THRASS PHONICS: A CASE STUDY OF THOMAS AS AN EMERGING READER IN ENGLISH[1]

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ABSTRACT
Current trends in education indicate that phonemic and phonic awareness are essential to developing key English literacy skills. In Malaysia, phonics has been recognized by the Ministry of education as a key instrument to improve English teaching and learning. Thus, this study aims to evaluate the capacity of THRASS phonics in teaching English literacy skills to a Chinese Malaysian primary school student in Kuching, Sarawak. The authors selected case study as the theoretical framework to illustrate the impact that THRASS phonics had on both teacher and student during the study. The paper discusses the findings and concludes with the implications for further phonics research in Malaysia.

Keywords: THRASS phonics, reading skill, primary school

Introduction
Phonics has been recognized as an instrument for Malaysian primary students to build essential English reading and literacy skills in the classroom. The Malaysian Ministry of Education (2011) English Standardized Curriculum for Primary Schools (KSSR) strongly recommends the use of phonics when teaching students (aged between 7 and 12 years) critical literacy skills. Increasingly beginning readers in Australia, the United Kingdom, New Zealand and the United States use phonics to assist beginning readers to acquire English literacy and fluency skills (Davies & Ritchie, 2003; Ehri, 2003).

The ability to read is one of the fundamental skills young students acquire at school and early literacy is a prerequisite for success in all aspects of education (Callinan & Zee Der Van, 2010; Cihon, 2011). Since the 1990s, THRASS (teaching handwriting, reading and spelling skills) synthetic phonics has been used to teach key English literacy skills in Australian and British primary schools (Callihan & Zee Der Van, 2010; Griffiths, 2008).THRASS creators Davies and Ritchie (2003) explain that THRASS phonics teaches the 44 phonemes (sounds

[1]The term 'emerging'in this paper is used as "beginning to read".

of spoken English); it promotes phonemic metacognition, and is a successful tool for developing English literacy skills.

These days, there are a number of phonics methodologies that claim to help early English readers. This particular study will explore, for the first time, THRASS phonics ability in teaching English reading skills to a Chinese Malaysian primary school student. The study took place in Kuching, Sarawak Malaysia.

Literature Review

For over 60 years, phonics has received attention in terms of the development of English reading skills. Few educators dispute that whole language and phonics are essential if students are to learn to read and speak English effectively (Coogan, 2005; Ehri, 2002; Stotsky, 2006). Indeed, the UK's National Literacy Strategy (2006) recommends the use of synthetic phonics (THRASS) to teach literacy skills in reading and speaking English in primary schools (Callihan & Zee Der Van, 2010). Similar reports in Australia and the United States have raised phonemic awareness and positioned phonics at the top of the literacy agenda (Callinan & Zee Der Van, 2010; Ehri, 2003; Stotsky, 2006; Wilson & Colmar, 2008). Wilson and Colmar (2008, p.91) point out that "the overwhelming findings indicate that direct and systematic instruction in phonics contributes more significantly to children's initial and ongoing literacy development than any alternate approach of either unsystematic or no phonics." In other words, proficient reading instruction should consists of phonemic awareness, phonics, guided oral fluency, vocabulary and reading comprehension (Ehri, 2003; Stotsky, 2006). Stotsky describes phonemic and phonics awareness as follows:

> Phonemic awareness is understanding that spoken language is composed of tiny segments of speech called phonemes. The National Reading (United States) Panel (2005) found that phonemic awareness training "significantly improves their [students'] reading more than instruction that lacks any attention to phonemic awareness.
>
> Phonics instruction is often confused with phonemic awareness, it teaches reading by making explicit the letter-sound correspondences in reading and writing. Research evidence points to the necessity of teaching phonics sequentially rather than merely highlighting phonics elements as they appear in a text (2006, p.11).

For Australian researchers Wright et al. (2011, p1), early phonological skills, particularly the ability to recognize the phonemic structure of spoken words helps children develop knowledge of grapheme–phoneme conversion rules (GPCs). Moreover, literacy research in the United States has found that phonemic awareness and letter knowledge were the two best predictors of reading ability in the first two years of instruction (Wilson & Colmar, 2008).Therefore, phonemic and phonic awareness build foundational skills that are predictive of students' future reading success (Wilson & Colmar, 2008; Wright et al., 2011).

