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Making the difference: teaching and learning strategies in successful multi-ethnic schools

September 2001

Introduction

What do we know about the characteristics of successful multi-ethnic schools?

Blair, M. and Bourne, J. with Coffin, C., Creese, A. and Kenner, C. (1998)
The Open University

This month the 'Research of the month' team has selected, appraised and summarised a study that sets out to describe characteristics of successful multi-ethnic schools. The strategies mainly highlight whole-school policies, but the authors have presented their study in an accessible and case-based way, which many teachers will find relevant to their daily practice.

The study

What did this project set out to do?

Report after report (eg, Madood et al, 1997; Weekes et al, 1999) has highlighted concerns about the relative performance of pupils in minority ethnic groups and how schools must meet the needs of ethnic minority pupils. But what do we know about how such needs and disparities might be tackled? What can teachers and school leaders do better?

The 'Research of the month' team has found very few studies that have looked into successful strategies that schools have used to try to overcome problems in meeting the needs of ethnic minority pupils. Fewer still have focused in on classroom teaching. This project started from the 1996 Ofsted survey which presented evidence that supported the view that schools were consistently underachieving for certain ethnic minority pupils relative to their peers. The Ofsted survey drew particular attention to underachievement by boys and girls of African-Caribbean, Bangladeshi and Pakistani origin. This survey commissioned by the DfES set out to identify multi-ethnic schools which were successful in raising the attainment of all their children or of particular ethnic groups of pupils regarded as underachieving in other schools.

This month's 'Research of the month' report contains evidence of practice that worked in the context of particular schools, some of which might be transferable between different schools.

What were the key findings?

Interviews with parents and students from the schools identified a range of explanations for underachievement. These included racism, low expectations of ethnic minority children, stereotyping and lack of respect for parents and students amongst some teachers. Other issues considered were poor communication, lack of understanding and missed opportunities for effective partnership between parents and schools.

The study found that effective multi-ethnic schools had taken steps to identify and address some or all of these particular areas of concern, and that they shared several characteristics – which were also features of all successful schools - including:

- * appropriate whole school approaches
- * improved communication
- * effective collection and use of data
- * responsiveness to individual need.

These findings are also supported by evidence published by the 'Raising African-Caribbean Achievement' (RACA) project carried out in Birmingham schools.

How was the research designed?

The project team chose to examine practice in multi-ethnic schools that showed evidence of the successful attainment of students of African- Caribbean, Bangladeshi or Pakistani origin. The existence of practice shown to be successful was the key to selection. The researchers did not attempt to structure the sample so that patterns in meeting needs in particular contexts could be established, or to compare specific different models. The team also analysed the attainment of Gypsy traveller children where they could be identified within the schools already selected.

The researchers used qualitative methods including observations and semistructured and open-ended interviews, to examine in detail a number of multi-ethnic schools.

They set out to explore:

- * the ways in which information about performance and experiences is collected and explicit targets for pupils and teachers are set and put into practice
- * the teaching and learning strategies employed
- * the responses to the above from a range of participants.

Throughout the project, the researchers also documented the values, attitudes and perceptions of participants in the schools, through interviews and by discussion in focus group meetings.

In the first phase of the project, the authors examined whole school policies.

During the second phase, the aim was to look more closely at whether and how schools collected and used ethnic monitoring data:

- * in target setting
- * in evaluating practice
- * to identify successful teaching and learning strategies.

The final report drew together exemplar material from nine primary and 12 secondary schools that were selected on specified criteria of effectiveness.

What else did the study discover?

In addition to their main findings, the authors highlighted some other issues that might give teachers useful insights into this complex area:

- * Did the strategies also help raise the achievement of traveller children?
- * How were the strategies applied to refugee and asylum seeker children?
- * What effect did the presence of minority ethnic group teachers have?

Appropriate whole-school approaches

The research team found that successful schools showed successful practice in their approach to:

- * principles, leadership and ethos
- * curriculum enrichment
- * good teaching
- * open and fair behavioural policies.

