NERF Bulletin
Evidence for Teaching and Learning

Issue 4 - Autumn 2005

In this issue:

Inclusion and student outcomes

It's been with us for years and everyone has strong opinions about it but what do we really know about the impact of inclusion on all students? Find out on **page 3**

Vocational learning programmes

There's a lot of it about now, with colleges opening their doors to 14 year olds as part of the flexible curriculum. But just what do young people gain from vocational programmes and what is it about the programmes that enhances their learning? **Page 5**

Teaching assistants, training and student learning

Make the most of TAs. A new study shows that they provide their most effective support when they're interacting with target groups of students on specific strategies. **Page 6**

Citizenship education and student achievement

There's evidence that practising goes a lot further than preaching when it comes to student learning in citizenship education. What's more, learning in citizenship can increase achievement in other areas of the curriculum. **Page 7**

Phonics put students ahead of the literacy game

Are synthetic phonics to literacy what steroids are to athletes? For 300 children in Scotland they certainly seemed to be. Take a look at the evidence behind the media hype and find out what is meant by synthetic phonics at the same time. **Pages 8-9**

Inclusion: serving the needs of students with SEN

Students with SEN are turning up for mainstream classes in large numbers. Are they learning anything and how are teachers organising their support? **Page 11**

Moving on can be hard for children

Transitional times can be troubled times even for very young children. How do they see the move from Foundation into KS1 and what are teachers doing to ease their passage? **Page 12**

School leadership is not everyone's cup of tea

Many teachers and middle leaders see headship as a step too far removed from the classroom and some heads are voting with their feet. A large-scale survey offers perspectives on headship from a range of practitioners, including classroom teachers, deputies and heads. **Page 14**

Plus

Viewpoint: Flexibility as a means of responding to students' needs **(Page 2)**

Research Round-up:
Parenting programmes can be more effective when they are aimed at specific educational outcomes and based in school **(Page 4)**

Using praise is not as simple as it might seem. Some ways may be better than others **(Page 4)**

Update: More evidence that sentence combining is better for writing than grammar teaching **(Page 10)**

The economics of the National Literacy Strategy **(Page 10)**

What works in early years professional development **(Page 13)**

Hot Websites **(Page 15)**
Reviews of three sites many of us might enjoy visiting. The National Literacy Trust site is full of evidence, ideas and discussions about the nation's burning topics; the Vocational Education Research Centre, although based in Australia, has lots of international evidence for those who want to follow up on our p.7 report. And the National College for School Leadership site offers access to an intriguing array of debate and support which might just change your mind about that headship post you didn't want.

NERF
National Educational Research Forum

Welcome to the Autumn 2005 *Bulletin* - the fourth issue in the series in which we have once again looked hard for good research evidence about issues that have intrigued you. We thought we should also remind you that the *Bulletin* is only one of a number of easy-access routes to research evidence. So if you haven't tried out the TRIPs website yet, *(www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/research)* have a look and see what you think. It's full of short, readable digests of evidence from recent research journals on lots of different topics. The Research of the Month site is also well worth a visit *(www.gtce.org.uk/research)*. If you go there you'll need a bit more time because the research summaries are more in-depth though still very readable. What's unique about this site is the link between large-scale studies and teachers' own research.

Inclusion: what are the real facts?

Unless you were asleep or out of the country in June this year you would have heard that Baroness Warnock, who originally advocated the inclusion of children with SEN in mainstream classrooms, was having a rethink. She said that the system was failing too many children. Of course, the media went to town on the issue. Inclusion has been a hugely contentious area for many years and it's time we had some hard facts about it. We found two systematic research reviews which help throw some light on the subject. One explored whether inclusion has negatively affected wider attainment and the best way of going about teaching in inclusive classrooms. The other investigated what inclusion means in practice for thousands of children with SEN. More research is needed, but it's a start. Flexible grouping and timetabling, structured small group work (yes! that again) and effective use of Teaching Assistants were all important to success.

Flexibility recurs as a theme in much of the evidence in this issue: from responding to the needs of children transferring from Foundation to KS1 to creating a flexible curriculum for disaffected 14 year olds. It is clearly a major plank in the strategies adopted by high achieving inclusive schools. But how does flexibility relate to clear planning and clarity of learning objectives? What is involved over and above the usual evidence about good teaching? The evidence in this *Bulletin* seems to suggest that seeking out and using detailed information on students' starting points is a good first step. For students whose needs occupy the wider ends of the spectrum the strategic use of the resources now available outside the classroom, plus collaborative planning with colleagues also emerges as important. At the heart of it all is taking care to offer students choice about learning processes and tailoring practice to needs.

*"NO! NO! THAT'S **NOT** WHAT I MEANT BY AN INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM!"*

How can you use some of the evidence in this issue?

As usual, *Bulletin* writers have thought of a few things but we know that the evidence will spark plenty of other ideas amongst readers. We thought you might:

- take a look at the impact that TAs were able to make on early literacy learning after just a short period of training. Are there ways in which you could target particular groups of 'at risk' students with the aid of TAs and a tried and tested teaching strategy?

- check out the strategies used for teaching phonics in the report on page 8-9. Are there any opportunities for teaming up with colleagues and trying a similar experiment in your school or network?

- put the research findings about active citizenship to the test by developing ways in which your students have more of a say about what they learn and how they can get more involved in school and community life.

- review the patterns of support for your SEN students. Are there ways in which you could be more flexible about meeting individual needs? By alternating the times at which they are out of the classroom for example?

Inclusion and student outcomes

Inclusion - how does it affect all our students?

Inclusion of students with special educational needs (SEN) is now a common feature of mainstream classrooms. Yet there are still strongly held opinions that inclusion does not necessarily benefit all SEN students, and that it can also have adverse effects on the achievements of other students. So what do schools need to do to make sure everybody benefits? In the first of two articles about inclusion we look at the evidence about the impact of including SEN students on those students without SEN, and describe some of the strategies adopted in effective schools. In a second article (see p.11) we look in more depth at teaching and learning strategies that teachers have successfully used in their classrooms to enhance the learning of students with SEN.

Does the presence of students with SEN change the attainment of students without SEN?

A recent study analysed the numbers of included students in all maintained schools in English LEAs and their results in national tests. They found that when all factors had been taken into account there was no evidence of an overall relationship between the level of inclusion and student attainment. Additional data in the form of teachers' and students' comments suggested that inclusion had positive effects on the social skills and understanding of all students. On the other hand the study authors did find differences in attainment levels between comparable individual schools with similar, high, levels of inclusion. Why did some schools perform better than other schools with similar numbers of included students? To try to answer this question the authors explored the practices of sixteen case study schools - all highly inclusive - but varying in the performance of their students.

What helped all students to learn?

Flexibility and attention to individual needs were key elements of successfully inclusive schools. The researchers found teachers in these schools were responsive - for example the way in which they grouped their students. Instead of following a set pattern, they used a mixture of unsupported mainstream class placement, supported mainstream class placement and small group or one-to-one teaching outside the mainstream class, in which teaching assistants played a key role in offering teachers a range of alternative grouping patterns. Some schools had trained their TAs in literacy development so enabling them to engage in teaching roles with SEN students.

Good systems of pupil monitoring enhanced flexibility by giving teachers the information they needed to understand where their students started from and what their needs were. Support was not fixed - children were moved about, taken in and out of groups and support was not for a pre-determined length of time.

As one SENCO commented:

'The key is making sure all get what they need, not that all get the same - everyone having access to what they need in order to achieve'.

Good planning was critically important to this process. One TA explained:

'I try to ensure [two boys with hearing impairment] fit into their class and also that they can manage the curriculum. That means meeting with [teacher's name] in advance. I say we need more visual things etc. and then we adapt materials.'

Such flexibility was also appreciated by the students:

Jim: 'Those who go out to Booster classes are given help to catch up with what's been going on.'
Gary: 'Sometimes the timetable is changed so children miss different lessons different weeks.'

