study. Although limitations have been acknowledged in a number of respects, the study can still be considered as an important further piece of evidence to contribute to the ongoing debate. It is of particular importance because it enables those who are at the centre of the policy of SSP-as-prime – children - to be heard.

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Appendix 1 – Letter to Headteachers

University of HUDDERSFIELD
Inspiring tomorrow's professionals

February 2017

Dear [Headteacher]

I am writing to ask whether you would be willing for me to conduct some research in your school with the children who are currently in Reception, moving in to Y1 in the Autumn. The research aims to find out about children's views on phonics and about reading for pleasure. Although so much has been written and said about reading, at the moment there is still a gap in the research literature related to what young children themselves think about reading and learning to read, and my research aims to help to fill that gap.

The study would involve 5 stages:

Stage 1 (Summer Term 2017): Familiarisation phase – I would like to start by being a helper in reception class this summer on 2-3 occasions, reading with a range of children. This would mainly be to help the children feel comfortable with me as well as helping them a little with their reading.

Stage 2 (late Summer Term 2017): Introduction phase – I would read a story to the whole class and talk to them about reading and learning to read in general. This would be a session lasting about 20 minutes. In this session I would explain that I am looking for children to help me to find out more about what children think about reading and learning to read - it is not a test and not about being 'good' at reading. I would have letters ready for children to take home for permission if they think they would like to take part in the focus group research.

Stage 3 (Autumn Term 2017): Focus group phase – I would aim to carry out a two focus group sessions with the children who have volunteered to take part and been given permission, each lasting approximately 30 minutes. Children will be asked about their favourite books and have a general discussion about the books and reading, and take part in some fun activities (like sending a message to an alien). The focus groups would be in school time if possible (any time at all to suit the school).

Stage 4 (Spring Term 2018): Wider views phase - in this phase, after the main active research phase with the children, I hope to interview some teachers and parents to deepen understanding of the views of each individual child and their feelings about learning to read, and about reading for pleasure. These would be short discussions and entirely voluntary.

Stage 5 (Autumn Term 2018): Final fieldwork phase – I would hope to return to the school to discuss my findings with the children (and teachers) who took part, and see if what I am saying they said matches with what they said, or whether their views and feelings have now changed.

A few notes:

- I am a qualified, experienced primary teacher and I have a current DBS
- The timings above can all be very flexible and I would fit in with whatever times work best for the school
- No children, teachers or parents have to take part – it is all completely voluntary and people can pull out at any time, without having to give a reason
- Sadly there isn't any money for this research – I am conducting it on an individual basis for my PhD studies at the University of Huddersfield. But I am happy to give back time in kind in any way I can e.g. by helping the teachers!
- The research is not aimed at making any judgments about teaching or teachers whatsoever. It is focussed strongly on children's views and feelings about reading and learning to read as a general idea, in the context of their whole lives (not just school).
- All findings will be confidential and any dissemination or presentation, via education publications, conferences and so on will be in a completely anonymised form (several schools will be taking part). I will provide you with a summary report of the findings.

I have attached a copy of the Parent and Child Information sheet for information only at this point. I would give this out at Stage 2, inviting children to take part in the focus group sessions.

I would be really happy to come in to school to meet with you and/ or teachers and explain further if there is any aspect you would like to know more about. The research should be fun and straightforward for the children involved, and the findings will, I hope, make an important contribution to the debate about early reading.

Thank you so much for reading this and I really hope to be able to work with your school on this project!

Yours sincerely

Liz

Liz Zsargo

University of Huddersfield | Queensgate | Huddersfield | HD1 3DH

Appendix 2 – Parent and Child information sheet

Children's Views on Reading - Research Study

This leaflet is for children in YR/Y1 and their parents

This information is provided for you to decide whether you are happy for your child to take part in a study about children's views on reading, for children in Reception and Y1 at school. It is also very important that your child understands and is willing to take part, so please could you discuss the child's leaflet with them. Both you and your child then need to sign the form, if you agree.

Thank you very much for reading it and considering taking part!

About the study

The purpose of the study is to explore young children's views on reading and learning to read. There will just be three or four short sessions over next year, all carried out in small groups, taking place at school during school time. The sessions will be informal and interactive and children should enjoy taking part!

