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Jeffery, T. (Ed.) (2017). *educationUndergraduate: Journal of Undergraduate Research in Education*, Volume 8. Lincoln: Bishop Grosseteste University.

This is an Accepted Manuscript published by Bishop Grosseteste University in its final form on October 2017.

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Journal of Undergraduate Research in Education
Volume 9: October 2017

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ISSN 1756-1280

Bridging pedagogical discontinuity: to what extent can play-based learning be sustained beyond children's transition to Year 1?

Philip Nicholson

Abstract

As children make the transition from the Early Years Foundation Stage to Year 1 they must negotiate pedagogical and curriculum discontinuities. Previous research has identified an absence of bridging between these two phases of education resulting in children being exposed to developmentally inappropriate practice. This study explores the feasibility of sustaining play into Year 1 in a small rural Lincolnshire school. Data were collected through interviews with both the Early Years Foundation Stage and the Year 1 teacher. A questionnaire with Year 1 children ($n = 23$) provided supplementary data. Findings suggest that the constraints of the National Curriculum make it difficult to bridge pedagogical discontinuity through play in Year 1 as the bridging process is occurring before children enter Year 1. This project is of particular interest to Early Years Foundation Stage educators as pressure to align competing discourses in their pedagogical space intensifies.

Introduction

Children transferring from a play-based curriculum in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (ages 4-5) to a purely content-based Year 1 (ages 5-6) represents the first significant educational transition of their education (Howe, 2016). The proficiency of children's academic and emotional capabilities can be placed at risk if this transition is inadequately (Bateson, 2013) or abruptly (OECD, 2006) administered. Consequently, more than ever it is becoming increasingly evident that EYFS provision is trying to counterbalance their child-directed pedagogy with the constraints of preparing their pupils for a politically manifested twenty-first century education (Ellis, 2002). The contrasting pedagogical approaches between these two adjacent phases of education results in a shift away from experience and towards content during children's transition to formal education (Howe, 2016; Walsh, Taylor, Sproule & McGuinness, 2008). However, for educators and academics the compromise of early years education and the prerequisites that accompany it are occurring too early in a child's education (Alexander, 2010; Elkind & Whitehurst, 2001; Margetts, 2007).

High-quality early years education has been proven to have a positive impact on a child's future education (Eckhoff, 2013; Sylva, Mulhish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford & Taggart, 2004). Therefore, to ameliorate an overly abrupt transition to formal schooling, the extension of a play-based pedagogy into Year 1 is advocated (CPR, 2014). As a comparison, in 2004, Wales extended its provision of early childhood education to age seven to allow children to further experience learning through play and active involvement (Phillips, 2012; Welsh Government, 2016). This is a popular theme throughout Europe as a later school starting age can ensure that children are only exposed to developmentally appropriate practice (Alexander, 2010; Sharp, 2002).

Therefore, an objective of this project is to explore if play can be extended to bridge pedagogical discontinuities between the EYFS and Year 1. By administering questionnaires for Year 1 pupils ($n = 23$) and semi-structured

interviews with the teachers ($n = 2$) either side of the transition, it is anticipated that this project will be able to make inferences into the feasibility of sustaining a play-based curriculum into Year 1 of the National Curriculum. The findings will be analysed for their disposition within the established literature base and recommendations will be based upon this comparison.

Literature review

Transition

Succeeding the sixth Summit of European Education Ministers in 1971, the concept of school transition has attracted major interest from academics, educators and policymakers alike (Athola, Poikenen, Kontoniemi, Niemi & Nurmi, 2012; Vrinioti, Einarsdottir & Broström, 2010). The subsequent forty-five years of research into these transitional phases that permeate education have been informed on an international scale. The Pedagogies of Educational Transitions (POET) alliance and the Early Years Transition Programme (EASE) draw upon perspectives from a wealth of international research (Ballam, Perry & Garpelin, 2016; EASE, 2010). Although a prominent method of attaining and measuring successful school transition continues to evade general consensus (Ballam et al., 2016), the literature widely perceives that a child's sense of belonging in a new setting represents an optimal transition to the school environment (Brooker, 2007; Broström, 2002; Bulkeley & Fabian, 2006).

Brofenbrenner's (1979) conceptualisation of ecological transitions assists in explaining how a child's development is influenced by a set of interconnected micro, meso, exo and macrosystems. When social contexts are adjusted, for example the transition to a new setting, the reciprocal relationship between a child and their environment is reconstructed as a consequence (Dockett & Perry, 2012; Fabian & Dunlop, 2006; Fisher, 2009). Athola et al. (2012) suppose that prior to Brofenbrenner's theoretic, literature on school transition focused mainly on facilitating change through the micro and meso-systems such as pre-school and school professionals. However, consistent with a neo-liberalist accountability agenda, school transition has become increasingly subject to macrosystems such as the National Curriculum and education policy (Athola et al., 2012).

Further to Brofenbrenner's (1979) notion of ecological transitions, other theoretical perspectives ubiquitous within educational transition literature such as 'rites of passage' (Van Gennepe, Vizedom & Caffee, 1960), 'horizontal and vertical transition' (Kagan & Neuman, 1998; Peitarinen, Pyhalto & Soini, 2010) and 'border crossings' (Peters, 2014) further identify the complexities of school transition. For the purpose of this study, however, Dunlop and Fabian (2007) and later Huser, Dockett and Perry's (2015) perceptions of transition as a bridge between pre-school services and the first year of formal schooling is the most applicable theoretical perspective. Applying the bridge theory helps to depict the current situation whereby provision for the EYFS is compromised by pressures from the National Curriculum (Alexander, 2010; Hood, 2013). In this instance,

transition is perceived as a one-way activity (Dockett & Perry, 2014), where bridging between these phases of education (Huser et al., 2015) to alleviate abrupt changes (Bulkeley & Fabian, 2006) is absent.

Transition from EYFS to Year 1

The international literature base identifies that young children must negotiate an abundance of discontinuities as they progress from the EYFS to their first year in primary school (Dockett & Perry, 2012; Huser et al., 2015; Johansson, 2007; Yeboah, 2002). An extensive range of educators (Kagan & Nueman, 1998; Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2000; McClure, 2002) and policymakers (OECD, 2006; Ofsted, 2004) advocate that these two phases of education should offer a continuous learning experience or, as Huser et al. (2015) contend, a bridged partnership. This perception aligns with Friedrich Fröbel stating as early as 1852 that education should establish an organic link between pre-school and primary education (Vrinioti et al., 2010). However, a study conducted by Ofsted (2006) reported that in comparison to their Danish and Finnish counterparts, English teachers felt caught between Foundation Stage (now EYFS) and Key Stage One expectations. This is a common theme throughout the literature as several studies have elucidated that provision between early childhood education and formal schooling severely lacks fundamental levels of coherence (Barblett, Barrat-Pugh, Kilgallon & Maloney, 2011; OECD, 2006).

Pedagogical discontinuity

There is growing recognition within the body of educational transition research that is indicative of embracing educational discontinuities (Kakvoulis, 2003; Page, 2000; Walsh et al., 2008). Dockett and Perry (2012) document that in some instances children pursue discontinuity in order to stimulate new experiences. However, influential research contends that the transition from the EYFS to Year 1 is overly instantaneous (Ofsted, 2004; Sanders et al., 2005). There are systematic differences between these two phases of education with regards to: the physical environment, curriculum content and classroom organisation (Boyle & Petriwskyj, 2014; Curtis, 1986; Dockett & Perry, 2012; Yeboah, 2002); outcomes and processes (Hood, 2013); and vision, culture and expectations (Huser et al., 2015). Whilst all of these discontinuities impact on children's transitions differently, there is a strong consensus that pedagogical discontinuities are the most pertinent characteristic polarising the EYFS and Year 1 (Fisher, 2009; Fisher, 2011; Love, Logue, Trudeau & Thayer, 1992; Sanders et al., 2005; White & Sharp, 2007).

Pedagogical discontinuity between the EYFS and Year 1 stems from divergent philosophical approaches to educating young children (Fisher, 2009; Howe, 2016; White & Sharp, 2007). When children enter Year 1 they encounter compartmentalised and prescribed programmes of study through means of the National Curriculum (DfE, 2013). In contrast, the EYFS implements a 'purposeful' play-based curriculum where teachers must 'respond to each child's emerging needs and interests' (Alexander, 2010; DfE, 2014, p. 9). Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2000) indicate how preschool environments typically foster the social development of pupils as opposed to the National Curriculum's predilection towards improving children's cognitive and academic capabilities in Year 1. A study conducted by Love et al. (1992) reported that children found the utilitarian shift away from play-based learning towards an academic curriculum in their first year of formal schooling to be the most challenging

aspect of the transition. Additionally, and perhaps more poignantly, a range of studies have ascertained children's perceptions (Dockett & Perry, 2012; White & Sharp, 2007), expectations (Chan, 2012; Vrinioti et al., 2010) and experiences (Fisher, 2009; Walsh et al., 2008; Waterland, 1994) of their transition to Year 1. Ascertaining the perceptions of children aligns with the growing awareness of the recognition of children as social agents (James & James, 2004) whereby their perceptions can assist in the improvement of provision (Howe, 2016).

Reducing the discontinuity of pedagogy between sectors has led to a range of educators advocating the need for a more synergetic approach. A unified approach (Bennett, 2013), dual synchronicity (Bennett, Wood & Rogers, 1997) and 'a meeting place' (Moss, 2013, p. 19) are all concepts within the literature which advocate the equal bridging of EYFS and Year 1 provision. However, the current Conservative Government recommends that in order to ease the transition the EYFS should change the emphasis from child-directed to teacher-directed pedagogy (DfE, 2014). Axiomatically, this suggestion offers a worrying insight into the government's attitude towards early childhood education. The shift away from child-directed activity suggests that the current government perceives the EYFS as solely preparing children for their next stage of learning as opposed to delivering an important curriculum in its own right (Howe, 2016). The literature identifies that wider neoliberal trends, such as accountability measures and more rigorously administered assessments, have resulted in the 'downward push' of the National Curriculum which is impacting upon Early Years provision and pedagogy (Alexander, 2010; Love et al., 1992; Hood, 2013). These findings align with the OECD's (2006) Starting Strong project which reported that formal education places an expectancy on Early Years providers to deliver children who are 'ready for learning'. Despite influential theorist Jean Piaget (1951) contending that children aged six and seven are still motivated by making sense of their own world, the literature identifies that many primary education systems persist with a constructivist pedagogy which facilitates the measurement and comparison of children's performance at specific ages (Fisher, 2011; Lansdown, 2005; Margetts, 2007).

Extending play beyond the EYFS

There is widespread consensus within the literature that argues against exposing children to formal education prematurely (Alexander, 2010; Elkind & Whitehurst, 2001; Margetts, 2007; Zigler & Muenchow, 1992). The Cambridge Primary Review (2014) endorses EYFS provision and proposes that this phase of education should be extended to age six. Not only would this align the school starting age in England with the majority of their European counterparts (Sharp, 2002) but it would also replicate the highly successful international education systems such as Norway, Canada and China (PISA, 2015). Most importantly for this particular study however, increasing the duration of the EYFS would administer the extension of a play-based curriculum.

Play can and has been defined and theorised in a range of ways (Pramling Samuelsson & Fleer, 2008). However, Bruce (2011) simply perceives play as helping to create 'an attitude of mind which is curious, investigative, risk taking and full of adventure' (p. 41). Whitebread's (2012) review of the Importance of Play contends that

contemporary play is a multi-faceted phenomenon with extensive evidence of psychological benefits. The relationship between play and developmental psychology is a predominant concept within the literature. Therefore, the notion that play and learning are inextricably connected has been advocated by an array of influential theorists both past: Dewey (1916); Montessori (Stoll Lillard, 2005); Piaget (1951); and Vygotsky (1978) and present: Broadhead, Howard and Wood, (2010); Whitebread, (2012); Moyles (2015); and Bruce (2011). After over a century of analysis from theorists and scientists (Whitebread, 2012), it was no surprise when Pellis and Pellis (2009) documented that playful activity has been proven to enhance synaptic growth in the frontal cortex of the brain – the neurological component of the brain responsible for higher meta-cognitive functions. The research from Pellis and Pellis (2009) correlates with the contributions put forward by Vygotsky (1978). Vygotsky's theoretical explanation of play's role in enhancing children's symbolic representation and self-regulation has contributed extensively in helping educators comprehend children's developing abilities (Garhart Mooney, 2013; Whitebread, 2012).

Extending play beyond current EYFS provision in England is a concept which is strongly advocated by an extensive range of educators and academics (Copple & Bredekamp, 2008; Fisher, 2011; Hood, 2013; Riley & Jones, 2010; Sylva et al., 2004; White & Sharp, 2007; Whitebread, 2012). Martlew, Stephen and Ellis' (2011) study of six primary schools where a play-based curriculum was introduced reported that all teachers responded to the pedagogical change with enthusiasm. However, the small-scale qualitative study revealed teachers had different understandings of the purpose and benefits of active play-based learning. Furthermore, in some aspects of the study, play was found to be peripheral to children's learning experience. This indicates that there are barriers to the inclusion of play as an integral learning tool in Year 1. This research aims to contribute to the established literature by answering the following question. Bridging pedagogical discontinuity: To what extent can play be sustained beyond children's' transition to Year 1? The following chapter will offer an in-depth explanation of the methodology of this study.

Methodology

A mixed-method approach, which amalgamates both qualitative and quantitative research methods (Denscombe, 2010; Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2016), was adopted for the purpose of this research. By implementing methods from both interpretivism and positivism research paradigms the research concurs that there are multiple legitimate forms of social enquiry (Greene, 2007; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). By choosing a method of triangulation, this project will be able to ascertain a more holistic perception of the research question (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000; Denscombe, 2010; Thomas, 2009) whereby greater confidence can be placed on the findings if both methods of data collection align (Gillham, 2007).

Ethics

Prior to any research being carried out a research proposal was designed in accordance with British Educational Research Association ethical guidelines (2011) and Bishop Grosseteste University research ethics policy (2014). The proposal gained the approval of both Bishop Grosseteste University and the placement school meaning data collection could commence. A professional working relationship was established with a rural Lincolnshire Church of England school through a placement one month prior to data collection. This placement allowed the investigator to convey to the relevant personnel within the school what the data collection would entail (Wisker, 2008). In accordance with ethical guidelines, the school, staff and pupils would remain anonymous and methods of data collection were administered in the agreement that all respondents had a right to withdraw and a right to not answer (BERA, 2011; BGU, 2014; Wisker, 2008).

The study

Qualitative data was attained through individual semi-structured face-to-face interviews with EYFS and Year 1 classroom teachers respectively. Prior to the interviews with the teachers, both sets of questions were piloted with trainee teachers. Piloting interviews with a similar cohort to the research sample is a strongly advocated concept (Clough & Nutbrown, 2012; Oppenheim, 1992) as it can identify aspects of the interview which may need refining (Sharp, 2009). The interviews consisted of a range of open, closed and divergent questions (Sharp, 2009; Wisker, 2008) which were relevant to the research question (Pring, 2000). Open questioning probes the interviewee to respond with more detail and therefore the interviewer can elicit responses leading to further enquiry (Oppenheim, 1992). Closed questions offered a balance to ensure that the interviewer maintained an appropriate balance between interrogation and enquiry (Sharp, 2009). Upon obtaining the teachers' consent the interviews were recorded with an electronic mobile device, transcribed and then destroyed (BGU, 2014).

The interviewer's personal characteristics are just a range of known effects that can reduce the validity and reliability of research (Sharp, 2009). Furthermore, within qualitative interview methods there is a tendency for the interviewer to pursue particular answers which support pre-conceived ideas (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 121). However, despite interviews taking a considerable time to listen to and transcribe (Sharp, 2009), interviewing subjects can provide rich contextual information that can exceed research expectations (Wisker, 2008). Additionally, semi-structured interviews allow the interviewer to negotiate any possible misinterpretations by seeking clarification (Pring, 2000). These advantages combine to make semi-structured interviews appropriate for individual research projects (Sharp, 2009).

In accordance with recognising the impact of consulting children's perspectives (Howe, 2016; Mann, Liley & Kellett, 2014), quantitative data was obtained through questionnaires with Year 1 pupils (n = 23). The questionnaire contained ten structured questions where the responses were pre-determined (Gillham, 2007; Sharp, 2009). In accordance with Sharp's (2009) recommendations regarding using questionnaires with children, the questionnaire was designed to be short, simple and aesthetically attractive by using emojis and pictures. The

language of the questions was adjusted to ensure the questions were appropriate, accessible and minimalised power differentials between the child and researcher (Robinson & Kellett, 2004). Due to the benefits of establishing personal contact (Bell, 2010; Wisker, 2008), the children were asked the questions directly on an individual basis.

As with the interview schedule, it was essential that the questionnaire was trialled on a similar age sample (Bell, 2010; Cohen et al., 2000). Prior to piloting, the questionnaire contained several open questions. This is because respondents can find it 'frustrating' if they are only allowed to choose pre-determined answers (Gillham, 2007). However, when the questionnaire was piloted it became apparent that open questions were not suitable for the age group sample (age 5-6) because they did not elicit responses which were relevant to the research question (Wisker, 2008). Therefore, the questionnaire was edited so that eight of the questions were dichotomous 'yes' or 'no' closed questions and two questions were designed on a conventional five-point Likert-type scale (Cohen et al., 2000; Sharp, 2009). Although intervals between each point-range may not be equal, the inclusion of Likert-type scales allows the research to make inferences into the respondent's strength of attitude towards a particular statement (Bell, 2010).

Scaled and dichotomous questions fail to elicit the complexities surrounding their context (Cohen et al, 2000; Sharp, 2009). However, an advantage of using a questionnaire consisting of pre-determined answers is the simplicity in which the responses can be coded (Cohen et al., 2000; Wisker, 2008). Additionally, conducting face-to-face questionnaires can ensure that the answers given are genuine (Denscombe, 2010). Therefore, when used in a method of triangulation, questionnaires can support the findings of other methods making them a suitable method of data collection for this small-scale study.

Presentation and analysis of findings

Axial coding of the data collated from two semi-structured interviews and analysis of the questionnaire revealed three consistent themes: the discontinued learning experience; issues surrounding play-based pedagogy; and, the downward push of the National Curriculum.

The discontinued learning experience

Naturally, interviews with both teachers explored the transition from the EYFS to Year 1. When discussing differences between EYFS and Year 1 provision the teachers responded with:

EYFS: 'its obviously the curriculums... the jump is massive. We've got play-based learning which is fantastic and that's taken away (in Year 1)'.

Year 1: 'the curriculum content is huge that they have to cover. The curriculum makes that (transition) difficult. It's a huge jump. They (the children) need familiarity to feel confident and safe'.

These sentiments provided by both teachers unequivocally correlate with the literature (Fisher, 2009; Fisher, 2011; Love et al., 1992) in asserting that pedagogical discontinuities polarise EYFS and Year 1 provision. In accordance with Curtis (1986) and Yeboah (2002) the teachers also identified curriculum content as an aspect of the transition where children experienced a lack of continuity. Sanders et al. (2005) reported that both curriculum content and pedagogy influence a child's learning experience. Curriculum content's capacity to influence pedagogy results in these two concepts being inextricably linked (Carr et al., 2005; Fisher, 2009).

Additionally, both teachers' responses support the findings from research conducted by Ofsted (2004) and Sanders et al. (2005) which established that children's transition to Year 1 was overly abrupt. For the EYFS teacher especially, the transition to Year 1 has become more disjointed since the reform of the National Curriculum in 2013. When asked if these two phases of education complement or contradict each other, the EYFS teacher responded:

EYFS: 'I would have said before (the reformed national curriculum) complement because it was a gentle slope into Year 1 but not now. There are so many objectives to get through'.

This perspective supports the research which indicates that Year 1 provision fails to offer children from the EYFS a continuous learning experience (Barblett et al., 2011; OECD, 2006). In some instances, the transition to the National Curriculum, which situates knowledge at its core (Brundrett, 2015), results in some children being exposed to developmentally inappropriate practice. This further highlights a lack of bridging between EYFS and Year 1 provision in order to avoid an abrupt transition (Dunlop & Fabian, 2007; Huser et al., 2015). Additionally, the teachers' perspective corresponds with the belief that school transitions are becoming increasingly affected by macrosystems such as nationalised curricula (Athola et al., 2012).

Responses from the questionnaire revealed that 87% (n = 20) of Year 1 pupils found the transition to Year 1 a significant change. This statistic supports the findings from White and Sharp's (2007) study whereby Year 1 children consistently identified considerable differences to their learning environment after their transition from the EYFS. Despite these differences, most children make the transition to formal schooling successfully (Margetts, 2007; Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta & Cox, 2000; Sharp, 2006; White & Sharp, 2007). The data from the questionnaire accurately represented this perspective as 91.3% (n = 21) of pupils stated that they have enjoyed moving into Year 1. It has been documented that for young children, the move to Year 1 is met with enthusiasm as it encompasses the perception of becoming more 'grown up' (Dockett & Perry, 2012; Walsh et al., 2008) and the opportunity to learn new things (Fabian & Dunlop, 2006).

During a child's transition, the pedagogical and curriculum discontinuities can have a profound impact upon children's enjoyment of learning (Sharp, 2006). This perspective is enforced by the statistics shown in Figure 1, which compares children's enjoyment levels between the EYFS and Year 1. Whilst all children enjoyed their time in the EYFS, the majority of children (87 % n = 20), stated that they 'really enjoyed' it. This correlates with

research conducted by Garrick et al. (2010) which suggested that children’s needs and interests in the EYFS are mostly catered for. Conversely, Figure 1 also depicts that children’s attitudes towards Year 1 were less congruent. Given the importance of play throughout the sensitive period (age 0-7) (Brown, 2013; Gleave & Cole-Hamilton, 2012; Goldstein, 2012) it could be suggested that a reduction in opportunities to play impacts upon children’s enjoyment of Year 1.

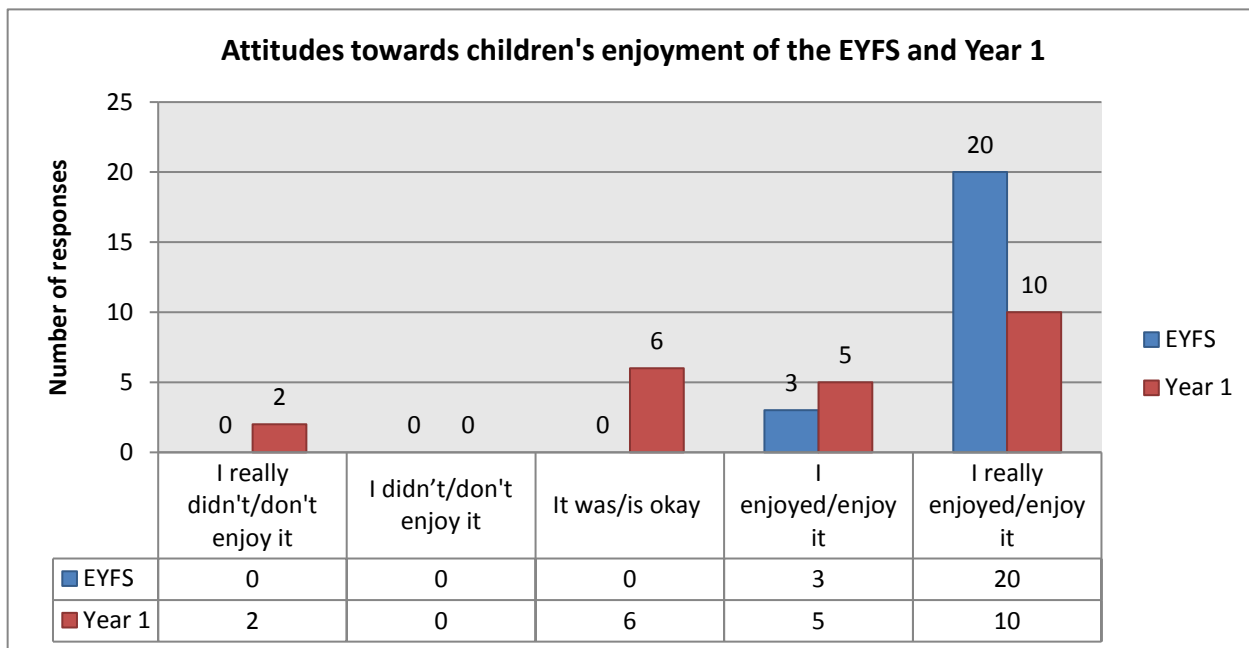


Figure 1: Attitudes towards children’s enjoyment of EYFS and Year 1

Play-based pedagogy

A key aspect of the study was to ascertain teacher and pupil perceptions towards play. Responses from the questionnaire divulged that 95.7% (n = 22) of children enjoyed play in the EYFS. Further to this, 87% (n = 20) of children wish they could have more opportunities to play in Year 1. These statistics align with studies conducted by White and Sharp (2007), Sanders et al. (2005) and Walsh et al. (2008) who all reported that upon their transition, Year 1 pupils regretted the curtailment of play-based activities.

