A Critical Review of a School’s Approach to Teaching Reading in Key Stage One, using Read Write Inc.

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Abstract

As you are reading this abstract, you are subconsciously blending phonemes together to construct these very words in front of you. The method that teaches children how to do just that is called phonics – or /ph/ /o/ /n/ /i/ /c/ /s/ - a topic that has been at the heart of controversies regarding the teaching of reading for more than 50 years. Additionally, proprietary reading schemes that advocate the implementation of synthetic phonics in the classroom have faced great criticism. This case study has focused upon a reading scheme – Read Write Inc – and how it is implemented within a Key Stage One setting.

Read Write Inc lessons were observed, and interviews with relevant members of staff were conducted. Four members of Key Stage One staff willingly participated in the study, providing rich qualitative data to be thoroughly examined and analysed.

The children seemed to enjoy Read Write Inc, yet criticisms associated with reading schemes were apparent in the results, such as teacher boredom, and phonics not being suitable for children that lack phonemic awareness. Further issues arose, such as the Read Write Inc scheme not being suitable for all abilities. Despite the issues, the teachers believe that Read Write Inc is allowing the majority of pupils to meet the reading expectations set forth in the Statutory Guidance within the National Curriculum.

There is not a one-size-fits-all solution for teaching reading to beginners, but as a future educator, there is a tremendous responsibility to provide children with the reading provision they need to allow them to develop within all aspects of their education.
**Declaration**

This dissertation is the product of my own work and does not infringe the ethical principles set out in the University’s Guidelines for Research Ethics. I agree that it may be made available for reference and photocopying at the discretion of the University.

**Signed:**

**Name:** Catherine Flanigan

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

The ability to read is one of the most important skills that children attain during their early years, and is a necessary pre-requisite for children’s continuing education.

(Callinan and van der Zee, 2010)

Despite this, the Progress in International Reading Literacy found the reading performance of children in England had fallen from 3rd to 19th in the world in 2007 (BBC, 2007). The same assessment has more recently highlighted that although England have since improved, they are placed significantly lower than where they used to be (Twist et al, 2012). Formal Liberal Democrat schools spokesman, David Laws (2007, in BBC, 2007) states that these results suggest schools’ reading strategies have been ineffective.

The most effective way of teaching reading has been contested for many years (Jolliffe, 2004). Whole Language Theory and phonics have been two strategies involved with this debate, and Goodman (1998) described these competing pedagogies as ‘the reading wars’. Whole Language Theory supports that learning to read is similar to learning to speak – a natural process, nurtured by unstructured immersion (Lemann, 1997). Phonics, however, involves learning letter and sound combinations that convey the 44 phonemes of the English language (Moats, 2007).

Learning to read is a fundamental aspect of children’s education. Correspondingly, children who achieve a ‘good start’ during their first years of reading are likely to have accelerated progress in their attainment throughout school (Papen, 2015). This
dissertation has explored whether a specific reading scheme is providing the Key Stage 1 (KS1) children with the ‘good start’ they require.

1.1 Background and Policy of Phonics

Little effort was made to raise the reading standards in England during the first nine years of the National Curriculum (1989-1998). Reports from Her Majesty’s Inspectors detailed that phonics were a weak feature of teaching (Rose, 2006). However, the National Literacy Strategy in 1998 changed this – engaging schools in developing a structured literacy programme – which included phonic content and how it should be taught. Subsequently, there was a rise in standards (Wyse, Andrews and Hoffman, 2010).

Following this was a government initiative named Progression in Phonics (PiP). This recommended an approach to teaching phonics with a lively, enjoyable fast pace (Chew, 2010; DfEE, 1999). Then, in 2004, the government produced ‘Playing with Sounds’ as a supplement to PIP, offering advice about teaching phonics, whilst placing emphasis on blending sounds (DfES, 2004).

In 2007, ‘Letters and Sounds’ was introduced to schools to replace PiP and Playing with Sounds (Adonis and Hughes, 2007). The programmes had not been working effectively enough, therefore a systematic synthetic phonics was required (Rose, 2006). He details, “speaking and listening, together with reading and writing, are prime communication skills that are central to children’s intellectual, social and emotional development” (p. 3). These skills are promoted by high quality, systematic phonic work (Rose).
1.2 Read, Write, Inc.

Read Write Inc, developed by Ruth Miskin (2017), is designed to create “fluent readers, confident speakers and willing writers”. Each Read Write Inc programme is said to accelerate children’s progress, to prepare them for the National Curriculum Tests (Oxford University Press, 2017). Further details will be outlined in Chapter 2.

1.3 Aim and Context of Study

The study is centred on Key Stage 1 in a mainstream community primary school, which caters for children from a wide variety of cultural and social backgrounds, and is situated in a rather deprived area. The school’s current approach to teaching reading consists of Jolly Phonics in Reception, and Read Write Inc in Years 1 and 2.

A case study method gathered data from observations and teacher interviews. The study examined the way in which the setting teach Read Write Inc (RWI) lessons in KS1. Furthermore, if and how one scheme can effectively cater for a mixed ability KS1 has been explored, whilst the views of the schoolteachers and teaching assistants have been recorded, considered and analysed – with particular interest into whether they believe certain children are being held back by the scheme, and why so. The study also aimed to determine whether the RWI scheme is allowing the children to reach the expectations set forth in the National Curriculum’s Statutory Guidance, with regards to reading (see Appendix 1). Therefore, the research aims were as followed:
1. Examine the way in which a school teach KS1 children how to read, using Read Write Inc.

2. Explore whether this approach is suitable for all abilities in the KS1 in this setting.

3. Determine whether Read Write Inc is enabling pupils to meet the expectations outlined in the Statutory Guidance within the National Curriculum (Department for Education, 2014).

A child’s reading ability has a major influence on their learning across other areas of the curriculum (Medwell et al, 1998). It is argued that if children struggle to read, they are likely to struggle in all curriculum subjects (Wasil and Thawani, 2014; Alexander, 2012; Geske and Ozola, 2008). Therefore, how children learn to read will always be of fundamental importance.

All data collected has been thoroughly analysed and discussed, and the chosen research methods have been justified and critiqued.
Chapter 2 – Literature Review

Introduction

Phonics has attracted debate for years, as a means of trying to increase reading attainment (Conrad and Serlin, 2005). This chapter will discuss the research and literature surrounding the topic of phonics, and Read Write Inc (RWI). It will dissect the studies that have shaped the way in which phonics is taught – specifically focusing upon a 7 year study in Clackmannanshire, and the debate surrounding the two types of phonics – synthetic and analytic.

2.1 What is phonics?

To become literate in the English language, it is necessary to understand that specific phonemes (sounds) are represented by graphemes (letters) in writing (Bryne, 1998; Bryne and Fielding-Barnsley, 1989). Phonics is an approach to teaching reading that involves linking letters, or groups of letters, to spoken sounds (Waugh, Carter and Desmond, 2015). To exemplify this, when the word ‘dog’ is read aloud, the constituent sounds are blended – /d/ /o/ /g/ – and when ‘dog’ is written, the word can be segmented, and these sounds represented with the appropriate letters (Graham and Kelly, 2000). The linguist, David Crystal (1987) determines that phonic approaches are centred on the principle of identifying sound-letter relationships in a writing system, and teaching children how to use these to decode or construct words. The theory behind phonics is that, if children can hear the sound ‘c’ at the beginning of ‘cat’, then they will learn to relate that sound to the letter when they see the ‘c’ letter in writing (Nyberg, 1998).
2.2 The Phonics Debate

Phonics is a much-debated area of literacy teaching (Papen, 2015). The National Literacy Strategy (DfEE, 1998) recommended a mixed approach to teaching literacy – including an element of phonics instruction. However, the argument is that such an approach could lead to confusion, especially in young children, and subsequently, phonics should be the predominant method of reading that children are taught (Torgerson, Brooks and Hall, 2006). Yet, there is much debate surrounding which method of phonics teaching is the most effective (Litt, Martin and Place, 2014).

In the debate on the teaching and role of phonics, advocates of a synthetic phonic approach (e.g. Glazzard and Stokoe, 2013; Rose, 2006; Miskin, 2005; Chew, 1997) argue that the results shown in synthetic phonics approaches are far in advance of the results obtained by children using other programmes, such as mixed phonics programmes (synthetic and analytic).

Synthetic phonics is the teaching of phonemes and their associated graphemes (Neaum, 2017). Lewis and Ellis (2006) explain that children start by hearing phonemes in speech, and blending the phonemes together orally. During reading, phonemes are represented by the grapheme, pronounced, and then blended together in order to create the word. For example: ‘hen’ – the child would sound out the three phonemes /h/ /e/ /n/, and then blend them together, forming ‘hen’.

Analytic phonics, on the other hand, teaches children to identify phonemes in the whole words, rather than the individual graphemes (Lewis and Ellis, 2006). Children analyse the common phoneme in a set of words, and each of these words will
contain the phoneme being studied (National Literacy Trust, 2017). For example, teacher and pupils may discuss what the following words have in common: tent, tree, tool and tip.

