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School Processes in Providing Reading Support in GCSE Examinations

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Summary

Against a background of increasing student eligibility for 'access arrangements' in examinations for the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), this paper examines the processes within schools that structure a student's access to the provision of reading support, including staff and student viewpoints. The paper reports upon a series of four case studies, each based within an urban secondary school offering some form of reading support to students in GCSE examinations. Each case study incorporates student interviews, observations of reading support in action, and interviews with staff who manage and provide reading support in examinations; within each school, these data are linked to assessments of the eligible students' individual reading needs, reading self-perceptions, motivations and anxieties. Quantitative findings show that the pattern of student preferences and uptake of reading support is usually 'idiosyncratic', i.e. not amenable to prediction on the basis of student assessments, though there is an association between students' preferred mode of reading support and the location in which it is provided. Qualitative analyses revealed key themes relating to the dynamics of provision and use of reading support, including 'student worthiness', 'relationships' and 'unfair advantage'. The researchers link these key themes to Roeser and Shun's (2002) motivational model integrating adolescent needs to school context. Recommendations are made for a more central role of student consultation within processes for providing reader support to GCSE examination candidates.

Introduction

In light of the importance of educational achievements to students' future prospects and transitions, access arrangements (AAs) for assessment have been developed in many countries in order to enable students with special educational needs, or disabilities, to access the most appropriate end-of-school programmes of study and to complete them successfully (Pepper, 2007; e.g. Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ), 2008). Furthermore, it is recognized that the awareness and availability of AAs may also support flexibility of teaching and learning opportunities for students experiencing special educational needs throughout the programme of study, as well as promoting the confidence of the student to succeed (Mathews, 1985; DfES, 2004; Cobb, 2005; Woods, 2007; Woods et al., in press).

In Great Britain, some provisions of assessment AAs for the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) can be made at the discretion of the school/ college, but others, particularly those that entail contemporaneous modifications of paper presentation or candidate response, require individual application to the GCSE awarding bodies. At present, a relatively large and increasing number of applications for assessment AAs is made on behalf of candidates with learning disabilities/ learning difficulties (QCA, 2007). Predictably, the incidence of literacy learning difficulties (e.g. dyslexia) is relatively high within this group of candidates; relevant assessment AAs include extra time allowed for the examination, the facility for the candidate to 'read aloud' the examination questions, the use of a scribe or voice-activated computer, and most commonly, an application by the school/ college for reading support to be provided to the candidate.

In relation to reading support, reading accuracy, reading speed and reading comprehension have been identified as underpinning and interdependent skills in the reading process (Stanovich, 1991; Parker, Hasbrouk and Tyndal, 1992; Stothart, 1994); according to the 'limited-capacity' model of reading, weaknesses in skills of reading

accuracy and reading speed divert attention away from the 'higher' intellectual skill of reading comprehension (La Berge and Samuels, 1974; Lee, 2003). For these reasons, the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ, 2008) identifies below-average performances in one or more of the reading skills of accuracy, speed and/or comprehension, as a basis for eligibility to reading support in GCSE examinations. Recent widening of eligibility criteria has inevitably led to expansion of numbers of students accessing reading support in GCSE examinations, which presented, and continue to present, sometimes significant logistical resourcing challenges to schools, in particular in terms of staffing and rooming (Woods, 2007; Griffiths, 2008).

Literature on policy traces a development away from a culture of AAs as 'concessions', specially granted on rare occasions towards a culture of 'entitlement' for a wider student body, over the last thirty years. However, Woods (2002, 2003) has recently argued that policy on AAs is still effectively 'disability-centred' and that 'equal opportunities' need to be considered in policy-making, and that, in this respect, the continued existence of 'thresholds' for eligibility are arbitrary. Critics of Woods (e.g. Dolman, 2003) argue mainly from a resource-based premise that limited resources to support AAs in schools mean that thresholds for eligibility must continue to exist. The tensions between disability-centred approaches and the principle of equal opportunities for all regardless of disabilities remain unresolved at the time of writing, though its influence may be relevant to school processes and the student experience.

