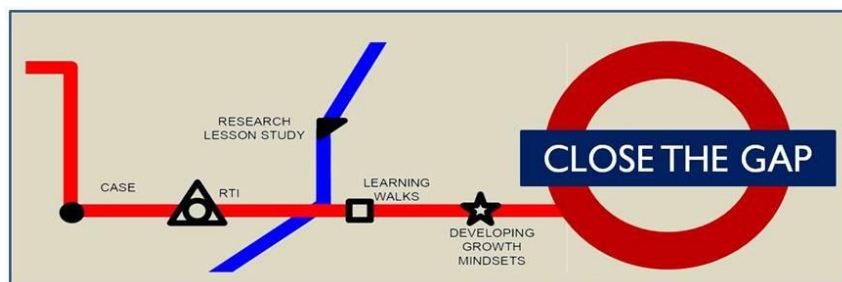


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**So Spring has actually started.** The sun started to shine allowing the Lakeland farmers to take the plastic mackintoshes off the lambs and back off feeding their mums. Spring has brought another new start – the exciting national Closing the Gap Test and Learn project being run by the equally new National College of Teaching and Leadership!



We are delighted to take on the responsibility, in partnership with Durham University, of:

- consulting schools about which gaps you feel need closing most urgently, which capacities you are keenest to develop and which interventions you have found most effective and inspiring; and
- designing interventions and support materials to make these as inspiring and manageable on the ground as is possible whilst also making them consistent enough to be rigorously evaluated.

So this is a different CUREE E-news – a short one focused entirely on Closing the Gap. In this special edition are:

- an “imagineered” vision of how learning for vulnerable pupils will be different when the project has succeeded in two years’ time;
- a short interview with Steve Higgins Professor of Education at Durham University, key architect of the Sutton Trust EEF toolkit exploring what he learned from developing the toolkit;
- a [consultation invitation](#) including a short survey about the aspects of learning and outcomes where the Test and Learn projects would make most difference to you and your school or to schools that you work with;
- an introduction to Ben Goldacre’s paper on Building Evidence into Education and the relevance of randomized control trials to us;
- some micro enquiry tools and resources for closing gaps from the R&D work we did for the National College’s Partnerships for Closing the Gaps project. You can find the full project report here (requires login or free registration) and;
- web links to two interesting teacher research projects on closing the gaps from the National Teacher Research Panel web site.

## Just Imagine - success at last in closing the gap!

In two years the gap between achievement for vulnerable students and their peers will have closed by 17%; the school system will be poised rapidly to close the remaining gap. System level changes include:

- many more white and black Caribbean working class boys and Roma children exceeding age-related expectations; and
- teachers routinely consulting the **Closing the Gap Evidence** database (CTGEEd) to find interventions proven to work in meeting particular groups of needs.

In school, Brad (from a white working class background) who had been disruptive in his Y4 class and only performing at a Level 2 is now an enthusiastic participant in learning and is on track to achieve a Level 4 by the end of Y6.

As Brad's teacher said: "previously we shared strategies we thought would close the gap, but we didn't have any way of finding the interventions with evidence that they were likely to work. Now we use the CTGEEd to focus on high impact interventions and collaborate with other schools to make them work for our students."

The Head noted:

"We had read about Ben Goldacre's vision for building evidence into education and his comparisons with the medical profession and you could say that our alliance used to be like a group of medical practices (schools) who shared ideas about drugs and treatments (teaching interventions) that seemed to have worked for their patients (students)... A vulnerable student has a right to tried and tested teaching interventions. Learning success will determine their future so we can't gamble. The CTGEEd means we don't need to."

### How do we get there?

You can help realise this vision by participating in our consultation to make sure the interventions that are trialed and tested across the system are focused where they need to be. You could volunteer to:

- [fill in this brief online survey](#) about your aspirations for pupils who are stuck in the gap;
- host a focus group or interviews so that we can explore the student needs the CTGEEd should address and the key elements of successful interventions;
- tell us about an intervention you have found to be successful and would like to see being trialed more widely; and
- participate in trials of the chosen interventions.

Of course, the Teach and Learn project is not going to achieve this all on its own but it represents a major opportunity for and investment in system learning at all levels from classroom to national government.