Observation showed that all students - with or without special needs - made good progress when teachers:

- clearly explained tasks - with models where appropriate to ensure that everyone was clear what was required - which could be completed by students in different ways depending on their abilities;

- demonstrated appropriate skills in dealing with challenging behaviour, such as talking quietly to individuals, ensuring all students could access the materials they needed, maintaining an even-tempered style, 'often employing a rather gentle humour'; and

- encouraged all students to participate by, for example, giving them some choice over the activities and how far they took them.

Flexibility and attention to individual needs are core elements of 'good teaching' everywhere: but the words are easy to say and hard to achieve. See Viewpoint, page 2.

How do we know this ?

Dyson, A., Farrell, P., Polat, F., Hutcheson, G. and Gallanaugh, F. (2004) *Inclusion and pupil achievement,* London: RR578, DfES. Available online at: *http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/ACFC9F.pdf*

The researchers analysed national pupil attainment data - held on the National Pupil Database (NPD) - on over 500,000 students in mainstream schools at each key stage, to explore the effects of inclusion on national assessment scores. They also examined practice in 16 highly inclusive schools (schools with a high proportion of students with SEN).

Kalambouka, A., Farrell, P., Dyson, A. and Kaplan, I. (2005) *The impact of population inclusivity in schools on student outcomes*, Research Evidence in Education Library [Online]. Available at: *http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/EPPIWeb/home.aspx?&page=/reel/reviews.htm*

Twenty-six studies were reviewed in-depth and provided the data for synthesis. Most studies were carried out in the USA. Almost all the studies were from the primary phase.

Parenting programmes can make a difference

Schools are under pressure to increase their interaction with parents and to get parents more heavily involved in their children's education. But many are struggling to succeed.

A research team from the London Institute of Education investigated when and how parenting programmes were most effective in the context of improving attendance and behaviour in school. They found that the systems in place for coordinating and providing parenting programmes in LEAs generally were 'fragile', often inadequate in scale, uncoordinated and still largely voluntary.

On the plus side, many LEAs were developing their own parenting programmes with a focus on the child's educational outcomes rather than more generalised family outcomes and the researchers found a range of examples of good practice in relation to these. They recommended that parent programmes might be better based *within* the school and that schools might consider having a key contact with responsibility for parenting issues and also providing training for school staff in developing relationships with parents.

In the Spring Issue we'll take a more detailed look at evidence about the impact of parental involvement and how different projects have tackled it.

Hallam, S., Rogers, L. and Shaw, J. (2004) *Improving children's behaviour and attendance through the use of parenting programmes: An examination of good practice* London: DfES RR585

What a good girl!

We all know that praise and how we use it can make a big difference to pupils' learning. But the findings from a study of 109 year four students in two schools suggest that *type* of praise may be more important than rate of praise and that praise is effective when it provides specific information - which could, for example, be directed at pupils' effort, or the particular strategies they use.

Researchers from the University of Southampton investigated the effects of teachers using two different kinds of praise (positive and specific) on pupils' on-task behaviour, perceptions of themselves as learners and enjoyment of numeracy. Positive praise was defined as giving approval about behaviour, e.g. affirming a correct answer or giving ability or whole-person feedback ('clever girl!'). Specific praise is positive, but also contextualises behaviour - it relates the praise to the actions taken by the pupil. It involves stating or describing the praised behaviour and possibly also the amount of effort put into it.

The research found that specific praise resulted in significantly greater increases in levels of on-task behaviour than positive praise. Specific praise also significantly increased the children's perceptions of themselves as academic learners, which positive praise did not - suggesting that the children were more aware of what made them successful.

Chalk, K. & Bizo L. A. (2004) *Specific praise improves on-task behaviour and numeracy enjoyment: a study of year four pupils engaged in the numeracy hour* Educational Psychology in Practice, 20(4), pp.335-351

EXPRESSIONS OF PRAISE KEEP CHILDREN 'ON TASK'

Developing an ICT strategy for early years

Evidence with the potential to inform early years practitioners about the role and potential of ICT comes in the form of a literature review from New Zealand. This is a rich study and we'll report it more fully in the next issue. Meanwhile, we can reveal that, contrary to the view that ICT is not appropriate for young children's cognitive, physical, social and emotional development, it can be a useful tool for supporting their learning and development. And it's not just computers. Early years practitioners are trying them all: from digital cameras and video to programmable toys, robotics and electronic musical instruments.

Find out more in Issue 5 (out next Spring).

Bolstad, R. (2004) *The role and potential of ICT in early childhood education: A review of New Zealand and international literature* Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research

Vocational learning programmes

What are the benefits and what strategies help?

'Flexible curriculum', 'Personalised learning' ... the world as we have known it since 1988 is changing. The focus on a single National Curriculum is rapidly giving way to an approach in which students' differing needs and ways of learning are taking centre stage. One way this is being translated into practice is through the vocational programmes on offer for 14-16 year olds. They can engage in vocational learning through the disapplication of the National Curriculum or through participation in the Increased Flexibility Programme. There are also formal programmes leading to qualifications, including GCSEs in vocational subjects and awards which combine qualifications and work-based learning. From the age of 16, vocational programmes are generally more labour market-oriented. Young people can pursue vocational courses and work-based training accredited by City and Guilds, Edexcel and OCR or Modern Apprenticeships.

So there's lots of it about. But just what do young people gain from vocational programmes and what is it about the programmes that enhances their learning? Researchers at Oxford University conducted a review to find out.

What do young people gain from vocational learning?

The researchers looked at the outcomes of vocational learning in schools, colleges and workplaces for three age groups: 14-16 year olds, post-16 and adults (post-19 learners pursuing non-degree qualifications). They found that participating in the programmes could result in changes in the way that students felt about themselves and their work (affective processes) but did not necessarily enhance either their conceptual knowledge or their ability to progress to further study.

- **Affective processes**
  The researchers found evidence that vocational learning enhanced the motivation, persistence and self-confidence of all three age groups, although these effects did not always transfer to their other learning activities.

- **Knowledge and skills**
  Students acquired a range of knowledge and skills from their learning experiences, but the type and depth of learning was variable. 14-16 year olds were more likely to gain social and technical skills although there was evidence from Ofsted that 60% of students on extended work related courses improved their value added scores in GCSEs. Post-16 learners gained qualifications and skills which were more often related to procedural knowledge (how to do tasks) than to conceptual knowledge. Some post-16 students used the time to re-engage with learning after earlier unsuccessful experiences. On basic skills courses, adults tended to enhance their literacy, but not their numeracy skills. There was evidence that family literacy courses, where children and adults learned together, had some success.

- **Progression**
  For the 14-16 age range participation in the programmes did not always enhance progression to full-time post-compulsory education and could even hamper progression - perhaps because of the emphasis on procedural learning rather than more critical or analytical learning. After 16, the actual qualification became important for entry to the labour market, which valued some qualifications more highly than others.

What processes enhance students' learning?

Positive effects were found when practitioners in school/college and workplace settings:

- encouraged individual responsibility by sharing planning with students and offering them some control over the pace and sequencing of tasks;

- promoted interaction of students with peers who have various roles in the workplace - this was found to be highly motivating;

- set workplace tasks which were authentic and relevant to both the vocational and curriculum sides of the learning process and which involved learning rather than just imitation;

- fostered a collaborative culture which valued training and learning and offered students opportunities for job rotation in the workplace setting; and

- integrated the school/college curriculum with work based learning tasks.

All learners benefited when strong guidance and support was available through mentoring or coaching, and older learners appeared to benefit particularly from diagnostic assessment which was then used to help direct their learning. Embedding learning into work activities (for example, integrating key skills such as literacy and numeracy into vocational training) also seemed to be an effective way of engaging vocational students to learn in those areas.