There are few published research studies on the use of assessment AAs in the United Kingdom (UK). Existing studies have focussed upon the general policies for identification criteria (Woods, 1998, 2003) or upon the general use of particular AAs, such as a prompter, a scribe or reading support (Woods and Reason 1999; Collins, 2003; Woods, 2004). Little research exists to elucidate the interaction between student needs, school processes and awarding body regulations; one exception, Lloyd-Bennett's (1994) single case study of a GCSE student with literacy learning difficulties using AAs, is now over a decade old and undertaken in an eligibility context that was very different from the present, where the numbers of students accessing examination support was significantly

smaller. Also, Woods (2004) reports upon the access arrangement needs of non-eligible students, and Collins' (2003) has clarified the needs of those using amanuenses, though there is no available research which examines the much more widely-used AA of reading support.

Woods (2007) highlights the importance of devising user-informed research to manage and develop the use of provisions such as reading support in order to assist effective resource management and to avoid the consequences of making ineffective provisions. The present researchers have worked from the premise that, in order to be fully comprehensive, research linking the processes of identification, assessment, provision and monitoring of reading support, should also include the views of those who manage and deliver the reading support and the students who use it. Against this background, this paper reports a study which aims to answer two research questions:

- How are the processes in the provision and use of reading support for GCSE examinations currently addressed in secondary schools?
- What are key stakeholders' views about the provision and use of reading support in GCSE examinations?

Method of the present study

Design

The project involved 4 urban, socio-economically comparable high schools, selected as a case-series from the 18 high schools in one Local Authority (LA) in England. Three of the schools were coeducational and one was a boys' school. They were selected because, as a group, they reflected different processes in aspects of their provision of reading support. The schools provided different locations for reading support (in the main examination hall; in a group withdrawal room; or in individual rooms). There were also choices for modes of reading support (all text read to individuals, all text read aloud to a group of candidates or individual requests for a word or words to be read made by putting a hand up).

Data Collection

In each school the Special Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo), two other members of reading support staff, and willing students eligible to receive reading support, were interviewed. Examination reading support sessions were observed.

Interview questions to SENCos focussed upon gaining descriptions of the overall management of school-based processes for the provision of GCSE examination reading support in their own schools as well as their opinions about them.

Interview questions to the reading support staff focussed upon descriptions of their experiences in the role of reader for students in GCSE examinations as well as their opinions about the effectiveness of the processes for current provision.

Across the 4 high schools a total of 32 Year 10 and 11 students (23 boys, 9 girls) were interviewed, all of whom were eligible for reading support in GCSE modular tests and examinations through the awarding bodies' criterion of a standardised score of below 85 on a single word reading test. Of the student group, 11 had been identified as having specific learning difficulties in literacy (SpLD) whilst the remainder were identified as having more generalised learning difficulties (GLD), with 5 of the latter group having English as an additional language (EAL). Interview questions investigated students' experiences of receiving reading support in examinations and their opinions about the effectiveness of such support. In addition, students were questioned about their experiences of tests and examinations in more general terms as well as their own perceptions of their reading skills, test anxiety levels and motivation.

All individual staff interviews were conducted before a series of GCSE examinations or individual GCSE science modular tests. All student interviews were conducted within a month of the end of a GCSE Science modular test or a series of mock GCSE examinations.

In addition to the individual interviews, observational data were gathered in a minimum of one GCSE mock Science examination and / or Science GCSE modular test for each school, using a mixture of time sampling and event records. These observations were participatory, with the researcher acting in the role of either examination invigilator, or occasionally, reader,

Finally, in each school, all reading support staff were jointly interviewed, using an unstructured interview format, immediately after an observed GCSE Science mock examination or modular test. These interviews sought immediate feedback about the provision and effectiveness of reading support in that situation, as well as a more general picture of how reading support was working in the current series of GCSE examinations for this particular group of students.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the data initially focussed upon each School 3s the unit of analysis, building up a matrix for each of the 4 schools, followed by a cross case series analysis ('case-ordered analysis') (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Then the data were re-analysed thematically, based upon themes emerging from the single case and cross-case analyses ('variable-ordered analysis') (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

Each of the data sources was used to triangulate the perspectives of participants against each other and against examination room observational data.

