OIDEAS 55

Earrach/ Spring 2010

Iris na
ROINNE OIDEACHAIS agus SCILEANNA

Journal of the
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION and SKILLS

AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS AGUS SCILEANNA | DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS

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INVITATION

The Editor invites teachers and educationists to contribute papers for publication in *Oideas*. Papers should be at least 1,500 words in length and should not exceed 5,000 words, and they should deal with aspects of education of current, practical, or historical interest.

Book reviews and shorter notices may be published also and publication will be subject to the approval of the Editorial Board.

Papers and reviews should be typed in black, in 1.5 spacing, and preferably should be transmitted to the Editor electronically. A short note on the writer's background should accompany every paper submitted and an abstract of the paper also should be provided.

Preferably, reference to authorities should be made in the text by use of the Harvard (or Authordate) system, but the British Standard (the Numeric system) also is acceptable.

Some examples:

Book
MacBeath, J. and McGlynn, A. (2004) *Self-evaluation: what's in it for schools?* London and New York: RoutledgeFalmer

Book chapter in an edited volume
Gleeson, J. (2004) 'Cultural and Political Contexts of Irish Post-Primary Curriculum: influences, interests and issues', in Sugrue, C. (ed) *Curriculum and Ideology: Irish experiences, international perspectives*, Dublin: The Liffey Press Ltd.

Journal article
Hayes, D. (1996) 'Aspiration, Perspiration and Reputation: idealism and self-preservation in small school primary headship', *Cambridge Journal of Education*, vol.26, no.2, pp.379-390.

Electronic source
Department of Education and Science, Ireland (2006) *A Guide to Whole School Evaluation in Primary Schools* [online], http://www.education.ie/servlet/blobservlet/insp_p_wse_intro.htm (accessed 26 October 2006).

AN GHAEILGE

Cuirfear fáilte ar leith roimh ailt i nGaeilge. Mura gcuirtear ar fáil dúinn iad ní féidir linn iad a fhoilsiú.

Aon tuairimí a nochtar sna hailt in *Oideas* is iad tuairimí na n-údar féin iad. Ní gá go leireoidís, ná go réiteoidís le, beartas na Roinne Oideachais agus Eolaíochta.

Opinions expressed in papers in *Oideas* are those of the authors. They need not necessarily express, or be in accord with, the policy of the Department of Education and Science.

Foilsítear *Oideas* faoi stiúradh Boird Eagarthóireachta.

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NÓTA ÓN EAGARTHÓIR

Bailíonn an t-eagrán seo d'*Oideas* le chéile cúig phíosa taighde a bhfuil obair an mhúinteora sa rangsheomra mar fhócas lárnach acu. Bíodh is go mbeidh dúil ar leith ag an gcleachtóir iontu, beidh suim ag lucht déanta polasaí, agus ag an bhforbróir curaclaim agus seirbhísí tacaíochta, iontu chomh maith. I ndairíre is díol suime na léiriúcháin seo d'éinne gur spéis leis an chaoi leis an bhfoghlaim a chur chun chinn i measc páistí.

Déanann an chéad pháipéar, le **Dr Joe Travers,** anailís ar thionchar pholasaí na samhla de leithdháileadh ginearálta ar thacaíocht foghlama don Mhatamaitic. Beidh sé ina chúis iontais do mhórán daoine gurb amhlaidh, ainneoin na hinfheistíochta méadaithe agus an líon méadaithe scoileanna agus múinteoirí atá ag tabhairt tacaíochta anois sa Mhatamaitic dá barr sin, gur dealraitheach nach bhfuil méadú ar bith tagtha ar rochtain daltaí ar thacaíocht san iomlán. Ina theannta sin, tugann a chuid torthaí le tuiscint chomh maith gur lú an dóchúlacht go bhfreastalóidh an fhoireann tacaíochta foghlama ar riachtanais foghlama daltaí a bhfuil deacrachtaí sa Mhatamaitic acu, i limistéir sainithe faoi mhíbhuntáiste, ná an dóchúlacht go bhfreastalóidh siad ar a bpiaraí siúd i scoileanna nach bhfuil sainithe. Ina fhianaise seo, éilíonn sé athbhreithniú ar na critéir atá mar bhun is mar thaca ag an tsamhail de leithdháileadh ginearálta i dtreo is go ndéanfar soláthar níos solúbtha do thosca uathúla catagóirí áirithe scoileanna.

Tá tacaíocht na foghlama mar fhócas chomh maith ag páipéar an **Dr Therese Day**. Ag machnamh di ar ghnéithe roghnaithe de chuairteanna ar scoileanna a thug sí thar thréimhse sé bhliana déag, ina cáilíocht mar stiúrthóir chúrsa dioplóma iarchéime sa tacaíocht foghlama, tugann sí faoi deara trí chéim leithleacha d'fhorás agus de bhéimeanna as a dtáinig sa deireadh thiar fócas i bhfad níos láidre ar lorg na brí i múineadh na léitheoireachta. Féadtar a cheapadh go léiríonn na hathruithe atá tarlaithe na curanna chuige, iad féin ag éabhlóidiú, do mhúineadh na litearthachta, atá le léamh i litríocht idirnáisiúnta. Nuair a chuirtear san áireamh an scéal athraitheach airgeadais a théann i gcion go criticiúil ar churanna chuige reatha d'fhorbairt leanúnach ghairmiúil, áitíonn sí gur léire dá bharr sin an tábhacht atá le tosaíocht a thabhairt don rud a theastaíonn ó fhormhór na múinteoirí as an bhforbairt leanúnach ghairmiúil. Dairíre, ciallaíonn sé seo go gcaithfear luach a chur ar cheird na múinteoireachta thar gach rud eile agus, sa dara dul síos, go gcaithfear curanna chuige scoile uile a chothú.

Ó cuireadh ar bun é i 1968, tá a dhícheall déanta ag *Oideas* scríbhneoireacht léannta i nGaeilge a spreagadh agus de réir an traidisiúin seo tá staidéar san eagrán seo againn ar ról na scéalaíochta agus na leabhar sa réamhscoil lán-Ghaelach. Aibhsíonn an **Dr Máire Mhic Mhathúna** an teoiric a chruthaíonn tábhacht na scéalaíochta agus na leabhar i gcur chun cinn na forbairte intleachtúla, sóisialta agus teangeolaíochta agus ceanglaíonn sí an léargas seo leis an méid atá tugtha faoi deara agus taifeadta aici i roinnt réamhscoileanna lán-Ghaelacha. Cuireann sí síos ar an gcaoi a thógann múinteoirí scafall don fhoghlaim i gcomhrá dinimiciúil le daltaí agus ar an gcaoi a n-imeasctar múnlaí teanga nua-shealbhaithe i ngnáthaimh laethúla. Molann Curaclam na Bunscoile (1999) scéalaíocht i nGaeilge mar réamhtheachtaí luachmhar don léitheoireacht fhoirmeálta, agus gheobhaidh múinteoirí naíonán sa scoil náisiúnta agus múinteoirí na ranganna arda leis, ábhar sa pháipéar seo a chuirfidh lena gcleachtas.

Fairsingíonn an **Dr Joy Alexander** ár gcuid eolais faoin gcaoi le cabhrú le buachaillí feabhas a chur ar a gcuid scríbhneoireachta, agus éilíonn sí cur chuige níos cuidithí lena ndíreodh múinteoirí a n-aird ar an rud gur léir go bhfuil buachaillí in ann é a dhéanamh sa scríbhneoireacht, agus tógáil air sin. Cuireann sí síos ar staidéar a rinneadh ar scéalta a scríobh buachaillí agus léiríonn sí go mbíonn claonadh ag múinteoirí an rud a thuigeann siad a luacháil – carachtracht, cur síos agus líofacht focal – agus go n-oireann sé seo do na cailíní. Murab ionann is sin, is iondúil gur fearr le buachaillí plota gníomhaíochta (performative), mar

a thugann sí air. Is é sin le rá, bíonn buachaillí ag samhlú agus ag achtú amach an scéil agus iad ag scríobh – agus de ghnáth is fearr leo scéal aicsin. Iarrann sí, go gonta, ciacu is fearr scéal marbhánta a insint go bríomhar nó scéal spreagúil a insint go liosta. Tugann an Dr Alexander le fios go bhfuil ceacht anseo do gach múinteoir, agus do mhúinteoirí mná, ach go háirithe, atá sa tromlach i measc múinteoirí Béarla, agus nach ionann a n-aireachtáil ar cad is scríbhneoireacht mhaith ann agus aireachtáil na múinteoirí fir.

Sa pháipéar deiridh, déanann **Ms Barbara Collins** agus an **Dr Michael O'Leary** fiosrú ar chritéir rathúlachta mar mhodh luachála i gcuraclam na bhfísealaíon. B'fhéidir go measfadh mórán múinteoirí go mbeadh an luacháil coimhthíoch do na físealaíona ach, ar bhonn a staidéir mheasartha mór ar obair a rinneadh i seomra bunscoile amháin, tugann an dá scríbhneoir leid gur féidir le húsáid critéar rathúlachta ag múinteoirí, luacháil piaraí agus féin-luacháil, raon leathan de dhea-thorthaí a bhaint amach. Is suimiúil le rá go bhfuil gach ceann de na trí straitéis seo ag dul i gcion go tairbheach ar scríbhneoireacht chruthaitheach a cuid daltaí Ms Collins, ar a gcumadóireacht ceoil, agus ar a gcuid damhsa ó cuireadh an staidéar i gcrích.

Soláthraítear leis léirmheas ar lámhleabhar suntasach ar an bhfoghlaim le triúr scoláire de chuid an Insitiúid Teicneolaíochta i bPort Láirge mar a bhfuil siad ina mbaill thábhachtacha de roinn na hiarchéime san oideachais

Tá súil againn go gcruthóidh an cúig pháipéar seo, maraon leis an t-athbhreithniú, go bhfuil pobal méadaitheach taighde againn atá tiomanta do thacú le hoideachasóirí, idir múinteoirí ranga, comhairleoirí agus lucht déanta polasaí. Tá dóchas againn go roinnfidh daoine eile a gcuid taighde linn i dtreo is go bhféadfaimid go léir mar phobal cásmhar oideachasóirí cur le gach uile gné den fhorás foghlama i measc na bpáistí.

Is é seo an t-eagrán deireannach d'*Oidea*s a fhoiseofar faoi chúram an eagarthóra seo. Tapáim anois an deis chun mo bhuíochas a ghabháil leosan uile a chuidigh liom le deich mbliana anuas. Cuirim bhuíochas faoi leith in iúl do an scribhneoirí a sholáthraigh ailt agus aistí léirmheastóireachta agus leis an mbord eagarthóireachta chomh maith. Cibé dul chun cinn atá déanta ag *Oideas* mar iris oideachais, tá cuid mhaith den bhuíochas ag dul dóibh siúd. Táim ag súil gur fás agus bláthú atá i ndán don iris sna blianta dúshlánacha atá romhainn agus go leanfaidh sí lena freastal ar an díospóireacht oideachais.

EDITORIAL COMMENT

This edition of *Oideas* brings together five pieces of research that have the work of the teacher in the classroom as their central focus. While they will have a particular appeal to the practitioner, they also will be of interest to the policy maker, the curriculum developer and support services. In fact anyone who has an interest in the promotion of children's learning will find much of interest in the presentations.

The first paper, by **Dr Joe Travers,** analyses the impact of the general allocation model policy on learning support for Mathematics. It will come as a surprise to many that in spite of increased investment in learning support leading to greater numbers of schools and teachers now providing support in Mathematics, it seems that overall pupil access to support has not increased. Further, his findings also suggest that pupils with difficulties in Mathematics in designated disadvantaged schools are less likely than their peers in non-designated schools to have their learning needs addressed by the learning support team. Arising from this, he calls for a review of criteria underpinning the general allocation model so that a more flexible provision is made for the unique circumstances of particular categories of school.

Learning support also forms the focus of **Dr Therese Day's** paper. Reflecting on selected aspects of school visits made in her capacity as course director of a graduate diploma in learning support over a sixteen-year period, she discerns three distinct phases of developments and emphases that have ultimately led to a much stronger focus on the search for meaning in the teaching of reading. The changes that have taken place can be seen to mirror the evolving approaches to the teaching of literacy outlined in international literature. When regard is had for the changing financial situation that crucially affects current approaches to continuing professional development, she argues that the importance of prioritising what most learning support teachers need from CPD becomes more obvious. In practice, this means that a premium must be set on the value of the craft of teaching and second, effective whole-school approaches must be nurtured.

Since its inception in 1968, *Oideas* has endeavoured to encourage scholarly writing in Irish and in keeping with this tradition we feature in this edition a study of the role of storytelling and books in the Irish language preschool. Highlighting theory that supports the importance of storytelling and books in promoting intellectual, social and linguistic development, **Dr Máire Mhic Mhathúna** applies the insights to what she has observed and recorded in a number of all-Irish preschools. She outlines how teachers scaffold the learning in a dynamic exchange with pupils and how newly-acquired language moulds are usefully integrated into daily routines. The Primary School Curriculum (1999) promotes storytelling in Irish in the infant classes as a valuable precursor to formal reading, and teachers of infants in the national school, and those of pupils in higher classes too, will find much in this paper to enrich their practice.

Adding to our knowledge on how boys may be helped improve their writing, **Dr Joy Alexander** calls for a more constructive approach that would have teachers focus their attention on what boys demonstrate they can do in their writing so that they may build on that. She details a study of stories written by boys and shows that teachers tend to evaluate what they know how to evaluate – characterisation, description and use of language – and that this favours girls. In contrast, boys tend to favour what she calls a performative plot, that is, boys are visualising and enacting their story as they write – and usually they prefer an action story. Pointedly, she asks if it better to tell a dull story well or an exciting story badly. Dr Alexander suggests there are messages here for all teachers, especially female teachers who comprise the majority of English teachers and whose perception of what constitutes good writing will be different from that of their male counterparts.

In the final paper, **Ms Barbara Collins** and **Dr Michael O'Leary** investigate the use of success criteria as an assessment approach in the visual arts curriculum. To a great many teachers the concept of assessment in the visual arts may seem alien but, drawing from their modest study of work undertaken in a single primary classroom, the two writers suggest that teachers' use of success criteria, peer and self-assessment can lead to a wide range of positive outcomes. Interestingly, since the conclusion of the study, all three strategies are impacting positively on Ms Collins's pupils' creative writing, music composition and dance.

We also present a review of an impressive guide for teachers on approaches to learning. The three authors are based in Waterford Institute of Technology where they are key figures in the institution's postgraduate education department.

We hope that together with the review, these five papers will show we have a growing research community that is dedicated to supporting the classroom teacher, the advisor and the policy maker alike. We trust that others will favour us with their research so that all of us as a concerned body of educationists may together make an increasing contribution to the development of children's learning in all its aspects.

This is the final issue of *Oideas* to be published by the current editor. I now take this opportunity to thank all those who have supported me during the past ten years in the production of the journal. Special thanks are due to the writers of papers and reviews and to the Editorial Board. Whatever progress has been made in making *Oideas* a useful educational journal is due in no small measure to their commitment and diligence. I sincerely hope that *Oideas* will grow and flourish as a forum for educational debate and as a catalyst for change in a world where change is inevitable

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Joseph Travers

THE IMPACT OF THE GENERAL ALLOCATION MODEL POLICY ON LEARNING SUPPORT FOR MATHEMATICS IN IRISH PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Joseph Travers is Director of Special Education, St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra. He is a former primary school teacher (mainstream, special class, learning support/resource). He is currently lead researcher on a DES funded project entitled 'Addressing the challenges of inclusion Irish schoolsl" and a member of the research team which conducted a review of the role of special schools and classes in Ireland for the National Council for Special Education.

ABSTRACT: Drawing on data from a multi-method study this paper analyses the impact of the General Allocation Model policy on learning support for Mathematics. The findings show that overall pupil access to support has not increased, despite more schools and teachers providing support in the subject. This is explained by reduced teacher caseloads and the redistribution of some teachers from larger schools to small schools. The findings also suggest that pupils with difficulties in Mathematics in non-designated schools are more likely to have their needs addressed than pupils in designated disadvantaged schools. Reported benefits of the General Allocation Model include the creation of special education teams in schools, a reduction in shared learning support teachers and an increase in in-class support.

INTRODUCTION

This paper addresses the issue of whether the General Allocation Model (GAM) introduced in primary schools in 2005 is meeting the needs of all pupils with low achievement/learning difficulties in Mathematics and whether there are differences in the level of support given to pupils between schools designated as disadvantaged and other schools. The paper draws on data from teacher respondents from six focus groups, six individual case study interviews and a questionnaire survey of 137 schools. It will firstly outline concerns about achievement levels in Mathematics, secondly the development of the General Allocation Model, thirdly the methodology of the study and fourthly, the findings and discussion of same.

Since the publication of the *Study of Remedial Education in Irish Primary Schools* in 1998 (Shiel and Morgan, 1998), there have been many other reports in the past decade which have highlighted concerns about the differences in mathematical achievement levels and the number of pupils who are experiencing low achievements, between schools designated as disadvantaged and those that are not (Shiel and Kelly, 1999; Shiel *et al.* 2006).

It was also clear from these evaluations that despite very different levels of need, the proportion of pupils receiving learning support in Mathematics across these differing school contexts was largely similar. Thus pupils in non-designated schools were more likely to have

their needs addressed by the learning support service in Mathematics, as there were proportionately less pupils in these schools in need of support. The role of the *Learning Support Guidelines* in reinforcing this inequity is clear when one considers the following advice from the Guidelines:

> Supplementary teaching should be made available to pupils with low achievement in Mathematics. Schools that do not provide such a service should introduce it on a phased basis over a period of two to three years *as the school's needs in English are reduced* (DES, 2000, p.58) (emphasis added).

Such guidance is only relevant to schools where the needs in literacy are reduced. However, this is far more likely to occur in non-designated schools. In fact there is evidence that the gap in literacy achievement is widening between schools in designated disadvantaged contexts and other schools (Eivers *et al.* 2004).

Thus it was no surprise that *The 2004 National Assessment of Mathematics Achievement* found that there was still no difference between the level of support in designated and non-designated schools despite a huge differential in achievement levels (26% of pupils in designated schools achieved scores at or below the 10th percentile, as against 8% in non-designated schools). In terms of overall access 12.4% of pupils were receiving learning support for Mathematics. Half of the pupils attended schools in which learning support was provided (Shiel *et al.* 2006). Of the teachers surveyed 35.5% provided learning support in English only, 2.9% in Mathematics only and 61.6% provided support in both subjects. Of the learning support teachers providing support in Mathematics only 24% of their time and caseload was devoted to the subject.