Although phonemic awareness and phonics increase reading performance in primary school students, it seems that few teachers are confident teaching the 44 phonemes and the graphemes (letter or group of letters) of written English (Davies & Ritchie, 2003). As Emmit and Pollack explain:

> To help students develop appropriate phonic (letter-sound) knowledge, you the teacher, must have accurate, explicit knowledge of these relationships. Too frequently students are given misleading information which clearly does not assist their learning and often creates confusion (2002, p.3).

The academic literature strongly argues that reading programs should include phonemes and phonics when teaching English literacy skills are being taught. However, in the United States and Australia it is estimated that up to 30% of children struggle to learn to read well, and reading programs that include phonemes and phonics training have not been widely implemented by schools and teachers (Emmitt & Pollack, 2002; Stotsky, 2006; Wright et al., 2011). For instance, the United States National Reading Panel Report (2000, p.1) concluded:

> Instruction strategies that include phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency were especially strong. The panel found that whole language instruction that ignores phonics and phonemic awareness was ineffective, especially for students with poor language skills and little exposure to print (Walsh, Glaser, & Wilcox, 2006).

There seems to be a crisis in pedagogical competency in relation to the implementation of literacy programs that use phonemic awareness and phonics to develop essential literacy skills, and educators remain confused about the differences between phonological awareness, phonemic awareness and phonics (Stotsky, 2006; Wilson & Colmar, 2008). Ehri (2002, p.7) argues "teachers are not well prepared to teach reading and many have not been taught about the

processes I have discussed, and they lack sufficient knowledge about the alphabetic system and phonemic awareness to teach it to their students."

In the final analysis, student literacy depends upon the teacher's mastery and knowledge of reading programs that include the 44 English phonemes and also explain how to teach them in the classroom (Ehri, 2003).Internationally, in the English language classroom, teachers still struggle to teach the science of reading and the vast majority of instructors rely on the old system of phonics that includes one-letter-makes-one-sound, 21 consonants, and five vowel sounds (a-e-i-o-u + y).The next section will discuss this old phonics system and draw comparisons with THRASS (new phonics).

Old Phonics and THRASS

The old system of English phonics was based on the idea that one letter makes one sound. The THRASS teacher's manual (2011) explains that when we speak English we use 44 phonemes but by using the old phonics system, students are only taught 23 of these 44 phonemes. As a result, students do not develop the correct visual image and may guess, for example, that the word "cat" begins with the letter "k"or "q" as in "qat" (Davies & Ritchie, 2011). The one-letter-makes-one-sound approach does not provide students with enough information to first visualize the phoneme correctly and then to associate it with its corresponding grapheme. In fact, the old system of phonics often confuse students when they try to put into practice what they have learned, and as a consequence both teachers and students soon discover that the "rules" do not hold true as English is filled with contradictions that must be overcome in order to become good readers (Fewster, 2011).

Furthermore, in the English language there are many ways of writing the grapheme (letter, or group of letters) for particular sounds and these seemingly endless variations can confuse and intimidate students (Fewster, 2011). In contrast, THRASS students do not have to overcome "letters being silent, magic, soft, tricky or irregular" (Davies, 2003, p.10) and there is no need for any change over teaching to help students change from artificial "letter sounds" to natural phonemes (artificial synthesis to natural synthesis), or to unlearn of inappropriate behaviours or thinking (Davies & Ritchie, 2003).

New Phonics: THRASS Periodic Table of English

In 1991, Allan Davies, along with Australian educator -Denyse Ritchie, created the periodic table of English - the THRASS phonics system they claim is based on scientific principles (Davies & Ritchie, 2003). With THRASS phonics, native and non-native speakers could utilize a systematic phonics methodology that

consistently delivered improvements to reading, writing, speaking and metacognition skills (Davies & Ritchie, 2003). The key features of THRASS phonics that help students acquire key literacy skill in English are described by Davies and Ritchie (2003, p.11) and Fewster (2011, p.5) as follows (revised from the original):

- THRASS identifies the 44 phonemes we use in English. The units of the program are the 44 phonemes (speech sounds) and 120 key graphemes (spelling choices) of English – not the artificial and restrictive "letter sounds" of old phonics programs.
- THRASS links each grapheme to a key word and to a picture. The picture cues the student as to how to read the word and the phoneme for the particular grapheme demonstrated in that word.
- With 44 phonemes to learn, the core information is shown on two charts: one for vowels and the other for consonants. These charts are at the centre to the methodology and students learn to use them very rapidly. The charts are arranged to group each of the 44 phonemes with the various graphemes that are used to symbolize each of the phonemes.
- Both lowercase and uppercase letters are always identified by name – as is expected of good readers and spellers, whether they be children or adults.
- The program teaches life-long word solving skills (phonographic metacognition)