A 7-year longitudinal study, conducted by Johnston and Watson (2005), in Clackmannanshire, Scotland, compared analytic and synthetic approaches. The study involved dividing around 300 primary school children into three groups. One group was taught using analytic phonics, another with synthetic phonics, and the last by an analytic programme, which included teaching without reference to print (Pearson, 2017). This study was actively promoted by the media (Wyse and Styles, 2007), resulting in a recommendation from England's Education Select Committee, that there should be a governmental enquiry into the teaching of reading (House of Commons Educations and Skills Committee, 2005). In fact, this study was hailed by Burkard (1999) as the ‘Holy Grail’ of teaching reading. In June 2005, the government announced that there would be a review of the teaching of reading in the early years to be headed by education consultant, Jim Rose (Rose, 2006).

The final report of the Clackmannanshire study concluded that the synthetic phonics approach is more effective than the analytic approach (Johnston and Watson, 2005). Nick Gibb (2012), the secretary for schools, claimed that on average, the children that were taught synthetic phonics were a reading age of 14 by the age of 11. However, when cited in the Rose Report, there is bias towards the work from this study that advocated synthetic phonics. Firstly, the study had been designed to compare the effectiveness of synthetic and analytic phonics used to teach children to read - yet, the group being taught analytic phonics were taught far fewer letters than
those in the synthetic phonics group (Wyse and Styles, 2007), and therefore did not allow for valid comparison. Secondly, Johnston and Watson do not provide information regarding the compliance or teacher effectiveness in the experiment, and the programmes were implemented by “one of the authors”, yet it is not clear which author this was. Therefore, perhaps \textit{a priori} views on synthetic phonics may have had a beneficial impact on the delivery of the synthetic phonic lessons, or a negative impact on the delivery of the analytic phonic lessons.

Lastly, the socio-economic backgrounds of the children were not outlined adequately in the study, and very little information was given regarding the schools involved (Wyse and Styles, 2007). With these limitations in mind, it may be difficult to comprehend why this study, as opposed to other studies covered in the two meta-analyses, was highlighted by the Rose Review, other than due to its strong media attention or as it was ‘politically expedient’ to do so (Wyse and Goswami, 2008). Nonetheless, the media advocated Clackmannanshire’s conclusions.

\subsection*{2.3 Phonics vs Phonemic Awareness}

Fitzpatrick (2008) explains that pupils must acquire a strong understanding of spoken language before they can start to comprehend written language. This knowledge of how language works is referred to as \textit{phonemic awareness}. In other words, phonemic awareness refers to the ability to notice, think about, and manipulate phonemes in spoken words (Ehri \textit{et al}, 2001). Reviews from authors such as Hurford \textit{et al}, (1993) and Mann (1993) support the idea that phonemic awareness is a highly important factor in teaching reading. It may be surprising that phonemic awareness is related to reading, as it is a skill that does not involve any
print – just spoken language. However, phonemic awareness becomes important when children start to learn to read – when they are confronted with the problem of associating letters with the phonemes that represent them (Thompson and Nicholson, 1999).

Thorough reading has highlighted that the relationship between phonemic awareness and phonics has the tendency to be misunderstood. Although phonemic awareness is a listening skill that exists with no contact to print - until contact with the written words, there is no kind of communicative value in developing such a skill, and many children simply cannot develop this capacity naturally (Hempenstall, 1997). To understand how phonemes are represented by graphemes, children must require some phonemic awareness (Adams, 1990).

Similarly, Robbins, Robbins and Kenny (2007) explain that, when it comes to decoding simple words, the skill of phonemic awareness is essential. Without the ability to decode simple words, the pupils have limited options for identifying the word they are trying to learn – they would have to ask someone what the word is, and then memorize it (Robbins, Robbins and Kenny). However, McGuinness (2004) emphasizes that this is not a good long-term option, as there is a natural limit to the capacity of a human’s brain to memorize ‘arbitrary visual symbols’, and since there are nearly 2 million words within the English lexicon – this option is simply unrealistic.

With this in mind, it may not be surprising to discover that gaining instruction from phonics is difficult when children are lacking in phonemic awareness (Harrison,
A study, conducted by Palmer and Reason (2000), that involved using phonics to teach sounds to children in Years 1 and 2, concluded that the volume and frequency of many of the words were too great for half of the children, because their phonemic awareness was not sophisticated enough to absorb them all.

Interestingly, (Muñoz et al, 2017; Fletcher-Flinn and Johnston, 1999; Fazio, 1997) found that children from lower-income families are a lot more likely to experience a lack of phonemic awareness than children from higher-income families. Correspondingly, Hart and Risley (1995) estimate that at the age of three, children from low-income families have heard ten-million words, those in middle-income families - twenty-million words, and those from higher-income families could have heard nearly thirty-million words. Therefore, given that Palmer and Reason’s (2000) study was conducted with children from varying-income families, the results of the study are hardly surprising.

This concept is further detailed by Thompson and Nicholson (1999), who state that children from low-income backgrounds generally start school with lower levels of phonemic awareness than their classmates from higher-income backgrounds. Studies from Wallach and Wallach (1976) and Dickenson and Snow (1987) found that children from lower-income backgrounds had great difficulty when completing phonics related tests, such as pointing to a picture that begins with a specific phoneme, and experienced great difficulty with rime awareness tasks, such as whether the word ‘cat’ rhymes with ‘fat’ or foot’. Although dated, these studies’
results are support by more recent research from Leyva, Sparks and Reese (2012) and Gillon (2012).

With these studies in mind, academics, such as (Pennington, 2009; Huata, 2006; Smith, 1999), state that phonics simply should not be taught to children prior to significant development in their phonemic awareness. This is, of course, difficult, with mixed-income and mixed-ability classes – yet, the posed literature suggests that teaching phonics to children with no phonemic awareness is merely a waste of time.

2.4 Read, Write, Inc.

Read Write Inc is a proprietary reading scheme, developed by Ruth Miskin, which provides a ‘structured and systematic’ approach to the teaching of phonics in early years (Oxford University Press, 2017). The scheme promises a “fun way” for all children to learn the letters and the sounds that blend together to make words (Ruth Miskin Training, 2017). RWI is claimed to adhere to the key aims of the National Curriculum through its ‘systematic teaching approach’ and ‘inspiring resources’. As an advocate of synthetic phonics, Miskin’s scheme is used to teach children the individual phonemes, before blending them together to make whole words (Waugh, Carter and Desmond, 2015). In Key Stage 1, children are introduced to the concept of blending phonemes together using CVC (consonant-vowel-consonant) words, and the early letter-sound correspondences make it possible to create many CVC words, for example: sat, map, pat and so forth (Rosen, 2016). Devine (2015) explains that in RWI, the individual sounds are referred to as ‘speed sounds’. A different speed sound is the focus of each individual Read Write Inc lesson – the sound will be learnt
through a repetitive flashcard activity. The speed sound will then be the emphasis within a short story, which will be read to and repeated by the children (Oxford University Press, 2016).

Although Miskin is now deemed the ‘phonics queen’ by Wilby (2008), in an interview with The Guardian, she admits that when it comes to phonics, she was once a ‘sinner’. When she originally started teaching, she believed that phonics ‘bored children witless’ and put them off reading, but when she scrapped all phonics resources, the children’s literacy results dropped at the end of the year. This led her to believe that rather than rejecting phonics, they should just be taught in a more interesting way – hence the development of RWI (Wilby).

Miskin (2008, in Wilby, 2008) developed RWI with children from low-income families in mind – claiming that the children who lack certain ‘home advantages’ are in desperate need of the phonics instruction that RWI aims to provide. However, this concept is in complete contrast with the above studies, conducted by (Pennington, 2009; Huata, 2006; Smith, 1999), who deem phonics instruction as pointless if a child lacks phonemic awareness, and, as already established, they are more likely to lack this phonemic awareness if they are from a low-income family.

Although taught in over 5000 schools in the UK (Gunter and Mills, 2017), RWI has received some criticisms over the years. Miskin’s approach has been deemed simply inadequate, as more than half of the most common words in English are not accessible using a purely synthetic phonics approach (Dombey, 2010). It is also
suggested by John Bangs, head of education at the NUT, that systematic phonics approaches, such as RWI, are making the assumption that all children learn in the same way (Scott, 2010). He believes that there is no one-size-fits-all, two-dimensional solution to teaching reading.

There is also concern that proprietary reading schemes undermine the skills of the individual teachers (Lefstein, 2005; Apple, 1981). With very clear step-by-step instructions on the first page of each RWI book, little skill is needed to provide a RWI lesson. The repetitive nature of RWI is also a cause for concern for Goodwyn and Fuller (2012), who conducted interviews with teachers, and found that many of them believe that the repetitive structure eventually leads to teacher boredom. Bentham and Hutchins (2012) draw a link between teacher boredom and pupil motivation, claiming that young children can pick up on teacher boredom, and subsequently, this has a damaging effect on their motivation to partake in lessons.