Since this report, there has been a major change in policy with the introduction of the General Allocation Model in primary schools since September 2005 (Department of Education and Science (DES) 2005).

THE GENERAL ALLOCATION MODEL

Three significant changes can be delineated in the circulars (DES, 2003, 2005) outlining the General Allocation Model. First, schools are allocated resources differentially within two systems; second, once allocated, schools can deploy resources flexibly, creating special education teams; and third a staged approach to assessment, identification and programme planning was also introduced. These changes will be discussed in turn.

All schools are allocated learning support/resource teacher support based on a weighted model taking into account factors such as school size, school location and whether the school is single-sex boys or girls. For example, all schools designated as disadvantaged get an additional teacher for every 80 pupils whereas a non-designated all-girls school receives their first full-time additional post when they reach 195 pupils. Small schools get fulltime access to the service when they have 105 pupils enrolled. The more favourable ratio for designated schools resides within a wider social policy of targeting disadvantage. However, all designated schools are treated similarly regardless of levels of disadvantage, and the different allocations based on whether the school caters for all-boys or all-girls did not apply in designated schools. Given the greater prevalence of boys assessed with mild general learning disabilities or dyslexia (NCSE, 2006) in these schools, this is surprising.

The teacher allocated under the new weighted model is called a learning support/resource teacher to reflect the fact that the teacher has a much wider brief than the traditional learning support teacher. They now also cater for pupils with borderline and mild general learning disabilities, dyslexia and mild behaviour problems. These categories of pupil

represented the largest categories on the former resource teachers' caseload and were termed high incidence disabilities. Pupils with dyslexia and mild general learning disabilities had since 1999 received 2.5 hours of resource teaching per week from a resource teacher with a caseload of between six and eleven pupils. Now they are part of the caseload of a learning support/resource teacher who had a recommended caseload of 30 pupils (DES, 2000).

Furthermore, the GAM drew a distinction between allocation and deployment for the first time and allows schools to deploy their support teachers, regardless of teacher title in the service of any pupil with special educational needs. This was the first time this blurring of roles and flexibility of deployment in creating special education teams was given official approval by the DES. How this change has affected support teaching in Mathematics is a further key focus of the paper. Thus the teacher sample in this study includes learning support/resource teachers, resource teachers for special educational needs, resource teachers for travellers and special class teachers, as under this new system any of these teachers can have a range of pupils (from pupils with very mild difficulties to low incidence special educational needs) on their caseloads regardless of teacher title. The GAM also introduced a staged approach to assessment, identification and programme planning allowing schools to prioritise support for pupils with the greatest needs.

The key policy issue addressed in this paper is the impact of the General Allocation Model policy change on the position of learning support in Mathematics within the wider context of inclusion. It is interested in how the new model affects provision and if there are any differences between designated and non-designated schools in relation to access to the service. The import of these issues is summed up by Shiel *et al.* (2006) in their comment that "it would seem important to ensure that application of the new system [the GAM] results in an appropriate response to the needs of pupils with learning difficulties in Mathematics in all schools" (p.165).

METHODOLOGY

To address the research question (Table 1) a mixed method research design was employed incorporating three stages.

Table 1 *Research question, level and methods*

Research question	**Level**	**Research method**
In the context of inclusion and equity, is the General Allocation Model meeting the needs of all pupils with low achievement/learning difficulties in Mathematics?	Policy and school	Focus group discussions, questionnaire and teacher interviews

Stage one consisted of five focus group interviews with 99 learning support teachers and resource teachers responsible for co-ordinating Mathematics learning support/special education across ten counties. The purpose of these group interviews was to pilot ideas, garner opinions and map the range of pertinent issues. In addition, the views were sought of 19 learning support and resource teachers seconded as regional learning support advisers for what was then the Primary Curriculum Support Programme.

Stage two consisted of a questionnaire survey. One full cohort (2005-6) of learning support teachers and resource teachers who were pursuing postgraduate studies in learning support/special education in all six centres around the country and four previous cohorts from

one of the centres were identified as the purposive sample which amounted to 230 teachers. The questionnaire addressed issues of pupil numbers receiving support in Mathematics, the level and organisation of support, size of teacher caseload, views on the GAM and views on learning support for Mathematics.

The third stage consisted of six individual teacher interviews with learning support/resource teachers and resource teachers in different contexts. Semi-structured interviews (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992) were perceived as providing the best means of addressing those issues raised in the previous stages in greater depth across different contexts.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Information on the background to respondents is followed by presentation of the key findings under the following headings: overall access to learning support in Mathematics, increase in provision, policy on access, size and nature of teacher caseload and the effect of the General Allocation Model at policy level. All of the descriptive and inferential statistics presented are derived from the questionnaire data. Different numbers of teachers responded to different questions in the questionnaire. This is indicated by (n=) in the text where n refers to the total number of respondents for that question.

Background on respondents to survey

Of 230 questionnaires posted out 137 were returned representing a return rate of 60%. All of the respondents, due to the nature of the survey sample, had either a postgraduate diploma in learning support or special education. School sizes ranged from 41 to 878 pupils. Teachers in designated disadvantaged schools accounted for 33% of respondents, leaving 67% in non-designated schools. Table 2 outlines the teaching roles of the respondents.

Table 2 *Percentage of teachers in the following roles (n=137)*

Learning support/resource teacher	Resource teacher for pupils with SEN	Resource teacher for travellers	Special class teacher
75.9	13.1	3.6	7.3

Access to support teaching in Mathematics

One hundred teachers in the questionnaire sample gave figures for the number of pupils receiving support in Mathematics in their schools. Overall, the 100 schools had 31,732 pupils with 2,712 getting additional help in Mathematics, which represented 8.5%. This represents a reduction in overall access, as the corresponding figure from 2004 was 12.4% (Shiel *et al.* 2006).

In designated disadvantaged schools 12.3% of pupils received support in Mathematics (n=38 schools). The corresponding figure in non-designated schools was 7.0% (n=62 schools). In terms of the mean figures for each type of school there was not a statistically significant difference in the number of pupils receiving support in Mathematics. Shiel *et al.* (2006) found that in 2004 "the percentages of pupils in fourth class in receipt of support did not differ between designated and non-designated disadvantaged schools, despite the lower level of achievement in designated schools" (p.164). The evidence from the present study suggests that this has only slightly improved under the GAM despite the policy taking disadvantage into allowance in the distribution of learning support/resource teachers. Given the extent of the disparities in achievement levels (Shiel *et al.* report a difference of 26% versus 8% between designated and non-designated schools as regards the number of pupils under the 10th

percentile) it is clear that the GAM is not meeting the mathematical needs of pupils in designated schools. Thus, a key finding from this sample is that pupils in non-designated schools are much more likely to have their needs addressed as regards support in Mathematics under this new model.

Table 3 *Percentage and number of schools with no Mathematics provision*

Designated school (n=45)	Non-designated school (n=87)	Overall (n=136)
8.9% (4)	7.6% (7)	8.0% (11)

Table 3 outlines the percentage of schools that do not provide learning support in Mathematics. A higher percentage of designated schools (8.9%) had no Mathematics provision compared to non-designated schools (7.6%). This again represents a differential negative impact on designated schools given the extent of low achievement levels in these schools.

However, while overall percentage figures for pupil access to support decreased in this sample, a greater number of schools (92%) now seem to provide some service in Mathematics than in 2004. This apparent discrepancy is explained by an increase in provision in smaller schools at the expense of other schools and reduced teacher caseloads. This would show a significant broadening of provision, as Shiel *et al.* (2006) report that just over half of pupils attended schools in which learning support for Mathematics was provided in 2004. Results show that provision for Mathematics has increased in terms of additional teachers providing it, more in-class support, greater attention to lower classes (1st class upwards), more frequent small group withdrawal due to smaller caseloads and less teachers shared between schools. Significantly, the proportion of pupils on teachers' caseloads who receive support for Mathematics has increased from 24% in the Shiel *et al.* (2006) benchmark study to 43% in the present study.

Increase in provision for Mathematics

Across 135 schools, 430 support teachers out of a total of 558 provided support in Mathematics (Table 4). This represents 77.0% and is an increase since 2004 when the figure was 64.5% (learning support teachers only) (Sheil *et al.* 2006).

Table 4 *Percentage of teachers providing support in literacy only, maths only or literacy and Mathematics across 135 schools (n=558)*

Literacy only	Maths only	Literacy and Maths
22.9	2.3	74.7

However, there have been differential gains and losses across school contexts from this overall increase. Table 5 shows the impact of the changes in terms of its effect on learning support/resource teaching in Mathematics. While most schools reported an increase in Mathematics support teaching, it seems some of this was at the expense of other schools with 12% reporting that in their school there has been a decrease in support teaching in Mathematics (Table 5).

Table 5 *Effect of the introduction of the General Allocation Model on support teaching in Mathematics (percentage of respondents)*

Effect of GAM	Overall (n =132)	Designated school (n=45)	Non-designated school (n=87)
Support teaching in Mathematics has decreased	12.1%	20.0%	8.0%
Support teaching in Mathematics has increased	56.1%	46.7%	60.9%
Support teaching in Mathematics has remained the same	31.8%	33.3%	31.0%

However, when the responses are separated out according to whether the teachers teach in a designated school or not it is clear that there has been a disproportionately negative impact on support teaching for Mathematics in schools in designated disadvantaged areas (Table 5). Consequently, schools in non-designated areas in this sample seem to have benefited far more from the policy changes in relation to support teaching for Mathematics. However, given that the confidence intervals for the differences in percentages overlap, this present sample does not provide sufficient evidence of a wider underlying trend. This was confirmed by a chi-square test (p=0.99, Chi-Square=4.621, df=2).

It is legitimate to ask how some designated schools could end up with less of a support service in Mathematics, as they were given a more favourable ratio in the appointment of learning support/resource teachers to cater for their additional needs. To answer this question it is necessary to explain how these schools had gained resource teachers under the previous system. As pupils with mild general learning disabilities and borderline mild general learning disabilities are over represented in areas of socio-economic disadvantage (Tomlinson, 1982; Mittler, 2000), designated schools had secured additional resource teachers for these pupils. Outside of these areas resource teachers were dealing with proportionately more pupils with low incidence disabilities. As pupils with mild and borderline general learning disabilities were removed from the caseload of resource teachers for appointment and retention purposes, designated schools lost proportionately more of these teachers, which in some cases were not offset by the teachers appointed under the GAM. Some all-boys designated schools were particularly affected as proportionately more boys than girls have been identified with mild general learning disabilities and dyslexia (NCSE, 2006). Some losses were quite dramatic:

> *We had six SEN teachers. Now under the GAM we have three. We are in a designated disadvantaged school. The children lost out big time. (Questionnaire respondent 37)*

In one teacher interview, the respondent reported that their school ended up with 60 pupils under the 10th percentile on standardised tests between two teachers and:

> *If we were to move up to the fifteenth percentile we would have another forty children. We would have a hundred children under the 15th percentile in a combined group of literacy and Maths need. (Teacher interview one)*

In another interview the respondent was in an inner city disadvantaged area with a high proportion of pupils with dyslexia:

The upshot for us when they put this new model together was an appalling vista. We had a large numbers of pupils with dyslexic difficulties who were getting support but who under the new model were called high incidence. We were wiped out. The Department in its wisdom put us into a cluster with four schools and we were losing all 3 of our support teachers and we were being granted 0.75 of a teacher through the GAM. (Teacher interview six)

However, following representations this school retained the resources on a year on year basis.

Also, teachers felt the GAM had a negative impact on pupils with mild general learning disabilities. As proportionately more of these pupils are in designated schools, this also contributed to the negative impact. There was evidence that some of the reduced time given to pupils with MGLD or dyslexia was taken from their former Mathematics provision:

Children now taken in groups of 4/5 with wider ability range - don't feel their individual needs are met, especially MGLD children relating to Mathematics - they now receive no maths in our school. (Questionnaire respondent 58)

Policy on access to support teaching in Mathematics

Less than 10% of 135 respondents were in schools that had one dedicated support teacher for Mathematics. This represented just over 2% of the total support teachers in these schools (Table 4) and does not seem to have increased as a result of the GAM. Many teachers were very clear in their comments that official guidelines prioritise literacy support over Mathematics and they expressed frustration with this:

In my experience (disadvantage) all our energies and innovations have been in the area of literacy. (Questionnaire respondent one)

As long as guidelines stress dealing with literacy first, then Mathematics - rather than putting them equal - children's learning support in maths will be insufficient. (Questionnaire respondent 58)

Proportionately more teachers in designated schools expressed these frustrations but they were also mentioned by the focus group teachers, the learning support advisers, questionnaire respondents and by teachers in the interviews.

There are also challenges in relation to how Mathematics is viewed within learning support in schools. Table 6 outlines some of these views. A significant minority of 15% would prefer to be giving learning support in literacy only. Nearly a quarter of the teachers agreed with the statement that Mathematics is less important than literacy and 36% agreed that schools should focus on literacy difficulties first before turning to Mathematics with a further 22% undecided on the issue. It could be argued that this is simply reflective of official policy in the *Learning-Support Guidelines*. Another consequence of this policy is that some schools because of the level of need in literacy would have insufficient time for Mathematics. This view is further validated by the 73% of teachers who expressed agreement with it.

Table 6 *Percentage of teachers' level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements*

SA: Strongly agree, **A**: Agree, **U**: Undecided, **D**: Disagree, **SD**: Strongly disagree	**N =**	**SA**	**A**	**U**	**D**	**SD**
Because of the degree of needs in literacy there is insufficient time for learning support in Mathematics	119	21.0	52.1	5.0	20.2	1.7
I would prefer to be doing learning support/resource in literacy only	120	5.0	10.0	3.3	43.3	38.3
School should focus on literacy difficulties first before turning to Mathematics	120	3.3	32.5	21.7	32.5	10.0
Mathematics is less important than literacy	117	1.7	23.1	10.3	41.9	23.1

Size and nature of teacher caseloads

The mean number of pupils on the caseloads of the 137 teachers was 21, ranging from five to 49 (SD=8.3). There was no significant difference between the size of the caseloads of teachers in designated and non-designated schools. Teacher respondents had a mean number of two pupils with low incidence special educational needs on their caseloads, ranging from 0 to 12 (SD=2.3). Fifty-one (37.2%) of the teachers had no such pupils on their caseloads. The mean number of pupils with high incidence special educational needs on the teachers' caseloads was nine (n=133) (SD=8.9). The mode and median were both five for such pupils. As the standard deviation for the mean is very large, the mode and median are better indicators of the average caseload in this case. Teachers had low numbers of minority ethnic pupils on their caseloads and similarly low numbers of travellers unless the teachers were specifically resource teachers for travellers. In the case of learning support teachers, caseload size has reduced since 1998 (Shiel and Morgan, 1998). However, the nature of the caseload has changed with more pupils with high incidence special educational needs included. However, the redesignation of many resource teachers as learning support/resource teachers has meant an increase in their caseload from the previous maximum of 11. Likewise, the nature of their caseloads has changed with more pupils with difficulties but not assessed special educational needs now included. Some resource teachers are continuing to operate the previous system and hence have small caseloads made up entirely of pupils with low incidence special educational needs. There was no significant difference between the number of girls and boys receiving support for Mathematics with means of 4.9 and 5.2 per teacher respectively.

A total of 103 teachers gave figures for overall caseloads and for Mathematics. For these teachers 43% of their caseload received support in Mathematics. This is a large increase since 2004 when the corresponding figure was just less than 24% (Shiel *et al.* 2006). However, the net effect of the percentage increase in the proportion of pupils receiving support in Mathematics has been offset by the reduction in the average teachers' caseloads from 46 for learning support teachers in1998 (Shiel and Morgan, 1998) to 21 in this study. The mean number of pupils per teacher caseload under the 10th percentile in Mathematics was nine in designated schools (n=31) (SD=5.4) and five for the teachers in the non-designated schools (n=51) (SD=3.0). The Mann-Whitney U test showed this difference to be statistically significant (U=359.5, Z=-4144, *p*=. 001). These differences then had a knock-on effect on the number over the 10th percentile in Mathematics on caseloads. Of the 30 teachers in designated schools who gave this data and teach Mathematics, 43% had pupils over the 10th percentile on their caseloads. This compared to 53% of the 51 teachers who gave this data and teach Mathematics in non-designated schools.

Therefore, in relation to these teachers, it is clear that those in non-designated schools were able to give support services to more pupils over the 10th percentile. Some of these

schools reported offering support in literacy and Mathematics up to the 30th percentile, one up to the 66th percentile in Mathematics and another, enrichment activities to pupils over the 90th percentile.

Influence of the GAM on teachers' work

Teachers were also asked to describe how the new model has affected their work. One hundred and six teachers responded to this open-ended question on the questionnaire. On the whole, comments were positive about the policy change. However, seven teachers reported that their schools lost teachers (others lost teaching hours) under the model. The effect of these losses was recounted as decreasing provision in Mathematics; not being able to cater for all pupils under the 10th percentile; reducing the number of pupils receiving learning support and only catering for literacy needs.

Another eight teachers reported no change in their set up. Another 30 specifically mentioned increased provision and reduced caseloads in their schools, which also could be inferred but not stated by many more teachers. In terms of gains, some were quite dramatic:

> *…increase from three to seven people in special education team meant 'crash' course for four newcomers. (Questionnaire respondent 98)*

Others reported reductions of up to ten pupils in their caseloads. Teachers in small rural schools reported significant benefits. Seven teachers who had been shared between schools are now based in one school fulltime:

> *I am now fulltime in my own school. I used to be shared. We now have another fulltime LS/RT teacher who focuses on Mathematics, whereas I focus on literacy. (Questionnaire respondent 38)*

Another four have had their cluster size reduced by the new policy.

In relation to how this new increased provision is being utilised, teachers reported the following changes: thirteen stated that provision for Mathematics was increased including having one teacher dedicated to Mathematics; ten that in-class support had been introduced or developed; four that early intervention had been initiated and another five that provision had been extended to pupils up to the 30th percentile.