School management and staff sought to build an ethos of respect for individuals and cultural groups. It was recognised that policies in themselves were not enough - equity had to be established in practice. At Northern Catholic High School, the headteacher questioned whether the school's own practices might have contributed to the poor behaviour of one group of boys. Structures were created which supported pupils against racism and unfair treatment, and which gave pupils a mechanism for dealing with any complaints they might have. Staff also found this valuable. Although it was a lengthy process, the school was successful in developing an atmosphere of mutual respect, which was noted by Ofsted. Individual teachers, departments and year groups were made accountable for the teaching and support they gave to pupils. At South Eastern Comprehensive School, departments improved their planning and targeting-setting processes. Staff felt that these changes had helped to increase the maths GCSE A* - C pass rate from around 14 per cent to 30 per cent after one year.

All three primary school case studies showed evidence of a full and rich curriculum. In Alton Primary School, for example, children produced a newspaper in collaboration with a local newspaper publisher. The school also ran whole-school curriculum focus weeks on particular subject areas including 'science week' and 'poetry fortnight'.

Some cases schools introduced ethnic studies into the curriculum. Northern Catholic High School, for example, made Afrikan (the school's term and spelling) and Irish Studies part of the school's Personal and Social Education (PSE) programme.

A common feature of all the successful schools was the emphasis placed on teaching and learning. One example of good practice was the close attention paid to vocabulary in the core subjects at South Eastern Comprehensive. Here the science department invited a local education authority (LEA) advisor to help in teaching science vocabulary to bi-lingual learners.

Open and fair behaviour policies, usually designed with the help of parents and children, were given a very high priority in the schools studied by the authors.

Improved communication

The evidence collected from the case study schools suggested strongly that good relationships were a key feature in creating a positive learning environment for minority ethnic group pupils, and that it took considerable time and energy to build them. Headteachers in the three primary schools and staff and pupils in the two secondary schools emphasised the importance of:

- * listening to children
- * communicating with parents.

Staff at Northern Catholic High School had made listening to students a central strategy in their approach to establishing good relationships. African-Caribbean boys at the school considered themselves to be the most likely to be subjected to unfair practices. By giving students the opportunity to express themselves, within a context where they could be sure of getting an appropriate response a dialogue was set up.

For example, one reason given by black pupils for feeling excluded was the lack of black peoples' history studied at the school. The school responded by amending its curriculum to include a module on black peoples' history. As relationships improved staff became more aware of the experiences of African-Caribbean students.

At Southern Boy's School, staff were aware of the importance of respect between staff and pupils in setting standards. The headteacher observed that: "The students here have a high expectation of the teachers. They expect them to be polite and not to 'talk down' to them."

Parental involvement was regarded as highly important in all the schools in the project and the schools used a range of strategies. At South Eastern Comprehensive, staff used as many different methods of communicating with parents as possible. They found it particularly helpful when parents could be spoken to, by telephone, in their first language.

At Northern Catholic High School, a forum was set up for the parents of African-Caribbean students, whilst at Northshire Comprehensive similar meetings were attended by an ethnically diverse group of parents.

Although still at an early stage, the number of ethnic-minority school governors has grown. This development has contributed greatly to those schools' understanding of issues of importance to ethnic minority pupils and their parents.

The importance of establishing positive relationships with parents of African-Caribbean origin was stressed in the report on the Birmingham LEA project 'Raising African-Caribbean Achievement' (RACA). A number of schools involved in this study regarded parents as an 'invaluable resource' and actively sought to bring them into the classroom. Not only did they share their skills and experience with the children, it also enabled the schools to create a dialogue with parents and to learn more about African-Caribbean educational values.

Effective collection and use of data

Detailed monitoring in order to identify individual and specific learning needs featured in most schools. Concerns about singling out particular groups of children seems to have restricted the number of schools that monitored attainment by ethnic group to five of the 12 schools visited.

The monitoring strategies used by the schools shared the features that the process:

- * was dynamic and constantly being updated
- * took into account feedback from staff
- * worked at a very detailed level.

Examples of ethnic monitoring by groups that led to identifying and tackling specific problems were shown by:

* Brook Primary School and City Infants School who, in fact, used ethnic monitoring by group to highlight specific high achieving groups to raise attainment, or low achievers to identify where support was needed

* South Eastern Comprehensive, Suburb Junior School and Southern Boy's School who found that ethnic monitoring by group enabled them to identify very specific underachievement among Pakistani, Kurdish and African-Caribbean pupils respectively.

To take a particular example, ethnic monitoring done by Suburb Junior School on reading levels of Year 3 pupils, highlighted underachievement by Kurdish boys. The school responded by allocating a bilingual Kurdish support teacher to the class.

