What works for pupils with literacy difficulties?

Presentation to the ‘Overcoming Disadvantage for Struggling Learners’ conference

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Based on:

• My 2007 DCSF report What works for pupils with literacy difficulties? The effectiveness of intervention schemes

• + a few updates

• The new microsite hosted by the Dyslexia-SpLD Trust:
  www.interventionsforliteracy.org.uk

What I won’t cover:

• Schemes which are not readily available now in the UK

• ALS, ELS, FLS

• Schemes which don’t have quantitative evidence that pupils make substantial progress

• Particular schemes in detail: see the report and the website

What I will cover:

The main principle which led to the selection of the schemes featured on the website, namely:

• Quantitative evidence from at least one study that pupils make at least double normal progress

Some general findings

Overcoming disadvantage for struggling learners (2010)
Addressing the problem of underachievement that has its roots in literacy and numeracy difficulties.
Double normal progress?

How do you measure this?

Impact measures:

- Ratio gain
- Effect size

Ratio gain (‘average monthly progress’) =

\[
\text{gain in months of reading/spelling age} \\
\div \\
\text{months between pre- & post-tests}
\]

Con: reading & spelling ages are elastic
dispersal of scores ignored
Pro: takes account of time elapsed
can be used for one-group studies

Effect size =

\[
\text{(programme group’s gain) minus} \\
\text{(control group’s gain)} \\
\div \\
\text{post-test standard deviation of control group}
\]

Pro: much more statistical
dispersal of scores crucial
Con: does not take account of time elapsed
must have control/comparison group

Substantial progress =

- Ratio gain of 2.0 or more
- Effect size of 0.5 or more

Result for website: 27 schemes
(out of 49)
**How robust is the evidence base?**

Among the 27 schemes, best evidence:

- Randomised controlled trials (RCTs): 2
- Matched groups quasi-experiments: 6
- Unmatched groups pre-test/post-test studies: 1
- One-group pre-test/post-test studies: 18

**Catch Up Literacy?**

- Original study was a matched-groups quasi-experiment

Since then:

- Many years of one-group pre-test/post-test data
- From dozens of LAs, hundreds of schools, thousands of pupils
- Highest ratio gains for reading: 4.6 for comprehension, 3.4 for accuracy (word recognition)
- Effect size for reading: 0.97 for accuracy
- Highest ratio gain for spelling: 1.6

**What works for writing?**

No secondary studies met the criterion

**Some general findings, 1**

- Ordinary classroom teaching DOESN'T help pupils catch up
- Phonics for reading works best within a broad approach
- Comprehension can be improved if directly targeted
- ICT only helps if precisely directed by a teacher

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Some general findings, 2

• Partnership schemes mostly work well for reading; many are now delivered by trained classroom assistants

• Search is still on for what works well for pupils with the worst difficulties

So finally:

Push for more robust designs & measures

Keep looking for what will work for the children with the most severe difficulties

Always evaluate! = collect data
- Catch Up is among the most assiduous