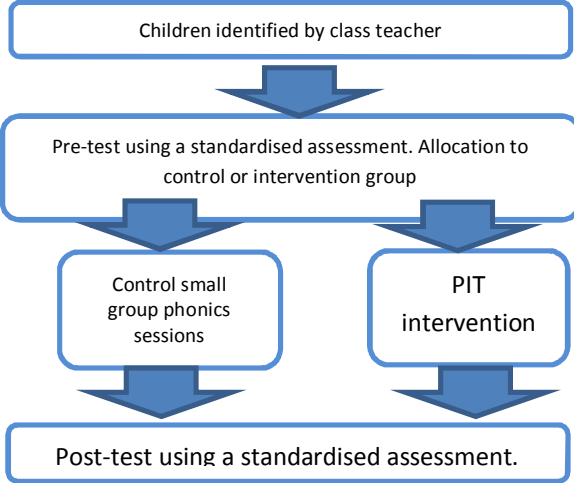


A small group intervention, Pulling It Together may be more effective at developing a child’s phonic and word reading skills than small group additional ‘phonics’ lessons – results from a small scale pilot study

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Schools involved: 4 schools within the Aspirer Teaching Alliance, Cheshire

Introduction
The introduction on the Phonics Screening Check in for children in Year 1 emphasised the need for all children to develop their knowledge of phoneme-grapheme correspondences and the metacognition of blending as a strategy for decoding single words. Although for many children, a balanced literacy curriculum including regular systematic phonics teaching is adequate, for some this structure is not effective and children can fail to develop these skills. One approach to supporting these children has been for a Teaching Assistant to reteach the whole class phonics lessons in a small group. It appears that some children fail to respond to this additional provision and may benefit from a different approach to the learning. As a consequence, for several years, the Teaching School at the heart of the Aspirer TSA, Ash Grove Academy, has been piloting a small group intervention intended to support the phonics learning within a meaningful context. This intervention, named PIT . Pulling It Together, was designed to complement the literacy curriculum, supporting the children to effectively consolidate their phonic knowledge and apply their skills within a reading and writing context. This trial sought to establish the efficacy of the intervention across a number of schools in the Teaching School Alliance.

Research design
This trial had 1 research aim;
To establish whether a 6 week small group intervention (PIT) was more effective at developing a child’s phonic and word reading skills than small group additional phonics lessons.
A matched-pair design was used with pre and post-tests only. To address the aims of the research the independent variable, word reading skills, was operationalised by creating two conditions
Level 1 (control condition) . TA-led small group additional phonics lessons
Level 2 (Intervention) . PIT intervention



Method
Participants:
The participants were children in Year 1, who were considered to be in danger of falling behind phonics acquisition and failing to establish age appropriate word reading skills. The children were identified from 4 schools across the Aspirer TSA. Initially, 8 children were selected by the class teacher from the Year 1 class. It was essential that the children were not taking part in any other intervention at the time, or on the SEN register in school. The total number of children in the study was 32.

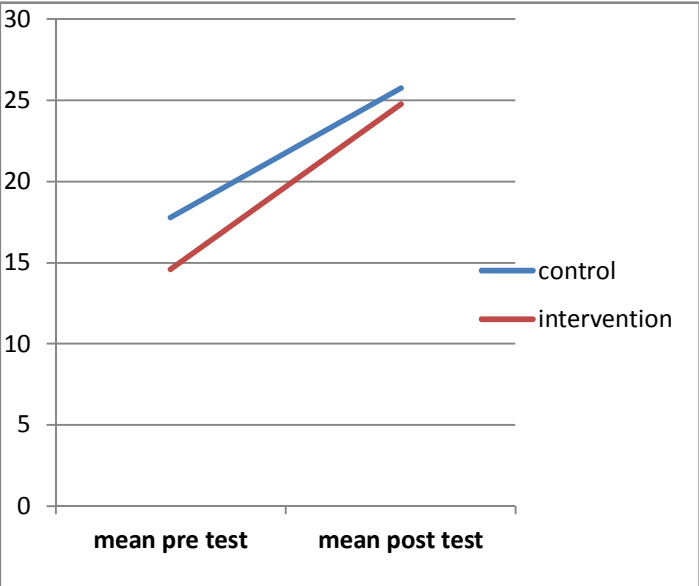
Procedure:
In each school, a Teaching Assistant (TA) who is familiar with the Year 1 class attended a half day training session in how to deliver the PIT intervention. A standardised pre-test using the Diagnostic Test of Word Reading Processes (GL Assessment) was administered by the TA. After identification and pre-testing, a case-matched sample (controlling for gender, age, time in school and attainment) was generated and each pair was randomly allocated to either the control or the intervention group

The intervention group received the PIT intervention, daily for 20 minutes in the afternoon, delivered by the trained TA, following the protocol of the intervention structure. The control group received a small group phonics lesson, based on the whole class phonics lesson of the day. The phonics session for the control group was delivered by the same TA. After the 6 week intervention all the children were retested using Diagnostic Test of Word Reading Processes

- Materials:**
- PIT Intervention materials to deliver the intervention.
 - Training in the intervention to ensure it is delivered as designed.
 - Diagnostic Test of Word Reading Processes

Results
Gain scores were first calculated from the results and shown in the graph and table below. A Wilcoxon signed-rank test indicated a non-significant (p = 0.136) small positive effect (r = 0.161) for the intervention group compared to the control.

	mean pre-test	mean post test	mean gain
Control	17.8	25.75	7.95
PIT intervention	14.6	24.75	10.15



Conclusion
This small preliminary trial suggests the positive value of using the intervention Pulling It Together to support phonics learning within a meaningful context. However, the result was not significant and this is likely to have been caused by the small sample size. As the design protocol has been piloted and training in the intervention can be arranged, the trial should be replicated across other schools within the Teaching School Alliance, increasing the sample size and therefore the external reliability of the findings.



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