In some cases, specialised support staff carried out their own specific forms of monitoring which provided further information. At Brook Primary School, for example, the teacher funded by the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG) monitored pupil performance in the pupils' home languages, and these assessments were added to the database of whole school records tracking every pupil.

Some schools compared predicted and actual grades in national tests to help identify weakness in written work among bilingual pupils who otherwise showed fluency in their work.

At Brook Primary School a chart tracking children's progress through the national curriculum level was displayed prominently in the staffroom. Monitoring helped teachers to reflect on their own practice, one teacher noting: "I think we've moved on. We don't talk so much about faults lying with the child, we are looking much more closely at our teaching."

Responding to individual needs

Identification of individual pupil needs led to well-developed systems of support in all of the schools studied during the project, including:

- * language support
- * mentoring
- * homework and revision clubs.

Children who were seen to be falling behind were given support on a number of levels. At Key Stage 1 at Brook Primary School, this provision included a daily readers' class, a reading recovery programme and timetabled twice weekly cross-phase attainment groups for English. At Key Stage 2 a six week daily reader's class was available, as well as individual special educational needs (SEN) support.

With a high number of bilingual pupils Alton Primary school had well developed strategies for meeting the language, as well as the curricular, needs of its pupils.

In Northshire Comprehensive School, all Year 7 pupils were involved in a language skills programme consisting of a small group or one-to-one session depending on assessed need each week. The latter were identified through assessment tests of language and literacy, designed by Section 11 and SEN staff. Seventeen mainstream teachers undertook the teaching - working from lesson plans, teaching guides and materials specifically addressing a particular need. Examples of areas of need included basic reading skills, listening and study skills.

Mentoring, sometimes but not always by members of the same ethnic group, was also used as an important means of

supporting pupils. Year 10 pupils at Northern Catholic High School participated in a mentoring programme with a local company.

Another successful strategy was the homework or revision club. In 1997, at Northern Catholic High School, African-Caribbean pupils gained 33 per cent of the A* – C grades in GCSE science. This compared with 9 per cent in a comparable school. The pupils attributed their success to a science revision class.

Did the strategies also help raise the achievement of travellers' children?

Although ethnic monitoring forms on attainment levels in LEAs did not usually identify Gypsy traveller children specifically, some evidence was found in an Ofsted report of 1996, *The Education of Travelling Children*. This suggested that attainment at KS 1 was comparable with the national average but there was considerable variation at KS 2 and significant underachievement. During KS 3 and KS 4 a serious decline in attendance and disproportionately high rates of exclusion were observed.

The research team reported on the provision for traveller children in an academically successful multi-ethnic secondary school, Southern Metropolitan. This school drew a small number of pupils from a settled Gypsy traveller community. Staff had found that three main problems to be tackled were the suspicion with which the families viewed the school, poor attendance of pupils and a lack of awareness of the needs of the pupils among staff.

In a drive to create a more inclusive approach, the school developed a number of strategies including the following:

- * using the LEA Traveller Education Service to find out the culture, language and lifestyle of the particular traveller community
- * one member of staff taking responsibility for the pupils, in this case the head of KS 3
- * establishing good relationships with the parents
- * arranging for the families to have a direct telephone line to the head of KS 3's office
- * monitoring attendance, assessing pupils, monitoring their progress and preparing individual education plans, through the services of a traveller support teacher provided by the LEA
- * ensuring that staff receive appropriate information about traveller children in their classes
- * positively representing the pupils' culture in the curriculum.

According to staff at the school, these strategies appeared to be working; pupils and parents alike were more confident and trusting, attendance had improved, there were more traveller children on roll, and pupil performance improved.

How were the strategies applied to refugee and asylum seeker children?

The project team collected evidence about refugees from one primary school and two secondary schools as well as from an LEA advisory worker, refugee students and five headteachers. In their report, the authors use the term 'refugee' to cover both refugees and asylum seekers, who may or may not have official refugee status.

Staff in the schools visited tried out different strategies aimed at building confidence and trust in parents and pupils, including:

- * establishing a link with parents through a named member of staff they can approach on a one-to-one basis
- * providing an induction programme for all new pupils
- * putting on awareness-raising sessions for all teaching staff
- * obtaining advice and guidance from external bodies such as the LEA, the Refugee Council, a mental health

institution and an institute of higher education

- * arranging peer partnerships between sixth-formers and refugee students
- * teaming up new refugee children with somebody from their neighbourhood to help integrate the child into the local community
- * setting up support networks by introducing the parents of new refugee children to other parents who speak the same language
- * using the services of local refugee community groups to help communicate with refugee parents.