Several colleges have been studying the flexible curriculum in regional networks. How have they been dealing with the influx of younger students to their colleges? In the next issue we will bring you some emerging findings from a practitioner perspective of the effects of the 14-16 flexible curriculum.

Jargon Buster

Vocational learning - *The researchers defined vocational learning as any form of activity or experience leading to understandings or skills relevant to work. Their definition covered a wide variety of experiences - from courses taught in classrooms and workshops, to certificated learning in the workplace.*

How do we know this?

Stasz, C., Hayward, G., Oh, S., & Wright, S. (2004) **Outcomes and processes in vocational learning. A review of the literature.** The Learning and Skills Research Centre [Online]. Available at: ***http://www.lsda.org.uk/files/PDF/1689.pdf***

The report is based on the findings of around 100 UK-based studies and some key studies from other countries including Australia and the US.

Teaching assistants

How effective are they?

'I could not cope without my two TAs!! Especially as there are so many behaviour problems in my class.'

'Support from a TA makes it possible for less able children to be focused, freeing me to work more meaningfully with other children in the class.'

This is how teachers involved in a recent, large-scale study of the role and effects of teaching assistants (TAs) in primary schools, summed up the benefits of classroom support. The study found that although TAs helped with all sorts of things, like preparing materials, administration and classroom organisation, teachers felt that their TAs' most effective role was interacting with the children. In particular, they valued the direct support they gave to pupils who had special educational needs, low ability or difficult behaviour.

The researchers' observations revealed there were indirect benefits from this kind of classroom support too. With a TA present in a class, pupils enjoyed a more active form of interaction with their teachers - they initiated contact, were involved in more sustained interactions, and were more likely to be given individualised attention by the teacher. Pupils were also more on-task when working on their own.

What difference does training make?

However, when the researchers delved a little deeper, they found that the picture was not quite so rosy. Although most TAs found their job satisfying because they liked working with the pupils and had a good relationship with the teachers, there were concerns about the lack of preparation TAs had for their role. As this TA explained:

'I feel I am being asked to take on more and more responsibility without the training and back up... if I had a child with special needs, I would want them to work with the teachers as much as the others do. However experienced we are - we are not teachers.'

Less than half of the TAs reported having qualifications relevant to their work, and lack of joint planning and feedback time meant teachers were not always able to discuss individual pupils and plan follow-up tasks with TAs.

Interestingly, the study found no evidence that the presence of TAs had any measurable effect on pupil attainment. But this may have been because the researchers only examined the relationships between TAs and the attainment for the whole class and did not investigate the impact of TAs on the specific pupils they supported. The researchers concluded that more precise studies were needed to explore these issues further and to better understand the role and impact of support staff on pupils under normal classroom conditions.

TAs and high level teaching interventions

A small-scale study, published three months later showed how one group of TAs were able to enhance poor readers' literacy skills after nine weeks. The researchers examined the impact of a literacy intervention strategy delivered by TAs in Year 1 classes from nine schools and found that the children's reading and spelling performance improved. The TAs were given a morning's training in generic letter-sound teaching, followed by training

in one of three intervention programmes:

- phonemes (activities involving 'consonant-vowel-consonant' words, e.g. 'cat' and 'map');
- rhyme (activities involving words that rhymed with e.g. 'at' and 'an'); and
- a mix of phoneme and rhyme activities.

Follow-up visits to support the TAs during the programme were also carried out. The TAs themselves worked with small groups of poor readers for 20 minutes four times per week during the word-level work of the National Curriculum.

After nine weeks, the children's performance was compared with the performance of children who undertook their usual class word-level work without help from a TA (the control group). Whilst all the children improved their literacy skills, the children helped by the TAs, particularly the phoneme group, showed significantly greater improvements than the comparison group children.

The researchers concluded that TAs can deliver effective phonic literacy interventions to small groups of children. This was not to say that TAs could take on the role of teachers, but that TAs can provide effective additional support for pupils. The study suggests that training for this role is crucial for enhancing TAs' effectiveness.

Since this research was conducted and following the January 2003 National Agreement, training for TAs is now also part of the national landscape. Go to **www.hlta.gov.uk** *for more information about TA training.*

How do we know this?

Blatchford, P., Russell, A., Bassett, P., Brown P. & Martin, C. (2004) **The role and effects of teaching assistants in English primary schools (Years 4 to 6) 2000-2003: results from the class size and pupil adult ratios (CSPAR) KS2 project.** London: DfES RR605 *(http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RR605.pdf)*

The researchers studied approximately 300 classes in around 200 schools from Year 4 to Year 6. They collected quantitative data, such as pupil test scores, surveyed around 150 TAs, 200 teachers and 200 headteachers, and made systematic observations and case studies of 20 classes. Their research highlighted the lack of studies that can help inform the current debate about the pedagogical role of TAs. Happily, the team has now been commissioned by the DfES to examine in detail the deployment and impact of all categories of support staff, and as part of this project they are investigating the classroom interactions of TAs.

Savage, R. & Carless, S. (2005) **Learning support assistants can deliver effective interventions for 'at-risk' children.** *Educational Research* 47(1), pp.45-61.

Citizenship Education

Is there evidence that citizenship education raises student achievement?

Good citizenship education (CE) can improve student achievement according to a recent systematic review. In the last *Bulletin* we looked at research findings about the ways in which schools have been implementing citizenship education. This review set out to look for evidence about the effects of citizenship education on student learning and achievement.

The studies in the review found evidence of improved grades and increased achievement in other areas of the curriculum when students were asked to:

- apply their knowledge to personal experiences;
- engage in complex analytical and conceptual thinking by solving problems and making decisions;
- express their views and justify them, listen to others and reconsider their views in the light of new information; and
- think about (and thus gain a better understanding of) their own learning.

Good citizenship education also fostered students' personal development. The review found evidence of improved attitudes, behaviour and attendance, plus increased self confidence and better communication and conflict resolution skills.

The picture in England

So far so good, but, like many research reviews, much of this evidence comes from the US. What's the picture in English schools and colleges? Here, participation and active citizenship are still relatively new and the association between pupil participation and pupil attainment has not been established. A recent study that sought the views of students in secondary schools depicted a landscape of uneven and patchy provision.

It found that the proportion of schools delivering citizenship education in a dedicated time slot had increased since 2002 to nearly 40%, but most schools still delivered CE through existing subjects, especially PHSE and RE, using non-specialist subject teachers.

Most students reported that teachers still tended to use traditional teaching methods such as taking notes, listening while the teacher talks and working from textbooks as their main teaching strategy in CE. (Though teachers reported that they offered students unbiased information, opportunities to discuss, debate, choose issues for discussion, express their views and make up their own minds.)

Patchy or not, messages about the *potential* of CE to raise achievement and how it could be done came from all three studies: the systematic review and two English studies into the provision of CE, including one on the post-16 sector.

All three studies recommended:

- an emphasis on combining knowledge, understanding and skills with practical action - political literacy in action, rather than a narrower, political knowledge approach;
- the involvement of young people in decisions about their learning and the development of a student voice; and
- the need for clear definitions of what the programme seeks to teach and achieve, tailored to students' needs and experience.

Citizenship education has three separate but inter-related strands: political literacy (or citizenship in the curriculum), social and moral responsibility (or citizenship in the school culture), and community involvement (citizenship in the wider community). The studies agreed that active involvement of young people was vital.

This could include:

- taking part in student councils and their elections;
- mediation or mentoring;
- participation in extra-curricular activities and off site visits;
- raising money for charity; and
- volunteering in the local community.

Staff believed that students' participation in such school and community based activities had a positive impact on their respect for and tolerance of others and on their ability to make informed decisions.

Good features of teaching and learning in classroom based citizenship were:

- developing a critically reflective learning environment, with scope for discussion and debate;
- finding out which issues interested young people and using resources from current events;
- using a variety of experiential learning experiences, including drama, role-play, photography, exhibition work and project work; and
- using external speakers and asking young people to be responsible for inviting them in and working with them.

