

Accelerating pupils' reading speeds – Robert Eves

Sounds English Phonics is an innovative app from Zaprendo that helps pupils learn their graphemes, the most laborious key skill in early reading.

Just before Easter last year, the developers were looking for people to try it in schools. Already a grapheme evangelist, I volunteered immediately.

We tested the app with a mixed-ability Year 3 class, with the school's other Year 3 class acting as the control group. Once the pupils had been assessed using Burt, WPM and Hodder, one class used the app for 15-20 minutes a day while the other did traditional phonics work.

The app is easy to use and takes pupils through a programme of activities set in the imaginary world of the planet Lumos. Here they are guided on a journey of discovery as they help the planet's citizens, the Lumins, light up the Great Learning Tree. After a period of familiarisation, the children completed the programme before half term, some more quickly than others. In theory, it is designed to be completed in 30 days, but that assumes learning three written sounds a day, and we had to work in shifts because we do not have a tablet for each child. However, as the app became popular, this was not a problem. In fact, some children volunteered to complete their session during lunch breaks.

The app takes a synthetic phonics-based approach, using 92 written sounds and 1,800 practice words. It also contains videos of all 92 sounds so that pupils



The app includes videos to help children pronounce the written sound correctly

can get the pronunciation correct. They can keep track of their own progress, and learning is entirely self-driven, eliminating the need for one-to-one adult supervision.

Most importantly, the app contains an algorithm that identifies the specific needs of each learner, teaching them only the sounds they do not know, and automatically identifying the next written sound they should learn. For instance, if they have a problem with one written sound, it will keep coming up in the next set of sounds that they need to work on until learning is secure.

It was noticeable that, after using

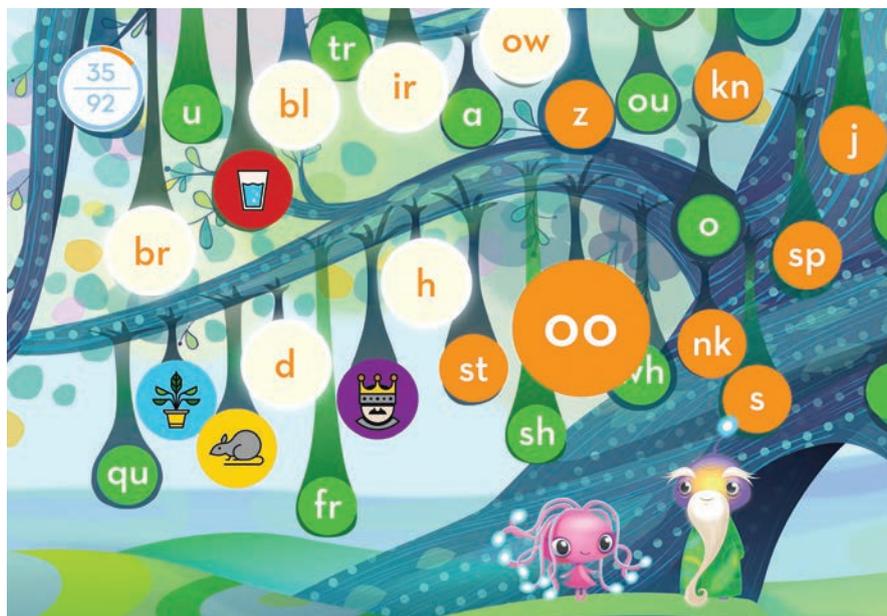
the app, pupils seemed more willing to use their enhanced phonological awareness when spelling unknown words in composition lessons – more often correctly than not.

The other class made quite good progress but nowhere near as much as children who used the app. In the autumn, I used it again in my new class with pupils who had a score of less than 70 WPM. In both cases, every pupil finished the term reading at least 120 WPM. Once they reach this speed, they start reading for enjoyment, and it is at this point that they gobble up words and vocabulary.

Since then, other teachers and learning support assistants have used the programme as an intervention for pupils with phonological awareness issues. Going forward, I plan to use it with any child entering Year 3 reading slower than 70 WPM as a way of accelerating their reading speed.

I intend to run more studies using the app. For now, I consider it another string to my literacy bow.

Sounds English Phonics from Zaprendo starts at £21.99 VAT, but there are discounts for site licences. <http://zaprendo.com>



The Great Tree of Learning highlights the graphemes a pupil has mastered and the ones to tackle next



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