One of the most difficult issues faced by schools was that the children had invariably suffered some sort of trauma. This led to severe behavioural reactions to everyday stimuli such as being pushed in the playground, letters from school to home, or sudden loud noises. This called for great sensitivity on the part of schools. The families of the children in many cases suffered from racial harassment in the local community, which made it difficult for both children and adults to settle. In addition, the diverse educational experiences of the children, some of whom had never been to school, presented a considerable challenge. In school, support was usually provided through EMAG and in some cases involved part-time refugee workers. Schools found refugee communities and associations an invaluable source of information. Where refugee children were too frightened to come to school because of racial harassment in the streets, schools worked with police to try to solve the problem.

What effect did the presence of minority ethnic group teachers have?

The authors noted that all participants in the study regarded the presence of minority ethnic group teachers in schools as important for a number of reasons including:

- * helping to affirm a positive sense of identity among children
- * understanding the issues involving minority ethnic group children
- * influencing their colleagues in a positive way
- * communicating with children in their first language
- * influencing school equal opportunities policies
- * acting as role models
- * encouraging and motivating pupils
- * helping to change the school culture.

Schools with minority ethnic group governors also found that their presence enabled them to address issues of diversity more effectively, by helping to make policy and practice relevant to the whole pupil intake.

The RACA project supported these findings. The report commented that having a multi-ethnic staff - teaching and ancillary - was a key factor in helping African-Caribbean pupils to gain a sense of self-worth. Staff observed that it was important for the children to see black and white adults working together.

How were the schools chosen?

The research team visited 11 primary and 18 secondary schools, in different parts of the country, selected from the Ofsted database.

The criteria applied in the selection of schools were that over ten per cent of students came from at least one of the following minority ethnic backgrounds; Bangladeshi, African-Caribbean and Pakistani, together with one of the following:

- * pupils were attaining at or above national average GCSE A* - C results for secondary schools, or, for primary schools, at or above national average results in KS1 or KS2 tests

- * although not reaching national average levels, pupil attainment could be seen to be steadily improving
- * the school showed 'much better than like' performance for their intake in relation to the socio-economic status of pupil's families (as indicated by eligibility of pupils for free school meals), English as an additional language numbers, and levels of attendance.

Additional information was provided by LEAs to support the Ofsted data. From the initial 29 schools visited by the research team, 12 schools were selected for more detailed study. In making this further selection, the research team sought to achieve a range in terms of type of school, age of pupils, socio-economic background and ethnic diversity. Out of the 12 schools, five schools – three primary and two secondary – were selected for case studies.

How was data collected from the schools?

Within the sample schools, the authors deployed a range of methods to enable them to provide illustrative data about the contexts, organisation, activities and perceptions of parents, students and teachers, which teachers will find interesting and useful.

Information was collected through a range of methods including the following:

- * semi-structured and open-ended interviews with
 - * headteachers
 - * senior management
 - * subject and class teachers
 - * support teachers and classroom assistants
 - * parents
 - * students
 - * LEA personnel.
 - * analysis of
 - * school development plans
 - * policy documents
 - * assessment data
 - * monitoring records.
 - * observations were made
 - * in the classroom
 - * during after-school activities
 - * in staff meetings
 - * at a parents' meeting
 - * at a governors' meeting
 - * during staff in-service training (INSET).
 - * through discussions at four focus group meetings involving parents headteachers and a LEA advisor, the participants in which came from all three main ethnic groups featured in the study.

Implications for practice

Whilst writing this RoM we became aware of a number of implications. An over-riding implication is the need for school leaders and teachers to create good communications with pupils and students from minority ethnic groups, and to involve them as much as possible in the life of the school. Evidence from the case studies suggests that in some schools, particularly in the primary sector, these processes are already advanced, but that the process is very uneven.

