

## **THE ROSE REPORT AND PHONICS: A TEACHER EDUCATION PERSPECTIVE**

### **Report of UCET Seminar**

#### ***Introduction***

The seminar was held in London on 11<sup>th</sup> September, 2007, and was chaired by James Rogers, UCET's Executive Director. The keynote speakers were Professor Kathy Hall of University College Cork and Professor Morag Stuart of the London Institute of Education. The keynote addresses were followed by group discussion in which questions were formulated for a subsequent question-and-answer session. On the panel for that session the two keynote speakers were joined by Professor Rhona Stainthorpe, University of Reading, Professor Peter Bryant, visiting Professor at Oxford Brookes University and formerly of the University of Oxford, and Sally Yates, Newman University College, and Vice-chair of UCET. The panel discussion was chaired by Professor Gordon Kirk, UCET's Academic Secretary. UCET is very grateful to the speakers for contributing to this report and for allowing their PowerPoint presentations to be placed on the UCET website.

The seminar was attended by representatives from UCET institutions and from a number of national agencies including Ofsted, the TDA, and the National Literacy Strategy. It was appreciated that Sir Jim Rose himself was able to attend and participate.

#### ***Opening remarks***

Welcoming participants, James Rogers provided the background to the seminar. Its genesis was a discussion at the UCET Executive Committee about the audit earlier this year into how primary ITE programmes were being adjusted to reflect the findings of Sir Jim Rose's report. UCET had major concerns about the tone and content of the audit originally proposed by Lord Adonis in late 2006. We did not think that it was appropriate, for a whole host of reasons, for a Government minister to demand from independent and autonomous HE institutions information, over and above that required by regulatory bodies, about the courses they run. We also had doubts about the protocol of writing to Vice-Chancellors and the effectiveness of what such an approach would be.

Fortunately, good counsel prevailed and the request was amended in such a way that UCET could not only acquiesce, but could encourage members – in the light of reassurances given about accreditation and quality ratings – to respond in a constructive and informative way. It is to the sector's credit that they did. All relevant HEIs responded and did so constructively, demonstrating that they were not only taking account of the report in order to comply with the formal ITE requirement, but went beyond that and engaged their students in a constructive and academically critical way. However, the UCET Executive wished to go further and to give the membership an opportunity to discuss and delve down, from an academic perspective, into the research base of synthetic phonics. Hence the seminar: he expressed the hope that it would encourage a fruitful exchange on the differing perspectives on synthetic phonics and that the discussion would proceed in a collegial way.

### ***Keynote Address 1: Rose in Context: the Teaching of Reading in Initial Teacher Education, Professor Kathy Hall***

The purpose of the presentation was to seek locate the recommendations of the Rose Report in a broader social and pedagogic context. It began by noting the contemporary context of teacher preparation and then went on to consider the broad aspects of what constitutes reading pedagogy and what influences reading achievement. To that end, it considered the teacher and school practices that research has shown to be highly effective in enabling pupils to participate fully in their learning and to achieve well in literacy. Debates in literacy, it was maintained, can be understood with reference to different ways of thinking about learning, pedagogy and research, and the presentation will outlined two different theoretical positions. Key messages included the following: learning to read is a complex process that requires much competence; the beginner reader and the student teacher benefit tremendously from teachers/tutors/lecturers/mentors who understand the reading process, assessment, and different approaches to developing reading; the beginner reader and the student teacher benefit also from being in a school where headteachers understand the reading process as well as the process of professional learning where the right balance is obtained between teacher autonomy and creativity in relation to pedagogy on the one hand, and school evaluation and monitoring of practice on the other.

### ***Keynote Address 2: The Rose Report and its Research Base Professor Morag Stuart***

Aspect 1 of the remit of the Rose Review posed this question: What best practice should be expected in the teaching of early reading and synthetic phonics? In addressing that question, the Review invoked an extensive range of evidence, including research on the teaching of reading, written and oral accounts of effective practice, HMI survey, Ofsted reports and visits by the review team.