Antithetical to a range of studies which revealed differences in practitioners’ understanding of play (Martlew et al., 2011; McInness, Howard, Miles & Crowley, 2011; TACTYC, 2011), the interviews elicited that attitudes towards the value of play were unanimous between both teachers. Unsurprisingly therefore, when questioned about the extension of play-based learning both teachers shared similar perspectives:

EYFS: ‘No, absolutely not (play should not be confined to the EYFS)... it should go through to at least the end of Year 1 if not Year 2’.

Year 1: ‘Definitely, we’d like to do more through play. Your EYFS needs to be brought into Key Stage One.’

These viewpoints are consistent with those of Copple and Bredekamp (2008), Fisher (2011), Hood (2013), Riley and Jones (2010), Sylva et al. (2004), White and Sharp (2007), Roberts-Holmes (2012) and Whitebread (2012) in promoting the extension of play beyond the EYFS. It has been suggested that extending EYFS provision to age six would assist in properly preparing children for formal learning (Alexander, 2010). Despite unanimity in attitudes towards play and its extension beyond EYFS provision, further questioning postulated divergent responses. The EYFS teacher focused mainly on the benefits of play as opposed to the Year 1 teacher's emphasis on the barriers of including play within the curriculum:

EYFS: 'It's learning at their pace. It's learning without them knowing. It's good for social skills. They get to choose and it gives them confidence. It's a lovely curriculum'.

Year 1: 'The amount that we have to cover... you've just got to sit down and go boom boom boom and get them doing it (formal work)'.

Evidently, the EYFS teacher's response aligns with the Department for Education and Skills (2008) in stating that 'play underpins all development and learning for young children' (p. 7). For Year 1 however, play assumes an entirely different role. The interview elicited that the Year 1 teacher uses play as an incentive to get 'through with the curriculum'. Hayes (2012) advocates incentivising play as a strategy to engage children to participate in more formalised learning. However, this should only be implemented when children become more familiar with more structured learning environments (Hayes, 2012). Arising from this pedagogical strategy are two fundamental limitations which have the potential to undermine the value of play. Firstly, relegating play to the periphery of young children's learning experience in favour of dictated criteria is unheeding of the profuse benefits of play (David, 1990). Secondly, the inclusivity of this strategy must be questioned. Rewarding children with play will only suffice to allow children who complete their work to procure its benefits. Conversely, this means that children who process their new academically focused curriculum at a slower pace are placed at a disadvantage. Additionally, research conducted by Howard (2002) contended that in settings where play was used as a reward, a dichotomy developed between pupils' perceptions of play and work. The emergence of a play-work dichotomy has severe implications as children begin to perceive play as recreation and work as learning (Howard, 2002). This perception carries weight as the questionnaire identified that only 43.5% (n = 10) of Year 1 pupils believe that they are learning when they are playing. Any attempts to curricularise play are far removed from the anthropologist's perception whereby play is a vehicle for learning in its own right (Edwards & Knight, 2000; Strandell, 2000). Therefore, Yardley (1984) suggests incentivising play to satisfy adult goals should be strongly opposed.

Incentivising the role of play in a teacher-directed classroom is a precarious strategy. However, the Year 1 teacher expressed how she was torn between delivering a 'very prescriptive' National Curriculum and wanting 'to do more through play'. The data obtained from the questionnaire revealed that 82.6% (n = 19) of children preferred choosing their own activity as opposed to participating in activities dictated by their teacher. It was clear that the Year 1 teacher understood the benefits of child-directed practice. The Year 1 teacher stated, 'If

they could do it through their interests and play I think their learning would accelerate'. However, further discussion again revealed that the constraints of the National Curriculum prevented the Year 1 teacher implementing a child-initiated pedagogy:

Year 1: I like them to think that they have free choice but there is a difference because you just have to cover it (National Curriculum)'.

It could be perceived that the Year 1 teacher is vacillating between a child-directed pedagogy, of which she is a strong advocate, and the teacher-directed pedagogy which she is obliged to cover. The conflicting educational objectives between the EYFS and Year 1 can mean teachers' professional expertise and judgement are suppressed by the pressure placed on schools to deliver prescribed educational outcomes (Athola et al., 2012; Howard, 2002; Moyles, 2001).

Downward push of the National Curriculum

Recent years have seen increasing political pressure being applied on the EYFS to ensure that children entering Year 1 are ready for learning (DfE, 2014; Neaum, 2016; Whitebread, 2012). This has seen the purpose of early childhood education recontextualised resulting in pedagogical 'sites of struggle' for Early Years practitioners (Broadhead et al., 2010; Moyles, 2015; Soler & Miller, 2003). When asked if the teachers feel the impact of the downward push of the National Curriculum the teachers' responses concurred with the literature:

EYFS: 'Absolutely... Academically they are not ready. Socially they are not ready. They are not ready to be pinned down. They (government) don't realise that their little brains aren't developed for all of this hard work'.

Year 1: 'Yeah I do think so because they have got to achieve so much up there (higher year groups) as well. It does start to feed in ... and sometimes (I am) going but they are so young, they are so young'.

Furthermore, these comments support the notion that the downward push of the National Curriculum is impacting upon the education of young children (Alexander, 2010; Hood, 2013). When asked if the pressure applied by the downward push affected her own practice, the EYFS teacher stated 'Yes. In the summer term especially. I am frantically trying prepare them for what's coming'. These sentiments correlate with the growing expectancy of Early Years providers to deliver children to Year 1 who are ready for learning (OECD, 2006, DfE, 2014).

The perception of early years teachers as preparing children for formal learning (Bingham & Whitebread, 2012; Howe, 2016) has marginalised play (Soler & Miller, 2003) and caused pedagogical tension within EYFS classrooms (Dockett & Perry, 2012; Roberts-Holmes, 2012). Additionally, in line with previous research (DfE, 2015; Fisher, 2011), the EYFS teacher affirmed that upon their transition to Year 1 'some (pupils) are still working on their early learning goals that they haven't achieved yet'. The early learning goals are a set of learning domains which outline the level of progress that young children are expected to attain prior to moving into Year 1 (DfE, 2014, p. 10). Despite some Early Years practitioners strongly resisting the downward push of the National Curriculum

(Dockett and Perry, 2012), the increasing pressure on the EYFS to formalise their practice further accentuates the lack of bridging between the EYFS and Year 1 (Huser et al., 2015; Miller, Soler, Foote & Smith, 2002; Pugh, 2010). Therefore, the data suggests that in accordance with Dockett and Perry (2014) the transition to Year 1 is a one-way activity. This puts practitioners in a precarious position as premature exposure to formal learning is damaging to children's academic, social and emotional development (Margetts, 2007).

Conclusion

This study has contributed to the comprehensive literature base that is concerned with children's learning experiences upon their transition from the EYFS to Year 1. Overall findings from this study suggest that there are difficulties in bridging pedagogical discontinuity through sustaining play in Year 1. Furthermore, there is evidence which indicates that the stage at which pedagogical discontinuity is addressed is increasingly impacting EYFS provision in light of intensifying National Curriculum pressure. It should be acknowledged that the findings from this study are taken from a small sample size and therefore should not be generalised (Cohen et al., 2000). Moreover, it is likely that teachers' and pupils' perceptions of the transition to Year 1 are likely to change as the academic year goes on. Although it was beyond the remit of this study, the findings would be enhanced through observations of before, during and after the transition as in some cases what teachers say is not commensurate with their practice (Bennett et al., 1997).

The widely documented pedagogical discontinuity that pupils experience upon their transition from the EYFS to Year 1 can be identified within the findings of the study. The data appears to support other studies that there is an absence of practitioners bridging between these two phases of education. This perspective is supported by the evidence which elicits that the EYFS feel obliged to adapt their practice to implement more formalised learning to avoid children experiencing an abrupt transition. These findings align with the concerning perception of the EYFS as solely a preparation for formal learning (Bingham & Whitebread, 2012; Howe, 2016).

It was evident throughout this study that both teachers and pupils recognised the value of play and would welcome more opportunities to extend play into Year 1. However, the extension of play beyond the EYFS appears to contradict the National Curriculum's prescribed programmes of study. Consequentially, the role of play in the Year 1 classroom, although highly valued, was largely consigned to a recreational status. This study therefore, further highlights the impact that curriculum content can have on pedagogy (Carr et al., 2005; Fisher, 2009). It could be argued however, that teachers' experience and confidence in moving away from National Curriculum guidelines has the potential to influence teachers' perceptions of facilitating play in Year 1.

Further research into the extent in which play can be sustained beyond the EYFS should seek to ascertain the perspectives of a wider range of teachers and pupils. Particular emphasis should be placed on researching the

relationship between a reduction in play and children's enjoyment of learning. Further to this, it would be beneficial to expand on the dearth of research into the implications of incentivising play.

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Teacher talk or teaching talk? Teacher perspectives on effective strategies for the teaching of speaking and listening in primary classrooms

Sarah McBroom

Abstract

Within classroom talk, opportunities that promote and develop speaking and listening skills are widely considered an essential part of pedagogic practice. Despite National Curriculum guidelines specifying that spoken language development is an 'integral aspect of every subject', speaking and listening programmes of study dedicated to the development of such skills have been withdrawn. This article considers what strategies are promoted by primary school teachers which enable effective speaking and listening to be developed in pupils. Eleven semi-structured questionnaires were distributed to three schools in the north-east of England, and semi-structured interviews were conducted with two primary teachers. Findings indicate that teachers organise classrooms in a variety of ways to promote effective talk opportunities. However, it is indicated that language development is not cross curricular and that English is perceived to be the subject most suitable to accommodate such pursuits. National Curriculum expectations in assessment and documenting learning were deemed as the main barrier for teachers utilising talk in the classroom. Future research should be undertaken to observe classroom practice and establish how these barriers are best overcome so that truly beneficial classroom talk can be established.

Introduction

Revisions to the National Curriculum in 2013 saw speaking and listening downgraded with the specific programme of study taken out (Department for Education 2013). It is argued that effective strategies are not initiated within schools to promote effective talk to aid productive thinking and learning (Alexander, 2008; Mercer, 2015).

Sociocultural views of learning put the role of language and social interactions at the heart of meaningful learning and construction of understanding (Alexander, 2008; Mercer & Littleton, 2007; Vygotsky, 1962). The Vygotskian view of language – both talking and listening – is central for building and sharing knowledge, and for interpretation of experiences, together with the development of understanding through a scaffolding framework by a more knowledgeable person (MacBlain, 2014; Mercer, Wegerif & Dawes, 1999; Pound, 2005). It is suggested that 'intermental' (collective) activity and 'intramental' (individual) development are implicitly linked (Vygotsky, 1962).

The focus of this research is on educational talk, defined as 'the use of spoken language for teaching and learning in the curriculum' (Mercer & Dawes, 2008, p.56) between both teachers and pupils and pupil-pupil interactions. An abundance of research has been undertaken in recent years regarding the importance of organising and developing effective 'talk' in the classroom (Coultas, 2012; Fisher & Larkin, 2010; Mercer, 2015). This research offers the view that the guidance and importance teachers put on language in the classroom directly affects its

successful use by pupils to formulate knowledge (Mercer, Wegerif & Dawes, 1999; Westgate & Hughes, 2016). Despite this, it is thought that speaking and listening has less educational priority compared to reading, writing and mathematics (Alexander, 2008; Ofsted, 2012; Mercer & Dawes, 2014).

The National Curriculum guidelines for spoken English require pupils to be taught a range of language skills including questioning, evaluation and negotiation (DfE, 2013). These enable pupils to check understanding as well as to build upon knowledge (DfE, 2013). This research aims to examine teachers' perspectives on effective strategies when organising speaking and listening in their classrooms, and to evaluate the barriers they experience when doing so. Specifically, it explores the views of primary teachers within three schools in the North East of England. Findings are taken using a mixed method approach of analysis of answers from semi-structured questionnaires ($n=11$) and interviews ($n= 2$). However, the small sample size may mean that the results do not reliably represent the general view of primary school teachers but may help to give an indicative picture.

Literature review

National Curriculum expectations for key stages one to four specify exacting standards and command of vocabulary using 'standard English' as the main priority when teaching vocabulary and language development (DFE, 2013). This emphasis focuses teachers' attentions on the mastery of speech and vocabulary rather than on the development of communication and language skills as an instrument for constructing knowledge through, for example, reasoning or enquiry (Grainger, 2000). Many researchers question why 'speaking and listening' no longer features in the current programmes of study (Alexander, 2013; Mercer, 2015), due to the plethora of research which advocates the use of collaborative language to develop understanding (Alexander, 2008; Barnes, 2008; Mercer & Littleton, 2007) and to promote vocabulary development and reasoning (Westgate & Hughes, 2016).

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), place the utmost importance on communication and collaboration in the development of twenty-first century skills and state that school curricula should be shaped to facilitate their development (OECD, 2013). Moreover, The Sutton Trust place collaborative learning and oral language interventions within their top ten resources which schools can utilise to raise attainment of their pupils (Higgins, Katsipataki, Kokotsaki, Coleman, Major & Coe, 2014). Both interventions are low-cost, but come with a warning that these must be implemented with skilled support, planning and delivery from the teacher (Higgins et al., 2014).

Research suggests that the quality of interactions in the classroom is often unsatisfactory (Fisher & Larkin, 2008; Mercer & Dawes, 2014; Mercer & Littleton, 2007). One pattern of discourse commonly utilised is the Initiation, Response, Feedback (IRF) exchange (Coultas, 2012; Fisher & Larkin, 2008; Mercer & Dawes, 2008). It is argued

that this creates imbalance as the teacher dominates the ‘talk’ time and selects which pupils should talk. In such scenarios, closed questioning is dominant, responses are short and pupils are unable to explore and further develop ideas (Coultas, 2012; Fisher & Larkin, 2008; Myhill, Jones & Hopper, 2006). Alexander (2008) further argues that in English primary classrooms, talk is too often limited and displays ‘unequal communicative rights’ (p.14) in favour of the teacher. Lessons utilise rote, recitation or instruction teaching techniques rather than allowing opportunities and techniques which develop and explore, such as transactional, expository, interrogatory, exploratory, expressive and evaluative talk. In comparison, in other countries – for example France and Russia – pupils are more likely to make extended oral contributions, and speaking and listening have much higher status than they do in English classrooms (Alexander, 2000).

Studies have demonstrated the positive impact that result from specific teaching strategies which encourage and develop children’s use of language (Mercer, Wegerif & Dawes, 1999; Norman, 1992; Rojas-Drummond & Mercer, 2004). Mercer (1995) identified three ways of talking and thinking that may be applied: disputational talk, in which pupils disagree but do not discuss and come to their own decision; cumulative talk, where pupils build on others’ points without criticism or disagreement; and exploratory talk, in which pupils collaborate to share and consider their own and others’ ideas. Interventions which target development of exploratory talk in the classroom indicate improvements in pupils reasoning and problem solving skills, in collaborative work and in individual achievement (Mercer, Wegerif & Dawes, 1999; Westgate & Hughes, 2016). It is proposed that exploratory talk allows pupils to organise their thoughts and develop their understanding to create new meanings collaboratively (Barnes, 1976, 2008; Mercer & Littleton, 2007). It also allows teachers to assess clearly the level of pupils understanding (Westgate & Hughes, 2014).

However, findings from ORACLE, a large-scale research project concluded that group work was often not productive (Mercer & Littleton, 2007). Although this research was carried out in the 1970s and so could lack relevance within schools today, more recent studies have corroborated these findings (Blatchford, Kutnick, Baines & Galton, 2003; Alexander, 2008). Mercer and Dawes (2008) propose that simply expecting that pupils will be productive within group tasks will not guarantee that they are. There needs to be a ‘common underlying approach’ (p.57) in which pupils are taught the ground rules for effective classroom talk.

Robin Alexander (2008) also advocates the use of ‘guiding principles’ (p.27) for managing talk in the classroom. His ‘dialogic’ method of teaching states that these rules must apply equally to both pupil and teacher. The approach aligns with the ‘Thinking Together’ approach of Mercer and colleagues (Mercer and Littleton, 2007) in which collectively agreed ground rules are used to facilitate both speaking and listening in the classroom. These ground rules can be brought together in five principles: collective, where learning happens together; reciprocal, in which both teachers and pupils are respectful, listen, share and consider viewpoints; supportive, in which pupils help each other in developing understanding and are able and willing to share ideas without fear of humiliation; cumulative, whereby teachers and pupils build on ideas; and purposeful, whereby achievable

educational outcomes are set (Alexander, 2008). In order to achieve these ground rules, teachers need to be committed to and skilled in modelling these principles across the curriculum (Fisher & Larkin, 2008; Westgate & Hughes, 2016). However, ground rules do not necessarily avoid the problem of interpersonal conflict already going on within the group, nor do they avoid alienating pupils whose communication style is at odds with them (Lefstein, 2010).

Other issues that have been identified by teachers when instigating effective classroom talk have been practical problems such as managing attention, groupings, engagement and assessment in learning. Teachers' confidence in utilising talk as a pedagogic tool has been highlighted as a barrier, together with how well collaborative work conforms to the ethos of the school, and the difficulty of developing new pedagogic styles (Coultras, 2012). Lefstein (2010) believes that the application of new ideological theories to classrooms is unrealistic and instead teachers should adapt to the already existing structures. Although Lefstein offers no practical insight, he further suggests that dialogic teaching is impeded by large class sizes, current curriculum content and objectives, and roles and responsibilities prescribed for teachers (Lefstein, 2010).

There appears to be much research focussing on how the use of productive talk in the classroom can be implemented to promote improved outcomes for students (Littleton et al., 2005; Mercer, Wegerif & Dawes, 1999; Westgate & Hughes, 2016). This research typically utilises classroom observations as a tool for data collection. This method allows for first-hand experience of what happens in the classroom but oversimplifies and rejects the perceptions of those involved (Denscombe, 2010). However, researcher bias and an observer effect may impede the validity of observations and behaviour may differ from the norm (Denscombe, 2010; Sharp, 2009). This review indicates a gap in the literature regarding teachers' perceptions of effective strategies for speaking and listening in the classroom. Other researchers have highlighted this, indicating that 'relatively little work has been undertaken to investigate effective teacher strategies for promoting group work' (Littleton et al., 2005, p.180). Fisher and Larkin (2008) propose that a teacher's approach is affected by how they view talk in the classroom and their role in it and Coultras (2012) agrees. As teachers plan, arrange and promote what talk happens in the classroom and how, it is important to take their views into account. The current study aims to partially replicate both these studies, utilising interviews regarding identified dilemmas (Coultras, 2012) and also expectations (Fisher and Larkin, 2008) of talk in the classroom. The aim of this research is to allow teachers to share insights into what they believe are effective strategies for the promotion of speaking and listening in the classroom and the barriers they encounter which hinder this.

Methodology

To evaluate teachers' perspectives regarding effective strategies when teaching speaking and listening in primary schools, teachers from three primary schools were asked to complete semi-structured questionnaires

($n=11$) and semi-structured interviews ($n=2$). The sampling technique selected was non-probability convenience or opportunity sampling (Denscombe, 2014; Sharp, 2009). This was chosen as the project was small in scale, with time limitations together for the researcher to access schools and teachers. This method could have implications regarding the representativeness of the findings and cannot be generalised beyond the bounds this research project (Mercer, 2010; Sharp, 2009). In an attempt to overcome this limitation, teachers from three primary schools were invited to take part, comprising two small rural schools and one larger town school.

To gather both qualitative and quantitative data, and examine the findings, a multi method approach of 'triangulation' was used (Bell, 2010). This allowed for the reliability to be assessed and provide in-depth analysis of teachers' perceptions (Denscombe, 2014; Gillham, 2000). The methods selected were a self-completed semi structured questionnaire and a one-to-one semi-structured interview. Quantitative data was gathered in numerical form, allowing patterns and relationships to be assessed. Within the questionnaires and interviews, this is in closed question format (Denscombe, 2014). Qualitative data, in the form of open questions generates fuller descriptions than closed questions, and allows for the development of view-points (Denscombe, 2014). These two methods were chosen as previous research had successfully utilised these methods (Fisher & Larkin, 2010; Coultas, 2012).

To ensure that the research was ethically sound, the project was designed and implemented in line with guidance from The British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2011) and Bishop Grosseteste University (BGU) (2014). All participants took part in the study voluntarily. Informed consent was signed prior to filling out questionnaires or participating in interviews. The participant was informed of their right to withdraw at any time, and that their personal details remained confidential and would be anonymised so that no individuals or schools would be identifiable. Participants were informed that their responses would be stored and disposed of appropriately, in line with the Data Protection Act. The nature of the research being undertaken was explained to participants, and that there would not be incentive for participation, and no likely risk of harm. No other ethical issues needed to be considered as the methods for data collection were only teacher perspectives and no class/pupil observations took place.

Questionnaires were chosen due to their ease of production, distribution and time taken to complete for the participating teacher (Gillham, 2000). Care was taken to ensure that the questions and layout were clear and that terminology was appropriate and understandable (Bell, 2010; Gillham, 2000), for example 'speaking and listening' and 'talk'. Consideration was made to the length of the questionnaire to prevent participant 'fatigue' effect when completing (Denscombe, 2014). A pilot version was distributed to a small sample of teachers prior to the definitive version of the questionnaire being distributed and appropriate changes made (Bell, 2010). In an attempt to increase engagement together with gaining in-depth insight the semi-structured questionnaires included 'open' questions for extended opinions together with 'closed' list options questions (Cohen, Manion &

Morrison, 2011). The question content was analysed for themes then coded and categorised (Denscombe, 2014; Sharp, 2009).

Self-completed questionnaires as a method mean that the researcher cannot check the honesty of the answers, delve deeper into issues raised, or ensure an acceptable response rate (Gillham, 2000; Denscombe, 2014). In an attempt to overcome these issues, the researcher personally asked each participant if they were willing to agree to complete the questionnaires (Hinds, 2000). Eleven out of twenty (55%) questionnaires were completed and returned.

Interviews are a useful method of data collection for researchers as they allow control but still give room for spontaneity and personal view points to be expressed (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Due to restraints regarding availability of teachers' free time, one-to-one interviews were chosen for ease in organisation. Participants were chosen again by non-probability convenience sampling (Denscombe, 2014; Sharpe, 2009). These were conducted in a semi-structured manner for flexibility and the development of ideas and opinions (Denscombe, 2014). The sample size was small ($n=2$) because interviews are time consuming in both development and analysis (Bell, 2010; Gillham, 2005; Mercer, 2010). Informed consent was sought to ensure that research was ethically sound (BERA, 2011; BGU, 2014). In addition, interviewees were asked if they would like a copy of the interview transcript to ensure openness (Gillham, 2005).

Questions were generated after a literature review in order to identify important topics and themes. These were then shown to a BGU supervisor, who is experienced in interviewing for suggestions and advice before amending for 'live' interview (Gillham, 2005). The interview was audiotaped to ensure that the researcher's full attention was with the interviewees, as well as maintaining eye contact, which would be difficult if taking written notes. This should also reduce the problem of interview bias as they provide a full and accurate account of the interview (Hinds, 2000). Content was then transcribed, examined and themes and issues recorded (Denscombe, 2014; Hinds, 2000). One problem with audio recordings are that they do not record any non-verbal cues displayed by interviewees (Denscombe, 2014). If the research was replicated, field notes would also be taken in order to complement the audio recording.

Presentation and analysis of findings

Data gathered from interview and questionnaires have been analysed and arranged into themes.

How speaking and listening is organised in the classroom

In order to assess how speaking and listening is currently organised by teachers in classrooms, participants were asked about the approaches that they currently use. Questionnaire participants ($n=11$) could choose from a list

of options and could provide more than one response. The results, shown in Figure 1, indicate that teachers adopt a variety of approaches when organising speaking and listening.

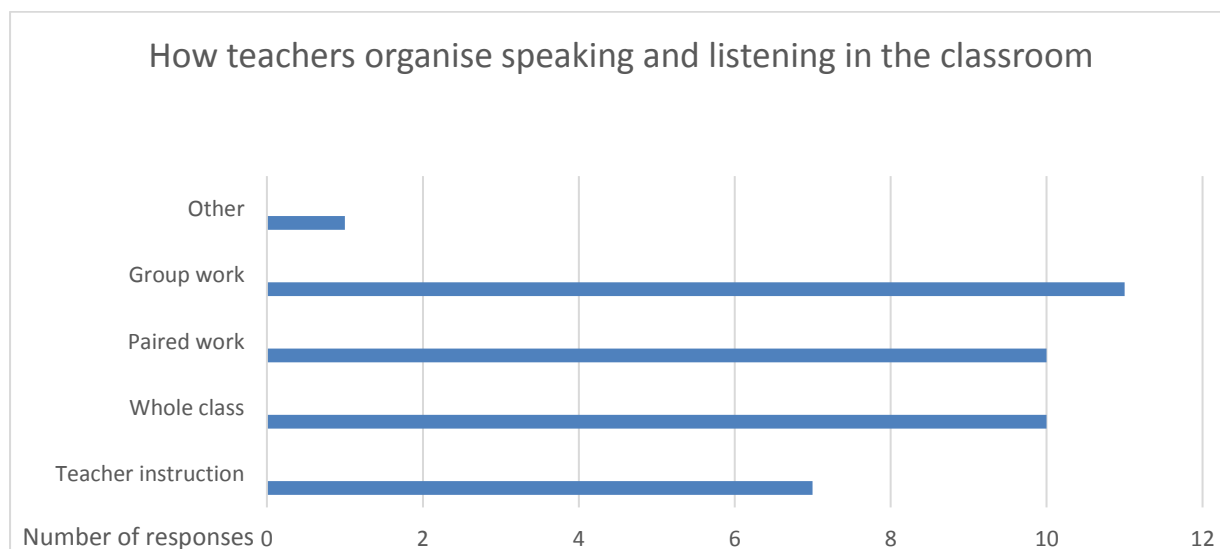


Figure 1: How teachers organise speaking and listening in the classroom

Of the eleven respondents, 64% ($n=7$) indicated that they use all methods listed, 91% ($n=10$) implemented whole class, paired and group work, and all participants stated they utilise group work to facilitate talk (Figure 1). Interview findings imply that teachers adopt different techniques 'depending on the subject and activity' (Teacher A, 2016) and aim to 'give a balanced amount of talk opportunities in order to develop their [pupils' speaking and listening] skills' (Teacher B, 2016). Many researchers suggest that talk opportunities in the classroom are inadequate or underused (Alexander, 2004; Blatchford, Kutnick, Baines & Galton, 2003; Littleton & Mercer, 2007). A limitation of this research is the validity of teachers' perceptions: is what they say really what happens in practice? It is suggested that effective practice incorporates a learning environment which is social, supportive and communicative. Skilful questioning techniques are implemented, in which pupils are encouraged to reason and reflect. Furthermore, importance is not just placed on 'subject content' but pupils are able to make sense of learning through problem solving (Littleton & Mercer, 2007). This can happen through a variety of strategies and findings of this study support the view that organising talk which meets the different learning and behavioural needs in a classroom whilst fulfilling National Curriculum requirements is complex (Myhill, Jones & Cooper, 2006).

