

The Early Years Enriched Curriculum Evaluation Project: EYECEP

**Year 5 supplementary evidence: Detailed analysis of the
findings from parents, teachers and other professionals**

(Data gathered during the period 2000-2005)

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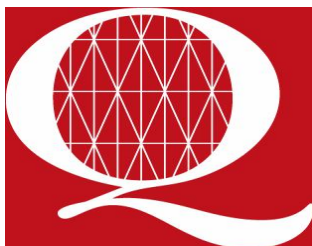


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The views expressed are those of the research team and not necessarily those of the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment

1. Scope of the evidence

The Early Years Enriched Curriculum Project and its evaluation have been running since September 2000, when the Enriched Curriculum (EC) was first introduced to six schools in the Shankill district of Belfast. This document is a supplement to the Year 5 report submitted by the evaluation team in June 2006 (Sproule, McGuinness, Trew, Rafferty, Walsh, Sheehy, and O'Neill 2006). It is concerned with the analysis of data gathered during the period 2000-2005 and combines new survey data gathered during the school year 2004-2005 with data gathered earlier and analysed in our report for the end of Phase 1 (Sproule, McGuinness, Trew, Rafferty, Walsh, Sheehy, and O'Neill 2005). There is also further analysis of interview data from parents and teachers gathered during the school year 2004-2005. This reporting period takes the pilot EC cohort from Shankill schools up to Year 5. The major feature of the evaluation in relation to this document is the augmentation of the number of schools in the evaluation from 12 to 24, with concomitant increase in the numbers in the samples of teachers, parents and principals. In the final section, we discuss some of the issues arising from this evidence.

In order to get a full picture of the Enriched Curriculum and its evaluation, *this document should not be read in isolation from the annual reports*. These yearly reports are available on the website of the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) at <http://www.ccea.org.uk/> . For those who do not wish to have the high level of detail of this supplementary evidence and analysis, the Year 5 report gives a coherent summary of the data analysed in this document. This document is intended to inform fully those directly involved with implementing the Early Years Enriched Curriculum Project and/or other curriculum reform. This document neither details the rationale for nor analyses the quantitative attainment data; this material is found in our Year 5 technical supplement.

This document first describes the survey evidence from teachers (Section 2), followed by interview evidence from teachers and other professionals (Section 3), parent interview evidence (Section 4) and parent interview evidence (Section 5) and finally, issues arising from the evidence (Section 6).

2. Survey evidence from teachers

Procedure for gathering data

As the children progressed from Year 1 to Year 5, the views of each year group of teachers were assessed as they encountered the EC for the first time. During each academic year, the teachers of the first cohort of EC children were asked to complete questionnaires. As Table 1 shows, during the study to date, a total of 87 teachers have responded to the questionnaire.

Teachers were not surveyed in the first year of the evaluation. In the second year of the study 14 teachers participated, 15 in the third year, 14 in the fourth year, and 44 in the fifth school year. During the first four years (Phase 1) of the project, 53 teachers from the six Shankill and six Contrasting Area Schools were surveyed; this was extended in the 2004-2005 school year (beginning of Phase 2) to include the 23 teachers from an additional twelve Mainstream Schools. As Table 2 shows, 35 Year 1/2 teachers, 45 Year 3/4 53 teachers and 7 KS2 teachers completed the survey. During the 2004-2005 school year, the first EC cohort from the Shankill Schools entered KS2 and the first KS2 teachers were surveyed. All survey respondents were novice Enriched Curriculum (EC) teachers, except for those teaching composite classes who were novices in the preceding year.

Table 1: Number of Teachers Completing Questionnaires during each Year of Study

Year of Study	Shankill Schools (6 schools)	Contrasting Area (mainstream) Schools (6 schools)	New (mainstream) Schools (12 schools)	Total No. of Teachers n=87
2000-2001	---	---	---	---
2001-2002	7	7	---	14
2002-2003	8	7	---	15
2003-2004	9	5	---	14
2004-2005	14	6	23	44

Table 2: Number of Teachers in each Stage Completing Questionnaires

Year of Study	Year 1/2	Year 3/4	KS2	Total
2000-2001	---	---	---	---
2001-2002	14	0	0	14
2002-2003	10	5	0	15
2003-2004	0	14	0	14
2004-2005	11	26	7	44
Total	35	45	7	87

For KS1 teachers, the questionnaires have been described previously (Sproule et al., 2005). For KS2 teachers, the questionnaires included questions designed to measure the teachers' views on:

- their preparation for teaching the children who have followed the Enriched Curriculum,
- the demands of teaching the children who have followed the Enriched Curriculum,
- attitudes to the Enriched Curriculum (their own and the stakeholders they encounter),
- resources for teaching the children who have followed the Enriched Curriculum, and
- the appropriateness of the Enriched Curriculum as a preparation for learning in KS2.