By far the biggest change reported was the development of special education teams in schools. Twenty-eight teachers mentioned this and, on the whole, found it to be positive. They reported better co-ordination between support staff, more collaborative whole-school approaches, more generic caseloads, greater flexibility in deployment with teachers working with class streams as against working with pupils with a particular category of need, and more professional discretion around organising support for pupils. Typical comments included:

> *School has developed a special education team. Less specialisation by teachers, more generic caseloads. Members of team have clearer overview of process of whole caseload receiving supplementary teaching. More collaborative approach. (Questionnaire respondent 73)*

This is a welcome development as one of the features of the Irish support system has been its differentiated nature with different types of support teachers with little or no contact or co-ordination between them (Travers, 2005).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has found that while the General Allocation Model has led to an increase in the number of schools and teachers providing support for Mathematics, overall pupil access has decreased because of reduced teacher caseloads and an increase in support in smaller schools at the expense of some larger schools. However, for those pupils receiving support the level of this support has increased since 2004.

The most disconcerting conclusion from this study is that contrary to Government policy of targeting disadvantage, there is clear evidence that pupils with difficulties in Mathematics in non-designated schools are much more likely to have their needs addressed than pupils in designated schools. Despite the differential allocation of resources through the GAM, schools in non-designated areas benefited far more from the changes in relation to support teaching in Mathematics. The following findings from this study combine to validate this claim:

(i) In designated schools 12% of pupils were receiving support for Mathematics while in non-designated schools 7% of pupils were receiving support. These figures need to be set in the context of the different levels of need between the two school types. Figures for low achievement, for example, from Shiel *et al.* (2006) show 26% of pupils in 4th class in designated schools scoring under the 10th percentile as against 8% in non-designated schools. Weir (2003) reports 46% of pupils achieving under the 10th percentile in 6th class in the *Breaking the Cycle* scheme schools.

(ii) There was no statistically significant difference between the mean number of pupils receiving support for Mathematics across designated and non-designated schools despite significantly different levels of low achievement between the two school contexts.

(iii) Learning support/resource teachers in non-designated contexts served a higher proportion of pupils performing over the 10th percentile on standardised tests of achievement than in designated contexts.

(iv) A higher percentage of designated schools than other schools had no learning support provision for Mathematics.

(v) Since the introduction of the GAM, 20% of learning support teachers in designated schools reported that support teaching in Mathematics had decreased as against 8% in non-designated schools.

(vi) Since the introduction of the GAM, 61% of learning support teachers in non-designated schools reported an increase in support teaching for Mathematics while the corresponding figure in designated schools was 47%.

With nearly a decade gone since the publication of the *Study of Remedial Education* (Shiel and Morgan, 1998), which raised similar issues in relation to literacy provision, it seems the same situation is being repeated for Mathematics. Clearly the objective of targeting disadvantage, at least in relation to a subject termed “the worst curricular villain in driving students to failure in school” (NRC, 1989, p.6) does not seem to be working.

There are at least four reasons why this situation has emerged. First, policy has prioritised literacy in a way that linked the freeing up of resources for Mathematics on the basis of first reducing needs in literacy. As shown, this favoured non-designated schools. Second, the GAM treated all designated schools similarly which impinged more negatively on those dealing with severe disadvantage. Third, the GAM gave no additional allowances to all-boys schools in disadvantaged contexts. Fourth, the differential makeup of resource teachers’ caseloads (balance of pupils with high and low incidence disabilities) between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged contexts seems to have been given insufficient attention. This resulted

in designated schools proportionately losing more and gaining fewer teachers under the GAM than non-designated schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

(i) The general allocation model

From the research the GAM policy would seem to be a crude mechanism based on prevalence estimates and not on actual needs. As a consequence, it requires redress procedures for schools where there is a clear mismatch between resources and need. In terms of the general allocation allowances, the case for treating all designated schools alike is weak, as is having different allowances based on whether schools are single sex boys, girls or co-educational for non-designated schools, and not for designated schools. These need to be reviewed. The case for taking designated schools, especially those in band one of the DEIS initiative out of the GAM and treating them on the basis of need is strong while allowing some flexibility to deal with specific anomalies in other schools.

(ii) Equity in distribution of resources

Policy makers should ensure all needs are met first in designated schools if the rhetoric of addressing educational disadvantage is to be matched by deeds. This should entail a redistribution of existing resources first in favour of those with greatest needs. Provision should be adequate enough to facilitate in-class, small group, individual withdrawal and special class placement where appropriate.

The study has shown that the GAM has considerable shortcomings in the design and outcomes of the policy. These include, at the design phase, making no allowances for different levels of disadvantage or gender differences in disadvantaged contexts. It has highlighted the disconcerting situation that despite rhetoric about targeting disadvantage, pupils in designated disadvantaged contexts are less likely than their peers in non-designated schools to have their learning needs in Mathematics addressed by the learning support service.

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Oideas 55

Therese Day

LEARNING FROM LEARNING SUPPORT TEACHERS: LESSONS FOR CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Therese Day is a senior lecturer in the Special Education Department in St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin. She has taught in mainstream and special schools as a class teacher and a learning support teacher. For many years she was director of the Graduate Diploma in Learning Support in St. Patrick's College, until this course was discontinued in 2006. She is currently director of the Masters in Special Educational Needs (MSEN).

ABSTRACT: This article offers a retrospective description and analysis of literacy lessons taught by approximately 150 learning support teachers who completed the Graduate Diploma in Learning Support in St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra between 1990 and 2006. Although much of the core content of their lessons remained constant throughout the sixteen year period, it is possible to discern lines of development and differences of emphasis in their teaching methodologies and practice over that time frame. The changes in the provision of continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers since 2006, and the more recent cutbacks in the education budget, underline the importance of prioritising what teachers most need from CPD in order to best serve the needs of children with special educational needs. Two areas in terms of planning CPD for teachers are identified: firstly, the need to value and nurture the craft of teaching and secondly, the importance of effective whole-school approaches in addressing the special educational needs of children. The twin concepts of craft-knowledge and whole-school endeavour working in tandem, can link the individual expertise of the teacher with the collective resource of the school.

INTRODUCTION

There is a scarcity of published accounts of the work practices of learning support teachers in Ireland. Through my work as a lecturer in the Special Education Department of St. Patrick's College, I have had the opportunity to visit learning support teachers in their classrooms and to observe their teaching at first hand. Of the many insights I have gained through these visits over a period of sixteen years, two in particular have continued to impress me: firstly, the need to value and nurture the craft of teaching and secondly, the importance of effective whole-school approaches in addressing the special educational needs of children. These concerns have remained constant despite adjustments in whole-school organisational arrangements and changes in the approaches employed by individual teachers. This article reports on selected aspects of school visits which I made in my capacity as course director and tutor of the Graduate Diploma in Learning Support in St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra. Although this course was offered since 1974, the paper is confined to a retrospective description and analysis of the lessons taught by learning support teachers who attended the course from 1990 until it was discontinued in 2006. Some contextual and background

information precedes an account of my detailed observations, records and reflections on their teaching over that time. This is followed by a discussion of the two issues highlighted above.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

There has been a shift of emphasis in the provision of continuing professional development for teachers which reflects the changes in the provision of additional support for children and young people with special educational needs (SEN) both nationally and internationally. The academic year 2005-2006 was the last year the Colleges of Education and Universities in Ireland were funded by the Department of Education and Science (DES) to offer postgraduate courses which were dedicated exclusively to learning support teachers. Since September 2006 these institutions, funded by the DES, have been offering a combined post-graduate course for learning support / resource teachers and teachers in special schools and classes. These courses changed in September 2009 when the fifteen-week block release for teachers from school was reduced to eight weeks full-time attendance in college. Given the implications of these changes and other recent cut backs in education, it is important to prioritise what teachers most need in order to best provide for children with special educational needs (SEN). As continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers of children with SEN heads into a new era, it is timely to reflect on the learning support provided by teachers who attended these courses in the past.

Between 1990 and 2006 I visited approximately 150 learning support teachers in primary schools and watched them teach lessons of thirty to forty minutes duration, to small groups of children, who had been withdrawn from their mainstream classes. Although most pupils were operating at, or below, the tenth percentile on nationally standardised tests of reading, some of these children, particularly in areas which were not designated as being disadvantaged, were functioning at higher levels. These teachers taught in a variety of schools representing the range of primary schools in Ireland. All schools were within a hundred mile radius of Dublin. Although I also saw the teachers teaching Mathematics, this article is restricted to the English language and literacy lessons I observed over that sixteen year period.

Readers should note certain limitations to this review. All these teachers were attending an award-bearing course and while my visits were essentially supportive and advisory, because their teaching was assessed the visits also contained an evaluative element. Inevitably this is not a value-free account and it is up to readers to judge the credibility of my interpretation for themselves. I am indebted to these teachers for their openness and professionalism which enabled me to learn so much.

LEARNING SUPPORT TEACHERS' LESSONS

Analysis of my observation notes of the learning support teachers' lessons reveals three different periods, which reflect a development in methodologies and approaches used by learning support teachers. Although there was considerable overlap between these periods, there was a definite difference of emphasis in teaching, which corresponded to the time sequences outlined below. Table 1 outlines the three phases, representing the time periods 1990-1994, 1995-1999 and 2000-2006, with a summary of the main elements covered in the lessons.

Table 1: *The main elements covered in the lessons*

1990-1994	1995-1999	2000-2006
Sight vocabulary	Sight vocabulary	Sight vocabulary
Phonics	Phonics	Phonological awareness & training
Word analysis		Some word analysis
Spelling		
Games	Games	
	Some oral language	Oral language
Some individual reading	Individual reading	Some individual reading
	Some story reading	Story reading (especially Big Books)
	Some whole group reading	Whole group reading (guided)
	Some computer work	
		Some reading strategy work
		Some writing

Although much of the core content of their lessons remained constant throughout the sixteen year period, it is possible in retrospect, to discern lines of development and differences in emphasis over that time frame. The first phase, 1990-1994, was characterised by a strong orientation towards the teaching of discrete literacy skills with a particular emphasis on teaching decoding skills. While this skills-based focus remained during the second phase, 1995-1999, it is also possible to identify early attempts to address the teaching of oral language coupled with a movement away from a purely skills-based approach towards a more whole-language approach to the teaching of reading. The third phase, 2000-2006, appears to represent a more integrated approach with a much stronger emphasis on the search for meaning in teaching reading. These changes mirror the developments in the teaching of literacy outlined in the international literature (National Reading Panel, 2000). Each of these phases is now examined in more detail.

Phase 1: 1990-1994

Lessons during this period typically lasted thirty minutes, were divided into short, five to ten minute slots, and covered a range of discrete activities. Basic sight vocabulary, usually drawn from lists of high frequency words, was taught using flash card drill, relying on children's visual memory. Visual representations of progress, such as word-walls and ladders were used to motivate children to increase their store of basic sight words. When teaching phonics, the teachers emphasised the isolated sounds of letters and relied on drill and practice. Word analysis generally involved teaching compound words and breaking multisyllabic words into syllables, with less attention to blending the syllables together again to make real words. The teaching of spelling involved some rote learning of spelling rules and usually relied on auditory memory with particular attention on rhyming words and phonograms. Overall, the teaching of these pre-requisite reading skills tended to be concerned with isolated words and was seldom related to continuous reading of text.

Where continuous reading of text occurred, it tended to be confined to the final minutes of a lesson when individual children read a few lines from their readers and were assigned further pages or a new book to read at home. The teachers I observed throughout this time tended to use a lot of workbook material. The use of games was very common and children made jigsaws and played board games which had a strong phonic component. However, these games did not appear to be related to the work carried out earlier in the lesson, again reflecting the isolated nature of the activities.

As observer of these lessons I was conscious of a certain pressurised atmosphere as the teachers tried to move quickly through a series of short, unrelated activities in the time allotted to each lesson. The arrival of the next group of children often signalled the end of the lesson rather than the more appropriate consolidation and closing activities, which the teachers had actually planned.

Phase 2: 1995-1999

Although the learning support lessons continued to be dominated by the direct teaching of skills during this period, it was possible to discern a greater influence of whole-language philosophy and approach to the teaching of reading, particularly in the second half of this period. Nevertheless, sight vocabulary was taught in much the same way as it had been in the earlier period. However, the teachers now contextualised these words and provided practice and reinforcement through the use of games. Similarly, although the teaching of phonics was still dominated by the explicit teaching of isolated sounds, the teachers often used commercial phonic programmes to practice these sounds in the context of words and sentences. In contrast with the earlier period, there was little evidence of teaching word analysis skills in the second half of the 1990s.

The learning support teachers in this period demonstrated their growing understanding of the importance of oral language in the teaching of literacy and the need to present reading as a search for meaning. Activities such as sharing personal news, similar to 'Our News' in the mainstream class, became part of the lessons. Although these early attempts at the formal teaching of oral language rarely moved beyond the identification of characters and objects in pictures, I noted that a small number of teachers also extended children's responses beyond simple labelling and tried to elicit more detailed descriptions.

While there was hardly any reading of continuous text in the previous period, some group reading was now in evidence. However, as in the earlier period, this tended to be limited to the final minutes of the lesson, where each child read a few lines aloud, 'round-robin' style. As was common practice then, there was more emphasis on reading accuracy and on testing, rather than teaching reading comprehension. Although I observed some teachers reading stories aloud, this tended to occur with the younger children only and then at the end of the lesson.

Just as the previous phase (1990-1994) was characterised by somewhat stressful attempts to fit a series of short teaching units into the lesson, time management also appeared to be an issue for the teachers during the period 1995-1999. In their attempts to address the teaching of oral language, the teachers appeared to let the discussion run on and were then under pressure to fit all the planned lesson activities into the allotted time.

Phase 3: 2000-2006

The movement towards a more meaning-based approach to the teaching of literacy gathered further momentum during the period 2000-2006. However, this was also accompanied by intensive instruction in phonemic and phonological awareness and skills training, particularly with the younger children. In addition, much of the word analysis and phonic work during this later period was firmly rooted in auditory training and attention to sound-patterns in words, with most teachers using commercial or school-designed programmes.

One of the biggest changes I observed from the earlier periods was the way in which the learning support teachers tried to make links across different activities to integrate various aspects of the lesson. For example, although the method for teaching sight vocabulary did not appear to have changed since the early 1990s, the particular words the teachers now taught

were usually related to the reading that formed part of the lesson. There was a similar attempt to integrate listening, reading and some writing. In addition, a small number of teachers used a thematic approach and integrated the work around particular topics.

The teaching of oral language appeared to become much more structured and this was reflected in the teachers' written plans. This could perhaps have been attributed to the fact that oral language had been given the status of a subject in its own right with the introduction of the revised *Primary School Curriculum* (1999). Additionally, the learning support course in St. Patrick's College had always maintained a strong focus on the teaching of oral language, not just as a pre-requisite for learning to read and write, but as an essential skill in itself. In contrast with the earlier periods, my observation notes reveal that the teachers appeared to be more confident about an oral language curriculum, assessment procedures and appropriate methodologies for teaching.

The stronger emphasis on oral language was also evident in the reading in which the children were engaged. The use of 'Big Books' and storybooks had become prevalent and children were taught basic concepts of print and story structure. Almost all of the teachers I visited made some attempts at guided reading with particular emphasis on prediction, discussion and comprehension before, during and after reading.

Whereas most of the reading in the earlier periods was conducted on an individual basis for brief periods of time, the reading during this period usually involved the teacher guiding the whole group, as they read from the same text. Additionally, most children were involved in some form of peer-tutoring reading programme which was organised and monitored either by the learning support, class, or home school community liaison teacher. The amount of time and the quality of attention given to individual reading varied greatly. Some teachers listened to and monitored the children's reading and comprehension every day; others did this on a weekly basis; others noted the books read at home and assigned new books as required.

While there was little evidence of the teaching of writing in the 1990s, apart from some handwriting and completing worksheets, most learning support teachers during the 2000s spent some time teaching writing skills. Activities usually consisted of writing letters, letter groups and words related to phonic and spelling activities. However, a very small number of teachers also taught narrative and expository writing. Teaching directly and explicitly, they used writing strategies and frames to introduce children to the skills involved in the writing process.

This most recent period was, in my view, characterised by the teachers' growing confidence in their teaching ability. They did not try to pack as much content or as many elements into lessons, as in the earlier years. In contrast to the somewhat disjointed and hectic pace of the nineties, these teachers' lessons appeared to be more coherent in terms of structure and pace.

LOOKING TOWARDS THE FUTURE

Having traced a line of development in the learning support teaching I observed from 1990 to 2006, I now attempt to draw some lessons from that review. This may help to inform planning for CPD for teachers of children with learning difficulties. Space does not permit a critique of specific aspects of literacy teaching at a micro level. Instead, I have selected two areas which I consider important at the macro level of teaching, in terms of future planning for the provision of CPD for teachers of children with learning difficulties. As stated earlier, the first is the need to value and nurture the craft of teaching and the second is the importance of

promoting and supporting sustainable, whole-school approaches that meet the special educational needs of children.

1. Learning support teachers' craft-knowledge

One of the strongest features of the learning support teachers' teaching I observed was their expertise in the craft of teaching. Most of these teachers had been class teachers for a considerable number of years before they took up a position in learning support and they were able to draw on that body of experience and expertise as they now focused exclusively on children with learning difficulties. These teachers displayed a level of excellence in their teaching that is sometimes referred to as craft-knowledge (Day, 2005). That is,

> *the professional knowledge and thought which teachers use in their day-do-day classroom teaching, knowledge which is not generally made explicit by teachers and which teachers are not likely always to be conscious of using.*
>
> (Brown and McIntyre, 1993, p. 19)

Instead of documenting all the instances I observed, the craft-knowledge of these teachers is illustrated below by three specific examples, which recurred persistently during my visits to classrooms: firstly, the teachers' ability to teach essential skills for learning and living, secondly, their expertise in planning and structuring a lesson and thirdly, their proficiency in providing much needed training and practice in skills which are critical to literacy learning.

Essential skills for learning and for living

Quite apart from the teaching of literacy concepts and skills, the learning support teachers I observed were extremely good at teaching and giving children practice in basic social and life skills such as taking turns, greeting each other, listening and paying attention and organising their personal belongings. Much attention was given to such daily learning routines as accessing and tidying the resources in use, learning when and how to interrupt or contribute to the group, and learning to repeat or think aloud. This sort of incidental but essential teaching appeared to be part of these teachers' craft-knowledge. One of the implications of the new weighted system of allocating teaching resources for children with SEN is that most of those teachers who formerly catered for children in need of learning support in literacy and Mathematics, are now teaching children with more serious levels of need. This has particular significance in terms of these children's need and ability to learn essential skills for living and learning. Because these social and learning skills are not learned intuitively by many children with SEN, it is important that these critical teaching practices are valued, highlighted and prioritised in future CPD courses for teachers. The craft-knowledge needed to teach and facilitate these skills must remain a central element of these teachers' teaching repertoires.