When asked which method they found most effective, four stated that they were all important. However, six answered 'small group work' despite this not being an option and one 'paired work'. Reasons given centred around the notion that smaller groups would improve confidence to talk and allow greater teacher control to ensure that pupils remain 'on task'. Teacher B (2016) agreed, and believed small group or paired work to be most effective although due to the age range of her class (key stage 1). She found that they needed 'teacher direction to ensure all are involved and remain on task'. Interestingly, Teacher A (2016) indicated that she

thought teacher instruction was the most effective strategy as it allowed her to ‘remain in control of the children’s learning’. Barnes (2008) agrees and suggests that although group discussion is a valuable resource for teachers, it should not be a ‘laissez-faire option’ but should be ‘embedded in an extended sequence of work that includes other patterns of communication’ (p. 7).

Participants were asked which subjects they thought lent themselves best to utilising speaking and listening in the classroom. This was posed as an open question and more than one answer could be given. As Figure 2 shows, English ($n=9$) is considered the most appropriate subject in the promotion of speaking and listening skills. This was corroborated in interview, and Teacher A (2016) stated that she believed guided reading and reasoning activities in English assisted in the development of ‘confidence to offer ideas and reshape them in light of other children’s contributions’. Furthermore, these activities were expected to expand ‘specialist vocabulary, develop arguments and justifications through talk opportunities’. However, National Curriculum guidelines state that development of the spoken language should be embedded across all subjects (DfE, 2013). Research supports this view and has shown the value of talk in encouraging meaningful learning in relation to other curriculum subjects such as Science (Scott, 2008) and Maths (Solomon & Black, 2008). Although Maths was recognised as a suitable topic by five participants, the findings (Figure 2) imply that promotion of speaking and listening skills are most strongly associated by teachers to be synonymous with English programme of study.

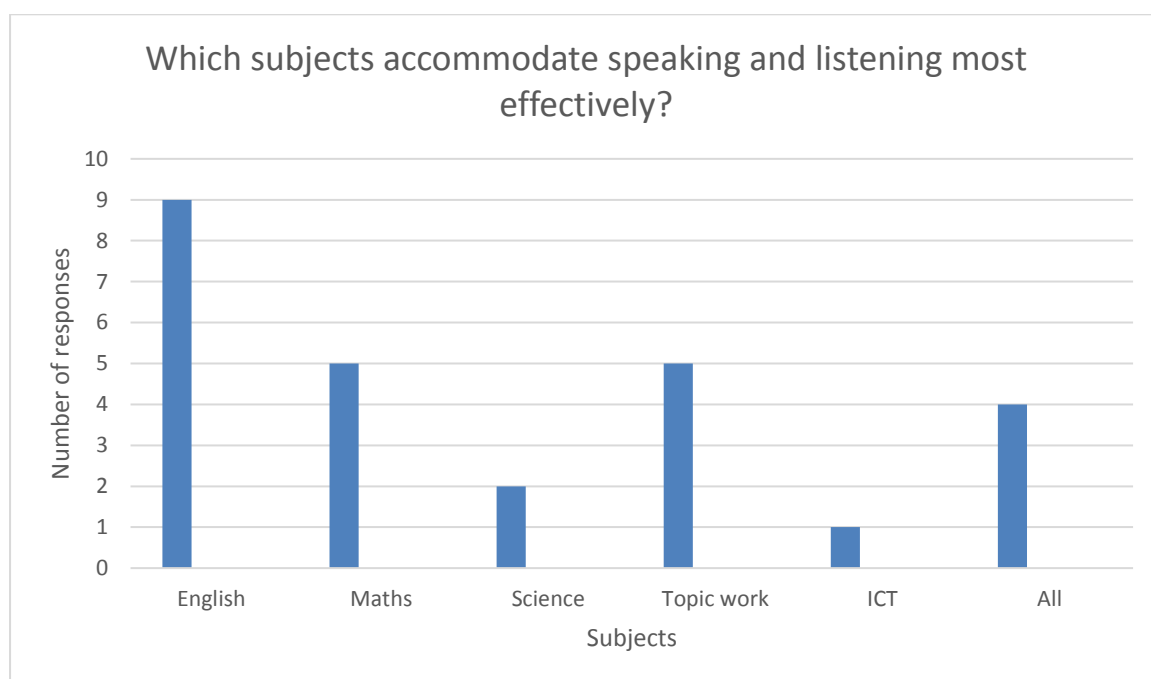


Figure 2: Teacher perspectives of the subjects that accommodate speaking and listening most effectively

When asked how Teacher A ensured that all pupils fully engaged in activities, she stated that ‘we use strategies to prevent unequal participation and free riders such as rally robin or timed pair share’, which she believed promoted team building, respectful interaction and the ability to value others’ opinions. Webb (2009) supports

this notion that pupils do not always need to participate actively and concurs that strategies need to be put in place to address this. Intelligence is not one dimensional (MacBlain, 2014), and the acknowledgement of this, and of the importance of different skills to complete tasks, is thought to increase motivation and ensure more equal participation of every pupil (Webb, 2009).

When asked about their questioning techniques 73% (n=8) said that they use more open than closed questioning techniques (Figure 3). Although many participants did not elaborate on why, those who did believed that open questions develop independent thinking (n=1), deepen understanding (n=4) and develop reasoning (n=1). However, investigations into teachers' pedagogic practice in questioning techniques disagree with these findings and indicate that a much higher proportion of closed or managerial questions are used by teachers (Hardman, 2008; Mercer, 1995; Wood, 1992; Wragg & Brown, 2001). The discrepancy could reduce the validity of the present research findings (Denscombe, 2014) and the answers given may not accurately reflect what happens in practice. Interestingly only one (n=1) teacher used open questions to 'encourage children to say what they think rather than just provide the correct answer'. This approach allows teachers to gauge pupils understanding and assess gaps or misconceptions in their knowledge and address particular needs (Myhill, Jones & Hopper, 2006).

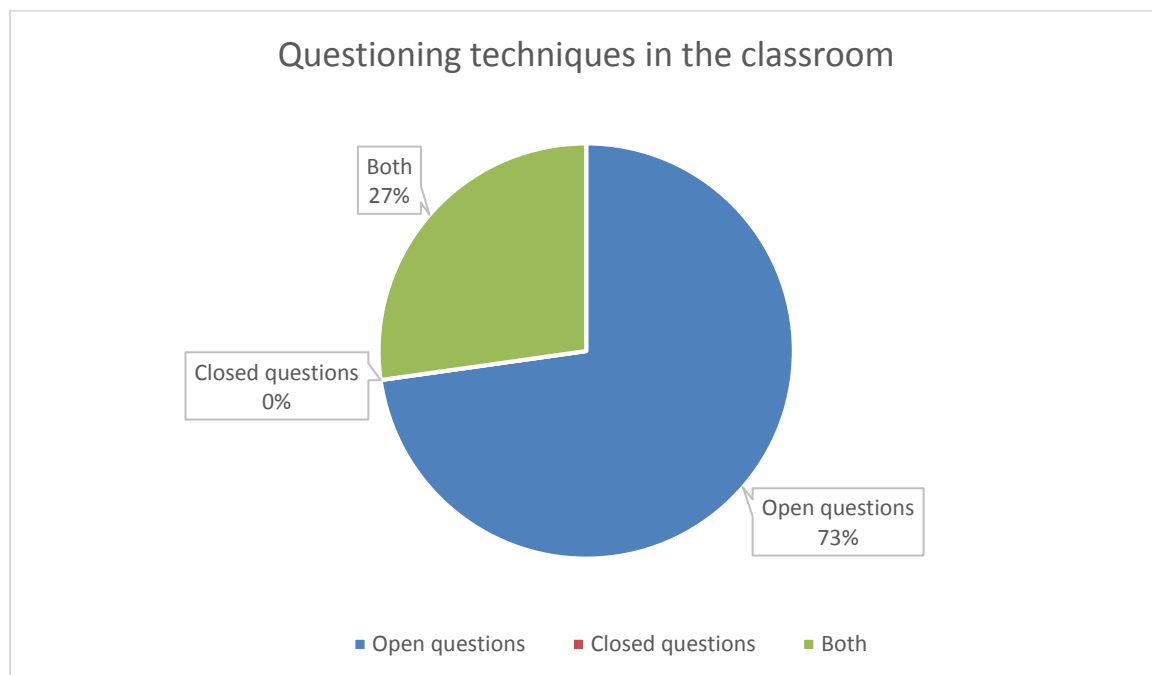


Figure 3: Questioning techniques that are utilised in the classroom most often

Interviews revealed that both styles were used in the classroom depending on the lesson objectives and children in the class. Teacher B concluded that 'you differentiate questions based on the individual children in the class and try to target questions appropriately' and further expanded that closed questions allowed her to 'keep control of the pace of the lesson'. Teacher A stated that she used closed questions in quick question-and-answer sessions, usually at the beginning and end of the lessons. However, in order to 'develop children's higher order

thinking skills I use this [points to a poster on the wall of Bloom's Taxonomy] and try to progress through each level to give my children the opportunity to evaluate and analyse concepts'. This discord regarding which technique is most beneficial regarding pupil achievement has also been noted by Wragg & Brown (2001) when reviewing literature. They agree with findings from Teacher A and conclude that open questions extend thinking, but that closed questions are useful for recall of facts. However, not revealed in this research is the use of IRF exchanges which is dominant in classrooms, according to literature (Coultras, 2012; Fisher & Larkin, 2008; Hardman, 2008; Mercer & Dawes, 2008). One explanation could be that many teachers are not aware of such technique, when they are using them or how to use them as a tool to enhance effective talk. Potentially, explicit guidance on the implementation of such exchanges could improve classroom practices (Mercer & Dawes, 2008).

Is collaborative work more productive than individual work?

All questionnaire participants believed that that collaborative work was an important aspect of pedagogic practice, but 73% (n=8) thought that both individual and collaborative work should be used. Reasoning centred around the ideas that the approach depended upon the lesson content and aims (Figure 4).

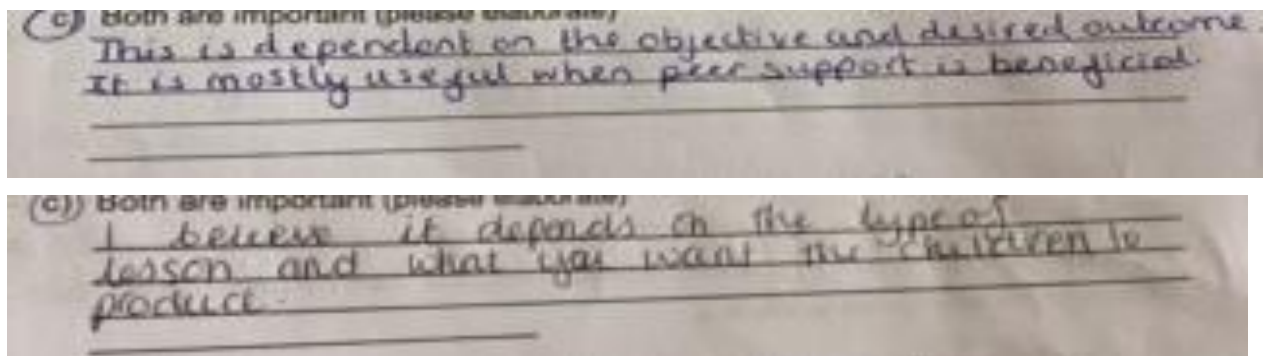


Figure 4: Teacher perceptions of collaborative work in the classroom

Findings therefore align with the view that combining collaborative work and their responsibility to teach a defined curriculum is a professional dilemma (Coultras, 2012; Mercer & Littleton, 2007).

The suggested advantages for collaborative work were peer support and sharing of ideas. Individualised learning allowed for assessment of understanding and development of the ability to work independently. Both interviewed teachers concur with this view:

Teacher A: 'I think that collaborative learning and group activities help my children to develop higher level thinking skills, develop social skills but also creates an environment of active, involved and exploratory learning. Individual learning is also important for productivity and a more scaffold approach [to learning] transfers responsibility from me to the children'.

The teachers' views seem to resonate with those of Watkins and colleagues who identify that different models of learning occur in the classroom. They propose three concepts of learning, firstly, learning is being taught by

the teacher. Secondly, learning is constructing and building on individual knowledge. Thirdly, learners collaboratively creating and extending knowledge (Watkins, Carnell & Lodge, 2007).

Further inquiry into the importance of exploratory talk found:

Teacher A: 'I think that it is really important for children to be able to discuss openly and engage fully so that they can come to an agreement. I suppose when sharing ideas children can challenge each other which can lead them to answers or ideas they might not have necessarily considered on their own'.

This view of social cooperative learning and extending understanding through interactions with 'more knowledgeable others' and re-evaluating their own understanding is one which aligns with social constructivist theorists (Barnes, 1976; Vygotsky, 1962). All questionnaire participants believed that exploratory talk was an important aspect in the construction of knowledge. Despite this, there are concerns that although teachers understand the importance of exploratory talk, they are likely to revert to traditional ways of organising discussion in the classroom due to the pressure to cover a prescribed curriculum. Furthermore, pupils develop an understanding of the correct response as opposed to offering alternatives or questioning (Fisher & Larkin, 2010; Wells & Ball, 2008).

Teacher views on the skills children gain from speaking and listening

This question again was posed as an open question and could offer more than one opinion.

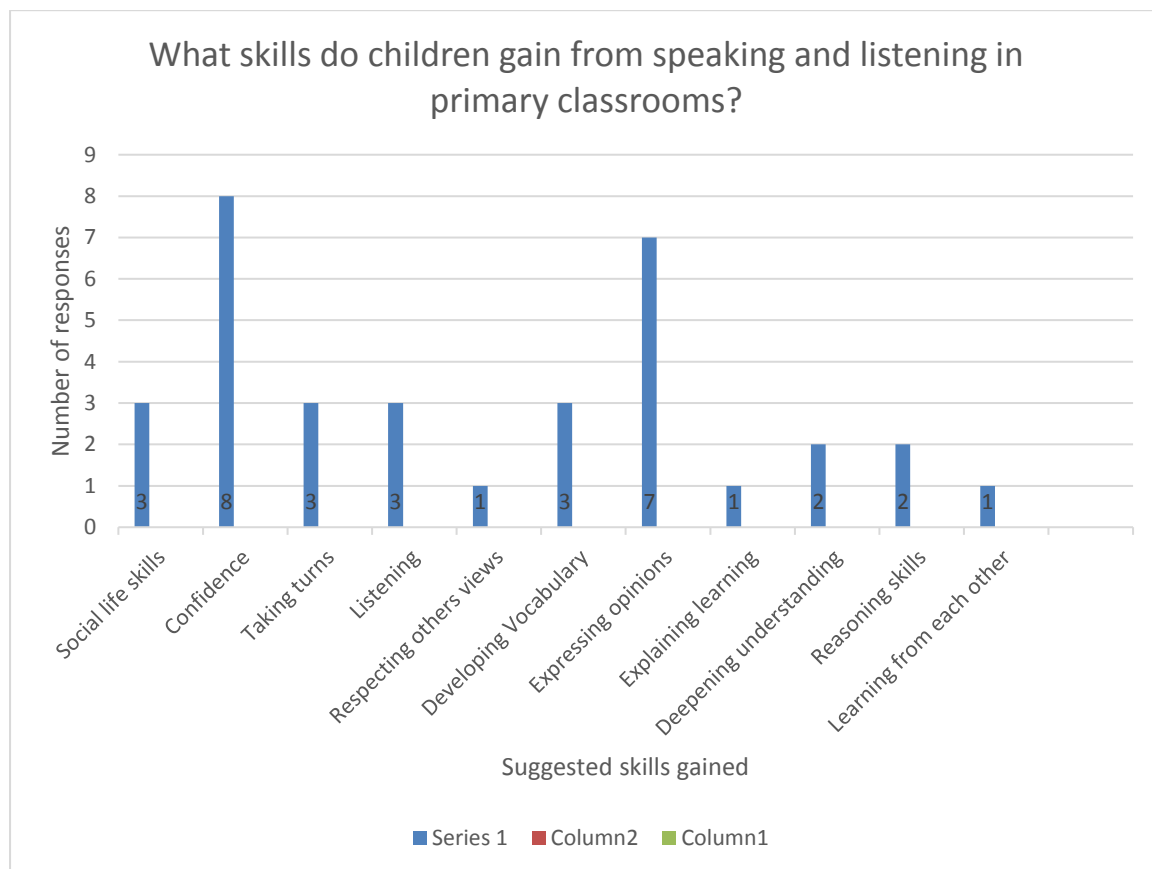


Figure 5: Teacher views on the skills children gain from speaking and listening

Clearly, teachers see the role of speaking and listening to promote confidence and allows pupils the opportunity to express their views (Figure 5). All teachers listed at least one of these in the questionnaire findings. Confidence was also mentioned as an important aspect of children’s talk by all teachers in Fisher & Larkin’s study (Fisher & Larkin, 2010). Teacher B’s comments summed up most of the questionnaire findings:

‘I think the most important skill that my pupils learn is to respond appropriately to others. I want them to value others’ opinions and learn from them. I hope that they think about what has been said and the language used, either by me or other children. I try to offer opportunities, obviously within the restraints of the curriculum, to speak in a range of contexts such as drama, show and tell, things like that so that they become confident talking in lots of situations’.

It is worth noting that both within the questionnaire and interview, only one teacher highlighted that talking offered opportunities for pupils to explain learning, and none regarded speaking and listening as a technique they used in assessment of learning. This could be explained in how learning is assessed and the importance of written word and documented evidence of learning (Alexander, 2008). However, it is argued that pupil talk allows teachers to assess the limits of their understanding more clearly (Westgate & Hughes, 2016).

Clearly, findings indicate that teachers believe a variety of skills are developed through speaking and listening opportunities. This implies consensus with Alexander (2008) who argues that talk is ‘the true foundation of learning’ (p.9).

Are ground rules promoted in the classroom?

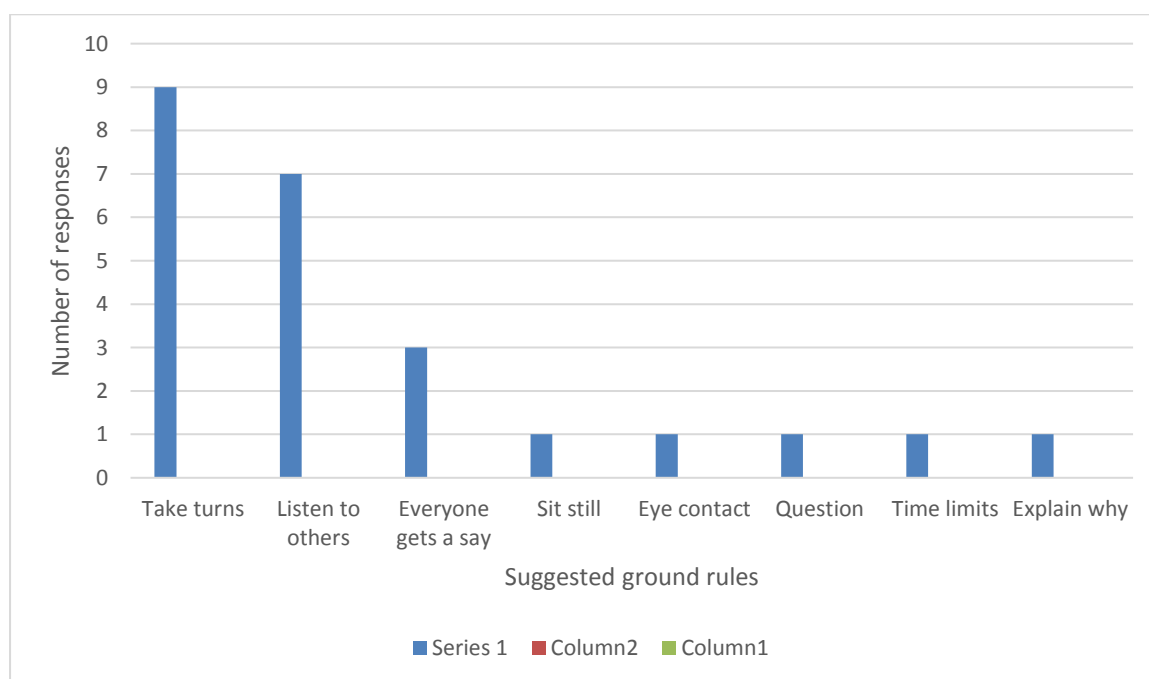


Figure 6: What ground rules are promoted in the classroom

Figure 6 shows that taking turns and listening to others were the primary ground rules in the classroom. Teacher A agreed with the findings and noted that:

'Children have to well trained to take part in talk activities [effectively]. I think that it needs to be part of their daily routine so that they [ground rules] become fully embedded. To be honest the rules are basic, just listening to each other, take turns and accept what other people have to say'.

These non-linguistic concerns regarding expectations of talk in the classroom were also reported by Fisher and Larkin (2008). In their study, (Fisher and Larkin, 2008) they concluded that pupils learn to perform to the teacher's expectations of classroom discourse. However, they also note that there is an 'unequal distribution of power' (p.15) and recommended that teachers should evaluate the effectiveness of the rules of participation. The rules should become part of the common knowledge of the classroom (Mercer & Dawes, 2008).

Within this study, ground rules for talk appear to be widely promoted by teachers. This resonates with Alexander's Dialogic approach to teaching and learning (Alexander, 2008).

What problems/barriers do teachers experience when using classroom talk?

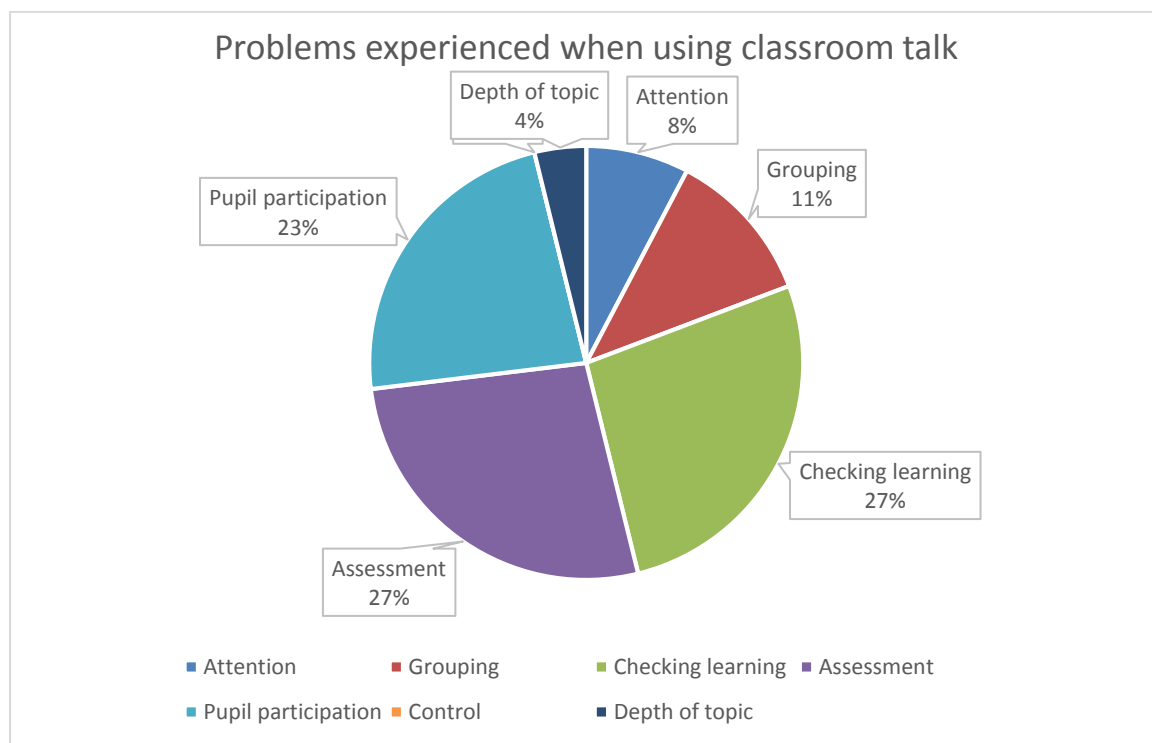


Figure 7: Problems experienced when using classroom talk

It can be seen in Figure 7 that the most common problems highlighted by teachers are those of pupil participation, assessment of learning, and checking learning. These practical problems concur with Coultas' (2012) findings when investigating teacher identified dilemmas. These difficulties were re-emphasised in this study, when teachers were asked what barriers would affect the decision to use talk opportunities in lessons. However, other points emerged, with time restraints being the most common response ($n=9$), closely followed by managing dominant/shy children appropriately ($n=8$). Also highlighted were pupils with specific speech and

language difficulties, English as a second language (EAL) or hearing difficulties ($n=6$), which affected how teachers approach or utilise talk in the classroom. There seems to be very little literature regarding whether these barriers do impact on the talk opportunities in the classroom. Littleton et al. (2005) indicated that an approach to teaching which encourages and teaches pupils to talk together effectively can promote inclusion. They found that EAL and SEN (Special Educational Need) children contributed more openly in discussions when ground rules were implemented (Littleton et al., 2005). Interestingly, teachers interviewed by Coultas (2012) did not mention such problems as being a barrier. Perhaps the sample had not experienced children with these particular problems and therefore not considered it. However, they did find that teacher confidence and school ethos effect how teachers plan for talk which this research did not uncover.