Comparable questions were asked during each year of the study. Descriptive statistics (bar charts and frequencies) were used to summarize the results. Clustered bar charts and cross tabulation were used to make comparisons for different groups e.g. Education and Library Boards and key stage groups.

Complete Survey: All subgroups of teachers together

The results show that the teachers expressed quite positive attitudes regarding the EC. The pattern of attitudes in the 2004-2005 year of the study was virtually identical to that for the results for Phase 1 of the study. The findings for each question are summarized below.

[Q1] Most of the teachers considered themselves as being 'poorly prepared', 'just adequately prepared' or 'well prepared' for teaching the EC at the start of the school year. Only 7 teachers rated themselves as 'very poorly prepared' and only 3 as 'very well prepared'.

[Q2] The vast majority of teachers felt that they were 'very well prepared', 'well prepared' or 'just adequately prepared' for teaching the EC at the time of questioning (in the spring of their first year of teaching the EC). Only 3 teachers considered themselves as being 'poorly prepared' and only 2 as 'very poorly prepared'.

[Q3] Only 2 teachers considered teaching the EC to be ‘less demanding’ and 1 considered it ‘much less demanding’ compared with teaching a traditional curriculum. The great majority of teachers considered it to be ‘equally demanding’, more demanding’ or ‘much more demanding’.

[Q4-8] The great majority of teachers rated both the attitudes of parents, their own attitudes and the attitudes of others such as colleagues and principals as ‘neutral’, ‘positive’ or ‘very positive’. Exceptionally, 1 teacher rated the attitude of their principal and their own attitude as ‘negative’ and 2 teachers rated the attitudes of parents and colleagues as ‘negative’.

[Q9] Only 15 teachers rated the resources supplied to support teaching as ‘completely adequate’. The majority rated the resources ‘just adequate’, ‘inadequate’ or ‘completely inadequate’.

[Q10] The great majority of teachers considered the EC to be ‘highly appropriate’ or ‘appropriate’ for their class. Only 8 were ‘neutral’. Exceptionally, 3 teachers considered it to be ‘inappropriate’.

[Q11] The majority considered the EC to be appropriate for all of the children in the class, while only 17 teachers disagreed.

Discussion of the findings from all teachers taken together

In general, many teachers consider training to be inadequate in the September of their first year of teaching the Enriched Curriculum, but by the Easter term, they are much more confident about their pedagogy. This finding confirms earlier findings from the smaller samples available at that time:

- In this augmented sample, we have confirmed our earlier findings that the Enriched Curriculum is considered demanding or very demanding by the great majority of teachers.
- As in previous years, most teachers enjoy support from their colleagues, senior staff and ELB officers.

- Many teachers in this augmented sample have raised questions about resources needed for the Enriched Curriculum.
- The great majority of EC teachers considered the curriculum appropriate for children in their class.

Shankill schools versus mainstream schools

There were some slight differences in responses between the teachers from the Shankill Schools and Mainstream Schools. The teachers from Mainstream Schools tended to respond in a slightly more positive way compared to teachers in Shankill Schools (i.e. slightly more teachers giving the most positive response). For example, compared to Mainstream teachers a slightly higher percentage (13%) of Shankill teachers considered themselves to be poorly prepared for teaching the EC. Mainstream teachers rated the attitudes of others including teachers, principals, colleagues and ELB officers more positively than Shankill teachers. Furthermore teachers from Mainstream Schools rated their own attitudes more positively than those from Shankill Schools.