Quantitative data from the student cohort as a whole were also analysed to check any patterns of association of key variables (e.g. between reading scores and support mode preferences)

Findings from the case series schools

How are the processes in the provision and use of GCSE examination reading support currently being addressed in schools?

Managing reading support

Whereas 10 years ago schools' examinations officers and educational psychologists (EPs) were key figures in the management of examination AAs in schools, examination officers in the case-series schools played only a distal administrative role in processing applications for AAs. The role of EPs in student assessment for AAs has largely been taken over by advisory teachers in this LA. In addition, specialist teachers in the schools themselves have taken on some individual student assessments, as well as some of the day to-day management, though the latter role is fulfilled mainly by the SENCo.

Identification of students for reading support

From Woods' (1998), 'primary' and 'secondary' criteria for student identification systems in the case-series schools were devised: primary criteria being those actively and consciously pursued within the school, and secondary being those available but not actively used. The primary criterion in 3 of the 4 schools was previous use of reading support in examinations. Students who had previously made use of reading support had been identified through their attendance at extra support lessons within the schools' Learning Support Departments, and were normally drawn from those on the School 3ction Plus and SEN Statement stage lists on the schools' SEN Registers. Others in receipt of reading support who were now on the School 3ction stage had previously been on the more severe stages and consequently had had support, therefore SEN register stage was in effect a primary criterion, especially at School 1, where it was still believed that students needed to have a Statement of SEN from the LEA to be eligible fore reading support. Secondary criteria included referrals by staff or parents or self-referral by students.

Percentages of students identified as eligible for reading support ranged from 9.4% of the GCSE student cohort at School 4 to just 2.7% at School 2. This comparison raises the issues of both possible variations in identification thresholds or of the limitations of using a 'snapshot' methodology.

The nature of the student cohort

The student cohort from the case-series schools eligible for GCSE examination reading support evidences a wider range of difficulties compared to 10 years ago when only students with Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD) were eligible. The majority of eligible students were identified as having General Learning Difficulties (GLD) (42/70) compared with 27 SpLD students and one with Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD).

Reading scores ranged from just below average to well below average, though cross-case means were broadly similar for the case-series, as were levels of test anxiety and

motivation. Only at School 2 was self-perception of reading skills noticeably lower than the other schools.

Of the 70 students eligible across the case-series, 32 were available for interview, though some of those unavailable were observed in examination sessions.

Those interviewed stated a widespread dislike of examinations with an even more widespread preference for practical coursework.

Despite high levels of agreement that Science GCSE was an important and useful qualification, there was a stark mismatch between these students' opinions and their self-reported efforts to revise for this subject's examinations, echoing perhaps Weddel's (2003) work on SEN students' experiences of failure in the examinations system and of Martin et al's (2003) motivational notion of 'self-handicapping' to maintain self-esteem.

Use of reading support in examinations

Students were observed using reading support in a variety of locations including group rooms at 3 of the 4 schools, and the main examination hall at the fourth. Staff-student ratios for examination reading support varied from 1:1 at School 2, through 1:2 at School 3 to 1:4 at School 1, all in withdrawal situations. Support in the main hall at School 4 was notionally 1:2. Students using an amanuensis at School 3 were accommodated alongside those having a reader only in the same room, which meant that other students could hear the answers to questions that those using an amanuensis were dictating.

At least 2 students at School 1 refused support altogether as it meant leaving the main examination hall.

In no school were the students consulted upon or given a choice in the location and mode of their reading support.

Students using the hands-up mode of support (at Schools 1 and 4) showed great variation in the uptake of such support, from no requests for help to a heavy use, particularly amongst students with English as an Additional Language (EAL).

At School 1 staff had mistakenly thought that hands-up mode was compulsory, based upon a misinterpretation of the JCQ Regulations.