THRASS phonics brings transparency to English teaching and learning as the 44 phonemes and graphemes can easily be identified by the consonant and vowel groups on the THRASS chart (Appendix A). The THRASS student quickly learns to correctly identify picture-phoneme-grapheme relationships. For example, on the THRASS chart in the vowel group "o", "oa", "o-e", "ow", students visually match the corresponding pictures "nose", "boat", "note", "snow", and rapidly associate the correct phoneme group "o"withits corresponding picture and grapheme(s). More importantly, students also learn that the phoneme "o" can have four different grapheme choices and they go on to develop proper phonemic awareness of those choices(Davies & Ritchie, 2003; Fewster, 2011). In other words, when students encounter the "o" vowel combinations in regular text they have developed prior knowledge of the proper phoneme-grapheme relationships and are arguably better prepared to identify these phoneme-grapheme combinations in real text.

Next, the THRASS picture chart immediately captures students' attention and this provides them with the opportunity to identify the correct phoneme-

grapheme relationship. In this manner, students can develop knowledge of the THRASS system and participate more fully in the English lesson. Table 1has been adapted from Callihan and Zee. (2010); it outlines the five fortnightly stages of THRASS teaching that we adapted for this specific study.

Table 1: Stages of THRASS teaching

Week	**Learning Descriptor**
1-2	Picture location-locate the pictures on the chart (120 pictures)
3-4	Letter formation – name and form letters Grapheme location – locate and name graphemes
5-6	Keyword location-locate and name 120 keywords Phoneme location – locate and articulate 44 phonemes
7-8	Keyword synthesis – blend, read and spell keywords Keygrapheme recall – visualize and spell graphemes
9-10	Keyword analysis – read, spell and analyze 120 keywords Transfer THRASS skills to books and real text

The teaching plan outlined in Table 1 also drew upon other THRASS resources, such as raps and sequences CDs in additional to other materials created by the teacher to correspond with student learning. In fact, the research team recycled the phoneme and phonics learning skills to increase students' comprehension and competency with the THRASS chart, vowels, consonants and encouraged students to apply these skills in real text situations.

Since THRASS phonics is designed to be used in conjunction with a whole language teaching approach, our English lesson sessions consisted of around 20 minutes of phonics followed by 30 minutes of THRASS chart application with real text or story time. During story time the case study student and his fellow classmates were encouraged to discuss and connect the THRASS chart with real text. They were also encouraged to explore unknown grapheme combinations.

Methodology

This section describes the methodology and methods used to investigate THRASS phonics. First, the research questions are introduced and case study methodology is discussed as the underlying framework that guided the research investigation. A rationale is provided for the collection methods used in the context of this particular case study.

Research questions

- How did THRASS phonics impact our participant's ability to read in English?
- What were the notable features of THRASS that helped a second language student acquire early English reading skills?

Case Study Research

Educational researchers have recognized case study research as a valid means of exploring a particular aspect of teacher or student behaviour, pedagogical practice, social justice issues, or curriculum application (Luck, Jackson, & Usher, 2006; Stake, 1995). Case study research usually investigates a person, group or policy and involves an examination of a research question in a real life context (Burns, 2000; Yin, 1993). Stake (1994, p.xi) argues that case study is designed to: "catch the complexity of a single case. The case itself is of very special interest to us and it is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case."

Stake (1995, p.4) suggests that one of the most important elements of undertaking case study research is "to maximize what we can understand about that case. We do not study a case primarily to understand other cases. Our first obligation is to understand this one case." Thus, case study researchers resist the tendency to draw conclusions but instead, allow the case to unfold naturally without preconceptions with respect to the investigation. Stake (1995) also points out that case study knowledge is different from other research knowledge in four key ways:

1. Case study knowledge is more concrete; it resonates with our own experience because it is more vivid, concrete and sensory than abstract.
2. Case study research is more contextual. Our experiences are rooted in context as is knowledge in case studies. This knowledge is distinguishable from the knowledge derived from other research designs.
3. Case study researchers are much more focused on process than outcomes or products. How do things happen? What is the natural history of the activity under study?
4. The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. Data are mediated through the human instrument.

Yin (1993) suggests that case study research offers a great deal of flexibility when the researcher has little control over events or variables in the social environment. This is also the case when the researcher evaluates whether a case, policy or program worked or not.