**Conclusion**

To conclude, this literature review has presented the concept of phonics, the difference between synthetic and analytic phonics and how studies have compared them. The difficulties faced by children learning phonics who acquire a lack of phonemic awareness has also been discussed, along with a discussion on Read Write Inc, and its criticisms. Based upon the research outlined in this literature review, this research project aims to provide readers with a deeper understanding of RWI, and how a particular school implements this scheme, along with whether
teachers believe this way of teaching systematic phonics is suitable for a mixed-ability KS1.
Chapter 3 – Research Design

Never has so much attention been focused on the findings of educational research, and never has the need for critical evaluation of that research been so strong

(Suter, 2011, p. 1)

Clear thinking about the process of educational research enables one to critically evaluate the research, and construct educational studies by collecting the answers to researchable questions. This chapter will outline how the research was conducted, the methods chosen, and the ethical considerations that were adhered to. Furthermore, it will explain the reasoning behind the decisions and use the research gathered to comply with the need for critical evaluation, outlined by Suter. Subsequently, if this study was to be repeated, this chapter should be a guide in doing so.

3.1 Paradigm

A paradigm is a “cluster of beliefs and dictates” (D’Cruz and Jones, 2004, p. 29), which influence what should be studied, how research should be done, and how results should be interpreted. An interpretive paradigm has been identified as appropriate for this study. The interpretive paradigm is underpinned by observations – collecting certain information about events, and interpretations – generating meaning from information (Aikenhead, 1997; Deetz, 1996). The school’s approach
to teaching reading, using RWI, is being reviewed. Therefore the personal experiences, thoughts and opinions of the teaching staff are fundamental aspects of the research. Acknowledging and understanding the importance of said aspects is the key to success (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). Robert-Holmes (2014) claims that this interpretivist approach does not allow for generalisations and absolute truths. However, this research is only reviewing one school, and therefore does not aim to make generalisations.

3.2 The Participating School

In order to gather good quality research, whilst allowing for time restraints, KS1 in a placement school was the research focus. Conducting research in a familiar setting means that during teacher interviews, the honesty and accuracy of the responses can be more easily gauged by the researcher, and having similar experiences as the teacher avoids any unnecessary questions being asked (Hockey, 2006; Riemer, 1977). Furthermore, limiting the research to one school allows in-depth research to be conducted, as opposed to gaining a general overview that will not enable the collection of such rich qualitative data.

3.3 Research Approach

In the early planning stages, it was apparent that devising research aims would allow the study to be more focused. Research aims must be interesting, ethical, relevant, manageable and simple (Hulley et al. 2011; Farrugia et al. 2010; English, 2002). Therefore, the aims of the research, set forth in Chapter 1, were in line with these recommendations.
There is no straightforward way to ‘mechanically convert’ research aims into methods, and methods are the means to reaching the research aims, rather than a logical transformation of the latter (Phillips, 1987). The selection of the research methods depends on which methods will work most effectively in the situation to provide the data sought (Maxwell, 2005). Therefore, a case study method, including observations and teacher interviews, would be the most effective and appropriate method for this study.

*Case studies, in their true essence, explore and investigate contemporary real-life phenomenon through detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions and their relationships*  
(Zainal, 2007, p. 1)

Case studies allow close examination of data collected within the specific school context, and allows for the understanding and exploration of complex issues (Bryman, 2016; Gulsecen and Kubat, 2006). Furthermore, if this study had been limited to quantitative methods, some important data may possibly have been obscured (Tellis, 1997).

An exploratory case study was conducted, as this type of study is more unstructured, and aims to generate hypotheses for future research (Bergh and Ketchen, 2009). The research collected was inductive, drawing conclusions and building theory from primary research (Lichy, 2015; Yin, 1994).
3.4 Data Collection Tools

Observations

As its name implies, observations are a method of gathering data through observing (Dudovskiy, 2016; Good, 1986) – aiming to develop a more detailed understanding of what is being studied, to describe it in detail (Gomez-Galan, 2016; Waxman and Huang, 1999; Brophy and Waxman, 1995). When collecting data through observations, it was acknowledged that the observational data must provide readers with the same level of understanding achieved by the researcher (Scott and Morrison, 2007).

Observations allowed RWI to be observed in its naturalistic setting – the classroom, providing a richer understanding of the scheme (Voogt and Knezek, 2008; Brain, 2000). Observations serve as a valuable tool to review and evaluate the effectiveness of a school programme (Dirr, 2003), which is highly appropriate for this study.

Simple, non-participant, unstructured observation was conducted. Simple observation refers to the observer having no influence on the situation (Webb et al. 1966), and non-participant observations involve the researcher observing, yet not participating in what is occurring (Bryman, 2016). Accordingly, in this study, there was no researcher participation in the activities. In fact, in agreement with Zaare (2013), the observer sat at the back of the classroom to ensure no distraction was caused. The aim of an unstructured observation is to record as much detail as possible, to develop a detailed narrative account of what is happening
Conforming to this, ‘continuous recording’ occurred – continuous recording throughout the observations, not watching for specific behaviours (Martin and Bateson, 2007).

However, issues could have arisen when conducting observations, regarding validity - referring to the believability or credibility of the research (Ary et al. 2013). Observations can be limited by reactivity. Also referred to as the Hawthorne Effect (McCambridge et al. 2014), reactivity refers to the phenomenon in which the subject changes their behaviour when they are aware they are being observed (Kazdin, 1981). This could have potentially affected the study’s results and, subsequently, the interpretation of the observational data (Reynolds and Kamphaus, 2013). To counteract this, being present in the setting over multiple periods allows teachers to become used to an observer’s presence (Keller, 1986). Therefore, adhering to this, a suitable amount of time was spent with both classes before the observations.

Although observations were beneficial to the research, they did not fully answer the research questions. Therefore, interviews with the teachers and teaching assistants were conducted when each observation was complete.

**Interviews**

Interviewing is the most commonly used data collection tool in qualitative research (King and Horrocks, 2010). Interviewing involves encouraging the interviewee to open up, and expand upon any knowledge they are willing to provide (Brenner, 2006; Gillham, 2000). Throughout, interviewers must convey their interest in what
the interviewee contributes, whilst encouraging them to speak expansively about a topic (Howe and Dougherty, 1993).

Unstructured interviews were deemed appropriate for this research - allowing flexibility (Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle, 2010). The interviewer set the direction of the interview, and listened and responded to the answers given in a conversational manner. The interviewees were encouraged to speak more than the interviewer, as this is a characteristic of a ‘good interview’ - a feature that differentiates an interview from an everyday conversation (Kvale, 1996; Spradley, 1979).

Various topic areas were written down to discuss, that aimed to provide the researcher with a deeper understanding of the RWI scheme. To allow for as much information as possible to be recorded, the questions and teachers’ answers were typed out during the interview.

However, there were potential limitations. Firstly, participants may feel discomfort and a sense if unwillingness to share information (Gates, 2007). Therefore, in line with Marshall and Rossman (1995), participants were briefed on the topics they would be asked about, and it was made clear that they could refuse to answer any questions with no repercussions. Furthermore, Newman and Newman (2008) explain the concept of self-presentation bias – when participants present themselves in the way that they wish for the interviewer to see them. This could have impacted the results of the study. Therefore, it was made clear that the dissertation is a review of the scheme – not the teachers, reducing the risk that self-presentation bias occurring.
3.5 Data Analysis

The observations were hand written and prominent themes to touch upon during interviews were highlighted (see Appendix 2), and although the interview data was typed, it was then processed into one document, and different colours were used to format the data, highlighting the common themes (see Appendix 3). Bernard (2000) refers to this process as the ‘ocular scan method’, which entails hunting for patterns within qualitative data, allowing the researcher to easily search for common themes (Ryan and Bernard, 2000; Dey, 1993).

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations can be specified as one of the most important aspects of research (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Ethics pertains to acting morally and avoiding harm, and harm can be avoided through applying ethical principles (Palaologou, 2012; Orb, Eisenhauer and Wynaden, 2000). Therefore, in line with the British Education Research Association (BERA, 2012), the following ethical considerations were analysed thoroughly, before conducting the research.

Informed Consent

Informed consent is not just a signed form – but is a process, during which the participant gains an understanding of the research and any risks involved (Office for the Protection of Research Subjects, 2013). Therefore, prior to conducting any research, the operational head teacher was provided with a gatekeeper consent
form, detailing the aims and details of the study, inviting any questions - in line with the University’s Research Ethics Committee (University of Gloucestershire, 2017). Once this form was returned, the participants were issued with a similar form, detailing the aims and the nature of the study. All forms enforced that participation in the study was voluntary, in line with the ESRC Framework for Research Ethics (2017, p. 1), who claim that, ‘research participants must participate in a voluntary way, free from any coercion’. Each form explained that although the gatekeeper’s permission had been received, the researcher wanted permission from individual participants. It was also thought that seeking individual consent from the teachers would lead to them being more cooperative during the interviews. (See Appendices 4 and 5)

**Right to Withdraw**

Research participants should always have the right to withdraw from the study, and this should be made clear to all participants before signing any consent forms (Seidman, 2015; Collins and Kneale, 2014). Therefore, participants were informed that if they wished to withdraw at any time, they could make contact before the study’s completion date, and any data could be removed.