### Dear Professor 'Iggins..



Professor Steve Higgins of Durham University is one of the country's foremost experts on effective teaching and learning, with a particular interest in the use of ICT. He is a member of the Education Endowment Fund's

Evaluation Advisory Group and a major contributor to the EEF/Sutton Trust Toolkit. He is one of the expert team from Durham University working with CUREE on the Closing the Gap: Test and Learn project. He is also very busy - but we pinned him down briefly to ask him about his work on the Toolkit.

#### Q: What did the best evidence look like?

A: The best evidence for me is where there are several meta-analyses, based on a large number of studies which have pretty consistent results across a range of contexts and across time. The evidence has built up to provide a consistent pattern. So the various syntheses of metacognitive approaches to improving learning have found similar high positive gains. The findings around peer tutoring also seem to be consistent across contexts, if slightly lower. There is less overall evidence about the deployment of teaching assistants but what there is, from experimental studies in the USA and from recent correlational studies in the UK, seems to paint a consistent picture

#### Q: What are you most looking forward to finding out more about?

**Q: When you were developing the toolkit what surprised you?**

**A:** A number of things were surprising. The first was the limited overall quantity and quality of the research evidence in education. I guess I'd suspected this from involvement in EPPI reviews where, although you get thousands of hits on a search, when you actually apply clear and strict criteria you are left with only a handful of studies with robust evidence. This makes the evidence base challenging to interpret. The second surprise was finding things that *don't* work, like the average impact of the deployment of teaching assistants, with the most recent UK evidence indicating pupils with SEN made more progress *without* a TA. This was a bit shocking given the overall investment in the system. It emphasises one of the key features of the Toolkit in identifying what hasn't worked (on average), as well as what has.

**A:** I'm most looking forward to finding out how good our predictions are for the EEF projects based on the currently available evidence. I'm also looking forward to understanding more about what explains the variation in impact of different approaches. How much is this the actual variability in the impact of different approaches? Some might work well in some contexts, but not in others. For others we may be able to design interventions with greater consistency to increase our chances of a positive effect.

**Q: Which interventions/approaches in the toolkit do you think most people will be able to do best and most quickly?**

**A:** I think it is easier to say which are likely to be challenging. We know a lot about what the evidence says from research studies. However we do not have good evidence about how to turn research findings into consistent or large-scale impact in practice. Take feedback for example, where the policy and approach for Assessment for Learning is based on the research evidence about feedback. I think what we have learned is that it is more difficult to translate research findings into effective practice and retain the authenticity of the original approach. In another year or two we should be able to answer this question more clearly as the findings from EEF projects start to feed into our understanding. We will at least know which approaches can be replicated at a reasonable scale and what kind of gains are achievable in schools.

## Get involved – tell us what you think

Closing the Gap: Test and Learn is a new scheme from the National College of Teaching and Leadership providing grants for schools and teachers to get involved in rigorous research. The goal is to help improve the evidence-base for what works in closing the attainment gap for disadvantaged pupils and also to stimulate robust research and development in schools. The scheme should also strengthen relationships between schools and higher education institutions.

Any school will be able to take part in the trials, provided that they collaborate with a neighbouring teaching school alliance, who will manage the finances and help co-ordinate the different aspects of the scheme.

The scheme will be run in two stages: a consultation to decide which interventions will be trialed, and a two-year programme of testing in schools. The first stage is to identify a group of around six interventions to be trialed in up to 1000 schools. The design team at CUREE and Durham University are asking for your help in that identification process by telling us what area of teaching and learning would have the most benefit in closing the achievement gap. We are also asking you to let us know of any approach you have used (or are currently using) which you think are sufficiently promising that they are worth trying out on a larger scale.

You can share your experience and your ambitions simply by completing the short on-line questionnaire [here](http://www.surveymalaxy.com/surPublishes.asp?k=OXO5YPWSXKQU&pubLogAction=getTokenId&pubUserSelection=anon&c=1&ref=&l=&p=)

<http://www.surveymalaxy.com/surPublishes.asp?k=OXO5YPWSXKQU&pubLogAction=getTokenId&pubUserSelection=anon&c=1&ref=&l=&p=> or by emailing [sian.bravington@curee.co.uk](mailto:sian.bravington@curee.co.uk) with your suggestions. **Time is tight –**

**the decision on which interventions to include in the scheme will be taken in early June so we need to hear from you in the next three weeks**

## Micro-inquiry Tools for Closing the Gap

Don't want to wait for the Test and Learn project or just want to try something out now as practice? Why not have a look at a couple of examples of the 'Micro-enquiry' Tools we developed in support of the National College's Partnerships for Narrowing the Gap project. These draw on the research evidence base around pupil underachievement to support classroom level R&D and whole school development.

