



What works for pupils with literacy difficulties?

The effectiveness of intervention schemes



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Chapter one

Focus and intention of this report

1.1 The focus

Most children learn to read and write satisfactorily first time through high-quality classroom teaching and/or home support, but what of those who don't? How are they to be helped? This research report reviews intervention schemes that have been devised to help struggling readers and writers, and is intended to inform schools' choices among such schemes.

More exactly, this research report is addressing the following questions:

- What intervention schemes are there which have been used in the UK in an attempt to boost the reading, spelling or overall writing attainment of lower-achieving pupils in at least one of Years 1–11, and which have been quantitatively evaluated here?
- What are those schemes like, and how effective are they?

The restriction to schemes used and evaluated in the UK is partly intended to avoid a deluge of information on schemes used elsewhere in the world, but mainly to circumvent the objection, 'How do we know that it will work here?'

The intention of this report is to provide clear and analytic information on such schemes available in order to inform practice and choices of approach. Those choices should be guided not only by the evidence assembled and analysed here, but also by careful matching of the needs of an individual school, class or child to the specifics of particular schemes.

Most of the schemes covered in this report are Wave 3 initiatives within the current structure of the Primary National Strategy's Framework for teaching literacy and the Secondary National Strategy's Framework for teaching English, as defined on the following page, though some are also in use as Wave 2 initiatives, and a few are preventive measures, aimed at preventing young children developing difficulties in the first place.

Within that structure, there is an obvious need for schools to have clear information, in order to make principled decisions about which approach to adopt for children who experience difficulties in literacy.

2.4 What works at secondary level?

There is much less evidence for secondary level than for primary; in particular, there is none at all for writing. That said, there is evidence of useful to remarkable effectiveness for reading for the following schemes: Academy of Reading, BRP, Corrective Reading, ENABLE PLUS (KS3), Literacy Acceleration, Read Write Inc. Fresh Start, THRASS and Toe by Toe; less convincing or mixed evidence for Catch Up Literacy, Philosophy for Children, The Accelerated Reader, Sound Training for Reading, and The Secondary Reading Research; and pretty convincing evidence of ineffectiveness for [ILS].

There are only four schemes with evidence for spelling at secondary level. Two have moderately convincing evidence of effectiveness: Literacy Acceleration and THRASS, while [Read Write Inc. Fresh Start] and [The Secondary Reading Research] seem relatively ineffective here.

While its effectiveness is not huge, [Philosophy for Children] nevertheless represents a wholly different angle from all the other schemes analysed; whatever benefit it might have for reading was an unexpected bonus effect.

Except where stated, the remaining sections of this chapter deal only with primary level.

3.45 Corrective Reading

Scheme

Corrective Reading is published by McGraw-Hill under the SRA imprint, and is the linear successor to DISTAR (see Somerset (4), section 3.34). It aims to provide intensive intervention for students who are reading one or more years below their chronological age. The materials come in three strands, Decoding, Comprehension and Workbooks, and in four levels within each strand. The Decoding strand moves up from word attack (65 lessons) through two levels of decoding strategies (65 lessons each) to skill applications (125 lessons). The Comprehension strand moves up from 'Thinking Basics' (60 lessons) through two levels of comprehension skills (60 and 65 lessons) to 'Concept Applications' (140 lessons).

Evaluation

The only data available came from one secondary school in Kent, which adopted it in September 2006 'as a way of radically addressing the very low literacy levels of a large number of [its] students on entry'. The pupils received six programme lessons a fortnight delivered by teachers and teaching assistants. There was a substantial improvement in reading.

References

Kirby (2007), www.mcgraw-hill.co.uk/sra/correctivereading.htm

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