**Confidentiality**

Confidentiality refers to an understanding between the participant and the researcher, concerning how the data will be used (Anderson, 1998). Confidentiality can also be viewed similarly to the principle of privacy (Gregory, 2003; Oliver, 2003). Adhering to the University of Gloucestershire’s (2017) ethical guidelines, the
consent forms stated that data would be kept private, with no possibility that any data would make it possible to identify the participants (Boudah, 2010).

The next chapter will present, analyse and discuss the data gathered from the research process outlined in this chapter.
Chapter 4 – Presentation of Data, Analysis and Discussion

This chapter aims to present and analyse the data collected. The research consisted of observations of the RWI lessons, followed by unstructured interviews with each member of staff in KS1. The data will be presented under the prominent themes that arose, and these themes will be explored and analysed. A transcript of the interview data, showing how it was organised for analysis, is available in Appendix 2. This chapter will draw upon links with literature outlined in Chapters 2 and 3, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the topic, and the data collected.

4.1 Enjoyment

The question, “do the children seem to enjoy the Read Write Inc lessons?” was one that was asked to each participant, and the responses were as shown:

**Figure 1:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 1 Teacher</th>
<th>“Yes”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 1 Teaching Assistant</td>
<td>“Yes, they definitely enjoy them”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 2 Teacher</td>
<td>“Usually”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 2 Teaching Assistant</td>
<td>“Yes, they do like them”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These answers reflect the observational data, which highlighted that, exceptions aside, the children generally seemed engaged and motivated during the RWI lessons, which Hyson (2008) regards as a sign that the children are enjoying the lesson. As outlined in the literature review, the scheme promises a “fun way” for children to learn phonics (Ruth Miskin Training, 2017) – which, with regards to the data collected, *did* seem apparent in the lessons at this setting. Interestingly, John (1996) asserts that if children enjoy lessons, they become more motivated, and Ferlazzo (2015) explains that when pupils feel more motivated, their academic performance improves.
The theme of enjoyment became apparent upon adhering to the first research aim – to examine the way in which a school teach KS1 children how to read, using Read Write Inc. Upon reflection, although one-to-one unstructured interviews appear to have the highest reliability (Conway et al, 1995), it is possible that the teachers may have exaggerated how much the children enjoyed the lessons – perhaps being concerned that disclosing that they did not enjoy the lessons would cause the researcher to develop a negative perception of their teaching ability (Grinnell and Unrau, 2010). Therefore, perhaps a more open question would have been appropriate here, such as “What do you believe to be the children’s opinions of the RWI lessons?” This open question would have allowed the teachers to answer more honestly (Glenn, 2011).

4.2 Lower Achieving Pupils (LAPs)

Presented as a significant theme within the literature review, acquiring poor phonemic awareness skills makes it very difficult for children to learn to read through the use of phonics. Although none of the participants specifically referred to any children lacking in phonemic awareness, some responses indicated that this was the case. When discussing the progression of the LAPs with the Year 1 teacher, she claimed:

“they just have trouble matching the written letters with the actual sounds”

This is almost a word-for-word definition of phonemic awareness, presented in the literature review:
The problem of associating letters with the phonemes [sounds] that represent them (Thompson and Nicholson, 1999).

Further research into this topic highlighted that children from low-income backgrounds are more likely to experience a lack of phonemic awareness in the early years of school. Interestingly, this setting’s most recent Ofsted report stated that in KS1, over two thirds of the pupils are eligible for the pupil premium – which is additional funding to raise the attainment of learning for disadvantaged children, generally from low-income backgrounds (DfE, 2014). This is well above the national average (Ofsted, 2014). Therefore, if poor phonemic awareness is common in children from low-income families, and phonemic awareness is so strongly linked with phonics instruction, then one may question the school’s choice to implement a scheme that is purely based on phonics – if over two thirds of the children are likely to experience difficulties, due to a lack of phonemic awareness.

Furthermore, it was evident that the RWI scheme is very teacher-led. A diagram has been devised to explain this concept more clearly:

**Figure 2:**
However, it is evident from research that a strong teacher-led style of teaching reading is not suited to all children (Curtis and O-Hagan, 2014). Perhaps it could be suggested that RWI does not take the child’s whole microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) into account, so it could therefore be suggested that the scheme is not suitable for their needs. Bronfenbrenner’s ‘microsystem’ refers to the interactions that occur within a child’s immediate surroundings, and for KS1 children, their microsystem (see below) is likely to be limited to the family (Shaffer, 2008).

**Figure 3**

[Diagram showing microsystem levels]

Donnelly (2016)

A child’s microsystem can have an impact on all aspects of the child’s life – including education (Landon, 2014). The data collected shows that some of the LAPs receive little-to-no parental reading guidance at home. The Year 1 teacher claimed that a child’s father had reading difficulties, and therefore could not read with him. Whatever the reasons may be, the idea is that reading at home with a parent is an effective means of fostering reading comprehension and fluency (Baker, Dreher and Guthrie, 2000). As shown in Figure 2, the knowledge starts with the reading
scheme, and ends with the child. Yet, in reality, it does not simply end with the child. Therefore, Figure 4 is a more accurate representation of how a child should appear in this reading scheme.

**Figure 4**

![Diagram showing relationships between child, parents, wider family, older sibling, and grandparents]

### 4.3 Higher Achieving Pupils (HAPs)

During the observation in the Year 1 class, a factor that immediately provoked interest was that fact that there were a small group of children that were not joining in with the RWI lesson. When asked about this, the teacher claimed that:

“they do so much extra work at home that they are well above the level that they are meant to be, so I try to set them harder things”

In fact, the participants all agreed that the HAPs need to be pushed harder – the Year 2 teacher even disclosed that a HAP’s mother has requested that her daughter
partake in more difficult reading activities, but the teacher claimed that this request is not possible, as they “don’t have the staff”.

Again, this concept can be related back to the child’s microsystem, and how the RWI scheme does not take this factor into account. As considered in Figure 4, the child’s reading ability can be influenced by all of the people in their immediate environment (microsystem). Although the LAPs may fall behind due to a lack of support from their microsystem, it is possible that the RWI scheme is not suitable for HAPs, as they become ‘too advanced’ from so much support from their microsystem. The National Child Development Study (in Carnie, 2011) discovered that children with parents that show a high level of interest in their reading ability generally acquire more advanced reading skills. Yet, one could question if it is fair that children that are encouraged so much at home cannot fully partake in RWI lessons because they are so ahead of their lesser-able peers. However, it seems as though this is not a problem subject to just this setting, as many parents of higher achieving children often show concern that their children are being ‘held back’ due to the lesson content being at a level to meet the needs of the lower ability pupils (First, 1991).

Although associating this particular issue with Bronfenbrenner’s microsystem derived from the research results, it may have been beneficial to discuss this concept with the teachers involved, to explore the idea that RWI does not take the children’s microsystem into consideration.

Exploring whether this approach is suitable for all abilities in the KS1 in this setting was in line with the second research aim, and questions in the interview were
designed specifically to meet this aim. All participants were asked to elaborate upon whether they believed this scheme was suitable for all abilities in KS1. The responses revealed that the teachers believe the scheme is not suitable for the very low achieving pupils, and some of the high achieving pupils, therefore indicating that it is only suitable for the children meeting the average, or MAPs (middle achieving pupils). As analysed in the literature review, teaching reading is not a one-size-fits-all process (Whitney, 2010). However, teaching children how to read should be multi-dimensional and child-centered (Rose and Rogers, 2012; Tzuo, 2007). Therefore, the idea that the setting is implementing a scheme that is not suitable for every single child could be flagged as a cause for concern.

The research aim was met, as the data did explore whether or not the scheme was suitable for all abilities, and this was achieved by providing the teachers to reflect upon a possible aspect of RWI that they may not have considered before.

4.4 Staff

All of the participants claimed that the lessons would be more effective if they had more members of staff, so that the groups of children would be smaller. When the Year 2 class teacher was asked what she would ask the extra staff to do, she claimed:

“I think I’d ask them to go and find even more members of staff to bring with them”

When teachers work with smaller groups of children, they are able to provide individualised instruction (Hassel and Hassel, 2004). Therefore, the logic behind the teachers believing that extra staff would make the scheme more effective was
apparent in each observation, especially in Year 1 – where a few children were ‘too advanced’ to join in, and the rest of the class were split into two groups, with around 13 children in each. The class size is 30 children, 13 children per group (minus the few that were not partaking), therefore, this may already sound like a small group of children. However, groups of up to four children can be as effective as one-to-one (Blatchford, 2003). Therefore, their desire to have more staff involved with delivering the RWI lessons can be seen as justified.

