The impact of the 2021 Autumn Phonics Screening Check on teaching and learning with a focus on reading for pleasure. A small-scale case study in an English primary school

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The impact of the 2021 Autumn Phonics Screening Check on teaching and learning with a focus on reading for pleasure. A small-scale case study in an English primary school.

By Rachel Sankey

Word count: 11,993 words
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Abstract

This study explores how an English primary school adapts pedagogy in preparation for the Phonics Screening Check, particularly in the unusual circumstances of the postponed 2020 and 2021 Checks. Arguably, heavy emphasis on phonics in the reading curriculum is a result of the Check and government guidance. Impacts on reading for pleasure can be wide and varying. But, concerns have been raised regarding affects assessments, such as the Check, have on learner reading identity, agency and enjoyment. This small-scale case study agrees with generalised findings of distorted perceptions advocating reading without meaning and phonics as a means of supporting writing.

Word count Abstract: 100 words
Chapter 1: Introduction

Nationally evidence suggests declining attitudes amongst children towards reading (Department for Education, 2012a, p. 4; Clark and Picton, 2021). I will be focusing on whether assessment preparations and post-Phonics Screening Check teaching foster or hinder reading for pleasure.

Although there is consensus about the value of being a life-long reader, how reading is assessed has been consistently debated (Bew, 2011; Department for Education, 2017a; Education Commons Select Committee, 2017; Rose 2006, 2009). This study investigates the impact of the 2020 and 2021 Autumn Phonics Screening Checks (otherwise referred to as the Phonics Check or simply the Check, terms used interchangeably here) on teaching and learning in a 3-form entry suburban English primary school. The Check is a national assessment of decoding and blending using synthetic phonics (the relationship between letters and sounds). It is usually carried out during June of Year 1 (learners aged 5 and 6). However, due to Covid-19 disruptions, the 2020 and 2021 Checks were postponed to the Autumn term of Year 2 (learners aged 6 and 7).

Teaching children to read is a fundamental aim in early primary education (Bradbury and Wyse, 2022, p. 1). In short, reading is vital for learners’ cognitive development (Sullivan and Brown, 2015). It equips them with the ability to access other areas of the curriculum, supports them in their progression to secondary school and is associated with profitable employment outcomes (Castles, Rastle and Nation, 2018). Topping et al. (2003) concluded the 2000 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) study showed reading could mitigate the effects of socio-economic status. Whilst there is consensus about the value of being a reader, there is no agreement on the best approaches to its teaching and assessment (Carter, 2020a, p. 49). Reading is held in high esteem and is a way in which the quality of education is measured (Bradbury and Wyse, 2022, p. 2) with schools being held accountable for learner progress. The measurement of progress is often judged through Phonics Check outcomes and scores in Standardised Attainment Tests (SATs) completed at the end of each Key Stage (in Years 2 and 6). Parents/carers, Ofsted, local councils etc. can use this test data to inform their judgements of schools.
The Check has contributed to stronger emphasis on phonics as part of the teaching of early reading. Policy changes have resulted in adaptations to pedagogy including separation of phonics from other literacy activities, attainment grouping and reliance on phonics schemes, all arguably restraining teacher agency and impacting learner identity. However, England’s 2016 result in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study, (PIRLS), shows success in approaches to reading teaching with England placed tenth out of 50 countries. Therefore, although reading is decreasing in favour amongst children in England, they are performing better in assessments (Department for Education, 2012a, p. 4; Clark and Picton, 2021).

The value of reading for pleasure could be judged as unmeasurable. Reading to inform, inspire and entertain holds greatest value when not enforced but, completed for oneself with a bearing on background, interests, values, beliefs and aspirations (Cremin, 2007, p. 1). Reading that is forced in a mechanical way and formally assessed could have the reverse effect, with preoccupations on form rather than substance. The major purpose may become satisfying the demands of others, passing tests and meeting teacher or parent/carer expectations (Woods, 2001, p. 74-5; Cremin, 2007, p. 1).

I continue to be drawn to papers outlining the impact of assessments on learner and teacher identity and the curriculum. Also, I am conflicted about the value of ‘high-stakes’ assessments to young learners. This study aims to understand the impact of the Phonics Check on the processes and practices of the learning and teaching of reading and whether this fosters reading for pleasure (Carter, 2020a, p. 49). I endeavoured to investigate impact on meso and micro levels (year group, teachers, support staff, individual learners and parent/carers).

This is a small-scale case study aiming to answer the research question: What impact did the 2020 and 2021 Autumn Phonics Screening Checks have on the teaching and learning of reading with a focus on reading for pleasure? With sub questions: Within the setting, how is pedagogy affected by the Phonics Screening Check? In which ways do leadership, teachers, support staff and parents/carers promote reading and reading for pleasure? Do learners identify any changes in reading lessons following Checks? How do learners value reading and reading for pleasure?

**Word count Chapter 1:** 736 words
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Developments in the teaching of early reading and assessment

The teaching of reading has long been debated. A seminal text was Jean Chall’s (1983) book ‘Learning to Read: The Great Debate’ (first published in the 1960s). Chall (1983) described opposition between ‘bottom-up’ approaches, prioritising teaching the alphabetic code, and ‘top-down’ approaches, placing greater emphasis on meaning and comprehension (Bradbury and Wyse, 2022, p. 8). Bradbury and Wyse (2022, p. 1) suggest the introduction of the Phonics Screening Check and promotion of systematic synthetic phonics led to early reading teaching practices in English primary schools altering significantly “for the first time in modern history”.

Previously, children were taught to read learning the relationships between phonemes (sounds) and letters, alongside teaching whole texts to promote comprehension skills, identifying text structures, activating prior concept knowledge and building meanings of unfamiliar words (Daskalovska, 2018; Campbell, 2021, p. 757). However, a survey by UCL’s Faculty of Education and Society reported synthetic phonics becoming the main approach (UCL, 2021). It is suggested the pivotal turning point was Sir Jim Rose’s 2006 report ‘Independent review of teaching early reading’ which outlined phonics should be taught “discretely” (Bradbury and Wyse, 2022, p. 8). Knowledge of systematic synthetic phonics is now a key component of National Curriculum requirements and part of the Teachers’ Standards (Department for Education, 2011, 2014a; Darnell et al., 2017, p. 506; Carter, 2020b, p. 600).

Introduced in 2012, the statutory Phonics Check reflects current emphasis on teaching early reading through systematic synthetic phonics (Darnell et al., 2017). It involves 40 phonetically decodable words (20 real words and 20 pseudo (non-real or ‘alien’) words). Year 1 learners must read 32 or more correctly to pass, those who do not are retested in Year 2. Rather than testing reading in the fullest sense (through comprehension, fluency etc.), the Check assesses whether learners’ phonics knowledge is at age-related expectations (Department for Education, 2010; Darnell et al., 2017, p. 505). Critics question its reliability and appropriateness, although advocates argue it is valuable for measuring progress (Carter,
The Department for Education states it provides a “progress check”, identifying learners requiring extra support (Dombey, 2011, p. 26). Although the Check is described as a ‘light-touch’ assessment (Department for Education, 2014b), there are consequences for schools if expected standards are not met (Department for Education, 2012b; Lingard et al., 2013), placing pressure on them to adapt pedagogy to suit the assessment’s requirements (Robert-Holmes, 2015; Darnell et al., 2017, p. 524).

The most recent PIRLS shows England’s reading attainment has improved. England’s average performance dropped to 539 in 2006, rose to 552 in 2011 and in 2016 learners achieved 559, their highest average score (Department for Education, 2017b). Learners are aged 10 when completing PIRLS. The 2016 cohort was the first to complete the Phonics Check. However, the Department of Education funded evaluation concluded it “did not find any evidence of improvements in pupils’ literacy performance, or in progress, that could be clearly attributed to the introduction of the Phonics Screening Check” (Carter, 2020a, p. 49; Walker et al., 2015).

Assessment can have positive and negative impacts on learner experience. In Buckingham and Wheldall’s (2020) article ‘Why all states and territories should follow South Australia’s lead and introduce the Year 1 Phonics Check’ they state learners enjoyed completing the Check. Teachers and leaders involved were of the opinion all learners responded positively, including struggling readers, and that they were engaged and interested. There were no reports of anxiety or stress and teachers “universally” commented learners “loved the one-to-one time with the teacher” (Buckingham and Wheldall’s, 2020).

Schweisfurth (2015, p. 264) suggests assessments need to be meaningful to improve learning. Sahlberg (2012, p. 23) proposes the value of tests depend on whether they “positively affect student learning, not whether [they] increase student scores”. However, More Than a Score (2020) notes the expectation to increase Phonics Check scores each year can result in “setting pupils for phonics as early as nursery”. Reay and Wiliam (1999, p. 345-6) discuss how children's identifications as learners are constructed through assessments and their judgement of success or failure is based on how their performance in assessments is ascribed. Therefore, statutory assessments could have lasting effects on self-worth and render learners afraid of failure or trying new things.
2.2 Phonics and Reading Comprehension

The Rose (2006, p. 8) Review defines reading as “the skill of word recognition combined with language comprehension”. However, the ‘simple view of reading’ framework advocated in the report separates decoding and comprehension. Cremin (2007, p. 9) argues this could focus pedagogy on reading words using taught sounds without regard for the texts meaning.

There are many arguments favouring systematic synthetic phonics and its value in teaching early reading (Gibbs, 2022; Rose, 2006). However, the Check has proved controversial due to the questioned efficacy of pseudo-words and it’s potential to narrow curriculum focus (Clark, and Glazzard, 2018). The contradiction between literacy as a means of communication and the teaching of pseudo words is evident in the voices of teachers in Carter’s (2020b, p. 604) study. Emphasis on basic skills at the exclusion of more comprehensive reading exercises may devalue the complex link between decoding and meaning and ignores the importance of vocabulary knowledge when decoding.