How do we know this?

Our article draws on the findings of three reports. The first is a recent systematic review using EPPI-Centre methodology. The second is a research study of a representative sample of 237 schools and 50 colleges. The third is an evaluation of the implementation and impact on young people of a pilot citizenship project in post-16 education, based on interviews and analysis of management information data.

Deakin Crick, R.,Taylor, M., Tew, M., Samuel. E., Durant, K. and Ritchie, S. (2005) *A systematic review of the impact of citizenship education on student learning and achievement.* In: *Research Evidence in Education Library.* London: EPPI-Centre, Social Science Research Unit, Institute of Education. [Online] Available at: *http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/EPPIWeb/home.aspx?page=/reel/review_groups/citizenship/review_two_abstract.htm*

Cleaver, E., Ireland, E., Kerr, D. and Lopes, J. (2005) *Citizenship education longitudinal study: second cross-sectional survey 2004: listening to young people: citizenship education in England* London: DfES RR626 [Online]. Available at: *http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/programmeofresearch/projectinformation.cfm?projectid=14513&resultspage=1*

Craig, R., Kerr, D., Wade, P. and Taylor, G. (2004) *Taking post-16 citizenship forward: learning from the post-16 citizenship development projects.* London: DfES RR604 [Online]. Available at: *http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/programmeofresearch/projectinformation.cfm?projectid=13079&resultspage=1*

Citizenship and Teacher Education is a helpful website with lots of information and suggestions for teachers, including post-16 case studies. *http://www.citized.info/index.php*

A useful link for those interested in mediation is: *http://www.mediation-eu.net/english/main_eng.asp*

"Just helping someone crossing the road is not citizenship. If you are a good citizen you will go to the council and get a zebra crossing there so that it benefits everyone."

Literacy teaching

Is synthetic phonics the answer to closing the gap in attainment?

News of the huge success synthetic phonics had in primary schools in Clackmannanshire, Scotland took the world of teaching by storm in April this year. So much so, that in June, the government promised a review of literacy teaching in English primary schools. The opinions of politicians and academics about synthetic phonics teaching were given plenty of news column inches and airtime, but little detail was given about the evidence base. What exactly were the researchers' findings and how is synthetic phonics different from the usual method of teaching phonics?

Who was involved in the study and what did they do?

Altogether, 13 classes of children aged five years (around 300 children) from eight schools in Clackmannanshire, Scotland took part in the study. The children's class teachers implemented one of three teaching programmes:

- four classes were taught using an analytic phonics approach;
- four classes were taught using an analytic phonics approach supplemented with phonological awareness (ability to segment and blend spoken words aurally at the level of rhymes and sounds, e.g 'st' + 'ring' = 'string'); and
- five classes were taught by the synthetic phonics approach.

The children's literacy skills were tested before the teaching programmes started, using a range of standard tests.

The programmes lasted for 16 weeks, the children receiving their interventions via scripted whole-class programmes for 20 minutes a day. The researchers assessed and compared the pupils' literacy skills using standard tests. The children in the analytic phonics groups then followed the synthetic phonics programme, which they completed by the end of their first year at school. The researchers followed the progress of all the children until the end of their primary schooling, from P2 (age 6-7 years) to P7 (age 11-12 years).

> **Analytic phonics**
>
> *Using the analytic phonics approach, letter sounds are taught after reading has begun. The children first learn to read by sight, but they also have phonic lessons when they learn letter sounds in a sequence i.e. in initial, final then the middle position, followed by blends, e.g. 'bl', 'cr', 'st' and digraphs, e.g. 'oo', 'ch'. Reading is taught before spelling. The full phonics scheme is not usually completed until the end of the third year at school.*
>
> **Synthetic phonics**
>
> *Synthetic phonics is an accelerated form of phonics - children are taught all letter sounds, including blends and digraphs in the first few months of school. Letter sounds are taught before children are introduced to books. Children are shown letters in all positions from the start and are taught to read and spell simultaneously.*

What effect did synthetic phonics have on the children's literacy skills?

When the researchers compared the performance of the children in the three groups at the end of the experimental programme, they found the synthetic phonics group:

- was 7 months ahead of both analytic phonic groups in reading and also 7 months ahead of their chronological age;
- was 8 to 9 months ahead of the other two groups in spelling and 7 months ahead of their chronological age;
- read imaginary words (e.g. 'hig', 'ped') better than the other groups; and
- was the only group that could read unfamiliar words by analogy (i.e. giving children clue words such as 'ring' to help them read similar words, e.g. 'sing').

By their last year of primary school (remember all the rest of the children had been taught synthetic phonics in their second year) all the children's:

- word reading was 3 years and 6 months ahead;
- spelling was 1 year 9 months ahead; and
- reading comprehension was 3.5 months ahead of the established chronological age norms.

### How did the performance of the boys compare with the girls?

Girls usually perform better than the boys in literacy - as shown by the national curriculum test results. In this study, the boys either did as well or outperformed the girls:

- boys and girls read words equally well in P2, but from P3 to P7, the boys performed significantly better than the girls;
- the boys spelt better than the girls in P4, 6 and 7; and
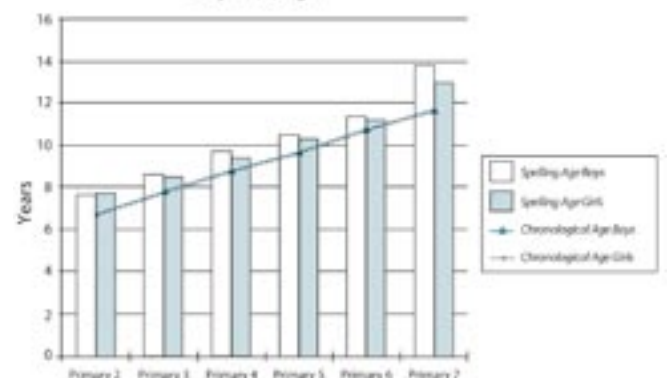- boys and girls did not differ significantly in reading comprehension.

Comparison of word reading from Primary 2 to Primary 7, boys versus girls
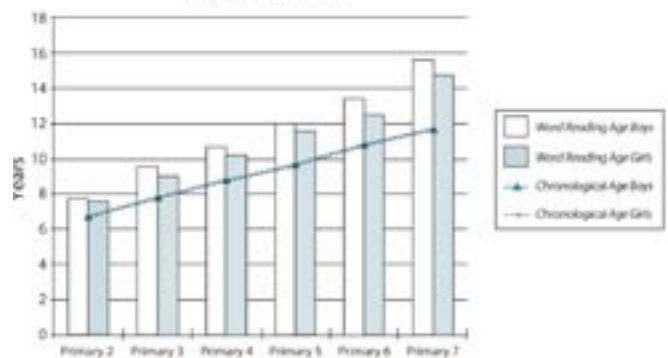
Comparison of reading comprehension from Primary 2 to Primary 7, boys versus girls
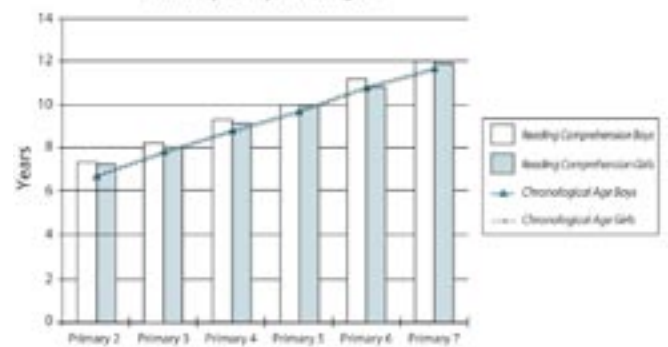
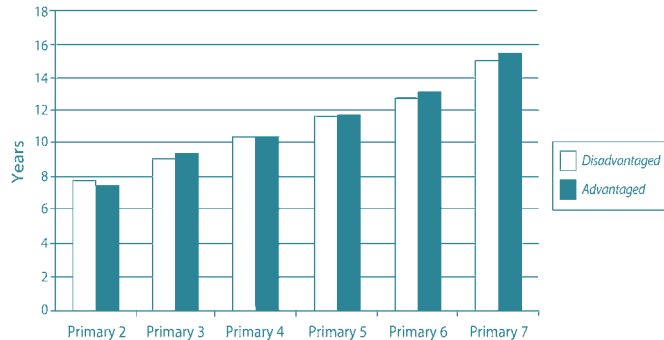Comparison of spelling from Primary 2 to Primary 7, boys versus girls