Risks, benefits and confidentiality

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with the study. The study does not focus on children's attainment or levels in reading and there are no questions related to this. It is all about how children feel about reading and the early stages of learning to read. The outcome of this study will be a report about my findings, which will form the basis of my long-term doctoral research. I also hope to publish and share the findings in an anonymised form at conferences, so that children's views are taken into account when people discuss reading. At no point will any participant or school be identifiable. I will record sessions using a voice recorder so that during each session I can focus on listening to and talking with the children. I will keep the voice recorder securely and after the study is finished I will delete the recording. I won't use the voice recording for any other purpose, and you would be very welcome to read the outcomes of the study once it is finished.

About me

I am a qualified primary teacher with almost twenty years' experience, the majority of them spent teaching Key Stage One children. I currently lecture in primary education at the University of Huddersfield, training new primary teachers. I have a full current enhanced DBS check.

Important

- You should be aware that your child can withdraw at any time, even during the session. This would have no consequences and no reason needs to be provided.
- I will explain to the children, in an age-appropriate way, what the session is all about when we start. They don't have to carry on if they don't want to, although hopefully they will enjoy it!

Child's Information Sheet

Why is the research being done?

As you know, learning to read is one of the most important things you do when you are at primary school. Everybody – parents, teachers, the people who run the country – all think it is important for you to learn to read. But so far, not many people have asked children what you think about reading and learning to read.

I'm doing a project all about what children your age think about reading. I want to find out – to do research - so that adults know more about what children like and don't like, or find easy or hard.

What will happen?

I will meet with two or more children at the same time to talk about reading, so you will always be with a friend. We will talk about reading and look at some books together. I'll also ask about the types of things you do to help you learn to read, and what you think about them. We will do a few fun activities to do with reading.

We will meet two or three times, for about half an hour each time. I will record what you say, so that I don't forget, using a special recorder (you can have a play with it so that you know what it is doing).

Do I have to take part?

You decide if you take part or not. It is completely up to you. Even if you say 'yes', you can change your mind at any time. And you can tell me, or your mum or dad or teacher, if you want to stop, or have a break. If you don't want to answer any of the questions, just say.

What do I need to do next?

If you are happy to take part, then you and your parent or guardian need both need to sign the form below and give it back to your teacher.

What if I want to know more?

If you have any questions, just ask! Mrs Liz Zsargo e.zsargo@hud.ac.uk

---

Parent's/ Guardian's consent

I have read the information and I am willing for my child to take part in this study

Name…… Signature…… Date……

Child's consent

My parent or guardian has talked about the study with me and I am willing to take part.

Name…….. Signature…… Date……

Appendix 3 – Show me how you feel - Emoticon activity

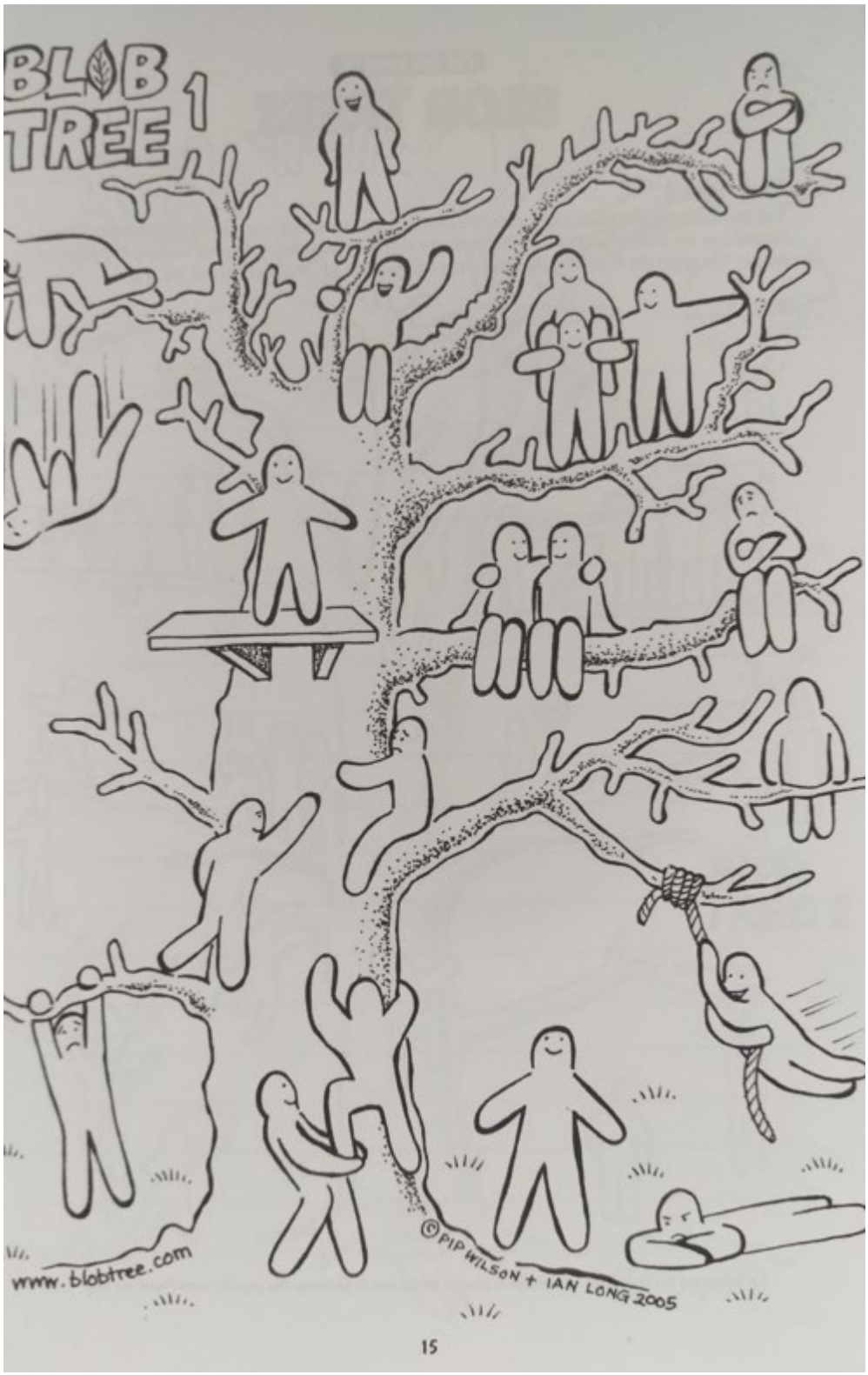
When I am reading my own books at home I feel