In contrast, some teachers felt there were no barriers in using talk ($n=3$). Teacher A felt that planning and an enthusiastic approach were key to avoiding any problems or barriers that may occur:

‘I really try to plan activities that are interesting and engage my children. I think that by putting energy, enthusiasm and creativity into talk based lessons goes some way to preventing behaviour issues occurring. I also consider in my planning any children with SEN or language difficulties as if I’m not inclusive then this can lead to frustration, behaviour issues and also embarrassment’.

Conclusion and implications

Overall, findings indicate that teachers use a variety of learning opportunities when developing speaking and listening in the classroom. They judge the benefits of these against the practicalities of the task and learning objective to be achieved. Literature suggests that such strategies are not effective in practice (Alexander, 2004; Littleton & Mercer, 2007) but this study did not measure this, which may be a limitation. It was indicated that English was believed to be the most appropriate subject for pursuing the development of speaking and listening skills, despite National Curriculum guidelines suggesting it should be embedded through the whole of the curriculum (DfE, 2012).

It seems that teachers’ perceptions of their questioning techniques are at odds with previous research observations (Hardman, 2008; Mercer, 1995; Wood, 1992) in which closed/managerial questions are dominant. It could be concluded that these teachers know the benefits of open questioning and so have given an idealistic view rather than an accurate account of what happens in practice. Only observations of classroom practice would confirm this, which this research did not include.

Findings clearly suggest that teachers value the role of talk in the classroom to develop pupils’ skills in a variety of ways, both socially and cognitively. They appear to implement a dialogic approach (Alexander, 2008) instilling ground rules for participation such as listening, taking turns and everyone’s opinions being valued. However, they do acknowledge that there are barriers which affect their practice, including equal pupil participation and assessment. Whether these impact upon the talk opportunities offered to pupils cannot be measured. It could

be interpreted that by recognising the problems they plan ways in which to overcome them. However, future research would need to be undertaken to explore this.

As this study is small in scale it is difficult to ascertain whether findings are a reliable representation of teachers' perceptions generally. Larger scale studies would need to be undertaken to add strength to the reliability of findings. Should this study be replicated, classroom observations should be incorporated as a method of data collection to assess if the views of teachers actually happen in practice.

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Making marks: the road to literacy?
**An exploratory study into the role of the practitioner and the strategies used
to support children's emergent writing in the early years**
Louise Tomlinson

Abstract

This study sets out to explore how the development of children's emergent writing skills are supported by practitioners in early years settings. Emergent writing skills can be demonstrated as mark making, drawing and early letter formation. Observations were conducted in the preschool setting, concentrating on the types of resources used, how they were integrated into daily use, and on the interactions between practitioners and children. Photographs of the children's drawings and early writing attempts were taken. Finally, six questionnaires were completed by practitioners in the setting, which provided information on their views of the purpose of emergent writing and on how they support it in the setting. The findings in this study demonstrate that children use their marks and drawings to support their thoughts and ideas and that they gradually learn that they can express themselves with pictures and/or words. The support of the practitioner scaffolds the children's development, through valuing the marks they make and using them to encourage communication. The study concludes that the richest resource available to emergent writers is a knowledgeable practitioner who supports and encourages development, whilst valuing every effort the child makes to communicate.

Introduction

Information from the Department for Education (2016) indicates that whilst 69.3% of children achieve a good level of development across all learning areas at the end of the Reception year, there is a large disparity between their global development and attainment in individual areas. The learning area of writing has the consistently lowest percentage of children achieving expected levels. For example, in 2016 just 72% achieved expected targets for writing, compared to 92% meeting targets in the learning area of technology (Department for Education, 2016). The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory guidance (Department for Education, 2017) outlines the early learning goals in writing for children at the end of the Reception year and focuses on the child's ability to write letters that are recognisable to others, including some words that are correctly spelt. Palmer (2012) argues that targets such as these may be unrealistic for many children of this age and suggests that focus in the early years should concentrate on developing and reinforcing children's emerging skills. Whilst it can be said that developing written skills is important as it can support a child's academic learning (Dennis & Votteler, 2013; Mackenzie, 2014), Whitehead (2010) advocates that the early stages of emergent writing, such as mark making and drawing, are just as important. Riley (2007) argues that children use their marks and drawings to communicate their thoughts before they are able to use written words. Therefore, this stage of development could be considered to be just as valuable as being able to write in the conventional sense.

This exploratory study will seek to understand how one setting supports and develops children's emerging writing skills. This will be achieved by exploring how early mark making skills are developed, what methods practitioners may use to encourage and support children and how children use their emergent writing skills within the setting.

Literature review

The ability to write coherently enables children to express their thoughts and ideas, to participate in academic learning at school and provides an additional method of communication. It is achieved through a journey of development from developing the necessary gross and fine motor skills to manipulate tools; to discovering that marks can be intentionally made with these tools, leading to meaning being assigned to the marks; and, finally, to developing recognisable letter shapes leading to successful writing literacy (Fisher, Myhill, Jones & Larkin, 2010; Glenn, Cousins & Helps, 2006; McGread, 2016). In order to develop these skills, encouragement, consideration and support must be given to the processes the child may pass through, and each process should be considered to be of equal importance. Dennis and Votteler (2013) discuss the need for pre-school practitioners to recognise and value the importance of children's emergent writing skills – that is the marks made to express meaning – as a critical phase of development in their journey to becoming writers. This view is also supported by Mayer (2007), who determines that supportive provision from knowledgeable practitioners encourages children to demonstrate their emergent writing skills and motivates them to experiment and explore different ways of expressing themselves. Not only do resources for mark making and emergent writing need to be made available within the early years setting but practitioners must also view themselves as a resource for enabling children to develop in this area.

Initially, the first phase of development leading to emergent writing is that of developing the motor skills needed to grasp and manipulate a range of tools that can be used to make marks. The Early Years Outcomes (Department for Education, 2013) suggest that between the stages of 22–36 months and 30–50 months, a child may progress from beginning to demonstrate some control in using tools, to having the ability to use scissors and to demonstrate a tripod grip when holding a pencil. Brock and Rankin (2008) and Palmer and Bayley (2010) discuss how encouraging children's fine motor skill development may be incorporated into activities throughout the setting, enabling children to develop these skills whilst experiencing other areas of learning. This could be achieved through offering activities and resources such as threading beads, play dough, sand play, small building bricks, jigsaw puzzles and using tools, such as scissors and tweezers (Sargent, 2016). A child's gross motor skills are also relevant to a child's writing development as balance and co-ordination are needed in order to move the arm across the paper when writing. Learning how to make shapes using large, whole-limb, movements also encourages a child's understanding when this knowledge is transferred into making similar movements on a smaller scale to form letters (Foundation Years, 2009). This may be achieved through encouraging children to engage with activities involving physical activity, such as climbing, moving to music and playing outdoors. These

areas of development are seen in the early learning goals within the Early Years Foundation Stage (Department for Education, 2017) and therefore early years practitioners would be expected to provide activities and resources that support children's learning and development in these areas.

In addition to providing activities that promote the development of gross and fine motor skills, the quality of provision of mark making activities must also be of high quality in order to encourage children to engage with the resources and experiment with ways to express themselves. Providing a range of materials, both inside the setting and in the outdoor environment, encourages children to practice their emergent writing skills alongside, and as a part of, their learning and play in all areas of the setting (Hall & Robinson, 2003). Gerde, Bingham and Wasik (2012) discuss the need for mark making and traditional writing materials to be accessible throughout the setting in order for children to capture their thoughts and experiences during their play. Smidt (1998) and Smith and Elley (1998) propose that initially children begin to make marks purely for the experience and enjoyment of discovering that they can manipulate materials to leave a permanent mark. Whilst children's emergent writing or mark making may initially look like randomly-made marks or 'scribbles', it then develops into recognisable shapes and letters (Glenn et al., 2006). Hall (2009) determines that by drawing shapes, a child can create a visual representation of their thoughts and to use that as a method of communicating their feelings.

The literature available on the beginnings of emergent writing skills through drawings – whether these are recognisable shapes or indeterminate 'scribbles' – reinforces the suggestion that a child may draw a picture to represent their interests, or as an expression of their thoughts as they begin to assign meaning to the marks they make (Cabell, Tortorelli & Gerde, 2013; Coates & Coates, 2016; Kissel, Hansen, Tower & Lawrence, 2011; Whitehead, 2010). Hall (2009) and Smidt (1998) determine that children use the process of drawing to enable them to make sense of the world around them, indicating that children's drawings are significant and must be viewed as important by the practitioners working in early years settings. Miller (1996) proposes that preschool-aged children are able to assign some marks as writing and some as drawing, indicating that children can give a purpose to the marks they make. However, Miller (1996) notes that both purposes were deemed to be of equal importance to the child. Cabell et al. (2013) suggest that the ability to distinguish between marks for writing and marks for drawing may indicate that a child is developing the ability to understand the function of the written word to convey meaning. This may then lead to the child seeking to develop the techniques necessary to form letters and further encourage their writing development.

An indicator of the meaning that the child assigns to the marks they are making may be the commentary that the child uses to accompany their activity (Hall, 2009). Coates and Coates (2016) argue that this accompanying speech enables practitioners to become involved with the work of the child and provides a window into the thought processes that the child is employing. The role of the knowledgeable practitioner is discussed by MacNaughton and Williams (2004), who determine that the children's learning can be supported through the practitioner modelling behaviours that promote literacy and writing development, alongside scaffolding the

children's learning to encourage progress. The work of Bruner, as cited in MacNaughton and Williams (2004), viewed the role of the knowledgeable adult as providing scaffolding for children's learning through offering guidance and support when approaching a new task or aspect of development that they are unable to complete without that support. Miller (1996) examines the use of scaffolding to support the development of children's emergent writing skills and determines that this is a vitally important factor in encouraging learning in this area. Smidt (1998) supports this view and emphasises how the quality of practitioners in early years settings enables effective scaffolding: specifically, practitioners who are knowledgeable about the stage of development that the child is at and who know how best to support that child are best placed to scaffold their development, leading to them becoming competent at that skill.

Whilst Cabell et al. (2013) acknowledge that the provision of mark making materials is commonplace in early years settings, they argue that many practitioners are unaware of the importance of supporting children's development as they progress from making early marks, to drawing pictures that communicate meaning, to the formation of recognisable letters. MacNaughton and Williams (2004) discuss the need for the knowledgeable practitioner to interact with the child as they begin to draw and write, using open questions and encouragement to enable the child to persevere with developing their skill and also to facilitate communication between the child and practitioner. Interaction when exploring mark making, drawing and writing activities can be encouraged through the provision of a designated area within the setting, in addition to the provision for mark making alongside other activities, such as within the role play area. Miller (1996) and Whitehead (2010) advocate the provision of designated areas for drawing and writing, such as a table with space for a group of children to sit together, with support provided by a practitioner also sitting with the group. Creating a social space in which children of different stages of emergent writing can sit together also facilitates scaffolding as more able children may assist less able children. Kissel et al. (2011) determine that social interaction with their peers, in terms of emergent writing, can assist children in discovering new techniques that further encourages their literacy development.

When the practitioner sits with children who are experimenting with their emergent writing skills, they are able to model letter formation and to act as a scribe for children who ask for words to be added to their drawings. Hutchin (2013) discusses the act of scribing for children as being a powerful tool for modelling, not only how to form letters but also how print is used in the English culture i.e. from left to right across the page and then from the top of the page down. According to Hutchin (2013), when children indicate that they are ready to begin learning how to form letters themselves, the word that is most important to them is their own name. Gerde et al. (2012) discuss that familiarity with the letters in their own name enables a child to begin to recognise them in print, in other words around the setting and in other social settings. Interacting with and recognising the function of print shows another developmental stage in a child moving towards successful literacy achievement. Hall, Simpson, Guo and Wang (2015) recognise the path of development from making marks, often determined

to be scribbles, through to drawing pictures that represent a child's thoughts and ideas and finally to recognising print and wanting to recreate that themselves.

It is important to encourage children's literacy development towards the ability to form letters and translate thought into words, in order for children to engage with their future academic learning and achieve their full potential. This can be seen in the EYFS (Department for Education, 2017) with specific goals for writing recognisable letters within the learning area of Literacy. However, Neumann and Neumann (2010) determine that within the early years it is of greater importance to motivate children to engage with making marks, drawing and creating meaning through their emergent writing skills. This study examines how one setting approaches this process. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following research questions in relation to this area of children's development: what is the role of the early years practitioner in supporting the development of children's emergent writing skills, in the context of a preschool setting; what strategies do early years practitioners use to develop, support and encourage children's emergent writing; and should emergent writing be viewed as a preliminary stage to writing or valued in its own right?

Methodology

When determining how to research a topic, it should be established whether the approach used by the researcher will be positivist or interpretivist. Clark, Flewitt, Hammersley and Robb (2014) and Roberts-Holmes (2014) discuss a positivist approach as being concerned with proving or disproving a hypothesis and dealing with quantifiable data. Conversely, Roberts-Holmes (2014) clarifies an interpretivist approach as being concerned with seeking and analysing understanding and meaning in a social construct. Mukherji and Albon (2015) determine that an interpretivist approach seeks to gain a deeper understanding of the views of participants and that the use of qualitative data facilitates this approach. This study seeks to understand the ways in which practitioners view their role in supporting children's emergent writing; how children assign meaning to their marks; and how they are encouraged to develop this skill. Therefore, an interpretivist approach will be used to gain insight into the different interpretations the participants may hold. As this study relates to children's early writing attempts and the strategies used by the setting to encourage children to develop this skill and give meaning to the marks they make, several different qualitative methods were used to gather data.

Completion of the University's Research Ethics Policy form (BGU, 2014) enabled the research questions and ethics of the proposed methods of study to be considered, planned accordingly and approved for action by university staff and the manager of the setting. As Thomas and Hodges (2010) advocate, research methods should be considered carefully for any ethical and moral implications that may affect the participants of the study. Mukherji and Albon (2015) and Robert-Holmes (2014) discusses the importance of seeking informed consent from all participants involved in the research and also from the parents of any children that may be involved. A letter outlining the purpose of the research and how it would be conducted was distributed to the

parents of all 48 children on roll at the setting to ensure that all parents would be aware of the research being conducted within the setting. A consent form was also distributed, of which 41 were returned with consent.

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework (Department for Education, 2017) recognises the importance of using observation to monitor children's development and progress and this is routinely used in early years settings. However, to maintain an ethical approach to this research, the consent of children to participate was also sought through asking their permission to photograph their work and respecting their decision. The right of children to withdraw from participating at any time should also be respected. Kay, Tisdall, Davis and Gallagher (2009) discuss the historical aspect of research with children, determining that children may previously have been the object of the research and not had their opinions valued or considered. The change in society's consideration of children and their right to be heard can be seen in article 12 of the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989, giving children the right to have a voice and be listened to (Roberts-Holmes, 2014).

The observations also raise the issue of the role of the researcher in conducting them. Kay et al. (2009) and Roberts-Holmes (2014) highlight the advantages of participant observation as it enables the researcher to interact with the child participating in the research, potentially providing richer data if the child is more comfortable with the researcher through being able to build a relationship with them. However, it must be noted that relationships take time to develop and some children may find participant observation intrusive and become unwilling to take part. As the study involved very young children, aged from two to four years, participant observations were deemed to be appropriate as children may be more likely to express the meanings they assign to the marks they make if they are comfortable with the researcher. This was achieved through engaging with the child and practitioner as the observations were conducted. From the 41 children that had parental consent, 14 observations were carried out with children of different ages and stages of development, of both sexes. From the 14 observations conducted with children, five were selected for use in this research as they clearly demonstrated the differing stages of emergent writing development.

In addition to observations, field notes and photographic data, questionnaires were distributed to all seven members of staff working at the setting. The purpose of the questionnaires was to ascertain how practitioners view the function and development of emergent writing skills and the ways in which they supported children in the setting. Consent forms and a letter of explanation were distributed for permission to observe the staff supporting children with their writing skills. These were followed up with a questionnaire. The use of a questionnaire enabled staff to complete it in their own time rather than during the busy, working day and the use of open questions aimed to gather a detailed response from practitioners, enabling them to reflect on their practice (Cottrell, 2003). Roberts-Holmes (2014) discusses the purpose of reflective practice as enabling the understanding of what actions are taken, why they may be taken and what changes may be able to be made. Through using these different methods of gathering data, a range of information is intended to be gathered

giving a richer picture of how children's emergent writing skills are developed, encouraged and supported within an early years setting.

Analysis and discussion of the findings

The research for this study was conducted in an early years setting, where the age of children attending ranged from two years through to four years. Evidence from observation showed that activities and resources provided for these different ages and stages of development. As the Early Years Outcomes (Department for Education, 2013) highlights, some children will be developing their fine motor skills and the co-ordination needed to use tools, whilst others will have progressed to experimenting with different methods to make marks and potentially drawing pictures. There may also be some children within the setting who are ready to write recognisable letters. Fisher et al. (2010), Glenn et al. (2006) and McGread (2016) have all discussed that for children to demonstrate emergent writing, there is a process of development which must be supported and encouraged through the strategic provision of resources and through the practitioners' understanding of which stage of development their children are at and how best to scaffold their learning. Observations within the setting provided the opportunity to see how resources could be used to encourage the development of children's hand-eye coordination and fine motor skills with provision of activities such as threading boards, tweezers and playdough (see Figure 1). This demonstrates the view held by Brock and Rankin (2008) and Palmer and Bayley (2010), who advocate the use of activities of this type in early years settings, as they enable children to develop and practice their fine motor-skill movements and hand-eye coordination.



Figure 1: Threading cards for fine motor skill development

Of the six staff questionnaires that were completed and returned, all made reference to the different types of activities offered at the setting to encourage children's development of emergent writing, providing examples of indoor and outdoor provision: such as paint, pens, chalk, pencils and crayons. One respondent determined that the outdoor environment was viewed as an extension of the indoor environment so the children would be

able to access mark making resources wherever they were and incorporate them into their learning and play (see Figures 2 and 3).



Figure 2: Mark making with water indoors



Figure 3: Mark making with water outdoors

The activity pictured in Figure 2 provided children with an opportunity to make marks with water inside the setting, with the children reacting with surprise when their marks appeared on the mat and then disappeared as they dried. Incorporating different resources into the setting may spark children's interest and encourage them to interact and persevere with the activity. This type of activity would seem to support the view of Smidt (1998), who determined that children may not be solely disposed to make meaningful marks but may instead seek to explore and enjoy the actual process of mark making. However, it could be argued that children may gain many different benefits from this type of activity, including: practising holding tools to make marks; enjoyment of the process of mark making; using the resource to make marks that are meaningful to the child; and to extend their play. With reference to mark making, question 2 of the questionnaire to practitioners asked them to consider how they viewed the purpose of mark making activities in relation to writing development. From the six responses, three clear themes could be identified: that mark making encourages the physical development needed for holding and manipulating writing materials; that mark making lays the foundations for the development of coherent and legible writing; and that mark making allows children to express themselves in a meaningful, creative, and non-verbal way. These themes are consistent with the literature surrounding the discussion of emergent writing in the preschool years and what its purpose and value may be.

The use of mark making to develop the physical skills for writing, enabling progression towards writing literacy, is concurrent with the early learning goal for writing as set out in the EYFS (Department for Education, 2017). The non-statutory guidance in the Early Years Outcomes (Department for Education, 2013) makes reference to children assigning meaning to their drawings in the age stage 40 to 60 months. However, the early learning goal for writing within the latest EYFS statutory guidance (Department for Education, 2017) makes no reference to drawing or assigning meaning to marks that are made. Instead, the early learning goal for children at the end of the Foundation Stage focusses on the child's ability to produce written words that can be recognised by others (Department for Education, 2017). As the research for this study was conducted in a pre-school setting, the practitioners use the EYFS to plan activities, track the children's development and to ascertain how to support

children in meeting their early learning goals. It may therefore be unsurprising for the practitioners to express the view that the purpose of mark making is to encourage development towards writing literacy.

When attending the setting, it was observed that activities for certain key developmental areas were made available each day for the children. One of these involved the setting up of a table for writing and mark making, with space for eight children and an adult to sit together. This table was set up for use each day with paper and various mark making resources such as pens, pencils and crayons (see Figure 4). In addition to this there were opportunities in the indoor and outdoor provision to use paint, chalks, sand, playdough and threading activities. The range of provision offered could be said to provide many differing opportunities to practice mark making, drawing and writing.



Figure 4: The writing table

The provision of an area routinely set up to enable children to spontaneously access mark-marking, drawing and writing materials enables children to engage with this activity throughout their session at the setting, as their interest and activity dictates. As discussed by Miller (1996) and Whitehead (2010), the provision of a specific writing table may also promote peer collaboration between children as they sit together and experiment with their developing skills. During observations at the setting, it was clear that children were able to choose when they accessed the writing provision and support was made available from a practitioner who sat with the children who had chosen to use the resources available. The practitioner was able to support the children through using questioning skills, interest and encouragement in order to scaffold children's development and understanding.



Figure 5: Jamie's picture

An observation of a practitioner, Marie, sitting with a small group of children at the writing table, was conducted. Jamie (aged 35 months) had joined Marie at the table and was showing some interest in the sponge-topped paint dabbers that were being used by some of the children. Marie encouraged Jamie to sit with her and provided commentary for Jamie's actions: firstly, by demonstrating how to use the dabbers, which engaged Jamie's interest; then, by encouraging Jamie to try it himself, and praising when he did so. Jamie requested that Marie used the dabbers to draw him which she duly did, but she extended Jamie's involvement and understanding by suggesting further details that may be needed; for example, by asking whether the drawing needed fingers. This resulted in a picture being co-created between Jamie and Marie. However, through the support and encouragement of Marie, Jamie could experience using a previously unfamiliar tool (see Figure 5). Jamie was unsure how to use the resources available and required that extra support from Marie to model how to use the dabbers to make marks in order for him to then feel confident in attempting to use them himself. Whilst Miller (1996) and Whitehead (2010) suggested that creating a table for a small group of children to access the activity simultaneously would encourage peer interaction and support, this was not witnessed during this particular observation. That is not to say that it would not be demonstrated at other times, perhaps dependent on the resources available or the dispositions and abilities of the children using them. However, this type of practitioner support was able to scaffold Jamie's learning as it enabled him to gain confidence and progress with the activity, furthering his development with gaining emergent writing skills. This observation would seem to support the work of Miller (1996) and Smidt (1998), demonstrating that it is the ability of the practitioner to know how and when to scaffold children's development that enables them to progress and achieve new skills.

MacNaughton and Williams (2004) determined that communication between the child and practitioner is also important for demonstrating to the child that their marks and drawings are valued. An observation was conducted between Susan (a practitioner) and Cameron (42 months) at the writing table. Cameron was engrossed in drawing on the paper and talking aloud to himself throughout the process. After watching him closely for a short time, Susan approached Cameron and began to ask about the picture, which led to Cameron to talk in great detail about his picture of two dragons (see Figure 6). The use of the child's supportive narrative about their drawings as a tool to develop communication between the child and practitioner is discussed by Coates and Coates (2016). This approach can demonstrate to the child that their drawings have value, through the interest and encouragement shown by the practitioner. Cameron was able to demonstrate to Susan that he had imagined a whole story about two dragons, could talk about it at length and in depth. It could be said that Cameron's drawing was a supplement his story and enabled him to create a visual representation of his creative ideas.



Figure 6: Cameron's picture of two dragons

Whilst Cameron's picture clearly consists of a formed image, children may assign equal meaning to indiscriminate marks. Kitty (34 months) was observed to be engrossed in using crayons to make marks on the paper (see Figure 7) whilst sitting at the writing table. When approached by Claire (the practitioner), Kitty was happy to talk to Claire and explain that she was drawing a lion.