Expertise in planning and structuring a lesson

Most of the lessons by learning support teachers followed an obvious structure with a distinct beginning, middle and end to each lesson. This structure was also recorded in the teachers' detailed termly and daily planning. I have no doubt that the level of teachers' planning and structure which I witnessed facilitated the children's learning. However, despite the fact that by 2006 very few learning support teachers I visited were teaching more than four children in a group, most of the teachers planned for and taught the whole group as if they were a homogenous group of children. I observed very little variation or differentiation to cater for different children's needs, strengths and learning styles within the groups. Future courses in CPD will need to highlight the importance of individual planning and differentiation to best serve the learning needs of all the children. As the practice of devising children's Individual Educational Plans (IEP) becomes more commonplace, as well as a legal requirement (National Council for Special Education, 2006), teachers will justifiably look to CPD courses to help them plan for, implement, monitor and evaluate individual children's learning and progress.

Skills training and practice

Although it was possible to detect a shift from a skills-based to a more integrated, meaning-based approach in the learning support teachers' teaching during the observation period, the direct teaching of skills, particularly at word level, remained constant. Teachers used drill, practice and repetition to reinforce these skills. While the direct teaching of such skills for children with learning difficulties is well supported in the literature (DEST, 2005; Rose, 2005), the research evidence also points to the need for these children to learn to transfer these skills to the real reading of continuous, meaningful text (Pressley, 2006). With a few notable exceptions, very few learning support teachers I observed taught children how to use and practise these skills when reading in context. While many of the children appeared to learn by exposure to, repetition of and immersion in literacy activities, the lack of direct teaching and modelling of how to read and write meaningful text was particularly disadvantaging for the children with more serious learning needs. Even when they were quite proficient in decoding and analysing words in isolation, these children did not seem to apply these skills when reading in context. Pupils were not proficient in questioning, self correcting and monitoring their own understanding and they did not appear to integrate new knowledge or skills into their existing repertoires. These children need to be taught strategies to enable them to learn and to transfer that learning from one situation to another. My observations suggest that the learning support teachers were highly proficient in teaching necessary literacy skills in isolation. However, future CPD courses might profitably concentrate on the virtues of teaching cognitive, meta-cognitive and practical strategies to children with learning difficulties and to provide structured and plentiful opportunities for transferring skills to real literacy and life contexts.

The three illustrations above present a flavour of the learning support teachers' craft-knowledge in action. In discussing and helping teachers evaluate their own teaching, the learning support teachers I visited appeared to be quite unconscious of this quality in their teaching. There is a need to respect and acknowledge what the very best teachers do all the time. There is also a need to develop a language that best describes teachers' craft-knowledge without diluting its complexity or integrity. By focusing on what teachers do best, it is possible to raise their confidence as teachers, thereby empowering them professionally. By valuing and highlighting the most positive and effective aspects of their craft-knowledge, it is possible to facilitate and nurture teaching of an even higher quality. This requires self examination and guidance at a number of different levels, ideally in a collaborative partnership between practising teachers and schools, in-service providers, teacher educators and researchers.

2. Whole-school approach for children with learning difficulties

The account of learning support teachers' practices outlined in this article is based on observations of teachers teaching small groups of children withdrawn from their mainstream class. Only a very small number of teachers observed was involved in some form of co-teaching with their mainstream colleagues. Despite the fact that most of their school plans espoused a whole-school approach to the education of children with SEN and or learning difficulties, very few of the schools I visited appeared to be operating any visible or obvious whole-school approach to catering for the needs of these children. Although, my records show that a small number of schools was providing additional learning support for children with SEN within the mainstream class from about 2004 onwards, my interpretation was that the responsibility for supporting these children was left almost exclusively to the learning support teacher and or the resource teacher. In most cases, the learning support and resource teacher had separate case loads and separate instructional learning programmes and it was not uncommon for them to operate autonomously without reference to the class teacher, the principal or even to each other. Although the roles of learning support and resource teachers have merged since the implementation of the general allocation model for accessing resources for pupils who need additional support in mainstream primary schools (DES, 2005), there still appears to be very little collaboration regarding teaching children with learning difficulties

between learning support/resource teachers and class teachers. The research evidence clearly points to the importance of teacher attitude and the need for all staff to commit to the concept of inclusion if all children, including those with learning difficulties, are to be made fully part of a school (Booth and Ainscow, 2002). Because the children with learning difficulties are the least likely to be able to transfer their learning from one situation to another, it is essential that teachers work together in planning and catering for these children's learning.

Most of the teachers I visited argued for a whole-school approach and for collective responsibility for children with learning difficulties. However, the practice in schools does not appear to have kept pace with the rhetoric or desire for such a collegial response. As long as children are withdrawn from class on a regular basis they will continue to be viewed as separate from the rest of the school population. As long as they are expected to follow at least two separate instructional programmes, attempts to seriously target their individual learning needs are likely to be haphazard and ineffective.

Schools are often the first place to experience and thereby reflect the changes within society. There is no doubt that the landscape of mainstream primary schools in Ireland has changed radically in the past decade. Change is never easy and the recent expansion and developments in Irish society have made it inevitable. McDaid (2007, p. 270) quotes an estimate from McManus (2007) of "20,000 minority language children in primary schools, with a further 12,000 such children in post-primary". The large number of languages spoken in Ireland today is represented in Irish primary classrooms. More than one in five mainstream primary teachers is now employed as a supplementary support teacher for children with SEN. The traditional model of the individual teacher, autonomous within the classroom, operating without reference to any other adult, is no longer tenable. Knowledge and expertise are not the exclusive domain of any individual teacher and most children with SEN require the services and support of their parents and professionals well beyond the individual teacher (Lacey, 2001).

Inclusive practice demands that children receive high quality education throughout the entire day, rather than for a few periods a week. In practical terms, this means focusing the support around the mainstream class, with the class teacher at the heart of curriculum provision. For too long, class teachers have been disempowered by the removal of the children with difficulties from their classes, despite the fact that policy documents state that it is the class teacher who has front-line responsibility for all the children in the class (DES, 2000). There is of course a case for withdrawing some children for intensive work at certain times and the individual needs of particular children will dictate the necessary balance between in-class and withdrawal work. However, such work needs to be incorporated into children's IEPs and to be part of the mainstream class teacher's programme.

It is the class teacher's programme, with its appropriately differentiated plans for individual children's needs, that should be the blueprint for all to follow. This places the onus on support teachers to adapt and accommodate the class teacher's programme so that all children are included as fully as possible in the mainstream class and are enabled to avail of the most appropriate education. This demands much closer collaboration between class teachers, learning support/resource teachers, children's parents, SNAs and all relevant auxiliary staff in planning, delivering and evaluating the learning programmes of children with learning difficulties (Doherty, 2005). School leadership and management have a critical role to play here. So too have the providers of CPD. In addition to the curricula and programmes of education they traditionally followed during their pre-service education, teachers need enhanced skills, proficiency and understanding of areas such as communication, consultation, negotiation, interpersonal relationships, planning, leadership, management and most importantly, collaboration.

There is a dearth of research on inclusive practice for children with SEN and learning difficulties in Irish schools. Schools cannot be expected to embrace the concept of inclusion without the evidence of its effectiveness and feasibility. Yet ironically it is the schools, rather than the researchers, academics and even the human rights campaigners, who will provide the most convincing arguments for and against the effective inclusion of all pupils in the mainstream school. Future CPD needs to equip teachers with the skills and confidence to engage in small-scale action research projects that answer the most fundamental and pressing needs of their own schools as they attempt to overcome the barriers to achieving successful educational outcomes for all. For only schools can grapple with the very real issues they themselves confront, such as finding time to collaborate together, co-ordinating programmes, recording and evaluating progress and differentiating their teaching to reach those most difficult to teach. It is the schools themselves who will generate sustainable, effective, inclusive practices. Given the supportive conditions, teachers are in the best, and most persuasive, position to 'go public' and share their knowledge and expertise with others.

CONCLUSION

Reflecting on the work of these learning support teachers, the most striking and recurring feature that emerges is their unstinting commitment and dedication to their pupils. They had attended a demanding, university-accredited, post-graduate course at least one day a week for a full academic year. As well as teaching in school, they fulfilled their course-work and teaching practice requirements and submitted themselves to a rigorous evaluation and assessment process. Because I believe good teachers are the most effective means of ensuring high quality education for all pupils, I consider it essential that we look after our teachers by supporting and up-skilling them. Whole-school approaches will only develop by building on the good practices in which teachers already engage and by enabling and facilitating them to share and develop these practices with each other.

The system for allocating resources for children with SEN has changed. CPD courses have changed. Further change is inevitable, indeed desirable. However, the needs of children with regard to their learning have not changed that much. Good teachers are as necessary as ever and the principles and craft of teaching remain constant. Craft-knowledge represents the most positive aspects of what I observed of the learning support teachers I visited. Looking forward, this craft-knowledge needs to be harnessed more productively within a whole-school approach. The twin concepts of craft-knowledge and whole-school endeavour working in tandem, can link the individual expertise of the teacher with the collective resource of the school. Schools are now being given the opportunity to respond in flexible ways that best meet the needs of all their pupils. Providers of CPD must collaborate seriously with schools in order to meet this challenge and responsibility.

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Máire Mhic Mhathúna

ARÍS IS ARÍS EILE: SCÉALTA MAR ÁIS TEANGA SA NAÍONRA

Léachtóir sa Luath-Oideachas in Institiúid Teicneolaíochta Bhaile Átha Cliath í Máire Mhic Mhathúna. Dhein sí a cuid staidéir i gColáiste Oideachais Mhuire na Trócaire, Dún Chéire, An Coláiste Ollscoile, Baile Átha Cliath, Ollscoil Uppsala, an tSualainn, agus Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath, áit ar bhain sí dochtúireacht amach de bharr tráchtais ar shealbhú na Gaeilge i naíonraí. Tá spéis aici i gcúrsaí teanga, litearthachta agus cultúir, go háirithe sna gnéithe sin a bhaineann le sealbhú an dara teanga agus na Gaeilge.

ACHOIMRE *: Déantar cur síos san alt seo ar ról na scéalta agus na leabhar mar áis fhoghlamtha teanga is scéalaíochta sa naíonra Gaelach. Déantar anailís ar an teoiric a bhaineann le forbairt na teanga is na scéalaíochta féin sa chéad is sa dara teanga. Deineadh cluastaifeadadh ar na seisiúin scéalaíochta i naíonra Gaelach amháin gach coicís ar feadh sé mhí. Scagadh na hathscríbhinní chun féachaint cén modh scéalaíochta a bhí in úsáid ag na stiúrthóirí is cén dul chun cinn a bhí á dhéanamh ag na páistí. Tugtar cuntas anseo ar na straitéisí scéalaíochta a bhí in úsáid ag na stiúrthóirí sin agus ar na naisc a dhein siad idir na scéalta is na gníomhaíochtaí eile sa naíonra. Tuigeadh gur chabhraigh an modh inste rialta leis na páistí chun páirt a ghlacadh sa scéal. Tuigeadh freisin go raibh tábhacht ag baint leis an scéal céanna a léamh go minic chun seans a thabhairt do na páistí dul i dtaithí ar an mbrí is ar an bhfoclóir is chun deis a thabhairt dóibh ceangail a dhéanamh idir na scéalta is imeachtaí an naíonra is a saol féin.*

RÉAMHRÁ

Pléann an t-alt seo le ról na scéalta agus na leabhar mar áis fhoghlamtha teanga i naíonra lasmuigh den Ghaeltacht, nuair atá na páistí ag tosú amach ar shealbhú na Gaeilge. Díríonn an chéad chuid den alt seo ar an teoiric a bhaineann le scéalta mar áis teanga is pléitear an scéalaíocht sa naíonra sa dara cuid.[1]

TEOIRIC NA SCÉALAÍOCHTA MAR ÁIS TEANGA

Tá taighde déanta cheana féin ar an naíonra mar ionad tumoideachais (Hickey 1997, 2003, Mhic Mhathúna 1996, 1999) ach díríonn an t-alt seo ar an scéalaíocht mar áis teanga agus mar dheis tuisceana ar an scéalaíocht féin. Deireann Browne (2001:65) go bhfuil buntáistí

[1] Gabhtar buíochas leis an gComhairle um Thaighde sna Dána agus sna hEolaíochtaí Sóisialta as scoláireacht taighde shinsearach a bhronnadh ar an údar don bhliain 2002-3 agus le hInstitiúid Teicneolaíochta Bhaile Átha Cliath as dámhachtain taighde don bhliain 2005/6.

pearsanta, sóisialta, intleachtúla agus teanga ag baint leis an scéalaíocht agus le leabhair maidir le forbairt na teanga dúchais. Tá béim níos mó ar an bhfoclóir i scéalaíocht sa dara teanga agus tá moltaí sa litríocht (Tierney agus Dobson 1995, Wood et al. 1999, Dickinson 2001) ar conas foclóir a chur i láthair páistí óga ar bhealach gníomhach. Molann siad, mar shampla, scéal a léiriú trí phictiúir, athinsint a dhéanamh ar scéalta atá ar eolas cheana féin sa teanga dhúchais agus bréagáin agus puipéid a úsáid chun brí a chur in iúl. Molann Tabors (1997:119) na scéalta agus na leabhair sa dara teanga a roghnú go cúramach maidir le hábhar, foclóir agus fad, mar aithníonn sí go bhfuil dúshlán faoi leith ag baint le scéalaíocht sa dara teanga. Ceapann sí gur fearr na scéalta a insint/léamh do ghrúpaí beaga páistí, chun seans a thabhairt don stiúrthóir/múinteoir ceisteanna agus spéiseanna na bpáistí a thabhairt san áireamh agus insint an scéil a chur in oiriúint dóibh.

Aontaíonn Hickey (1997:79) go bhfuil dúshlán sách ard ag baint leis an scéalaíocht sa dara teanga. Léirigh a cuid taighde siúd ar naíonraí sa Ghaeltacht agus sa chuid eile den tír gur thuig stiúrthóirí naíonra na buntáistí a bhain leis an scéalaíocht ach gur aithin siad go raibh dúshlán ag baint leis. Mar sin féin, molann lucht taighde go léifear scéalta do na páistí sa teanga dhúchais nó sa dara teanga go minic má tá buntáistí teanga agus forbartha le fáil ag na páistí.

Aithníonn An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Curaclaim agus Measúnachta tábhacht na scéalaíochta mar thacaíocht chun cumas páistí óga sa teanga dhúchais labhartha a fhorbairt (2004:30). Deir siad go dtabharfaidh timpeallacht shaibhir lán de chaint agus de chló bunús maith don pháiste sa litearthacht is go bhfuil leabhair agus scéalta mar chuid thábhachtach den timpeallacht sin. Cabhróidh na leabhair chun stór focal na bpáistí a leathnú agus méadóidh siad tuiscint na bpáistí ar na bealaí éagsúla ina n-úsáidtear teanga. Molann *Curaclam na Bunscoile* (1999:10) scéalta a léamh as Gaeilge do pháistí óga sna ranganna naíonán sa bhunscoil i bhfad sula dtosaíonn siad ar an léitheoireacht fhoirmiúil chun tuiscint na bpáistí ar an nGaeilge a fhorbairt. Tá an scéalaíocht bunaithe ar an teanga agus cuireann scéalta sa dara teanga deis ar fáil do na páistí an teanga sin a chloisteáil i suíomh spreagúil réadúil (Morrow agus Gambrell 2003:356).

ATHINSINT AR SCÉALTA

Ceapann taighdeoirí a dhéanann staidéar ar litearthacht agus an teanga dhúchais (Morrow agus Gambrell 2003; Wasik, Bond agus Hindman 2002; De Temple 2001) gur próiseas atá sa scéalaíocht agus molann siad go léifí an scéal céanna go minic. Nuair a léitear an scéal céanna go minic, tugann sin seans don pháiste óg dul i dtaithí ar theanga an scéil, ar na pictiúir is ar an scéalaíocht féin. Tugann na páistí aird ar na pictiúir sa leabhar i dtosach. Ansin is féidir leo aird a dhíriú ar an teanga, ar na focail atá ar eolas acu cheana féin agus ina dhiaidh sin ar na cinn nua. Fanann an scéal mar an gcéanna ach déantar forbairt ar theanga agus ar idirghníomhaíocht an pháiste leis an scéal le linn athinsintí nó athléimh. De réir a chéile téann na páistí i dtaithí ar an bhfoclóir agus is féidir leo a thuar cad a bheidh ag titim amach sa scéal. Beidh siad in ann triail a bhaint as an bhfoclóir is as na frásaí is tugann sin seans don duine fásta léiriú a fháil ar thuiscint agus spéis an pháiste. Thar aon ní eile, spreagann an athinsint comhrá níos doimhne agus níos saibhre idir an páiste is an duine fásta, ceann a bheadh bunaithe ar an scéal, b'fhéidir, nó ar an gceangal lena saol féin. Ceapann Wasik et al. (2002:60) go bhfuil an-tábhacht leis an saghas seo comhrá, a chuireann ar na páistí caint a chloisteáil agus a dhéanamh de bhreis ar an ngar-chomhthéacs. Molann siad go gcruthófar deiseanna chun caint níos forbartha a dhéanamh trí ghníomhaíochtaí a bhunú ar an scéal agus trí thagairt a dhéanamh do na scéalta le linn imeachtaí eile.

Baineann go leor de na buntáistí céanna le scéalaíocht sa dara teanga. Cabhraíonn minicíocht, so-thuarthacht agus idirghníomhaíocht le sealbhú an dara teanga (Ellis 1994:286).

Baineann na gnéithe seo go léir le scéalta a léamh arís is arís eile sa dara teanga. Má chloiseann páistí an scéal céanna go minic is é inste/léite ar bhealach beo tarraingteach, beidh seans acu an teanga nua a thuiscint agus a shealbhú de réir a chéile, triail a bhaint as an bhfoclóir nua agus tuiscint a fháil ar an scéalaíocht.