Leaders may like to consider the following issues and questions that arose from the main study in the context of practice and the needs of the students in their own school:

* The study highlighted the benefits of using teachers and other adults with specialist expertise in minority ethnic achievement, travellers' education, SEN and reading to support classroom teachers. A core feature was that care was taken to plan specific developmental programmes of support and to reduce specialist inputs as pupils improve. Might this be a helpful way to proceed in your school? What are the most effective ways of harnessing school or community expertise to support such work? Could time be set aside for teachers to work and plan for this in department subject or year teams?

* There was evidence that students responded positively to additional support through homework and revision clubs. What would a review of support clubs in your school reveal? Could these be targeted more effectively towards the needs and desires of ethnic minority students?

* Some schools provided opportunities for minority ethnic students to express themselves in their own cultural terms, such as, creating newspapers and running media projects. The evidence from these schools suggests that such activities help to increase students' confidence in learning. What opportunities could be extended or initiated in your school for students to express themselves in their own cultures?

Teachers may like to consider these issues and questions:

* Students from minority ethnic groups responded positively to the inclusion of material covering a range of ethnic backgrounds into the curriculum. Would it be possible to extend the presence of such material in your teaching plans? What would be needed to enable teachers to work in subject or department groups to add this material to the curriculum?

* Students with low self-esteem and students at risk of failing at school were helped by mentors both inside and outside the school. Could your pupils help you to develop mentor strategies or help you extend existing schemes to involve members of the targeted communities?

* There was evidence in the study that the self-esteem of minority ethnic group pupils and students was raised when their views were considered seriously. One effective approach involved staff and pupils working together to develop behaviour codes. Would you find consulting pupils a way of fostering good relations with students and helping to raise their self-esteem?

* Involving pupils in peer-peer relationships to spread the impact of positive role models, to build self-esteem and to support pupils who were particularly disadvantaged, all seemed to help to raise achievement in multi ethnic schools. Is such peer-to-peer working an approach that you could promote or extend?

Your feedback

Have you found this study to be useful? Have you used any aspect of this research in your own classroom teaching practice? We would like to hear your feedback on this study. Click on the link below to share your views with us.

research@gtce.org.uk

Case studies

The first five case studies are all from the study itself. The authors decided to keep the names of all the schools providing exemplar material anonymous, including the five case study schools, to protect them from publicity. Of the five schools, the first two are secondary schools and the others are primary schools. Also included is a case study from a Midlands Local Education Authority, chosen by the 'Research of the month' team to illustrate examples of good practice identified by the authors of the main project.

Case Study 1 - Northern Catholic High School

This case study illustrates the importance of targeting boys' underachievement. The school, situated in the North of England, is a mixed voluntary aided Roman Catholic school with about 670 pupils (in 1997). The two main ethnic groups are 67 per cent White of mainly Irish descent and 29 per cent African-Caribbean. Most black pupils come from the local community, one of the most disadvantaged in the country with high rates of unemployment among black males. This case study shows how committed and determined work by senior staff, initially, and then all staff, began to improve achievement for all pupils.

The new headteacher, who had previously been a deputy at the school and had witnessed a period of deteriorating relationships and worsening achievement, recognised that the school needed to develop a new ethos. She was aware that African-Caribbean males particularly experienced a level of alienation and exclusion that had to be addressed. Listening to pupils and taking their concerns seriously became a major strategy to change the culture of the school. Older pupils were treated as adults and the different experiences they brought to the school were recognised. Black history studies were initiated for all pupils, to be followed by Irish studies.

Giving a clear lead, the headteacher sought to win over staff through an honest and open approach. A staff meeting allowed staff to express their doubts about the introduction of black history studies because (headteacher): 'What I didn't want to do was to sit back and see what would happen. I preferred to go up front and ask people why they were saying certain things and where they got their information from.'

Whole school policies were redefined in various ways, which included:

- * using INSET to develop staff awareness of equality of opportunity regarding race and gender
- * involving parents in drawing up an anti-racist policy
- * establishing a code of conduct applying to both staff and students.

Systematic efforts were also made to raise achievement by changing pupil attitudes to achievement. For example, mentoring through a local company was established for all students in years 9 and 10, an initiative that gave extra support to the more vulnerable pupils such as those influenced by gangs outside school. Also, individual pupils were identified to create positive role models to combat the peer group view, particularly among African-Caribbean boys, that it was not 'cool' to take academic work seriously. *

*The issue of underachievement among African-Caribbean pupils is analysed in the context of peer group pressure in a paper by Tony Sewell.