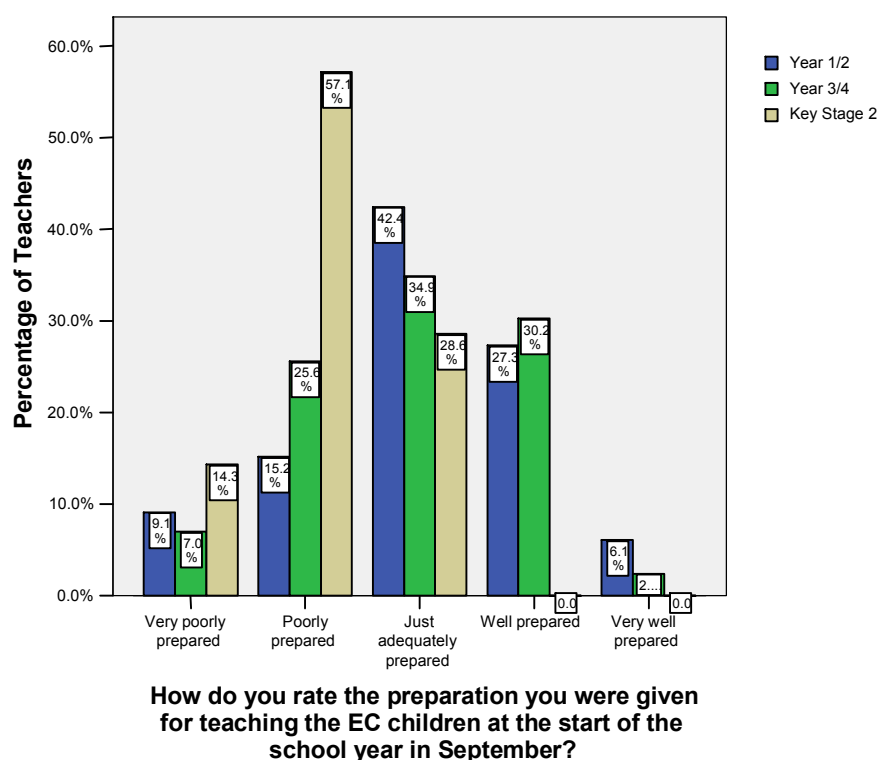
There are no significant differences in responses of teachers in different education and library boards. However, there is a tendency for the teachers from BELB and NEELB to rate the attitudes of others such as parents, colleagues, and the principal as less positive as well as rating their own attitudes less positively than the teachers from other ELBs.

Comparison of Teachers in Key Stages

This section illustrates differences and trends in teachers' responses across stages in the child's primary school career; Year 1/2, Year 3/4 and KS2.

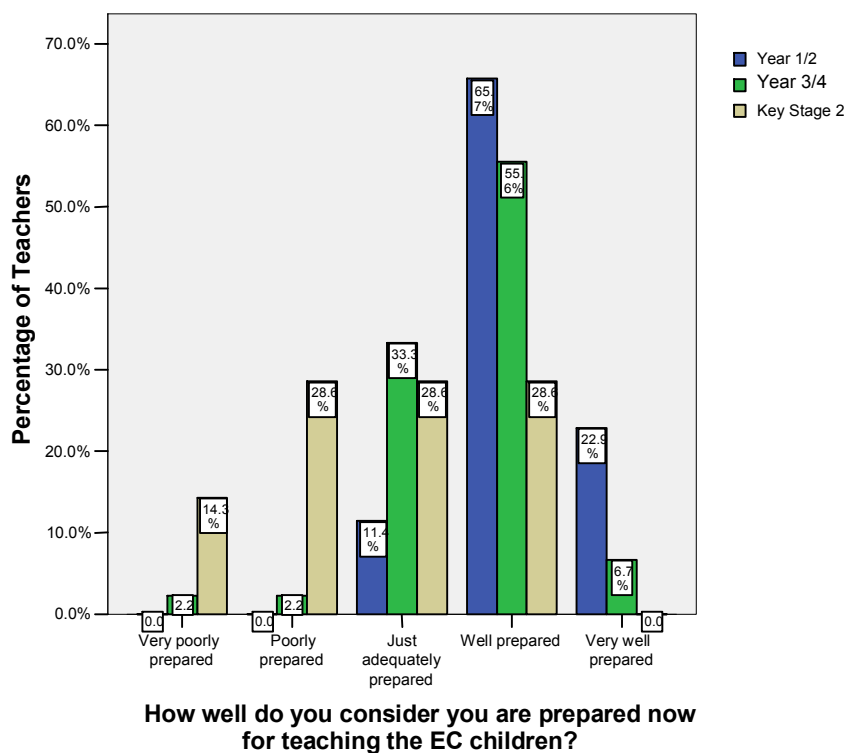
Q1: Overall, the Year 1/2 teachers rated their preparation for teaching the Enriched Curriculum (EC) children at the start of the year most favourably with the majority considering themselves to be ‘just adequately prepared’, ‘well prepared’ or ‘very well prepared’. The pattern for KS2 is important. Although there were only seven KS2 teachers at this time, none rated themselves as being ‘well prepared’ or ‘very well prepared’. In fact, all of these teachers considered themselves as being ‘just adequately prepared’, ‘poorly prepared’ or ‘very poorly prepared’. This may be accounted for by differences in the amount of training given to teachers of different year groups, and is supported by attitudes expressed during the teacher interviews.