Figure 7: Kitty's picture of a lion

Claire was able to use the picture to open up a conversation. When asked where the lion would live, Kitty added some black crayon marks to the picture stating that the lion would live in the jungle, with the black marks denoting the jungle. As Kitty completed her picture she asked Claire to add her name on it for her, which she duly did. Kitty is not at the stage of forming letters but understands that her name can be written down and will therefore give ownership to her drawing. As Hutchin (2013) determined, the practitioner can provide a scaffold to Kitty's development through acting as a scribe for her until Kitty is able to write her name herself. The importance of a child recognising their own name and becoming familiar with the letters in it is discussed by Gerde et al. (2012). This was observed during a planned activity between Jackie (the practitioner) and Paige (53 months), during which Jackie was supporting Paige's attempts to write her own name. Jackie began the activity using paint and a large brush for Paige to practise writing the letters on a large piece of paper, before moving to a pencil and demonstrating to Paige how the letters should be formed. Paige's understanding was scaffolded

through Jackie's use of template dots for Paige to draw over, combined with lots of encouragement and praise (see Figure 8).

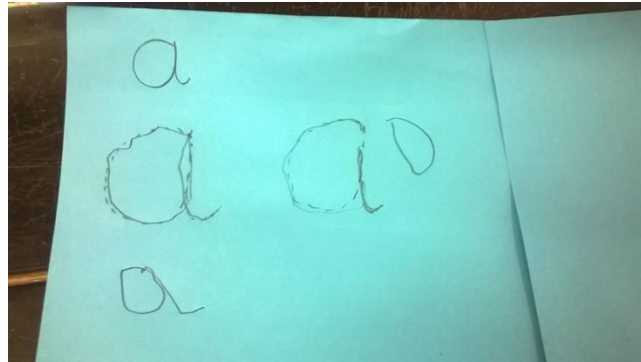


Figure 8: Paige practising her name

Through having knowledge of the stage of development that Paige was demonstrating, Jackie was able to plan an activity that broke the task down into manageable steps in order for Paige to fully understand the process and progress in her learning.

Part of the developmental process of emergent writing is the understanding that words can convey meaning. Cabell et al. (2013) suggest that a child may demonstrate that they have reached this stage of development by determining that some marks they make are writing and some are for drawing. Millie (44 months) was observed telling another child that she was writing to her Mum and showed them the letter. Millie went on to explain to the other child that the letter said 'Mummy' and also pointed out the letter 'a' (see Figure 9). Whilst Millie has not written the recognisable word 'mummy', she has written some recognisable letters and clearly understands that letters carry meaning, thus supporting the point made by Cabell et al. (2013).

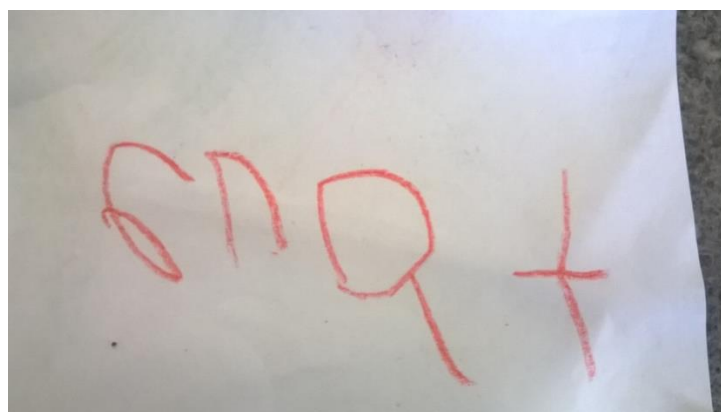


Figure 9: Millie's letter to her Mum

From observing the practitioners, it was clear that they were using several strategies to scaffold and encourage the children's development of emergent writing skills. These included the provision of a range of resources,

communicating with the children, taking an interest in the marks and drawings made, and modelling writing themselves. With regards to the practitioner questionnaire, all respondents indicated that they have not attended any specific training in children's writing development but would welcome the chance to do so in the future. The reasons given by the practitioners for wanting to attend training included: a desire for further ideas for activities; a desire to learn about the teaching of letter formation in primary school; and a need to increase their own professional knowledge about how children develop emergent writing skills and, therefore, how the practitioner can best support them.

The observations conducted in the setting demonstrate that there are clear processes in the development of writing literacy. Children experiment with their skill and use mark making, drawing and written words to express themselves, extend their play and enrich their ideas. As these processes seem important to each child as they are engaged in them, it could be argued that each process should be just as important to the practitioner (Dennis & Votteler, 2013; Mayer, 2007). It could even be said that a child's picture provides a valuable window into their creative world, which may only be glimpsed at that moment and should therefore be valued for the alternative method of communication it offers.

Conclusion

The aim of this work was to undertake an exploratory study into children's emergent writing skills in the early years. Observations in the preschool setting provided evidence that a range of resources and activities were employed by these practitioners that encourage the development of fine motor skills and hand eye coordination. Encouraging children's physical development in these areas supports the foundations of emergent writing as children require these physical skills to begin to make any marks (Brock & Rankin, 2008; Palmer & Bayley, 2010; Sargent, 2016). Through using observations within the setting and questionnaires for the practitioners, it was ascertained that a range of strategies are used within the setting to encourage children's spontaneous interaction with activities that support the development of emergent writing. This was demonstrated through the provision of mark making activities throughout the setting and of a social space for writing, with a table set up daily with writing and mark making materials. In addition to these strategies, the observations supported the view of MacNaughton and Williams (2004) that the role of the practitioner is to scaffold children's development in emergent writing. This was demonstrated through the practitioners communicating with the children about their marks and drawings, modelling tool manipulation, planning activities to introduce letter formation and encouraging children's efforts through the use of praise.

The practitioners work within the guidelines of the EYFS (Department for Education, 2017) which has a clear goal for writing literacy of the child being able to produce recognisable letters. As Cabell et al. (2013) determine, emergent writing skills underpin the development of writing literacy, which in turn supports academic learning. It could therefore be argued that it is perhaps unsurprising that the practitioner responses to the questionnaire

indicated that the staff felt that their role was to support children's development towards this goal. However, a further theme identified in the responses indicated that practitioners felt that children's marks and drawings were a meaningful representation of children's ideas. There is a body of research that suggests that children's drawings should be valued by early years practitioners for the insight they may provide into a child's understanding or for the opportunity they provide to inspire communication between the practitioner and child (Cabell et al., 2013; Coates & Coates, 2016; Kissel et al., 2011). This was observed in the setting, from Kitty's indiscriminate marks that clearly held meaning for her, to Cameron's picture of definite shapes that represented an image of the story he had created in his mind. Each of these observations demonstrated the opportunity the practitioner had to interact with the child about the process with which they were engaged. It could be argued that as these marks and drawings are clearly valuable to the child making them, they should be equally valued by the practitioners supporting them. This, in turn, highlights that each developing stage of emergent writing is as important as the goal of establishing writing literacy.

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How does the Maths Makes Sense scheme affect key stage one pupils' confidence in mathematics?

Aliya Arthur

Abstract

This small-scale case study investigates the effect of the Maths Makes Sense (MMS) scheme upon the confidence of key stage one pupils in mathematics. The research was conducted in the year one and two classes of a one-form entry village school in Lincolnshire. Twenty semi-structured interviews were conducted with the pupils, in addition to three staff interviews. The interviews were triangulated with six structured observations of MMS lessons. During these observations, the children also self-rated their level of confidence at three different intervals. The findings from the project suggest that, overall, the MMS scheme had a positive effect upon the confidence of key stage one pupils in mathematics. However, there were elements of the scheme that affected the children's confidence negatively. The positive factors identified included the use of concrete objects, physical actions, whole class responses and lack of ability streaming. Partner work received mixed opinions in terms of its influence upon confidence. Meanwhile, the pressure to respond as an individual in front of the class, as well as the structure of MMS scheme were deemed to be negative factors.

Introduction

Boaler (2015) argues that 'mathematics, more than any other subject, has the power to crush students' confidence' (p. 22). This issue dominates the English education system and continues to persist without resolution. Though research has been conducted into the cause of this confidence crisis and offered possible solutions, many pupils are still progressing through their education without gaining the confidence in their mathematics ability to support their everyday lives (Boaler, 2015; National Numeracy, 2015).

In an attempt to overcome the lack of confident mathematicians, some primary schools introduced mathematics schemes. An example is the Maths Makes Sense (MMS) scheme, which claims to produce 'confident mathematicians' through its teaching and learning approaches (Dunne, 2012, p. 2). However, to the best of my knowledge, there is no systematic, objective research into its effectiveness. Hence, I devised my research project to offer an impartial answer amongst the subjectivity. Having had conflicting views regarding the MMS scheme myself, I was intrigued to research it further.

My research project asked the question: how does the MMS scheme affect pupils' confidence in mathematics in key stage one? I believe it is essential to establish confidence in mathematics from an early age, hence the focus upon years one and two. This is consistent with the literature, which states that an early loss of confidence in mathematics can lead to avoidance and anxiety, which become progressively more difficult to overcome (Chinn, 2012; Maloney & Beilock, 2012; Piper, 2008). My small-scale project involved the staff and pupils in key stage one within a one-form entry primary school in Lincolnshire.

Literature Review

Despite the emphasis on developing confident mathematicians in the *National Curriculum* (DfE, 2013), too many children leave school without the confidence in mathematics to navigate the challenges of daily life (Boaler, 2015). This review examines the existing literature that explores pupils' confidence in mathematics, particularly focusing upon the factors that relate to the teaching and learning of the MMS scheme. These factors include pupil performance, ability, collaborative working and the use of practical resources. Through the analysis of the literature, I have highlighted the factors that can benefit pupils' confidence in mathematics and those that may hinder it, which I later discuss alongside my research.

The relationship between a child's confidence in mathematics and their performance is common throughout the literature (Burton, 2004; Hegarty, 2016; Nunes et al., 2009; Piper, 2008). However, the causality between these factors is debated, and it remains unresolved as to whether confidence arises as the result of a pupil's achievements or if it is the cause for this success (Burton, 2004; Falco, Summers & Bauman, 2010; Nunes et al., 2009). Newton (2015) supports the former, believing teachers should plan tasks that allow children to succeed so that they feel more capable. Similarly, within MMS lessons, the guided practice scaffolds all pupils to be successful (Dunne, 2012). This concurs with Piper's (2008) research comparing attainment and confidence in mathematics, as the pupils who were more successful had greater confidence in their abilities. However, the participants in Piper's study were all high attainers, hence the findings may not represent the entire ability spectrum. In contrast, Boaler (2015) argues that mathematics needs to be challenging, as this makes the learning more productive. Therefore, whilst ensuring a student's success impacts their confidence positively, it may not be as advantageous to their progression.

Moreover, the perception of mathematics as a judgemental subject can affect pupils' confidence (Chinn, 2012). Whilst Chinn refers specifically to arithmetic when making this claim, which is only one area of mathematics, his statement is mutually recognised (Ashby, 2009; Boaler, 2015; Hegarty, 2016). Falco, Summers and Bauman's (2010) research found that a pupil's motivation was determined by whether they thought they could succeed. Whilst this research was conducted upon a small homogenous sample, questioning its generalisability, it is consistent with Maloney and Beilock's (2012) research, which found that children worry about the consequences of a task. Hence, to generate confident mathematicians, it is important to create a safe learning environment, where children can attempt a question without fearing the outcome (Baria, 2013; Newton, 2015; Ofsted, 2012; Piper, 2008). However, in contrast, Boaler (2015) argues that there is value in making mistakes, so children should not always be sheltered from this. Making mistakes is vital to the learning of mathematics, hence mistakes should be celebrated as a sign of the children learning, as opposed to debasing confidence (Hegarty, 2016).

Furthermore, the link between a child's confidence level and their ability group occurs regularly in schools (Ashby, 2009; Burton, 2004). However, research by Nunes et al. (2009) exploring the confidence of primary pupils in mathematics found that ability labelling may be causing the lack of confidence amongst lower attaining children. Within the study, the children in the lower ability group were less confident than their peers, even when the research measured their attainment as equal to those in higher groupings. This was a large-scale, longitudinal study involving 4,000 pupils, improving the reliability. However, the participants were all from Avon which may reduce the generalisability of the findings. Whilst ability streaming benefited the higher attaining children, this impact was minimal. In contrast, mixed ability grouping can improve the confidence of all pupils (Wilson, 2014). Boaler (2015), a professor in mathematics education, agrees with this, noting that the world's most successful countries in mathematics steer away from ability labelling but believe all pupils can achieve. This is echoed by the MMS scheme, which aims 'to help every child succeed' through a whole class approach (Dunne, 2012, p. 3). Furthermore, the mixed ability approach aligns with Dweck's (2012) growth mindset, which is said by Hegarty (2016), National Numeracy (2015) and Newton (2015) to promote confidence in mathematics. It is also suggested that a child's perceived ability can affect their confidence within mathematics, which can occur regardless of ability group (Ashby, 2009; Boaler, 2015). Baria's (2013) study exploring girls' confidence in primary mathematics supports this, as the majority of the pupils lacked confidence in their ability despite their attainment level. However, Baria's study focused upon one gender, which may limit the generalisability of the findings. This is particularly worth considering given the mutual agreement that girls tend to be less confident in mathematics than boys (Ashby, 2009; Burton, 2004; Falco, Summers & Bauman, 2010; Nunes et al., 2009; Piper, 2008). The MMS schemes helps to instil a high level of self-belief in the pupils by encouraging them to teach one another, which can be an uplifting role for the child (Dunne, 2012).

According to Burton (2004), working collaboratively can positively influence a child's confidence in mathematics. Though Burton's research studied advanced level students, it is consistent with Baria's (2013) more recent study in the primary sector, which found that the opportunity for pupils to work together helped to increase their confidence and progress. Furthermore, collaborative work was recognised as good practice for building confidence by Ofsted (2011). The MMS scheme is built upon collaboration through partner work, which Dunne (2012) claims to be a 'proven technique' for success (p. 3). However, whilst Piper's (2008) research supported the value of collaboration, it also revealed some contrasting negative consequences, for example, pupils relying on others to complete the work or the learning going off-task. Therefore, whilst working collaboratively may benefit pupils' confidence in mathematics, this must be considered alongside the potential disadvantages to their attainment.

Confidence is further influenced by how a child is perceived in their mathematics lessons by others (Nunes et al., 2009). Chinn (2012) refers to his thirty years of teaching experience to note that children want to 'maintain a positive self-image' amongst their classmates (p. 2). This was supported by his research, which found that pupils would rather avoid failure than incorrectly attempt a question in front of their peers and consequently be

labelled as a 'low ability child'. Chinn's study (2012) was conducted over 12 months with a large sample of children from across the United Kingdom. Within the MMS lessons, the learning, aside from the partner teaching, is whole class (Dunne, 2012), meaning the children are continually exposed in front of their peers. Hegarty (2016) notes the negative effect this can have upon children's confidence, due to the pressure they feel to answer quickly and correctly (Ashby, 2009; Baria, 2013; Boaler, 2015; Chinn, 2009; Wilson, 2014). This is supported by Maloney and Beilock's (2012) research, which found that the pressure compromised pupils' cognition. However, the MMS scheme encourages the teacher to guide the pupils during responses in front of their peers (Dunne, 2012), which may minimise the impact upon the child.

Securing the basic foundations in mathematics is a further means of aiding pupils' confidence (Boaler, 2015; Maloney & Beilock, 2012; National Numeracy, 2015; Wilson, 2014). Without this basic understanding, mathematics becomes cognitively taxing which is discouraging for pupils (Newton, 2015). According to Hegarty (2016), it is easier to secure the fundamental learning in mathematics by using a scheme. However, Hegarty writes from his personal experience as opposed to research, which may reduce the reliability of his conclusion. The MMS scheme agrees with the need for a basic understanding to be established as early as possible (Dunne, 2012, p. 2). Nevertheless, the scheme was designed around the old curriculum for mathematics so, although it may promote a secure foundation, this may not be in line with the basic requirements established by the current curriculum.

To secure a strong foundation, Wilson (2014) suggests a practical approach to mathematics. This concurs with Baria's (2013) research, where the concrete apparatus helped improve the attainment and confidence of the participants. However, this was a small-scale study, limiting the generalisability. Yet, the need for resources is consistent with the seminal work of Bruner (1966), who found it important to establish a concrete understanding before introducing the abstract learning. More recently, the emphasis for practical learning remains common within the literature (Barmby, Bolden & Thompson, 2014; Black, 2013; Carbonneau, Marley & Selg, 2013; DfE, 2013; Ofsted, 2012). This, too, is consistent with the MMS scheme, which is designed around the use of concrete objects to secure the children's understanding and develop their confidence (Dunne, 2012).

Having reviewed the literature regarding pupils' confidence in mathematics, it is clear that this is a complex issue, given the many factors involved. In particular, the conflict between what is most conducive to a child's confidence in comparison to their attainment needs to be carefully considered. In summary, the factors deemed to have a positive influence upon pupils' confidence in mathematics include practical resources, collaborative working and a secure basic understanding. Yet, in contrast, the judgmental nature of mathematics, ability streaming and the perception of others can impact a child's confidence negatively. Although it is clear from the literature that pupils' confidence in mathematics has been scrutinised, there is currently no research into the effect of the MMS scheme upon confidence, thus influencing my own research project.

Methodology

My research was a small-scale case study, as my project focused upon one key stage within one school (Denscombe, 2014). Although this limits the generalisability of my findings (Ashley, 2012; Elliott & Lukes, 2008), the focus allowed for better depth. A case study is an effective means of answering a 'how' question, for example, the evaluation of a particular programme (Yin, 2009). This linked directly to my research question which evaluated the effectiveness of a scheme. Furthermore, the data collected within a case study is predominantly qualitative. This allowed for a better appreciation of the complexity of my research area over utilising a strictly quantitative approach (Atkins, Wallace & BERA, 2012).

Elliott and Lukes (2008) refer to case studies as the ethnographical approach for educational research. As such, my data was collected over two weeks, during which I became immersed within the MMS scheme (Ashley, 2012). My project triangulated three methods of data collection, which added depth to the study, as well as gaining two different perspectives which drew a more holistic picture (Denscombe, 2014). The triangulation improved the validity of my research, hence this was a strength of my methodology (Hamilton, Corbett-Whittier & BERA, 2013).

Setting

My project was conducted within one village school in rural Lincolnshire, where the MMS scheme has been used for seven years. School A is a smaller than average primary school comprised of seven one-form entry classes. The majority of pupils are White British and the proportion with English as an additional language (EAL), special educational needs (SEN) or pupil premium support is below the national average (Ofsted, 2014).

Methods

My research triangulated three methods - see figure 1 - to improve the credibility of my data (Guthrie, 2010).

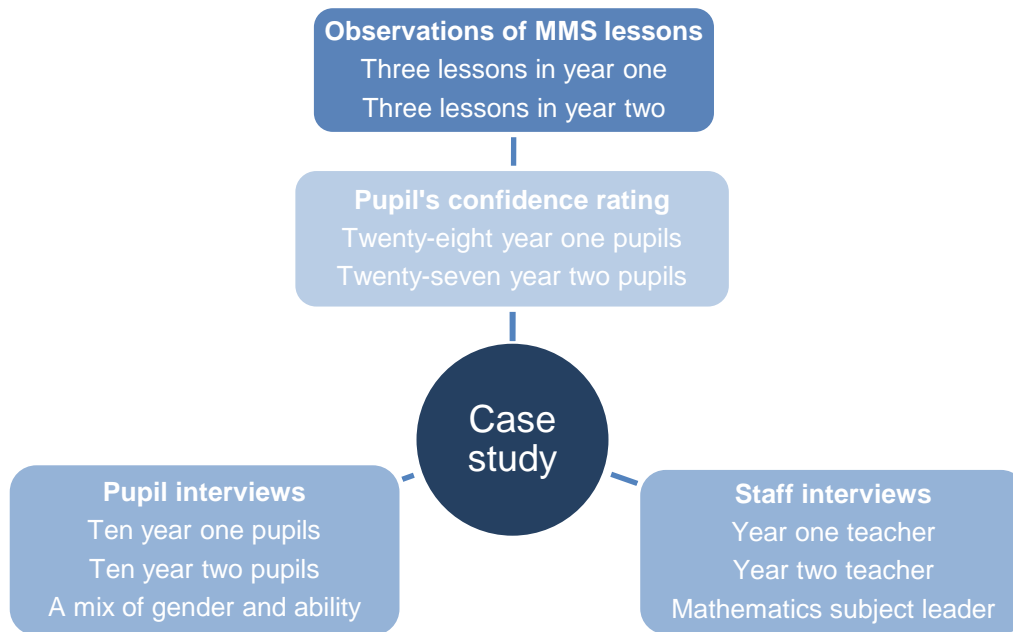


Figure 1: Triangulation of methods

I conducted semi-structured interviews to gather qualitative data from the pupils regarding their confidence in MMS lessons. I interviewed ten pupils in year one and ten in year two, ensuring the sample represented both genders and a range of abilities. A strength of this method was the direct contact that I had with the participants, as this allowed me to clarify the questions or check my understanding of the children's responses, improving the validity of my data (Atkins, Wallace & BERA, 2012). This was particularly important considering the young age of the pupils, where language can be a barrier to comprehension and articulation. I also conducted the interviews in pairs to reduce the power of the interviewer (Burton, 2004), a further strength. However, a limitation to this was in the recording of the interviews, as I was noting the responses from both participants simultaneously, which perhaps impeded the accuracy (Denscombe, 2014). Audio-recording may have benefited this stage, however, when I considered the inhibitions this may have caused the participants, the additional ethical considerations, as well as the timely transcription process (Atkins, Wallace & BERA, 2012; Denscombe, 2014), I decided that making notes would be the best option.

I also interviewed the two key stage one teachers, as well as the school's mathematics leader. This provided an additional perspective, aside from the children's responses, facilitating a more holistic view of the scheme's impact. Similarly to the pupil interviews, the staff interviews were conducted using a semi-structured format. This was useful as it allowed the participants to elaborate more widely on their ideas, in comparison to if the interviews had been strictly prescribed (Guthrie, 2010; Hamilton, Corbett-Whittier & BERA, 2013). Furthermore, the flexibility of the semi-structured approach allowed me to maximise upon the teacher's experience of the scheme, as they contributed valuable ideas beyond the areas I had established.

Aside from the interviews, I conducted six non-participant observations of MMS lessons – three in year one and three in year two – during which I recorded the signs and behaviours of pupils exuding confidence. Contrastingly to the interviews, I conducted structured observations which allowed for better data comparison between the lessons I observed (Denscombe, 2014). However, the structure did restrict my ability to record any relevant behaviours outside of this framework, so perhaps a semi-structure would have been valuable. Nevertheless, confidence is a broad topic so, without a defined structure, my observations would have been difficult to conduct. This would have been exacerbated by the fact that I was researching independently; the limitations of the structure made the process more manageable. The overt nature of the observations was a further strength, as it eliminated the ethical concern of deception. However, this was also a potential limitation, as the children may have displayed demand characteristics, which would reduce the validity of my data (Angrosino, 2012).

During the observations, I asked the children to rate how confident they were feeling at three different intervals within the lesson. This was a useful means of improving the validity of my observations, as I could compare the children's own measure of confidence alongside the behaviours that I recorded. Initially, I planned to use a traffic light system for this task however, within my research school, this system is already used for behaviour. As I did not want the association of confidence with behaviour to affect the validity of my research, I altered this method to instead use thumbs-up/thumbs-down to record the children's responses.

Ethical considerations

My research adhered to the guidelines of the Bishop Grosseteste University (2014) *Research Ethics Policy*. The project also complied with the *Ethical Guidance for Educational Research* provided by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2011), which was important given the involvement of children. Before commencing, my project was approved by my research tutor at the university to ensure it was ethically sound. I obtained full informed consent from all participants involved in the research (Denscombe, 2014). This included gatekeeper consent from the school's Head Teacher, as well as passive consent from the parents/guardians who were informed about the research project. I also gained consent from the children before they participated, as well as respecting their autonomy and right to withdraw at all times to ensure their continued assent (BERA, 2011). Every participant had free will throughout the process and were not coerced through incentives or power relations.

Confidentiality and anonymity were of utmost importance throughout my research to protect the identity of the participants and the school (BGU, 2014). This is in compliance with the UK Data Protection Act (1998). I used coded names for the participants and referred to the research setting as School A, to preserve their anonymity. In addition, I stored the data securely throughout the project so that it remained confidential (Guthrie, 2010). I was the sole person with access to the data and, upon completion of the project, I have destroyed all of the data collected.

Analysis and discussion of findings

Pupil interviews

When asked about the effect of collaboration upon confidence, two year one pupils preferred working with their MMS partner, as they were able to 'help each other out' (Pupil E). Upon analysis, both these participants were female, which may possibly explain their preference given that girls tend to be less confident in mathematics than boys (Ashby, 2009; Nunes et al., 2009; Piper, 2008). A further three year one pupils noted the benefit of working collaboratively, but only when the learning was difficult, feeling more confident to work independently otherwise. The remaining five year one pupils favoured independent work over working with their MMS partner, finding this 'easier' (Pupil G). This differed from the literature, as collaborative work was seen as most beneficial to pupils' confidence (Baria, 2013; Burton, 2004; Ofsted, 2011; Wilson, 2014).

