

**The Early Years Enriched Curriculum  
Evaluation Project: Year 5 Report Executive Summary  
(Data collected during school year 2004-2005)**

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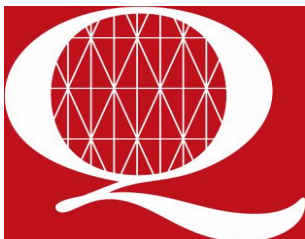
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## **Executive Summary**

### **1. 1. Brief background to the Enriched Curriculum and the evaluation**

The Enriched Curriculum was originally devised jointly by the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) and the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) to address the perceived problems in the formality of the traditional early years curriculum, particularly in socially disadvantaged areas. The curriculum was designed to be more responsive to the developmental needs of younger children. The goal was to remove the early experience of persistent failure and to promote children's sense of self-competence and self-esteem. In literacy, it involved more emphasis on developing oral language skills and on emergent literacy (phonological awareness), and less on formal methods such as reading schemes. In mathematics, it involved laying foundations in number through sorting, matching, counting rather than formal number recording. The methods included a greater emphasis on play and activity-based learning rather than desk-work, to stimulate children's curiosity, creativity, social development and engagement with learning.

In the initial stages, the Enriched Curriculum was characterised as evolving and this was viewed as a strength as it allowed teachers to exercise their professional expertise within the framework described above and engendered a sense of ownership. As the curriculum expanded to include new teachers, new schools, additional ELBs, and as children progressed through Years 2, 3 and 4, the main issue has been the consistency and integrity of implementation of the curriculum across contexts.

In the first year (school year 2000-2001), six schools (9 classes) in the Shankill area in Belfast were involved in the evaluation. An additional six schools (8 classes) from across Northern Ireland were included in the following year (school year 2001-2002), to be more representative of the Northern Ireland population. Twelve additional schools were included in the school year 2004-2005 to increase sample size (see below).

The role of the evaluation team is not only to provide summative end-of-year evaluations on the progress of EC children as they progress through their schooling, but also to provide formative feedback to CCEA and other stakeholders about implementation, so that adjustments can be made. The views expressed in the report do not necessarily reflect the views of the funding body.

## **2. Scope of the Year 5 report**

This report describes the findings of the fifth school year of the Early Years Enriched Curriculum Evaluation Project and the first year of Phase 2 of that project. Thus the data reported was collected during the schools year 2004-2005. In September 2004, children in the original Shankill pilot cohort of the Enriched Curriculum (EC) moved into Year 5, thus becoming the first Enriched Curriculum children to move into Key Stage 2 (KS2). Enriched Curriculum children in the pilot cohort in our second group of schools, previously called the Contrasting Areas schools because of their very different baseline and socioeconomic parameters, completed Year 4 in June 2005. We now have completed Key Stage 1 (KS1) data analysis for the children in these two samples and the appropriate control groups, and additional analysis for Shankill children in their first year in Key Stage 2.

In order to get a full picture of the Enriched Curriculum and its evaluation, the current report should be read in conjunction with earlier reports which are available on the website of the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) at <http://www.ccea.org.uk>.

## **3. Changes since the last report - sample size**

Since our last report, the most important change to the evaluation project was the increase in the number of schools in the evaluation from 12 to 24 and the consequent rise in the

number of children taking the attainment tests to circa 1650<sup>1</sup>. With regard to the quality of the sample size in the evaluation, these increases bring the evaluation into line with recommendations in the National Foundation for Educational Research report, prepared for the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (NFER 2004). The increase in the number of schools and in the number of children enables us to be confident that the findings will generalise well to all Enriched Curriculum schools across Northern Ireland. Where the findings in the new schools corroborate previous findings, we can now be more certain that these earlier findings were not particular to a small number of schools but are representative of schools in all groups.

#### **4. Range of evaluation measures used in Year 5**

- Children's mathematics and reading attainment as measured by PIPS end-of-year assessments, as described in earlier reports.
- Written expression of children, as measured by Wechsler Objective Language Dimensions Tests of Written Expressions (WOLD, 1996), first reported in Year 4 in the previous report.
- A new measure of print exposure, the Book Title Test, was included to assess whether the Enriched Curriculum had succeeded in increasing children's exposure to a wider range of books.
- Because of dissatisfactions with previous measures, no self-rated attitudes and dispositions measures were collected on the full sample this year. Instead, a pilot study was conducted with new instruments in preparation for more detailed work in future years.
- Important contextual information was collected from principals about children with special needs and about other programmes in the school that might impact on the Enriched Curriculum.

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<sup>1</sup> Not all children are tested in each wave of testing but techniques for dealing with missing data in multilevel analysis allow us to make use of every single piece of data, even if a child is tested only once and then leaves the school or is absent for any subsequent testing.

- Teachers' views on their experience of the Enriched Curriculum continued to be collected.
- Views of parents continue to be collected.

## 5. Main Findings

The main findings about patterns of attainment in mathematics and reading have been confirmed in the augmented sample. The pattern is virtually identical to that reported in the End-of-Phase-1 Report.