However, the teachers unanimously acknowledged that the idea of more teaching assistants being hired to teach RWI is unrealistic, or to quote one participant, ‘not do-able’. The National Careers Service (2017) state that the salary of an experienced teaching assistant is, on average, around £15,000 per annum. If this setting was to hire two more TAs (one for each KS1 class), then this would cost the school £30,000 – even two part time TAs (assuming it is half the salary) would cost them £15,000. Considering the cheapest training package for RWI is £2,500 + VAT (see Figure 6) before purchasing the books (Ruth Miskin Training, 2017) – the scheme is already costing the school a significant amount of money, without this additional expense.

**Figure 5:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Package</th>
<th>Price</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phonics Package</td>
<td>£2,750 + VAT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fresh Start Package</td>
<td>£2,750 + VAT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy and Language Package</td>
<td>£2,500 + VAT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Training Package 1</td>
<td>£2,700 + VAT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Training Package 2</td>
<td>£3,850 + VAT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development Day Bundle</td>
<td>£3,000 + VAT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Furthermore, even if the cost could be justified, this would still not address the issue regarding the children’s microsystems. Although each child would be able to receive
more individualised instruction in smaller groups (Hassel and Hassel, 2004) – if the LAPs are still receiving little reading support from those within their microsystem, learning to read with RWI could remain challenging for them.

This theme was not preconceived prior to the interviews being conducted. On reflection, although unstructured interviews should not reflect any preconceived ideas (Polit and Beck, 2010; Gill et al. 2008; Morse, 1990), it would have been beneficial in this case to have thoroughly considered and analysed as many potential ideas that may have arisen in the teacher interviews. This would have allowed certain areas, such as the idea of more staff, to have been explored in more depth, rather than questions to probe further detail being constructed on the spot.

4.5 Repetitiveness

It was evident in the observations that the children knew what was expected of them. For example, when the Year 2 teacher instructed the children to ‘quickly go through the speed sounds’ this needed no further instruction, and the children all instantly knew what was expected from them. Perhaps this is because the RWI scheme is very repetitive – each week follows the same structure, just with a different set of phonics to learn and practice. The teachers unanimously agreed that the repetitiveness of the scheme was good for the children, and that the children enjoyed this aspect of it, because they “like to know what’s coming next”. However, it is interesting to note the differing responses of the teachers, when they were asked their thoughts regarding the repetitiveness of the scheme:
Figure 6:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 1 Teacher</th>
<th>“We always mix it up a bit, so as long as it helps them I don’t mind it being repetitive”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 1 Teaching Assistant</td>
<td>“We mix it up in this class so they don’t get bored of what they’re doing, so I think it is fine”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 2 Teacher</td>
<td>“I don’t like it, personally. I think it is quite boring and that’s not what learning should be about”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 2 Teacher Assistant</td>
<td>“That’s the thing I don’t like about it – I know it’s different stories but the red books are about 30 words per book – not very exciting”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notice that the Year 1 staff claim that they “mix it up”, and do not mind the repetitive nature of the reading scheme, whilst the Year 2 staff do not disclose any information about mixing up the lessons, and both the Year 2 staff claim to dislike the repetitiveness. Perhaps the Year 1 teachers do not find it boring, as they, to quote “mix it up”. Yet, just how effective are the lessons that are not following the precise structure of RWI?

When asked to extend upon how she mixed the lessons up, the Year 1 teacher claimed that as the group “loves drawing”, she sometimes provides them with drawing activities, and justifies this by stating that this activity “gets the chatting about what they’re drawing, which will be related to the speed sounds they’re learning”. There are numerous criticisms brought to light here:

1. The teacher simply cannot control conversations between multiple children. “Chatting” about what they are drawing, and using the new speed sounds could very well occur, yet the teacher would face difficulties listening in to the
conversations of 6/7 pairs of children, ensuring they are practising the new phonic.

2. Although art has come under curriculum and political pressure over the years (Jolley, 2013) and this is by no means undermining its importance – Read Write Inc is a reading scheme, not an art scheme.

3. The same teacher also claims that the parents all appear to be happy with the progress their children are making. This is, of course, positive – yet, it could be questioned whether they would remain happy with their progress if they knew that a teacher was not quite following the precise structure.

4. As outlined in the literature review, phonics is a reading approach that involves linking letters to spoken sounds (Waugh, Carter and Desmond, 2015). This drawing activity, however, holds no consideration to this type of phonics instruction, as the children are not learning to link the letters with the spoken sounds – they are merely completing an activity that relies on them to practise the spoken sounds. In line with McNee (2012), this is a slow-paced activity, which can be completed without noting the words/phonemes that are being taught. The statutory guidance within the National Curriculum for reading in KS1 contains a detailed list of what teachers can do to help children learn to read with phonics, and not one of these points includes any activities that do not involve children having contact with written words/graphemes.
5. Lastly, a lesson-consistency problem may occur when the Year 1 children transition into Year 2. If the Year 1 teachers provide more variety in their Read Write Inc lessons (effectivity aside), it is possible that the children may deem the RWI lessons ‘boring’ when in Year 2, compared to their experience with the scheme in Year 1. If children regard the lessons as boring, this could have a negative impact on their lesson engagement (Wiggins, 2014), having a negative impact on their reading improvement and attainment (Wagner et al. 2012).

Criticisms aside – perhaps the factor worth analysing at this point is why some staff members felt the need to stray from the RWI structure in the first place. As detailed in the literature review, a study that conducted interviews with teachers found that many believe that the repetitive structure that is required of propriety reading schemes eventually leads to teacher boredom. At this point, it is important to note that the Year 1 teacher and TA have been working within KS1 for around 4 years longer than the Year 2 teacher and TA. Therefore, perhaps the explanation for this is that, having more experience with propriety reading schemes, the teachers have grown to become bored of teaching in this structured way, and have tried to vary the lessons, but this variation, with no guidance from the RWI scheme, can be considered ineffective.

However, the knowledge that the participants all had a varying number of years of experience within KS1 was known prior to the conduction of the research. Therefore, if this study was to be repeated in a different setting, a question regarding
how long each participant had worked within KS1 would be important to include, as otherwise, a similar link (if present) would not be able to be explored.

4.6 Expectations in the Statutory Guidance in the National Curriculum

The third research aim was to discover whether teachers believed that RWI was enabling children to meet the expectations outlined in the Statutory Guidance within the National Curriculum. Therefore, all of the participants were asked to elaborate on this, and the general consensus was that it is allowing the *majority* of the children to meet the expectations outlined, but not the lowest of the low achieving pupils. Yet, one of the main responsibilities of a school is to follow the statutory guidance that is provided in the National Curriculum (Hornby, 2014), and it has been highlighted that RWI is not catering for all abilities in KS1 in this setting. Also set forth in the literature review, Ruth Miskin (2017) claims that RWI adheres to the aims within the National Curriculum, and although ‘the majority’ of the children are meeting these expectations – this is not the case for all children.

The observations highlighted that some of the children in both KS1 classes lacked in phonemic awareness – having great difficulty matching the phonemes with their associated graphemes, and this could explain why the teachers do not believe that RWI is enabling *all of the children* to meet these expectations. As presented in the literature review, in order to understand how phonemes are represented by graphemes, children must require some phonemic awareness. In fact, by Year 2, the children should “be able to read all common graphemes”. As highlighted, this is very difficult for children that lack phonemic awareness. Perhaps it could be
suggested that the statutory guidance within the national curriculum, along with RWI, do not take phonemic awareness issues into much consideration.

However, when constructing the research aims, the assumption was made that the participants would be familiar with the statutory guidance under consideration – yet, it may have been the case that the participants were aware of the guidance, but were not overly familiar with it. Therefore, the answers for the question regarding the statutory guidance in the National Curriculum may be slightly unreliable, as it is not unusual for participants to still give an answer to a question that they do not understand, rather than state that they do not have a full understanding of the question (Holder, 2016; Wallace, 2013; Mitchell and Jolley, 2012). Perhaps as they were qualified members of staff, and therefore they presumably wanted to set a good example to the researcher, they did not wish to disclose that their answer may not be fully reliable, not having an extensive understanding of the guidance in question (O’Hara, et al 2011; Grieg, Taylor and Mackay, 2007). However, questioning whether the teachers had knowledge regarding the statutory guidance may have caused them to feel patronised, and this could have developed a poor rapport, perhaps implementing the quality and the answers provided (Clark et al. 2014). Therefore, the question could have been worded in a way in which asked the question, and provided the significant parts of the guidance that the researcher was asking about. For example:

“I have been doing research regarding the statutory guidance for reading in the National Curriculum, and found it interesting that at this stage, the children should be able to […] – do you believe RWI is enabling them to meet this aim?”
Chapter 5 - Conclusion

This chapter aims to summarise the key findings that arose when trying to achieve the research aims, whilst critically reflecting upon the research process – and will make recommendations based upon the research findings. Additionally, this chapter will draw upon possible areas for future research, and will end with a brief conclusion of the entire research project.

5.1 Key findings

When trying to achieve the first research aim - examine the way in which a school teach KS1 children how to read, using Read Write Inc – it was found that the children generally show signs of enjoying the RWI lessons, which is said to have a positive impact on their motivation, and therefore their reading attainment. Furthermore, the scheme is very repetitive, and the teachers’ opinions on this were divided.