Chall (1983) suggests a differentiation between teaching phonics and teaching wider reading (comprehension etc.) is part of a linear approach and Rose (2006) states the skills of reading precede their application. Carter (2020a, p. 56) acknowledged her research began from the starting point of phonics as an essential, but not sufficient, tool in ensuring children develop as life-long readers. Studies of the brain show reading is a complex, multi-stranded processing activity (Wolf, 2008). To make this complex process familiar, children need to read text. They must engage with the written word and make meaning from it, so the act of word identification becomes automatic (Dombey, 2011, p. 25). Literacy learning involves reading continuous text, not just letters, sounds or words in isolation. This requires the integration of many skills and behaviours essential for meaningful communication. Phonics in insolation cannot deliver the pronunciation of homographs (e.g. read, read or minute, minute). If learners are to recognise such words fluently, they must make use of context cues (Dombey, 2011, p. 25).

Many studies note differentiation by teachers and learners between phonics teaching and its application in reading (Bradbury, 2018; Carter, 2020a; Carter, 2020b; Clark and Glazzard, 2018). Bradbury (2018, p. 545) suggests this is a new phenomenon, driven by the Phonics
Check. Carter (2020b, p. 606) recognised a need to understand phonics is not a discrete subject. In focus group interviews, Carter (2020a, p. 52-4) reported learners viewing phonics as a subject disconnected from reading, with its own technical jargon, supporting spelling and writing.

I will be exploring whether this separation of phonics and reading occurs within the case study setting. I am also keen to investigate Bradbury’s (2018, p. 545) suggestion that an emphasis on phonics in Key Stage 1, in part because of the Check, has led to reading for pleasure and meaning losing its power. Undoubtedly, phonics is an important part of teaching early reading. However, when taught in domination, distinct from other aspects of literacy and isolated from whole texts, reading with comprehension and for pleasure may suffer. Explicit literacy teaching is at times useful and necessary but, a focus on word recognition first, then comprehension, may hinder learners becoming affectively involved and making connections (Cremin, 2007, p. 9).

2.3 Teacher Agency

Teachers are often conflicted by performativity, organising their practice and pedagogy in accordance with targets (e.g. assessment outcomes) (Ball, 2003, p. 215). This may constrain teacher agency and conflict teacher identity. Consequently, this can affect learner agency and identity (Reay and Wiliam, 1999). Ball (2003, p. 215) discusses how performativity provides opportunities to outline successes but, may also challenge personal values, motivations and, ultimately, the love of learning. Increasing effort and time spent on core tasks are offset by increasing effort and time devoted to accountability (Ball, 2003, p. 220). Thus, teachers may feel positioned as unwilling agents in a complex policy context (Bradbury, 2018, p. 551). Arguably, teaching should be an improvisational activity, with teacher’s flexibility and creativity allowing them to meet the needs of individual learners (Milosovic, 2007, p. 29).

Assessment has substantial impact on goals and pedagogy, with professionals adopting practices deemed most ‘effective’ for high-stakes tests (Bradbury, 2018, p. 551). Many schools have turned to phonics schemes to aid their teaching, following practices considered
successful in meeting and maintaining high scores in the Check (Milosovic, 2007, p. 28).

Arguably, using a scheme fosters the belief that the process of learning to read is identical for every learner. In Bradbury’s (2018, p. 548) study ‘The impact of the Phonics Screening Check on grouping by ability: A ‘necessary evil’ amid the policy storm’, she suggests the Check drives pedagogy, even when teachers are conscious it may not be “what’s best” for learners. According to Moss, (2017, p. 62), this accountability agenda has led to distortion of the curriculum with assessment tools overpowering teacher agency and becoming the curriculum. In her study, Carter (2020b, p. 593-5) comments teachers were using the Check as objectives for teaching, for example, teaching pseudo words rather using them as assessment tools. Teachers discussed how they altered teaching in light of the Check, quickening the pace for lower-attaining readers and slowing it for higher-attainers (they may be beyond decoding but fluency in reading might not reflect positively in their Check score) (Carter, 2020b, p. 606). With this in mind, Bradbury (2018, p. 540) questions the role of the Check in identifying learners struggling with phonics. These practices reflect Ball’s (2013) identification of education policy implementation bringing about damaging practices which nonetheless satisfy performance requirements.

Clark and Glazzard (2018) reported on an independent survey of head teachers, teachers and parents which sought views on the impact of the Check. Responses from all groups suggested the Check was neither useful nor effective (Carter, 2020a, p. 49, p. 49). More recently, in the UCL (2022) survey of 936 teachers, all but one commented unfavourably on the test. Carter’s study (2020b, p. 599-600) reported whilst teachers recognised the important role of phonics in learning to read, other approaches were sometimes required. In the Rose (2006) Report, best practice in teaching reading is described as formalised in design but taught creatively, with due regard for individual differences (Cremin, 2007, p. 9). Arguably the Check does not allow for this, contradicting strives for responsive, learner-centred teaching. Current practices could be seen as narrowing the curriculum by following Government recommended phonics schemes and not allowing teacher agency, or the encouragement of reading for pleasure (UCL, 2022).

Attainment-based grouping is strongly linked to the assessment regime in English primary schools and commonly practiced in the teaching of reading (Bradbury, 2018, p. 542). Although literature on grouping by ‘ability’ is extensive, there is little on the specifics of
phonics grouping, largely because this is a new phenomenon resulting from the introduction of the Check (Bradbury, 2018, p. 544). This resurgence is counter to considerable research suggesting little overall benefit in terms of student outcomes (Taylor et al., 2017, p. 328; Campbell, 2015; Bradbury, 2018, p. 542). Like assessment, grouping can have profound effects on learner identity. Learners may distinguish themselves in terms of group identifiers, limiting their academic self-concept (Marks, 2013, p. 35; Bradbury, 2018, p. 543). Labelling theory (Becker, 1963) is also relevant when considering grouping. Teachers may attribute ‘labels’ to learners in terms of perceived attainment which can limit expectations of potential progress and result in a self-fulfilling prophecy. Dombey (2011, p. 29) describes how learners in “lower attaining” phonics groups tend to stay in them going over the same phonic ground and falling further behind peers in other subjects.

Within the case study school, learners are grouped in phases based on half termly assessments (Years 1 and 2, 3 and 4, 5 and 6) for phonics or reading lessons. In preparation for the 2021 Check, 41% of Year 2 were given daily one-to-one phonics interventions and 18% twice daily, disrupting wider curriculum learning. Also, fluent readers continued to be taught phonics, rather than progressing to reading lessons, to ensure they completed the Check’s pseudo ‘alien’ words. Post-Check, curriculum objectives prioritised answering Year 2 ‘SATs-style’ questions, potentially limiting learner preference and restricting reading for pleasure.

2.4 Reading for Pleasure

The term ‘reading for pleasure’ is not used consistently within educational discourse (Reedy and Carvalho, 2021, p. 135). The purpose of a person’s reading is important because it drives their motivation and enjoyment (Clark and Rumbold, 2006). When children read for pleasure, we must acknowledge they are doing so of their own volition, emphasising the value of learner agency and autonomy in their intrinsic desire to read (Reedy and Carvalho, 2021, p. 135).

Milosovic (2007, p. 29) suggests children’s reading abilities often depend upon the amount of reading they do. Research suggests reading for pleasure boosts academic success (Clark and
Teravainen, 2017). If children do not read for pleasure, they are likely to read less than peers who find enjoyment and purpose in it. Learners deciphering meanings of words cannot concentrate fully on comprehension. As a result, they may have minimal understanding of what they read, finding the process laborious and unsatisfactory (Milosovic, 2007, p. 30).

The National Curriculum states encouraging reading for pleasure is part of the school’s role (DfE, 2013). However, evidence suggests nationally there are declining attitudes amongst children towards reading (Department for Education, 2012a, p. 4; Clark and Picton, 2021). The PIRLS (2016) assessment process also showed whilst children in England were among the most able in the world in terms of achievement, they had a much poorer attitude to reading and read less often for pleasure than pupils in other countries (Cremin, 2007, p. 2). In 2016, England dropped to 34th position on the attitude scale with 1 in 5 learners openly expressing a dislike of reading (Department for Education, 2017b). Interestingly, Clark and Teravainen’s (2017) annual survey for the National Literacy Trust found, for the first time, there was no recorded difference in levels of children’s reading enjoyment and their socio-economic status (Reedy and Carvalho, 2021, p. 136).

There are many influences in a child’s environment contributing to their construction of reading and view of themselves as a reader. A school’s discourse of what makes a reader might not be in keeping with a learner’s experience of reading at home and learners may develop two competing reading identities - one for school and one for home (Levy, 2008). The teacher-directed process of phonics instruction is different to a learner’s home reading experiences (Rodriques, 2018, p. 19). Children tend to choose to read if they find a purpose in it. This can be influenced by wide-ranging factors such as environment, autonomy, values of parents/carers, options of reading material available etc. (Reedy and Carvalho, 2021, p. 137). Levy (2008, p. 63-64) supports opportunities for early years learners to unite home and school literacy whilst recognising the role of popular culture and digital technologies in children’s lives.

In Carter’s (2020b, p.600) study, some teachers acknowledged a division between their understanding of teaching reading and the perceived curriculum view. They endeavoured to make the process enjoyable, engaging and one that involves parents/carers, referring to a holistic understanding of reading and making specific comments about story, rather than
word reading. Whilst acknowledging the role of phonics for the majority of learners they suggested a more flexible approach, with a reading culture of engagement and enjoyment taking precedence (Carter, 2020b, p. 600). The reading curriculum could be seen as constrained by ‘requirements’ with other areas of reading lacking validity because they are not tested (Campbell, 2021, p. 757-8). Reedy and Carvalho (2021, p. 137-41) argue reading for pleasure is being marginalised in schools, evidencing learner desire for autonomy over what they read thus fostering enjoyment. They emphasise how assessment restricting curriculum and agency is at the detriment of reading for pleasure.

**Word count Chapter 2:** 2669 words

**Chapter 3: Research design**

The primary research for this Small-Scale Investigation has been completed as a case study. The case study school is the school in which I work as Class Teacher and Pupil Voice Lead.