FOGHLAIM FAOIN SCÉALAÍOCHT

Pléann McCabe agus Peterson (1991), Hudson agus Shapiro (1991) agus Berman agus Slobin (1994) le forbairt tuisceana ar struchtúr na scéalaíochta sa teanga dhúchais ach is beag taighde atá foilsithe ar fhorbairt na tuisceana sa scéalaíocht agus páistí óga ag tosú amach ar shealbhú an dara teanga. Ó thaobh taighde de agus ó thaobh an pháiste de, is gá tosú mar sin leis an tuiscint a bheadh ag leanaí ceithre bliana ar an scéalaíocht ina dteanga dhúchais. Léirigh taighde Berman agus Slobin (1994:32) go raibh páistí trí agus ceithre bliana d'aois in ann cur síos a dhéanamh ar scéal i leabhar trí chuntas a thabhairt ar gach pictiúr, ceann ar cheann. Chonaic Sulzby (1985:465) an pátrún céanna, is é sin gur fhéach na páistí ar gach pictiúr scoite amach ó na cinn eile is nach raibh tuiscint acu ar an scéal mar aonad ann féin. Is beag ceangal nó leanúnachas a chonaic na páistí idir na pictiúir. De réir a chéile, tuigeann páistí an leagan amach atá ar scéal faoi mar atá rianaithe ag McCabe agus Peterson (1991), is é sin go bhfuil plota sa scéal, go bhfuil "fadhb" le réiteach agus go bhfuil eachtraí áirithe a thiteann amach chun an fhadhb sin a réiteach. Feiceann páistí go dtarlaíonn na heachtraí in ord áirithe is go bhfuil ceangal eatarthu. Bíonn siad in ann cuntas níos mine is níos iomláine a thabhairt ar na pictiúir is ar an tslí a bhfuil na heachtraí ceangailte le chéile. Ciallaíonn sé seo go bhfuil tuiscint á forbairt ag an bpáiste ar an scéal mar aonad. Ar deireadh bíonn tuiscint níos forbartha ag na páistí ar na príomheachtraí sa scéal is bíonn siad in ann cur síos a dhéanamh orthu go beacht. Braitheann forbairt na tuisceana seo roinnt mhaith ar thaithí na bpáistí ar scéalta is leabhair is ar an saghas scéalta a insítear nó a léitear dóibh.

Ceapann Dickinson agus Smith (1994:118) go gcaithfidh an-taithí a bheith ag páistí ar scéalta, ar leabhair is ar chaint mar gheall ar bhrí na bhfocal is an scéil, má tá forbairt le teacht ar a dtuiscint ar an scéalaíocht. Ceapann siadsan go bhfuil roinnt de na sain- scileanna céanna i gceist maidir le forbairt foclóra is le forbairt na scéalaíochta. Orthu siúd áiríonn siad cé chomh minic is a insítear an scéal, na hiarrachtaí a dhéanann an páiste chun an bhrí a thuiscint is dóthain eolais a bheith sa scéal nó tugtha ag an múinteoir chun an bhrí a dhéanamh amach. Ceapann Dickinson (2001:198) go gcabhraíonn comhrá a spreagann machnamh nó a chothaíonn anailís ar bhrí na bhfocal, go gcabhraíonn sé chun an tuiscint ar scéalaíocht a fhorbairt.

MODHEOLAÍOCHT AN STAIDÉIR SEO

Measadh mar sin gurbh fhiú go mór staidéar a dhéanamh ar an scéalaíocht sa dara teanga i naíonra, ar na modhanna scéalaíochta a bhí in úsáid ag stiúrthóirí agus ar an bpróiseas foghlamtha a bhí ar siúl ag na páistí. Roghnaíodh naíonra faoi leith i mBaile Átha Cliath a raibh cáil na scéalaíochta air chun staidéar a dhéanamh ar an dea-chleachtas ann. Téann na páistí chuig an naíonra seo ar feadh bliana de ghnáth sula dtosaíonn siad ar scoil, nuair atá siad trí no ceithre bliana d'aois. Nuair a thosaigh an staidéar seo, bhí na páistí ag freastal ar an naíonra le ceithre mhí anuas ar feadh 2.5 uair an chloig sa lá. Fágann san go raibh taithí timpeall 200 uair an chloig acu ar an nGaeilge faoin am san. De réir ceistneora a tugadh do na tuismitheoirí sa naíonra, labhair 50% acu roinnt bheag Gaeilge lena bpáistí sa bhaile agus bhí beirt acu siúd a labhair Gaeilge go minic. Dúirt an 50% eile nár labhair siad aon Ghaeilge sa bhaile in aon chor.

Deineadh cluastaifeadadh (le miondiosca) ar na seisiúin scéalaíochta gach coicís thar thréimhse sé mhí agus glacadh nótaí breathnadóireachta chomh maith. Deineadh tras-scríobh

mion ar gach seisiún. Tugadh ainmneacha bréige ar na páistí ar mhaithe lena bpríobháideachas a chosaint. Deineadh anailís ar na sonraí sin chun an próiseas a thuiscint, go háirithe an bealach ina raibh na stiúrthóirí ag cuidiú leis na páistí teanga na scéalta a shealbhú. Anailís sa traidisiún dioscúrsach a bhí i gceist, anailís idirghníomhaíochta. Cuirtear tábhacht leis an ionchur, an chaint a chloiseann an foghlaimeoir, agus leis an idirghníomhaíocht, an caidreamh teanga idir na cainteoirí, sa teoiric seo (Wesche agus Skehan 2002, Gass 2003). Scrúdaítear na príomhghnéithe den teanga agus den idirghníomhaíocht is cuirtear tábhacht faoi leith leis na hathruithe a dhéanann cainteoir dúchais/cumasach ar a chaint féin chun go mbeidh sé intuigthe don fhoghlaimeoir.

MODH INSTE AN SCÉIL

Bhí raon leathan gníomhaíochtaí foghlama agus súgartha curtha ar fáil sa naíonra is bhí cur chuige faoi leith déanta amach ag na stiúrthóirí chun scéalta a insint do na páistí agus a fhí isteach sa chlár iomlán foghlama. Léigh na stiúrthóirí scéalta áirithe, timpeall sé cinn, go minic thar thréimhse ceithre go sé sheachtain. Léigh siad an spriocscéal don ghrúpa iomlán de 20 páiste gach lá. Léadh an scéal céanna do ghrúpa beag páistí, ceathrar nó cúigear, gach lá freisin. Bhí seans ag gach páiste a bheith páirteach sa ghrúpa beag uair in aghaidh na seachtaine.

Thaispeáin na stiúrthóirí na pictiúir sna leabhair do na páistí is thug siad cuntas orthu. Ansin chuir siad ceisteanna simplí ar na páistí faoi na pictiúir is thug siad seans do na páistí na ceisteanna a fhreagairt trí fhrásaí is abairtí a chríochnú. D'úsáid na stiúrthóirí na focail agus na frásaí céanna i ngach insint den scéal is bhunaigh siad na ceisteanna ar na rudaí a bhí le feiceáil go soiléir sna pictiúir. Chuir siad na ceisteanna céanna is bhíodar ag súil leis na freagraí céanna ó na páistí. De réir mar a chuaigh an fhoghlaim ar aghaidh, chuir siad ceisteanna níos casta, cinn nach raibh na freagraí orthu le feiceáil sna pictiúir is bhíothas ag lorg freagraí níos casta. Mar shampla, cuireadh ceisteanna mar gheall ar mhothúcháin nó bhí siad ag lorg na gcúiseanna ar tharla eachtra éigin. Bhain na páistí an-sásamh as an rannpháirtíocht is spreag sé sin iad chun leanúint leis an bhfoghlaim.

SCAFALL CAINTE

Gné amháin den chur chuige a chabhraigh go mór leis na páistí ná an scafall cainte a chuir na stiúrthóirí ar fáil. Maidir leis an naíonra de, mhúscail na stiúrthóirí spéis na bpáistí san fhoghlaim trí scéalta oiriúnacha a roghnú, cinn a chabhraigh le foghlaim na teanga ar bhealach céimnithe. Bhí pátrún láidir athrá sna scéalta, idir fhoclóir agus eachtraí, rud a dhein an tasc níos simplí agus a sholáthraigh creatlach don fhoghlaim. Thar aon ní eile, d'inis siad na scéalta ar bhealach beo bríomhar agus thug siad páirt lárnach do na páistí san insint, rud a spreag agus a choinnigh spéis na bpáistí san fhoghlaim.

Caithfidh scafall cainte a bheith dinimiciúil chun go mbeadh sé éifeachtach (Van Lier 2001:96). Caithfidh an próiseas bogadh ar aghaidh má tá an fhoghlaim le dul ar aghaidh. Chuir na stiúrthóirí béim ar fhocail is ar fhrásaí áirithe is mhol siad na páistí go hard nuair a d'fhoghlaim siad iad. Nuair a bhí an teanga sin ar eolas ag na páistí, bhog siad an moladh agus an tacaíocht go dtí focail nua is chuaigh an fhoghlaim ar aghaidh. Nuair a bhí na páistí in ann frásaí a thabhairt mar fhreagraí, leathnaigh na stiúrthóirí na freagraí sin go dtí abairtí níos iomláine. D'iompair na stiúrthóirí ualach na scéalaíochta tríd an gcuid ba dheacra de na habairtí a rá iad féin agus bearnaí a fhágáil do na páistí le líonadh le focail a bhí ar eolas acu. Chabhraigh sé go dtagann an briathar i dtosach na habairte sa Ghaeilge mar thosaigh na stiúrthóirí formhór na n-abairtí. Sa tslí seo, chuala na páistí na briathra ach ní raibh orthu iad a rá go ró-luath.

Bhí na páistí ag éisteacht lena cheile chomh maith is ag cur scafall cainte ar fáil dá cheile trína rannpháirtíocht sa scéal. Muna raibh an freagra ar eolas ag duine amháin acu, bhí sé ag an duine eile, nó bhí siad in ann leagan níos iomláine den fhrása a thabhairt. Cuireann Kanagy (1999) agus Donato (1994) tábhacht leis an saghas seo scafaill cainte ó pháistí eile mar go gcuireann sé deis ar fáil do na páistí tacaíocht foghlama a thabhairt dá chéile.

GNÁS TEANGA

Insíodh an scéal leis na focail is frásaí céanna gach uair. Taispeánann an taifeadadh go raibh an insint beagnach mar an gcéanna, focal ar fhocal, sna chéad leaganacha de na scéalta, idir théacs an scéil is na ceisteanna is fhreagraí. Tá an saghas seo gnáis teanga an-spéisiúil agus ceannródaíoch. Is leathnú é ar an ngnáthúsáid de na foirmlí cainte a mbaintear leas astu le linn gnásanna nó idirghníomhaíochtaí a tharlaíonn go minic (Wray 2002, Hickey 1993). Chonaic Vesterbäcka (1991), Kanagy (1999) agus Weber agus Tardif (1991) gur theagaisc múinteoirí sa luath-thumoideachas foirmlí cainte do na páistí chun páirt a ghlacadh i ngnáthaimh ar nós am lóin, beannachtaí agus cluichí. Leathnaigh na stiúrthóirí sa naíonra prionsabail na bhfoirmlí cainte go dtí an scéalaíocht trí insint a bhunú ar an stoc céanna d'fhocail agus de fhrásaí. Ba ghnáthamh idirghníomhach ann féin é an scéalaíocht, le bearnaí soiléire a bhí le líonadh ag na páistí le teanga a bhí ag éirí níos casta, de réir mar a bhí a gcumas sa teanga ag forbairt (Mhic Mhathúna 2008).

Aon uair a d'fhéadfaí, chuir na stiúrthóirí foirmlí cainte ó ghnáthaimh eile sa naíonra isteach sa scéal, cinn ó ghníomhaíochtaí eile sa naíonra mar am lóin, rudaí a chomhaireamh nó rannta agus amhráin. Thug sé seo seans do na páistí na foirmlí cainte a bhí ar eolas acu cheana féin a úsáid arís is chonaic siad go bhféadfaí iad a rá i suímh eile chomh maith. Toisc go raibh an frása nó abairt ar eolas acu, bhí sos beag acu leis is ní raibh an t-ualach próiseála teanga chomh trom sin.

DUL CHUN CINN

Chabhraigh an modh scéalaíochta seo leis na páistí chun an scéal a insint. Tabharfar samplaí den phróiseas seo thíos maidir leis an dá scéal is mó a léadh do na páistí, *Teidí* le Mairéad Ní Ghráda agus *Cá bhfuil Bran?* le Eric Hill. Insíodh *Teidí* seacht n-uaire déag sa taifeadadh is léadh *Cá bhfuil Bran?* ocht n-uaire. Tugtar cuntas ar na nodanna clódóireachta ag bun an leathanaigh seo[2] agus úsáidtear ainmneacha bréige do na páistí. Sna seisiúin thosaigh, thaispeáin an stiúrthóir pictiúr sa leabhar *Teidí* do na páistí is thug sí leath-abairt dóibh. Bhí na páistí in ann na habairtí a chríochnú gan dua:

Stiúrthóir: Chonaic Teidí ---
Páistí: **Bean.**
Stiúrthóir: Chonaic Teidí bean.

Ghlac an stiúrthóir le freagra na bpáistí is leathnaigh sí an freagra aonfhoclach go dtí abairt iomlán, rud a chuir sampla den abairt iomlán ar fáil dóibh. Bhí freagraí na bpáistí mar chuid den insint agus lean an scéal ar aghaidh ón bpointe sin.
Ag deireadh na bliana, bhí na páistí in ann ceisteanna oscailte a fhreagairt is formhór na gcarachtar a liostáil, suas le cúigear i gcás amháin. Bhí buachaill amháin in ann cur síos a dhéanamh ar cad a bhí ar siúl acu:

[2] --- : spás don pháiste chun focal a rá
Cló dubh: caint an pháiste as Gaeilge
Cló iodálach: freagairt oiriúnach an pháiste as Béarla ar abairt as Gaeilge

Stiúrthóir: Céard a chonaic Teidí?
Naoise: **An fear abhaile, an fear abhaile, an buachaill abhaile**.

Cheartaigh páiste eile foirm na habairte dó:

Tomás: **Ag dul abhaile.**

Sa tslí seo, bhí páiste amháin ag cabhrú le páiste eile an leagan ceart a rá.

Nuair a bhí na páistí in ann ceisteanna simplí a fhreagairt, cuireadh cinn níos casta orthu, cinn nach raibh na freagraí préamhaithe sa cheist féin nó le feiceáil sa pictiúr. Bhí orthu smaoineamh ar an mbrí agus ar an teanga. Bhain roinnt den fhoclóir le mothúcháin nó staid, rud a bhí níos casta ná rudaí a ainmniú:

Stiúrthóir: Cén fáth go bhfuil siad ag dul abhaile?
Úna: **Mar tá siad tuirseach.**
Stiúrthóir: Céard atá siad ag déanamh ansin?
Tomás: **Ag lig a scíth.**

De réir a chéile, leathnaigh an stiúrthóir an cur síos ar na pictiúir is chuir sí ar na páistí breis sonraí a thabhairt. Sna seisiúin luatha, ba leor cur síos lom a dhéanamh ach diaidh ar ndiaidh, spreagadh na páistí chun cur síos a dhéanamh ar ghníomhaíochtaí na gcarachtar.

RÉIMSE NA MOTHÚCHÁN

Cuireann Lambert agus Clyne (2000:65) tábhacht le réimse na mothúchán san fhoghlaim. Deir siad go gcaithfear an caidreamh idir an foghlaimeoir agus an duine eolach a thabhairt san áireamh, chomh maith le muinín an pháiste agus an staid forbartha atá aige/aici faoi láthair. Má éiríonn go maith le páistí agus iad ag foghlaim ábhar ar bith, beidh féinmhuinín is coincheap díobh féin mar dhaoine cumasacha á bhforbairt acu. Chuir na stiúrthóirí sa staidéar seo rompu féinmhuinín is féiníomhá chumasach a fhorbairt sna páistí. Chuir siad gach deis ar fáil do na páistí chun an méid a bhí ar eolas acu a léiriú. Thuig na stiúrthóirí cé mhéad den teanga a bhí ar eolas ag na páistí is den chuid is mó, chuir siad ceisteanna orthu a bhí siad in ann a fhreagairt. Spreag na stiúrthóirí na páistí ar bhealach spórtúil is spraiúil le moladh mór nuair a dúirt siad focail nua agus ansin nuair a bhí siadsan ar eolas, bogadh an tacaíocht ar aghaidh go dtí focail eile.

Bhí caidreamh an-bháúil idir na stiúrthóirí agus na páistí. Léirigh na stiúrthóirí go raibh cion agus gean acu ar na páistí trí ghlacadh i gcónaí le freagraí na bpáistí, as Béarla nó as Gaeilge, trí na bréagargóintí a bhí acu maidir le roinnt de na ceisteanna agus tríd an úsáid den fhoirm cheana d'ainmneacha na bpáistí. Bhí an cion céanna ag na páistí ar na stiúrthóirí, rud a chuir siad in iúl tríd an iarracht ollmhór a dhein siad na ceisteanna a fhreagairt nó aon eolas a bhí acu a sholáthar. Bhí a fhios acu gur freagraí as Gaeilge a bhí ag teastáil ó na stiúrthóirí is dhein siad a ndícheall iadsan a sholáthar.

Tugann an scéalaíocht sa naíonra seo léiriú ar an saghas scafall cómhalartach a luann Lambert agus Clyde (2000). Ciallaíonn sé seo go dtugann an stiúrthóir freagra an pháiste san áireamh sa chéad ráiteas eile aici féin. Tá iliomad samplaí sa taifeadadh ón naíonra den éisteacht a thug na stiúrthóirí do na páistí, nuair a lean siad ar aghaidh ag caint ar spéis an pháiste, seachas an rud a bhí beartaithe acu féin.

Stiúrthóir: Céard a deir an cat?

Caoimhín: **Míáú, míáú, míáú.**
Alan: *I have a cat like that.*
Stiúrthóir: Cat dubh agus bán, nó cat rua?

Spreagann an saghas seo éisteachta an páiste chun rudaí a mholadh agus léiríonn sé dó go bhfuil meas ag an stiúrthóir ar a thuairimí agus ar a chuid spéiseanna. Ar bhonn teanga, cuireann sé ionchur ar fáil díreach ag an bpointe is mó spéis ag an bpáiste agus tugann sé seans dó leanúint ar aghaidh ag caint faoin rud a bhfuil spéis aige féin ann.

Chuir rannpháirtíocht láidir na bpáistí sna scéalta céanna arís is arís eile seansanna ar fáil dóibh chun focail agus frásaí éagsúla a thriail go comhfhiosach nó go neamh-chomhfhiosach agus féachaint conas mar a ghlac na stiúrthóirí leo. D'fhéadfaidís cloí leis na leaganacha sin nó triail a bhaint as leagan eile amach ansin, ag brath ar an aischothú a fuair siad.

