

## Summary of the significance of the Integrated Group Reading (IGR) research findings and their implications

*“We are so pleased with IGR because our children have come on in leaps and bounds. We invited the Literacy Co-ordinator (at Sundorne Infant School) over to HJS to observe the IGR Teacher focus and she couldn’t believe the impact it has had on them. It feels really nice to be part of an intervention that actually works.”*

*Assistant Head, Harlescott Junior School (see T1)*

The IGR programme is an innovative early reading intervention for children who are struggling to learn to read. Following an initial training day in both 2015 and 2016, it was trialled over two research phases as an inclusive version of small group teacher-led classroom-based reading teaching. During this time the programme team, including local authority literacy advisers, provided regular support visits for teachers implementing the new approach and in addition ran local follow-up support training sessions halfway through the intervention to try and help keep things on track.

The initial research question was two-pronged: (i) would IGR teaching result in improved reading gains and attitudes to reading for the IGR group as compared to the control group, and (ii) would teacher-led inclusive IGR teaching have a negative effect on progress in reading for the rest of the class?

It was decided that the first year of the study (Phase 1) would be run as a randomised controlled trial, with some schools having the intervention and others serving as control classes. In Phase 2, teachers in these schools were also trained to offer the intervention. In Phase 1, schools finding themselves in the control group were asked to continue with normal support arrangements for their struggling readers. Both groups (intervention and control) were monitored at regular intervals by the evaluation team.

In the event, the outcomes for research question (i) were mixed, resulting for Phase 1 in a mean ratio gain (Hodder) of 1.6 for accuracy and comprehension (11.5 months progress in 7 months) in both the intervention and the control groups, and for Phase 2 in an improved mean ratio gain of 2.0 (14 months progress in 7 months) for the remaining intervention groups. Ratio gains of 1.6 are considered ‘modest impact’, and of 2.0 are considered ‘useful impact’.

Insofar as (ii) was concerned, results showed that, in Phase 1, IGR in the classroom did not have any negative effect on the reading progress of children not having the intervention, and in Phase 2 that non-IGR children showed somewhat better progress on the Hodder standardised scale in the treatment classes compared to the control classes (Executive Summary *ibid*).

*These results were positive, and help to negate any fear that schools may have that high quality teacher-led teaching in the classroom with struggling readers might be detrimental to the progress of others.*

Also on a positive note, the outcome of the experimental evaluation indicated that the multi-perspective IGR approach that supports enjoyment of reading resulted in Phase 1 in as much reading gain as the more phonics oriented and intensively delivered programmes used in control classes, and in Phase 2 in better progress on the Hodder scale than that of Phase 1 control groups. *The multi-perspective IGR approach could be viewed, therefore, as an alternative (or addition) for pupils who continue to experience difficulty with a singular synthetic phonics route into reading.*

Insofar as the SWRT (the reading of unfamiliar words out of context) was concerned, there were no comparative control outcomes for these, but treatment group results were, for the most part, better for Year 2 than for Year 3 teachers. This suggests a general dropping off of classroom phonics and sight word training in schools once the end of Year 2 follow-up Phonics Screening Check has occurred. It also suggests that the Year 3 IGR teacher-led lesson could usefully include a word-check revision component and that more attention could also be paid by teachers to the precise and consistent use of analytic phonics games. In addition, TAs could be trained to deliver individual rather than group Pelmanism word games in IGR follow-up sessions.

A story-linked synthetic phonics game for each IGR learning pack for children needing to strengthen their L>R phoneme to grapheme mapping skills has also now been added to the IGR programme.

Insofar as the Hodder (accuracy and comprehension) results were concerned, questions nevertheless remain as to why it was that some teachers delivering IGR had better outcomes than others in terms of the gains their children made. What was it about their understanding and implementation of the new way of working, and about the pedagogical and organisational contexts in which they were embedded that was making the crucial difference for their children?

In an attempt to look at this more closely, the process evaluation (run alongside the experimental evaluation by the evaluation team) is relevant.

Specifically, the work of seven Phase 2 teachers with diverse profiles was looked at in terms of school characteristics, IGR organisation, IGR teaching, and mean group reading scores and reported outcomes, with particular attention being paid to the extent of the match in each case between level of IGR fidelity and reading gains.

The matter of what a fidelity index would include was a complex one: to what extent were we looking at organisational matters (lessons being held consistently in the classroom, for instance), and to what extent does IGR fidelity mean fidelity to and understanding of the teaching pedagogy itself? What happens, for instance, when lesson items are postponed by teachers so that a Year 2 group can more successfully learn at a pace that suits them? Which aspects of IGR delivery can be adjusted, and

which are strictly non-negotiable? What can we learn from the teaching practice and teaching contexts of teachers whose children made good progress gains?

Eventually, a working fidelity index was devised to reflect (with the inclusion of classroom organisation) the IGR lesson sequence shown on the Lesson Observation Record Forms employed by programme team literacy advisers over the course of the intervention, but including, this time, a range of fidelity scores for each item on the index. Teacher Lesson Observation Records were then scrutinised, with teaching details entered onto individual fidelity indices. These were then cross-referenced with individual teacher mean group reading scores in the search for any discernible patterns or correlations between context, teaching detail and reading gains.

#### Case studies

These are set out in detail elsewhere (Koutsouris & Norwich, 2018), but, in summary, of the 7 cases analysed, although in 3 cases there was a match between level of overall IGR fidelity and reading gains (T1, T2, and T4) in the remaining 4 cases there was a mismatch. These latter 4 cases could be organised into 2 groups: the first included teachers with high or medium fidelity index scores and low reading gains (T3, T6 and T7); the second was a single case study of a teacher with a low overall fidelity index score but relatively high gains (T5). More details are given below.