**3.1 Paradigm**

My ontological position is subjectivism. I view meaning as constructed and interpreted by individuals. I resonate with Clark’s (2011a, p. 311-312) definition of knowledge as co-constructed through interaction. This research acknowledges teachers’ and learners’ roles as experts in their own lives and their views have constructed my case study understanding. Regarding epistemology, I believe there is no absolute truth or normative component but, rather, interpretations of truth. I am working within the paradigm of interpretivism. As a researcher, I seek to understand viewpoints and illustrate everyday phenomena whilst reflecting local conditions and culture. I believe interpretivism gives me scope to analyse and draw conclusions linking closely with my research interests. I acknowledge my research cannot be separated from assumptions or biases. Data will need to be explored and understood with an awareness of reflexivity. Although I aspire to take a holistic approach, within the complexity of such research, I realise this is possibly unobtainable.
3.2 Research Design

Although I considered narrative and biographical approaches to research design, I concluded a case study more appropriate to answering my research questions. A study with a small pool of participants suited my investigation scope and constraints. However, elements of narrative research informed my data collection ideas, particularly when considering how to elicit children’s voices through visual methods. I was interested in how ethnography studies a setting’s behaviours, structures and values. But, I was concerned collecting data over long durations, assuming a ‘cameo’ as researcher whilst balancing my role as teacher, might prove uncomfortable for myself and colleagues, resulting in authenticity concerns. Arguably, action research would support the development of my practice. However, I was motivated by the prospect of better understanding my setting and have longer term plans to test new ideas and support reflective practice. I view case study research as a step towards action, with findings reflected upon, interpreted and put to use within the setting.

3.3 Research Methods

The case study was carried out within a 3-form entry mainstream academy primary school in suburban England. At the time of the research (Spring 2022), I was in my third-year teaching in Year 2, a SATs year group undertaking the postponed Phonics Screening Check during the Autumn term, for the second year running. I planned to investigate learner experience of phonics/reading lessons following the 2021 Check with a focus on reading for pleasure alongside parent/carer, teacher, support staff and leadership views of assessment, grouping and the reading process and, therefore, collected qualitative data through focus group and individual interviews. I considered the views of Year 2 learners who completed the 2021 Autumn Check, Year 3 learners who completed the 2020 Autumn Check and Year 1 learners preparing for the 2022 Summer Check. I also sought the opinions of the school’s Junior Governors(School Council) in Years 4 to 6.

Although I drafted questions, I did not allow interviews to be dictated by these (see Appendix 5 and 6 for ‘Interview Schedules’). Overly structuring and standardising could disregard the spontaneity of conversations (particularly among young children). When writing questions, I
was conscious of wording them to maintain meaning whilst ensuring they were engaging to young children. Within my ‘Schedule for Undertaking Research’, I outlined time to review interview schedules before commencing data collection in order to edit questions if necessary. This time proved invaluable as the alterations were necessary to focus interviews more closely towards the Phonics Check. Melton et al. (2014, p. 604) note children are good at identifying appropriate questions and parameters others will respond well to. As Pupil Voice Lead, I co-ordinate the setting’s Junior Governors and asked their opinions on the learner interview schedule. They suggested I reduce the quantity of questions (from 12 to 6, see Appendix 6 for the original and amended questions) highlighting the interviews were intended as a discussion and, considering the interviewees age, they may not be fully attentive if there were too many questions. Prompted by the sensitivity shown by Carter (2020a, p. 50) and Reay and Wiliam’s (1999) towards interviewing learners regarding assessment, I did not directly ask learners about the Check because it could worry them and many were not aware they had completed it.

3.4 Research Instruments

Although I primarily collected qualitative data from focus groups and individual interviews, I also investigated the case study’s teaching and learning policies and planning. Additionally, I drew on data collected in my 2020 TMA 01 (which studied the 2020 Autumn Phonics Check’s impact on learner curriculum and teacher pedagogies) to allow comparisons. This study included focus group and individual interviews with five learners in Year 2 at the time. I reapplied for consent to use the data in my study.

Interviews were semi-structured, using questions and prompts to guide discussions whilst allowing opportunities to improvise or explore subjects in more depth (Adams, 2014, p. 86). Noting Burton and Bartlett’s (2005, p. 12) advise on ordering interview questions, I reflected on using ‘routine’ introductory questions to put participants at ease. With participant consent, I audio recorded interviews so I could fully engage in discussions, without fear of note taking disrupting conversational flow. I made reflective notes after interviews. All
Interviews were face-to-face, asides from one conducted over Teams due to the staff member being at home due to illness.

Clark (2011b, p. 327) and Bagnoli (2009, p. 552) acknowledge both children and adults can benefit from exploring views and experiences through combining visual and verbal modes. In particular, Clark and Statham (2005, p. 48) noted some children were not interested in talking within the formalities of traditional interviews. Therefore, I incorporated a timeline activity at the start of interviews with participants mapping reading progression and including important markers e.g. assessments, comprehension, reading for pleasure. The activity aimed to make participants feel more comfortable whilst providing a catalyst for discussion and reflection (Clark, 2011b, p. 324). However, I respected participants who were hesitant and facilitated a different way of drawing out similar data or simply did not complete the activity with them.

I undertook four stages of data collection. The first entailed discussing phonics and reading provision with learners focus groups (three groups each with five Year 1, 2 and 3 learners (separated into years groups) and three groups with three learners from Years 4 to 6). The Year 2 and 3 focus groups were followed by individual interviews. I found Johnson et al. (2014) ‘Steps to engaging young children in research’ invaluable when considering my approach. I hoped group interaction would facilitate an environment where learners stimulated discussion and unpicked questions in child-friendly language.

Carter’s (2020a) study ‘Listening to the voices of children: an illuminative evaluation of the teaching of early reading in the light of the phonics screening check’, selected learners content talking with unfamiliar adults and representing a range of attainment. This approach arguably affects the validity of results, reflecting only those confident in expressing their views. However, because wellbeing and ethics are paramount and, although I am familiar with most year groups, I took a similar approach for recruiting learners. The Year 3 learners were those interviewed in my TAM 01 2020 study. Therefore, they were used to focus groups and individual interviews with myself as researcher. All other learners were Junior Governors. I chose them because they were accustomed to informal ‘meeting’ style discussions and vocalising their thoughts in my presence. The interview participants came from varied socio-economic backgrounds and were members of different phonics groups.
In Stage Two, I elicited leadership, teacher, support staff and parent/carer responses. Firstly, I conducted a focus group with three Year 2 support staff and another with two class teachers (one Year 2, another previously Year 2). These were not followed by individual interviews (this decision was reflected on and confirmed in Stage Three). I then completed five individual teacher and leadership interviews with practitioners in roles influencing the phonics and reading curriculum and assessment. Also, I planned three interviews with Year 2 and 3 parents/carers but, was only able to carry out two. Within Carter’s (2020b) ‘The assessment has become the curriculum: Teachers’ views on the Phonics Screening Check in England’, learner responses informed discussion points for teacher focus groups. Whilst maintaining confidentiality, some Stage Two interview prompts reflected learner’s comments in focus group interviews.

Stage Three involved providing participants with their interview transcript, to check accuracy and offer opinions. Many expressed they were content with previous responses and did not wish to provide further comments. Two adults, however, offered written comments, one altering their timeline and the other expanding remarks made in the interview with written annotations. Drawing on Clark and Statham’s (2005, p. 48) research, to facilitate reflection for learners who were struggling readers, I played back audio recordings so they could listen to previous responses and make changes or add new comments. Learners found this a novelty and sometimes struggled to focus. However, it did assist some to make valuable reflections. Follow up interviews were conducted with six willing learners, with previous comments forming the basis of dialogue.

Stage Four incorporated study of the school’s education policies, phonics and reading planning, assessments etc. I did this at the final stage, rather than first, so the knowledge did not influence my initial data collection. As a teacher within the setting, I already had knowledge of these documents. However, studying them in detail helped me identify themes within my interview analysis.

Within my Appendices I have included my ‘E822 Ethical Appraisal Form 21J’ (Appendix 1), adult and child interview information letters (Appendix 2 and 3 respectively) and interview consent and assent forms (Appendix 4). Also included are ‘Interview Schedules’ for learner, teacher/leadership and adult/carers (Appendix 5 and 6), information letters
for the use of timeline drawings (Appendix 7), the setting’s policy documents (Appendix 8) and a documents consent/assent form (Appendix 9).

3.5 Reflections on Research Instruments

I struggled to focus some learners in the Year 2 and 3 focus groups. Topics quickly changed from reading lessons to other subjects. This was possibly due to group interviews being too long. The timelines broke the ice but took a while to complete, not focusing learners in the way I hoped. The Year 1 focus group was the last learner interview completed and not followed up with individual interviews because I had already collected large amounts of data. I did not complete a timeline with this focus group (nor the Junior Governor Years 4 to 6 groups) and, as a result, conversation was more focused on reading.

The Year 2 focus group timelines did not orientate around reading but, rather, growing up (Figures 1 and 2) (aspects such as riding a bike were mentioned). Also, learners seemed preoccupied with the drawings, commenting on large heads, the look of the baby etc. After 5 minutes, we came together and completed a group timeline (Figure 3) (I drew and scribed). I began the Year 3 focus group by creating a group timeline with learners drawing and annotating their contributions (Figure 4). They showed knowledge of progression in reading (phonics, to bridging and then whole-class reading) and made some valuable contributions.
I hoped focus group interaction would create a more relaxed atmosphere for individual interviews, learners being familiar with the format and having the chance to reflect upon previous responses. However, in Year 2 individual interviews, learners needed encouragement and reassurance there were no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answers. Learner 2c remarked some of the questions were a “bit tricky”. During the focus groups, I used academy silent signals for transition (moving from the timeline to the table for group discussion) which, in hindsight, may have reinforced my role as teacher not researcher. The Year 3 learners appeared more comfortable and confident in their individual interviews.
There can be issues of sensitivity when questioning learners about assessments and imminent tests. When formulating interview questions, this was foregrounded. However, I regret not asking teachers/adults directly about the Check. All teacher and adult interviews were constructive. They were comfortable and informal, possibly due to existing rapports. Within the two focus groups, they embraced the timeline, nominating a willing scribe and separating who contributed to which section (Figures 5 and 6). Initially, the two teachers in the class teacher focus group were reserved. Present in the room was a Year Group Lead (also interviewed individually). She asked to “chip in” after a long pause following the first question. The unexpected contribution helpfully sparked conversation. However, it may raise questions on the validity of results as responses might have been influenced by the input.