SCAFALL SCÉALAÍOCHTA

Cabhraíonn pátrún rialta le páistí nuair a bhíonn siad ag foghlaim rud nua is bhí pátrún láidir ag baint leis an tslí inar insíodh na scéalta sa naíonra. Insíodh gach scéal leis na focail chéanna nach mór, go háirithe ag an tús, is léadh scéalta áirithe minic go leor chun go rachadh na páistí i dtaithí orthu. Bhí pátrún inmheánach san insint ar gach scéal freisin mar insíodh gach mír nó eachtra sa scéal ar an modh céanna. Bhí sé seo thar a bheith soiléir sa scéal *Cá bhfuil Bran?*

Eachtra 6
Stiúrthóir: Ach cá bhfuil Micí Moncaí ?
Páiste: **Micí Moncaí.**
Stiúrthóir: Tá sé ---
Marcas: **Ins an** *wardrobe.*
Stiúrthóir: Níl sé sa wardrús!
Páiste: **Tá!**
Stiúrthóir: Tá Bran ins an wardrús.
Páistí: **Níl.**
Stiúrthóir: Nil Bran ins an wardrús?
Marcas: **Micí Moncaí ins an wardrús.**

Cuireadh na ceisteanna céanna nach mór faoin gcéad eachtra eile:
Eachtra 7
Stiúrthóir: Tá a fhios agam cá bhfuil Bran! (ag taispeáint pictiúir)
Páiste: **Níl, crogall**.
Stiúrthóir: Tá sé faoin leaba!
Páiste: **Crogall.**
Stiúrthóir: Cá bhfuil an crogall?
Marcas: *Under the bed.*
Stiúrthóir: Tá sé --- faoin ---. Céard é sin? Tá sé faoin ---
Páiste: **Leaba.**

Chuir an scafall scéalaíochta seo pátrún cinnte scéalaíochta ar fáil do na páistí, ach ag an am céanna, bhí deiseanna ann d'eachtraí éagsúla taobh istigh de gach mír. Thaispeáin Ninio agus Bruner (1978:2) conas a chabhraíonn pátrún scéalaíochta le leanbh óg chun a theanga dhúchais a shealbhú. Taispeánann an cur chuige sa naíonra seo gur féidir leis an bpróiseas céanna oibriú maidir le sealbhú an dara teanga i suíomh luath-thumoideachais. Chabhraigh an pátrún inste céanna leis na páistí chun tuairim a fháil faoi na heachtraí a bhí le teacht, cad a

déarfadh an stiúrthóir agus cad a bheadh orthu féin a rá. Uaireanta, léim siad ar aghaidh go dtí an chéad eachtra eile, rud a léirigh gur thuig siad pátrún na scéalaíochta.

Maidir leis an gceangal idir an scéal agus a saol féin, dhein na stiúrthóirí an ceangal seo an-soiléir trí cheisteanna a chur mar gheall ar dhaoine eile sa teaghlach ag na páistí nó trí thagairt a dhéanamh d'imeachtaí sa naíonra cosúil le ham lóin. D'úsáid siad an deis a thug timpiste Theidí dóibh chun cur síos a dhéanamh ar an mbealach slán chun dul trasna an bhóthair is thug na páistí eolas faoi conas mar a dhein siad féin an bóthar a thrasnú. **"Féachann mé suas agus síos**," a dúirt Tomás san insint deiridh de *Teidí.* Dhein na stiúrthóirí ceangail freisin le carachtair ó scéalta eile, mar shampla tugadh ainm Micí Moncaí ó scéal le Mairéad Ní Ghráda leis an ainm céanna, ar an moncaí i *Cá bhfuil Bran?* Chabhraigh na tagairtí seo go léir chun eispéireas leathan ar úsáid na teanga i suímh éagsúla a chur ar fáil do na páistí. Dhein sé na ceangail lena saol féin soiléir dóibh, rud a bhí oiriúnach dá n-aois agus dá staid forbartha.

GNEITHE EILE A CHABHRAIGH LE TUISCINT AR AN SCÉALAÍOCHT

Cabhraíonn an t-eispéireas iomlán sa naíonra le forbairt na Gaeilge agus le cumas na bpáistí chun tairbhe agus taitneamh a bhaint as an scéalaíocht. Chuir na stiúrthóirí sa naíonra seo rompu na ceangail idir na gníomhaíochtaí éagsúla sa naíonra a dhéanamh soiléir ar mhaithe leis na míreanna céanna teanga a úsáid arís is arís eile. Mar shampla, cheangail siad na habairtí a úsáideann siad ag am lóin chun rudaí a chur sa bhosca bruscair le scéal Bran, d'úsáid siad abairtí eile i gcluichí boird agus dhein siad tagairt do dhathanna agus d'uimhreacha go minic in an-chuid réimsí éagsúla. Chan siad amhráin agus rannta a bhain le hábhar sna scéalta chomh maith. Sa tslí seo bhí daingniú á dhéanamh ar an teanga a bhí ar eolas ag na páistí cheana féin is chonaic siad go bhfeadfaí an foclóir is na habairtí a úsáid i suímh eile chomh maith. Ag an am céanna, bhí an fhorbairt teanga ag cabhrú leis na páistí tuiscint a fháil ar an teanga *per se* agus tús a chur le tuiscint mheititheangeolaíoch. Bhí cúpla sampla sa taifeadadh de na páistí ag insint don stiúrthóir faoi na focail Ghaeilge a bhí ar eolas acu. "I know the Irish for elephant," a dúirt buachaill amháin agus d'fhiafraigh páiste eile faoin nGaeilge ar "treehouse." Le linn comhrá eile, bhí sé soiléir go raibh páiste amháin, Matt, ag déanamh machnaimh ar na focail "bosca bruscair" nuair a dúirt sé "*My* **bosca bruscair** *hangs up because it's a bag*." Chabhraigh an machnamh seo chun cumas teanga agus cogneolaíoch na bpáistí a fhorbairt is chabhraigh sin leo chun na scéalta agus an scéalaíocht a thuiscint.

CONCLÚID

Léiríonn an staidéar seo gur fhoghlaim na páistí i naíonra áirithe an-chuid focal is foirmlí cainte a d'fhéadfaidís a úsáid chun páirt a ghlacadh sa scéalaíocht. Chabhraigh léamh minic na spriocscéalta go mór le forbairt teanga is le tuiscint ar an scéalaíocht, mar chuid den eispéireas iomlán sa naíonra. Dúirt De Temple (2001:34) go bhfuil an forás a thagann ar léamh na scéalta is ar an gcomhrá a bhunaítear orthu ar cheann de na buntáistí teanga is mó a leanann léamh minic ar na scéalta céanna. Cabhraíonn buanseasmhacht na scéalta le tuiscint a fhorbairt is feidhmíonn sé mar dhul siar ar na focail, frásaí agus abairtí. Tá sé seo fíor i gcás scéalta sa dara teanga chomh maith. D'fhoghlaim na páistí focail aonair agus roinnt frásaí i dtosach. Leathnaigh na stiúrthóirí na focail is na frásaí go dtí abairtí iomlána is de réir a chéile bhí roinnt de na páistí in ann iad seo a rá freisin. Tríd an gcaint acu féin bhí siad in ann na príomheachtraí sa scéal a insint iad féin. Cheap De Temple (2001:50) gur chabhraigh "adequate exposure to specific books" le forbairt na teanga dúchais. Is léir go bhfuil sé seo fíor i gcás forbairt an dara teanga chomh maith agus gur féidir leas tairbheach a bhaint as

scéalta mar áis teanga do pháistí atá ag tosú amach ar na nGaeilge a shealbhú mar dhara teanga sa naíonra.

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Joy Alexander

BOYS READING BOYS' WRITING

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ABSTRACT: In this study stories written by boys were commented on and assessed by other boys and also by both male and female teachers. The results reveal boys' attitudes and preferences with regard to writing and also indicate some differences in the responses of male and female teachers. For boys, the performative aspect of narrative writing is important. While English teachers, who are predominantly female, can identify the weaknesses in boys' writing, they less often note what boys attempt and may do well, for example, ambitious plots, and they lack ways to acknowledge and reward such efforts. A number of recommendations are made on ways in which teachers can assist boys both to enjoy their writing but also to improve at it.

INTRODUCTION

The genesis of this study was serendipitous. I was at the back of a classroom, watching a student teacher taking an English lesson with a class of 12-13 year-olds in an urban all-boys' secondary school. In a previous lesson, the teacher had 'set up' the task, which was for the pupils to write stories of their own choice and design an accompanying title page. Without any obvious exceptions, they were writing eagerly and with enthusiasm. They would write a paragraph, then get the attention of their mates and read out what they had written. They vied with each other to share the excitement and entertainment of their narrative. Although they were voluble and animated, the atmosphere was purposeful and they remained on-task; clearly they were motivated. Subsequently the teacher made copies for me of the stories, 23 in all, the average length (not counting the title page) being over five sides of A4.

I was curious to investigate the writers' enthusiasm. I wondered how other male readers would respond to the stories and also English teachers both male and female. While concerns about boys' literacy are perennially raised, especially in relation to reading (see for example, Eivers *et al.* 2005), a UK Ofsted-commissioned literature search on improving boys' writing found that "there is little research focusing on boys' views on writing" (Daly, 2003, p.4). This study does not access boys' attitudes directly but infers them indirectly by analysing how boys respond to other boys' writing. It also allows comparisons between the responses of

male and female teachers, a matter of some significance since English teaching is a majority-female profession.

BOYS' WRITING

What do boys like to write about? Research has increased our understanding of boys' writing preferences, for example, the discovery that boys quite enjoy writing poems. One study which investigated boys' use of personal writing journals lists the following topics which commonly appeared: a film rewritten as story; spin-offs from watching television; story topics influenced by adventure films; writing about sport, e.g. wrestling; writing linked to the news; writing on topics of interest, for example, volcanoes or space (Purbrick, 2002, pp.35-36).

In a millenium article, Peter Hunt anticipates the future for children's literature; the changes he foresees will no doubt apply also to writing. He explains that "[e]lectronic media are not simply changing the way we tell stories: they are changing the very nature of story, of what we understand (or do not understand) to be narratives" (Hunt, 2000, p.111). The narrative patterns of computer games, for example, are open-ended; they "provide settings and then allow their 'players' to exist within them" (Hunt, 2000, p.116); spontaneity rather than linear coherence is privileged. Since boys are more familiar with the multimedia world, when they construct their own narratives they may well display some of these non-traditional characteristics. On the basis that "popular culture may actually be increasing children's motivation to read and produce their own texts with connections with their popular cultural interests" (Millard, 2005, p.59), Elaine Millard investigated how teachers could capitalise on this reality by negotiating with pupils ways to use popular culture constructively in the classroom, specifically in their writing.

What problems do boys commonly encounter when writing? Currently it is common practice to teach young people how to write through a genre approach. The concentration on genre may be limiting for boys as it may encourage a sub-conscious belief that there is a 'right', derivative, formulaic way to write and discourage creative, purposeful adaptation of generic forms. The most neglected genre is often narrative writing, since it is assumed that this is already familiar. Hunt, however, working with Key Stage 2 pupils, found that narrative was "the most difficult form of writing for the pupils and the most frustrating and labour intensive for the teacher" (Hunt, 2001, p.67). She found that it was necessary to teach "the format of story writing, namely: Set scene, introduce characters, develop plot, resolve an issue, and conclude writing." She advises that developing writers should restrict the number of characters and avoid excessive use of speech in order to maintain control. Boys tend to favour a 'busy' plot. Is it better to tell a dull story well or an exciting story badly? Certainly mark-schemes are more likely to reward the former, though it would be good to have more strategies for nurturing writers of the latter. Research has found that boys enjoy imaginative writing:

> *Whereas teachers believed that boys prefer factual reading and writing and lots of structure, boys themselves expressed a liking for creative and narrative writing where they had freedom to choose what to write about and to use their imagination. (Myhill and Jones, 2004, p.21)*

The use of oral work and of drama and film has been advanced as strategies that are worthwhile supports for boys' writing. One research project quotes a teacher who says that "I want to allow for ideas to be worked out through drama: explored, refined, spoken through, and I'm going to use drama as a means to scaffold writing more frequently" (UKLA/PNS, 2004, p.36). In the same project, it was found that:

Examining features of texts, such as settings, themes and character in the context of film or of a drama activity, allowed connections to be made across media. (UKLA/PNS, 2004, p.38)

However other researchers report that, while boys like to draw on visual sources, difficulties arise when they try to "translate these visual images to coherent written text" (Bearne and Warrington, 2003, p.19). Higgins characterises the resultant plots:

The reader was frequently taken on a roller-coaster ride of action events, often going round in circles and then coming to an abrupt stop. The writers often appeared to record a 'movie' going on in their heads in a somewhat 'two-dimensional' way – favouring action over detail, leaving motives, relationships and emotions unexplored. (Higgins, 2002, p.27)

In an important and interesting study, Bearne compares the written and pictorial texts in boys' and girls' stories (Bearne, 2002). She finds that boys are more likely than girls to draw on multimedia and multimodal experience in their writing. The perspective is that of the camera's eye:

...the pictorial and moving elements of their inner narratives are not being represented on the page. As a result their writing is seen as lacking organisation and cohesion, whilst it is very possibly only a partial representation of the full story carried in the mind's eye and ear. (Bearne, 2002, p.72)

*...how does a writer know how to resolve a narrative if the imaginative impulse comes from computer games whose structure is repetitive and recurrent? (*ibid, *p.73)*

What boys attempt can be more sophisticated than girls, but the girls' texts are more likely to fit in with customary assessment requirements. McClay, examining the experimental writing of a boy immersed in computer games, is alert to the evaluation problems that arise:

...a teacher's overt or subtle mandate to work from established rubrics for assessment ... may cordon off and suffocate experimental works of fiction. (McClay, 2002, p.53)

She argues that it is in the interests of young writers for teachers to allow pastiche because not to do so risks making writing "less integral to the literacy worlds of young adolescents" (*ibid*, p.54).

When Willett writes that:

Children's media-based stories appear problematic by school literacy standards: they contain implausible characters and plots, unnecessary violence, lack of development, far too much dialogue, and insufficient description (Willett, 2005, p.143)

What is problematic is that literacy standards are being used solely to make negative judgements. A more constructive approach would be to ask what boys *can* do in their writing and build on that. Teachers need to increase their knowledge of what boys like to do and what they are able to do. They then need to be alert that boys are rewarded for their strengths in writing at the same time as strategies are devised to support them in those areas where they experience difficulty. A fuller understanding is gradually emerging of these issues. My study was designed to add to what is known and to provide practical recommendations for teachers to help boys improve their writing.

METHODOLOGY

First of all I studied the 23 stories and then selected four which seemed representative. A number of boys read these stories and provided their reactions to each of them. They were asked to comment in a short questionnaire on the story's *content* – state what they liked and did not like about it; indicate their favourite part and say why they thought it was the best bit; mark the story for content. They were then asked about the story's *style* – in what ways did the writer write well; how could he improve his writing or tell his story better; indicate the part they thought was best written and say why; mark the story for style. All the respondents were male pupils aged 13-14 years in an all-boys' secondary school. Of the four stories, I received 16 responses to one of them, 17 responses each to two others, and 18 responses to the fourth story.

I also invited trainee teachers of English to assess the stories. After reading each story, they noted for both *content* and *style* what they considered to be the story's strengths and weaknesses and assigned it a mark for each of these aspects. I received eight responses to one of the stories and ten responses each to the other three stories from male student English teachers. Twenty-three responses each to two of the stories and 24 responses each to the other two stories were received from female trainee English teachers.

These data gave an interesting insight into what boys themselves thought about other boys' writing. They also showed how teachers assessed these same stories and whether male and female teachers responded differently to them. The initial data is of boys' writing; to this male pupils were invited to respond as readers and male and female teachers were invited to respond as teachers. In presenting the results, a number of issues which emerged from their analysis will be considered in turn before some general recommendations are offered.

THE STORIES

Almost three-quarters of the stories were action stories involving violence, murder and mayhem. They featured all kinds of weapons and varied means of death – buried alive, head chopped off, throat cut, for example. The titles suggest the content either literally - "Horror on 31st Street," "Carnage in Vegas," "Harry the Hatchet Man," "Live by the Gun." – or through the use of irony – "Nothing ever happens in Boston," "Let's Have Fun," "What a Summer!" In half of these stories, violent conflict is the central interest, in a third of them it forms at least a significant interest, and in the remaining handful it has a more minor role. The one categorical statement that can be made in relation to virtually all of the stories is that it is difficult to envisage any of them being written by a girl. These stories confirm Maynard's summary of typical boys' stories:

> *Boys' stories were often (but not always) action-packed fantasies of violence and domination incorporating the language and sound effects of the cartoons and videos they enjoyed. (Maynard, 2002, p.89)*

They bear out Thomas's description of boys' stories as having "pace and event at the expense of anything else" (Thomas, 1997, p.25) and his belief that "it is *contest without context* which gives [boys] most satisfaction" (*ibid*, p.26). Since they are characteristically action stories, there is a need for explanation of the events, although this is often only perfunctorily supplied. There are a number of characters, predominantly male. The stories tend to be repetitive and there is often an abrupt ending. Relief from the constant activity is likely to take the form of dialogue.

Plot

The stories are "all plot", in the sense that the central focus is on plot rather than on characterisation or setting. The plot-line is typified by constant action rather than by a plausible narrative. Yet plot is, in fact, a problematic aspect of a text in current literary theory. In her book *Plot*, Elizabeth Dipple titles the first chapter "Plot: The Basic Problem" and says in the first sentence that "Plot currently has no strong place in the pantheon of acceptable literary terms" (Dipple, 1970, p.1). She points out that "a plot is not an easy thing to achieve with appropriate success" (p.9), one reason for this being that "the action must be easily contained in the mind and not escape into episodic confusion" (p.10). On the one hand, we should recognise that boys are often ambitious in what they attempt in their writing – a 'busy' narrative, numbers of characters, while on the other hand we may acknowledge their limited success – the story-line gets out of control or becomes unrealistic. Male writers are disadvantaged because we do not know how to credit skills in plotting. Teachers evaluate what they know how to evaluate - characterisation, good description, use of language - and this often favours girls. It seems unfair to deprecate a story with a number of characters and constant activity because it is not a more sedentary tale with a couple of characters. Perhaps the most striking feature of these 23 stories is the extent to which they defy a teacher's conventional expectations of, and responses to, pupils' writing.