However, when meeting the second research aim - explore whether Read Write Inc is a suitable teaching approach for all abilities in the Key Stage 1 in this setting – it was evident that RWI is not a suitable approach for the some of the LAPs and HAPs. Deeper analysis highlighted that this could be due to the support these children are receiving from their microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), and as the scheme does not take this idea into account – it is insufficient for the reading needs of these children. Each interview also highlighted that more staff involved in teaching the scheme would be ideal, but unrealistic, due to cost factors. Upon further analysis, even if cost was not an issue – the idea regarding the children’s microsystems is still
not considered. Therefore, although this was a prominent theme – it seems rather irrelevant to the research process.

Lastly, with regards to the last research aim - determine whether Read Write Inc is enabling pupils to meet the expectations outlined in the Statutory Guidance within the National Curriculum – this question was directly asked to each of the participants, and despite the varying opinions of the scheme, the teachers all claimed that they believed the scheme was enabling most of the pupils to meet these expectations, but not all.

It is important at this point to reaffirm that no generalisations have been made from the results of this study, as the sample is not statistically representative of the whole KS1 population, as it is subject to this setting. Therefore, should this research be carried out in another setting, varying results would be expected (Falk and Guenther, 2006).

5.2 Recommendations drawn from research

Devising recommendations drawn from research results is an important aspect on any case study research (Polonsky and Waller, 2010). Therefore, upon deeper analysis of the results, the recommendations are as followed.

Utilise the Library’s Resources

With regards to learning to read, in order for children to transition from ‘accuracy’ to ‘automaticity’ – they need to read frequently (Dougherty-Stahl and McKenna, 2006). In fact, children that read at home show rapid reading improvement in the early years of schooling (Lawrence, 2004). However, there is a rather large number of children
in KS1 in this setting that are from low-income backgrounds – indicating that they are likely to have fewer books in their home due to cost factors (Kreider and Westmoreland, 2011).

The school has an extensive library, which could be utilised more effectively. Successful school libraries are well-used, and use innovate approaches to engage children in reading (Greenwood, Creaser and Maynard, 2008). Therefore, a potential recommendation could be to organise the school’s library in a way that means children can find books to read that match up with the new sounds that they have been learning throughout the week in the RWI lessons. Each child could take a book home, allowing them to practice and develop their newly learnt phonics. Perhaps extra reading practice would help to bridge the gap between the LAPs and their higher achieving peers, allowing them to progress more quickly through the RWI books and develop phonemic awareness.

Based on this, a further recommendation would be to incorporate the children’s chosen books into the RWI lessons at least once a week, perhaps allowing each child to read a page of their book to the class, or participating in quiet reading, and the teacher could aim to spend a few minutes listening to each child read within the half an hour session. This may reduce the likelihood of teacher boredom – along with the negative impacts that this brings – and further practice could enable the LAPs to develop their phonemic awareness.

Although this seems to be tailored around the children from low-income backgrounds, even for children from higher income backgrounds can benefit from this, as phonics, like any other skill, improves with practice (Hiskes, 2010; Blevins, 1998).
**Peer Tutoring**

Another recommendation drawn from the results gathered is the idea of peer tutoring – when the more advanced learners adopt a tutor role in order to assist a lesser-abled peer (Jarvis, 2005). In this case, the recommendation would be that the higher achieving pupils are paired with one of the lower achieving pupils. This implementation would require thorough consideration, as the Department of Education and Skills (2011) claim that peer tutoring has the opportunity to be a powerful agent, for reading.

With regards to peer tutoring, Topping and Maloney (2004) explain that low achievers often benefit from the individualised instruction that is provided by their higher-achieving peers, and this is extended upon by Nardiello (2009), who claims that peer tutoring is a highly effective way to improve the phonemic awareness of such low achieving pupils. A study by Lancy (1994) highlighted that when pupils received support from a peer, their phonemic awareness showed much development.

Vygotsky (1987) claimed that learning occurs most effectively when it a child is learning within their zone of proximal development (ZPD). The ZPD consists of activities that a child could not complete alone, but could complete with the assistance of a higher ability peer – which is in line with the recommendation of peer tutoring in the setting, as it would allow the LAPs to learn within their ZPD.
Moreover, further analysis of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) eco-systems theory highlighted that, along with parents, peers are also a component of the microsystem. Therefore, it could be beneficial for a low achieving child to receive reading support from a higher achieving pupil, especially if they are not receiving any type of reading support from their parents (Brain and Mukherji, 2005).

Similarly to the former recommendation, variety of the RWI lessons may reduce the risk of the teachers, and more importantly, the pupils, becoming bored with the scheme.

5.3 Critique of the research

Upon planning, unstructured interviews were deemed the most appropriate for this research, due to the flexibility that they allow (Kumar, 2010). Yet, upon reflection, it seems as though semi-structured interviews may have been more appropriate for this study, as they still allow for flexibility, yet they portray the interviewer as being more prepared, and therefore more competent (Shapiro and Kratochwill, 2000). Furthermore, preparing questions beforehand generally results in more comparable qualitative data, as asking the participants similar questions would be ensured (Nezu and Nezu, 2007). However, as a novice researcher, this weakness will not have any impact on the school involved (Ellis and Levy, 2009). In future practice, more thorough scrutiny of each data collection tool will occur prior to the conduction of the research, to ensure the most appropriate method is selected.
For over 50 years, the topic of phonics has been at the heart of controversies regarding the teaching of reading (Au, Carroll and Scheu, 1997). Subsequently, the readings and studies based upon phonics are innumerable. Therefore, critically reading the literature was essential, to prioritise the most prominent studies and literature to review, analyse and relate to the study (Barnard, 2010).

McCuan (1996) emphasises the importance of time management skills during the research process – they are essential skills, needed to ensure the completion of specific tasks by their required deadlines. Time management only became an issue in this process when it came to organising the times and dates to carry out the observations and interviews, as often, when the Year 1 class had their RWI session, commitments had already been made with the Year 2 class. However, enough time had been dedicated to the research process to ensure that this was not a major issue – merely a minor setback. Furthermore, the time constraints of the study meant motivation and discipline were essential throughout the research process (Kumar, 2014; Meerah, Johar and Ahmad, 2011).

5.4 Further lines of enquiry

If the opportunity to repeat this research arose, an aspect to explore could be how the progression, implicit in RWI, is tested and tracked. This way, the qualitative data already collected could be strengthened by quantitative data, such as test scores and rates of improvement (Flick, 2013).
Furthermore, Conner (2003) draws a direct link between assessment results to the quality of learning and teaching, suggesting that the better the teaching, the better the results. To investigate this further, a comparison of two school’s approaches to RWI would be appropriate. Observations and interviews would be used as the data collection tools, and to deepen the analysis, quantitative data, such as test results, would also be gathered. This type of mixed research methods approach places emphasis on the integration of alternative approaches, and would encourage an explicit account of how the scheme is implemented in two different settings (Denscombe, 2014). Prominent themes would be highlighted in both sets of data, and the quantitative data would be examined, to draw upon any conclusions made, and make comparisons between the two schools’ approaches (Cunningham, 2011). Highlighting strengths and weaknesses in both schools’ approaches may be beneficial to practice of delivering RWI lessons (Johnson et al. 2009). Furthermore, the comparative aspect would explore whether the issues highlighted in this setting (e.g. the idea that RWI is not suitable for all abilities) were subject to just this setting, or could draw upon a generalisation for the Read Write Inc scheme as a whole (Tashakkori and Teddie, 2010).

5.5 Conclusion

To conclude, the aims of the research project were met, but room was left for further analysis. The school’s approach to teaching reading with Read Write Inc was examined thoroughly, along with an exploration into whether the scheme was suited to meet the needs of all abilities in KS1, and if teachers believed RWI was allowing the children to meet the expectations set forth in the statutory guidance in the
National Curriculum. However, if the time frame had not been restricted, a similar study would have been carried out within another KS1 setting, in order to cross-examine the data collected, and draw conclusions from the comparisons. This way, all of the issue that arose in the data could either be deemed as a generalisation for Read Write Inc as a scheme, or deemed subject to this particular setting.
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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Statutory Guidance for reading in Key Stage One, set forth in the National Curriculum

Taken directly from Department for Education (2014)

Key Stage One – Year One

During year 1, teachers should build on work from the early years foundation stage, making sure that pupils can sound and blend unfamiliar printed words quickly and accurately using the phonic knowledge and skills that they have already learnt. Teachers should also ensure that pupils continue to learn new grapheme-phoneme correspondences (GPCs) and revise and consolidate those learnt earlier. The understanding that the letter(s) on the page represent the sounds in spoken words should underpin pupils’ reading and spelling of all words. This includes common words containing unusual GPCs. The term ‘common exception words’ is used throughout the programmes of study for such words.

Alongside this knowledge of GPCs, pupils need to develop the skill of blending the sounds into words for reading and establish the habit of applying this skill whenever they encounter new words. This will be supported by practice in reading books consistent with their developing phonic knowledge and skill and their knowledge of common exception words. At the same time they will need to hear, share and discuss a wide range of high-quality books to develop a love of reading and broaden their vocabulary.