Adapted from Johnston + Watson 2005

## How did children from disadvantaged homes fare?

Children from deprived homes usually do less well than children from non-deprived homes in literacy. With the synthetic phonics teaching, disadvantaged children:

- read words more-or-less as well as those from advantaged homes;
- only spelt less well in their final year of primary school; and
- were ahead of more advantaged children for reading comprehension in P2, but behind in P5 and P7.
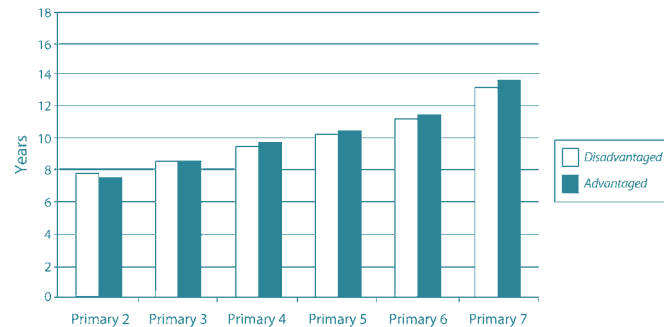
Comparison of word reading from Primary 2 to Primary 7 for the advantaged and disadvantaged children

Comparison of reading comprehension from Primary 2 to Primary 7 for the advantaged and disadvantaged children
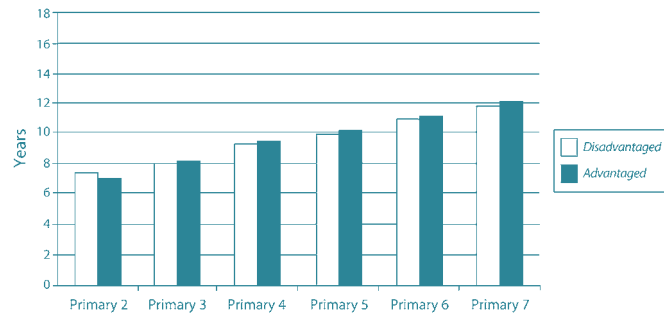
Comparison of spelling from Primary 2 to Primary 7 for the advantaged and disadvantaged children

Did the synthetic phonics programme benefit children of all abilities?

The researchers took a performance level of more than two years below chronological age as indicating underachievement and calculated how many children came into this category. As can be seen from the table, few children were behind with reading and spelling in their last year of primary school. But it is clear that whilst some children could decode words, they struggled to understand what they were reading, a finding that suggests the importance of teaching comprehension skills too.

Percentage of children underachieving

Year Group	More than 2 years behind chronological age		
	Word reading	Spelling	Comprehension
P2 (6-7 years)	0%	0.4%	0%
P3 (7-8 years)	0.8%	0.4%	1.2%
P4 (8-9 years)	0%	0.4%	1.6%
P5 (9-10 years)	1.6%	1.7%	5.0%
P6 (10-11 years)	8.4%	3.0%	16.2%
P7 (11-12 years)	5.6%	10.1%	14.0%

Where next?

This study showed that explicit synthetic phonics teaching results in pupils making good progress with reading. The children also experienced systematic teaching of comprehension skills so 'cracking the phonetic code' may not be enough to ensure the development of pupils' literacy skills. Another study by Nunes et al (2004) found that pupils' development of comprehension and morphology (creating meaning through parts of words such as prefixes or suffixes) at KS2 depended on explicit teaching, which in turn depended on teachers having explicit knowledge of the concepts.

The researchers observed how teachers helped pupils to become actively engaged in interpreting what they read. They found the teachers modelled a good range of comprehension strategies, such as question generating, summarising, clarifying and predicting, but without making the comprehension strategies explicit or giving the children an opportunity to practice these skills for themselves. They suggested the reason why the teachers did not make the comprehension skills explicit was because their knowledge of them was implicit - as skilled readers they used well rehearsed and effective comprehension strategies, without necessarily being aware what the strategies were.

The researchers then investigated what effect increasing teachers' explicit knowledge of morphology had on their pupils' learning. The spelling ability of classes whose teachers had received training in morphology was compared with classes whose teachers had not attended the course. After seven weeks, all the children had improved, but the morphology group had made significantly more progress.

How do we know this?

Johnston, R. & Watson, J. (2005) *A seven year study of the effects of synthetic phonics teaching on reading and spelling attainment* [Online]. Available at: *http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library5/education/ins17-00.asp*

The researchers assessed the children's literacy skills using standard tests and used a high level of statistical analysis to compare the performance of different groups of children at the end of the 16-week experimental programme and in each year of primary school.

The National Literacy Trust also features this study, see P.15 for details of their website.

Nunes, T., Bryant, P. & Hurry, J. (2004) *Teachers' explicit awareness of key concepts in literacy at KS2 and its relationship with teaching and children's learning.* Paper presented at the TLRP 5th Annual Conference, 22-24 November 2004.

Jargon Buster

Phonological awareness - *ability to segment and blend spoken words aurally at the level of rhymes and sounds, e.g. 'st' + 'ring' = 'string'.*

Phonic code - *alphabetic code.*

Morphology - *a morpheme is the smallest part of a word that carries meaning, e.g. the suffix 'less' in 'careless'. As children become more aware of conventional spelling, they employ more morphological information. E.g. representing the 't' sound at the end of past tense regular verbs with 'ed'.*

Research Round-up

What works for writing?

Remember *THOSE* research reviews? First the one that found no high quality evidence that traditional grammar teaching helped young people to improve their writing? And then the one which found that sentence combining did help improve writing? (See the last issue of the *Bulletin* if this isn't ringing any bells.)

That evidence has been boosted by an article published earlier this year which described research in the US which found that instruction designed to improve sentence construction skills resulted in greater improvements in story writing than traditional grammar instruction. Unlike many studies, the report describes in helpful detail exactly what was involved in each type of instruction as well as the measures for assessing the effects of the treatment.

Saddler, B. & Graham, S. (2005) **The effects of peer-assisted sentence-combining instruction on the writing performance of more and less skilled young writers** Journal of Educational Psychology 97(1), pp.43-54

Blue ink and memory retention

Can the use of blue ink improve students' memory retention in maths? One teacher found that providing terms and definitions in blue ink seemed to improve her students' memories. So researchers put her theory to the test. Sadly, after a careful study lasting eight weeks and involving 93 secondary (high school) students, the answer was found to be - no.

Din, F. (2001) **The effects of blue ink on students' memory retentions of maths terms and definitions** paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Rural Education Association, October 2001

Value for money?

According to an analysis by economists, the National Literacy Strategy has been cheap to implement, with benefits on a par with much more expensive policies such as class size reduction.

Normally, economists focus on the influence of school resources on pupil attainment. Now they are starting to look at the costs and benefits of changing the content and structure of teaching. In this case they compared the reading and overall English attainment of children in the first National Literacy Project schools (in 1996) with a set of control schools and found a large increase in attainment in reading and English for pupils in NLP schools. They also found evidence that boys benefited more from the literacy hour than girls did.

The table below shows the gender differences in achievement at KS2 English and reading for all schools from 1996 - not just the original NLP schools. Note how a plateau emerges from around 2000 onwards.