Action

Action, speed and in-the-moment excitement are valued above logic, cohesion and closure in narration. Plenty of activity in a story is a plus-point for pupils:

"I liked the action and development of the story-line."
"...it just kept going on; it was fast-moving."
"It had action with guns and running away."
"I really liked this story; it was filled with unpredictable excitement''.

Conversely pupils criticised "The JCB", a Monty Python-esque tale, because *"there was not much of a plot"* and there was *"too much speech involved."* Boys' recommendations for how this story could be improved included *"less description," "less direct speech," "more action, less speech," "add more excitement and suspense."* Repeatedly the criteria by which boys praise stories are excitement, tension, movement, suspense, fast pace. In fact, good writing is equated with excitement – *"this part was exciting and action-packed and I felt it kept me interested which is why it was well-written,"* and the majority of boys' suggested improvements related to how to make the story more exciting.

Teachers' comments are more judicious and measured. The following comments by male teachers all relate to the same story:

"Some patchy areas'' (parts glanced over, in order to get to the next part).
"A little too hasty."
"Tries to cover too much."
"He's not as interested in character."
"Might have used more description."
"The story jumps too much in places."

Teachers noted how in another story too much action led to confusion:

"Perhaps too much happens too fast, hard to keep track."
"A bit disorganised - confusing (in parts)."
"Hard to follow story."
"Story gets lost a little behind all the blood and guts and techno-speak."

With so much activity going on, the problem can be how to bring it to a stop, and in many of the stories the endings are unsatisfactory. Sometimes they are more like a pause in the action, as if they are left open until the action re-commences: *"Was Sammy dead? Only time would tell,"* or *"You could be next."* Often the story is simply brought to an abrupt and rather arbitrary conclusion: *"That night he went back to his house and killed himself."*

Performative
A striking aspect of the plot is usually that it is performative, that is, as the writer writes he is visualising and enacting his story. The page is a stage where the writer is an actor and conversation is a script. This accounts for the repetitive nature of many of the stories as "the good bits" are endlessly re-lived. Teachers' comments noted this:

"[writer has] no clear idea of what is going to happen next."
"He entered into the world that he was writing about."
"Seems to be writing as he thinks without planning ahead for narrative."

Boys commenting on the stories tended to note effects on the reader rather than features of the writing, as though their criterion of good writing is that it enables the reader to re-live the story: *"it makes you very excited," "makes you feel what he is feeling."*

The classroom arena in this study was one where peer culture functioned positively to reinforce the writing task. For the duration of this writing assignment it was 'cool' to be writing a long, exciting story and to 'show it off' to peers. Boys enjoyed entering into the spirit of the activity. A teacher described one story as *"any boy's fantasy"* and hence something that they would enjoy experiencing; another teacher says of the same story that *"it is obvious that he enjoyed writing it."* The pupils were writing for themselves and also using their stories to display their masculine identity and bond as males. This is a situation that by no means always pertains; it may even have been a rare happy chance. However it is worth considering how to create such an environment.

Conversation
Dialogue is usually, along with action, a major component of the plot. If not well handled, it can be confusing to know who is speaking. A female teacher recorded as a weakness that the *"last page read like a script."* Often the dialogue is entertaining in itself and reads like a crisp, macho script:

"Good awareness of the power of direct speech. Realistic dialogue."

Humour
In the whole set of stories, a few are written in humorous vein by writers with a taste for comedy but the majority are almost entirely humourless. "The JCB" is a one-off, quirky, sophisticated story. The pupils show almost no appreciation of its humour, with only one conceding that it is *"quite funny."* The teachers, by contrast, thought that its strength was its humour:

"Very surreal imagination."
"Entertaining dialogue."
"Extraordinary imagination. Amusing throughout."
"Original and witty."
"Very humorous."

Style
In broad terms, the stories are well written; they could be given to pupils to read as though reading a story. From an English teacher's point of view it is perhaps depressing but not surprising that pupils' comments on the style of the stories concentrated on secretarial aspects such as paragraphing, spelling, *"uses good words", "knows how to use big words," "used*

speech marks very well," "is punctuated properly." The pupil who judged a story good because there were *"no spelling mistakes"* was possibly reflecting standards internalised from a teacher's marking. However other characteristics of the typical mode of narration are of greater interest.

Characterisation

Characterisation appears simply not to be a focus of interest for these male writers. Such characterisation as there is draws on stereotypes or is inferred from dialogue. It is an infrequent matter for comment by male readers. On the other hand it seems to be more looked for by female teachers, who often identify characterisation as a weakness:

"Needs to develop characters."
"Very little attention paid to character development"

In particular the constant emphasis on the characters' actions is accompanied by an almost total inattention to their feelings and emotions. The teachers often identify this as a weakness in the stories: *"no mention of main character's feelings during this story," "doesn't give much depth to inner thoughts/feelings of character,"* or *"not enough development of John's feelings,"* and are quick to commend instances where feelings are mentioned: *"has tried to include emotions as well as reporting fact"* (noted by a female teacher).

In the boys' stories there is no acknowledgement of an inner self in the characters or in the reader. Only 5 of the 23 stories use first-person narration. The preferred perspective is that of objective story-telling as though watching a screen-play rather than re-telling from within a single speaker's mind and experience, even though the latter would allow greater control through the stability of a single viewpoint.

Description

Female teachers were more likely to comment on descriptive writing – either to praise it when present or to lament its absence: *"The dialogue/script style needs to be backed up by more passages of description – setting the scene and creating an atmosphere."* Maynard found that "boys shied away from using figurative and descriptive language" (Maynard, 2002, p.66) and she goes on to consider what it is that counts as 'good' writing, asking: "Are we clear *why* the development of narrative through dialogue and passages of description is considered preferable to a more episodic, visual narrative style?" (*ibid*, p.67).

Techno-speak

Male readers were more likely to discuss 'technical' aspects of the stories, such as weapons that were mentioned (*"a good idea about the flame thrower"*) or that there was *"good scientific notation"*. Machinery and 'hardware' were of interest, for example, the Galaxy class star-ship with its *"metallic hull and three blue glowing warp nacelles."* One of the stories assumed knowledge about zombies and their characteristics; the male teacher who pointed out that the story *"draws on archetype of zombies which instantly creates a strong visual and emotional sense of the situation for the reader"* was correct insofar as the reader had sufficient knowledge about zombies to bring to their reading. Boys had the necessary knowledge and reacted to the story according to their liking for the zombie genre:

"I liked that the story had zombies."
"Zombies are not my favourite kind of entertainment."
"I found it annoying that there were zombies in every room."
"I like karate and I like zombies."

Influences

It will scarcely be necessary to say that the apparent influences on the boys' stories were TV and film, computer games and superhero comics. This ranged from *Star Trek* to *Sesame*

Street. This could prove a bonus in terms of narration. For example, a male reader praised the style of one of the stories (claimed by another male reader to be *"a copy of the movie* Aliens*"*) because the writer *"creates good mental pictures."* The sound effects in one comics-influenced story (Beeeeeep! AAAAAHHHH! YAARRGGHH! Bang! Whack! etc) were popular, probably because they filled in a narrative dimension that would be present in a movie version.

The movie genre seems both to have assisted male writers and to have provided the male readers with a criterion for what makes a good story. One male reader reversed this process and seems to have imagined what he read as if it were film; his favourite part of the story was selected because *"it was unexpected and if made into a movie would make you laugh."* The overlap between the processes of reading and watching a film are evident in a pupil's comment that *"it is easy to imagine the story in your head."* A number of readers commented that this story was derivative from films, but it was a female teacher who regarded it as a weakness that *"most of the ideas are quite familiar from TV movies."* Similarly another story (identified as based on a named computer game by one male teacher and one male reader) was adjudged weak by a female teacher because it *"sounds very much like he's re-telling a film"* and by another because there were *"too many similarities with existing movies!"* While drawing on movies and computer games seems to have been an enabling and supportive strategy for the writers, female teachers are likely to disapprove and discourage such imitation.

ASSESSMENT

The marks awarded by the three groups – pupils, male teachers, female teachers – reveal some noteworthy trends.

Table 1 *Average percentage marks*

	Pupil	Male teacher	Female teacher
"What a summer"			
Content	71	71	76
Style	69	71	75
"Horror in Edone"			
Content	70	71	61
Style	69	70	61
"The JCB"			
Content	66	79	81
Style	63	79	81
"Mystery Man"			
Content	67	66	74
Style	66	65	70

Most striking is that the average marks awarded by the pupils and the male teachers for both content and style for each story were remarkably close. The one exception was "The JCB", a sophisticated, humorous, surreal tale, which was rated much more highly by the teachers than the pupils.

Female teachers marked more generously than the other two groups, except in the case of "Horror in Edone", where their reaction probably reflected the fact that it was the story with the highest level of violence. Where a male teacher noted the *"grand guignol massacre"* at the end of one of the stories as a matter of style in that it *"destroys realism,"* the comments

of several of the female teachers were value-judgements: *"the end was a bit too gruesome," "horrific ending," "a bit gory at the end."* Several pupils liked this ending, one pupil because *"it was not an unrealistic happy ending"* and another because *"everyone died in the end."*

Female teachers were much more likely to use an unspecific term such as "imaginative" when noting a story's strengths. They were more likely to look for logic, consistency and internal coherence in a story and to deplore their absence:

"Hard to follow."
"Not enough is explained.''
"Far-fetched."
"Does not explain why [aliens] had to be killed."
"Jumps from one thing to another too quickly."
"Confusing conclusion."

Female teachers also comment more on characterisation and on description of feelings:
"Very little attention paid to character development."
"Oddly – no mention of main character's feelings during this story."
"All description of action and no mention of character's feelings."
"Little imaginative use of language."
"Needs to use more description – i.e. to create atmosphere, suspense, fear, etc."

Since the majority of English teachers are female, it is important that they should be judicious in acknowledging what their male pupils can do as well as identifying their weaknesses.

In the average marks, there was no notable distinction between content and style for any group. In the average marks, style was never rated above content, reflecting the widespread sense that what the story is about is more important than the way it is told. This can mean for boys, however, that they are penalised for what they choose to write about. It can also mean that the obvious features of style - description, satisfying conclusion – are looked for rather than others such as use of dialogue or pace.

RECOMMENDATIONS

• English teachers should explore ways to teach 'plot'. The boys' plotting was generally ambitious; they were willing to attempt more than they could pull off. Specific features that could be practised would include maintaining control, for example, of the number of characters, maintaining realism and credibility, handling action well (use of verbs, pace, etc) and devising appropriate endings and effective final sentences. Mark-schemes generally credit writing skills which girls are more likely to display (characterisation, empathetic writing) and do not reward skills which boys are more likely to show (plotting). This needs to be addressed.

• Since dialogue was well-used in many of the stories, drama and oral discussion would be helpful preliminaries for boys before writing. Of the twenty-four males who were the subjects of their research, Smith and Wilhelm write that drama "was perhaps the single instructional technique that was mentioned positively across the boys" (Smith and Wilhelm, 2002, p.131). Writing tasks could feature more script-writing, such as scripting scenes in a TV play or film. Drama enables exploration of character, thought-tracking, rehearsal of dialogue and conjecturing and improvisation of plot sequences. Daly helpfully points out that drama is not merely for use as a prelude to writing, but is "a tool for teacher intervention at critical stages in the writing" (Daly, 2003, p.18).

• There should be some negotiation with boys with regard to subject-matter. Research has found that boys want greater choice in the topics that they write about (UKLA/PNS, 2004). However there has to be a balance between catering for their preferences and discouraging tales of violence and mayhem.

• Tolerance of computer games, etc is advisable. They are a stimulus for writing and there is greater benefit in handling imitation constructively rather than condemning it. Millard has argued for a "literacy of fusion", where teachers are "attentive to children's interests and preferred ways of creating meaning, in order to enable them to both question and transform knowledge brought from their interests outside to meet the needs of the classroom" (Millard, 2004, p.161). Teacher input could aim to encourage development from the imitative to something more imaginative and creative. The appropriation of narratives by pupils is a fact; the learning focus can be on how to do so selectively and skilfully.

• More account should be taken of the performative aspect of boys' writing discussed above. Willett notes that the production of media-based narrative texts is a means by which boys "gain and share pleasures" (Willett, 2005, p.144). They enjoy writing that allows them to relive a computer game on paper and they enjoy the public display inherent in sharing such texts with male friends. Connected to this is the resistance which boys show to returning to and revising their writing (Barrs and Pidgeon, 2002). The pleasure lasted as long as the writing and reading out were new; they know that they cannot "recapture the first fine careless rapture."

• Writing is ultimately an individual and independent activity, but it would be more attractive to boys if it were placed in a social context. One of the key findings in Smith and Wilhelm's research was that "when the literate activity provided the occasion for social connections, the boys had intrinsic motivation for their engagement" (Smith and Wilhelm, 2002, p.147). Writing activities could be set up so that they involve individual tasks within a group or incorporate sharing with and feedback from peers. This is less a matter of creating a sense of audience than of providing peer support and mutual stimulus. Boys respond better to social approaches to literacy.

• To keep abreast of the times, there will surely be increasingly a move to multimedia texts. Writing in this medium may prove to be a means whereby boys can derive greater satisfaction and success from their writing.

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Oideas 55

Barbara Collins and Michael O'Leary

INTEGRATING ASSESSMENT WITH TEACHING AND LEARNING IN THE VISUAL ARTS: A STUDY IN ONE CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT: *This study, in a single primary classroom, investigates the use of success criteria as an assessment approach in The Visual Arts Curriculum. It seeks to establish the benefits and implications of using success criteria as a method of peer- and self-assessment. Convincing associations between the use of success criteria and pupils' positive attitude towards generating ideas, rectifying perceived weaknesses and reaction to criticism were identified. Findings suggest that pupils were much quicker to begin a task and more confident about the process of making art. Indications of a shift away from subjective, egocentric evaluations of work towards objective criteria referenced judgments were identified. Other positive outcomes included increased confidence about engaging in the creative process and more creative and diverse art products.*

INTRODUCTION

The Primary School Curriculum (Government of Ireland, 1999) makes it explicit that assessment is an integral part of teaching and learning and that it should be used to monitor learning processes and achievement in each area of the curriculum including the visual arts. However, a review of that curriculum carried out by the NCCA (2005) described assessment in the visual arts as being "out-of-bounds" and "anathema to the philosophy of visual arts" and quoted teachers as saying that they equated it with grading and marking and did not see its relevance in art (p. 125). The report also suggests that many teachers lacked confidence and expertise in the area of assessing children's work in general. Similar findings are reported in other reviews by the DES Inspectorate (2005a, b) and by Eivers *et al.* (2004). The low levels of assessment skills may be considered worrying in a context where the research literature suggests strongly that pupils taught by teachers with high levels of assessment skills make greater gains in achievement than their counterparts being taught by teachers without those skills (see, for example, Black and Wiliam, 1998).

The study described in this paper sought to investigate if assessment could be integrated successfully with teaching and learning over a relatively short period of time in the visual arts curriculum for primary schools. The approach taken was influenced by what is termed *Assessment for Learning* (AfL) or assessment where the primary focus is on helping pupils to learn better during a period of teaching and learning. AfL may be conceptualised as one side

of an assessment coin with *Assessment of Learning* (AoL) on the other. The primary focus of AoL is on summing up what pupils know following a period of teaching and learning. Both feature strongly in the recently published assessment guidelines for primary schools (NCCA, 2007). It should be noted that while some commentators make a distinction between Assessment for Learning and Formative Assessment, the terms will be used interchangeably for the purposes of this paper.

KEY AfL STRATEGIES

In their 1998 pamphlet, *Working inside the Black Box: Assessment for Learning in the Classroom*, Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam presented the findings from a review of a research literature spanning many countries and classroom contexts and concluded that formative assessment (or AfL) can have a powerful positive influence on educational achievement. Some years later Black and his colleagues acknowledged that the earlier review, while influential, was of little practical use to the classroom teacher because it lacked the detail needed to identify and implement assessments that would impact positively on pupil learning (Black et al, 2003). Luckily, researchers in many countries have since addressed this lacuna and we now know a good deal more about what works in terms of assessment for learning. Among the strategies identified by Black et al (2003), Clarke (2005) and the NCCA (2004), three are interlinked and feature in this paper: self-assessment, success criteria and effective feedback.

In the NCCA's (2007 a) *Assessment in the Primary School Curriculum: Guidelines for Schools* self-assessment is described as a method whereby pupils "look at their own work in a reflective way, identify aspects of it that are good and that could be improved, and then set personal learning targets for themselves" (p. 14). Here, as elsewhere in the research literature, pupil self-assessment and its close relation, peer-assessment, are considered to be at the heart of good AfL practice. However, the same literature makes it clear that successful peer and self-assessment is predicated on teachers and pupils understanding of the role played by success criteria and feedback.

Shepard (2000) refers to success criteria as "explicit criteria" meaning that the pupil has a very clear idea of the criteria by which their work will be assessed. She says that "features of excellent performance should be so transparent that pupils can learn to evaluate their own work in the same way their teachers would" (p. 11). She also states that student self-assessment "promises to increase pupils' responsibility for their own learning and to make the relationship between teacher and pupils more collaborative" (p. 12). In the appropriate circumstances, Shepard is a strong advocate of teachers and pupils working collaboratively in coming to an understanding of and in drawing up the criteria for success. These criteria then become the basis of effective feedback between the teacher and the pupil, between the pupil and the teacher and between peers. The work of Sadler (1989) has been especially influential in this regard. He identified three elements necessary for meaningful feedback. The first is that the pupil should understand the meaning of quality work. This can be achieved by, for example, applying success criteria to critically review a sample of work from other pupils. The second element is the provision of the opportunity to make comparisons between the pupil's own work and the standard being aspired to. This can involve the pupil working with the teacher and/or peers in reviewing work in progress or completed work. The third element is that the pupil must be allowed the opportunity to make any adjustments necessary to attain the success criteria. Clarke (2005) calls this "closing the gap" feedback or feedback focused on action for improvement. There is a close link here to Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development (the difference between what a child can do with help and what he or she can do without guidance). In addition, the point that Clarke makes about the need for teachers to relinquish control of the assessment process is an important one. She argues that feedback

must take place with reference to the success criteria rather than the teacher's opinion. As a first step in achieving this she advocates involving pupils in drawing up the success criteria or defining the learning goal. Pupils can then be encouraged to review their own work and the work of their peers and make decisions about "the achieved performance and the desired performance" (Clarke, 2005, p. 88).