Figure 5
(teacher focus group)
3.6 Approach to Data Analysis

Following Stages One and Two, I studied emerging themes, listening to recordings several times before transcribing them. I adopted an inductive approach, searching data for relationships and patterns to generate themes (Cohen et al., 2018). Considering the types of data collected and my research questions, I opted to follow thematic analysis to structure my analysis process. I also used critical analysis to draw reasoned conclusions relating to my theoretical position. One challenge was generating too much data to support effective analysis. Therefore, I needed to include data reduction (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 643). Justification of data selection is important, particularly given the volume gathered. This will be expanded on in the following chapter. To maintain methodological transparency within my data presentation and analysis, I will explain steps to develop from description to understanding, interpretation and conclusions (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 643).

Data analysis involved interpretation and needed to be continuously reflected upon to preserve the validity of findings. Within my report, I aimed to be pragmatic about how my role may affect findings and how I navigated analysis to preserve validity. I also followed Burton and Bartlett’s (2005, p. 17) suggestion of a “critical friend” to read transcripts and support my judgement of whether analysis appeared fair.

I considered breaking down my data presentation analysis into stages of research, separating the thoughts of learners, teachers/leadership and parents/carers. But, as I began thematic
analysis through reading and rereading transcripts, I found interesting overlaps between the comments of all participants and so I have chosen to address participant responses as one. I have organised participant comments and academy structures and policies within subthemes. When quoting participants, I used pseudo names. Also, to maintain anonymity class teachers and leadership in roles influencing phonics and reading curriculum and assessment are referred to as Teacher A, B etc. LSA and class teacher focus group interviews are referred to as ‘first’ and ‘second’ teacher focus group with parents/carers as Adult A, B etc. Year 2 learners have number 2 before a letter coding (e.g. Learner 2a) while Year 3 learners have 3 and a letter (Learner 3c etc.). To maintain anonymity of the school, I have carefully reflected on academy polices and not quoted directly.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

I followed British Educational Research Association (2018) ethical codes and The Open University’s ‘Code of Practice’ (Wardale, 2020) and ethical protocols. Any personal data, making the setting or participants identifiable, was redacted and documents stored and destroyed according to the Data Protection Act 2018 legislation and GDPR. My identified Gatekeeper signed the E822 Dissertation Ethical Agreement Form. Prior to TMA 02, I informed them of my small-scale investigation proposal, potential participants and additional permissions I needed and they were happy for me to proceed. Throughout the research, I used a personal, password protected laptop. Once I had compared interview recordings with completed transcripts, the recordings were deleted and transcripts kept as password protected files. File names were carefully considered to preserve anonymity. Signed consent forms were kept in a secure place agreed with my Gatekeeper.

As teacher-researcher within the setting, my existing rapport with participants could have affected responses. I endeavoured to use methods which would maximise participant’s ability to give informed consent and exercise agency. To establish trust and authentic communication, prior to gaining assent/consent, I explained the interview purpose and my role as researcher, not teacher. I offered clear invitations for learners to ask questions about what participation entailed (British Psychological Society, 2014, p. 17). Also, I provided
questions and timeline activity information to all interviewees (and their adult, if applicable) before they consented/assented to taking part. This allowed them to discuss content and meaning and ensure they felt comfortable. I acknowledge providing questions may have affected the validity of findings as parents/carers might have influenced learner responses. However, I believed preparing participants took precedence.

Teachers eliciting responses from children raises authenticity questions. It is hard to judge what children may reveal or withhold when interviewed by adults. To offset the power imbalance referred to in Johnson et al. (2014, p. 36), I closely considered the interview environment and completed learner interviewers in the school’s art room, an available, quiet space with adults working in the adjoining room. In accordance with safeguarding, we sat visible to the adults with all doors open. In the learner focus groups, we sat around a table. Throughout interviews, I endeavoured to use positive body language. Adult interviews were conducted in a space suiting participants, usually a classroom.

Throughout all stages of research, ethical considerations were foregrounded and revised in response to emerging needs. I did not assume consent was ongoing. Instead, I checked assent at the end of each interview. I also highlighted participants did not need to answer every question and could withdraw at any time, without explaining why. During the interviews, where necessary, I referred to learner behaviour as an indication of willingness to participate or withdraw assent. I informed participants they could go to the project gatekeeper or contact my tutor if they had any concerns. Within Stage Three of data collection, participants were offered a debriefing to validate data findings. Also, to maintain openness, the final report will be shared with participants if they wish.

My closeness to the research topic may raise questions concerning the reliability of results. I have used methodological triangulation (employing focus groups, individual interviews, timelines and documentary evidence) to support validity in my findings. In addition, data sources were triangulated over time through the use of further interviews and respondent validation (Adams, 2014, p. 80).

**Word count Chapter 3:** 3071 words
Chapter 4: Data Presentation and Analysis

As an interpretative analysis, I have drawn from interview responses and school policies but, also from my knowledge of the educational context and observations as class teacher.

4.1 Background

Due to the coronavirus pandemic and school closures, the 2019 and 2020 Checks (usually completed in June of Year 1) were postponed. Standards and Teaching Agency (2020, p. 3) guidance allowed schools to administer a past screening test of their choice during the second half of the 2020 and 2021 Autumn term of Year 2. Questions have been raised about the value of this on learner experience. By Year 2, some learners are reading fluently and struggled returning to phonic decoding, particularly the expectation to read ‘nonsense words’ (More Than A Score, 2020). From discussions with teachers at other schools, I understood some chose tests regarded as ‘easier’ and hinted to tailoring teaching accordingly. Arguably, this does not help learners to read. However, results will still be published and inform parent/carer judgements.

Yearly, the academy achieves above national average results in the Check and Years 2 and 6 SATs. Within leadership, they are considered paramount to the school’s reputation. Despite Covid-19 disruptions, Senior Leadership outlined the Check pass rate should be above 95%. This figure increased from 90% in 2019 and 80% in 2016. The average pass rate nationally is 82% (National Statistics, 2019). There are noticeable curriculum changes in preparation for Phonics Checks. In the week prior to a Check, phonics activities replace maths lessons and Senior Leadership conduct story times whilst phonics interventions take place with Class Teachers.

The academy’s curriculum has a strong reading focus with an hour a day time-tabled for reading (systematic synthetic phonics or reading comprehension) along with 20 minutes story time. The setting has its own phonics program which has close overlaps with Read Write Inc. (e.g. phonics given distinct curriculum time, setting of children within key stages, targeted interventions, layered lesson structure etc.).

My research focus caught the attention of leadership and their support has been encouraging. As a result, they created a new role for me. Alongside responsibility for Pupil
Voice, I will be Reading for Pleasure lead, an exciting opportunity to transfer my studies and enthusiasm into actions.

4.2 Value of Reading

All learners, teachers and adults in this study, believed reading held value in later life. The Year 6 learners thought it would be “really hard to survive” if someone couldn’t read. They provided examples such as being unable to type on a laptop, read signs when driving or struggling to get a job. Learner 3c valued reading as a means of changing your mood; “if you're sad about something, you can read a book and it'll make you feel better”. Teacher B considered reading a means of “navigating your way through the world. It's important for communication. It's fundamental to all life, whether it's online or offline”. Teacher D suggested reading is “not even about reading a book and being academic, it's just a general life skill” and Teacher A deemed it a “foundation for life”. Reading as a means of accessing ‘another world’ was a common theme amongst adults and learners. A Year 5 learner said “I think it opens up another world”. Adult C used very similar terminology suggesting reading “opens up a whole new world to [children]”. Likewise, Adult B suggested “reading is 'creating a world’”.

Carter (2020b, p. 599-600) describes how teachers in her study acknowledged the importance of engaging learners in literature, capturing their imagination, rather than word reading without meaning or context, which is arguably, the requirement of the Phonics Check. Teacher E said reading was her “favourite lesson of the day. It’s a chance for [learners] to comment on their own likes and dislikes. I mean we had a debate based on one of our books the other day and they were really engaged in it”. Teacher C commented “I think reading for pleasure is so important because of their imagination, their creativity, but also knowledge. I think fostering that pleasure for reading broadens your horizons.”

The first teacher focus group related reading with developing social skills e.g. increasing confidence and acquiring a wider vocabulary. Similarly, a Year 5 learner remarked how reading could give a person confidence and understanding when holding a conversation, “if somebody is using all these different things that you’ve never heard of, if you were reading,
you'd be used to them”. Another Year 5 learner considered reading important in developing your personality; “you wouldn't have a big personality because reading gives you different ideas”.

Teacher B spoke of reading as a means of developing language but also empathy, understanding of one another and an ability to create connections with characters. Teacher D said “relating to characters is massive. You might identify with a particular character because of the colour of their hair, they’re a woman, they have a tan skin, because of all sorts of things”. However, one Year 5 learner commented on the limited diversity in phonics books; “you have the same characters and they’re all just the same. There's no one of say different skin colours or with glasses”. They referenced the commonly used phonics books with Sid and the characters Biff and Chip. Teacher B talked about the role of reading in constructing identity, “if you can make sense of the world through the pages of a text, that can help you understand your world and conceptualise things a lot better”. If there is limited diversity in the books available, the ability to relate to characters is restricted, constraining the meaning a reader may draw from texts and hindering opportunities to conceptualise personal experiences.

4.3 Learning to Read

Understandably, many learners were unsure how they had learnt to read. In their individual interview, Learner 2a described the process as “making and doing words... when you need to try and guess them”. In the Year 2 focus group, Learner 2a stated “my mum would read to me”. While in the Year 3 focus group, Learner 3b also discussed exposure to books as how they initially learnt to read “by listening to books when I was baby. I used to have bedtime stories with C Beebies, and then as I got older my Mum read to me and now I go to bed reading to myself”.

The interview process prompted some adult participants to reflect on their reading journey. Teacher A commented she “learnt to sight read from a very young age. I was four when I was reading fluently because I was read to and I recognised the words. Then I could read those words. Some people go about it differently, sometimes we forget that not everybody learns
in the same way. That it’s phonics is driven by the Government, I suppose. It's the way they've decided we should learn to read, but it doesn't mean it's the only way or necessarily the best way. Not for everybody”.