Percentage of Pupils Achieving Level 4 and Above in Key Stage 2 English

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Change 1996-2002
All	57	63	65	71	75	75	75	18
Boys	50	57	57	65	70	70	70	20
Girls	65	70	73	76	79	80	79	14

Percentage of Pupils Achieving Level 4 and Above in Key Stage 2 Reading

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Change 1997-2002
All	n/a	67	71	78	83	82	80	13
Boys	n/a	63	64	75	80	78	77	14
Girls	n/a	71	79	82	86	85	83	12

Machin, S. & McNally, S. (2004) **The Literacy Hour** *Centre for the Economics of Education*

Window on the world of teaching

In March 2005:

- 526,141 teachers had registered with the General Teaching Council for England, including 36,458 supply teachers;
- just over a quarter (140,399) were male, 385,742 (73.3%) were female;
- 41.2% were primary, 41.4% secondary and 3.2% special. 1.5% were in the independent sector and 0.2% in FE;
- only 171 nursery teachers were male and 1,724 were female; and
- there were more teachers in the SE than anywhere else in England (68,787) but the North West came a close second with 64,686.

Are we an ageing profession?

It may come as no surprise to discover that over 40% of all teachers were over 40, with a hefty 30% in their fifties. But the fact that only 65% of the 28,044 registered NQT teachers were in their twenties seems to confirm all the anecdotal reports that increasing numbers of people are turning to teaching later in life, bringing all that rich experience to the mix.

(Figures from the third **Annual Digest of Statistics from the General Teaching Council for England***, June 2005)*

Inclusion: serving the needs of students with SEN

Does inclusion mean more than being in the same classroom?

Including children with special educational needs (SEN) in mainstream classes may look like integration, but how can we be sure that these children are learning and participating in lessons in addition to simply turning up? In our first article about inclusion on page 3 we looked at the impact of including pupils with SEN on the achievement of pupils without SEN. That report also provided evidence about a range of whole-school and classroom strategies designed to ensure everybody learned, not just SEN students.

A recent systematic review enabled researchers to identify approaches to teaching and learning which helped improve the academic and social development of children with SEN in mainstream classes, mainly in the primary or middle school phase. Although the evidence came principally from US schools it should provide teachers and schools with some useful pointers to approaches they might like to consider and adapt for use in their own classrooms.

Is peer working the key to success?

The evidence certainly suggested that pupils with SEN developed both academically and socially when they worked with other pupils in interactive ways. Included in these reported benefits for pupils with SEN were:

- greater engagement in classroom activities;
- improved academic performance; and
- achievement of better social relations with their peers.

There was also evidence that their attitudes to learning, and beliefs in their own competence and self-worth, improved.

Findings in the studies showed that co-operative learning, guided enquiry and 'Circle of Friends' type activities all contributed to improved development of pupils with SEN in terms of academic as well as social achievement. Across the studies the reviewers found that pupils with SEN benefited in situations in which they had to work with peers to make sense of what they were doing or reading. It was found to be particularly helpful when teachers structured activities to include teamwork in which students were taught how to support each other. Teachers integrated academic and social elements of learning by encouraging all pupils to engage in dialogue with their peers. For example, they used peer-led discussion groups and devised questioning strategies which probed their peers' knowledge and understanding.

What else made teaching and learning more effective for pupils with SEN?

Pupils with SEN learnt better when the strategies their teachers adopted were underpinned by their belief that all pupils were capable of learning. In this 'pupil-as-learner' approach teachers encouraged pupils to think of themselves as active learners and prompted them to shape, as well as participate in, their learning. Helping pupils with

SEN feel part of a learning community was related to positive results in a number of studies. Strategies for inclusion in the classroom were reinforced when schools' values included respect for other learners and a commitment to active and collaborative participation in learning.

Other findings related to positive impact included:

- the effective organisation of other adults in the school community to support peer group activities in which pupils and adults planned and worked together; and
- the adoption of a 'holistic' view of basic skills development in which teachers embedded basic skills in classroom activity and subject knowledge. This is in contrast to the isolated skill development associated with traditional 'remedial' programmes for pupils with special educational needs.

(It seems that structured group work and peer interaction is important for learning for learners across the ability range and for all age groups, including adults. See past *Bulletins* for more evidence.)

How do we know this?

Nind, M., Wearmouth, J. with Collins, J., Hall, K., Rix, J. and Sheehy, K. (2004) ***A systematic review of pedagogical approaches that can effectively include children with special educational needs in mainstream classrooms with a particular focus on peer group interactive approaches*** Research Evidence in Education Library [Online]. Available at: ***http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/EPPIWeb/home.aspx?&page=/reel/reviews.htm***

The review reported on ten studies which were judged to have medium or high weight of evidence, six of which were about literacy. Nine of the studies in the review were from the USA and one from England.

All the studies except for one took place in the primary or middle school years.

The in-depth review included those studies which:

- included a focus on a peer group interactive pedagogical approach beyond peer tutoring or behavioural prompting;
- were conducted by mainstream classroom teachers without necessitating additional staff support; and
- included an indication of academic and/or social interaction or involvement outcomes measured through systematic data gathering.

Early Years Transition

All work and no play...

Problems of transfer and transition persist all through a young person's schooling and beyond. In Issues 2 and 3 of the *Bulletin* we looked at some of the evidence for the 7-14 and post-16 age groups. But it all starts well before Key Stage 1. One potentially critical phase of early transfer is the move from Reception to Year 1. This not only represents a transition from one year group to the next, but also crosses the boundary between the Foundation Stage, with its emphasis on activities that are fun, relevant and motivating for children, and Key Stage 1, where children move to a more prescribed routine with an emphasis on developing numeracy and literacy skills.

If you have found transition a difficult path to smooth for your pupils you are not alone. A recent study on transition from Reception to Year 1 identified how children's experiences in the two years differed, explored how children felt about transition, and highlighted good practice that teachers in both years have developed in order to make the cross over easier.

A less flexible environment

When it came to looking at how life in Reception differs from the Year 1 classroom, the study found some quite stark differences, which included:

- fewer resources, with children finding themselves in more confined spaces, having fewer opportunities to play outside and less equipment to play with, as well as having less adult support;

- changes in curriculum styles. Changing demands and expectations in the two years meant that the children in the study experienced a sometimes abrupt switch from the play-based, flexible teaching approach of Reception, to a more rigid, subject-based regime in Year 1 which was characterised by more formal styles of teaching; and

- limited opportunities for child-initiated activities. Because the curriculum was subject-based and shaped by external requirements such as the numeracy strategy, teachers in the study felt that their timetables were too pressured, and that they needed more control over children's learning activities.

The children's perceptions

When asked what sorts of things they did in Reception, typical replies from the children included:

'Read books, colouring, play on the computer, cut and stick, play with dominoes...' or 'Play on the computer, write stuff, quad bikes, playing battleships.'

In contrast, when the researcher asked about what they thought it would be like in Year 1, the children's responded along the lines of:

'No toys', 'It is just going to be work, work, work', and 'You have to do work all the time - writing.'

Once in Year 1 the children confirmed that they were indeed doing hard work, and when asked why it was hard, several replied that it was because they were doing number work. Although some children's responses revealed they enjoyed the challenges of a more demanding environment, the researcher reported that most children identified 'hard work' as something they disliked doing.

Bridging the gap

The research found that school leaders and teachers in both years worked hard to ease transition. For example, Reception Year teachers met those in Year 1 to discuss academic and pastoral notes on the pupils. Or a member of staff, usually a member of the support team, would move up with the children. Other strategies included:

- continuing aspects of the Reception curriculum in Year 1, particularly role-play and offering the children a degree of choice;

- introducing aspects of the Year 1 curriculum in Reception, such as more adult-led, whole class sessions, especially in numeracy and literacy. (But about a third of Reception class teachers felt that this was a coping strategy not altogether in keeping with the philosophy of the Foundation Stage curriculum); and

- relaxing the timetable in the afternoon in Year 1.