Those using the all-text mode (at Schools 2 and 3) were generally amenable to such support, though some individuals unilaterally rejected this mode and either refused help

altogether or effectively switched to a hands-up method, to which adult support readers generally acquiesced.
In no school did any of the students make use of the discretionary 25% extra time that they had been awarded, though at School 3, in the observed Science examination, this time was compulsorily added on at the end, to the visible disgruntlement of the students

Monitoring of AAs
Whilst School 3 reported a regular management meeting to monitor and review the provisions and use of examination AAs, monitoring across the other case-series schools was patchy and *ad hoc*, usually consisting of informal discussions between individuals within Learning Support Departments and including communication with neither Senior Management Team (SMT), mainstream subject staff who had set and would mark the examinations, nor the students using such support.

What are key stakeholders' views about reading support in GCSE examinations?
Identification processes for GCSE examination reading support.
Interviewed staff felt generally satisfied with the identification criteria in their schools, though many were aware of the lack of referrals by mainstream staff and remained concerned that those students who had 'slipped the net' of the primary identification criteria (see '*Identification of students*' subsection above), but who were beginning to struggle with the literacy demands of GCSE might not be identified in time to qualify for support in early modular examinations.

"Just a reading age [sic] *or a Code of Practice stage is not reliable enough. We need everyone to be alert for students with literacy problems." (TA, School 4)*

In contrast, some other staff were less concerned about widening the identification net

"I'm reassured that the kids we work with get help. I'm not so bothered about the others 'cos they probably get by, whatever" (TA, School 2).

This latter point of view was generally a minority one amongst respondents, though some staff made oblique references to student 'worthiness' as a factor influencing identification.

Location of GCSE examination reading support.

The student cohort expressed a clear preference for withdrawal from the main examination hall to receive their reading support, with most students preferring a group withdrawal room (20/32), whilst another 9 preferred individual rooms. As a result those schools providing withdrawal returned accordingly higher satisfaction rates from students.

Reasons supporting the preferences for withdrawal were focused primarily upon self-consciousness and the avoidance of feelings of embarrassment.

"Anywhere but the Hall. When I got stuck I'd leave the question rather than put my hand up." (Student JM at School 2).

"If it was in the Hall I wouldn't do the exams." (Student KP, School 2)

At the same time, the prospect of embarrassment conversely motivated a minority of students.

"I'd feel uncomfortable on my own or with other readers. I'd rather be with all the others doing the same exam."(Student RA, School 3).

Indeed, 2 students at School 1 had refused examination reading support because it entailed being withdrawn from the main hall.

Withdrawal was also preferred by some students as an enhanced environment for working.

"I'd prefer a separate room; you get more concentration."(Student AA, School 4)

Student preferences for location found no statistically significant associations with the measured within-student variables of self-perception of reading skills, test anxiety or motivation, though an association between reading skills levels and locational preference did approach statistical significance (Spearman = 0.41; p= 0.056).
Staff at 3 of the 4 high schools also favoured withdrawal as being more sensitive to student feelings. At the fourth school (School 4) the main hall was favoured by staff as a more inclusive option for those receiving reading support: a preference which did not triangulate with the majority of students at that school, though 3/11 did agree with the staff choice.

Mode of reading supporting GCSE examinations
The student cohort opted generally for the 'individual all-text' mode (21/32), once again citing embarrassment and having to wait to be attended to as reasons for rejecting the hands-up mode of reading:

"Hands-up could be embarrassing, especially if you're in the room with everybody else". (Student JM , School 2)

For some others the issue was time management:

"With hands-up you have to wait. It's annoying" (student AA, School 4)

However, many also cited the potential benefits of enhanced comprehension with the individual all-text method '*limited capacity',* model of reading, where over-focus on the mechanics of decoding text were seen to create an impediment to higher-order reading skills, such as comprehension (cf. La Berg and Samuels, 1974).