Figure 1. Teachers’ responses to Question 1



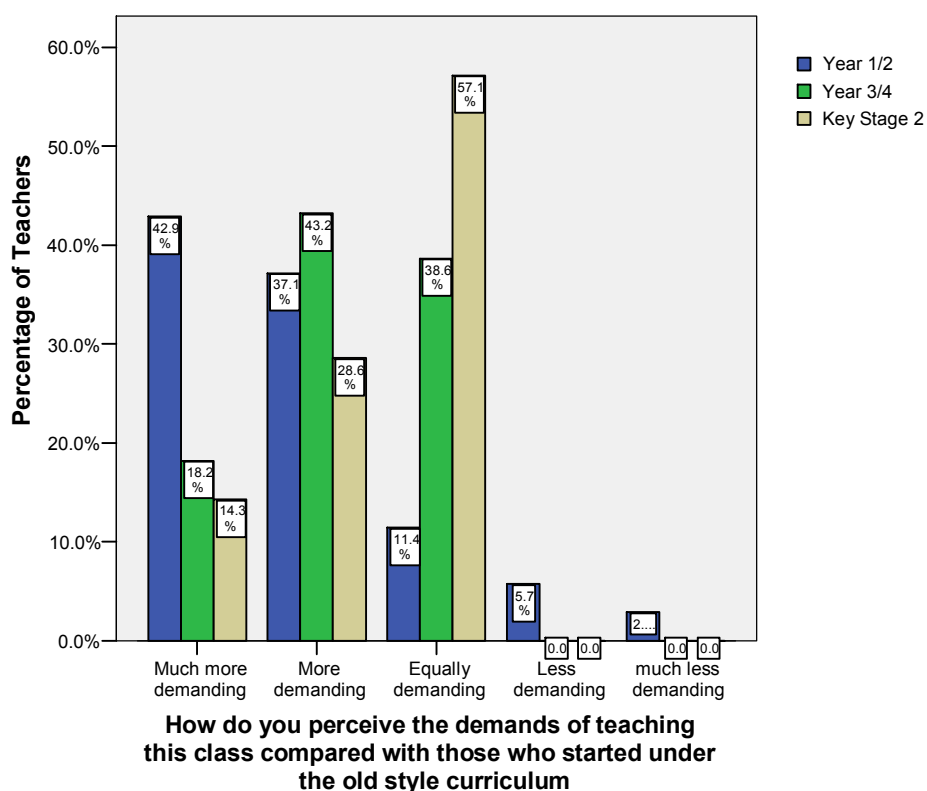
Q2: Generally, teachers rated their preparation as better at the time of testing in comparison to preparation for teaching the EC children in September. Overall, the pattern shows that Year 1/2 and Year 3/4 teachers were more positive in rating their preparation for teaching the EC at the time of testing in comparison to KS2 teachers. No Year 1/2 teachers rated themselves as being ‘very poorly prepared’ or ‘poorly prepared’. The majority of Year 1/2 teachers rated themselves as being ‘well prepared’. Year 3/4 teachers were more inclined to rate their preparation as ‘just adequately prepared’ than Year 1/2 teachers and one teacher rated themselves to be ‘poorly prepared’ and one as ‘very poorly prepared’. Out of the KS2 teachers, two teachers each considered themselves to be ‘well prepared’, ‘just adequately prepared’, and ‘poorly prepared’, and one as being ‘very poorly prepared’. None of the KS2 teachers considered themselves as being ‘very well prepared’. Differing amounts of training given to teachers of different year groups may account for the discrepancy, as suggest by teachers during interviews.