Four recommendations were made in relation to Aspect I of the remit:

- The forthcoming EYFS and the renewed Primary National Strategy Framework for teaching literacy should provide, as a priority, clear guidance on developing children's speaking and listening skills
- High quality, systematic phonics work as defined by the review should be taught discretely. The knowledge, skills and understanding that constitute high quality phonic work should be taught as the prime approach in learning to decode (to read) and encode (to write/spell) print.
- Phonic work should be set within a broad and rich language curriculum that takes full account of developing the four interdependent strands of language: speaking, listening, reading and writing and enlarging children's stock of words.
- The Primary National Strategy should continue to exemplify "quality first teaching", showing how robust assessment of children's learning secures progression in phonic work and how literacy is developed across the curriculum from the Foundation Stage onwards.

Two issues raised in the Rose Review have prove controversial issues in some quarters:

- The recommendation (in the annex to the review) that reliance on the "Searchlights" model of reading should give way to the principles embodied in the *Simple View of Reading*.

- The recommendation that systematic phonics teaching should conform to the major principles implemented in what has become known as “synthetic” phonics.

What does the Simple View imply? The Simple View proposes that there are two sets of abilities that contribute to reading: word recognition abilities (the ability to read and understand the words on the page) and language comprehension ability (the ability to understand language we hear and language we read). Evidence for this view is provided in the Annex to the Rose Review. These two sets of abilities are seen as continuous dimensions: people can vary independently on each. It is a fully interactive model but one which delineates clearly the two different dimensions of reading. This clear differentiation (which is in the teacher’s mind for pedagogic purposes, not the child’s mind) provides a conceptual framework that (a) better allows teachers to specify their teaching objectives and engage children in relevant activities to foster development towards achieving the corresponding learning objectives; (b) encourages teachers not necessarily to expect that the children they teach will show equal performance or progress in each dimension; (c) offers the possibility of separately assessing performance and progress in each dimension, to identify learning needs and guide further teaching; (d) makes explicit to teachers that different kinds of teaching are needed to develop word recognition skills from those that are needed to foster the comprehension of written and spoken language; and (e) emphasizes the need for teachers to be taught about and to understand the complex cognitive processes involved in the development of both accurate word recognition skills and of language comprehension. The simple view offers a useful framework within which the complexities in each dimension of reading and the complex interactions between the two dimensions can be clearly addressed and better understood.

Turning to the second controversial issue, there is a need to consider how “phonics” is to be situated within the Simple View. Phonic knowledge is essential to developing word recognition skills. Phonics teaching therefore is concerned with the word recognition dimension of reading. There are three questions to be considered:

- What do we know about skilled word recognition – about the processes involved in reading and understanding the words on the page?
- What do we know about how these processes develop?
- What is the role of phonic knowledge (and hence, phonics teaching) in their development?

The remainder of the presentation was devoted to a detailed examination of the research relating to these three questions. This research evidence and the pedagogic implications could usefully inform Initial Teacher Training at all levels. With regard to the teaching of phonics, the Rose Review acknowledged that, while “findings from different research programmes are sometimes contradictory or inconclusive” teachers and others “must take decisions based on as much firm evidence as is available from a range of sources at the time, especially from replicable and sustained best practice”. The research base of the Rose Review recommendation for systematic “synthetic” phonics teaching of grapheme-phoneme correspondences (GPCs), and phoneme segmentation and blending skills acknowledged the research evidence that such teaching is at least as effective as any other method of systematic phonics teaching; it also drew on observations of current successful phonics teaching in UK schools, which was characterised by systematic teaching of GPC rules, and phoneme segmentation and blending, directly providing children with knowledge and skills known to be used by skilled readers

Phonics is a means to an end, crucial to developing word reading skills. However, this is only the starting point for reading, a very small part of what has to be developed, taught and learned. If we get the word reading teaching right quickly, that frees us up to develop all the other manifold complexities involved in reading texts for pleasure and purpose, and it frees children up to devote their cognitive capacities to these more difficult aspects of reading.

It has to be noted that the agenda for teacher training outlined in the Rose Review is designed to make sure that teachers are properly equipped with the knowledge they need to make truly professional judgements about their own teaching practice and goes beyond the National reading panel report in the USA which recommended only that teachers should be provided with knowledge to enable them to determine which teaching programmes are based on strong evidence.