"That question was hard to read, about kettles. I didn't understand it. When the teacher read it for me I understood it. I can just think about the question" (Student ML, School 3)

Of those preferring hands-up (9/32) some cited a need to feel independent:

"I know half the words so it got on my nerves having all the words read." (Student EK, School 3)

Others also cited *that* method as being less conspicuous (and therefore less embarrassing) than the constant presence of a staff member needed for the individual all-text method.

"All the text read? It'd be humiliating. Hands-up is easier" (Student KF, School 4)

Of the 2 students preferring the (unused) 'all text read from the front to all students' method, one cited lack of conspicuousness as his reason whilst the other felt that all students having access to a reading was 'fairer'.

Across the student cohort there was a strong feeling that a choice should be given to students in the matter of reading mode in examinations. No statistically significant association was found between individuals' preferences of mode or their strengths of feelings on the matter of choice and the within-student variables of reading accuracy levels, self-perception of reading skills, test anxiety and motivation. There was, however, a statistically significant relationship found between student mode preferences and their locational preferences (X^2 (1,31) = 6.11;p = 0.013), with those preferring individual all-text also preferring withdrawal from the main hall. This association was discussed in terms of student self-consciousness.

The lack of association between student preferences for mode or location, on the one hand and within-student variables on the other, concurs with Woods' (2004) evidence of the idiosyncratic nature of student demands for reading support.

Whilst staff at School 1 (mistakenly) thought that hands-up was the *required* method and staff at School 4 felt that hands-up could be administered inconspicuously in the main hall (because other students would be raising their hands to request equipment), staff at schools H and A held the strong conviction that all-text provided better insurance against the students misreading text.

"The fact is that sometimes, especially in Science, they think they've read it right when it's wrong…like they'll read 'hydrochloric acid' as 'hydraulic acid'." TA School 1

This conviction led some staff to pursue their favoured mode, irrespective of student reaction.

"I just force myself on them. I don't ask, 'Do you want me to read it?' You've got to really force them." (SENCo, School 3).

Student reaction to this was often very negative:

"It did me 'ead in them standing beside me." (Student LO, School 3)

"I don't want people all over me." (Student LB, School 3)

Nearly all support staff felt that use of tone, pause and stress were legitimate and a necessary part of the reading role, though one TA felt that this crossed the threshold of legitimacy, as did the reading aloud of scientific and mathematical symbols and formulae.

'Relationships' in the delivery and use of reading support in GCSE examinations
Interviewed staff made the universal assumption that, for students, having a familiar and trusted adult to read to them in examinations was important.

"Particular pupils relate to particular members of staff. There's a dyslexic kid I know who was in a practice test. He came up to me and said, 'Where was yer? I wouldn't ask her [another TA] to read it 'cos she'll think I'm thick.' They've got to trust you" (TA , School 1)

However, triangulation of data with student responses found that this sentiment was shared by only half the students interviewed. Amongst those students stressing the

importance of relationships, feelings were particularly strong from those also using their reader as an amanuensis, echoing Collins' (2003) findings.

However, statistical analyses found no significant association between students' strengths of feeling on this matter and the within-student variables of reading accuracy skills, self-perception of reading skills, test anxiety and motivation.

AAs regulations and guidance.

Whilst staff were broadly supportive of the JCQ regulations on reading support as 'fair', a finding that differs from Woods (2007), many expressed reservations on particular issues. Data revealed differing trends between SENCos and support staff. SENCos felt that schools should have more autonomy in deciding who had which access arrangements:

"Do we really need to apply [to the awarding bodies]? It questions the SENCO's professionalism. SENCOs should be certified to make the decisions. Most SENCOs know the kids' levels." (SENCo, School 4)

Support staff were more interested in reforms to the actual delivery of reading support:

"I feel that anyone who needs a reader should have a reader. Some people get really nervous and block up and read it all wrong. Also then we'd not be singling out the SEN kids with reading problems." (TA , School 4)

Other reforms proposed by TAs were access to a reader for English Literature examinations and an option to offer clarification to any student confused by examination question 'carrier language' (cf. Pollit et al., 1985), and finally the scrapping of access arrangements thresholds for eligibility, which they considered 'arbitrary' (cf. Woods,

2002)[1]. These demands elicited less enthusiasm from SENCOs, who were concerned about the resource implications of such changes.