Figure 2. Teachers’ responses to Question 2



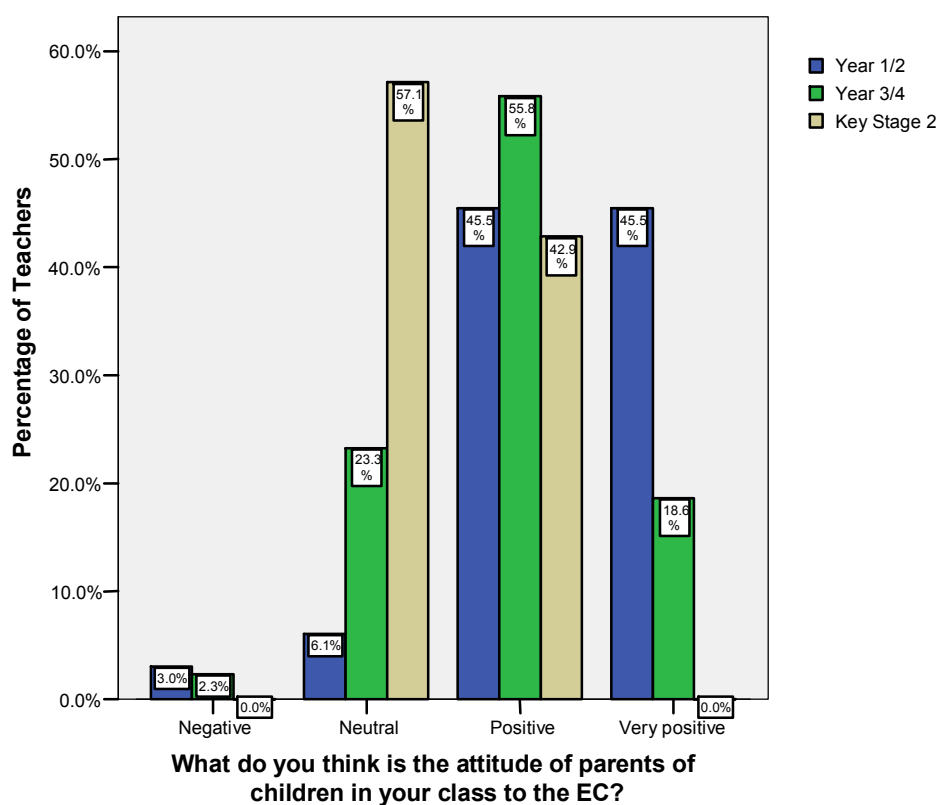
Q3: Nearly all the teachers across the age groups considered the EC children to be ‘equally demanding’, ‘more demanding’ or ‘much more demanding’ to teach than when following the traditional curriculum. The great majority of Year 1/2 teachers perceived the EC children to be ‘more demanding’ or ‘much more demanding’ to teach than the traditional curriculum, although their appended comments indicated that many found it more rewarding as well. Interestingly, two Year 1/2 teachers rated it as ‘less demanding’ and 1 as ‘much less demanding’ to teach. None of the Year 3/4 or KS2 teachers rated the EC children as being ‘less demanding’ or ‘much less demanding’ to teach. Over a third of Year 3/4 teachers than Year 1/2 teachers rated the EC as being ‘equally demanding’ to teach. This was supported by information obtained in the interviews during which teachers of different classes highlighted the increased demands of teaching the EC in relation to planning and need for resources etc.

Figure 3. Teachers’ responses to Question 3



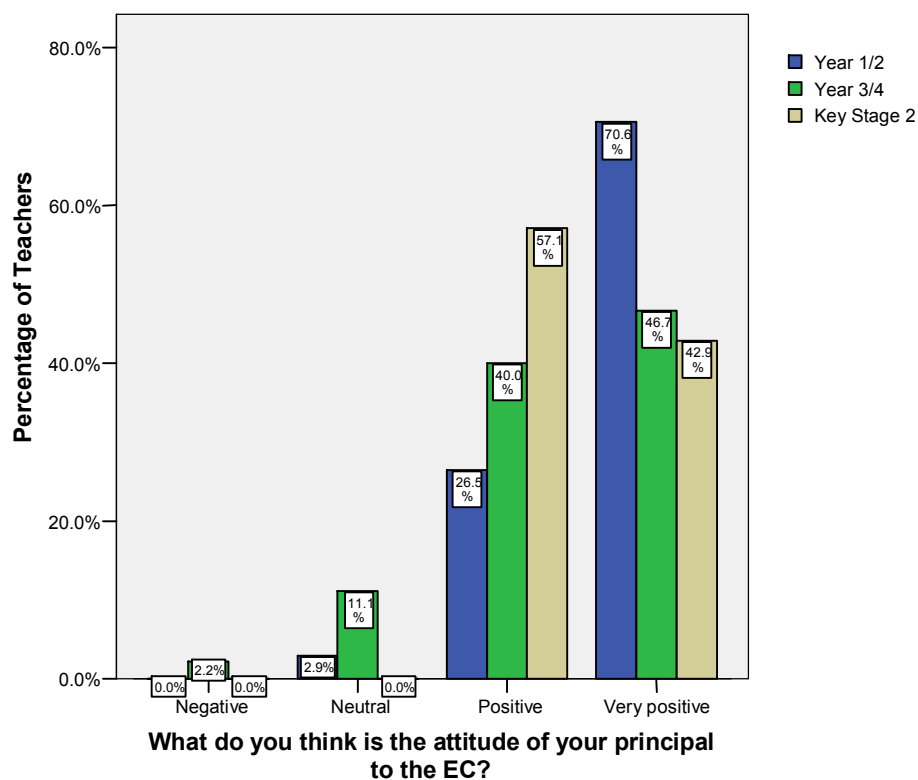
Q4: The Year 1/2 teachers viewed the parents as having the most favourable attitudes to the EC and none considered parents to have a 'negative' attitude. The majority of Year 1/2 teachers considered the parents' to have 'positive' attitudes to the EC. A greater percentage of Year 3/4 teachers rated the parents as having a 'neutral' attitude. Although there were only seven KS2 teachers all rated the parents as having 'positive' or 'neutral' attitudes. None of the KS2 teachers rated the parents as having a 'negative' attitude, while a small number of the Year 1/2 and Year 3/4 parents did so. This is supported by the overall findings of the parent questionnaires in which the majority of parents expressed positive opinions about the EC.