Many adult participants enjoyed talking about personal experiences of reading for pleasure e.g. summer library challenges as a child or reading a book on holiday. However, some discussed negative experiences of reading as a child. Adult B said, because of their struggles learning to read, they strived to create the opposite for their children. They wanted it to be a happy experience with children feeling comfortable reading and not scared of “having a book in front of them”. Teacher A said her husband refused to read, “he hates it because he was forced as a child to read and reread and he didn't enjoy it”.

Teacher D thought there was “immense” value in children reading for pleasure “even if they don’t read for pleasure as an adult, the fact that they've had all of those stories as children, you'd like to think that, if they then become parents, they would understand the value in that and do it for their children”. Adult A said they had friends that were indifferent about reading with their children, “I’m horrified. If you go into the house, you wouldn’t find one book”. This underlines the importance of parents/carers in developing a child’s reading identity and nurturing their motivation, delight and desire to read. Adult C said her own children “have this absolute love [for reading] and it's because we've kind of nurtured and fostered that at home”. Adult A talked about the value of reading at home for her child with special educational needs, explaining their reading journey began with “us reading to them, looking at picture books, then obviously going to school and learning about letters. But, to be honest, the majority of it is due to us reading everyday with them”. Adult C also read to her children daily. She commented her child “could read before she came to school. She could sight read before she learnt phonics. When she started at school, she didn't need phonics”. Learner 3d considered the purpose of reading lessons was “to learn and when we are adults we can read to our children”.
4.4 Assessments

Teacher D suggested “it's hard because obviously schools being data driven, it's all about Phonics Screening. It is about results, which doesn't necessarily push the pleasure”. Arguably, focusing assessments at the expense of meaning and pleasure is suppressing the idea that reading is interesting and texts have important and entertaining things to say (Dombey, 2011, p. 28). However, as phonics took greater precedence during the lead up to the 2020 Autumn Check, a shift in values was perceived by learners. Learner 3a stated “I used to not like phonics but now I do” and Learner 3d said “I like phonics and know that I am getting better at reading” (2020 TMA 01 research). When asked why they thought we were doing more phonics, Learner 3c responded “because why would we be doing phonics if we weren’t learning” (2020 TMA 01 research).

In preparation for answering SATs reading questions, we teach Year 2 learners to highlight key words in questions and scan for these in the text. Teacher A commented “we’re teaching them quite an adult skill. We’re not teaching them to read the whole thing, so it’s not exactly the value of reading for pleasure, but reading for a purpose”. This was echoed by Cremin (2007, p. 3) who commented schools concentrated the reading curriculum on developing particular skills and knowledge suited to text structures causing them to overlook more meaningful reasons for reading text.

The teachers talked passionately about the value of assessments. The first focus group commented on grouping learners and introducing alien words from reception was due to the Phonics Check. Based on half termly assessments, learners are grouped in phases (Years 1 and 2, 3 and 4, 5 and 6) for phonics or reading lessons. Group sizes vary from 4 to 30, depending on learner needs and adult experience. The first teacher focus group agreed the half termly assessments were used to identify gaps, monitor progress and “for the Phonics Screening”. They said they found assessments useful in sorting partners and identifying learners who appeared “stuck” in the same group but, concluded the assessments were limited in what they communicated and not always a true reflection of learner progress. The second focus group acknowledged assessments identified gaps but, also, did not do some learners justice. They do not test learner comprehension of texts, but solely speed and recognition of diagraphs, trigraphs and split sounds. Teacher A stated learners “reading
beautifully, with expression and fluency, are often not quite fast enough” and, as a result, they are penalised. “But it sounds far nicer to listen to them reading with expression, than going 100 miles an hour”.

Teacher A discussed the heavy focus on summative assessment being a cause of government accountability measures because “we need to be able to prove that [learners] are at a certain point”. They followed this by saying “some children test really well, some children don’t. And there’s the unfairness in that system”. Teacher D considered doing age-related standard tests “wrong” because “we do everything else in our lessons to teach the children... to their ability”.

During the 2020 TMA 01 interview process it became apparent many learners were not attuned to the impending Check, unlike adults in the academy. Describing their perception of the importance of assessments, a Year 4 learner said “if you don’t pass you could stay behind in Year 6”. A Year 4 learner observed you do tests in school “to see how well you are doing. If you do bad on one, you might go down a set”. A Year 6 learner said “reading tests help you get the marks to show you previously worked hard and people are going to want to employ you”. Another Year 6 learner insightfully noted “reading lessons help everyone in tests. The words in questions and what you need to do for it. It’s, say, like training”.

Teacher E stated a test “gives you a snapshot of where that child is on that day. It doesn’t necessarily reflect their true ability”. Teachers also discussed pressures learners may feel taking tests and how some “don’t do that very well” particularly when they are used to reading aloud in phonics and reading lessons but are then expected to read in silence. A Year 4 learner said “assessment week is so hard”. Teacher B described assessments as “a necessary evil” to support analysis of understanding and progress but, acknowledged they needed to be used with “caution” because “you don’t want to switch the children off their reading”.
4.5 Phonics Lessons

Bradbury (2018, p. 550) discusses grouping for phonics and concerns when learners remain in the same group, not following the expected progress of moving to the next stage of phonics knowledge ‘when ready’. The first teacher focus group commented some learners become stuck in certain phonics groups, covering the same curriculum and reading the same books. Arguably, this does not support reading for pleasure. Teacher C acknowledged learners may disengage and “you've lost that passion and interest”. Teacher A said “I do feel, where there's a stagnant group of children, why are we teaching the same thing that isn't actually teaching them how to do the thing they need to pass the test”.

The academy has a strict phonics lesson plan and 3-day cycle for books. However, some teachers admitted adapting planning and teaching to the half termly assessments (using timers to improve speedy reading etc.). A teacher said extending the cycle to 5 days allowed them to circulate and listen to learners read and “that is really helping”. Learner 2b thought it would make phonics lessons even better “if we got to read for a little longer”. Teacher D did not think there were differences between phonics teaching and the teaching of reading because, in the academy’s lesson plan, “we read alongside our phonics lessons, we apply what we’ve learned in phonics to reading. We are teaching reading with a phonics strategy”. However, 20 out of 50 minutes in the academy’s phonics lesson plan is devoted to spelling and handwriting. One teacher in the second focus group argued important aspects of reading such as fluency and comprehension were squeezed out of phonics lessons as “most of my time gets taken up by doing the writing bit”.

When completing their timeline, Teacher D commented on the inclusion of “common exception words as well, obviously [learners] can’t always use their phonics to read”. Undoubtedly, reading requires more than just phonics knowledge. When decoding real words within the Check, learners are not required to draw on meaning to help them identify correct pronunciations (Milosovic, 2007, p. 29). Teacher A said “I think phonics teaching is super important because that's the mechanics of how to read but, teaching somebody to read is completely different because reading shouldn't just be about whether you can sound out a word and read it. You need to know what the word means in context”. 
Learner 3d commented on the noise of lots of people reading aloud, you may “get distracted because you can’t hear properly”. Learner 3b agreed, stating they often could not hear their partner read. When asked why they were indifferent toward reading lessons, a Year 5 learner said “my partner is really annoying”. This proved to be a common theme with learners suggesting their enjoyment of reading lessons was dependant on the partner they had. A Year 5 learner said “I think [reading lessons] could be better, sometimes you have to read with a partner you don’t necessarily get along with”. Another suggested “I thought it’d be nice if we could just read. Without a partner”. Learner 3c said they would prefer to read by themselves “because, when we do partner reading, my partner is slow and it takes quite a long time for my go to read” and they said this frustrated them.

In their individual interview, Learner 3a commented “when we take turns to read a page, I don’t like it because we all have different voices for the characters”. Learner 3a thought, rather than partner reading, it would “help if one person reads the whole book first and then the second person reads it so then we each have an understanding of it”. Campbell (2021, p. 766) suggests a risk to comprehension when learners are passive rather than active participants in reading. Arguably staggering who reads sections may limit learner understanding of the full text. A Year 6 learner said “when you don’t have a partner, you understand the book better”.

4.6 Reading for Pleasure

Internal surveys show learners across varying ages expressing negativity towards phonics and reading lessons. Nationally, evidence suggests declining attitudes towards reading amongst children (Department for Education, 2012a, p. 4, Clark and Picton, 2021). Therefore, a results focused curriculum could come at the cost of reading for pleasure.

Dombey (2011, p. 23) states a dominate phonics focus within the reading curriculum is inadequate for the complexity of the English language and does not support learner enjoyment of reading and their ability to engage with a text. In the first teacher focus group, one participant said “the way we do it, you can’t start to learn the pleasure of reading until you’ve learnt phonics”. Another teacher suggested “phonics is a synthetic way of teaching
children sounds to decode words so it’s completely different from the teaching of reading. The teaching of reading is about the love of reading”. The second focus group noted phonics teaching was the mechanics of learning to read whereas the teaching of reading (in whole-class reading lessons) focused on reading for pleasure.

Once the half termly assessment deems a learner has completed the academy’s phonics program they begin ‘whole-class reading’. Whole-class reading is particularly enjoyed by some teachers as there is more variety in texts and learners get excited about reading them. “It’s a really nice environment where you can nurture that love of reading” (Teacher D). Arguably, whole-class reading fosters learner curiosity, offering choice from a range of multimodal texts and inspiring reading for pleasure (Cremin, 2007, p. 9). Teacher E described phonics as “the small parts of reading, whereas whole class reading is looking at the language intent and the structure of sentences. Phonics is just how a word is made up”.

The first teacher focus group suggested learners needed to “get through phonics” to become a fluent reader “then, once you have, you can choose a book of your choice”. Reedy and Carvalho’s (2021, p. 138-140) study emphasises the importance of fostering learner agency to create an environment nurturing reading for pleasure. They highlighted the need for choice where reading materials were not overly prescriptive. A Year 5 learner said they “preferred” reading for pleasure to “reading lessons”. When asked what they meant by reading for pleasure, they replied “I prefer when I choose books”. This echoes children in Reedy and Carvalho’s (2021, p. 140) study who suggested being able to choose reading material would increase the likeliness of them wanting to read for pleasure. When asked whether they thought reading for fun was important Learner 3b replied “yes, because you choose the book”. A Year 5 learner said similar stating reading for fun was important “because you get your own choice”.