From the analyses of the individual school data and those of the cross-case analysis, eight themes were inductively drawn, each of which constitutes an important driver for a school's provision and use of reading support in GCSE examinations. These eight themes are discussed below.

Managing reading support: common themes across the four schools

Theme 1: Confidence and competence

A central element to the successful provision of reading support in GCSE examinations is the competence and confidence of the staff and other adults involved in the management and delivery of such support. The data analysis underlined the central importance of staff knowledge of the JCQ regulations, which was found to be variable and often out of date. The necessity of opportunities for updating knowledge through reading and /or training has emerged a key issue affecting the quality of provision for examination AAs. Additional confidence and competence issues arising from the present study were lack of explicit training for students on how best to use reading support and other access arrangements as well as the levels of confidence and competence amongst support staff in the actual reading of some subject technical words.

Theme 2: Worthiness

Staff attitudes as to who should be considered for AAs in GCSE examinations were sometimes found to be coloured by notions of 'worthiness' for such support.
Three varieties of worthiness were identified from the data analysis. The first was 'moral worthiness': the belief that students should 'earn' eligibility to AAs through hard work, good behaviour and/or regular attendance at school: a phenomenon also noted in Lloyd-Bennett's (1994) work.

[1] Interestingly, since the end of this research project, the JCQ have allowed limited access to clarification, but only for those students with a diagnosed language difficulty. In contrast, the NAA regulations for Key Stage 2 tests (for 10 -11 year olds) allow this option for any student that might request it.

"Access is wasted on the 'wasters'. (TA School 1).

This belief had led to staff resistance to the inclusion of some eligible students for support at one school. The second was 'prioritised worthiness': the belief that those students known to the Learning Support staff were, by definition, those most in need and therefore to be prioritised for AAs (see School 2 TA's comments above). This belief led to admission by staff at one school that no effort would be made to actively seek out new students potentially in need of reading support.

A third variety was 'academic worthiness': a belief that students with General Learning Difficulties (GLDs) would profit less from AAs that those with SpLDs and that the growth in numbers from the former group was actually diverting resources away from the latter. At one school, this led a TA to offer prompts to read for SpLD students but not for those with GLDs, which, within a framework of clear guidelines and regulations, could be considered ethically contentious.

Theme 3: Unfair advantage

Noting the discrepancies between eligibility criteria for reading support between the end of Key Stage 3 Tests and the GCSE examinations as well as lack of access to clarification of examination question carrier language, data from staff interviews support Woods' (2002) critique of a 'disabilities-based' AAs framework including thresholds for eligibility. Whilst the GCSE (JCQ) regulations establish the principle of not allowing 'unfair advantage', many staff expressed more concerns about the possibility of unfair *disadvantages* accruing to 'non-eligible' students: an approach located in an 'equal opportunities' framework.

Theme 4: Relationships

Relationships emerge as a central theme from the present study's data, where affective factors were found to be important drivers of students' attitudes and behaviours in particular.

Data from the study identified avoidance of embarrassment as a major motivator in students' choices of locations and modes of reading support for GCSE examinations, whilst those stressing the importance of having a trusted and familiar adult reading for them also noted needing to avoid self-consciousness and feeling judged. This phenomenon echoes Edelmann's (1987) research on the psychology of embarrassment, in particular his notion of 'the public aspect of self'.

Another affective phenomenon that influenced the participants' attitudes, behaviours and relationships was identified as 'disaffection'. The data on many students' poorly-motivated behaviours in both revising for and sitting examinations (including their uptake or otherwise of reading support) were seen often to be coloured by more generalised disaffection, which could, in turn, be traced to short and long term experiences of academic failure. This phenomenon can be considered in terms of Hewitt's (2003) social-interactionist concepts of the formation of both 'situated' (short-term) and 'biographical' (long-term) identities.