Figure 4. Teachers' responses to Question 4



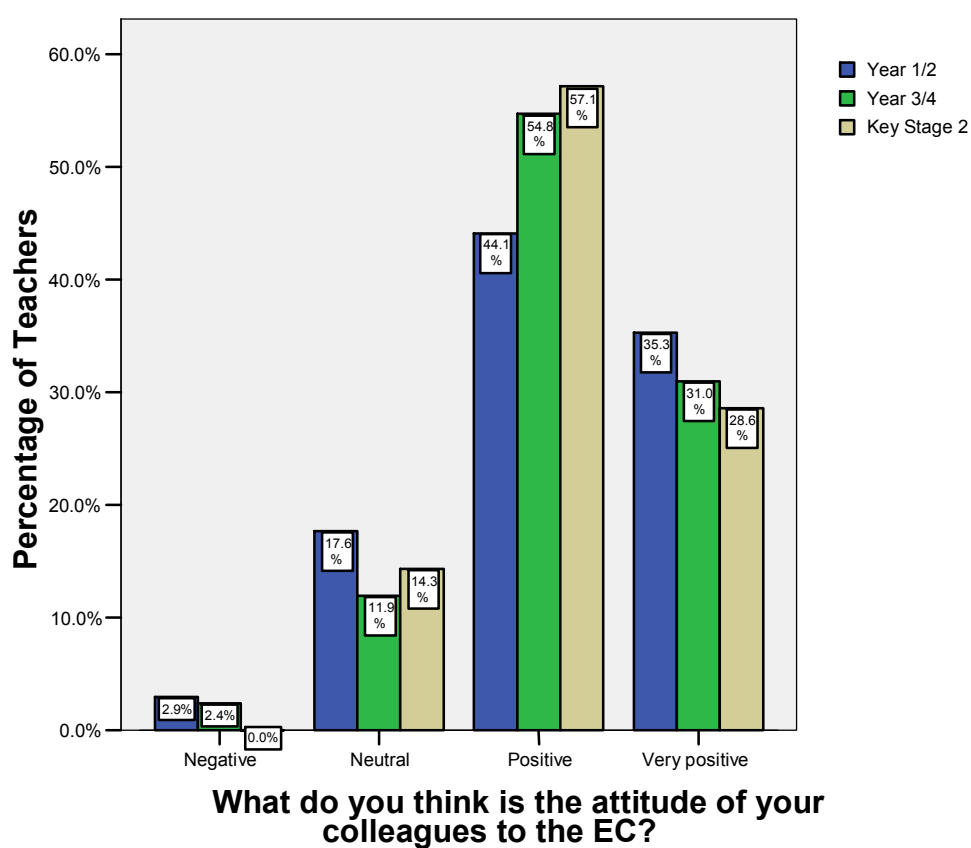
Q5: The vast majority of teachers in each of the groups rated the attitude of the principal as 'positive' or 'very positive'. Interestingly, one Year 3/4 teacher rated the attitude of the principal as 'negative', and one Year 1/2 and five Year 3/4 teachers rated the principal's attitude as 'neutral'. The Year 1/2 teachers were more inclined to rate the attitude of the principal as 'very positive' than the Year 3/4 and KS2 teachers.