When I am reading my school book at home I feel

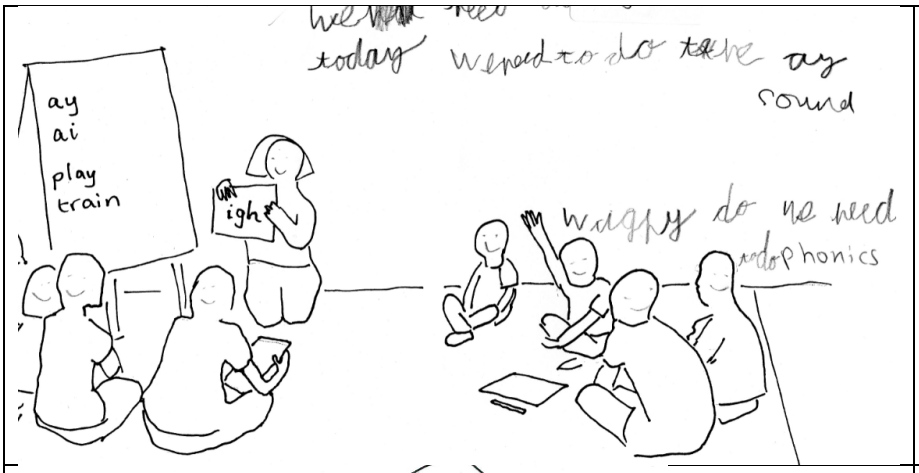
When I am reading my school book at school I feel

When I am doing phonics at school I feel

Appendix 4 – Blob tree activity



Appendix 5 – Unfinished pictures

	Phonics session
	Child reading with adult
	Guided reading session

Appendix 6 – Interview schedules

SESSION 1

Preamble

- Introduce myself and Rusty, explain what we are doing and that they can stop at any time
- Rusty is here to help, he wants to find out about what they do in school and about what they think about reading
- Demonstrate the voice recorder; invite children to try it out before setting it off
- Have a small selection of fiction & non fiction books to show -ones they are likely to know e.g. the Gruffalo, Hungry Caterpillar, Paper Bag Princess, the book I read to them, Sharks, Animal Encyclopedia.

Activity 1

- Rusty has some books here. He wants to know what you think about these books and why.
-
    - Do you know any of these books? Which one would you most like to read? Why? (ask all children to choose 1 of the books and say why)

    - Who reads at home?
    - What do you read at home?
    - Use emoticon fans – which one shows how you feel when you are reading at home? *Discuss firstly what the emoticons are and which feelings they represent & practice using*

    - Who reads at school?
    - When do you read at school?
    - What do you read at school?
    - Use emoticons – which one shows how you feel when you are reading at school?

Activity 2

- Play quick version of stuffed animal game (to pilot it) – this one loves reading at school, this one doesn't like it at all. Which one are you most like? Are you a bit like that one or a lot like that one?