Theme 5: Judgements

Data analysed from the present study identified an ongoing tension between students' need for autonomy in decision-making over location, mode and staffing for reading support, and staff's concerns over the reliability of students' judgements, particularly their ability to avoid errors where they may elect not to have all-text read. What emerges strongly from the present study's data is the negative effects upon student reactions to reading support where their judgements and preferences were not taken into account (for example students' refusal to have all the text read or refusal even to be withdrawn for examination reading support).

Observational data on seeming compliance of the majority of students in the examination sessions was shown, when triangulated with interview data to belie widespread strongly held feelings about the right to choose their reading support conditions. The data underscore Erikson's (1995) identification of 'autonomy' as a major motivational force in adolescent developmental psychology.

Theme 6: Resourcing

Another reason for tension between the desire of students for a choice in the nature of the provision of their reading support in GCSE examination and the reluctance of the interviewed SENCo to allow this principle was demand upon school resources, particularly given the steady rise in eligible numbers of students accessing reading support in GCSE examinations.

Provision at 3 of the 4 schools had already obliged SENCos to abandon what they felt might be optimal support options for students: for example, separate rooms for students using amanuenses at School 3; the forced move of supported Year 10 students back into the main hall reported to the present researcher at School 1; School 2 SENCo report that any further increase in numbers might mean having to move to hands-up mode, away from her preferred mode of all text. This theme contrasts Dolman's (2003b) claim that the reality of limited resourcing *in itself* is a key reason for maintaining thresholds for eligibility for access arrangements with Elliott and Thurlow's (2000) claim that an effective access arrangements system *must* take as its starting point the individual student, not the regulations or the resourcing situation. The point is also raised that consulting students on their support preferences could actually mean less demand on resources, for example the freeing up of staff when a number of students need only a hands-up reading mode rather than all text read.

Theme 7: AAs as a whole school issue

Whilst Backhouse et al. (2004) recommend that both SMT and all subject teachers are included in the planning for GCSE examination AAs, data from the present study suggest that there was little or no direct evidence of SMT or Governors' involvement in the schools; nor was there evidence of mainstream teachers' involvement in either the identification of students or the monitoring of AAs provision and use.

Whilst the absence of this evidence is not necessarily evidence of absence, available data suggest that the Learning Support Departments in each case school, whilst liaising with their Examination Officer on applications for AAs, were otherwise handling the provision of AAs, if not entirely in isolation, then with only patchy involvement of other members of staff. There were reported concerns from some LS staff that they felt that mainstream subject staff should be more involved at all stages in the process.

As far as students' involvement in the process was concerned, they were initially asked whether or not they wanted AAs but beyond that there was no further consultation with them at the time of the study (see Theme 5 above).

Theme 8: The researcher's influence upon the research setting

Robson (2002) notes the widespread phenomenon of 'reactivity' to the researcher by participants in social science research. Such reactivity, in the case of the present study, needs to be considered on two levels. First, the indirect influence of the researcher upon the four schools in that participants' involvement in the research activities provoked reflection, particularly from staff, upon their individual and collective practice concerning the provision and use of reading support in GCSE examinations. This included the researcher's feedback to staff on student thoughts and feelings upon the matter, which, in the case of School 4, for example, provoked the moving of reading support from the main hall to a group withdrawal room. Second, the researcher's professional relationship with each school, as their advisory teacher meant that they were receiving, for example, information updates on changes in the JCQ regulations, which, in turn, would modify practice in each school. These two levels of contact can be seen as combined in what Booth and Ainscow (2002) characterise as the role of 'critical friend' to a school.

Discussion

Linking the present study's emerging themes to Roeser and Shun's (2002) framework of adolescent motivation

The thematic data emerging from the present study can be mapped onto Roeser and Shun's (2002) framework, which characterises adolescent academic motivation as a set of reactions to their educational contexts, where 3 key elements of those contexts: ('structures', 'support for autonomy' and 'quality of relationships') dynamically interact with adolescents' developmental psychological needs (need for competence, need for autonomy and need for relatedness) As shown in Figure 1 below, the results of such interactions, the eight themes emerging from this study, could be seen as key drivers influencing the nature of the contextual elements of the framework and thus influencing

student academic behaviours, which in turn had influences upon those contextual elements.