Traditionally, case studies use "thick" description to provide a full, rich, literal exploration of the incident under investigation (Burns, 2000; Merriam, 1988). However, thick description does not necessarily mean that the educational researcher sets about describing every observation and nuance at the research event, rather it is designed to enhance reflection, understanding and perceptions of the actors involved in order to further the reader's knowledge of that case (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995). That is to say, the actor's views and actions are a source of data in case studies that allows his or her unique voice and ownership of the environment to come through to the reader (Elliot & Lukes, 2008; Gerring, 2004).

Single Case Study Design

The theoretical assumptions of case study are drawn from the qualitative hermeneutic traditions where the educational researcher's observations and interpretations of research events are considered essential for generating insight, discovery and knowledge into the case under investigation (Gerring & McDermott, 2007; Stake, 1995; Yin, 1993). While drawing from the qualitative tradition, the case study researcher is also free to use a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods to better understand the case (Gerring, 2004).

Crucial to any successful case study is the definition of the group as a unit which sets it apart it in some way from the general population (Burns, 2000; Merriam, 1988, Stake, 1995; Yin, 1993). Burns (2000) argues that the objective of case studies is to gain full understanding of the participant's perspective and often focuses on a classroom, group, teacher or pupil using a variety of observation and interview methods as their major tools. Thus a classroom, a cafeteria, a specific person can all be subject to case study observation (Burns, 2000). Ultimately, case study relies a great deal on research observations and other methods to uncover elements that highlight the bounded entity or program under investigation (Bogdan & Bilken, 2003).

Participants

The participants for this study were four volunteer Chinese Malaysian seven-year-old primary students', in Kuching, Sarawak Malaysia. Three participants had prior knowledge of English and had been evaluated as emerging readers. We decided to focus our research efforts on one student's experience with THRASS and analyze the phonics system's capacity to teach reading. As a significant case study, the research team investigated THRASS's impact on our participant's ability to read in English.

Participants were also given self-study materials: the THRASS DVD and phonemic THRASS chart in order to build awareness of the phonemes and

grapheme relationships of English, which they were encouraged to study at home. It is important to note here that the THRASS system is a proprietary, copyrighted product developed in England and Western Australia (Fewster, 2011).

Methods

In the present study, we employed an action spiral approach that consisted of observations, teacher reflection and validation meetings that were used to collect data on the participant's experience with THRASS phonics.

Because our participant was only seven years old, he was considered too young to reflect deeply on his personal experience with THRASS. Therefore, the research team decided to focus on the THRASS system's capacity to teach English skills, and we used our collective observations and the research spiral to interpret the participants reading progress with the phonics system. Thus, we relied on case study observation and production activities to assess how effective THRASS phonics was for our case study participant. The THRASS textbook (2011) outlines specific benchmarks that children should reach with the phonics system and THRASS chart. However in a second language context we did not follow any rigid protocols rather we employed THRASS as a natural part of the weekly English teaching lesson during the study.

The teaching and research of THRASS was conducted in collaboration with Shirley Su, a lecturer at IPGKBL, a teachers' training college in Kuching, Sarawak Malaysia. With over 30 years' experience as a teacher and lecturer, Shirley is also the phonics coordinator of the English department at IPGKBL campus in Kuching. As a teacher-researcher Shirley was the primary instrument for collecting data and mediating that data which is consistent with qualitative research methods (Stake, 1995; Stenhouse, 1975).

Despite both my and Shirley's prior knowledge of English teaching, THRASS as a phonics system and new to us and both of us had to learn to teach THRASS at the same time as our study participants learned the system. The English lessons were conducted from 8:30 am until 12:00pm every Saturday from June 2011to January 2012. The case study participant's parents enrolled their son in the study group because they had noticed that "Thomas" struggled to read in English. Shirley volunteered to provide him with extra tuition and to use THRASS phonics to assist him with English language acquisition.

Having established the way THRASS phonics works and case study methods used, the next section will explain how validation meetings and teacher reflection were the methods used to collect data in this study.

Validation Meetings

During the study, data was collected through validation meetings as the researcher's perspectives of the research events are considered valid data(Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). During these meetings the research team can develop a new synchronistic view of the research events(Cohen et al., 2007). Baker and Johnson (1998, p241) explain: "talk about teaching produces versions of morally accountable action (praxis) because the teacher is at the centre a practice that combines care and control. Professional talk is situated professional action." In other words, discussion about pedagogic practice is a form of reflective dialogue that can generate data and the development of a praxis orientation in the teacher-researcher.