Pupils should be helped to read words without overt sounding and blending after a few encounters. Those who are slow to develop this skill should have extra practice.
Pupils’ writing during year 1 will generally develop at a slower pace than their reading. This is because they need to encode the sounds they hear in words (spelling skills), develop the physical skill needed for handwriting, and learn how to organise their ideas in writing.

Pupils entering year 1 who have not yet met the early learning goals for literacy should continue to follow their school’s curriculum for the Early Years Foundation Stage to develop their word reading, spelling and language skills. However, these pupils should follow the year 1 programme of study in terms of the books they listen to and discuss, so that they develop their vocabulary and understanding of grammar, as well as their knowledge more generally across the curriculum. If they are still struggling to decode and spell, they need to be taught to do this urgently through a rigorous and systematic phonics programme so that they catch up rapidly.

**Key Stage One – Year Two**

By the beginning of year 2, pupils should be able to read all common graphemes. They should be able to read unfamiliar words containing these graphemes, accurately and without undue hesitation, by sounding them out in books that are matched closely to each pupil’s level of word-reading knowledge. They should also be able to read many common words containing GPCs taught so far [for example, shout, hand, stop, or dream], without needing to blend the sounds out loud first. Pupils’ reading of common exception words [for example, you, could, many, or people], should be secure. Pupils will increase their fluency by being able to read these words easily and automatically. Finally, pupils should be able to retell some
familiar stories that have been read to and discussed with them or that they have acted out during year 1.

During year 2, teachers should continue to focus on establishing pupils’ accurate and speedy word-reading skills. They should also make sure that pupils listen to and discuss a wide range of stories, poems, plays and information books; this should include whole books. The sooner that pupils can read well and do so frequently, the sooner they will be able to increase their vocabulary, comprehension and their knowledge across the wider curriculum.

In writing, pupils at the beginning of year 2 should be able to compose individual sentences orally and then write them down. They should be able to spell many of the words covered in year 1 correctly - see English appendix 1. They should also be able to make phonically plausible attempts to spell words they have not yet learnt. Finally, they should be able to form individual letters correctly, establishing good handwriting habits from the beginning.

It is important to recognise that pupils begin to meet extra challenges in terms of spelling during year 2. Increasingly, they should learn that there is not always an obvious connection between the way a word is said and the way it is spelt. Variations include different ways of spelling the same sound, the use of so-called silent letters and groups of letters in some words and, sometimes, spelling that has become separated from the way that words are now pronounced, such as the ‘le’ ending in table. Pupils’ motor skills also need to be sufficiently advanced for them to write down ideas that they may be able to compose orally. In addition, writing is intrinsically harder than reading; pupils are likely to be able to read and understand
more complex writing (in terms of its vocabulary and structure) than they are capable of producing themselves.

For pupils who do not have the phonic knowledge and skills they need for year 2, teachers should use the year 1 programmes of study for word reading and spelling so that pupils’ word-reading skills catch up. However, teachers should use the year 2 programme of study for comprehension so that these pupils hear and talk about new books, poems, other writing, and vocabulary with the rest of the class.
Appendix 2 – Drawing themes from the interview responses

Key

More staff
Not suitable for LAPS
Not suitable for HAPS
Are children reaching the expectations outlined in the statutory guidelines?
Children enjoy the lessons
Repetitiveness

Interview – Year 1 Teacher
Are the Read, Write, Inc lessons taught every day in this class?
Yes, unless we have a trip or a theme day then it’s everyday, usually in the morning

How are the groups split?
The LAPS go with me, and the HAPS go with [teaching assistant] in the teaching room. Our very advanced ones are getting on with writing their own stories based on their favourite Read Write Inc books

So they [the children at the back] don’t join in with Read Write Inc?
They join in with the story at the start of the week, and they do a few of the activities, but they do so much extra work at home that they are well above the level that they are meant to be, so I try to set them harder things.

Do the children seem to enjoy the lessons?
Yes

What do you think they enjoy about the lessons?
They like doing their speed sounds in pairs too.

Do you think the repetitiveness of the sessions helps them to learn?
I do, yes.

How do you feel about the repetitiveness of the sessions?
We always mix it up a bit, so as long as it helps them I don’t mind it being repetitive

What do you do when you mix it up a bit?
Sometimes I give them some drawing activities – this group loves drawing, and it gets them chatting about what they’re drawing, which will be related to the speed sounds they’re learning.

What do you think about the scheme? Do you like it?
I like it. I think the books could be a bit longer though. Some of the red books can be only 20-25 words long – I’ve read it to them in under a minute, and when they’ve done all of the activities we can be left with quite a lot of time on our hands, but we find ways to fill the time.
What do you usually do if you have time left after the activities have been completed?
Normally a little group discussion about what we have been reading

So the book today was about camping. If you had had time left over, you would have discussed camping?
Yes, has anyone been camping? Was it fun? Who did you go with? It helps them to practice some of the new words and sounds that they have learnt

You take the LAPs for Read Write Inc lessons. Do they all seem to be making good progress?
They are making progress, but some slower than others. A lot of them do well during the week, but when we revise some of the sounds we have already done, it is as if they have never heard them before

Why do you think that is?
I'm not sure. It is generally the same few children. They don't have any kind of speech problem, they just have trouble matching the written letters with the actual sounds.

I've seen from their books that some of them really struggle with their writing. How do you feel this affects their progress in reading with Read Write Inc?
It makes it difficult, because every few weeks we ask the children to take their writing books home, so their parents can see the sounds they have been working on and practice them with them at home, but when their writing is illegible, we have to write above it what they believe we were trying to say, which of course takes a lot of time which we don't really have.

When we spoke before the lesson, you mentioned that a few of the children had particularly bad attendance in this class. Do you feel as though this has a negative impact on their progression through Read Write Inc?
It can be difficult – especially if they miss the Monday session because that’s when we start working on a new sound – if they miss the actual learning of the sound, then we don’t have the time to give them the individual attention to catch them up with the others

In your opinion, would you say that the progression in Read Write Inc is suitable for all abilities in this class?
Most of them but not all of them. I think the very high achievers find it a bit too easy, but we don’t have the staff to work with them to do the higher level books – they’re on year 2 level easily but the scheme is teacher led so we can’t just leave them to their own devices to learn new sounds

What about the very low achievers?
That’s a hard one. They do really struggle with Read Write Inc but I think they would struggle with anything reading related to be honest. If some of them had an extra push at home then I think that would help a lot but there is only so much you can do as a teacher to encourage parents to read with their children
So you think if their parents read more with them at home then they would make better progress in Read Write Inc?
Definitely, or even if their parents read to them

If their parents read to them, you think they would make better progress in Read Write Inc?
I think so – they’d be hearing new words and new language and that’s what children’s books are designed to do, even just bedtime stories would help I think

Do you know why some of the parents don’t read with the children at home?
Well a few reasons really. Take [child] for example, her parents speak don’t speak English at home and [child] lives with his dad, who really struggles with his reading too

So if you had another member of staff in the classroom when you were teaching Read Write Inc sessions, what would you ask them to do?
That’s a hard one as well – I think I’d ask them to go and find even more members of staff to bring with them! But if it was just one, I would either ask them to do some additionally work with the high achievers, or go back to basics with the very low achievers

What do you mean by back to basics?
Honestly things as simple as holding a pen and recognising letters. I don’t know how they’re expected to be able to learn all of the sounds when they can’t even recognise letters on paper

Finally, do you believe that Read Write Inc allows you to progress all students to their meet the expectations outlined in the statutory guidance in the National Curriculum?
Most of them yes – the higher group especially, they’re ready to start on the year 2 material. Most of the lower achievers have come on a lot too, so I definitely think the scheme has helped them.

Interview – Year 1 Teaching Assistant

Do you teach with the Read Write Inc scheme everyday?
Yes – I take the HAPS

Do you think the children enjoy the lessons?
Yes – they definitely enjoy them, they can actually get a bit overexcited sometimes

Is there something in particular that always gets them excited?
I say a line of the story and get them to repeat it the way I say it. First I say it normally, then I whisper it, then I’ll say it in a funny voice, then I’ll shout it, and when they shout it – they scream it!

So you think that is something they enjoy in the lessons?
Definitely – its nice to see them all get so excited about something so small
What else do you think they enjoy about the lessons?
I think they like that they know what's coming

Because it is repetitive?
Yes, I think it keeps them motivated because they are always looking forward to the next thing they're doing.

What do you think about the repetitiveness of the sessions?
We mix it up in this class so they don't get bored of what they're doing, so I think it is fine. Plus I think they like to know what's coming – it seems to help them.

What do you do to mix it up?
A couple of weeks ago, we did a book about the circus, and during break time I turned the little teaching room into a mini-circus, and set up little stations for bubble-blowing, hula-hoops and face painting and stuff like that – we made it a bit of a longer session, and I just made sure that as we were all doing the activities, we were discussing what was happening, like ‘blowing bubbles’ and hula-hoops, which was helping them with their stretch sounds like ‘ow’ and ‘oo’.