Activity 3

- Blob people activity
    - *Show blob tree and discuss, look at together*
    - *How do you feel when /about reading? (choose blob person) What made you pick that one? Are you thinking about reading at home or at school? How about if you are reading at home/ school?*

    - *Do you do phonics at school? What do you do in that? Is that reading or not? How do you feel about doing phonics? (choose emoticon). What (other) reading do you do at school?*

Activity 4

- Finally ask the children to close their eyes and think about a time when they have been reading, or maybe someone was reading to them, when they felt really happy and they were really enjoying the book/ story/ reading. Think about what the reading was, where they were, if anyone else was there. Open your eyes! Can you draw a picture showing what you were remembering?

Give letter asking for them to bring their favourite book to the next session

Thank children for taking part and for all their help. If they want to, they can stay a bit longer and read the book they chose at the start.

SESSION 2:

Preamble and reminders at start

Activity 1

Looking at school reading books from a selection and any home reading books they have brought in – very open activity with choice and discussion

Activity 2

Questions - 2 stuffed animals – one positive and one negative – each child put their name card by the animal they think they are most like – then ask them to say why there have positioned their name there

Enjoyment

1. I like to read
2. I like to be read to
3. I like doing phonics

Value

1. I think reading helps me to learn
2. I think doing phonics helps me to learn

Perceived competence

1. I think I am good at reading
2. I think I am good at phonics

Activity 3

Show the children a picture of a class doing phonics What is happening here? Ask them to describe & add speech/ thought bubbles.

Activity 4 if time & children want to continue

Incomplete picture of adult and child reading – discuss, describe, add thought/speech

SESSION 3 – Return to the field

Activity 1

General discussion about what and how they read at school

- When do you read at school? (Guided reading? How does it work? What do you think about doing that?)
- What do you read?

- Who do you read with? (Reading with an adult? Reading with a buddy? Reading alone?)
- Do you take school books home and what do you do with them? (What do you think about doing that?)
- Do you still have phonics lessons? (& if so what do you think about that?)

Activity 2

Guided reading unfinished picture – as previous activities

Activity 3

Give the children back the emoticon sheet from Session 1

- Look at previous responses - how about now – same or different? Discussion

Activity 4

Rusty doesn't know how to read. Can you explain to him what he needs to do? (write instructions – children write or LZ can scribe if they prefer)

Appendix 7 – Complete transcript

Oldtown 2C 20/11/18 Emily, Anand, Jude

L do you remember we were talking about reading and about doing your phonics? Do you still do reading in school?

All: Yeah!

L What reading do you do in school now?

A Er, we do, phonics stages

L Phonics stages?

J Yeah you know like stages, Stage 1 or Stage 2

L Aah, is that your reading books?

J Yeah, I'm on Stage 8

E I'm on Stage 8!

A I don't know because my one was called no ball games and it doesn't show it

L Aah, right. Do you do guided reading

Yeah

L tell me what guided reading is, tell me about that

A it's like reading with the teacher

L reading with a teacher Anand? Sorry Emily, go on

E if you don't have a teacher you just work on a piece of paper. If you have got a teacher you read with the teacher.

J If you don't have a teacher you like go and do some wordsearch

L ok, yeah. What do you do when you do have a teacher in guided reading, what do you do then?

E You just read with the teacher

L Just you on your own?

A With the group, with your reading group

L Ah with your reading book, ok. So are you all on the same book, or do you have different books?

J We have the same book on each table

L the same book

A No

L do you have one each

E We have the same book, but all the other tables they have different kinds of books

L Right ok. Do you have one each, or do you just have one book in the middle?

E you have one each

L One each, and do you all read out at the same time, or do you read it in your head, or how does it work?

A So one person reads, you listen and also read in your mind, and then the second and the third and the fourth like that

L Ah, thank you Anand, you explained that really well. And how much do you read each?

E like about 20 pages

L 20 pages?!

A Sometimes we almost read the whole thing

L Wow. How about you Jude, when you do your guided reading?

J On Thursdays

A We're doing it on Thursdays

L On Thursdays. Right, I've got a picture for you here.

You know cos I'm trying to find out what you think about reading, and this will help me to know what you think. Is that ok?

All Yes

L so, what are they doing in this picture, can you see?

All: Reading!

L this is what's called an unfinished picture

J so that's like the teacher and that's like the people

L That's exactly right Jude yes. So that's the teacher and that's the children

E Why are they bald?

L Because it's an unfinished pictutre so they've got no hair, no eyes….