In this study, validation meetings were held after the teaching, observation, and personal reflection to triangulate and explore our experience with the case study as well as to generate new insights into THRASS phonic's ability to teach our participant to read in English.

Teacher Reflection

In 1904 Dewey argued teachers needed to be taught reflection to improve their thinking, and that encouraging teachers to think about and reflect upon, their work can transform ordinary thinking into critical thinking. In Dewey's (1933) view, the purpose of reflective practice was to change pedagogical practice, and once the event had been reflected upon action was the next necessary step to improve practice. Reflection without action was considered meaningless. Levin and Merrit (2006) argue that systematic data collection and reflection can lead to the transformation of knowledge and teaching practice. Honan (2004) also calls for critical research that involves teachers as active participants in qualitative inquiries into their own practices.

Since Shirley was the teacher-researcher of THRASS phonics I asked her to generate a series of observations and reflections about her experience which was used then to explore and collect data about the THRASS phonics system's effectiveness. The reader may note a change in the writer's voice as we turn to some critical reflection snow follow from Shirley's experience of teaching, observing and reflecting on THRASS phonic's ability to teach English to Thomas (not his real name) - our significant case study.

Reconnaissance by Shirley Su

Many years ago, I was asked by friends "How would you teach a young child to read in English?"I could not really give a satisfactory answer at that time even though I was an English teacher. Indeed, the question, - "How do I teach a child to read?" still haunts me. Years later, I was introduced to teaching phonics through the new Malaysian Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah (KSSR) and began to think that phonics held part of the answer to teaching a child how to read.

In addition, when I was teaching my teacher-trainees transcription, I observed that they faced a lot of problems in transcription, and when it concerned the schwa (/ə/), more often than not they would transcribe /ɜ:/ in place of schwa. On studying the THRASS charts, I realised that some of my trainees' problem could be solved. I thought the THRASS charts could help me answer the question: "How would one know when to use /ə /?" THRASS phonics matches the schwa to 5 graphs, three diagraphs and one trigraph (a, e, i, o, u, er, ar, or, and ure). With THRASS phonics I realised that one could make an informed decision when to use the schwa.

In March 2011, at the request of several parents and relatives I began to teach English reading, writing, and speaking to a study group on Saturdays. In Kuching, Sarawak Malaysia, our case, Thomas was in standard one (7 years old) and he joined the group for additional exposure to the English language. Initially in our English lessons, I noticed that each time I wanted to engage him in conversation or get him to answer questions, Thomas would not engage in English. During story time when I gave Thomas a book to read, he would just look at me, then shift his eyes to the book and back to me (almost willing me to understand - I do not read in English) and he also passively refused to participate in group activities or shared reading.

In contrast, the rest of the group was doing well with their reading tasks which made it even more difficult for me to understand what exactly was going wrong. In fact I was at a loss about what to do and how to help Thomas read in English. My teaching experience tells me that I should start Thomas off with English sight words, however what about so many other words that the child is going to encounter when he embarks on the reading process? How can he recognize and decode the majority of English words he does not know?

From my teaching, I know that I should start with the basics and phonics is one of the answers to help students learn English. When I discussed THRASS as a potential teaching tool with Dr. Jeff, I thought we could try it out on Thomas to see if it could help him read in English.

Case Background

Thomas is a standard one pupil at primary school in Kuching, Sarawak Malaysia. His mother tongue is Mandarin Chinese. As a close relative of the family he would drop by occasionally and I would speak English to him during those visits but Thomas would not reply. But if I spoke to him in Mandarin he would respond; albeit softly and shyly.

Stage 1

Thomas was introduced to THRASS in June 2011. On the first lesson he was given a soft landing and learnt THRASS terms like: row, column, grapheme, and phoneme. Next, Thomas learnt to associate the phoneme with the grapheme explicitly. This was followed by blending and segmenting of phonemes.

At the early stages of THRASS phonics, Thomas could sometimes match the grapheme to the sound, but he was reluctant to try blending sounds. Since Thomas was studying in a group, he was able to sit and listen to how his peers blended the sounds from the THRASS chart but could not as yet participate. Because all the students were new to the THRASS system it was teacher intensive: I gave the students a lot of help and the opportunity to use the THRASS chart, raps, and homework materials.