However, during the interviews, it was apparent that some of the children were responding with answers they thought I wanted to hear, rather than being honest with themselves. This was particularly prominent in the year one interviews, perhaps because they were my placement class and were trying to impress me as their teacher, unable to separate my role as a researcher. During my observations, I found the reliance upon partner support was frequent, regardless of ability or gender, differing from the pupils' responses.

When the same question was asked to year two, eight of the 10 children showed a preference for collaborative working. The two pupils who preferred to work independently were high attaining males, one of whom was gifted and talented in mathematics. Hence, the participant's gender and ability may have influenced their responses (Baria, 2013; Nunes et al., 2009; Piper, 2008; Wilson, 2014). The staff also identified collaboration as a positive element of the MMS scheme during their interviews, commenting on the 'supportive environment' (Teacher B) it creates.

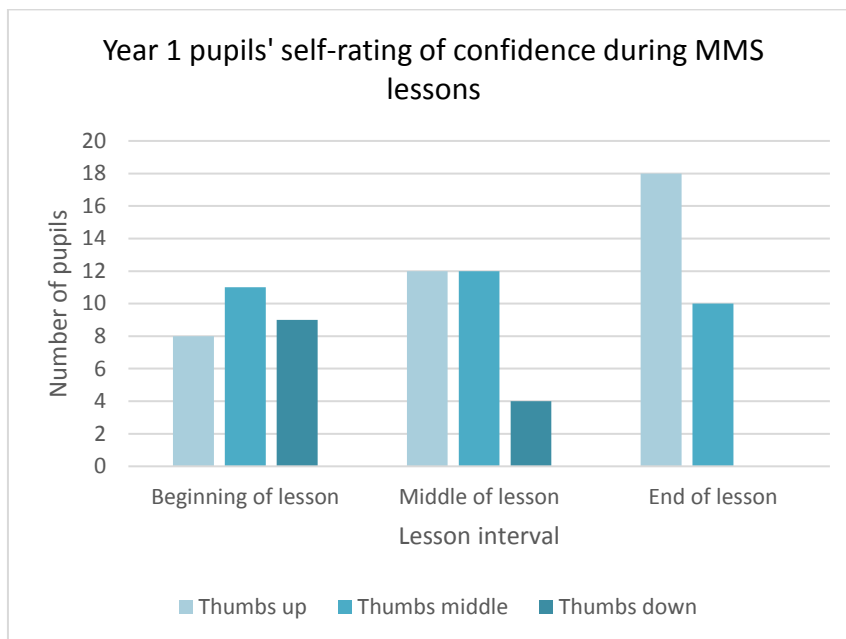
When asked about the impact of resources, 19 of the 20 pupils reported the positive effect they had upon their confidence. This was also prominent within my observations, as the children were better engaged and showed more positive body language during the activities involving manipulatives. The use of cups was recognised most predominantly, with Pupil P noting, 'they help me because I can move them.' This was further echoed by Pupil D who stated, 'you can take one away or get one more.' Thirteen pupils noted that using resources made the learning easier and aided understanding, which was consistent with the results of Baria's (2013) research detailed above. In addition, 17 children listed the different resources used in the MMS lessons, giving examples from their learning, demonstrating the confidence they professed to have.

The one pupil who responded negatively regarding the effect of resources upon confidence said they were 'silly and confusing,' an anomalous result amongst my own research and the literature. This may be due to him having

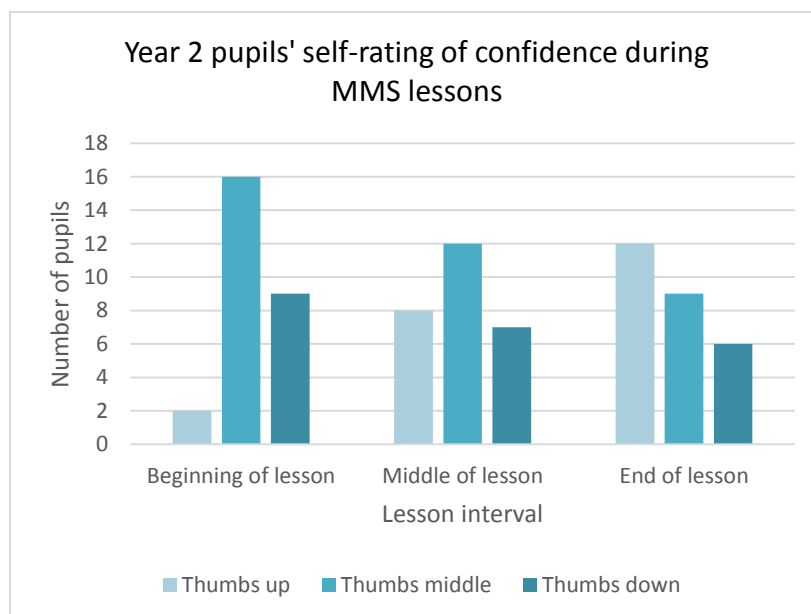
a different learning style that conflicts with the use of manipulatives. However, upon analysis, this child responded negatively throughout the interview due to a dislike for mathematics, hence this may have influenced his answer.

Pupils' confidence rating

The graphs below show the pupils' responses from their own confidence rating averaged over the six lessons that I observed. Thumbs-up denoted confident, thumbs-down unconfident and thumbs-middle was an in-between. This was explained to the children in child-friendly language at the beginning of each observation, to improve the reliability of my findings.



Graph 1: Year 1 pupils' self-rating of confidence during MMS lessons



Graph 2: Year 2 pupils' self-rating of confidence during MMS lessons

The confidence ratings suggest that the MMS scheme had a positive impact. At the beginning of the lesson, the majority of pupils rated themselves as thumbs-middle, with only 29% of pupils in year one and 7% of pupils in year two rating themselves as confident. Yet, at the end of the lesson, the number of pupils who rated themselves as confident increased by 35% in year one and 37% in year two. I have used percentages to present the statistics to show a fairer comparison, as there is an extra pupil in the year one class.

The findings correlate to the expected progression for learning, which raises the question as to whether this was simply a conditioned response from the pupils. Furthermore, the children may have been influenced by their peers as, if other children were feeling confident, they may have felt pressured to follow suit. This links to the literature, as Chinn (2012) and Nunes et al. (2009) noted the effect of the perception of other pupils. Asking the children to rate their confidence in a hidden measure perhaps would have encouraged a more truthful response and thus, improved the validity of my research.

Whilst, on average, the number of pupils who rated themselves as unconfident at the beginning of the lesson was the same in both years, the findings suggest that the MMS scheme had less impact in year two in comparison to year one. In year one, the number of thumbs-down decreased by 32%, compared to year two where the number decreased by 11%. There are many possible explanations for the difference between the year groups, for example, the different blocks of work, different teachers, sample variation, as well as the year two concepts being more advanced so perhaps needing longer for the pupils to grasp them.

I asked the children during their interviews to explain how they knew they were feeling confident within their MMS lessons. The children knew that being confident was a positive feeling, associating it with feeling 'happy' (Pupil B), 'proud' (Pupil E) and being 'a good thing' (Pupil L), but the majority could not elaborate on this. Confidence is a complex idea which is difficult for children to comprehend, hence conducting my research within such a young age range may have affected the validity of my findings.

Observations

During the MMS lessons, I observed the body language of the pupils, as Burton (2004) noted this as an indication of confidence during his study. Positive body language was evident during the lesson inputs, particularly at the beginning, where the children had a relaxed, open body language and good eye contact with the teacher. However, as the learning became more difficult, the children's body language altered. This was particularly evident from the lower attainers, who began shuffling and fidgeting. A year one pupil was lying on her back as well as turning away from the teacher, whilst in year two, there were a number of girls playing with one another's hair, as well as one boy tying his jumper in knots. These may have been strategies of avoidance due to a lack of confidence, which corresponds with the literature (Chinn, 2012; Hegarty, 2016). However, the fidgeting may also have been the result of boredom, as the MMS inputs are fairly long, as well as possible SEN or behavioural needs contributing to these behaviours.

There was also a clear change in body language when the teacher was looking for an individual to answer a question. This concurs with the literature, where the pressure to answer in front of the class was deemed to have a negative effect (Ashby, 2009; Boaler, 2015; Chinn, 2009; Hegarty, 2016; Wilson, 2014). Upon analysis, this mainly affected the female pupils who began to look down and hunch their shoulders, which correlates to the gender differences previously identified (Burton, 2004; Falco, Summers & Bauman, 2010; Nunes et al., 2009; Piper, 2008). This change occurred regardless of ability, which correlates to the findings of Baria's (2013) study, as the pupils lacked confidence in their ability despite their attainment level.

During the partner work, the body language became far more positive from the pupils. Upon consideration of the literature, this may be due to the fact that the pressure to respond in front of the class was now eliminated, hence this was a safer learning environment (Baria, 2013; Newton, 2015; Ofsted, 2012). The children were also now working collaboratively (Burton, 2004; Nunes et al., 2009; Ofsted, 2011), as well as using concrete objects to support their learning (Baria, 2013; Wilson, 2014), which may have further contributed to this change.

I also observed the impact that answering a question correctly had upon the pupils' confidence during MMS lessons. The literature review discussed the idea that successful performance in mathematics increased pupils' confidence (Burton, 2004; Falco, Summers & Bauman, 2010; Newton, 2015). This concurs with my observations, as the whole class responses offered all pupils the opportunity to answer a question correctly, which improved confidence. This was evident through their happy facial expressions, improved engagement, more positive body language and increase in the number of hands to answer subsequently. Hence, this was a positive aspect of the MMS scheme.

The effect that I observed corresponded with the pupils' interview responses, strengthening the validity of my observations. All twenty pupils noted the positive effect that answering correctly has upon their confidence. Pupil E noted that it made her more confident as 'I know I can do it,' whilst Pupil D noted the reward of being able to 'get a merit' when the answer was correct. These findings highlighted a contrast between intrinsic and extrinsic factors upon confidence: for Pupil D it was the reward that increased her confidence, whilst for Pupil E it was the increase in self-belief. Upon analysis, thirteen of the pupils referred to the intrinsic benefits, whilst seven of the pupils referred to extrinsic factors. Given that the extrinsic rewards were not prescribed by the scheme, these findings raised the question as to whether it was the solely the MMS scheme that was causing the increase in confidence in mathematics.

Staff interviews

When asked whether the MMS scheme made pupils more or less confident in mathematics, all three teachers agreed that the scheme increased pupils' confidence. The two teachers who were employed at the school before the implementation of the MMS scheme commented on the improved pupil confidence since the scheme was

introduced. Teacher A stated 'The MMS scheme has given all pupils a boost in their mathematics lessons. They are now not only confident learners of mathematics, but also confident teachers'.

Within the school, the scheme is used in foundation and key stage one. The mathematics leader noted the improvement this has had upon the learning in key stage two, due to the 'strong foundations established from using the MMS scheme.' This concurs with Hegarty's (2016) statement in the literature review, as he noted the benefit of using a scheme to secure basic understanding.

When asked which elements of the scheme affected pupils' confidence, Teachers A and B noted the positive effect of not segregating the children by ability. Teacher B commented, 'MMS allows all of our pupils to feel successful in their maths lesson,' which echoes the views of Boaler (2015), Hegarty (2016) and Wilson (2014) discussed in the literature review.

A further benefit identified by all three teachers was the integration of concrete resources, which concurs with the pupil interviews, my observations and the existing literature. Teacher B also noted the actions and physical movements that complement the use of manipulatives, further aiding the practical approach to learning advocated by Baria (2013) and Wilson (2014). She mentioned that:

The physicality improves the retention [of the children's learning], as it is a very memorable experience for them. It secures the concrete understanding before the abstract learning takes place.

This links directly to Bruner's (1966) stages of representations, as discussed in the literature review, as Bruner valued the importance of concrete learning before the symbolic stage.

An aspect of the MMS scheme identified as having a negative effect upon pupils' confidence was the structure, with Teacher A stating 'It is frustrating that I cannot address misconceptions straight away because this can leave children feeling unconfident until we re-address the topic the following week'.

This was the only aspect of the MMS scheme that was identified as having a negative effect upon confidence by the staff. Whilst the teachers may see the scheme as beneficial to pupils' confidence, it is important to consider that they may have a vested interest. The school spent a lot of money on the scheme and fully advocate it, so the staff may have felt obliged to state that the addition of the scheme has been worthwhile.

Conclusions and recommendations

Having analysed my findings alongside the existing literature, it is clear that there are aspects of the MMS scheme that have a positive effect on pupils' confidence within the school. The inclusion of concrete resources was the most prominent benefit of the scheme, which was identified in all my data. This was complemented by

the physical actions that the MMS scheme prescribes. Furthermore, the opportunity for pupils to respond to questions as a whole class was another positive factor, as it eliminated the pressure upon individual pupils. In addition, the lack of segregation by ability was a benefit identified by the staff, as the MMS scheme encourages all pupils to succeed.

The partner work within the MMS lessons received mixed opinions. Whilst my observations and staff interviews highlighted collaboration as a positive factor upon confidence, only half of the pupils interviewed supported this. Moreover, a negative element of the MMS scheme upon confidence, as identified by the staff, was the structure, as this makes it difficult to secure the learning in a timely manner. Additionally, the pressure to respond individually in front of the class was a further negative influence upon the children's confidence.

However, the pupils' confidence increased as a result of the MMS lessons according to their own ratings. In addition, the staff agreed that introducing the MMS scheme had benefitted the confidence of pupils in the school. Hence, these findings suggest that the positive factors of the MMS scheme outweigh the negative and that, overall, the MMS scheme did have a positive effect upon the confidence of key stage one pupils in mathematics in this school. However, my project was only conducted upon a small sample within one school, hence this is a tentative answer. Research would need to be conducted in other schools to see how this compares to my own project. The small-scale of my research also limits the generalisability of my research to the wider population.

Nevertheless, the findings from my research project have highlighted a number of implications for my own mathematics teaching in the future. I will strive to use a kinesthetic approach more frequently, as the positive effect this had upon children's confidence was clearly evident. In addition, I will shift from predominantly requesting individual responses when asking questions to the children to also include whole class responses. Furthermore, I would like to experiment with using mixed ability groupings, particularly as this style of teaching is consistent with the mastery approach, which is the current trend in mathematics education.

Ultimately, confidence in mathematics is unique to every child. Even within the small sample of children involved in my research, it was evident that, whilst some elements of the MMS scheme benefitted the confidence of one child, they hindered the confidence of another. Hence, my research has emphasised the need to combine a number of teaching styles and approaches for mathematics in order to suit individual needs.

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The perceived benefits experienced by families as a result of engaging with Sure Start Children's Centres Danielle Camp

Abstract

This systematic review aimed to identify recurring themes within the current literature regarding the perceived benefits of Sure Start Children's Centres for the families that use them. The systematic review focused on twenty pieces of literature and thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. In order for a benefit to be classed as a theme it must have appeared within 50% or more of the included literature. Overall, there were found to be three themes: support for parents/families, parents able to learn new skills, and improved child development. Therefore, the current government is recommended to re-evaluate budget allocations for Children's Centres, and prevent further budget cuts to help aid the pressures faced by Children's Centres.

Introduction

Defining Children's Centres

Statutory guidance defines a Sure Start Children's Centre as a place or a group of places 'which is managed by, on behalf of, or under arrangements with the local authority...through which early childhood services are made available, and at which activities for young children are provided' (DfE, 2013b, p.6).

The core purpose of Children's Centres is to improve outcomes for young children and their families and reduce inequalities between families in greatest need and their peers in:

- child development and school readiness
- parenting aspirations and parenting skills, and
- child and family health and life chances. (DfE, 2013b, p.7)

History of Children's Centres

In the United Kingdom, Sure Start features as one of the most significant New Labour policy interventions targeted at young children five and below (Hey & Bradford, 2006). The Labour Government initially introduced Sure Start Local Programmes (SSLPs) in 1998, acting as early intervention for young children, focusing on the most disadvantaged children and families. SSLPs were seen as a key mechanism for improving outcomes for young children, reducing inequalities, helping to bring an end to child poverty (Bouchal & Norris, n.d, p.3). Whilst each programme could be adapted to meet the individual needs of each area, and families who used them, SSLPs were required to provide five core services: outreach and home visiting, support for families, good-quality early learning/childcare, healthcare, and support for children and their parents with additional needs (Anning & Hall, 2008, p.12).

However, the Every Child Matters Act (2003) marked a change in the emphasis in the delivery of SSLPs. Services would now be provided in a 'one-stop' Sure Start Children's Centre, with greater local authority oversight

through integration in to existing children's services (Bate & Foster, 2015, p.6). This redesign of Children's centres was a move to make them more streamlined and cost effective (4Children, 2012, p.16). This resulted in a clear picture of change, with centres moving away from the traditional standalone model, towards clusters of centres and sites (DfE, 2015b, p.55). Cluster models shared resources, staff and management, physical spaces, and/or services. In 2003, the government committed to delivering 3,500 Children's Centres across the country by 2010 (Bouchal & Norris, n.d, p.2). This aim was exceeded, as of the 30th April 2010, the total number of designated Children's Centres was 3,631 (DfE, 2010, p.1).

Another change in Sure Start policy came in 2004. This change in policy marked the end of Sure Start being aimed particularly at disadvantaged areas, instead becoming a universal provision for all families. This provision promised Sure Start Children's Centres in every community, offering a range of parenting support services, as well as directly provided childcare or easy access to childcare (Field, Eisenstadt & Stanley, 2014, p.6). However, when the Coalition Government came in to power in 2010, the role of Children's Centres changed again. Once more the aim of Children's Centres reverted back to ensuring the most disadvantaged families get the most support. Hence correlating with the core purpose of Children's Centres, outlined by the Department for Education (2013b), to reduce the inequalities between families in greatest needs and their peers.

Since the Conservative Government came to power in 2015, the future of Sure Start Children's Centres seems uncertain. A consultation on the future of Children's Centres had initially been due to launch in autumn 2015, focusing on making sure Children's Centres have the best impact possible on children's lives (Puffet, 2017). This consultation did not and still has not taken place, hence the future of Children's Centres seems uncertain. However, it does appear that The Department for Education is committed to having a consultation on Children's Centres. A Department for Education spokeswoman spoke to Children and Young People Now stating that 'We are considering the future direction for Children's Centres and will provide further detail in due course' (Puffet, 2017).

Services Children's Centres Offer

Statutory guidance states that:

'Children's Centres should make available universal and targeted early childhood services, by providing the services at the centre itself, or providing assistance to parents/prospective parents in accessing services provided elsewhere' (DfE, 2013b, p.16).

Whilst the individual services which Children's Centres offer can vary from centre to centre, services commonly offered include: health advice, childcare and early education, employment advice, informal drop-in facilities, and specialist support on parenting (Hall et al., 2015). In a survey carried out in the 4Children (2015) Children's Centre census, 388 Children's Centre managers were asked about the services they offered (see Table 1). It shows the majority of centres offered parent and health services, such as stay and play, though a smaller amount of centres offered services such as relationship support and birth registration. This correlates with a survey

carried out by The Department for Education (2015a) completed by 5,717 parents which found the services families most commonly used through Children's Centres were stay and play or play and learn groups (p.27).

**Table 1: Services Offered at Children's Centres
(4Children, 2015, p.5)**

| | |
|--|-------|
| Parent and Health Services | |
| Stay and Play | 95% |
| Parenting advice | 91.6% |
| Breast-feeding support | 85.2% |
| Baby massage | 82.1% |
| Health check-ups | 79.8% |
| Support around transitions to pre-school/school | 78.7% |
| Father's group | 45.1% |
| Relationship support | 32.2% |
| Birth registration | 15.7% |
| Outreach Services | |
| Family support in the home | 83.5% |
| Family support through outreach venues | 76.8% |
| Support for those with additional needs | |
| Child protection | 77.6% |
| Support for domestic violence | 76.8% |
| Support for children with Special Educational Needs | 70.3% |
| Support for those experiencing substance misuse problems | 32.5% |

Table 1: Services offered at Children's Centres

Who uses Children's Centres?

In 2015 it was estimated that over 1 million families were using Children's Centres on a frequent basis (4Children, 2015, p.6). Over the years, the target audience for Children's Centres has changed between targeting disadvantaged families and being a universal provision. However research by The Department for Education (2015a) showed that disadvantaged families are taking up a greater number of services through Children's Centres than more affluent families (p.38). Reasons why families do not use Children's Centres vary, though in a survey of 170 families, 42% said they had not heard/received any information about their local Children's Centre, and 73% said they were not aware of the services their Children's Centre offered (Royston & Rodrigues, 2013, p.7). Hence, a lack of advertisement leads to a lack of knowledge about Children's Centres and the services offered.

Furthermore, research shows mothers are much more likely to engage with Children's Centres in comparison to fathers (DfE, 2015a, p.30). Research by The National Evaluation of Sure Start Research Team (NESS) (2003) exploring fathers' disengagement with Children's Centres found fathers who were interviewed stated feeling apprehensive about engaging with Sure Start. The most cited reason for male non-involvement within Children's Centres was that it was predominantly a female environment (p.40) with one father stating he worried the mothers would think 'who is this man, where is the mother?' (p.31). Hence, it can be extremely intimidating to enter a largely female environment, especially if they were the only male. Additionally, another reason cited by fathers interviewed, was that the opening hours of Children's Centres coincided with the hours that fathers were

at work (p.42). Consequently, whilst they may want to engage in services offered it would be impossible for them to do so. Thus it would be assumed that mothers who attend Children's Centres are not in either full or part time work.

Funding Children's Centres

Children's Centres are funded through the Early Intervention Grant (EIG), created as part of the 2010 Spending Review by The Coalition Government, which replaced a number of various different funding streams. The EIG is an unringfenced funding stream paid to local authorities, meaning local authorities have the freedom to determine how to fund their networks of children's centres to best meet local needs and statutory duties (DfE, 2013a). This means potentially Children's Centres governed by the same local authority may not get equal amounts of funding. From 2013-14 the EIG was no longer paid as a separate grant allocation, instead it formed part of the wider central government revenue allocation to local authorities (Action for Children, National Children's Bureau & The Children's Society, 2016).

However, since 2010 budget pressures on local authorities mean that Children's Centres have faced cuts in budgets and resources. As seen in figure 1, local authority spending on Children's Centres has been cut by almost half, with a reduction in spending of £705 million in 2015-16 compared to 2010-11.

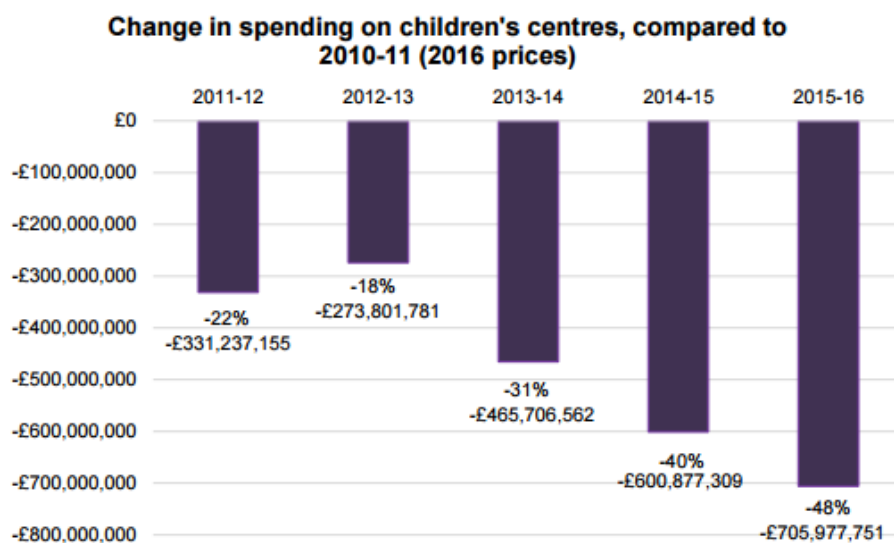


Figure 1: A graph showing the changes in spending on Children's Centres (Action for Children, National Children's Bureau & The Children's Society, 2016, p.11).

Looking further into funding cuts, the three regions which have seen the biggest reductions are the North East (61%), North West (59%), and Yorkshire and Humber (56%) (See figure 2).