J What does unfinished picture mean?

L It means not finished, so it's not been finished. It's a half done picture, not finished off.

So what I'm going to do is give you a picture and a pencil, and I'd like you to add some more details to this picture.

J Oh I really might like to watch this, we used to watch this Art ninja

A I used to like that

L Is that right Jude? So what I want you to think about is finishing this picture off, but also what do you think people in the picture are saying? What are they thinking? I want you to try to add some speech bubbles in with what they are saying.

J Their fingers are where they are reading

A On the words. I'm going to write some words.

L Are you going to write some words in the book Anand? Great idea.

J how about let's do it like lines

A First I'm gonna draw the picture

E You've got to do the nails of them

L you can add in whatever details you like Emily. That's it Jude, I can see you drawing the lines in.

A I'm doing a football net cos I love football

J Yey me too. Even if we're not in the same class.

A I just love football.

J Can we draw around the people?

L You can, but remember rthat what I want you to do is add in things that are important, like what do you think they are saying, or putting the words in the book, things like that

J I think these are the people whose names are on the here

L Ah, is that the teacher's book with the names in?

J Yes

L right, I see Jude

J I'm just doing it in weird lines because it won't fit

L Yes it's very small isn't it, but then we know that that's names

L What do you think the teacher might be saying?

J Please do….or like, you're doing really good reading?

L you're doing really good reading? Can you put a speech bubble with the teacher saying that – you're doing really good reading?

[J adds a speech bubble with T saying ‘nice reading’]

A I’ve wrote ‘goal’

L whose saying that?

A That person there

J I do it like, putting a line next to the mouth

L you don’t really need the bubble do you, you could just do a line with the word

E Oh my gosh I’ve done it wrong.

L That’s ok, what does it say, it’s your turn?

E it’s your turn to read

L Well done Emily, ‘It’s your turn to read’ [T saying]

A I want to play my ultimate team. It’s in my FIDA squad.

J I think I’ll put a full stop there.

L ok. What have you got the teacher saying there Jude?

J Nice reading

L Nice reading. Well done. How about you Anand, what’s the teacher saying in yours?

A ‘Do not shout!’ Because he’s shouting.

L Do not shout, does your teacher sometimes say that? Oh he’s shouting, I see.

L What about you Emily, what is your teacher saying?

E ‘It’s your turn to read’.

L It’s your turn to read, thank you.

J Oh I have to do one more.

E I’m going to put this guy going ‘I like this book’

L I like this book, great.

A I just hate that picture I just drawed, I could do better than this

L Jude just do it going across his face, it’s ok, I don’t mind. Or do it on the other side of him

J Do it there?

L Yes, do it there

J I…so like he’s thinking about them…

L Yes, exactly

J [writing] I…like…

L Is that what you sometimes think when you're doing guided reading?

A how do you write don't?

L d –o-n-apostrophe – t. That's some nice joined up writing I can see there.

A [writing] I – don't – get – it. I don't want him to be bald!

L you can draw on some hair, that's fine.

A I'm drawing him [inaudible] hair

L And what's that person saying Anand?

A Which one?

L the one that you've just drawn there

A I don't get it

L I don't get it, oh

Shall I tell you what that guy is saying?

L Yes

E That guy is saying - oh, I forgot to put a full stop, there we go [she adds in]

I want to put eyes on them, cos that's not good, because they might not see the book!

J That one's actually a bit better

J He's like oh, I'm tired

L Who's saying that?

J The teacher

L The teacher's saying they're tired?

A I'm tired, I want to play on my ultimate team

L Is that what you want to do when you get home Anand?

A Yes. I want to get Jamie Vardy on it.

J What?

A Jamie Vardy

L so Jude, the one at the back there that you're just putting the eyes on, what's she saying, or thinking?

J 'I don't like this book'. That's my best D what I've ever done in my life. Cos I used to do it like that.

A In reception people write so big.

L Why does she not like the book?

J Because they've all got different books. Because this boy, these two are boys, and they're friends, but the girl -some girls have short hair but I'm just going to do long –

L So why does she not like the book – are they not all reading the same book?

J no

A I've drawn a TV and playing FIFA on it, that's what I'm doing

L Would you be doing that in guided reading? You wouldn't, would you. Remember we're doing guided reading here

A I'm drawing the smartboard actually

J I thought we were reading books

L Not this time

J Ah so it's different in year 2?

L A little bit, yes

Jude:

T – nice reading

C - I don't like this book

C – I like this book

Anand

T – do not shout

C – I don't get it

C - Goal!