The presentation concluded by showing that, contrary to some commentaries, the Rose Review and the National Reading Panel in the USA adopted broadly comparable stances on key aspects of the teaching of reading.

### **Panel Discussion**

Seminar participants were invited to divide into groups and identify one question per group to be put to the panel.

#### ***Question 1: What changes in assessment can be expected with the introduction of the Simple View of Reading?***

#### **Panel responses:**

- Changes will be required. For example, one measure of reading in Key-stage 1 should relate to single-word reading, as pupils should be relatively advanced in this by the end of Key-stage 1.
- Ability in regard to synthetic phonics should be assessed and measured alongside other examples of reading proficiency. Normative as well as the summative assessment provided through SATs should be conducted.
- ITE (and subsequent PPD) programmes should, if possible, cover different forms of assessment and what they entail and what the research base for each is.
- Assessment of single-word reading does need to take place. But care should be taken to ensure that it is not only single words that form the basis of this assessment. Comprehension should also be covered.
- What is assessed will determine what is taught and how it is taught. Agreement should, therefore, be reached on the latter before models of assessment are set. Assessment must not be allowed to force teaching into narrowly constrained areas. Teachers should, in most cases, know which pupils are able to de-code effectively and assessment practices should vary according to the stage of development of the child concerned.
- What can be expected of children in regards normative assessment will vary according to a number of factors such as location, social composition of the school concerned?

#### ***Question 2: There is a danger that all children will be taught in the same way at the same time with insufficient account taken of their particular needs. What then is the role of ITE?***

## Panel responses:

- The Simple View of Reading allows for an understanding of such issues and complexities. Children adept at de-coding can be given a rich diet of literature, while others will require more focused teaching in the basics. Professionally informed and targeted assessment will allow such needs to be identified and addressed.
- The Simple View of Reading can allow differentiated assessment to take place. But, in addition to research informed by psychology, consideration should also be given to socio-economic factors and the diverse prior experience of students. Schools should also all have experts/specialists in English and reading and not just “subject managers” in English.
- Reading specialists are required in all schools. In fact, all Key-stage 1 and 2 teachers should have strength in reading, while all those teaching Key-stage 3 should have a good knowledge of reading development (although this could be cross-curricular rather than based solely in English departments).
- While the Simple View of Reading might allow for some variation in assessment practices, sight should not be lost of other ways in which children can learn to read.
- Assessment should be based, in part, on a discursive, prose-based analysis of what different children are able to do with texts in different contexts. Teachers should not rely solely on SATs-type assessment methodologies. Categories with which to judge progress are required, but learning pathways should be allowed to differ. The same assessment path does not need to be followed by all.

The questioners then expressed concern that Newly Qualified Teachers might have little option but to go into school and apply the Simple View of Reading in the same way to all pupils. It was also asked how the value of differential assessment could be squared with the existence of an apparent wealth of evidence pointing to the pre-eminence of one teaching approach. In response, however, it was pointed out that the Simple View of Reading could allow for a wide range of differentiated teaching practices and synthetic phonics is a time-limited route for the teaching of early reading that can be applied effectively to all young children.

***Question 3: There appears to be a tension between the way in which synthetic phonics is presented in the Rose Report and the way it has been interpreted and described by the media and by politicians. How, therefore, do we ensure that synthetic phonics remains part of a broad and balanced curriculum?***

## Panel responses:

- Teacher education, in partnership with schools, should have a role in making sure that the Rose Report is correctly interpreted.
- Primary National Strategy tools and advice should help to ensure that the Rose recommendations are properly interpreted. But narrow and politically motivated interpretations should be guarded against.
- Care must be taken not to focus on one feature at the expense of all others. Politics aside, the evidence does suggest that teachers are able to mediate policy programmes and initiatives, and that teachers can have far more impact on pupils learning than central policies. The effectiveness with which teachers apply policies is, therefore, of crucial importance.
- ITE institutions are required, by statute, to ensure that NQTs are able to deliver statutory procedures and policies. One way that ITE providers can help to ensure that teachers want to remain in the profession is to enable them to make sensible and informed

decisions in response to externally imposed policies and procedures and not simply accept them as they are portrayed in the media.