The clear message from the study is that transition should be viewed as a process rather than an event. For the authors this means schools adopting strategies that ensure continuity and communication. Other research indicates that this starts well before Reception. There is strong evidence about the influence of pre-school experiences on children's attainment on entry to school, and that this persists into Year1. Factors affecting differences in performance on school entry range from the children's age to the home learning environment, family economic status and pre-school settings. This suggests that the communication of this information between Reception and Year 1 would help Year 1 teachers to recognise and plan for the diversity of learning needs the children would bring with them. Children who have not attended pre-school, for example, are likely to continue to benefit from additional support well into Key Stage 1.

> Transition in all phases seems to be plagued by very similar issues. There seems to be a cross-phase theme here, involving discontinuities in both pedagogy and curriculum. We would like to build on our knowledge of the research in this area. Contact us *(Info@nerf-UK.org)* if you know something we don't.

How do we know this?

The findings about Yr R to Yr 1 transition reported in this summary are largely based on case studies in 12 schools, which entailed interviews with 70 children and their parents on two occasions (before and after the transition). The NFER research team also interviewed 80 members of school staff (teachers, support staff, Foundation Stage Coordinators and headteachers) and eight school governors.

Sanders, D., White, G., Burge, B., Sharp, C., Eames, A., McCune, R & Grayson, H. (2005) *A study of the transition from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1.* Nottingham: DfES RR SSU/2005/FR/013 [Online]. Available at: *http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/SSU2005FR013.pdf*

A summary of the study and further information on related research in the early years (including a reading list) can be found at: *http://www.nfer.ac.uk/research-areas/early-childhood-education/*

The evidence about the influence of pre-school experiences comes from: Sammons, P., Elliot, K., Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Siraj-Blatchford, I. and Taggart, B. (2004) *The impact of pre-school on young children's cognitive attainments at entry to reception. British Educational Research Journal* 30(5), pp.691-712

No thanks to leadership

Schools in America are facing a crisis of leadership. According to a recent study it's because many school leaders are at or near retirement age and so many teachers simply aren't interested in becoming heads. Why? Using survey data two researchers from Ohio University found out what the attractions and disincentives of headship were for over 800 teachers. They found the top five attractions were:

- the anticipated satisfaction of 'making a difference' as a principal;
- ability to affect the lives of a greater number of children;
- opportunity as a principal to implement creative personal ideas;
- chance to have a greater impact as a principal; and
- improved annual salary as a principal.

Their analysis also revealed that the five top disincentives were:

- anticipated stress about having less time at home with family members;
- anticipated stress associated with having to 'play politics';
- principals' increased responsibility for local, state, and federal mandates;
- accountability for societal conditions beyond an educator's control; and
- decreased opportunity to work with children directly.

Does any of this sound familiar? See our article on the state of school leadership in England on p.14 for the picture on this side of the Atlantic.

Howley, A., Andrianaivo, S. & Perry, J. (2005) ***The pain outweighs the gain: Why teachers don't want to become principals***, *Teachers College Record Vol.107(4), p757*
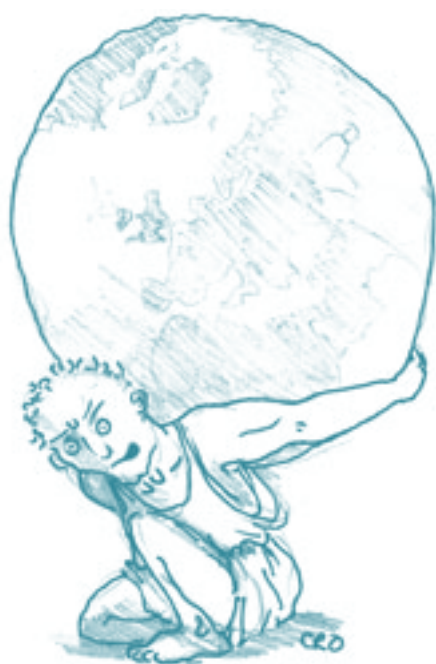
SO THE SALARY REFLECTS MY RESPONSIBILITIES? WHEN DO I GET THE CHANCE TO SPEND IT?

Poverty doesn't have to be a barrier to achievement

Intrigued by the fact that some schools with very poor student intakes did so much better than other schools with similar populations, researchers in Kentucky set out to see whether the high performing schools had characteristics in common.

Using a standardised school audit instrument, they found that the schools did share a number of characteristics. Overall they found that teaching was always part of a larger collaborative effort, not a solitary activity. The entire school community shared understanding of what was being taught, what performance expectations were, and where each teacher's focus fitted into the broader curriculum of the school. Unexpectedly, the study found little difference in the area of leadership between low and high performing schools.

Kannapel, P. & Clements, S. (2005) ***Inside the black box of high-performing high-poverty schools*** Lexington, Prichard Committee for Academic Exellence

What works in early years professional development (CPD)?

In Issue 1 of the ***Bulletin*** we reported on the evidence from systematic reviews about collaborative CPD and the positive impact on changing teacher practice. The evidence came entirely from studies of teachers of pupils in the 5-16 age range so we were pleased to find corroborative evidence in a review of CPD for Early Years teachers.

The reviewers found that, among other things, 'quality' CPD in early years settings:

- incorporates participants' own aspirations, skills, knowledge and understanding into the learning context;
- provides theoretical knowledge, content knowledge and knowledge and information about alternative practices;
- involves teachers in investigating pedagogy within their own early childhood settings;
- uses critical reflection to enable participants to investigate and challenge assumptions and extend their thinking;
- supports educational practice that is inclusive of diverse children and families; and
- helps teachers/educators change practice, beliefs, understanding, and/or attitudes.

So far, so very similar. Schools spending scarce resources on CPD will be interested to know that the review also highlighted the importance of the 'professional development adviser' in the success of the CPD programmes. This will be the subject of the next systematic CPD research review... watch out for reports in future issues.

Mitchell, L. & Cubey, P. (2003) ***Characteristics of professional development linked to enhanced pedagogy and children's learning in early childhood settings*** Wellington, NewZealand Ministry of Education [Online]. Available at: ***http://www.minedu. govt.nz/web/downloadable/dl8646_v1/ece-pd-bes1.doc***

School leadership

School leadership is not everyone's cup of tea

There's a crisis in school leadership in the US because more people are retiring than are waiting to take their places (see p.13). Excellent leadership is a critical ingredient in the mix that makes for excellent schools and can have a huge impact on our own professional lives and the progress of our students. So is the UK in the same boat? Certainly, many head teachers are due to retire in the next decade and Steve Munby, the new Chief Executive of the National College of School Leadership in a speech earlier this year identified "the need to grow future leaders with the motivation and the skill set to take over what is an increasingly demanding and relentless job" as a major challenge. A large scale survey of staff in over 1,000 schools set out to discover both the appeal of leadership and what aspects of the job of a head teacher put off potentially good candidates.

The survey conducted in England by MORI canvassed the views of around 2,500 head teachers, deputy head teachers, NPQH candidates, middle leaders and governors, plus nearly 100 LEAs.

Who wants to be a head teacher?

Quite a lot of NPQH candidates in the survey (64%) definitely wished to be a head teacher in the future and a further 22% thought this might be possible at some stage. Deputy head teachers were much less certain: 36% wished to become a head teacher (the good news is that this is up 10% on 2001 figures of 26%), 21% said they might consider it but more than a third were adamant that they had no desire for headship.

Middle leaders were the least likely group to aspire to headship -13% said they wanted to be a head teacher and 17% would consider it, but the majority (62%) of middle leaders had no aspirations to become a head teacher at all, though 59% hoped to become a deputy head. Middle leaders in secondary schools were more likely to want to become deputy head teachers than middle leaders in primary schools.