Ofsted (2004) and Cremin (2007, p. 5) note schools seldom build on learners own reading interests, often marginalising particular texts such as online media, comics and other material learners access at home. When asked whether there was anything they would like to do differently when learning to read, Learner 3b replied “ask the class what book they want to read”. Learners take home a (prescriptive) phonics book read in lessons and appropriate to their phonics ‘level’, which they are asked to practise reading over and over to improve
fluency. They also take home a book of their choosing from their classroom’s ‘sharing box’ to read with their adults. The first teacher focus group referred to these as books “for pleasure”.

Teacher C said in lessons “the children don’t read the books because they’re bored and they've read them five times before”. A Year 4 learner stated “I don't really enjoy reading at school because the teacher makes us do boring things, but I do like reading at home”. Disruptive behaviour is known to be an issue during phonics lessons. One Year 3 learner commented “I think the fun bit about phonics lessons is getting into trouble”. In the first focus group, a teacher said “unless they're lucky enough to have parents at home with a range of books, and the parents are actively reading with them, it's not [fun], is it?”. Another teacher replied “sometimes that's a double edged sword, they're not bothered about the phonics book because the books they read at home are far more exciting than a phonics book”.

Campbell (2021, p. 757) argues the range and quality of literature available plays an important role in supporting the teaching of reading and fostering a love of learning. Learner 2c noted in phonics lessons “we don't have exciting books” and Learner 3d commented they got “really boring phonics books”. When asked why they were boring, another learner interjected “because they're a bit simple maybe”. Learner 3b considered it “a bit boring reading books over and over again”.

Like learners, teachers also commented they felt stuck in the same phonics groups. The LSAs, in particular, thought they always taught the “lower attaining” learners, sometimes hindering their own excitement of teaching the lesson. One teacher commented “they don’t have that love for the phonics books really. Especially if they’re in the same group they are reading the same again and again”. Another teacher replied “you're absolutely right. 'cause I go ohhh, we've read this!”. In this respect, it is not just the learner’s excitement that dwindles, teachers can also struggle with fostering excitement for a book they have taught multiple times. Teachers highlighted they did not want to feel this dread for teaching phonics but, they sometimes did due to repetition.
4.7 Phonics and Writing

When asked if they enjoyed reading lessons, a Year 1 learner remarked “we don’t do reading lessons”. To prompt an association between reading and phonics, I asked why they thought they did phonics to which they replied, “I don’t know”. I followed this by asking “what’s phonics for?” and another Year 1 learner answered, “to help you write”. When asked why Learner 2a enjoyed their phonics lesson, they remarked “because I like writing”. Likewise, when asked why they learnt phonics, Learner 3d enthusiastically said “to write! You need to learn to write”. This focus on writing was reiterated when the Year 1 learners were asked how they thought their teacher helped them with reading; “If we get a word wrong she helps us get it right” and “If we got a letter the wrong way around, she writes in her blue pen so we can copy it”. Learner 2b thought they learnt to read to “know how to write words” and for “joined up writing”. This perception is echoed in Carter’s (2020a, p. 53) study, where many of the learners considered phonics a means to improve writing, associating phonics lessons with the development of transcription skills, e.g. spelling and handwriting. Unlike learners, teachers did not comment on phonics as skills to improve writing but, Adult C said reading “helped my boys develop a love of writing, they write for pleasure because they’re inspired by what they’re reading.”

When asked why we do alien words, Teacher D joked “because the government told us to” then explained it was “so that we can truly understand that they have applied their blending skills”. Teacher B stated “alien words, is just like any language, you have to learn the subtleties of how the words are put together”. When completing the timeline, the first teacher focus group associated the teaching of alien words to the Check stating “it’s for the Phonics Screening, isn’t it? Not for anything else”. Carter (2020a, p. 55) suggests the inclusion of teaching alien words creates a disconnect between decoding and reading as a meaning making process. Innocently, Learner 1b thought we learnt alien words so we could “understand what aliens say a tiny bit more” and Learner 3d proposed alien words were part of lessons “to make us laugh”.

Word count Chapter 4: 4218 words
Chapter 5: Conclusions and implications

My literature research found significant regard is given to teacher, leadership and parental views of the Phonics Screening Check (Walker et al., 2015; Bradbury, 2018; Clark and Glazzard, 2018), but learner opinions are often not included. I endeavoured to gain greater insight into learner experience through the interviewing process. It is by discussion that perceptions are clarified and built on to provide clearer understanding. I found interviewing learners from my own setting valuable as their perspective is important in developing my practice to support their learning.

Within this case study, I was principal researcher and sole analyser. I acknowledge my role as researcher in knowledge construction (Adams, 2014, p. 70) and have attempted to adopt a reflexive approach throughout, highlighting my reflections within the report to enable readers to consider how my values might influence research. This project was based predominately on semi-structured interviews. Such a small-scale research project cannot make firm claims from its findings. Just as summative assessments only provide evidence of learner attainment on a given day, interviews provide data on the learner perspective on a particular day. If I were to further my studies, I would look to triangulate my research with different data collection methods such as questionnaires, or research ways of standardising the interview process to incorporate a control study and find measures to make comparisons. However, standardising interviews could disregard the spontaneity conversations have, particularly with young children.

This research began from the starting point that phonics is an essential but not sufficient tool in ensuring children develop as life-long readers. However, the study has demonstrated the Check, because of its high-stakes nature, may have a negative impact on learner understanding of the reading process and fostering reading for pleasure (Carter, 2020a, p. 56). I cannot quantify the impact of the 2021 Autumn Phonics Screening Check on the teaching and learning of reading. However, I have been able to indicate some of the measures the case study school takes in adopting pedagogy perceived as effective in achieving high scores. My interviews revealed staff valued reading as a fundamental life skill and endeavoured to support engagement to ensure every learner had the opportunity to reach their full potential. However, teacher agency appeared to be constrained, arguably by
the prescriptive lesson plans which used assessment tools as an objective of teaching. I try to ensure result expectations do not impact my teaching and, subsequently, learner identities and practices. However, to meet accountability, there are undoubtably effects on my own pedagogy beyond the enforced narrowing of the curriculum.

The teaching of early reading is a polarising issue and has been for many years. In this study, professionals acknowledged the value of phonics. However, they recognised phonics did not work for all learners. Arguably, testing sends “signals” to schools about what is important in the curriculum. There were questions on the suitability of the Check as a means of assessing learner skill and understanding and its effect on pedagogy, particularly the dominance of phonics in preparations for the Check (such as extra phonics replacing maths in the week prior and interventions impacting wide curriculum learning). Practices such as repeating phonics books, grouping where learners appear ‘stuck’, limited learner choice, partner reading and emphasis on spelling were all highlighted as potentially hindering reading for pleasure.

Staff questioned the value of reading assessments, including the academy’s own half termly phonics assessments, and their detrimental impact on learner identity. It could be argued, assessment and the teaching of reading is an inherently insoluble problem but, central to learning with wide-ranging impacts on learner perceptions in later life. Teachers addressed phonics as a separate subject to the teaching of reading and learners appeared to have a perception of phonics as a means to support writing rather than reading. Reading for pleasure was undoubtedly fostered in the teacher’s enthusiasm to meet the needs of all learners in an engaging, creative environment. However, the Check’s impact appeared to be distorting the reading curriculum leading to an impoverishment in learner’s experiences of literacy.

I have been able to consider how reading for pleasure may currently be obstructed but, could be supported within the case study school. I am excited to put these considerations into actions through my new role as Reading for Pleasure Lead. I endeavour to establish a reading community where a culture of reading for pleasure can flourish and will be drafting a ‘Reading for Pleasure’ initiative to be used in the academy’s development plan. I have also been asked to promote the relaunch of the school library with the Junior Governors and will
be devising a timetable for classes to regularly visit it. Additionally, I plan to organise visiting
readers and staff training on the importance of reading for pleasure, whilst emphasising
learner choice and agency.

**Word count Chapter 5:** 800 words

**Postscript: Narrative critical reflection**

The Personal Development Planning document helped me reflect on progress upon
completion of each masters module. It also supported understanding of how my studies
influenced my teaching practice and helped me differentiate between the two (which was
needed to sustain a work-life balance at critical times). However, feedback from my tutor was
most valuable in my considerations of how to approach my research in a practical but, also,
fulfilling manner.

**TMA 01 feedback:** I think a major issue for you is going to be data gathering instruments
(methods) and some of your reading has alerted you to this. Eliciting responses from children
by teachers is fraught with difficulty and you may need to consider novel ways of doing it.

These comments prompted me to consider visual methods of research. I was fascinated with
how to elicit children’s voices through inclusive, creative means. The timeline activity used in
my participant interviews combined visual and verbal modes to avoid potential formalities
and social discomfort in face-to-face interviews and offset power imbalance between
researcher and ‘research subject’. I had contemplated an entirely child-led research project,
with Junior Governors navigating the direction of research. However, realised this was not
the best means of focusing a masters dissertation year. I considered practitioner-led research
would give me experience and understanding of research tools which could be implemented
to facilitate future child-led research projects within my setting.

**TMA 01 feedback:** I've made a note on your list of preliminary RQs.
Tutor comments in post TMA 01 consultation email thread: [commenting on research question ideas] It depends what you are interested in or how you see these questions as linked. ...Again, you can only make these design decisions when you are sure of your RQs

Initially, I struggled formulating research questions and communicated with my tutor about wording them. I created a table with questions, data sources and notes. This helped refine my focus but, the exact wording of questions were only finalised after the data analysis write up. I have more to learn when constructing effective research questions and considering the scale and focus of intended studies.

TMA 02 Feedback: I suggest you think carefully about sample size and about how realistic your plans for transcription really are.

When formulating my research design, the biggest challenge was generating too much data to support effective analysis. Once I began transcribing and analysing, the scope of the 12,000 word limit became sobering and justification of data selection was difficult given the volume gathered.

TMA 01 feedback: If you already have an opinion, make sure you read anything which offers a different one.

I needed critical reading skills to appraise relevant academic studies, ensuring I sourced articles supporting and contending lines of thought. Although my confidence has increased in accessing scholarly publications and asking questions about their content, I believe this is still an area for development. Also, I must commit to looking for what has not been said as well as reading what has.

