

# What works for pupils with literacy difficulties?

Presentation to  
RAI Seminar, 9/2/09  
St Patrick's College, Drumcondra

Greg Brooks  
University of Sheffield, UK

## MAIN IMPLICATIONS FROM RESEARCH

- In general, normal classroom teaching does not enable children with significant literacy difficulties to catch up.  
*Implication: Although good classroom teaching is the bedrock of effective practice, most research suggests that children falling behind their peers need more help than the classroom normally provides. This help requires co-ordinated effort and training.*
- Working on building a child's self-esteem and reading in parallel has definite potential.  
*Implication: Building strong and trusting relationships between teacher and taught is an essential pre-requisite for accelerating learning. Schools need to provide a coherent network, using multi-agency support.*
- Children's comprehension skills can be improved if directly targeted.  
*Implication: Engaging the child in exploring meaning embeds the relevance of reading for life, expands vocabulary and broadens the range of texts. Children falling behind their peers need both carefully structured reading material and rich exciting texts.*
- Work on phonological skills needs to be embedded within a broad approach.  
*Implication: Phonic teaching should normally be accompanied by graphic representation and reading for meaning so that irregular as well as regular patterns can be grasped. Children with severe difficulties in phonological skills or using English as an additional language may need more "stand alone" phonics teaching to support their speaking and listening.*

- Highly structured schemes work best for children struggling with spelling.  
*Implication: Children with spelling problems need schemes tailored to their preferred ways of learning and delivered systematically “little and often”. Such schemes work particularly well for enabling children to grasp relatively regular patterns of spelling.*
  
- Technology used to boost literacy attainment should be targeted as precisely as possible to provide value for money and specific impact.  
*Implication: The mediation of a skilled adult is essential to ensure technologically driven schemes meet children’s needs. Time needs to be allocated effectively so that the diagnostic tools of programs can be used for each child appropriately.*
  
- Large-scale schemes, although initially expensive, can give good value for money in the long term.  
*Implication: When establishing value for money, long-term impact and savings in future budgets for special needs must be considered, particularly when helping the lowest attaining children.*
  
- Where resources are limited and partners are available and can be given appropriate training and on-going support, reading partnership approaches can be very effective.  
*Implication: Reading partners need skilled training and support to maximise impact. A school needs to manage partners so that feedback to classroom teachers is effectively and regularly given.*
  
- Success with children with severe problems is elusive. This finding reinforces the need for skilled, one-to-one intervention for these children.  
*Implication: The greater the problem, the more skilled the teacher needs to be. Children with special educational needs normally benefit from a highly trained teacher working through an intensive and wide-ranging scheme using powerful on-going diagnosis based on close observation.*
  
- Successful implementation of effective schemes can double the standard rate of progress. Since this can be achieved, it is reasonable to expect it.  
*Implication: If the scheme matches the child’s needs, teachers and children should expect to achieve rapid improvement. High expectations are realistic expectations in most cases.*
  
- Most of the initially effective schemes incorporating follow-up studies showed that children maintained their gains.  
*Implication: Classroom teachers need to be aware of the progress of children in intervention schemes and raise their expectations in line with that progress. Effective schemes give lasting benefit if normal teaching capitalises on them.*

## Reference

Brooks, G. (2007). *What Works for Pupils with Literacy Difficulties? The Effectiveness of Intervention Schemes*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. London: DCSF. No ISBN. Ref: 00688-2007BKT-EN.  
<http://www.nationalstrategies.co.uk/Catalogue/Product.aspx?id=d814e242-d371-dd11-a136-000f20f6550e>