#### Programme team lesson observations

Use of the programme team lesson observations supported the case study analyses and their respective summaries:

In the cases of T1 and T2 (high fidelity; high gains), all supporting contextual and classroom organisation factors were securely in place, including regular high quality literacy adviser support and guidance. Teachers worked hard to understand, learn and implement IGR teaching in depth and did this consistently over time. After an initial period of confusion in terms of what was expected, there was strong fidelity to IGR practice throughout the course of the intervention, including close adherence to the innovative and unfamiliar Storytelling, Lotto and Collaborative Reading parts of the lesson

In the case of T4 (low fidelity; low gains), regular high quality Literacy Adviser support and guidance could not mitigate the continuing absence of other factors and the presence, for most of the intervention, of strong and countervailing pedagogical thinking. There was an unwillingness, in particular, to follow requested IGR practice as regards Storytelling, Lotto, and Collaborative Reading which, taken together, are at the heart of the IGR teaching rationale and teaching methodology.

In terms of T3 (high fidelity; low gains), the full range of fidelity index items was observed to be mostly present over time but IGR teaching itself was of poor quality. Further scrutiny of programme team observations showed a teacher going through the motions without properly engaging herself or the children, nor understanding the need for strengthening children's reading ability through consistently

meticulous, in-depth IGR teaching (Storytelling, Lotto, and Collaborative Reading sections were also, in the case of this teacher, especially weak)

Teachers 6 and 7 (medium fidelity; low gains) on further scrutiny of individual Lesson Observation Records can be seen, especially, to have consistently delivered less than accurate teaching over time of IGR recommended practice in Storytelling, Lotto and Collaborative Reading. This involved, for instance, giving out the books and asking inference questions rather than engaging children as a storytelling group, or storytelling that is too perfunctory to ensure children's deep engagement; in Lotto, forgetting to put words into story-linked sentences, asking children to read the Lotto words, or using Lotto to make teaching points about spelling, grammar and word analysis; failing to give children free perusal of new books before they read; using the Collaborative Reading section to 'read round', failing to develop the practice of using choral reading strategically in support of individual reading or to restore pace and fluency, and forgetting consistently to briefly check children's understanding, match phonics games with book level, or prepare them for their TA sessions

T6 also failed for most of the intervention to include the supporting phonics game at all until the final observation, when a game was chosen that matched neither the level of the book nor the learning needs of the pupil she was especially targeting

In the case of T5 (low fidelity; medium high gains), the SWAP phonics game was also omitted from the lesson, making it difficult for the observer to know whether the game chosen for later on in the day was a match for the children's current or proximal IGR reading level or was being chosen to tally with the school's classroom spelling curriculum.

This Year 2 teacher's low fidelity index score was also reflective of (i) a 25-rather than 30-minute lesson, (ii) children's TA follow-up work not being referred to in the lesson, and (iii) teacher and children not consistently opening and closing the new text chorally. Her IGR teaching itself, however, was for the most part high quality, especially in the Storytelling, Lotto and Collaborative Reading sections. These were delivered with strong fidelity to recommended IGR practice and with meticulous attention to IGR teaching detail, not least in the strategic use of choral reading to support children's individual reading development during Collaborative Reading

*In summary, teachers whose children had high reading gains had in common 8 key characteristics:*

- Good classroom organisation and TA support
- Able to give children in the IGR group their undivided attention
- Very supportive and involved school literacy leaders
- A willingness to teach IGR with a high degree of teaching fidelity and with good lesson pace and lesson section timing
- Close, meticulous and detailed teaching consistently over time

- An understanding of the IGR model and teaching rationale
- A particular willingness to learn to deliver the new, unfamiliar and interconnected IGR practices of (i) Storytelling for deep engagement, (ii) Lotto for phonological to visual mapping, (iii) Free time for children to peruse their new books before reading, and (iv) Collaborative Reading for the strengthening, support and development of individual reading ability
- An ability to understand and deliver well-pitched and supportive analytic phonics games

*What is non-negotiable in IGR practice?*

Whether books and associated learning materials are covered over one lesson or two:

- (1) using the IGR learning sequence with fidelity is a fundamental aspect of IGR pedagogy,
- (2) giving due weight and time to each section of the learning cycle,
- (3) adhering in a detailed way to IGR best practice as regards the learning content of each component of the teaching sequence.

*Implications of the research findings:*

- There is a place for inclusive IGR teaching in primary schools alongside standard classroom synthetic phonics delivery
- Guided Reading practices and strategies militate against children's progress when they are struggling to learn to read
- Integrated Group Reading (IGR) is an effective way of helping to secure children's early reading progress and enjoyment of learning to read
- The following aspects of IGR practice could be strengthened: story-specific Year 3 word revision and retention-checking at the beginning of the teacher-led lesson, and straight after TA individual follow-up Pelmanism games
- Future teacher training should include a more explicit explanation of the importance of following recommended practice in relation to step-by-step, developmental progression through the books and materials and the role and importance of well-pitched, matching analytic phonics games
- There is a place in IGR for a follow-up story-specific synthetic phonics component to be included in each book-related learning cycle (these have now been developed)
- Further materials (and additional materials) need to be generated and made widely available to schools through publication along with an effective school and teacher training programme