Why become a head teacher?

Teachers listed several similar factors influencing their decision to pursue headship to those mentioned by American teachers. Both serving heads and practitioners aiming at headship were motivated by the possibility of making a difference to students' lives. Britons and Americans were both attracted by greater opportunities for professional autonomy and the chance to implement their own vision. But British teachers explicitly mentioned the opportunity to build shared values and the positive influence of inspiring head teachers with whom they had worked.

Middle leaders were more likely than deputy head teachers or NPQH candidates to cite increased opportunities for managing staff, the ability to make decisions and better pay as reasons for wanting to be heads (American teachers placed 'improved salaries' in their top five reasons for aspiring to headship).

Practitioners who did not want to be heads were put off by many things, especially:

	% of deputy heads	% of middle leaders
● high levels of stress	44	51
● personal commitments (e.g. family)	42	39
● reduced time spent teaching children directly	37	53
● increased administrative demands	29	38
● inspection and measures of accountability	29	38

American practitioners gave similar reasons for avoiding headship, but many also mentioned a dislike of 'playing politics' and school leaders' accountability for conditions in society that lay beyond an educator's control.

How did serving head teachers see their future?

Half the serving head teachers in the study envisaged leaving their current post within three years. Of these, two in five intended to retire, about one in three were seeking a post in a different school and the remainder expected to take up a post elsewhere in education or outside it.

What did head teachers think were the biggest challenges they faced?

Head teachers identified their biggest challenges as:

● raising school achievement - not necessarily the same thing as hitting examination targets;

● implementing and sustaining workforce reform without central funding, especially for primary heads;

● improving pupil behaviour;

● inclusion - accommodating pupils with Special Educational Needs in mainstream without adequate provision; and

● managing new initiatives and complying with new legislation - this was especially challenging for special schools with a small staff covering five Key Stages.

How do we know this?

A representative sample of over 900 head teachers, 1100 subject leaders, deputy heads and NPQH candidates, nearly 500 governors and 96 LEAs completed a MORI questionnaire on school leadership in England. Detailed, qualitative evidence was collected from four

Stevens, J., Brown, J., Knibbs, S. & Smith, J. (2005) *Follow-up research into the state of school leadership in England*. London: DfES RR 633 [Online]. Available at: *http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RB633.pdf*

You'll find the full text of Steve Munby's (the chief executive of NCSL) speech at: *http://www.ncsl.org.uk/media/C39/8B/munby-speech-leadership-challenges.pdf*

Hot websites

The National Literacy Trust

http://www. literacytrust.org.uk/index.html

Meet like-minded practitioners, find out about new initiatives or share some of your own ideas by logging on to the National Literacy Trust's website.

Initiatives such as the National Reading Campaign, the Literacy and Social Inclusion project, and 'Reading Champions - celebrating male readers' all have their own place on the menu, but if you're not sure where to start, there's a site A-Z and a search engine.

You need to register to join the discussion forum but it's quick and easy. The noticeboard is another way to create or find a network of others with similar interests to you - but beware, the list is very long. You could try using Ctrl + F on your keyboard to search the page for key terms, otherwise you can read the most recent ones as they are posted in date order.

The links and menus on the site do tend to move around a bit so it can be difficult to tell which part of the site you're in sometimes, and it can make browsing confusing. But keep your eye out for the right hand menu wherever you go on the site - it changes according to which section you're in, and can help you to dig deeper to find what you're looking for. The many access points help whether you know what you're looking for or not. For example, the research and statistics section allows you to browse by theme or sector. On the home page, the right hand menu allows you to search for literacy information in the sector/age-group you're interested in.

National Centre for Vocational Education Research

http://www.ncver.edu.au/

Australia

NCVER offers VET research findings from Australian and international sources through the VOCED database. Although lots on this site is Australian, there is plenty to interest those of us involved in vocational education - from studies of adult literacy and numeracy to research into student drop-out.

The easy-to-search VOCED database provides a thesaurus to help you choose the right search terms. The site also uses a handy 'breadcrumb' system showing the path you have taken through the website to get to where you are, so you can return to useful pages.

There are multiple access points to the content on this website via the two separate menus as well as a search engine. The menu across the top of the screen is topic-based and the left-hand menu allows you to personalise your search by

choosing the area most appropriate to your role or interest i.e. students or teaching and learning. The resulting page generates a list of publications which would be of relevance to people in those areas.

NCSL - National College for School Leadership

http://www.ncsl.org.uk/

You don't have to be a head to benefit from this rich and diverse website. The National College for School Leadership supports present *and* future school leaders, champions the Networked Learning Communities initiative and offers a lively array of online communities. Those who are on one of the leadership programmes (e.g. NPQH, Headlamp) can join 'Talk2Learn', where big names frequently chair 'hotseats' where they have their say and you have yours in well structured discussions. The site is a little difficult to navigate, but the college runs free half-day training sessions which help you get more out of the experience. Recent topics of discussion on the site include extended schools, personalisation, the 14-19 curriculum, and ICT. There is also a research page where you can find out about others' research or introduce yourself and your own investigations.

A rainbow of colours is used across the site - each colour according to which section of the site you are in - to save you from getting lost, and other identification tools such as icons show whether you are about to download a Word document or a video.

Health Matters

Did you know that more than 10% of children suffer from mental health problems?

In the last two *Bulletins* we've looked at issues around children and young people's health and what schools and colleges can do to help - especially in partnership with other agencies and public services. This time we focus on some key facts about mental health.

What are the Facts?

In a 1999 survey 5% of 5-15 year olds had clinically significant conduct disorders, 4% had emotional disorders (anxiety and depression), 1% were hyperactive, 0.5% suffered from less common disorders such as autistic spectrum disorders and eating disorders. The overall rate of mental disorders was 10%.

More boys than girls had mental disorders (11% and 8% respectively). Black children were more likely to have a mental health problem (12%) than white children (10%), Pakistani & Bangladeshi children (8%) and Indian children (4%). Looked after children are *five times* more likely than their peers to have a mental health disorder. Children and young people with significant learning disabilities are three to four times more likely to have a mental disorder and at least 40% of young offenders have been found to have a diagnosable mental health disorder.

Who is at risk?

Supporting children and young people with mental health problems is not just the responsibility of specialists. Recognising when children are at risk is a key element in preventing mental disorders. Lack of family support, bullying, peer pressure, boredom, and worries about tests and exams can result in truanting, being disruptive or underachieving. Bereavement, divorce and mental illness in the family can also cause severe problems.

Ofsted published its report on the role of schools in promoting the emotional well-being of their pupils in July 2005. The report analysed practice based on evidence gathered from visits to 72 schools, and reports on the impact of the guidance provided to schools four years ago by the DfES.

Inspectors found that a lack of shared/common language between social services, health services and schools led to difficulties in recognising and meeting pupil needs. Training for staff on mental health was unsatisfactory in over a third of the schools visited and most training tended to focus on managing pupil behaviour.

Mental health problems in children are associated with educational failure, family disruption, disability, offending and antisocial behaviour. These all place demands on social services, schools and others. So it's part of the government's benchmark for good practice that all staff working directly with children and young people have enough knowledge, training and support to promote the psychological well-being of children, young people and their families and to identify early indicators of difficulty. They recommend that protocols for referral, support and early intervention should be agreed between all agencies. Now that schools are working more closely with other agencies and services it helps to know what the expectations are. So here is the web address: *http://www.dh.gov.uk/assetRoot/04/09/05/60/04090560.pdf* for the National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services.

You can also order the DfES guidance (Promoting Children's Mental Health Within Early Years And School Settings) online from: *http://www.dfespublications.gov.uk/cgi-bin/dfes/index.html*

*Figures from **MIND, The Mental Health Foundation, CAMHS, TeacherNet, Kidscape, Ofsted, Department of Health, Office of National Statistics (ONS)**.*

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