Figure 5. Teachers' responses to Question 5



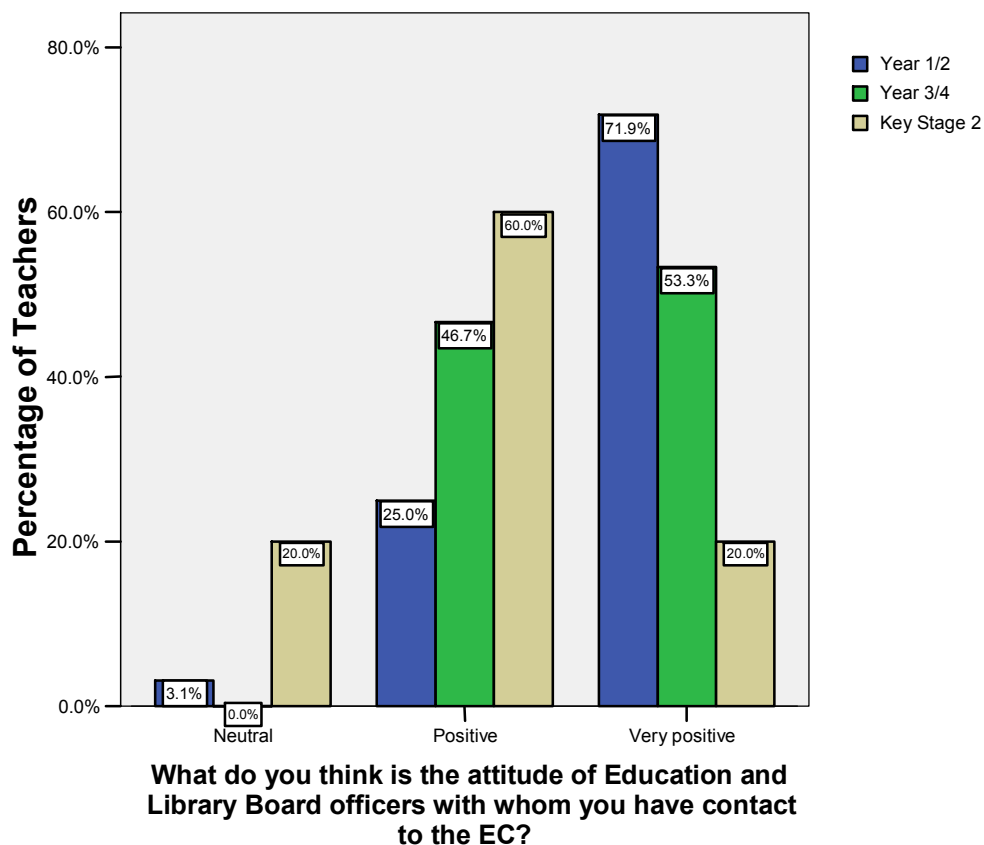
Q6: Most teachers in each group rated the attitudes of their colleagues as ‘positive’ or ‘very positive’. One Year 1/2 and one Year 3/4 teacher rated the attitude of their colleagues as ‘negative’. Small percentages in each group also rated the attitude of their colleagues as ‘neutral’. The Year 1/2 teachers were more inclined to rate the attitude of colleagues more positively than the Year 3/4 and KS2 teachers. Interestingly, none of the KS2 teachers rated their colleagues as having negative attitudes, while interviews with teachers highlighted some concern by teachers of the older children regarding the transfer procedure in Year 7.

Figure 6. Teachers’ responses to Question 6



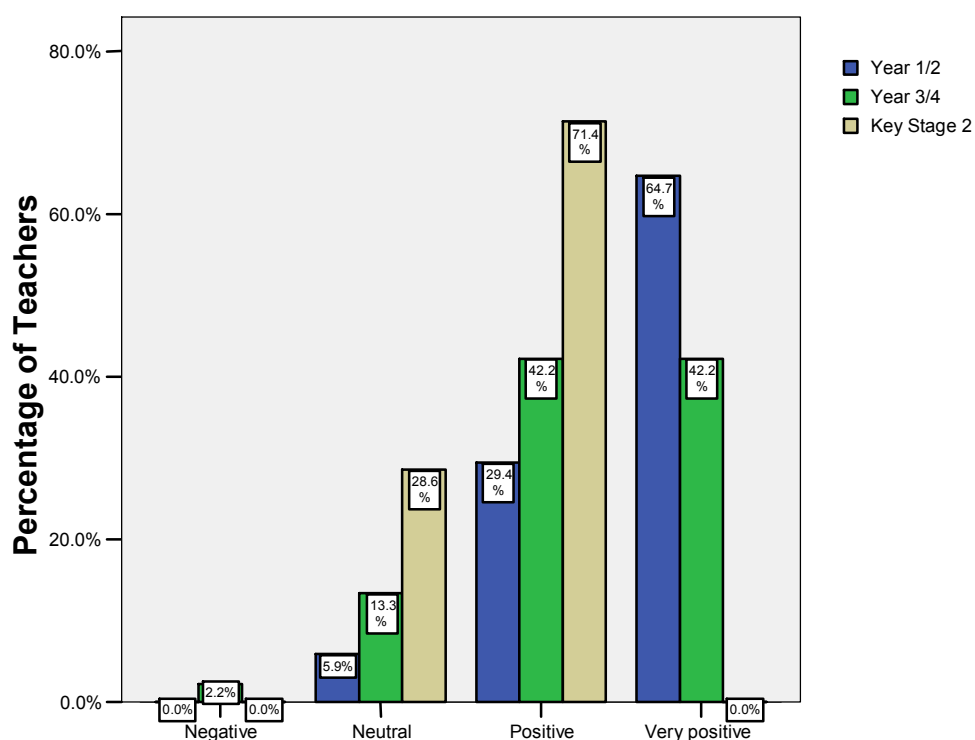
Q7: The vast majority of teachers in each group rated the attitude of the ELB officers as 'positive' or 'very positive'. One of the Year 1/2 teachers and one in five KS2 teachers rated them as having a 'neutral' attitude. The Year 1/2 teachers were inclined to rate the attitude of the ELB officers more positively than the Year 3/4 and KS2 teachers.