[Click here to access the tools](#)

You can also read the report of the whole project, including details of several of the individual school case studies on the [National College website here](#) (NB – requires login or free registration on the College members website)

The Test and Learn trials (or most of them) will be conducted under Randomised Control Trial (RCT) protocols. If you are not sure what that might be like, take a look at some work on vulnerable and underperforming pupils undertaken by the Centre for Effective Education at Queens University Belfast. [Click here](#) to go to the summary report or [here to see the reports](#) of several similar research projects by the same team

## Teacher Research on Closing the Gap

England has a long and honourable record of supporting in-school practical research conducted by practicing teachers (and school leaders). A larger number of teachers were supported over several years through the National Teachers' Research Panel and their work has been written up in short, succinct and practical reports published on the NTRP website.

There are many examples of those reports relevant to Closing the Gap. Here are links to a couple of them:

- Narrowing the Gap  
<http://www.ntrp.org.uk/content/narrowing-gap-developing-personalised-curricula-vulnerable-students>
- Improving Writing through a Creative Approach  
<http://www.ntrp.org.uk/node/101>

You will find a lot more of the same kind on the [NTRP website here](#).



## Bad Science – Good Education?

Ben Goldacre, doctor, epidemiologist, pundit and scourge of snake oil merchants, has produced a report on generating and using high quality research in education. You can find

that report [here](#). The concept of evidence-based practice is now widely accepted and adopted in medicine. The profession – and the public – now expect that a new treatment will have been subjected to tests of its efficacy and that patients won't be prescribed treatments that will make them worse not better. The design of those tests is quite important; some tests are more reliable than others. Top of the evidence tree is a 'randomised control trial' (RCT) in which an intervention is given to one group of people and the results compared with another group of people who did not get the intervention. People are selected for the intervention group or the other one (the 'control') randomly thus increasing the likelihood that the effects are indeed caused by the intervention and not by something else.

As Ben points out, educationalists in this country have been very reluctant to subject educational 'treatments' to the test of RCTs, though it's not really clear why. Some argue that withholding a teaching method from a child is unethical while others assert that RCTs can't be done in education. The first position is based on the flawed assumption that the new thing is better than the old one (when, pretty much by definition, we don't know that it is). In any case, many RCTs are designed so the control group gets the benefit of the new thing a bit later on – and once we've demonstrated that it actually is a 'benefit'. The second position is undermined by the self evident fact that RCTs are done in education extensively but mostly in other parts of the world (including, as we've seen above, in far flung Belfast).

Many practices are applied to young people in education with rather weak evidence of their effectiveness. Without evidence, everybody's opinion is as valid as anyone else's and the professionals in the system have no grounds for resisting the latest fad. Of course, as Ben acknowledges, RCTs are not the only form of rigorous, valid research and RCTs

are good for answering some questions (**does** something work, or not) and poor at others (**how** does it work). That is why the Test and Learn scheme sets out to find areas of practice which need better teaching and learning solutions; to use RCT methodologies where appropriate and to use other, but still rigorous, methods where justified.

## Find out more and take part

You can find out more about the Closing the Gap: Test and Learn project by:

- Going to the DfE website and looking at these pages [here](#)
- Contacting us at CUREE by phone or by emailing [rebecca.raybould@curee.co.uk](mailto:rebecca.raybould@curee.co.uk) or [sian.bravington@curee.co.uk](mailto:sian.bravington@curee.co.uk)
- Follow developments on the Closing the Gap pages on the CUREE website [here](#)

## You can contribute to the design of the scheme by:

- Completing the questionnaire [HERE](#)
- Sending your views by email to [sian.bravington@curee.co.uk](mailto:sian.bravington@curee.co.uk)
- Hosting a focus group at your school (email us or use the on-line form) or joining a focus group organised by someone else
- Completing the on-line survey form on the National College website [here](#)
- Joining in the discussion about the Test and Learn scheme in the online community on the National College website [here](#) (NB – needs a login or free registration)

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