Emily:

T – It is your turn to read

C – I lie this book

C – His friends were playing in a sunny place

C – I am so happy

Do you remember last time I came I was asking you some questions and you had cards with smiley faces on? So on here I've put some smiley faces and sad faces, and this shows the answers that you gave me last time. If there's a cross by it that means I didn't ask you that question. It doesn't mean you answered wrong, it just means I didn't ask you that question.

J Why did I circle all of them?

L you must have said all of them!

J Why did I think all of them?

L Sometimes you might say all of them because you might say sometimes I feel like this, and sometimes I feel like that.

…

[12:30]

L So, Jude, will you read me out the top sentence please on there?

J 'When I am reading my own books at home I feel' – happy!

L What does that mean, your own books at home? What sort of books do I mean by that?

J Because it's like, your favourite book what you like to read, that sort of thing

L Exactly. Your books that belong to you at home. So not your school books, your own books. And if you have changed your mind that is fine – you need to put a circle around whichever one you think now. So it might be the same as last time, or it might be different. So it's either do you like it? So you're happy, or you don't like it, then you circle the sad face, or if you're not sure, or you don't really like it but you don't really dislike it either, then the one in the middle

E Why are there already circles on?

L These are the answers that you gave me last time Emily, that you circled.

J [was happy, still happy] I'm still super happy!

L You still like reading your own books at home do you Jude? Anand, how about you? You still really like it?

A [was happy, still happy] Yes

L And Emily, how about you. So put a circle round with the felt tip pen.

E [was happy, still happy]

L right Anand, could you read out the next one please?

A 'When I am reading my school book at home I feel'

L so which book am I talking about there? Your school book at home.

Pause

L You know your guided reading book – do you take that home with you to read at home?

All: Yes

L Yes, so that's what that means. Your school book, when you take it home and read it at home, how do you feel then?

J What does the middle one mean?

L It means your not really keen but you don't really hate it.

J I changed my mind then

L You're in the middle are you?

L how about you Emily, which one are you going to circle? And Jude? So last time you said you didn't like it, and this time you say you really like it? How come?

J [was sad, now happy – but see also below] Because, I like reading to my brother.

L Do you read your school book to your brother?

J Yes

L Fantastic. But you didn't used to like it?

J Now I like it

[see also this section from below

J I think mine is that and that [he has now also circle the middle face]

L How come you've circled the middle one as well Jude?

[18:00]

J Because I don't – a bit don't like it, because my mum keeps telling me, my mum keeps telling to go -when I go on playstation…

L remember we're talking about reading your school book at school, so your mum's not there

J oh

L So did you mean to put the middle one?

J No

L No. So just cross that one out then.

J But I'll cross out the face!

L it's all right, it doesn't matter, as long as I understand which one you meant. Are you talking about when you're reading your school book at home? The next one up?

Ok, put the middle one there then as well. And that's because sometimes you want to go on your playstation?

J Yes] end of insert

L Anand, you've put it in the middle. How come you've put it in the middle?

A [was middle, still middle] cos I don't really like reading that much, but I like it a bit

L Ok, that's fine. So why don't you like reading your school book really, at home?

A Because it's too long for me

L Right, ok. And how about you Emily, you've put that you don't like it at all? You don't like reading your school book at home?

E [was middle, now sad] It's because I keep on forgetting doing my homework all the time. And then when I'm doing my maths test, I'm always getting like - not 10 out of 10

L right. And do you not do your reading at home? Do you forget, or do you do it?

E Sometimes I forget

L Ok. And when you do do it, do you like it or not like it?

E I like it when I don't forget it, and then when I do forget it, I get sad.

L Ok, right. Emily, could you read me out the next one, please?

E 'When I am reading my school book at school I feel'

L so this is when you're doing your guided reading, and you read your school book at school, with your teacher in your guided reading. How do you feel then?

A I feel bored. Would bored be that one?

L You feel bored - how come you feel bored?

A [was all 3, now middle and sad] Because I really want to read all of it but we have to read it with everyone.

L You have to read it with everyone?

A Yes. So which one would it be?

L Well if you feel bored that means you don't like it so would that be the sad face?

A I feel bored but not that much [puts sad and middle]

L So Jude, you really like doing that do you?

J [was all 3, now happy face]

L so Emily, you really like doing your guided reading at school? How come you like it?

E It's because, when a teacher's sitting next to me I like it, it's because they tell you who is doing it next and then it's exciting. Every time I read it it's all about magic keys and stuff!

A No it's not! it's sometimes not

L There are different stories aren't there

J I think mine is that and that [he has now also circle the middle face]

L How come you've circled the middle one as well Jude?