Word count Postscript: 499 words

Reference List


Buckingham, J. and Wheldall, K. (2020) ‘Why all states and territories should follow South Australia’s lead and introduce the Year 1 Phonics Check’. Nomanis, vol. 9, pp. 18-20


Appendices

Appendix 1

E822 Ethical Appraisal Form 21J

E822 Ethical Appraisal Form
Masters: Education, Childhood and Youth

NB: it should be noted that The Open University is unable to offer liability insurance to cover any negative consequences students might encounter when undertaking ‘in-person’ data collection. It is therefore very important that you follow appropriate research protocols which should include seeking Gatekeeper permissions to undertake any data collection within your setting and adhering to ethical principles for the safety of yourself and your participants.

Because ethical appraisal should precede data collection, a completed version of this form should be included with TMA02 for those developing a Small-Scale Investigation (SSI) and as part of the EMA submission for those completing an Extended Literature Review and Research Proposal (EP) form of the Dissertation.

Fill in section 1 of this document with your personal details and brief information about your research. For section 2, please assess your research using the following questions and click yes or no as appropriate. If there is any possibility of significant risk please tick yes. Even if your list contains all “no” you should still return your completed checklist so your tutor/ supervisor can assess the proposed research.
# Section 1: Project details

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>Student name</td>
<td>Rachel Sankay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td>PI</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c.</td>
<td>Project title</td>
<td>The impact of the 2021 Autumn phonics reading check on teaching and learning in an English primary school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d.</td>
<td>Supervisor/tutor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.</td>
<td>Qualification</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Masters in Education</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Masters in Childhood and Youth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f.</td>
<td>MA pathway (where applicable)</td>
<td>Learning and Teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g.</td>
<td>Intended start date for fieldwork</td>
<td>Week beginning 14th March 2022 (Talk to potential participants, share information sheets and assent and consent forms).</td>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>h.</td>
<td>Intended end date for fieldwork</td>
<td>6th May 2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i.</td>
<td>Country fieldwork will be conducted in</td>
<td>England</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

18th March 2022 Trial interview questions and visual methods of data collection.
25th March 2022 Begin collecting data.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section 2: Ethics Assessment</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Does your proposed research need initial clearance from a ‘gatekeeper’ (e.g. Local Authority, head teacher, college head, nursery/playgroup manager)?</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Have you checked whether the organisation requires you to undertake a ‘police check’ or appropriate level of ‘disclosure’ before carrying out your research?</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Have you indicated how informed consent will be obtained from your participants (including children less than 16 years old, school pupils and immediate family members)? Your consent letters/forms must inform participants that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Will your proposed research design mean that it will be necessary for participants to take part in the study without their knowledge/consent at the time (e.g. covert observation of people in nonpublic places)? If so have you specified appropriate debriefing procedures?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>✔️</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Does your proposed design involve repetitive observation of participants, (i.e. more than twice over a period of more than 2-3 weeks)? Is this necessary? If it is, have you made appropriate provision for participants to renew consent or withdraw from the study half-way through?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>✔️</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. You must agree to comply with any ethical codes of practice or legal requirements that may be in place within the organisation or country (e.g. educational institution, social care setting or other workplace) in which your research will take place. If required an appropriate level of disclosure (‘police check’) can obtained from the Disclosure and Barring Service (England and Wales), Disclosure Scotland, AccessNI (Northern Ireland), Criminal Records Office (Republic of Ireland), etc.

2. This should normally involve the use of an information sheet about the research and what participation will involve, and a signed consent form. You must allow sufficient time for potential participants to consider their decision between the giving of the information sheet and the giving of consent. No research should be conducted without the use of informed consent of participants or their caregivers. In the case of children (individuals under 16 years of age) no research should be conducted without a specified means of gaining their informed consent (i.e., in the case of young children, their assent) and the consent of their parents, caregivers, or guardians. This is particularly important if your project involves participants who are particularly vulnerable or unable to give informed consent (e.g. children under 16 years, people with learning disabilities or emotional problems, people with difficulty in understanding or communicating, people with identified health problems). There is additional guidance on informed consent on the Masters: Education and Childhood and Youth website under Project Resources.

3. Where an essential element of the research design would be compromised by full disclosure to participants, the withholding of information should be specified in the project proposal and explicit procedures stated to obviate any potential harm arising from such withholding. Deception or covert collection of data should only take place when it has been agreed with a named responsible person in the organisation and it is essential to achieve the research results required, where the research objective has strong scientific merit and where there is an appropriate risk management and harm alleviation strategy.

4. Where participants are involved in longer-term data collection, the use of procedures for the renewal of consent at appropriate times should be considered.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Are you proposing to collect video and/or audio data? If so, have you indicated how you will protect participants’ anonymity and confidentiality and how you will store the data?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Does your proposal indicate how you will give your participants the opportunity to access the outcomes of your research (including audio/visual materials) after they have provided data?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Have you built in time for a pilot study to make sure that any task materials you propose to use are age appropriate and that they are unlikely to cause offence to any of your participants?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Is your research likely to involve discussion of sensitive topics (e.g., adult/child relationships, peer relationships, discussions about personal teaching styles, ability levels of individual children and/or adults)? What safeguards have you put in place to protect participants’ confidentiality?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Does your proposed research raise any issues of personal safety for yourself or other persons involved in the project? Do you need to carry out a ‘risk analysis’ and/or discuss this with teachers, parents and other adults involved in the research?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Will the study involve recruitment of patients or staff through the NHS or the use of NHS data?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you answered ‘yes’ to questions 12, you will also have to submit an application to an appropriate National Research Ethics Service ethics committee (http://www.nres.npsa.nhs.uk/).

Appendix 2

E822 Information Letter for adults (post-18) Interviews. (Some information removed to preserve anonymity).

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E822 Information letter for adults (aged over 18): Interviews

**What is the aim of this interview?**

The aim of the interview is to gain an individual’s perspective on an aspect of education, childhood and youth studies as part of a small-scale investigation for a Masters qualification designed to contribute to knowledge and practice in my chosen area of specialism. This particular interview is designed to help understand the impact of the 2021 Autumn phonics reading check on teaching and learning in an English primary school.

**Who is conducting the research and who is it for?**

This interview is part of my studies on the Open University Masters module E822 ‘Multi-disciplinary dissertation: Education, Childhood and Youth’. During this module I will be designing a small-scale investigation which will generate findings relevant and of value to practice settings. The interview has been agreed with my tutor to be an important part of this design to allow me to include the perspectives of selected participants in addressing the above research focus. I will be analysing the data collected and reporting my findings in the dissertation I submit to the University as my final assessment for my Masters qualification.

**Why am I being invited to participate in this research?**

You have been chosen as your experiences and opinions would be highly valuable in helping to address a question considered valuable to your setting and others like it.
If I take part in this research, what will be involved?
The interview is intended to last no longer than 30 minutes and will take place in a mutually convenient setting. If there is anyone else affected by the interview, such as a member of staff, they will also be consulted. Permission has been granted by [REDACTED], I would like to ask your consent to make an audio recording of our discussion so that I can refer back to what was said more accurately than would be possible just from my notes. If you do not wish to be audio recorded then I will rely on my written notes. Only I will have access to the audio recording. I do not need to share this with the University or anyone in this practice setting. I will transcribe and anonymise the interview before sharing any part with my tutor or it forming part of the final dissertation. Your contribution will be recognised by a pseudonym and you will be asked if you would like to suggest what name should be used. Any other real names referred to during the interview will be removed and renamed.

What will we be talking about?
The focus of the interview will be to find out your perspective on our approach to reading and phonics lessons, including assessment and grouping. I can share the questions with you in advance if you would like.

Will what I say be kept confidential?
Your participation will be treated in strict confidence in accordance with the Data Protection Act (2018). No personal information will be passed from me to anyone else. Your consent forms will be stored safely in our professional setting as agreed with the senior leader overseeing the safe conduct of this research. Audio recordings and my interview notes will be kept confidential and typed up as soon as possible. However, if you disclose anything during your interview which I consider means that you might be unsafe or have been involved in a criminal act, because this is a safeguarding concern, I will need to pass this immediately to the organizational Designated Safeguarding Officer. The anonymised records of the interview will be stored securely on password protected devices and the original notes and recordings will then be destroyed. I will be submitting an analysis of the data collected as part of my dissertation in the end-of-module assessment. I also plan to present my findings to relevant audiences. I can confirm that neither you as an individual nor the setting will be identifiable in any of these reports and presentations.

What happens now?
After reading this information sheet, please review and complete the consent form. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you can withdraw your consent at any point up until I use your data in my University assessment (01.09.2022). If you let me know you wish to withdraw, your consent forms and any data collected will be destroyed.

What if I have other questions?
If you have any questions about the study, I or my tutor at the University would be very happy to answer them. Please contact me at sankey@[REDACTED] or contact my tutor [REDACTED]

The ethics protocols and documentation to support the E822 Multi-disciplinary Dissertation: Education, Childhood and Youth have been developed with advice from the Open University Human Research Ethics Committee and have been confirmed by the Chair as fully compliant with The Open University’s Ethics Principles for Research with Human Participants.
Appendix 3

E822 Information Letter for children and young people (pre-18) Interviews. (Some information removed to preserve anonymity).

E822 Information letter for children and young people (pre-18): Interviews

What is the aim of this interview?
The aim of the interview is to gain your view on what learning to read is like at ________.

Who is conducting the research and who is it for?
This interview is part of my studies on a masters-level course at The Open University. I will be carrying out a small-scale investigation. I am using a range of ways for collecting information to help me learn about the impact of the 2021 Autumn phonics reading check on teaching and learning. This is aimed to help me better understand and develop phonics and reading lessons here. I will be sharing my findings with others for whom they will be relevant to changing practice.

Why am I being invited to participate in this research?
You have been chosen because your views would be valuable in answering the question set for the study. I hope you will be prepared to talk to me about your experiences and opinions.

If I take part in this research, what will be involved?
The interview should take no more than 30 minutes. I will make sure I have checked with your teachers that when and where we talk is the most convenient for you and them. Permission has been given by ________, for me to invite you to this interview. I would like to ask your consent to make an audio recording of our discussion so that I can refer back to what was said more accurately than would be possible just from my notes. If you do not wish to be audio recorded, I will accept your wish, and rely only on my written notes. Only I will have access to the audio recording. I do not need to share this with anyone at the University or at school. You and anyone else you name during our discussion will be referred to by a false name (pseudonym) and you will be asked if you would like to suggest what name I use.