Figure 1: Themes from the present study applied top Roeser and Shun's (2002) framework

The success or otherwise of current provision for reading support in GCSE examinations could therefore be seen in terms of a series of positive or negative motivational outcomes for students, the key end users of the process, depending on the goodness of fit between the provision of their examination reading support and their individual needs, both academic and affective.

Implications for practice

Identification and selection

Whilst schools seem to have good identification and selection protocols for students already known to their Learning Support departments, SENCos have a key role to play in fostering mainstream staff's alertness to students who may be beginning to struggle with the relatively higher demands of GCSE courses soon after entry into Year 10. A 'Concerns' pro-forma could be adopted for subject teachers to feedback information to SENCos on potentially vulnerable students.

Assessment

To access the text of a GCSE examination paper students need reading accuracy, reading speed and reading comprehension. Whilst reading accuracy assessments are widely used, more checking of reading speed and comprehension measure could be used, especially in case where an identified 'at-risk' student has scored just above the reading accuracy threshold for AAs.

Furthermore, extra time alone may well not offer the same opportunities for reading comprehension to slow-reading students as having the script read to them aloud at normal speed (Zabrouky and Ratner, 1992).

Provision

The study reported here provides strong support for the principle of consulting students over their preferences for the location and mode of their examination reading support. SENCos' concerns about the inaccurate reading by students using the hands-up mode need to be acknowledged and appropriate training given to students to minimise this risk (e.g. being aware of potentially confusing similar-looking words). However, it seems better to take the risk of allowing students to choose their preferred mode than having them refuse support altogether. Furthermore, if a key principle in inclusive education is to develop students' independent learning skills (DCSF, 2008), then leaving them still completely dependent upon others to read for them in mid-adolescence does not seem to make any sense , nor does it foster their positive academic self-image (see Roeser and Shun, 2002, above).

Resource concerns arising from the principle of offering a choice reading support mode and location may be met to some degree by the fact that student choices may be as likely to reduce resource needs as to increase them (e.g. preferences for a hands-up mode or a group room rather than an individual room). Furthermore, the introduction of the new '14-19 Diplomas' (QCA, 2008) into high schools and colleges will be likely to mean lees students sitting GCSE examinations at the same time, thus freeing up some resource capacity.

Monitoring and record-keeping

In light of the finding of variable student reactions to their packages of AA support, a 'feedback form' jointly filled in by staff and each student at the end of each examination series would allow schools to monitor the effectiveness of their practice, including the effective use of resources, which SENCos and other management staff could then use to inform future planning.

Use of outside support services and agencies

LA advisory teachers have a key role to play in ensuring that school staff are kept updated on changes to the JCQ Regulations and Guidance and upon any new and updated assessment tools that might be useful in identifying potentially eligible students for AAs in GCSE examinations. Given that since 2007, the JCQ has allowed assessments for AAs

to be carried out by 'competent' non-specialist staff nominated by the Head of each examination centre, the advisory and training role (rather than merely the assessment role) for advisory teachers, as well as from private providers, continues to be of importance and seems likely to expand.

Directions for future research

This study has detailed practices for the identification and provision of GCSE examination reading support in English secondary schools as well as, for the first time, systematically gathering data on key stakeholders' views about the appropriateness and efficacy of such support. Future research could now usefully explore knowledge and understanding in 3 areas relating to reading support for examinations: identification, provision and response.

One unexpected finding from the present study has been the relatively higher levels of (hands up) requests for reading support in examinations amongst EAL students compared with their first-language peers.

It would be useful to discover how typical these higher levels of requests from EAL by extending the numbers of students observed. To what extent are higher levels of request a function of their current levels of competence in English language (perhaps measured the NASSEA Assessment system) as compared with their measured reading accuracy scores? What might the implications be for students with large numbers of EAL students?

Research such as this, and that of the present study, will have a key role to play in the developments of policies and practices that are fair and responsive to all students' needs.

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