As a teaching method, when I introduced vocabulary during my pre-stage I would draw attention to the THRASS chart, asking him to show me the row (coordinates on the THRASS chart: row 1, picture 3) where a particular phoneme is found and its grapheme representation (meta-language). As I did this, Thomas began to blend the phonemes on the chart; he would listen, then I would get him to say the individual phomene and try blending. Thomas would repeat the process when we he did his extensive reading. Over time his speed at blending phonemes, graphemes improved.

As Thomas familiarized himself with the THRASS system of phonics we deliberately taught the meta-language of phoneme, grapheme and developed THRASS chart awareness. During stage one of the research, the teaching and learning routinely recycled the skills highlighted in the literature review and we began to notice some improvement in Thomas's attitude and basic THRASS awareness while studying English.

Stage 2

At this point our study group had been using the THRASS phonics system on Saturday for about four months and I was able to develop strong impressions, and opinions with respect to the THRASS picture chart. However, it would be incorrect to claim that trying out THRASS was smooth sailing from the

beginning. For instance, in order to use the THRASS chart, a child needs to understand that one side is about vowel-and-diphthong sounds, while the other side is about consonant sounds. While teaching THRASS at the beginning, I noticed that more often than not Thomas would turn to the wrong side of the chart. In addition, each chart contains numerous graphemes that add to students' confusion.

Each time Thomas used the chart, he listened to my teaching cues, such as: "This is a consonant chart." "Look for the grapheme in the vowel chart."In other words, as the child flips and refers to the charts regularly, he is able to find a grapheme and its corresponding phoneme pretty easily. In short, a child is able to work out which chart (consonant or vowel) he should be referring to at any one point in his attempt to read.

A positive aspect of the THRASS chart was that it gave a range of graphemes that corresponds to a particular phoneme, making it a valuable resource for teaching a child how to read. For example, the chart shows that /i:/ manifests itself as the graphemes "e", "ea", "ee", "ey", and "y" as illustrated in Figure 2,

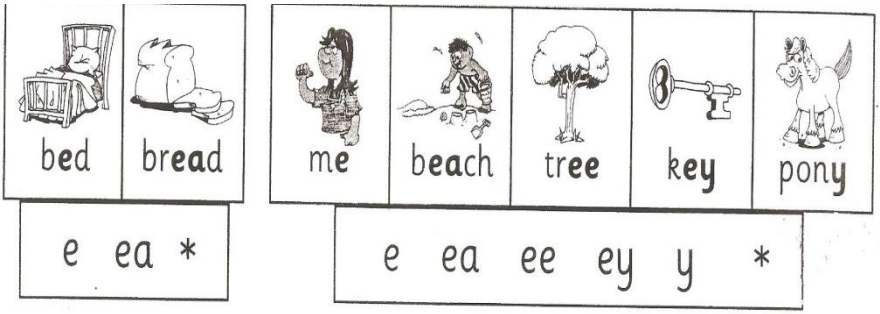

Figure 2: Phonics Chart

As a result, when a child encounters these graphemes while reading, he'll associate them with this particular phoneme. Thus his learning horizon on this particular phoneme is much broader than when he is only introduced to /i:/ - "ee" relationship which propels him forward faster in his reading.

In addition, the chart also shows that graphemes "ea" and "e" also correspond to /e/. It could be argued that this might cause slight confusion as to which phoneme (/i:/ or /e/) is the correct one for a particular word. At this point, the teacher has to step in to help and support the student, overtly informing and teaching the child that a particular phoneme (/i:/ or /e/) is the correct one. The

child can then blend the phonemes based on the information provided by the teacher.

However, one of the challenges for me was that the THRASS charts do not contain all the possible graphemes for a particular phoneme; there are simply too many combinations in the English language to include on a single chart. But for each phoneme, there's a "grapheme-catch-it-all" represented by an asterisk (*) on the chart. This is where a teacher would need to resort to his/her phonetics knowledge to add to the list of graphemes for a particular phoneme. For instance, the grapheme "ie" (as in the word "piece") is not found in the charts. Based on the teacher's knowledge of phonetics transcription, the grapheme "ie" would be added to the asterisk column shown below, indicating that it corresponds to the phoneme /i:/ (refer to the illustration below). Thus, it is important for an English teacher to have developed phonemic and phonetics awareness if they are to teach THRASS effectively. This should not be a hindrance to using THRASS as most dictionaries already cater to this. In addition, the 44 phonemes can be found on the UK's BBC website should teachers wish to check the 44 phoneme sounds in the English language.