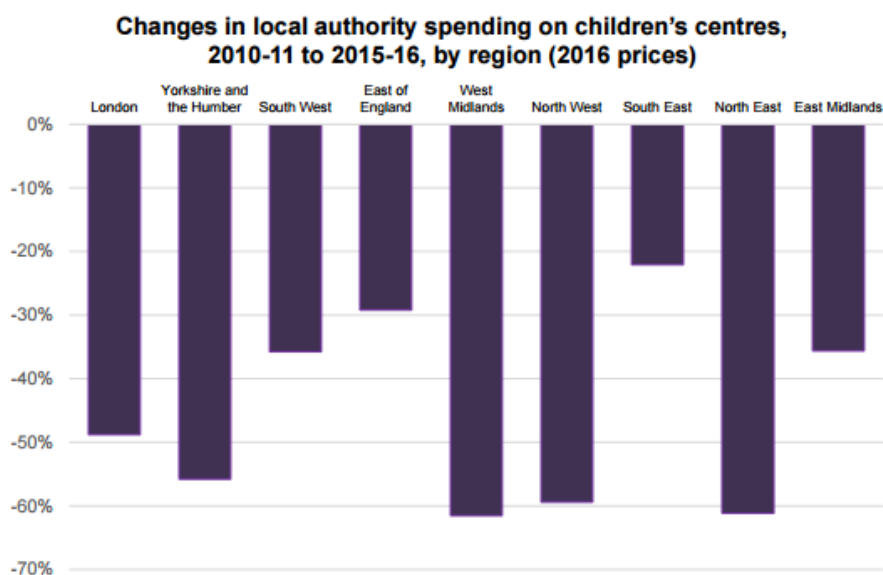


Figure 2: A graph showing the changes in Local Authority spending on Children's Centres (Action for Children, National Children's Bureau & The Children's Society, 2016, p.12).

Based on responses from 388 Children's Centres managers, representing 1,000 Children's Centres, 64% have had their budgets cut (4Children, 2015, p.13). The impact of budget cuts vary from each individual Children's Centre, though when the managers were asked how budget cuts were affecting them, the main finding was that 57.5% said they were cutting back the services they offer (4Children, 2015, p.14), affecting families that rely on these services.

However, whilst some Children's Centres are kept open with reduced funding, some centres are forced to close, or to increase fees for services. For example, since 2010-11 North Yorkshire County Council closed 10 of its 37 centres, and some of the services that used to be provided for free started to require a fee (DfE, 2016, p.53). As disadvantaged families use Children's Centres services more frequently, they may not be able to afford to pay for services. For example one parent spoke about increase in fees stating '...its 75p. That may not sound like a lot, but it is to people round here... There were times when I didn't have 30p in my purse' (National Foundation for Educational Research, 2010, p.35). Thus increasing fees due to lack of funding can deter families from attending services offered as they cannot afford the money required.

From the latest spending review it appears that The Conservative Government are prioritising investment in children's education. The total spending on education will increase in cash terms from £60 billion in 2015 to nearly £65 billion in 2020 (HM Treasury, 2015, p.44). As part of this spending, the government is investing £23 billion in school buildings, opening 500 new free schools, creating 600,000 school places and rebuilding and refurbishing over 500 schools (HM Treasury, 2015, p.44). Whilst this investment in children's education is important, it appears that as the investment in education is increasing, Children's Centres and Early Years

funding is decreasing. Hence in this current political climate and the uncertain futures of Children's Centres, I believe it is important to carry out a systematic review, in to the perceived benefits for families attending Children's Centres.

The aim of this systematic review was to identify recurring themes in regards to the benefits of Children's Centres for the families who use them, focusing on the following research question: what are the perceived benefits of Children's Centres for parents and children within the current literature?

Methodology

Before any data was collected, an ethics form was submitted and approved in line with Bishop Grosseteste University ethical guidelines (2014). In keeping with this, all authors data was treated with care, and all authors were acknowledged and referenced.

Inclusion Criteria

In order for a piece of literature to be included in this systematic review it had to fit in to an inclusion criteria (see table 2).

Table 2: Inclusion Criteria

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| Topic | Literature must relate to the research question, looking at both parents and staff members point of view (see appendix B). |
| Date of publication | Literature must have been published between 1998 - 2017. |
| Geographic spread | Literature must be from the United Kingdom. |

Table 2: Inclusion Criteria

Sources searched included: Google Scholar; Worldcat via Bishop Grosseteste University; Taylor and Francis Online Journal; SAGE Online Journal; Cambridge Core; Gov.UK website. Search terms included: Sure Start; Children's Centres; Impact of Children's Centres; Benefits of Children's Centres; Community impact of Children's Centres; Evaluation of Children's Centres; Effects of Sure Start and Parents and Children's Centres.

Searching and Screening Process

Firstly, Google was searched using the search terms 'Sure Start', which produced 91,800,000 results and 'Children's Centres', which produced 1,640,000 results. From these five were selected as being within the inclusion criteria, all of which were research reports. Google was also searched using the search term 'perceptions of Children's Centres', which produced 1,220,000 results, of which three were selected as being within the inclusion criteria (1 research study, 2 research reports). Another search term used in Google was 'the impact of Sure Start/Children's Centres', which produced 2,270,000 results. From these four were chosen within the inclusion criteria, all of which were research reports, one of which was a government publication. Furthermore, Google was searched using the search term 'community impact of Sure Start/Children Centres',

which produced 1,030,000 results. From these three were selected (1 research study, 2 research reports). Finally Google was searched using the search term 'parents AND children's centres', which produced 7,370,000 results, of which two were selected both of which were research reports.

The Bishop Grosseteste University Worldcat database was searched using the terms 'Sure Start'. This produced 920 results, of which one was selected as being within the inclusion criteria, which was a book. From the book two pieces of research were used. Through Worldcat the journal Taylor and Francis was accessed and searched using the search term 'Sure Start'. This produced 115,014 results, of which one was chosen as fitting within the inclusion criteria, which was a research study.

Table 3: Types of Literature Included in Systematic Review

| Type of literature | Amount of literature included |
|---|-------------------------------|
| Research study | 5 |
| Local evaluation/impact research reports | 8 |
| National evaluation/impact research reports | 7 |
| | Total: 20 |

Table 3: Types of Literature Included in Systematic Review

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to conduct the systematic review, which enables themes to be identified within the literature. Braun and Clarke (2006) created a six stage approach to analyse data; familiarisation with the data, initial coding, searching for themes, review of the themes, theme definition and labelling, and report writing. In order for a benefit to be classed as a theme and embedded in the literature it was decided that it must be present within 50% or more of the included literature.

Each piece of literature was analysed by hand searching for key benefits which were recorded. Once this had been done for each piece of literature, similar benefits were colour coded, and grouped together to create/define one main theme.

Findings from raw data

Methodology

All pieces of included research used self-report methods, specifically either semi-structured interviews, or questionnaires, hence allowing the users of Children's Centres to give detailed accounts of their experiences, and what they and their children have gained from attending Children's Centres.

Those who used questionnaires used both open and closed questions. Therefore whilst in some questions parents were asked to choose from a list of various answers, there was a space to write any other answers which were not listed. Also at the end of the questionnaires, there was a space where the parents could add any other comments if they wanted to.

Also within the methodology of the questionnaire, the national research reports included the Confusion, Hubbub, and Order Scale (CHAOS) scale, which were used to measure the organization and running of the family's home environment. This consists of fifteen statements, against which parents rate their beliefs on a four-point scale. Once completed a single score is calculated. The higher the score the more chaotic and disorganized a home is considered to be.

Sample

The samples used in all pieces of literature explored the views of parents/families using Children's Centres. Whilst not all literature specified the age of the children, from those which did, the ages ranged from 0-5 years, correlating with Children's Centres being aimed at preschool children. In addition, samples used in national and local evaluations also tended to collect views of staff members, which research studies did not. Furthermore, the national evaluations tended to use comparison samples of non-users of Children's Centres. Therefore, this allowed statistical analysis on data collected to see if there were differences between the users and non-users of Children's Centres. Hence any significant differences would suggest that attending Children's Centres had impacted upon the families.

Another difference between the different types of literature is the sample size. Research studies and local evaluations naturally had much smaller samples compared to national evaluations. The samples used in research studies ranged from 11 to 88 parents, and the samples in local evaluations ranged from 40 to 383. In contrast, national evaluations used samples between 2,000 and 9,000. Therefore, due to the large sample sizes, the national evaluations may be more reliable and representative of the whole population. However, this difference is to be expected. Local evaluations and research studies focus on a selected number of Children's Centres, thus focusing on a smaller sample of service users. Whereas national evaluations are exploring Children's Centres across the United Kingdom, hence they have a much larger sample of service users.

However, a weakness of the sample used is they were gender biased focusing on the mothers, with the exception of the research which focused on fathers in Sure Start (NESS, 2003; Potter & Carpenter, 2010). Therefore, it may be that the themes/benefits found in this systematic review are more representative of mothers attending Children's Centres, though this bias in the sample is representative of the users of Children's Centres as discussed previously.

From the analysis of the data three themes were found and will be discussed; support for parents/families, parents able to learn new things, and improved child development.

Discussion

According to staff, an easily accessible and non-threatening environment is fundamental to the high use of Children's Centres (National Foundation for Education Research, 2010; Gutherson Research, 2012; NESS, 2007b). In turn, parents state the friendly, approachable demeanour of the managers and staff encourages them to return to the centres (National Foundation for Education Research, 2010).

Theme 1 - Support for Parents/Families

The first benefit which emerged from the data was the support parents received from attending Children's Centres, with one parent stating, 'I have found myself at a real low, if staff hadn't supported me I would have given up my son' (Cumbria County Council, 2011, p.11).

Social Isolation

Attending Children's Centres can reduce feelings of social isolation (Cumbria County Council, 2011). Pascal, Bertram, Dupree, and Rice (2002) found a major benefit for parents attending the centres was being able to meet other parents and having someone to talk to. Talking to other parents and sharing concerns or difficulties helps them to realise that they are not alone. One mother known as Roxanne stated '... it's nice to have support and to know that other people are going through the same things you are' (Donetto & Maben, 2014, p.2563). Thus Children's Centres can act as a catalyst, bringing parents together, helping them to meet new friends and build up a social network.

Children's Centres can particularly help families who have recently moved to an area and do not yet know anyone. One parent mentioned that Sure Start made it easy to get to know people in the area, and felt that if Sure Start was not there it would have been much harder (Bridge Consulting Partners, 2005, p.18). Knowing other families in the area can help families to feel settled. '... knowing so many other parents makes it more comfortable to live in the area' (NESS, 2007b, p.49). This network of friends can then meet up outside of Children's Centres and organise trips/outings (Gutherson Research, 2012), thus creating a sense of community.

Peer-Peer Support

Creating a network of friends can enable parents to receive support from other parents. This allows for the sharing of 'informal' advice and reassurance for parents that they are not the only ones finding looking after their young children hard (Donetto & Maben, 2014). Therefore, Children's Centres provide parents with a space where they can get help and advice from other parents building a network of friends who are all going through the same things. '...You can say your child's worst behaviour and feel comfortable talking about ... [parents] will say you could do this ... and you have got all of these ideas' (NESS, 2007b, p.49). Hence parents can help support their peers through difficult times.

Support from other parents can be particularly important for certain maternal issues such as breastfeeding. Within society there is a pressure on mothers to breastfeed their children, so, struggling to breastfeed can create a sense of failure for the mother. A course run by certain Children's Centres called 'Bumps to Babies', offers a place for mothers to discuss their struggles and get advice from other mothers. One mother spoke about how she was nervous about breastfeeding her new baby due to previous bad experiences with her first born. However, after learning new techniques and tips from other mothers, she gained confidence and subsequently breastfed her second child (Bridge Consulting Partners, 2005). Therefore these sessions run at Children's Centres can help to increase the number of mothers breastfeeding, which has a number of benefits for the child including reduced risk of infectious diseases (Duijts, Jaddoe, Hofman & Moll, 2010), and improved cognitive development (Gomez-Sanchiz et al., 2004).

Whilst fathers are less likely to engage in Children's Centres (NESS, 2003), fathers valued peer-to-peer support, specifically all male groups. Fathers stated 'it's easier to for dads to talk amongst [other] dads than it is in a mixed environment' and 'we're all the same gender so you don't feel embarrassed talking about certain things' (Potter & Carpenter, 2010, p.9). This correlates with research stating a barrier to father involvement in Children's Centres was that it is a predominately female environment (NESS, 2003). Though fathers spoke about the importance of learning from other fathers present at Sure Start dad's groups, with one father stating 'other dads have got older kids so they can pass information down' (Potter & Carpenter, 2010, p.10). Thus some fathers value all male groups as they feel more comfortable sharing information with those of the same gender. Additionally, research by Summers, Boller and Raikes (2004) argues that men from low income families are more likely to seek informal support as opposed to more formal support, suggesting that all male support groups may be a successful way to engage more fathers in Children's Centres.

Normalizing Experiences

Children's Centres can also help to normalize experiences parents are going through. Parents get reassurance from their peers and staff so they feel like they are doing the right thing (Gutherson Research, 2012). The sense of not being alone and the opportunity to compare notes enabled parents to realise that problems they are going through have been experienced by others (Donetto & Maben, 2014). In research carried out by Woolfson, Durkin, and King (2010) one parent stated, 'You'll hear things that [other parents say] and you think, oh mine used to do that, my god I'm not the only one' (p.15); hence reassuring parents they are not the only ones experiencing difficulties, helping to increase their confidence. 'You're not the only one, you're not this abnormal, terrible mother,' stated one participant (Woolfson et al., 2010, p.21).

Sense of Identity/Place & Benefit to Mental Health

Building relationships with peers, and simply getting out the house, can help increase an individual's sense of place and help with their mental health (Gutherson Research, 2012). Denise, a mother of one, stated 'I went through a stage where I didn't want to go out of the house' (Donetto & Maben, 2014, p.2564). Hence, parents

can exclude themselves from social circles and feel judged by others which decreases their self-confidence. However Children's Centres provide a safe place for parents to go. Louise, a mother of four, stated 'You weren't being judged. You come here to have a natter, have a laugh and you're all welcome' (Donetto & Maben, 2014, p.2564). Thus, Children's Centres represent a space where parents can go to where they will not feel judged or criticised by others, which can increase parent's self-esteem.

Emotional and Moral Support

Children's Centres also provide a vital source of support for families experiencing difficulties such as domestic violence or addiction (Weinberger, n.d). Parents spoke about the emotional and moral support, as well as increased confidence that Children's Centres brought about in them, enabling them to make the decision to make changes in their lives (Gutherson Research, 2012). Therefore, Children's Centres help provide support to enable parents to change their lives for the better, which will benefit the whole family.

Additionally, family support emerged as the most significant impact of Sure Start for children and families with special needs and disabilities (NESS, 2007a). Centres that provide specialist staff helping to support these families are vitally important. Several parents described their SSLP as being a 'lifeline', knowing they have someone to talk to when things get too much (NESS, 2007a). One parent known as John is a single father of two children. A few years ago, his daughter had a stroke that left her disabled. Sure Start workers helped him understand his daughter's condition and linked him to relevant services and support networks, including access to childcare for a few hours every week (NESS, 2007a, p.34). These few hours off every week provide parents with respite helping them to de-stress. For example, Marianne has three young sons one of which has a physical disability, and she herself has suffered from depression. She said that without the childcare provided through Sure Start 'my partner and I would probably have split up ... we would never have coped' (NESS, 2007a, p.34). Therefore, the services Children's Centres offer directly or indirectly, provide much needed support for parents/families without which many may not have been able to cope.

To summarise: support for parents/families, either from staff or other parents, emerged as a vital benefit of attending Children's Centres. Hence, Children's Centres act as a catalyst for parents to meet other parents, which has other positive effects such as normalizing experiences and increasing parents' confidence.

Theme 2 - Parents Learning New Skills

A second benefit reported by parents of engaging in Children's Centres was the ability to learn new skills and better themselves (Cumbria County Council, 2011).

Improved Parenting Skills

Children's Centres can help parents improve their parenting skills, achieved either by staff modelling desired behaviours, or through parenting courses. Parents reported how Children Centres helped them to learn how to

interact and play with their children (Gutherson Research, 2012). Research by Wolfson et al. (2010) found that mothers reported learning new activities they could do with their children, and different techniques to help manage their children's behaviour. Techniques taught included: setting clear boundaries for the child, better communication between the parent and the child and use of daily routines (Wolfson et al., 2010, p.13). One mother shared an example of learning to better communicate with her child stating 'I try and speak to him ... rather than just getting all frustrated and moaning and shouting at him' (Wolfson et al., 2010, p.13).

Additionally, due to improved parenting techniques, parents undertook less harsh discipline of their children (NESS, 2005; NESS, 2010; NESS, 2012; DfE, 2015c). One parent stated '[I learned] to ... listen to her, praise her...you learn different ways of coping' (NESS, 2007, p.49). This reduction in harsh discipline can also affect a child's behaviour. Parental harsh discipline whether used by the father or mother increases the risk of behavioural problems in young children (Mackenbach et al., 2014). Thus less harsh discipline and increased positive parenting, can also lead to improvements in the child's behaviour.

Increased Control and Confidence

Learning new parenting strategies enables parents to feel a greater sense of control when dealing with their child's challenging behaviour (NESS, 2007b). One programme offered within Children's Centres is 'Connecting with our Kidz'. Research by Drake, Weinberger and Hannon (n.d.) explored the effect of the programme within an SSLP. The results showed after the programme parents reported feeling more in control, and self-report of their ability and confidence as a parent improved (pp.46-47). Therefore, learning new parenting techniques enabled parents to feel better about themselves and their ability. One parent stated:

I'm able to deal with problems they might have ... I'm not tearing my hair out. I was getting to the point where I didn't want to look after my kids anymore, but ... I've started to enjoy it again (NESS, 2003, p.32).

Hence parents learn they can be in control of situations without having to stress out themselves which can lead to a situation escalating.

Improved Home Environment

Implementing new parenting techniques can help to improve the home environment, decreasing family stress, and improving the function of the household measured through the CHAOS scale (NESS, 2005; NESS 2010; NESS, 2012; DfE, 2015c). Hence, whilst parents initially benefit from gaining new parenting techniques, when these strategies are implemented in the home environment it can benefit the whole family. Research shows that home chaos is associated with less effective parenting and children displaying elevated levels of behavioural problems (Dumas et al., 2005). Consequently, by decreasing household chaos, this can also lead to more effective parenting and improved child behaviour. However most research examining the link between home chaos and parenting has included only mothers so it is unclear whether fathers' perceptions of home chaos are linked to their parenting practices (Nelson, O'Brien, Blankson, Calkins, & Keane, 2009). It may be that due to stereotypical

gender roles fathers feel less responsible for the home environment, though this could be an avenue for future research.

Furthermore, by gaining new knowledge this enabled parents to provide a more stimulating home learning environment for their children, which included reading with the children and implementing play activities learned from Children's Centres (NESS, 2008; NESS, 2010; NESS, 2012). Research shows that the influence of the home learning environment was over and above that of measures of parental education and socio-economic status. Thus a stimulating home environment is associated with improved literacy and numeracy in primary school (Melhuish et al., 2008).

Educational Courses

Furthermore attending Children's Centres enabled parents to take part in educational courses improving their qualifications. Parents spoken to during the research named long lists of courses attended, speaking with a sense of pride in their achievements (Gutherson Research, 2012). One parent spoke about how support from Children's Centres gave her confidence to further her education. 'It gave me the confidence to go to college last year ... and I think without having Sure Start ... I wouldn't have had the courage to do it' (NESS, 2007b, p.48), thus enabling parents to better themselves, improving their career prospects.

Additionally, by parents partaking in educational courses, this provides a positive role model for their children. Linking this with Bandura's Social Learning Theory, this proposes that children learn through observing and imitating others (Bandura, 1971, p.5). Hence, by children observing their parents attending educational courses and enjoying it, this can have a positive effect on their children wanting to achieve good qualifications. Support for this was found by Davis-Kean (2005) in which results showed that parents' education influenced their child's achievement indirectly through the parents positive beliefs about education.

One course offered at certain Children's Centres, which can have long-term positive implications is a first aid course. One father spoke about how attending this course improved his knowledge of caring for his child following an accident. '...I knew what to do I put him under the cold tap and then took him to the hospital... putting his head under cold water cooled it down and stopped the heat penetrating' (Potter & Carpenter, 2010, p.10). Thus by the father attending this course it gave him the knowledge of how to deal with the situation, decreasing the severity of the child's injury.

To summarise: Children's Centres enabled parents to take part in educational courses, bettering themselves and providing a positive role model for their children. Additionally through parenting courses and modelling by staff members, parents learnt new parenting techniques, which helped improved their confidence about their own abilities, and improve the family's home environment.

Theme 3 - Improved Child Development

A final benefit reported by parents was that the Children's Centres helped to improve their child's development, as Children's Centres provided opportunities and activities that parents could not necessarily provide at home (RMRA & Centre for Research on the Child and Family, 2009).

Social Skills

Research found families attending Trailblazer Sure Start Centre's had expectations of what would be gained from attending, which included social inclusion for children (Northrop, Pittam & Caan, 2008). This expectation appears to have been met, as services used by families are seen by both staff and parents to have enhanced children's social skills (The National Foundation for Education Research, 2012; Cumbria County Council, 2011). One mother stated '[her child] had become more sociable with other children ... [and] she had become less clingy (RMRA & Centre for Research on the Child and Family, 2009, p.76). These impacts tend to increase in proportion with the amount of time the children spend at the Children's Centre (DfE, 2015c).

The opportunity for children to meet other children can be of particular importance for those who come from a one-child household, and/or do not have many opportunities to interact with other children. One parent stated by taking her only child to her local Children's Centre, she noticed a real difference in her child's behaviour. 'Mixing with children [of different ethnicities], learning to be more patient and understanding towards others' (Pascal et al., 2002, p.42). Furthermore, another parent stated that her child 'had come out of himself ... and made new friends' (Bridge Consulting Partners, 2005, p.16). Hence, through socialising with others, children become more independent and learn to interact with their peers in an appropriate manner.

Alongside this, parents valued the opportunity for their children to take part in play activities, often speaking about how through play their children learned various social skills (Cumbria County Council, 2011). Play allows children at a very early age to engage and interact in the world around them, and learn how to work in groups, share, negotiate and resolve conflict (Ginsburg, 2007). Hence, play can act as a catalyst for children to interact with other children, developing social skills and creating friendships. These friendships can continue in to school decreasing the risk of social isolation on transfer to school (RMRA & Centre for Research on the Child and Family, 2009).

School Readiness

As a result of the children's improved social skills and the chance to learn new things, children are perceived to be more school ready (Gutherson Research, 2012). One parent stated 'I won't have any problem with him going to school because I've seen that he can now adapt to different situations' (Woolfson et al., 2010, p.16). Additionally, fathers' engagement with their children's development was often focused on how the Sure Start activities had helped to prepare their children for school (Potter and Carpenter, 2010). One father spoke about

his child's reading ability stating 'she's beating eight year olds [in reading ability] and part of that I do put down to the way that Sure Start had bred in to me about [the importance of] reading' (Potter & Carpenter, 2010, p.8).

Whilst parents perceive their children to be more school ready, this also appears to be echoed by teachers. Potter and Barnes (2004) interviewed head teachers and/or heads of foundation stage at three primary schools, which take at least 75% of their pupils from Sure Start areas. Summing up one school's view, they stated 'we would have many more children coming to school with low language, health, and emotional wellbeing without Sure Start' (p.40). Each representative of the school felt Sure Start had helped with language development, because children are able to experience large groups of children, contributing to language use and social development (p.39). Additionally a vital aspect of children's involvement with Sure Start led to schools knowing about children's struggles before they arrived at school. Consequently, measures can be put in place from the beginning of the child's schooling, instead of starting from scratch with assessments after the children had arrived (p.40). Therefore whilst this piece of research only included the views of three primary school and further research is needed, linked with parental and staff views, it appears that Children's Centres help improve children's transition to school.

To summarise: Children's Centres provide a space where children can interact and socialize with other children, improving their social development, and making new friends. Consequently, this helps children's transition to school, as children are perceived to be more school ready.

Conclusion

Children's Centres and the wider policy area surrounding the Early Years have been in constant flux through the current and previous UK governments (Hall, 2015, p.101). Whilst this was only a small scale review and further research is needed, it has identified benefits for families who engage in Children's Centres. From the literature, three main benefits were found: support for parents/families, parents being able to learn new skills, and improved child development. Hence linking this with the core purposes of Children's Centres, this systematic review provides evidence for two of these: child development and school readiness, and parenting aspirations and parenting skills (DfE, 2013b, p.7). However, as stated previously, the majority of research focused on the mothers' experiences. Therefore an implication of this systematic review, is for further research to be undertaken into father-led households, and their perceived benefits of Children's Centres.

Nevertheless, many families rely on the services Children's Centres offer and the support gained from staff and other parents. Due to budget cuts, Children's Centres face an uncertain future, with some centres having to close and others cutting back services, leaving users without vital support. Hence it would be timely for the

current government to re-evaluate budget allocations for Children's Centres, and prevent further budget cuts to help aid Children's Centres and the pressures they face and reduce further potential closures.

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**How can positive inclusion and strategic pastoral care lead to a reduction in permanent exclusions in secondary schools?
A review of one school's journey from rhetoric to reality
Lynda Martin**

Abstract

Recent changes in legislation encouraged schools to shift from reactionary 'zero-tolerance' approaches towards more proactive, child-centred policies. This study explores how the pastoral team of a secondary school in Lincolnshire overcame the challenges posed by new policy and its associated inclusion strategies. Interviews were conducted with two key members of staff. These findings were compared to the information provided by ten members of the pastoral support team, to the case studies of two children, and to statistical data provided by the school. The results highlighted that pedagogy can be manoeuvred into a positive culture by empowering pastoral teams in education, reducing the number of pupil exclusions. Empowerment of staff at a micro level was a key element of this school's success in lowering exclusions.