- The EC children's reading and mathematics attainment is lower relative to the controls in the first two years of primary school. They begin to improve in Years 3 and 4, such that there are no statistically significant differences between them at Year 4.
- As the data for Year 5 (first year of Key Stage 2) are currently confined to the Shankill schools and attrition has reduced the size of that sample, there is no definite evidence as yet that the potential upward trajectory identified last year has been confirmed.
- With regard to additional measures of literacy, there is some evidence from the tests of written expression that EC mainstream children have benefited relative to the control children. This confirms previous findings from the EC Shankill children. In addition, using a new test of print exposure (the Book Title Test), there are some indications that EC children in KS2 are more knowledgeable about books than would be expected for their age group.
- Children from Shankill schools are performing at similar levels in mathematics and reading attainment to other children *with similar levels of ability and from similar backgrounds*. This is an important finding, given the level of social unrest in the area during the lifetime of the evaluation.
- Previous findings about general factors that affect attainment have also been confirmed. For both EC *and* control classes, month-of-birth influences both reading and mathematics attainment, with older-born children performing better. The effect is larger for mathematics. There are no differences between boys and

- girls in mathematics attainment, but girls outperform boys in reading. The effects of month-of-birth and gender are cumulative, leaving younger-born boys at a particular disadvantage for reading. Social economic background variables (indexed by free school meals) have important influences. These can be mediated in several ways; through the cognitive and social resources that individual children bring to school but also through peer effects. For example, the evaluation has identified that the average ability in the class (the peer effect) can influence attainment beyond a child's individual ability.
- Eighty-seven teachers who are teaching the EC curriculum have now been surveyed and/or interviewed. They include Y1, Y2, Y3, Y4 and Y5 teachers. The pattern that was previously identified with regard to teachers' views and experiences of the EC curriculum has been largely confirmed. Y1 and Y2 teachers report more positive views and experiences than Y3 and Y4 teachers. However, a new finding is the upsurge in positive views expressed by Y5 teachers - the first year of KS2. As yet, this sample is small and will need confirmation as the main cohort of EC children progress into KS2.
  - Teaching reading remains the main concern in Years 3 and 4. From teachers' reports we have identified some issues connected with teaching reading that are likely to impact on the performance of EC children in the evaluation.
  - An issue that has become more prominent this year has to do with the understanding and interpretation of a 'developmentally appropriate curriculum' as children progress from starting school through KS1 and then into KS2. This issue is important because it has implications for teacher training and practice and is discussed more extensively in the full report.
  - The parents' sample now consists of over 600 parents of children participating in the EC curriculum. The overwhelming majority express positive views about the curriculum and the perceived effects on children's learning. A small minority continue to have reservations and express more negative opinions. Their concerns often rest on the risks of being at the forefront of an educational innovation and being unsure about whether their *individual* children will benefit or not.

## 6. Issues for policy and practice

As well as providing annual summative evaluations about the progress of the Enriched Curriculum project, the evaluation team has a formative evaluation role and a responsibility to provide feedback to CCEA about the implementation of the EC and related issues. In the Final Report Phase 1, 10/14 recommendations were about implementation and were organised around two themes: **Principles and Pedagogy**, and **Professional Development and Resources**. The following recommendations are an extension of those already made.

The evaluation team considers that the Enriched Curriculum project is at a crucial stage of its development as it begins to scale up – in terms of ‘rolling upwards’ through the key stages of the curriculum and ‘rolling outwards’ to new schools. Actions are required in terms of key principles and teacher guidance, if the potential is to be fully realised. Stakeholder groups are greatly influenced by central decision-making concerning the Enriched Curriculum’s status and future viability. The likely effect of delay is loss of confidence and curriculum drift.

In making these recommendations, we recognise that action may have already have been taken on several of them – in the context of preparations and training for the roll-out of the Foundation Stage of the Revised Curriculum.

The team considers that the following actions need to be taken:

### **By those responsible for central policy and implementation:**

- Available teacher guidance should be distributed without delay. This should include video guidance. If there is further work to be done in refining the guidance, this should not be a reason for withholding the material that has already been prepared.
- There should be an agreed framework for teaching reading, allowing flexibility for developmental appropriateness, but specifying the core aspects of teaching reading; emergent literacy experiences, phonological awareness and letter knowledge, a systematic programme for decoding strategies, promotion of

pleasure in reading, increasing vocabulary, reading for understanding and becoming fluent, developing independent reading practices and preferences, together with the interrelationships between reading, spelling and writing.

- There should be an agreed framework for the teaching of mathematics. Again this should allow for flexibility and developmental appropriateness, but can recommend the order in which concepts are presented and specify the balance between concept development through activity-based learning and the importance of practice using a range of mathematical notation and mathematical language.
- Ideally, Key Stage 2 teachers should receive more information about the ways in which EC children have been taught in Key Stage 1 and how their stage of the curriculum can be adapted both to accommodate and to build on the experiences of EC children.
- Enriched Curriculum principles and practices need to be merged with the more general changes and training materials that will accompany the introduction of the Revised Northern Ireland Curriculum.
- A short document based on the findings of the evaluation should be distributed to all teachers in Northern Ireland.

### **For schools**

In order for a school to get the best out of the Enriched Curriculum, we recommend the following strategies:

- The staff should be encouraged to see the principles of the Enriched Curriculum as a whole school project - which will impact on every teacher and every child.
- There should be clear, proactive leadership from the principal and senior management, demonstrating confidence in the Enriched Curriculum and support for its implementation.
- The school should have a short written plan for implementing the Enriched Curriculum at all levels, making links with Key Stage 2.
- Arrangements for formal dissemination of ideas and experience of training between teachers within and across schools would be advantageous, for example,



through staff training days. Articulation of and reflection about practice appear to be important for change.

- Peer coaching for teachers who are new to an Enriched Curriculum school or are having difficulties implementing the Enriched Curriculum would be very beneficial.
- Teachers can exploit opportunities for professional development by being encouraged to video themselves and by using videos to improve practice and to share that experience.

The views expressed are those of the research team and not necessarily those of the Northern Ireland Council for Curriculum Assessment and Examinations