With reference to the same grapheme and phoneme and the grapheme catch all GCA:

as in piece / shriek

E	ea	Ee	Ey	Y	*** ie**

By the end of stage two, Thomas had developed competency with the THRASS system and was able to use the metalanguage of the system to distinguish between phoneme, grapheme, vowels, and consonants on the chart and had progressed toward being an emerging reader in English.

Stage 3

In Stage three we decided to conclude the study with evidence of Thomas's ability to read. We used video as documentary evidence of the emerging reading skills he had acquired with THRASS. Video can be misleading as it is only a short summary presentation of all the study, effort, attention and input that was required from Thomas to read in English.

The video clip of Thomas using THRASS was taken in January of 2012. Thomas was not informed beforehand that we would be filmed that day. Just before the video recording, Thomas was told that he would read a storybook on his own,

and that he would be "photographed". Thomas did not have any choice in the selection of reading material. We selected Barnyard Banter as the sentences found in the story are short, and mostly consist of about five words. Barnyard Banter is an appropriate book for emerging readers and is very colourful and attractive. Furthermore it was a book Thomas had not read or heard of before.

The video demonstrates that Thomas had developed emerging reading skills and was able to utilize the THRASS phonics chart with confidence to decode words and read the Barnyard Banter without adult supervision. The video documents Thomas's transformed attitude instead of being daunted by the task of reading an entirely new story, he was now willing to 'have a go' in English. He showed confidence when sounding out and decoding the words he did not know. The video captures a tremendously important moment in Thomas's life, where he is able to self-direct his reading. He was confident enough to decode and sound out new words, and clearly emerged as an early reader of English. Moreover, the video demonstrates that Thomas had acquired the key foundational literacy skills that show promise for his future with the English language.

Results and Discussion

The findings presented are specifically organized around one finding and two factors that correspond to the research question. This study finds that THRASS phonics did have a positive result on our participant's recognition of the 44 phonemes in English and it instilled confidence in Thomas to read, sound out and decode words in English. That is to say, THRASS phonic system of pictures, instructional meta-language and connections between phoneme-grapheme relationships supported Thomas's ability to discern, decode and identify key relationships in learning to read in English.

The first contributing factor is that the systematic nature of THRASS phonics gave both teacher and student the opportunity to develop essential phonemic and phonic awareness skills which enhanced both parties' ability to teach and learn reading effectively.

The second contributing factor is that Thomas benefited from the social interaction in the English study group with more knowledgeable others. As a member of the group he was able to engage in peer learning, teaching, sharing, and experimentation with THRASS phonics as well as learn from the "little teachers" in his group.

Finding 1: THRASS Phonics and Emerging Readers

During the research study Thomas became an emerging reader with the help of THRASS phonics. This study finds that THRASS phonics was one of the factors that contributed to Thomas's increased ability to read in English. THRASS phonics provided Thomas with a systematic means to begin his English study and develop confidence with using the chart. As Shirley Su's reflections indicate, THRASS was not easy to teach or for students to learn initially, Thomas struggled to make connections with the metalanguage of THRASS (phoneme, grapheme, consonants, vowels, digraph and tri graph) and to connect these with his reading. However, after this initial period (stage one) the THRASS system proved beneficial as once the student mastered the metalanguage they were, as Shirley argues, "propelled forward faster in their reading."

Contributing Factor One: Standardized Phonics Instruction

THRASS phonic's systematic instruction and recycling of key phonic skills using the chart, raps and exercises standardized the teaching and learning that Thomas experienced during the weekly English lessons in this study. According to Wilson and Colmar (2008) systematic instruction in phonics contributes more significantly to children's ongoing literacy development than any alternative approach. Thus, consistent exposure to the teaching and learning of the 44 phonemes, THRASS picture chart, graphemes and phonics meant that Thomas had the opportunity to consolidate previous learning, recycle skills already learnt and incorporate new skills into his growing reading repertoire.

English literacy research argues that the most productive and effective teaching practices include systematic instruction in phonemic awareness and phonics (Wilson and Colmar 2008).For instance, the Rose Report (2006, p.1) that reviewed the United Kingdom's National Literacy Strategy recommended:

> High-quality phonic work should be taught as the prime approach in learning to decode (to read) and encode (to write/spell) print in English.
>
> Phonics work should be set within a broad and rich language curriculum that takes full account of developing the four interdependent strands of language: speaking, listening, reading and writing and enlarging children's stock of words.