Did they seem to enjoy it?
They loved it.

Do you like the Read Write Inc scheme?
Personally I wouldn't have chosen it if I was in charge, but it is what we use in year one, so I make the most out of it.

Why wouldn't you have chosen it?
It's not anything personal to the scheme, I just don't think there was anything wrong with what was being used before and I don't think it needed changing.

Do you think that the group you normally take are making good progress?
I think so.

Could you tell me more about how the scheme is tested?
Yes, but its not so much the scheme that is tested, it is just their phonics ability in general. They have 50 sounds, and we take them one by one to read the sounds, and they get marked out of 50, it is as simple as that.

And what happens with those scores?
Well when we get their scores in June, we will pass them to [teacher] so she knows how to group them for next year.

How well do you expect this group to do?
Alright I think, I hope anyway!

Is there anything about the scheme that you do not agree with, or that you think could be improved?
I think the scheme is fine, but some of these [children] could do with a but more pushing, but I can only teach what I am meant to be teaching, I can't realistically be...
teaching ¾ different lessons in one. Its great when we have someone extra in the class to help out but it doesn’t happen much

You think an extra helper in the classroom would benefit the children?  
Definitely, but its obviously not realistic

So overall, do you believe that the progress in Read Write Inc is suitable for all abilities?  
For this group yes, but not some of the one’s in [teacher]’s group – they’re too low ability, some of them are still working at reception level at a push

What about the higher achievers, the one’s that don’t fully participate in the lessons?  
Its done its job to get them to that stage, but again, if there were more staff then maybe someone could be with them doing harder things

With regards to reading do you think all of the children are working at the level that the national curriculum expect of them?  
The majority of them yes, it’s just the same few in [teacher]’s group that are struggling, but they’re struggling in all areas and aren’t really meeting the expected requirements for other areas either

Interview – Year 2 Teacher

Is Read Write Inc taught everyday in this class?  
Yes, for half an hour

How are the groups split?  
Red group with [teaching assistant] next door, and the rest of the class in here with me.

How did you decide this?  
Although the class is mixed ability, red group in this class are very very low ability – they’re still on books that some of the HAPS in reception can read

So are they taught with Read Write Inc differently?  
No – same process, just slower and with much easier books and sounds

Do the children seem to enjoy the lessons?  
Usually

Are you seeing progress being made from the children?  
Generally yes

Are you pleased with the progress that they are making?  
Some of them have come on so much this year, but even then, in the SATS in July, not even half of the class are expected to meet the average. I don’t know if that can be blamed on the scheme or the way it is taught though, as it is the same case for maths
How do you feel about the repetitive nature of the scheme?
I don’t like it, personally. I think it is quite boring and that’s not what learning should be about. It doesn’t allow for variety apart from the books.

So would you say that the progress in Read Write Inc is suitable for all abilities?
It’s hard to tell, because it is difficult to track their progress. I think some of the HAPS find it boring though and they need something to push them more but we can’t put them in different groups.

Would you say that more staff in the classroom would be beneficial then?
Yes, but not just for Read Write Inc, for everything! Its such a shame that children like [child] and [child] can’t use their reading time to read their books from home that they actually want to read. [child] is far too advanced for this, her mum has actually asked for her to do harder reading tasks whilst we are doing Read write Inc. I would love to say yes but its not do-able – we don’t have the staff.

Do you feel as though Read Write Inc is pushing the children to meet what is expected of them by this age, in the national curriculum?
It’s definitely pushing them in the right direction. Obviously [child] and [child] are nowhere near, but it’s helped the rest of them I think.

So if it were up to you, what would be done to make this scheme more effective?
More staff, smaller groups and better ways of testing their progress. I hate testing, but we thought their reading progress was going really well, until a mock SATS test which showed not as much improvement as we hoped.

Interview – Year 2 Teaching Assistant

You take red group for Read Write Inc, do they seem to enjoy the lessons?
Yes, they do like them.

What makes you think they enjoy the lessons?
They always tell me they look forward to them and they always laugh at the stories.

Do you think they are making good progress with the Read Write Inc scheme?
Possibly. I have moved some of them up to [teacher]’s group because they started to find what we were doing quite easy. [child] really struggles to match sounds with letters, he does something different to the rest of the group.

What does he do?
I’m teaching him one letter at a time whilst the rest of his group are set to start writing their sentence out, but he really needs one-on-one attention, not just five minutes a day.

So you don’t think Read Write Inc is suitable for his ability?
No, but I’m not really sure what is, he can’t even hold a pencil. We have someone coming into to assess his needs next week so hopefully that will give us an insight.
into what he needs, but I don’t think it will be Read Write Inc – he is working at preschool level and these books are for Key Stage One

Do you think the children are working at the expected level that is outlined in the national curriculum?
Yes, but red group need a bit more work, like you saw today – blending is so difficult for them.

How do you feel about how repetitive the scheme is?
That’s the thing I don’t like about it – I know its different stories but the red books are about 30 words per book – not very exciting

Do you feel that the children benefit from the repetitiveness of it?
I’m not sure – because they struggle they find it boring, but I don’t know whether that is because they struggle or because it is the same thing every week.

Is there anything that you can think of that would improve the scheme?
Smaller groups would be better but we don’t have that option, so no.
Appendix 3 – Example of the way in which the observations were recorded

Year 1 Observation / Read Write Inc

Teacher asks what the book was about yesterday. "What words did we learn?"
"What was the story about?"

Group of children sitting at the table during writing.
Children on expect start with sound sounds in pairs.
Book introduced and topic discussed.

Teacher reads the book to the group.
Green words and red words chanted & repeated.
Pairs read the book to each other (struggling).
"Why is their quiet?"

Teacher reads each line and group repeats them.
Children laughing – a bit distracted.

Teacher reads first line of story again and children have to write it down.
Children go to sit at table in pairs.
"Why?"

Writing it appears difficult and is taking awhile.
Please read this form carefully, and ask any questions you might have before agreeing to be a part of this study.

Background Information:
My name is Catherine Flanigan and I am a third year student, studying Education Studies at the University of Gloucestershire. I have been on placement in this setting since November 4th 2016.

Purpose and Procedures:
The purpose of my study is to gain a better insight into phonics, and why Key Stage One follow the synthetic phonics approach in this setting, with particular interest in the Read Write Inc. scheme.

If you agree to be a part of this study, this will allow me to observe a taught lesson and allow me to ask the teachers / teaching assistants some questions regarding certain methods, and why they are used.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
Allowing the school’s participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, then you still have until May 2017 to withdraw – May being the hand-in date for my dissertation project. Should you wish to withdraw from the study, you can contact me personally at [my e-mail address] or [my phone number].

Risks of Being in the Study:
There are no risks associated with the school or the participants being a part of this study. If the teachers, however, experience feelings of stress or anxiety during the observations at any point – the observation can be terminated. All participants hold the right to refuse answers to any questions asked.

Confidentiality:
The records included in my study will be kept completely private at all times. The only readers of my study will be the first and second marker of my dissertation. I will ensure not to include any information in my study that would make it at all possible to identify you, the school, the participants, and the children. Research records will be kept on my personal laptop, and only I will have access to these records.

Statement of Consent:
I have read the information above, and have a full understanding of the process that I have agreed for the school to be a part of. I consent to the school’s participation in the study.

Printed name of participant _______________________________________________________
Participant Signature ____________________________________ Date ______________________
Researcher Signature ____________________________________________________________
Appendix 5 (Consent Form)  

CONSENT FORM  

Dissertation Observation Study

Please read this form carefully, and ask any questions you might have before agreeing to be a part of this study.

Background Information:

My name is ....... and I am a third year Education Studies student at the University of Gloucestershire. I have been on placement in this setting since November 4th 2016.

Purpose and Procedures:

The purpose of my study is to gain a better insight into phonics, and why Key Stage One follow the synthetic phonics approach in this setting, with a particular interest in the Read Write Inc. scheme.

If you agree to be a part of this study, this will allow me to observe a taught lesson and allow me to ask some questions regarding certain methods, and why they are used.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, then you still have until May 2017 to withdraw – May being the hand-in date for my dissertation project. Should you wish to withdraw from the study, you can contact me personally at [my e-mail address] or [my phone number].

Although I have received permission to carry out these observations by Operational Head, [gatekeeper’s name], I felt it appropriate to receive further permission from each individual involved in the study.

Risks of Being in the Study:

There are no risks associated with being a part of this study. If you do, however, experience feelings of stress or anxiety during your participation in the observation at any point – the observation can be terminated. You also hold the right to refuse answers to any questions asked.

Confidentiality:

The records included in my study will be kept completely private at all times. The only readers of my study will be the first and second marker of my dissertation. I will ensure not to include any information in my study that would make it at all possible to identify you. Research records will be kept on my personal laptop, and only I will have access to these records.

Statement of Consent:

☐ I have read the information above, and have a full understanding of the process that I have agreed to be a part of. I consent to my participation in the study.

Printed name of participant ________________________________________________

Participant Signature ___________________________ Date ______________

Researcher Signature ________________________________________________