One member of staff observed: '...S (is) another role model, he was able to be popular, to work and still have credibility with the other students. He didn't mind having his work pinned up....One of S's friends came in and asked for extra work at KS3 because he wanted to do as well as S'.

The school's commitment to raising the achievement of African-Caribbean boys led to the percentage of black boys gaining 5 A* - C passes at GCSE rising from 0 per cent in 1995 to 19 per cent in 1997.

Case Study 2 - South Eastern Comprehensive School

This case study highlights the importance of raising staff expectations of pupils. The school is set in a suburban part of southeast England. Although the local area is predominantly white middle-class, the school recruits from a much more deprived area. There are about 920 pupils on the roll, 90 per cent of whom do not have English as their first language. The two main ethnic groups are Pakistani and Bangladeshi each comprising about 45 per cent of the pupils. The headteacher had taken over a school, which was originally a largely white grammar school but was now 90 per cent Asian, and recognised the need for extensive staff development to prepare staff, many of which had been at the school for a long time, for meeting changing needs.

One of the greatest challenges facing senior management was to raise teacher expectations of the pupils. Measures aimed at boosting pupils' performance in national examinations were introduced, including:

- * enabling form tutors to meet pupils individually to assess their needs
- * contacting parents at an early stage in cases of underachievement
- * carrying out gender and ethnic monitoring on a routine basis.

A deputy head explained:

"Each year when GCSE results come out, Heads of Department have to prepare a very detailed response which includes their conclusions of gender and ethnic monitoring...They have to come out with strategies to change the situation."

The school recognised that teachers had to create opportunities for all the pupils. To do this, teachers had to meet the language needs of their pupils, which they did in a number of ways, including:

- * careful selection of textbooks and schemes of work to ensure the language was accessible
- * a concentration on vocabulary support in science and maths
- * a widespread use of literature from India and South-East Asia.

Case Study 3 - Brook Primary School

This case study illustrates the significant effect that monitoring and support can have. Brook Primary is a popular, oversubscribed inner city school. White pupils made up 37 per cent of the school population and African-Caribbean pupils accounted for another 28 per cent of pupils. There were also eight per cent black African, 12 per cent 'dual heritage' and other black children, and three per cent South Asian. The other children at the school came from a very wide variety of other language backgrounds including Arabic, Farsi and Polish to name but three out of 24. The authors point out that many of the children were of mixed ethnic group origin reflecting the emergence of new cultural forms in late twentieth century inner city areas. In the authors' opinion, these features presented further challenges to responding sensitively to the needs of individual pupils. The school achieved exceptional results - at or above the national average in KS1 tests, and well above the national average at KS2, in 1997.

A highly developed system for monitoring individual pupil's progress allowed staff to make their targeting effective. Pupils' results were analysed using a database, which included information on:

- * ethnic origin
- * gender
- * free school meals
- * EAL stage
- * SEN stage.

Class teachers, support teachers and the special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) set up individual programmes for children who were not attaining the national average. The first stage of support at KS1 was a daily readers group, which ran for six weeks. This would be followed if necessary by a Reading Recovery programme, which catered for three six-year-old children at a time, run by the SENCO for between 12 and 22 weeks. At KS2, a timetabled reading group was available as well as individual SEN support.

To maintain this high level of support the headteacher had made a clear decision to invest in curriculum support. From its own budget, the school had appointed two curriculum support teachers with a floating role. Not only did this allow the school to achieve a comprehensive level of support, it made it possible for the school to explore different ways of organising teaching groups. As well as learning English and maths in their normal classes, children were also taught these subjects in attainment groups spread across each phase. The teachers involved planned their work together ensuring that all children covered the same material, with built in differentiation.

Case Study 4 - City Infants School

This case study illustrates the importance of involving parents in helping to raise standards. Like Brook Primary, City Infants School had a very varied ethnic mix of pupils. The two main groups were UK white and African- Caribbean in almost equal number, who together made up half of the school population. The remaining pupils came from a wide range of language backgrounds. Unlike Brook Primary, City's pupils came from a more deprived catchment area, with high unemployment.

There were also several refugee or asylum seeking families and other families of a transient nature in the area. Another contrasting feature with Brook Primary was that City Infants was a school in a process of change, involving a merger with the separate junior school on the same site in autumn 1997. Despite these difficulties, City infant's success was in evidence in the school's attainment figures in national tests. In the KS1 tests, the children gained well above the national average in reading, writing and numeracy.