[18:00]

J Because I don't – a bit don't like it, because my mum keeps telling me, my mum keeps telling to go -when I go on playstation…

L remember we're talking about reading your school book at school, so your mum's not there

J oh

L So did you mean to put the middle one?

J No

L No. So just cross that one out then.

J But I'll cross out the face!

L it's all right, it doesn't matter, as long as I understand which one you meant. Are you talking about when you're reading your school book at home? The next one up? Ok, put the middle one there then instead. And that's because sometimes you want to go on your playstation?

J Yes

L Jude could you just read out the bottom one for us please?

J 'When I am doing phonics at school I feel…'

J I feel sad!

L oh do you, why do you feel sad?

J Because about my phonics books sometimes what I get, they're kind of complicated

L They're complicated? What's complicated?

J Um, I forgot [J circles sad face then crosses out, then middle face and crosses out, then finally happy face]

L Ok. Anand, you've circled round the sad [and middle] face as well, for phonics? Can you tell me why you've done those ones, the sad and the middle?

A Because sometimes I'm normal but sometimes I feel, I feel like I don't want to do it

L Why don't you want to do phonics?

A Because it takes a long time and I want to go home to play FIFA

L What kind of things do you do in phonics?

E We just learn some words like e-y

J That's what we were learning about today

A Sometimes we play games

L Sometimes games, do you like the games?

All: Yes

L Which games do you like?

J Everyone's favourite game is DJ Cow

E Yes because when you try to find the words and you find all of them….

A I changed! I changed! I changed it into a…

L That sounds fun! Some how come you put a sad face if you think it's fun?

A I've changed into everything [A now has all three circled]

J I didn't Oh I'm going to cross it out

E [middle face] Yeah I've done the middle one

A I've done all of them

L [to E] is that cos sometimes you like it and sometimes you don't?

A I've changed my mind, I've changed my mind

E No, it's just cos…

A I've done them all!

L Anand, let me listen to Emily a second

E It's because sometimes when I do phonics some people keep on shouting really loud and I'm not sure if we're supposed to shout really loud when the teacher's talking

L Why do you do phonics?

J Because it helps us learn words

E because it helps you read words

L it helps you read words?

J It helps you learn words if you like get them wrong and you've never done them before you can just, like, ask your teacher can you put it in my dictionary?

L Ah right. Is phonics the same as reading?

All: no

L or is it different from reading?

A It's different, it's way different.

L Way different? Ok, tell me why.

J Because books have got like so much words and phonics don't, because it's just a word, like igh has got three, and the other ones have two

L oh igh has three letters in it?

J Yes, and one's an abcd, they've all just got one letter, but if they're together like in a mat of them, they might be with the capital ones like that

L right, Go on Anand

A I changed mine to put all of them

L so why have you put that for phonics, all of them?

A Because when we play the games it's fun for me

L ok – but then there's other bits that you don't like?

A Yes

L ok

L right I've got one more thing. What I'd like you to do is have a go at writing some instructions for Rusty to tell him how to read. Do you think you can do that?

So there's no right answer, I'm not looking for a particular thing for you to write, you have to think if you're going to tell Rusty how to read, what does he need to know about reading? Give him some instructions, tell him what to do, because he doesn't know how to read.

So do it in your own mind, so everybody writes what they think.

J how old is rusty?

L Oh he's quite old

J I don't know what I'm going to put

L so if you're reading Jude, what do you actually do when you're reading? What do you need to tell Rusty to do?

J Erm…try again?

L Try what? What does he need to do?

J And read?

A How much do we write?

L As much as you want to

L so how do you read Jude? If you have some words on here, so Rusty is looking at those and he doesn't know how to read them. What does he need to do?

A Sound out them

J Help him?

L That's maybe what you would do, but what does he need to do, to read? What's he got to look at, what's he got to do?

J Look at the pictures?

L Ok, so write that down if that's what you think he should do

E I've done everything wrong

L Have you? Let me see. Oh is that because you're writing about writing not reading?

E Yes

L Oh, you can turn over if you like, but it's fine

…

L How do you read? What do you need to do?

Anand

Sound out the wurd. Consentrate when your are reading.