- NQTs must have the skills to critically evaluate, and go beyond textbooks and policy statements to undertake the critical analysis of official and other reports and evidence. The fostering of such critical analysis should begin during ITE and extend into CPD and postgraduate professional development.
- There is a real danger of throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Synthetic phonics has traditionally been associated with an attack on other methods of learning to read, when in fact strategies can be a good route into achieving phonological knowledge.
- All recommendations and policy initiatives are subject to interpretation. What matters is who holds that power of interpretation. Teacher educators clearly have a locus in this task. A “policy literacy” as well as a “policy on literacy” might be required.

It was then suggested, from the floor, that the Rose Report acknowledges that other methods are appropriate once the groundwork had been laid by the use of synthetic phonics, and that teachers do indeed require the skills to make informed and professional choices. Teacher educators, and those responsible for the training and development of teaching assistants and other educators, have a key role to play in cultivating these capabilities. It was also suggested that, while teachers did need to be experts in the way the Rose report suggests, there were potential pitfalls resulting from the fact that exclusively synthetic phonics programmes might be easier to audit than more broad-based approaches. Some doubt was also expressed about the extent to which the Rose recommendations did in fact allow for a variety of teaching approaches (at least during the initial stages), although it was acknowledged that synthetic phonics was an approach that was time-limited.

***Question 4: What, in the context of the Rose report, is a “broad and rich language curriculum”?***

**Panel responses:**

- It will depend on the age and stage of development of the children concerned. For pre-school and Key-stage 1 children, it would be a curriculum designed to facilitate the development of a vocabulary and syntactic and narrative skills. Research shows that, particularly for younger children, the impact they receive from teachers and the curriculum has a significant impact on their language development.
- One strength of the Simple View of Reading is that it stresses comprehension, which can be encouraged in a language rich environment. Children like to make inferences from plots. Morphemes are hugely important in reading, and it is possible to encourage children’s knowledge of the morphological structure of words and phrases. This should be stressed alongside the importance of synthetic phonics.
- The playfulness of language is indeed important. Children do learn from it.
- The right balance needs to be struck between skills and context. A “broad and rich” curriculum might mean developing the whole curriculum, although with English as a subject still having a role. The definition of “literate” might also need to be considered. UNESCO, for example, defines “literate” in the context of being able to function in the society concerned. In the UK, this will include the context of texting, chatrooms etc.
- A “broad and rich” curriculum will enrich children’s life in the here and now, and not only in the future. Children must be able to participate fully in the society in which they live.

It was suggested, from the floor, that a distinction needed to be drawn between oral and textual language skills. The two were said to be separate, and the latter did not simply

represent the former written down. Did the Rose Report do sufficient justice to this distinction?

**Question 5: How can, in the context of very intense ITE programmes, ITE providers ensure that NQTs know all they need to about the teaching of early reading?**

**Panel responses:**

- PGCE programmes should last for two years.
- ITE should lay foundations that can be built on through postgraduate professional development.
- ITE providers do an extremely good job, given the statutory, regulatory and time constraints under which they work.
- Schools, in partnership with ITE, can provide pupils with rich experiences through school trips, drama productions etc that can stimulate an interest in the wider world and, through that, an interest in language.

**Conclusion**

James Rogers thanked the keynote speakers and panel members for their contribution to a stimulating day. He also thanked all present for their participation and expressed the hope that the exchanges during the day would form part of a continuing professional debate on the vitally important work involved in the teaching of reading.

Gordon Kirk  
Academic Secretary

28<sup>th</sup> September, 2007

*Chair*  
Professor Michael Totterdell, BA, PGCE, MA, MID, FInstAM, FRSA  
*Executive Director*  
James Rogers, MA, FRSA  
*Honorary Life-President*  
Mary J Russell, MBE, DEd, DLitt

Whittington House  
19-30 Alfred Place  
London WC1E 7EA  
T: 020 7580 8000  
F: 020 7323 0577  
E: gordon.kirk8@btopenworld.com  
W: www.ucet.ac.uk