The school made conscious efforts to engage with parents. This was helped by the fact that a number of parents had themselves been pupils at the school. The school/parent involvement included:

- * bringing parents' expertise into the school by encouraging them to help in classrooms or take part in sessions for parents
- * making various kinds of leaflets aimed at supporting and advising parents available in the entrance hall
- * the accessibility the headteacher maintained towards parents and carers at the start and end of each day.

Parents were very appreciative of the school's open-door approach to them and they responded by a willingness to share responsibility for their child's academic and pastoral life at the school. As one parent said: "We need to take responsibility for this as parents. We have to acknowledge that, yes, our children might bully. We can't just say 'He's not like this at home!' We have to come into school to find out how our children are doing."

Case Study 5 - Alton Primary School

The importance of supporting the language needs of pupils is illustrated by this case study from Alton Primary School. Alton is an inner city school with an intake that was 98 per cent bilingual in Bengali and English in 1997. Its pupils

came from very disadvantaged backgrounds with the highest free school meals entitlement of the three primary case study schools.

On entry to the school most children could speak only a few words of English and over a fifth of pupils were on the SEN register. The school's success with these children was shown in 1997 with achievement in the KS1 national tests at or above the national average in all subjects. This progress was maintained through KS2 where the percentage of pupils reaching level 4 or above was at least at the national average across the core subjects. This result was highly significant because it showed that EAL learners were achieving at a high level given the level in English they began with.

A major factor in the school's success was the attention paid to language development. The school had developed a comprehensive strategy, which included the following features:

- * In the early years, a bilingual programme supported children through the transitional phase of learning English
- * An ethnically mixed staff made it possible to place a dual-language speaking member of staff in each class
- * While a bilingual approach to teaching and learning was maintained as the children moved up through the school, Bengali was used less in more formal teaching situations
- * By KS2, teachers and assistants normally used English when working with the children
- * In Year 6, no extra bilingual support was provided in the classroom.

The school had produced a detailed whole school language policy that was updated regularly. The inclusion of specific advice to staff about ways of developing language across the curriculum made this a useful, practical document.

The school transferred Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG) teaching roles between teachers as part of staff development, a strategy that built up language support skills and experience among all teachers and helped to integrate EMAG teachers more closely into the school staff. Observers noted the consistency of approach across the school with EMAG and class teachers interchanging smoothly in the classroom.

The school also regarded extra-curricular activities as an important strategy in developing children's confidence and competence in English. In addition to a 'science week' and a 'poetry fortnight', regular activities included:

- * visits to museums and galleries
- * artists and poets visiting the school
- * commercial production of a school newspaper
- * commercial publication of children's own poems
- * a joint public concert with a local music college
- * a street art project
- * a highly successful 'Business in the Community' initiative with a large international law firm.

The importance of an integrated approach to language support is also illustrated by the experience of teachers in a Coventry school. For the reference see Bassi, M. in the further reading section.

Case Study 6 - Raising African-Caribbean Achievement (RACA)

This research was published following a project looking into the strategies for raising the achievements of African-Caribbean pupils in Birmingham LEA schools with the encouragement of Professor Tim Brighouse, the Chief Education Officer. The RACA project, as it was called, sought to achieve the following:

- * identifying good practice from within a range of selected schools
- * highlighting strategies which contributed to success
- * supporting successful schools in building on their achievements
- * disseminating successful practice to other Birmingham schools
- * encouraging other schools to build successful strategies and interventions into their development plans.

The primary schools chosen for the project were selected on criteria similar to those applied by Blair and Bourne. The research team used methods that were also essentially the same as those of the latter.

RACA highlighted the importance of the following features of successful schools:

- * leadership
- * relationships between pupils, staff and parents
- * behaviour management strategies
- * consistency of approach
- * focus on teaching and learning
- * ethnic monitoring
- * positive approach to the needs of African-Caribbean pupils.

An important feature of the Birmingham schools was the conscious implementation of strategies to prevent exclusion, a particular issue in relation to African-Caribbean boys. One strategy involved 'nurture groups' based on, for example, co-operative games, sporting activities and special duties around school, which were set up as a result of joint planning between senior staff in schools and the African-Caribbean community.