What will we be talking about?
In the interview I will ask you questions about what you think about learning to read and your phonics lessons. I can share the questions with you in advance, if you would like to see them.

Will what I say be kept private?
Your participation will be treated in strict confidence in accordance with the Data Protection Act (2018). No personal information about you will be shared more widely. Any audio recordings and my notes of the interview will be private to me and typed up as soon as possible. However, if you let me know anything during your interview which I consider means that you might be unsafe or have been involved in a criminal act, because this is a safeguarding concern, I will need to pass this information immediately to the organisation’s Designated Safeguarding Officer. When I make anonymised records of interviews these will be stored securely on password protected devices and the original notes and recording will then be destroyed. I can confirm that neither you as an individual nor the setting will be identifiable in my submissions to the University or any presentations I make of my findings to interested audiences.
Appendix 4

E822 Interviews Consent and Assent form. (Some information removed to preserve anonymity).

**ECYS/WELS E822 INTERVIEWS CONSENT AND ASSENT FORM**

If this request relates to a child/young person under the age of 18 and a child or young person would benefit from this, please would a parent, carer or guardian read these questions to them and, if necessary, complete the replies for them.

Please indicate YES or NO for each of the questions below and return the completed form by Friday 18th March 2022 to Rachel Sankey.
Have you read (or had read to you) the information about this interview?  YES  NO
Has someone explained this interview to you?  YES  NO
Do you understand what this interview is about?  YES  NO
Have you asked all the questions you want?  YES  NO
Have you had your questions answered in a way you understand?  YES  NO
Do you understand it is OK to stop taking part at any time?  YES  NO
Will you have an adult present with you?  YES  NO
Are you happy for the interview to be audio recorded?  YES  NO
Are you happy with how your data will be stored?  YES  NO
Do you understand that your and any other real names, as well as any identifiable information, will be removed from what will be shared after the interview?  YES  NO
Are you happy to take part?  YES  NO

If any answers are ‘no’ you can ask more questions. But if you don’t want to take part, please let me know and don’t sign your name.

If you do want to take part, please write your name and today’s date

Your name  

Date  

If the person to be interviewed is a child or young person under 18 and you are happy for the child or young person you are responsible for (as their parent, carer or guardian) to participate, please could you also sign and date below.

Print name  

Sign  

Date  

Please return this form in person to Rachel Sankey (or via email )

Thank you for your help.

The ethics protocols and documentation to support the E822 Multi-disciplinary Dissertation: Education, Childhood and Youth have been developed with advice from the Open University Human Research Ethics Committee and have been confirmed by the Chair as fully compliant with The Open University’s Ethics Principles for Research with Human Participants. Link: http://www.open.ac.uk/research/sites/www.open.ac.uk.research/files/files/Documents/Ethics-Principles-for-Research-with-Human-Participants.pdf
Appendix 5

Adult Interview Schedules

Parents/carers

Does your child enjoy reading?

In your opinion, what is the purpose of reading?

From what you can recall, how has your child learnt to read?

Are there differences between phonics teaching and the teaching of reading?

Is there value in reading for pleasure?

What are the uses of reading assessments?

Support staff/Teachers/leadership

In your opinion, what is the purpose of reading?

What skills are involved in learning to read?

Are there differences between phonics teaching and the teaching of reading?

In phonics lessons, why do you think we teach alien words?

Is there value in reading for pleasure?

What are the uses of reading assessments?

In your opinion, do reading assessments have any limitations?

Appendix 6

Learner Interview Schedules

Learners ORIGINAL

Do you enjoy reading?
Why do we learn how to read?

How do you think you have learnt to read?

Do you like phonics/reading lessons?

Why do you think we learn phonics?

Why do you think we learn how to read alien words?

Prompt/probe: Is there anything you would like to do differently when learning how to read?

How does your teacher help you with your reading?

Prompt/probe: How does your teacher find out about your phonics/reading understanding?

Do you think reading for fun is important? Why?

Do you have to do any tests in reading?

Prompt/probe: Do reading tests affect the fun you get from reading?

**Learners AMENDED**

Do you enjoy reading?

Do you think reading for fun is important? Why?

Why do we learn how to read?

Do you like phonics/reading lessons?

Is there anything you would like to do differently when learning how to read?

Do you have to do any tests in reading?
Appendix 7

E822 Information Letter - Drawings Documents. (Some information removed to preserve anonymity).

Faculty of Wellbeing, Education, Language and Sport

Study related to Masters module ‘E822 Multidisciplinary Dissertation: Education, Childhood and Youth’

For participants invited to provide documents

E822 Information Letter: Documents

To those involved in my interviews,

I am currently studying the masters module ‘E822 Multidisciplinary Dissertation: Education, Childhood and Youth’ at the Open University in the Faculty of Wellbeing, Education, Language and Sport. My studies are being supervised by a personal tutor [who can be contactable via: WELS-ECYS-Masters@open.ac.uk]. I am following research protocols recommended by the University which have been approved by a named supervisor in this setting. I will be using a range of means for collecting information to help me learn about the possible impact of the 2021 Autumn phonics reading check on teaching and learning. It will be a small-scale investigation aimed at helping me better understand and develop phonics and reading lessons here. I will be sharing my findings with others for whom they may be relevant to changing practice.

I invite you to provide your permission to use the drawings you create as part of my study.

- If this is specifically created documentation, I confirm that documents will be either created so that the author cannot be identified or will be de-identified.
- I confirm that I will not be collecting images which include images of people (whether children and young people or adults).

All documentation will be kept confidential, being stored securely on password protected devices. In the case of paper copies, digital images will be taken as soon as possible. The original versions will then be destroyed. You can withdraw your permission for the documents to be included in my study. If you wish to do so, please contact me by 1st June 2022.
If the documents were created by a child or young person under 18 then a parent/carer or guardian will also be asked to support their decision to share their document. Please return the consent/assent form. If you do not consent for the requested documentation to be used in my study, please contact me and I commit to excluding your data. Feel free to ask me any questions about how this document will be used in my research before making your decision. I can be contacted via email (Sankey@). 

Yours sincerely

Rachel Sankey

The ethics protocols and documentation to support the E822 Multi-disciplinary Dissertation: Education, Childhood and Youth have been developed with advice from the Open University Human Research Ethics Committee and have been confirmed by the Chair as fully compliant with The Open University’s Ethics Principles for Research with Human Participants.


Appendix 8

E822 Information Letter - Policy Documents. (Some information removed to preserve anonymity).
I am currently studying the masters module ‘E822 Multidisciplinary Dissertation: Education, Childhood and Youth’ at the Open University in the Faculty of Wellbeing, Education, Language and Sport. My studies are being supervised by a personal tutor [who can be contactable via: WELS-ECYS-Masters@open.ac.uk]. I am following research protocols recommended by the University which have been approved by a named supervisor in this setting. I will be using a range of means for collecting information to help me learn about the possible impact of the 2021 Autumn phonics reading check on teaching and learning. It will be a small-scale investigation aimed at helping me better understand and develop phonics and reading lessons here. I will be sharing my findings with others for whom they may be relevant to changing practice.

I invite you to provide your permission to use the Teaching and Learning Policy and Assessment Policy as part of my study.

- If this is existing documentation, then I confirm that all identifiable information will be removed before the documents are shared beyond the setting.

All documentation will be kept confidential, being stored securely on password protected devices. In the case of paper copies, digital images will be taken as soon as possible. The original versions will then be destroyed. You can withdraw your permission for the documents to be included in my study. If you wish to do so, please contact me by 1st June 2022.

Please return the consent form. If you do not consent for the requested documentation to be used in my study, please contact me and I commit to excluding your data. Feel free to ask me any questions about how this document will be used in my research before making your decision. I can be contacted via email (Sankey@).  

Yours sincerely

Rachel Sankey

The ethics protocols and documentation to support the E822 Multi-disciplinary Dissertation: Education, Childhood and Youth have been developed with advice from the Open University Human Research Ethics Committee and have been confirmed by the Chair as fully compliant with The Open University’s Ethics Principles for Research with Human Participants.

Appendix 9

E822 Documents Participant Consent and Assent form. (Some information removed to preserve anonymity).

**ECYS/WELS E822 DOCUMENTS PARTICIPANT CONSENT AND ASSENT FORM**

If this request relates to a child/young person under the age of 18 please would a parent, carer or guardian read these questions with them and, if necessary, complete the replies for them.

Please indicate YES or NO for each of the questions below and return the completed form by Friday 18th March 2022 to Rachel Sankey.

Have you read (or had read with you) the information about the documents to be collected? YES NO

Has someone explained the reason for collecting the documents to you? YES NO

Do you understand which documents will be collected? YES NO

Have you asked all the questions you want? YES NO

Have you had your questions answered in a way you understand? YES NO

Do you understand it is OK to withdraw your permission to use the documents? YES NO

Are you happy with how your data will be stored? YES NO

Do you understand that your name and any other real names as well as any information that would identify you will be removed from the documents? YES NO

Are you happy for documents relating to you to be used as explained? YES NO
If any answers are ‘no’ feel free to ask for further information. However, if you don’t want to allow your documents to be used, please just let me know and don’t sign your name.

If you do give consent, please write your name and today’s date. You can change your mind later, by letting me know.

Your name

____________________________________

Date

____________________________________

If the documents were created by a child or young person under 18 and you are happy for the child or young person you are responsible for (as their parent, carer or guardian) to share them, please could you also sign and date below.

Print name

____________________________________

Sign

____________________________________

Date

____________________________________

Please return this form in person to Rachel Sankey (or via email [Sankey@______________________]).

Thank you for your help.

The ethics protocols and documentation to support the E822 Multi-disciplinary Dissertation: Education, Childhood and Youth have been developed with advice from the Open University Human Research Ethics Committee and have been confirmed by the Chair as fully compliant with The Open University’s Ethics Principles for Research with Human Participants. Link: http://www.open.ac.uk/research/sites/www.open.ac.uk.research/files/files/Documents/Ethics-Principles-for-Research-with-Human-Participants.pdf