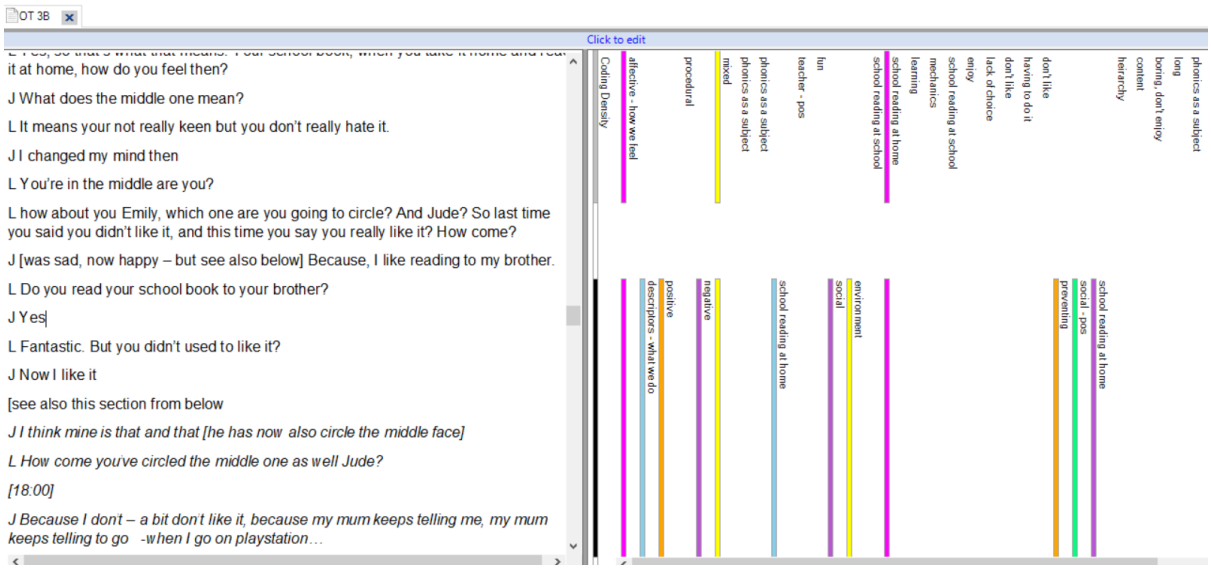
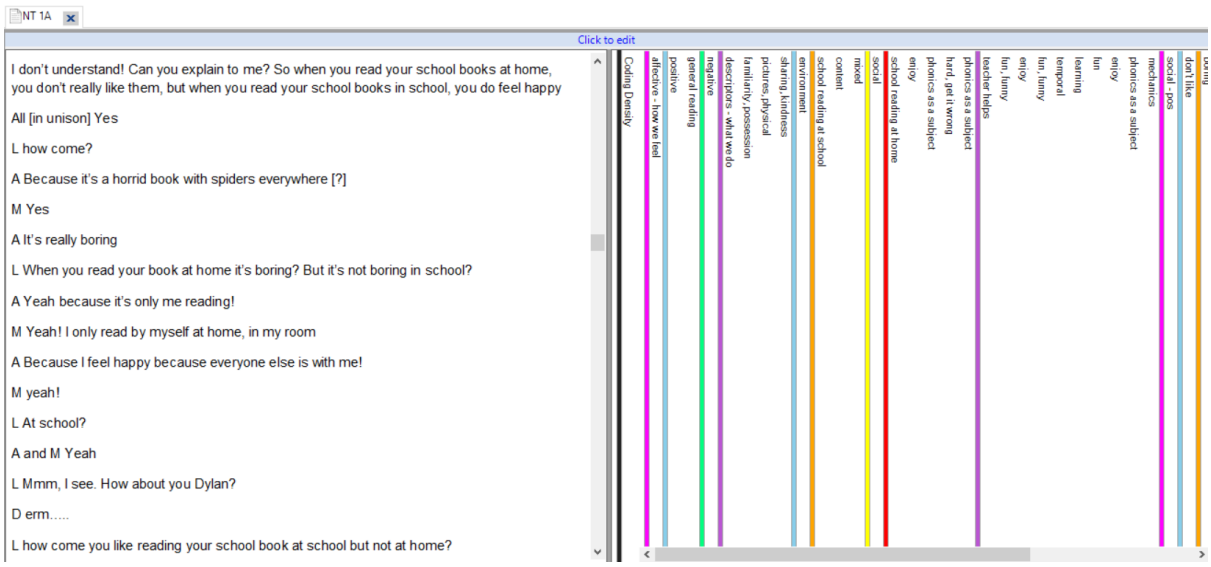
Jude

Rusty can look at the pichers

Rusty trys.

Emily

You need to get a book and then read the title then you flip a page and if you see leters you read it if you see a dot you stop reading and then you read again

END

Appendix 8 – Example coded extracts