It should be noted that AfL is not without its critics. Torrance (2007), for example, argues that "formative assessment is not necessarily or inevitably a benign or expansive process or one that will always promote independent learning" (p. 292). He cautions against the over use and narrow interpretation of success criteria in learning situations and points out this may in fact reduce the independence of the learner and encourage a higher degree of dependence on the teacher. He provides evidence from research studies suggesting that the transparency involved when success criteria are used by pupils leads to what he terms "instrumentalism" (p. 281). In other words, the presence of success criteria make it easier for pupils to simply comply in a non-thinking way. He argues that this criteria compliance ends up dulling creativity, replacing real learning and militating against the acquisition of generalisable skills. He suggests that assessment *for* learning has become assessment *as* learning which does not develop student autonomy. We will return to these criticisms later in the paper.

RESEARCH STRATEGY

The study described here was undertaken by the first author with her class to investigate the use of success criteria as method of peer and self-assessment in the visual arts. The research strategy chosen was action research. Cohen *et al*. (2007) advocate the use of action research in a variety of areas including "improving one's method of continuous assessment" (p. 297). In this piece of research "a personal attempt is made to understand, improve and reform practice" (Ebbutt, 1985, as quoted in Cohen *et al*. 2007, p. 297). Cohen *et al.* (2007) suggest that action research can be divided into two stages namely a diagnostic stage and a therapeutic stage. They explain that during the diagnostic stage, the problem is analysed and the hypotheses developed. The therapeutic stage involves the testing of the hypothesis "by a consciously directed intervention or experiment in situ" (Cohen *et al.* 2007, p. 304). In this study, the diagnostic stage involved the first author's acknowledging that she, like many other teachers, had been reluctant and unable to engage in meaningful assessment in visual arts. The therapeutic or hypothesis stage was reached when she made a decision to investigate if the use of success criteria would help to rectify this. The research design involved two elements: four art lessons and two data sources.

THE ART LESSONS

During the month of December, 2008 a series of four lessons on the *Fabric and Fibre* strand of The Primary School Curriculum were conducted by the first author with the fifth class she was teaching. The class consisted of thirty-two pupils, three of whom were non-nationals. Although two of the non-national pupils received language support, they were able to participate fully in class activities and had reasonably fluent English. The school is an eight-teacher mainstream rural school with one learning support teacher and one part-time language support teacher. The lessons were developed in a way that would allow the pupils and teacher to reflect on their experiences with two types of lesson – one where success criteria were a central element and one where they were not. The following is a step-by-step outline of how this series of lessons was implemented.

Lesson One: Making a collage
Pupils were asked to make representational fabric collages suitable for Christmas cards. This involved the teacher displaying her own ready-made examples of collages but with no discussion about them. One box of fabric was allocated between five or six pupils. Pupils decided which example they preferred to replicate. The teacher gave the usual directions about the use of glue, scissors, card etc. Pupils then set about making the collages. This lesson took about fifty minutes to complete.

Lesson Two: Developing the success criteria
The collages produced from the previous lesson were displayed. Pupils were asked to identify the collages they considered to be good and justify their choices. Pupils were then asked to identify collages that could be improved upon and specify exactly how they could be improved. All suggestions were recorded by the teacher using post-it notes and displayed on the notice board. The teacher then introduced the term "success criteria" to the pupils and explained how they could be used when learning about art. In a discussion involving the whole class, a list of both product and process success criteria for creating a good collage was drawn up and recorded by the teacher on the white board. Product criteria included those relating to shape, filling space, including detail, and colour matches/contrasts. Process criteria included working carefully, using fabric scissors to get a neat edge, not allowing the glue to ooze from beneath the fabric, gluing shapes straight and not allowing threads etc. to get stuck on accidentally. Through questioning (e.g. What big shapes would be good to use? How can we fill in more detail? How can we match/contrast colours? Is there anything missing from the list? etc) the list was reviewed a number of times until the pupils were happy. This lesson took about thirty five minutes to complete.

Lesson Three: Using the success criteria
The pupils were asked to create a collage of any theme they wished but with reference to the success criteria drawn up previously. A few minutes were spent reviewing the criteria before the pupils were allocated materials similar to those used in the previous lesson. However, an important change was introduced into this lesson. About half way through and before the collages were glued, pupils were asked to engage in a review of their work. First pupils had to assess their work with reference to the success criteria. Then each pupil was randomly allocated another student to peer-assess. On each occasion pupils were asked to identify two areas where the success criteria were being met and one area where an improvement could be made. Pupils were then given time to implement the changes before completing their collages. Due to the self and peer assessment activity this lesson was longer than the previous one – about an hour and ten minutes in all.

Lesson Four: Developing and using success criteria for a Winter collage
This was a stand-alone lesson that aimed to fully integrate assessment with the teaching and learning process in art. Success criteria for a Winter collage were drawn up with the pupils as before. Pupils worked on their collages for a period before engaging in a period of self and peer assessment. Pupils then made improvements to their work before completing their collages. This lesson took approximately one hour and ten minutes to complete.

THE DATA COLLECTION

The instruments used to collect the data were a descriptive journal and a questionnaire. The descriptive journal contained a written record of lessons and a reflective element. These were written up after school hours on the day of the lesson. This work of Cohen *et al*. (2007) and Denscombe (2007) was used to guide this process. Due to the reflective nature of the journal, lessons evolved in response to observations from the previous lesson. Planned changes and their perceived effects were noted in the diary over the course of the project.

When the four lessons were completed, a short questionnaire was administered to the pupils as a means of ascertaining their response to the lessons. In developing the questionnaire close attention was paid to the wording of questions to ensure that the pupils could provide an honest account of their experiences of the lessons. As a result, most questions were constructed as open ended and, where questions were multiple-choice type, pupils were asked to explain their responses. The questionnaire was developed following principles set out by Cohen et al (2007) and Greig and Taylor (1999).

Parental consent forms together with a short explanation of what the pupils would be expected to do in order to complete the questionnaire were issued to the class. A week was given in which to return the consent forms. Pupils were asked to complete the questionnaire as part of their homework on one particular night. Twenty-seven questionnaires were completed. Five were not completed for reasons which included failure to return consent form (2), pupils absence (1), and pupils not wishing to complete the questionnaire (2).

KEY THEMES AND FINDINGS

Once the data gathering period was completed, the reflective journal and questionnaires were analysed separately using a coding process to identify key themes. Common themes across the two data sets were then highlighted and linked to related themes in the research literature. The findings with respect to each are discussed below. No importance should be attached to the order in which the theses are discussed.

Theme 1: Faster on task/fewer procedural questions

When asked to comment on the value of the discussion about criteria before the lesson, pupils indicated it helped them get started quickly and gave them ideas about what to do. These comments support the observational data where the teacher noted that pupils were much quicker to start the task. They were also more purposeful in the way they moved about the room looking for fabric. Instead of copying other student's work or start conversations, pupils who normally took longer to get started, were observed as being more focused. This resulted in fewer questions, less repeating of instructions and less time wasting. One student said that when success criteria were used "teacher doesn't get annoyed because people aren't saying they don't know what to do and asking the same questions". This finding is supported by an opinion expressed in an NCCA publication (2007a): "Teachers using Assessment for Learning approaches in their classroom get to talk more about learning. And what's more, many are finding that because of the positive impact of their new skills on student motivation, the need for the other kind of lesson talk is greatly reduced" (p. 6). The other type of lesson talk referred to is "the reminders, the pleas, the warnings, the orders, the rebukes" (NCCA, 2007a, p. 6). A number of pupils indicated that they did not feel the need to ask the teacher questions or chat with their friends before beginning. This is consistent with Clarke's (2005) findings that "success criteria have had a positive impact on children's behaviour"(p. 50).

Theme 2: Lower frustration levels/Longer on task

Research has noted that pupils who perceive themselves as not being strong in the area of visual arts and who frequently time waste often have no regard for their own work, even if the teacher comments favourably. Lindström (2006) citing Eisner (1974) maintains that children need "considered assessment and criticism." That is how the success criteria seemed to work in this study. Pupils were happy that they had been given a clear idea of how to do well. As one pupil noted: "Now I know what to do, to do good art. Mine always looked bad even when I didn't mess and tried to listen to teacher." Observations made during the final two lessons also reflect the fact that the majority of pupils enjoyed doing the task and were happy to implement changes identified by themselves or their peers. This supports the notion that

learners respond positively to "the fundamental sense of fairness" present when excellence is put within their reach (Shepard, 2000, p. 12). Miller and Lavin (2007) talk about "the supportive, scaffolding nature of formative assessment" which seems to be of most benefit to those pupils "identified by teachers as lacking in confidence in themselves as learners" (p. 19). This was observed in the case of at least six pupils during the course of this study. It is very notable that in Lindström's (2006) study of the assessment of the visual arts in Sweden highlights the only school that made significant progress in the area of peer- and self assessment was the school where pupils "are in constant dialogue with the student as the work evolves" (p. 62). Long periods of engagement with projects were the norm. In this study a pupil who had previously given up easily wrote that she would have liked more time to spend on improving her collage.

Theme 3: Varied work/Little replication

Observations carried out after the first lesson revealed that many of the collages produced by pupils were very similar to the examples provided by the teacher. However, after lesson three it was noted in the reflective journal that one of the key differences between the work produced by the pupils after the success criteria were incorporated into the lessons was that it was much more varied. Again, this was consistent with the pupil's own views. Ten of them commented that having a discussion and drawing up success criteria before undertaking the collage making helped them think up their own ideas. One pupil made the important point that the strategy "gives you the time to come up with your own ideas". All of this would seem to contradict Torrance's (2007) criteria compliance claims. However, it should be noted that Torrance was commentating in a context where pre-formulated success criteria were being applied as part qualification gained on a particular course. In this study pupils were centrally involved in drawing up success criteria that involved both process and product elements. Both elements were highlighted by Dewey (1934) as being vital in art education. In that respect Lindström (2006) believes that "inventiveness can be fostered if the teacher emphasises the process as well as the product and provides ample opportunity for research, experimentation and revision." (p. 63). Comments made by the pupils about assessing their work before they glued the final collage indicated that it allowed them to change and improve their work corresponding to Lindström's (2006) idea of "research, experimentation and revision." This allowed the pupils time to think and generate their own ideas. Drawing up the success criteria with the pupils encourages independent learning not just "criteria compliance". This is consistent with Clarke (2005) who says that in order for effective learning to take place pupils must be involved in the generation of success criteria because pupils must have a clear idea of what success is before they can aim for it. Lindström (2006) refers to fostering creativity and says that dialogue and discussion contribute to fostering creativity. Lack of discussion may lead to the instrumentalism referred to by Torrance (2007)

Theme 4: Improved artwork/Increased confidence

The use of success criteria has the potential to allow excellence to be attainable as pointed out by Shepard (2000) who adds that explicit criteria allow us to "know the rules of how our work will be judged" (p. 11). This is consistent with Miller and Lavin's (2007) findings on the use of success criteria which "clearly point to an increasing sense of belief in one's competence" (p. 13) and that "those who benefit most…are children identified by teachers as lacking in confidence in themselves as learners" (p. 19). These factors may have been responsible for some of the changes observed for some of pupils in this study. Their increased willingness to attempt a task may be seen as a manifestation of an increase in self-confidence. As one pupil noted, "it was easier to start because you knew what to do." It was also the case that a number of them treated "mistakes" in their work as temporary and things that could be changed e.g. "the success criteria let you change your mind without starting again." Following the recommendation by Clarke (2005) and Sadler (1989) the time allocated by the teacher for revision was a most important aspect of the later lessons.

Theme 5: More focused feedback/A structure for critical comments

One set of notes in the reflective journal pertained to the changes in the way feedback was given by the teacher to the pupils. There was a sense that it was more meaningful and that token praise was avoided. Comments were more constructive and pupils were given an opportunity to engage in a dialogue with the teacher. Pupils had more opportunities to respond than had previously been the case. It was also noted that many pupils were able to use the criteria to provide focused feedback to their peers and were more willing to ask others to comment on their work. Comments such as "you should start with a bigger shape to make your picture have more impact" were heard frequently during the later lessons. Indeed, eighteen pupils said that they would use the success criteria only when judging the quality of their peers' work. Observations and questionnaires provided consistent data so that pupils never felt their work was ridiculed or criticised harshly by the teacher or their peers. Due to the safe, predictable structure created by the use of success criteria for peer and self assessment, comments were not taken personally. There were occasions where pupils did not agree with the comments from peers. In these cases it was especially helpful to the teacher to have the success criteria rather than her opinion as a reference point in dialogue aimed at trying to reach consensus about whether or not improvements should be made. Lindström (2006) argues that dialogue of this nature is a major factor not only in building the capacity for self-assessment, but in fostering the creativity inherent in all good art.

CONCLUSION

The concept of assessment in the visual arts may be alien to many teachers. However, as this study has shown, the integration of assessment with teaching and learning in art is possible. The use of success criteria, peer- and self-assessment and focused feedback brought a number benefits that acted as a spur for a change in pedagogy. All three, singularly and in combination, impacted positively on creativity, motivation, and behaviour during the period of the study. They enhanced not just the product elements of pupils' work, but the process elements also. Since the conclusion of the study all three strategies have become a regular part of the first author's assessment strategies in other areas of the curriculum such as creative writing (essays), writing in response to reading, music composition and dance. This has brought additional benefits, some of which have been commented on by the parents. They were particularly enthusiastic about that fact that their children had less difficulties with homework (especially essay writing) and had found doing corrections more meaningful.

This was a small-scale study and its limitations must be acknowledged. The findings may not be generalisable because the study took place in a single classroom. In addition, the first author had the benefit of two twenty-hour courses on the theory and practice of AfL before the study took place. That said, the relative ease with which the AfL strategies were implemented and their very positive effects should be of interest to teachers willing to re-evaluate teaching and learning in the visual arts in their classrooms. Moreover, the study may provide an impetus for further research investigating the impact of other AfL strategies in other contexts.

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REVIEW

Approaches to Learning: a Guide for Teachers, Ann Jordan, Orison Carlile and Annetta Stack, Berkshire UK, Open University Press, 2008 (278 pp.)

As one looks back on a long career inspecting schools abundant memories of often animated and robust debate with conscientious teachers come to mind. Usually the discussion would pivot on questions of good practice and how best one could enable children's learning. Exasperated teachers would often assert that the expounding of theory crowded out a more useful emphasis on practical ways of mediating the curriculum to large classes. They themselves were practical people, they had little time for theory and the sooner advisors understood, the better for all and especially the learners! But while one respected their opinions and their admirable commitment to promoting children's learning, one could never concede that a firm grasp of theory was a crucial element of good practice in every classroom and every school. The fact was, and will always remain, that all of us engaged in education hold theories of learning either consciously or unconsciously. A theory constitutes a valuable tool that helps us understand some aspect of a learning situation and occupies a central element of every teacher's intellectual resources. These theories influence how we understand learning and learners, and to the extent to which we succeed in making explicit our personal theories of learning, teaching and knowledge, the better we understand practice. That is, our own practice and that of others, including that of children.

But for too many of us theory was encountered at a time when we were not in a position to comprehend its value. Working through a multiplicity of assignments and meeting threatening deadlines either in the college of education or the university education department, our reflection on theory too often came out second best. And the fault was not always ours, for the texts were often turgid and divorced from the practicality of the classroom with its ever changing complexities. In short, a consideration of theory was seen to be far from urgent and as the years passed and memory faded the shallow understandings we had painfully acquired became shallower still. And our teaching was poorer for it. But with the publication of *Approaches to Learning* the busy educationalist - the student teacher, the teacher, lecturers, advisor or inspector – has to hand an accessible compendium of learning theory that will provide a sound grounding on the most powerful ideas that underpin successful teaching and learning. And, crucially, the theory contained therein is systematically applied to the practical realities of the classroom.

What first of all strikes one about this book is its comprehensiveness: it boldly brings together the vast spectrum of theoretical approaches that inform the modern principles of western education. Not only does it constitute a lucid overview of powerful theories that underpin the work of educators, but it also considers their implications for policy and practice in an admirably succinct manner - and given its vast canvas it succeeds in doing so without sacrificing depth or rigour. The authors point out that this is an introductory text covering a vast area, and hence it is pitched at a level that can be easily understood. This is true and to this end they focus on the better-known theorists and the more established texts rather than on cutting-edge research or findings. But one should not be deluded by this for the book is a serious work - and one too that only the strongest of heart would read from cover to cover in a short period! But by its nature it was never intended to be used in this manner and the book can be read as a series of stand-alone chapters or as an integrated overview of theoretical perspectives drawn from the philosophy, psychology, sociology and pedagogy that guides educational principles and practice.

One of the great strengths of the book is seen in its structure. Indeed this is perhaps its greatest strength given that there are many texts that attempt to provide an overview of key writings on education from various disciplinary backgrounds. Each chapter contains an accessible introduction to each theory and a summary of key principles. Critical insights follow on drawn from the theories discussed, accompanied by examples and illustrations. Summary sections highlight critical and key ideas in each chapter and the practical implications for education professionals are highlighted. Indeed, it is from the neatly and conveniently bulleted 'Key ideas' and 'Conclusion' sections in virtually each of the seventeen chapters that a great many will derive most benefit: here the authors provide a clear explication of key ideas with justificatory underpinnings and draw out the implications for practice and policy. Arising from this, the dividend for the learner may be seen in the emergence of knowledgeable, reflective teachers who are not so committed to one theoretical approach that they shut off consideration of others. Finally, and most usefully, there is at the end a comprehensive glossary that explains various terms and ideas in concise form.

The vast range of theory encompassed is worth outlining: in addition to the initial chapter on philosophy of education, there follow chapters on behaviourism, cognitivism, constructivism, social learning, cultural learning, intelligence, life course development, adult learning, values motivation, the learning body, language and learning, experiential and competency-based learning, inclusivity and blended learning. Then in the final chapter on the future there is the crucial message that in spite of technological advance a person will always be needed to connect physically, experientially, and emotionally to the physical experience of the learner.

This is a book that will be of value in pre-service and in-service teacher education, in postgraduate studies, curriculum design and in inspection studies. And, importantly, it will fill a niche in the library of the busy teacher who at odd moments of leisure likes to take down an authoritative and easily accessibly study of the wide range of learning approaches, and who wishes to identify the link between theory and practice. Moreover, readers will be interested to note that the three Irish authors come with a wealth of experience in a range of pedagogical settings (two are honorary professors at Lev Tolstoy Pedagogical University, Russia) and are now based in Waterford Institute of Technology where they are key figures in the institution's postgraduate education department.

Editor

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