Second, the standardized approach that the THRASS phonics system used was also important for pedagogy as it specified what was to be taught and mastered by the teacher before it was relayed to students. As the literature review points out, a challenge in the teaching of English literacy is the teacher's own mastery

of phonemes, phonics and being able to competently teach these skills in the classroom. As our case study demonstrates, it is necessary for the teacher to develop competency with phonemes and phonics before he or she can teach their students effectively. THRASS gives a coherent and progressive way for teacher and student to engage in the development of phonemic awareness and phonics without being overwhelmed. Conversely, teachers that do not have a systematic phonics methodology like THRASS may make up the rules of English literacy and this tends to lead to greater confusion for both teacher and student(Cihon, 2011; Davies, 2003; Ehri, 2002; Emmitt & Pollack, 2002; Rose, 2006).

Contributing Factor Two: Social Nature Of Learning

Another contributing factor in relation to Thomas's ability to read was his engagement with a peer group of students who were more advanced in English reading than him. In other words, Thomas benefited from his peers' social interaction and involvement in peer teaching, sharing, story time and experimentation with THRASS phonics during the weekly English lesson. The transformation of Thomas's reading ability resulted in part from the social interaction he had with more knowledgeable others in English class and this was a contributing factor to his emergence as an English reader (Vygotsky, 1978).

Limitations of the Study

Case study researchers immerse themselves deeply in understanding subjective phenomena and form close relationships with their research participants. In light of this, they must constantly consider counter measures to ensure their own research objectivity (Yin, 2003). In the present study, we consistently sought to counter our subjectivity by using a diversity of collection methods to illustrate THRASS phonics' effectiveness in teaching Thomas to read in English. However, it would also be incorrect to claim the research team was totally unbiased and objective during the case study because we were intent upon teaching and coaching the study group as well as wanting Thomas to acquire English literacy skills.

As critics of single case study often point out there is little evidence to support qualitative generalizations and it can be difficult to replicate case study findings in another location or situation (Burns, 2000). Yet replication of findings is not the sole purpose of qualitative research as Simons (1980, p.226) indicates: "case study is the way of the artist, who achieves greatness when, through the portrayal of an instant locked in time and circumstance, he communicates enduring truths about the human condition." In this study we sought to evaluate THRASS phonics' capacity to transform our participants' attitude and ability to read and study in English. The transformation that occurred in Thomas is reason enough

for the case study, and "communicates an enduring truth about the human condition" as his ability to read in English will have positive reverberations throughout his life.

Conclusion and Implications

THRASS phonics is a compelling instrument that can be used by Malaysian English teachers to ensure systematic and comprehensive phonemic and phonics instruction with students throughout Malaysia. THRASS phonics focuses on specific coding skills and sub-skills that must be learned by beginning readers, but which then teach those readers how to acquire phoneme, grapheme, and development of coding competence essential prerequisites for English literacy skills(Callinan & Zee Der Van, 2010; Cihon, 2011; Ehri, 2003; Emmitt & Pollack, 2002; Rose, 2006; Stotsky, 2006; Walsh et al., 2006; Wilson & Colmar, 2008).

This study is part of a growing body of literature that argues phonemic awareness and phonics are essential in English language acquisition. The literature stresses that not all phonics learning systems are equal or of the same quality. The literature concludes that the type of phonics system utilized must include the 44 phonemes and systematic instruction, so that teachers may master the skills to teach English literacy to their students. In this case study, THRASS phonics has been demonstrated to be an effective method of instruction whereby both teacher and student acquired the phonemic, phonics and metalanguage skills necessary to be competent in English literacy.

Synthetic phonics has been widely recognized in the United Kingdom(Ehri, 2003; Rose, 2006), Australia(Emmitt & Pollack, 2002; Wilson & Colmar, 2008), and the United States (Pressley, 1998; Stotsky, 2006; Walsh et al., 2006)as the key instrument for native and non-native speakers to become literate in the English language. In our view, the Malaysian Ministry of Education (MOE) has an incredible opportunity to take a leadership role and to introduce and evaluate THRASS phonic's potential to transform English language teaching in Malaysia and increase students' ability to read and speak English effectively.

We recommend a future large-scale pilot study to evaluate THRASS phonic's capacity to teach literacy with a large sample of Malaysian school children that would track their progress with THRASS phonics over a six-month study period. Such a study would provide the evidence required to demonstrate conclusive findings with respect to THRASS phonic's ability to bring improvements to Malaysian English teaching and learning with scientific certainty.

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APPENDIX A
THRASS VOWELS CHART