

EARLY INTERVENTION: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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This report, which comes at a time when increasing interest is being focused on pre-school and early years of schooling, reviews the UK and international literature on the use of early intervention schemes and examines their scope, organisation and effectiveness. The researcher presents evidence gathered from published accounts on the most appropriate time to intervene, the effectiveness of alternative strategies and reported long-term benefits. Most of the documented and evaluated schemes have concentrated on literacy, but mathematical attainment (or lack of it) is also causing concern.

The strong message from the research literature on intervention is that there are no single measure answers to under-achievement either in literacy or numeracy. Early intervention falls within the broader category of equal opportunities for all, where efforts are made to ensure that gender, race, disability and socio-economic circumstances do not lead to educational disadvantage. However, educational disadvantage linked with socio-economic deprivation appears to be very resistant to efforts toward positive change.

The author argues that effectiveness resides in mixed and comprehensive strategies rather than single-strand schemes. There is a consistent pattern in the research studies reported here that strategies, *per se*, do not result in specific improvements in reading. One example of a successful mixed-strategy programme included the following:

- high quality pre-school provision
- research-based curriculum and instructional methods which formed a continuum of improvement from pre-school to later stages
- reduced class size
- activities to build positive relationships and involvement with parents
- one-to-one tutoring from teachers for those falling behind in reading in their first year at school
- family support programmes.

Clearly, the research evidence on achievement in reading points to early intervention rather than later remedial action. Preventing early reading failure is seen as a far more effective strategy for schools to pursue and the evidence highlights the need for the kind of one-to-one tutoring by the teacher of six year olds at risk of failure advocated by specific programmes such as Reading Recovery. The author suggests that schools can make a difference in this area providing other factors are also present. Purposeful leadership, classroom practice which articulates with specific interventions, teachers trained in appropriate methods, increasing curricular time spent on literacy in the early stages and involvement with outside agencies are all associated with successful interventions. Significantly, the quality of teacher training is linked to the level of effectiveness of Reading Recovery (and by implication to all one-to-one tutoring). But the

author identifies that such programmes need to be extended to include more phonological training. On the negative side, data on numeracy interventions are far less evident but there are some indications that numeracy should be more firmly located in the domains of thinking, mental reasoning and language than currently happens in the UK.

Overall the review provides a timeous summary of research findings in the area of early intervention which both teachers and Education Authorities should find useful. A copy of the full report has been placed on the SOEID Research and Intelligence Unit website. <http://www.hmis.scotoff.gov.uk/riui>

SPECIAL SCHOOLS: DEVELOPMENT PLANNING AND THE USE OF THE SCHOOL DAY

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This research reports a small scale study of seven special schools and one special unit in two Education Authorities which was undertaken in conjunction with a large project funded by the Economic and Social Research Council entitled *Special Schools and Multiple Policy Innovations* (ESRC Award R000235843). Several commentators of special education have been critical of the failure of mainstream schools to undergo the radical reform necessary for inclusive policies to be successful. Special schools, in the meantime, appear to have taken up the challenge to alter their structure, culture and practices. This has partly been in response to pressure from central and local government to be part of multiple policy initiatives and partly their own efforts at school improvement in order to protect their future. One such innovation is School Development Planning — the subject of this research.

School Development planning offers schools a process of auditing, determining priorities and targets, implementation and evaluation. In practice, pupils attending special schools experience a shorter day than their counterparts in mainstream schools. This is intended to take account of travelling time from home and perceptions that children with significant difficulties may become stressed by a longer day. With these two aspects in mind, the research set out to:

- explore the use of School Development Planning cycles within special schools and perceptions of their impact on teaching and learning; and
- investigate perceptions of the length of the special school day.

The findings from this particular aspect of the larger study of special schools and their culture suggests that there have been substantial changes in recent years. School development planning and the introduction of the *5-14* programme have had a very considerable impact on thinking and encouraged staff to talk to each other about what they do. This increase in staff participation through the process of development planning provided a structure for managing and presenting a framework for identifying priorities. All of this was generally welcomed by teachers but the researchers warn that there is still some way to go.

They identify a mismatch between the language of Government documents regarding development planning and the headteachers' and teachers' accounts of both their teaching and planning processes. Plans rarely focused on standards of

attainment, accountability and the design of professional development directed towards the improvement of standards — the language of Government documents. In contrast staff reported that the planning process was more important than the plans, although these were used as a ‘kind of checklist’. Additionally school plans did not emphasise the impact of planning on learning; success criteria were not expressed and ideas of monitoring or evaluation of outcomes were rarely voiced. There was little evidence of performance management or accountability for targets set either in or outwith the schools.

With reference to the second aspect of the study, most teachers reported that their pupils could not cope with an extension to the school day, especially those with moderate learning difficulties and young or fragile pupils. Various features of pupils’ behaviour and physical or psychological states restricted the level of activities which could be maintained.

By way of a conclusion, the researchers argue that there are difficulties associated with pressure on the one hand to conform with particular priorities, such as achievement standards, and, on the other hand, promulgating expectations that teachers should be forward looking and creative. At the moment, this appears to present special schools with particular difficulties.

ROUTES INTO PRIMARY TEACHING

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The Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) and Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) routes into primary teaching vary in their length and in their intake groups, but both are intended to provide similarly competent trained teachers. However, the mix of training routes offers a broader entry base for the teaching profession than would be the case with a single route, but issues inevitably arise about the comparability and relative quality of teachers trained by these contrasting routes. This research project, jointly funded by the Scottish Office and the General Teaching Council for Scotland, was designed to identify similarities and differences between B.Ed. and PGCE trained teachers in relation to their background, deployment, quality (defined as strengths and weaknesses as perceived by headteachers who employ them) and career development. Additionally, the researchers drew out some implications for the appropriate balance of places between the two training routes.

The research concentrated on four discrete areas: the supply of teachers at point of provisional and full registration; the experiences of probationers; headteachers’ views of the two routes, and finally, the subsequent careers of teachers recruited from the two routes. The main findings were as follows:

- The B.Ed and PGCE groups demonstrate a number of different characteristics during both initial teacher education and probation (including for example, age and employment and deployment experiences as a teacher) which make direct comparisons difficult;
- The prevailing view amongst headteachers is that PGCE trained teachers are as good but no better than B.Ed. graduates. Training route does not seem to be a significant variable in relation to headteachers’ employment and deployment preferences nor do the majority of headteachers see it a predictor of teaching strengths and weaknesses. This may be because other factors, such as individual characteristics, are also seen as important.

- For a minority of headteachers (38%), all of whom are B.Ed. or equivalent trained themselves, the training route is important. These may be a vocal minority but they clearly exist as a distinct group.
- For probationers, training route does seem to be important in that it relates in a significant way to employment and deployment patterns. B.Ed. teachers are more likely to complete the required probationary period more quickly than PGCE entrants, perhaps as a consequence of more stable employment patterns.
- However on the evidence presented in the study this difference is short-term and does not carry over into the post-probation period.

The report provides interesting insights into the career development of novice teachers and further information is available from the research team.