Introduction

In educational institutions, pastoral care is the platform upon which inclusion takes place and whereby cultural change occurs, impacting upon all areas of social, personal, and political life (Armstrong, Armstrong, & Barton, 1999). Barton (Clough, 1998, p. 84-85) explains that inclusive education is not merely about providing access into mainstream school but about the participation of all children by removing all forms of exclusionary practice. This study assesses how one school has made changes in their strategy and pastoral practice in order to reduce permanent exclusions.

The school used for this study is a larger-than-average secondary school in Lincolnshire, and a specialist language college which achieved academy status. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language and those from minority ethnic groups is lower than in most similar schools. There is an average proportion of students eligible for free school meals, students known to be eligible for pupil premium, students from service families, and looked-after children. The number of students with special educational needs and disabilities who are supported through school action is a little below average. Most students are from White British backgrounds, with increasing admissions from Eastern European heritage. The school has a dedicated pastoral team who work closely with the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) in providing inclusion for all students. The definition of inclusion used in this dissertation is that stated by Armstrong and Armstrong (2003, p.2), 'Inclusion refers to a set of principles, values, and practices which involve the social transformation of education systems and communities.'

A mixed qualitative and quantitative methodology is used, enabling comparison of the rhetoric of current legislation against the socially constructed world of practice. Data from interviews, questionnaires and case

studies provide phenomenological experiences of those within the pastoral team. Quantitative data provides evidence of change and movement in exclusion rates. The combined data lead to a discursive narrative on the changing culture and pedagogy of education and the legislative requirements of inclusive practice, ultimately highlighting how the rhetoric of legislation can translate into reality and inclusion using strategy, policy, and practice.

Literature review

The French philosopher Foucault, when discussing the two alternative meanings of the word 'subject', explained that, 'Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to' (Dreyfus, Rabinow, Foucault, & Dreyfus, 1983, p. 212). The work of Dreyfus et al. (1983) applied Foucault's theories on power and disciplinary systems to prisons and educational institutions. They drew parallels between both institutions and recognised that modern approaches, although deemed to be more humanitarian than earlier approaches, still 'construct' individuals in the two ways that Foucault identified: through self-knowledge and conscience, individuals are a subject of their own identity; but at the same time, they remain subject to someone else by means of restraint and control (Dreyfus et al., 1983). Foucault's theory combined with literature on the use of 'zero tolerance' strategies paved the way for modern views on inclusion to become less totalitarian and more flexible, especially in their approach to pastoral support and behavioural intervention (Dreyfus et al., 1983).

Research on adolescent social immaturity has highlighted the need for improved pastoral care. Research into developmental neuroscience has found compelling evidence that brain structures in adolescents have not matured and developed as much as once believed (e.g., Sowell, Trauner, Gamst, & Jernigan, 2002; Giedd et al., 1999; Nelson, 2003). During adolescence, psychosocial immaturity is displayed in four areas: attitudes surrounding perception and risk taking (Arnett, 1992; Hooper, Luciana, Conklin, & Yarger, 2004); reduced resistance to influences from their peers groups (Gardner & Steinberg, 2005; Zimring, 1998); controlling of impulsive behaviours (Luna, Garver, Urban, Lazar, & Sweeney, 2004; Cauffman & Steinberg, 2000); and orientation for the future (Greene, 1986; Grisso et al., 2003). When specific structures within the brain are not completely developed, corresponding functionality will exhibit signs of immaturity (Baird & Fugelsang, 2004; Luna & Sweeney, 2004); thus, during an individual's adolescent years, lack of thought about consequences and the propensity to take more risks can be prevalent.

The framework of some secondary schools is starkly juxtaposed with the developmental needs of pupils: specifically, it is not well tailored to emotional needs during adolescence, including the need autonomy, identity negotiation, support from other adults, and for meaningful peer relationships, and academic self-efficacy (Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Eccles, 2004). Research has shown that zero tolerance policies could exacerbate both the types of challenges that are faced during the early teenage years, and the mismatch between the structure of

secondary schools and developmental stages of adolescence. As adolescents can be neurologically susceptible to lack of judgment (Peterson & Skiba, 2000), incidents that arise from their poor judgment may require more complex responses than zero tolerance in order to avoid further escalation.

Current policies have stemmed from the failures in zero tolerance, which was the norm in educational practice and cultural expectation throughout institutions in 1990s. A report completed for the American Psychological Association (APA) by the APA Zero Tolerance Task Force looked at the recommendations for both reforming zero tolerance where its implementation is necessary, and for alternative practice to replace zero tolerance where a more appropriate approach is indicated (Skiba et al., 2016). Skiba et al. (2016) found that the predetermined consequences of zero tolerance were often severe and punitive in nature, and were applied regardless of the gravity of behaviour, mitigating circumstances, or situational context. Thus, in Foucault's terms (Dreyfus et al., 1983), the power inherent in the macro system of education had a negative impact upon the subject. Zero tolerance effectively relinquished the power it had to improve a subject and let them go into society without the knowledge and emotional intelligence to be able to cope. Hence many subjects were found to move from education to the juvenile justice system. It was recognised that the dynamics of power and education had a major influence upon behaviour.

The evidence from both USA and the UK shows that a zero-tolerance approach in schools fails to result in positive changes, and can be detrimental to pupils. The recognition of this in the UK has led to the evolution of the Children and Families Act (HM Government, 2014) and the revised Special Educational Needs Code of Practice 'SENCOP' (DfE, 2015) which make inclusion and the voice of the child a legal obligation for all schools. However, the rhetoric of legislation can often be very different from the pedagogy of education. Inclusion and exclusion exist in all walks of life; for children, the quality of opportunity within education is affected by both the social demographic of the micro world surrounding them and the macro world of politics, social capital, and hidden agendas. These factors can perpetuate hidden inequality unless a school's practice and culture challenge existing paradigms of inequality. At the macro level, the policy has shifted to focus on the voice of the child, but culture within schools has been slow to adapt into inclusive practice. Fulcher's work on policy argues that, 'Policy is the product, whether written (laws, reports, regulations), stated or enacted (in pedagogic practice), of the outcome of political states of play in various arenas (1999, p.11).

As highlighted by Armstrong, policy is not a top-down process; and assessment of the impact of policy requires an understanding of a wider social context in terms of its relationship to people's lives (2003, p. 5).

At a local level, one of the policies that is forcing schools to embed new culture is the 'The Lincolnshire Ladder of Behavioural Intervention' (LLBI) (Lincolnshire County Council, 2016). This policy has originated from research stating that children who are struggling with social and emotional aspects of life would be much safer if retained in the educational system, with specific strategies based on reducing behavioural problems and increasing

opportunities for children. Models of primary prevention have been used as strategies within literature suggesting that school discipline and violence programs would be effective when using three levels of intervention (Elliott et al., 2001; Dwyer et al., 1998; Tolan et al., 1995):

- Primary prevention strategies targeted at all students;
- Secondary prevention strategies targeted at those students who may be at risk for violence or disruption; and
- Tertiary strategies targeted at those students who have already engaged in disruptive or violent behaviour.

The LLBI policy document is based on this research and has recently been circulated to all schools in Lincolnshire. Schools are now moving through the three levels of intervention on the ladder and exhausting all other avenues prior to exclusion. The policy document is underpinned by current statutory guidance on permanent exclusion to which schools must adhere to, 'the exclusion from maintained schools, academies and pupil referral units in England' (Dixon, 2012). The LLBI outlines the specific opportunities and strategies for the inclusion of all pupils and encourages collaboration with stakeholders. It helps to ensure that hidden inequalities are dealt with at an earlier stage via Inclusion Policies, with the appropriate interventions taking place in order to provide opportunity and inclusion (Lincolnshire County Council, 2016).

Due to the emerging field of Pastoral Care following new legislation and policy guidance, there is very little research on the impact of positive inclusion upon exclusion. This study focusses on the efforts of one school to move from a zero tolerance, or reactive, approach to inclusion to one that is innovative, holistic, and proactive.

Research Design

A mixed method design was used to assess the shifting paradigms of pastoral care within a school and to learn how that has ultimately changed practice and reduced exclusions. The underpinning policies and legislation that result in practice provide the theoretical framework upon which pastoral care bases its assumptions. The research perspective draws on the phenomenological interpretation of the lived experience of both staff and students. This is juxtaposed with a constructivist approach, which derives from the legislation and policies that create the socially constructed environment of pastoral care.

Ethics clearance was granted for the study by the University (BGU, 2014), following guidance from the British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2011). Informed consent was sought from participants for interviews and survey data, and the school provided informed consent for access to and use of quantitative data and evidence from case studies.

Qualitative Methods

Interviews

Phenomenological interpretation of the Inclusion Policy and the local offer, the LLBI, was enabled by completing semi-structured face to face interviews with the pastoral lead and with the Spiritual, Moral, Social, and Cultural (SMSC) Coordinator. Following transcription of the interviews, thematic analysis was applied, using techniques described by Green, Thorogood and Green (2013, p. 210) and Hayes (2000). A thorough reading of the transcripts enabled identification of meaningful sections of text. The data was systematically reviewed by highlighting themes that led to a table of coded themes ensuring that a name, definition, and realistic set of data supported each theme and sub theme. Thematic analysis revealed in six categories, grouped into three key themes (see Analysis for the full table of themes). The data was transcribed and coded manually establishing the coherence and reliability of the themes.

Case Studies

Using secondary data provided by the school, two case studies were used to pinpoint changing practice and assess the impact of the new Inclusion Policy; one prior to changes in legislation, and one where the new Policy and resulting practice, has negated the need for exclusion.

Quantitative Methods

Surveys

To assess the shift in a cultural pedagogy, 20 members of the Pastoral Team were asked to complete a survey of attitudes towards the new policy and the interventions it uses. Of these, ten participants gave informed consent and completed a short, printed survey that used Likert Scales to assess attitudes to pastoral care within the school. This was designed to be convenient for the participant, cost effective, and easy to administer. A spreadsheet was used to log data and look for patterns and themes.

Exclusion Data

Exclusion figures over a five-year period for the School were collated and compared to county exclusion rates. A spreadsheet was used to log data and look for patterns and themes.

Findings

Raw data from the pastoral survey and exclusion data gives unambiguous evidence of declining exclusion rates, and positive attitudes about pastoral care. Thematic analysis of the pastoral lead interviews highlighted three clear themes embedded within the data: attitude, teamwork, and funding and resources. These themes were repeated throughout the interviews. These themes were mirrored by the responses to the pastoral survey, and in the case studies. The findings are presented individually, initially, and will be linked together in the discussion.

Figure 1 shows the themes in relation to the child; the child's voice is placed at the centre, and this is surrounded by the different layers representing the macro world of political agendas in legislation and the micro world of practice:

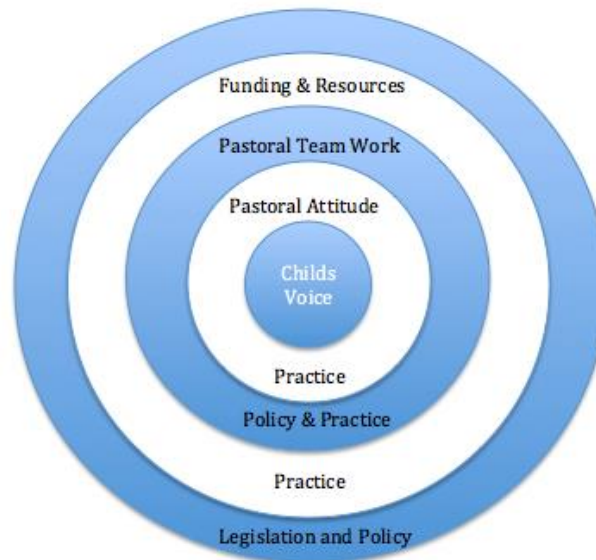


Figure 1: Theme Diagram

Pastoral Lead Interview

Three primary themes were identified from the interview with the pastoral lead. These themes of pastoral attitudes, teamwork, and funding and resource are explained in more detail below. Each is further split into sub themes.

Pastoral attitudes were referenced many times with 27 positive comments and 19 negative comments. The positive support for inclusion and a change in pedagogy was explained by the pastoral lead:

'Paul and I on that, on that training day sort of looked at the fact that we've got an exclusions policy and, and there and then on the second day in the afternoon we'd rewrote our whole policy, and we changed it from being exclusions to being an inclusion support policy, we removed the word 'exclusion' from it.'

Further references to the benefit of teamwork provided an argument that pastoral care was a whole school vision embraced by all staff and given time and commitment in practice by the senior leadership team:

'Yeah, I mean we've got a really fantastic pastoral team and we've always, there's something the school's always prided itself on being really inclusive and making sure that that provision's there, you know, we have a non-teaching pastoral manager in every year group and not every school has that.'

With sub themes in Solutions Focussed Counselling and the culture of the school, the pastoral lead gave a real feel for how in practice rhetoric was replaced with reality:

'I think the solutions focused coaching bit of it that, that kind of underpins some of the practice is, is brilliant, its been, its quite obvious and its not a massive change in a way to how we'd have had those conversations with students anyway but it just tweaks that, that focus slightly.'

The theme of funding and resources highlighted a concern, although this was only referred to five times. The pastoral lead felt that recent cuts in funding had made a significant impact on provision ultimately placing more pressure on services at a county level and forcing the school to be more creative on a micro level:

'We pay a lot of money to [an external provider] because they're a really valuable service, but we're paying for them already, then we have to pay for boss, then we have to pay for the TLC, whereas other schools aren't using **already** [the] behaviour consultancy, they're just going straight from their school offer to the county offer.'

SMSC Coordinator Interview

Unfortunately this interview could not be completed in person therefore, a printed copy of the interview schedule was emailed and the coordinator completed the questions individually and returned by email. The response also suggests that pastoral care is of top priority with positive comments outweighing negative by 7:1. A pride in the support of students can be seen in the following comment, 'I enjoy the flexibility of subject matter and the feeling that this part of the curriculum makes a difference to the day to day lives of our students.'

Specific reference to teamwork and legislation backed up evidence in the Pastoral Lead interview that pastoral care was a whole school approach:

'Without the positive attitudes of the Pastoral team, the school would not have moved forward in terms of provision. Although legislation states a legal duty of care, attitudes make positive practice possible. The school is a leader of inclusion for our county and this has been shown by a reduction of exclusions over the last few years.'

The use of resources also highlights an important area of provision and the way technology can focus care across the whole school and for individual cohorts who may have a hidden inequality, such as pupils with special educational needs (SEN) or in receipt of the pupil premium (PP), 'In order to establish a true picture of provision, all subjects/areas of school life need to record activities on GridMaker.' 'GridMaker' (Opeus, n.d.) is a piece of software that audits and tracks SMSC provision. It is able to identify strengths, weaknesses or gaps in provision and measure the impact and evaluating the effectiveness of SMSC (Opeus, n.d).

Pastoral Survey

The pastoral survey was used to provide raw data from the pastoral team on attitudes and the culture of the school regarding pastoral care and inclusion. Twenty surveys were circulated to staff and ten were completed. Seven staff (70%) stated that they understood and agreed with the Inclusion Policy. Nine staff (90%) agree that they are well managed and all (n=10) agree that the team makes a difference to overall behaviour. All staff agreed that the SLT were committed to decreasing exclusions. The results show that all staff involved with the survey agreed with inclusive practice.

Exclusion Data

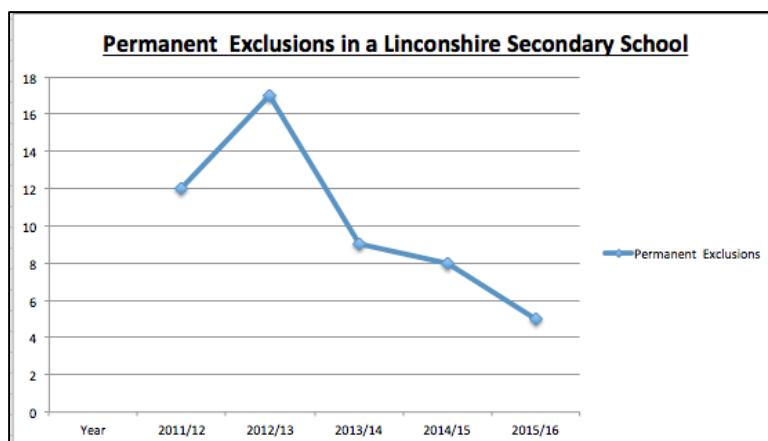
Table 1 shows the raw data for exclusions over the last five years.

| Year | Secondary School | | National Average (%) | County | |
|---------|---------------------------|-----------|-------------------------|-----------------|-----------|
| | Permanent Exclusions (PX) | % of Roll | | Lincolnshire PX | % of Roll |
| 2011/12 | 12 | 1.29 | 0.14 | 82 | 0.17 |
| 2012/13 | 17 | 1.56 | 0.12 | 107 | 0.22 |
| 2013/14 | 9 | 1.40 | 0.13 | 108 | 0.23 |
| 2014/15 | 8 | 0.70 | 0.15 | 144 | 0.31 |
| 2015/16 | 5 | 0.40 | 0.13 | 132 | 0.28 |

Table 1: Exclusion Data: 2011/12 – 2015/16

Source: Lincolnshire County SEN Offices for County data, the host school for Secondary School Data

The data was analysed using a spreadsheet and used to create a graphical representation of the results. Graph 1 shows a decline in exclusions over the last five years:



Graph 1: Permanent Exclusions in a Lincolnshire Secondary School
Source: Data Office: Lincolnshire Secondary School

Case Studies

Two case studies (Boy A and Girl B) highlight the change in the school’s approach to inclusion and pastoral support. Boy A joined the school in 2013 at a point where the exclusion policy was in place and the LLBI had not been introduced. Although the school followed their Behaviour Policy, interventions were not used early enough and outside stakeholders were not able to engage. The boy’s behaviour had breached all policies; hence exclusion was the only option.

Girl B joined the school in 2016. Both the Inclusion Policy and LLBI were in place. Her problems were dealt with swiftly; early intervention and the introduction of collaborative work with outside stakeholders from the beginning dealt with problematic behaviour. The Post Adoptive Team worked with Girl B in school once every

14 days. The Pastoral Team also worked around Girl B's reduced timetable and allowed weekly sessions for Solutions Focused Counselling (SFC). This was a new concept introduced by the Schools Team at County Offices. With a heavily reduced timetable and therapy over eight weeks, Girl B felt able to function in school. Her outlook changed and with the support of behaviour strategies, and time out cards she could look at school with a different mindset. Her behaviour continued to improve and she joined an adoption outreach programme for children who were experiencing a comparable situation to her own. To date, Girl B had only had minor breaches of the behaviour policy and remained in school.

Discussion

The aim of the dissertation was to research how positive inclusion and strategic pastoral care can lead to a reduction in permanent exclusions in secondary schools. This discussion will analyse the results with reference to existing research and legislation. The key findings will be summarised and there will be discussion of the limitations of the research, and its practical implications, and potential future research ideas. Three embedded themes were recognised within the Thematic Analysis of each interview and this discussion will consider how the results of this study and the reduction in permanent exclusions are hinged upon these themes.

Attitudes

The main findings in this study highlight positive attitudes towards pastoral care from both pastoral leads and the team of staff supporting them. The positivity surrounding teamwork, legislation, and policy driven practice shows a new focus of care; and this is supported by the raw data. As shown in Graph 1, permanent exclusions for the school have reduced from 18 pupils in 2012 to five in 2015/16. The strategies used and outlined by Case Study B, show quite clearly that interventions are taking place at an earlier stage both in line with the school's Inclusion Policy and the LLBI (Lincolnshire County Council, 2016). The use of Solutions Focussed Counselling (SFC) has given the staff a method of preventing exclusion: this may be a means to improving behaviour, supporting learning, increasing engagement and wellbeing, and building strengths in reflection (metacognition) and resilience. Increasing the capacity of school pastoral staff to support students over the full range of difficulties they might experience, SFC directly links back to the theory that developmental challenges in adolescence require the need for close peer relationships, autonomy, support from other adults than parents, identity negotiation, and academic self-efficacy (Eccles 2004). SFC was use in Case Study B and is referenced in both interviews as a great resource for positive pastoral care. SFC has empowered the Pastoral Team: it has resulted in a positive attitude and morale, and enabled the assertion of power and behavioural manipulation over pupils at a micro level. In agreement with Dreyfus et al.'s (1983) understanding of Foucault's theory, individuals are under control but able to construct their identity with a more flexible approach and peer support. Thus, effective practice has been achieved through positive attitudes and the effective use of legislation, policy, and resources.

Team Work

At a micro level, teamwork has been the key to achieving positive inclusion (Dixon, 2012). The inclusion support procedure within the school's policy is taken directly from the LLBI (Lincoln Council, 2016) and takes a holistic view of the child, including collaborative care with outside stakeholders where necessary. The use of teamwork and collaboration was discussed at length during the pastoral lead interview, and by the SMSC coordinator, who noted that the whole school approach embeds teamwork into every aspect of pastoral care at a whole school level. Thus, the marked decrease in exclusions over the last three academic years (from 18 exclusions to five) is most likely due to changes at a macro level working their way into policy and practice on a micro level. The pastoral care survey resulted in 100% agreement that the current strategy towards teamwork makes a difference to overall behaviour. The use of teamwork as a paradigm in the pedagogy of modern day education and pastoral care ties in with the model of primary prevention (Dwyer et al., 1998) as discussed in the literary review. These strategies which base their functionality on teamwork can be seen both within the inclusion policy and the associated pastoral team and connected resources such as SFC. By using these strategies, hidden inequalities outlined in both case studies were targeted earlier and more effectively in the case of Girl B.

Funding and Resources

The findings regarding the use of funding and resources were perhaps the one area of negativity, leading to difficulties within the pastoral care strategy at the school and in collaboration with outside stakeholders. It is therefore surprising that the school has achieved such a positively marked reduction in exclusions, with the cuts in funding over the last two years. The pastoral lead made specific reference to internal funding cuts leading to the loss of valuable services, which then had an impact on the level of support needed by the Behaviour Outreach Service (BOSS) at a county level. Due to funding cuts at a micro level, the BOSS service is struggling to meet demand. Therefore, early intervention using SFC has become even more of a priority and is included in the Inclusion Policy. Technical resources such as GridMaker (Opeus, n.d.), as outlined by the SMSC coordinator have been useful tools in tracking hidden inequality and areas of need for those pupils requiring extra pastoral intervention.

Conclusion

This study aimed to research how positive inclusion and strategic pastoral care can lead to a reduction in permanent exclusions in a secondary school, and review one school's journey from the rhetoric of legislation to the reality of practice. This study has reinforced the philosophy that the use of primary prevention strategies that are embedded in legislation and positive, inclusive policy can successfully develop into robust inclusive practice. This was highlighted in the themes of attitudes, team-work, funding and resources. Ultimately, these themes reflect a socially constructed world of proactive power and behavioural management that shapes individual pupil behaviour, making the pupil more open to learning in the mainstream educational institution within which they exist. The results outline how critical to inclusion are the culture and attitude of staff towards

using resources like Solutions Focussed Counselling and outside stakeholders within the primary steps of the LLBI. As outlined in the case studies, if intervention is too late, the pupil and their primary carers are more unlikely to engage. The raw data supports the evidence that the new Inclusion Policy at this school is a success, and highlights why this school has been used as a model of best inclusive practice for the county.

The results from the raw data exposed a further fall in exclusions following the introduction of the LLBI and Inclusion Policy during the 2015/16 academic year. These data also highlight the importance of strategic use of SFC within the Inclusion Policy and how its adoption at a whole school level could have dramatic effects on overall behaviour and wellbeing of students. With a combination of technology revealing hidden inequality and SFC revealing individual struggles, schools may be more successful in helping pupils before behaviour or the ability to cope deteriorates. This could reduce the needs for external stakeholders and services that have been affected by funding cuts; a fundamental issue highlighted in the pastoral lead interview. However, these results are taken from a school with a large and established pastoral department whose exclusion rates have been falling since 2012. The picture across other secondary schools in Lincolnshire could be very different, and thus more extensive research would reveal where different approaches may also be just as successful.

This study had several limitations and future studies could build upon each area. Although qualitative data looked at pastoral attitudes and gave a phenomenological perspective on the pastoral care in school, it was only the opinion of two members of staff. Further studies could involve more participants. Another significant factor was that only half of the pastoral team completed the pastoral care survey. This provided limited feedback on the attitude of staff and culture of the school. However, given the limitations of the study, raw exclusion data still showed a decrease in permanent exclusions since the adoption of the new Inclusion Policy. The findings suggest that the research perspective and methodology used were effective and could be repeated on a larger scale with additional analysis of school and county data by using a quantitative data platform to run analytics on possible correlations and patterns. This study looked at one school, and the recommendation for a more indicative view of the pedagogy of inclusive practice in education would be to research a sample of different secondary schools across Lincolnshire. Further studies could also assess the long-term impact of SFC on permanent exclusion.

Finally, when it is asked 'how' positive inclusion and strategic pastoral care lead to a reduction in permanent exclusions in secondary schools, it is important to consider that one of the most noteworthy findings of this study was the positivity and empowerment of staff at a micro level. Political agendas may exercise power using legislation for education, but pastoral care is socially constructed by policy, strategy, attitudes and teamwork. It is this symbiotic relationship of micro society with opportunities based in strategy that leads to positive actions, and ultimately to inclusion, by exposing both hidden inequalities and the voices of individual children.

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