A second strategy involved a structured process of 'peer mediation'. In this process, pupils were selected and trained to help other pupils resolve their disputes. The parties to the dispute were helped to identify and analyse the original problem, to see it from each other's point of view and then to look jointly for a solution. The policy applied to staff as well as pupils and enabled pupils to develop and apply skills such as communicating, listening, cooperating, affirming and problem solving.

Your feedback

Have you found this study to be useful? Have you used any aspect of this research in your own classroom teaching practice? We would like to hear your feedback on this study. Click on the link below to share your views with us.

research@gtce.org.uk

Further reading

What else might I enjoy reading?

Raising African-Caribbean achievement
 Brown, G. and Walker, C.,(2000)
 Birmingham City Council Education Service

Ethnic minorities in Britain: diversity and disadvantage

Maddood et al,(1997)

London, Policy Studies Institute

Identifying the pastoral needs of African-Caribbean students: A case of 'critical antiracism'

Sewell, T.,(2000)

Education and Social Justice vol. 3, no. 1

Improving practice: A whole school approach to raising the achievement of African-Caribbean youth

Weekes, D and Wright, C,(1999)

London: Runnymede Trust in Association with Nottingham Trent University

Targeted language support

Bassi, M.,(2000)

Literacy Today (Sept)

Recent research on the achievements of ethnic minority pupils

Gillborn, D. and Gipps, C.,(1996)

London, OFSTED

Educational inequality: mapping race, class and gender

Gillborn, D. and Mirza, H. S.,(2000)

London, OFSTED

Raising the attainment of minority ethnic pupils

Office for Standards in Education,(1999)

London, OFSTED

Research Digests

Digests of research studies on the theme of ethnicity are available at:

<http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/research/themes/Ethnicity/>

Appraisal

M Blair, and J Bourne with C Coffin, A Creese and C Kenner

The Open University 1998

Robustness

This a complex and under-researched area. Most studies are concerned with the problems and issues and there are relatively few which tackle strategies and solutions in a robust and accessible way. This study starts from a given sample of 29 schools - a sample of schools that appear, from the 1996 Ofsted survey, to be successful in meeting the needs of ethnic minority pupils. Within these sample schools a range of data sources including observations, interviews, school development plans, policy documents, monitoring records and assessment data were used. The research investigated pupil and parental perceptions, attitudes, relationships, pastoral structures, teaching strategies and learning outcomes. From the investigated sample five schools were selected as case study sites. Within the limits of the sample and the illustrative aims of the study the research methods applied were fit for the purpose. Although, as always, it is not possible to generalise robustly from these case studies, they do provide clear evidence of what the participants believed worked in their particular contexts. As a snapshot of perceived good practice, this study offers some useful insights into successful inclusive strategies.

Relevance

Significant underachievement among minority ethnic pupils has long been a concern for many schools, teachers and education agencies. The authors argue that practice leading to improvement in the achievement of certain groups of these pupils seems likely to benefit all the other pupils and this makes this report meaningful to teachers in all types of schools and in all phases. The five case studies illustrating the main findings are all based in schools with which many teachers will readily identify and the authors make a point of drawing out good practice that is relevant to other contexts. The evidence is mainly qualitative. Any quantitative roots lie in the preceding study undertaken by Ofsted.

Applicability

The main purpose of the study is the identification of practice that leads to improved achievements in teaching and learning. Inevitably, the issue of achievement among multi-ethnic pupils has a large whole school dimension and this is reflected in most of the strategies described in the book. However, whole-school policies are about creating the right culture for changes to be implemented and in any case always have to be put into action by classroom teachers, so the information will be relevant to teachers. Findings in this study are clearly described within the context of selected schools that are representative of schools performing at average and slightly above average level. The five case studies, which occupy a substantial portion of the book, are clearly presented and vividly illustrate how teachers everywhere can build on their own practice and make a difference to the achievement of ethnic minority pupils.

Writing

The report is written in an accessible, straightforward style without the use of jargon. The findings are clearly presented with the potential for all teachers to find them relevant to their work in the classroom. Most findings are presented in descriptive form, there are no technical data, and where numerical data are given the statistics are relatively simple.

The difficulty the 'Research of the month' team experienced in finding informative studies when researching this field indicates the need for more work to be done in this area. Of particular value and interest would be findings from other studies with which to compare those presented in this summary.