Figure 7. Teachers' responses to Question 7



Q8: Overall the teachers in each group expressed quite positive attitudes to the EC. Only one teacher (Year 3/4) rated their own attitude as 'negative'. The teachers' own attitudes towards the EC were more positive in the Year 1/2 and less positive in KS2. The great majority of the Year 1/2 teachers rated their own attitude to the EC as 'very positive'. Although the majority of Year 3/4 teachers rated their attitudes as 'positive' or 'very positive' a greater percentage of Year 3/4 teachers expressed neutral attitudes compared to Year 1/2 teachers. Among the small number of KS2 teachers all rated their attitude as 'positive' or 'neutral'.

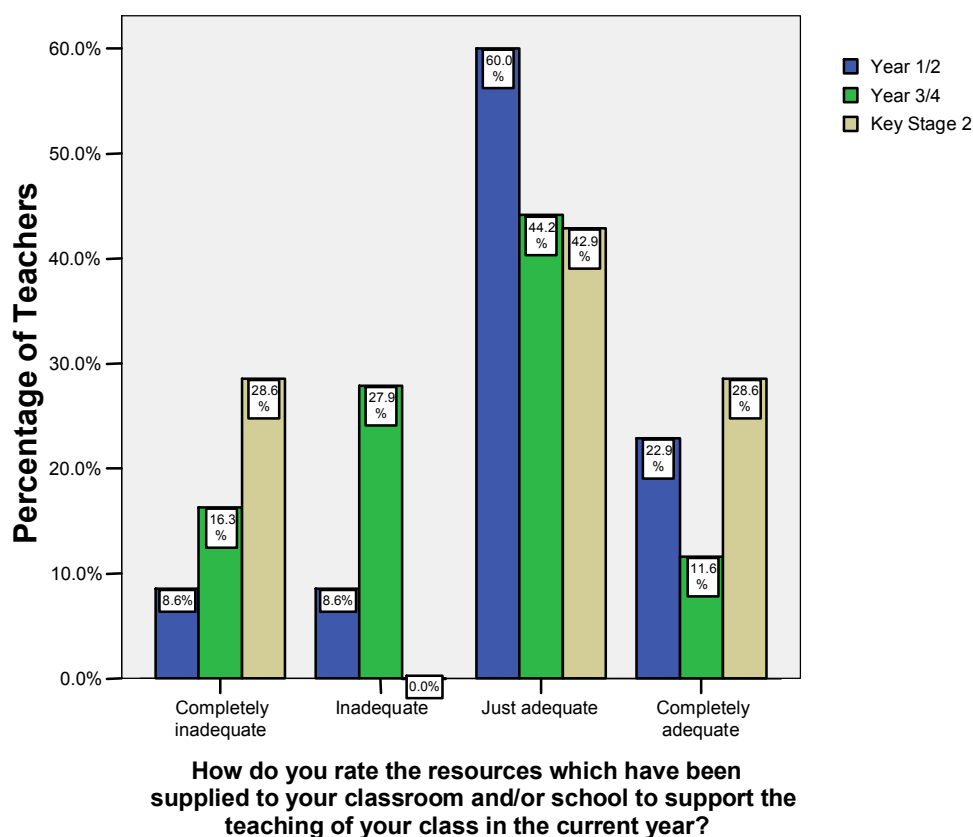
Figure 8. Teachers' responses to Question 8



Now that you have had some months' experience teaching the Enriched Curriculum children, what is your own attitude towards it?

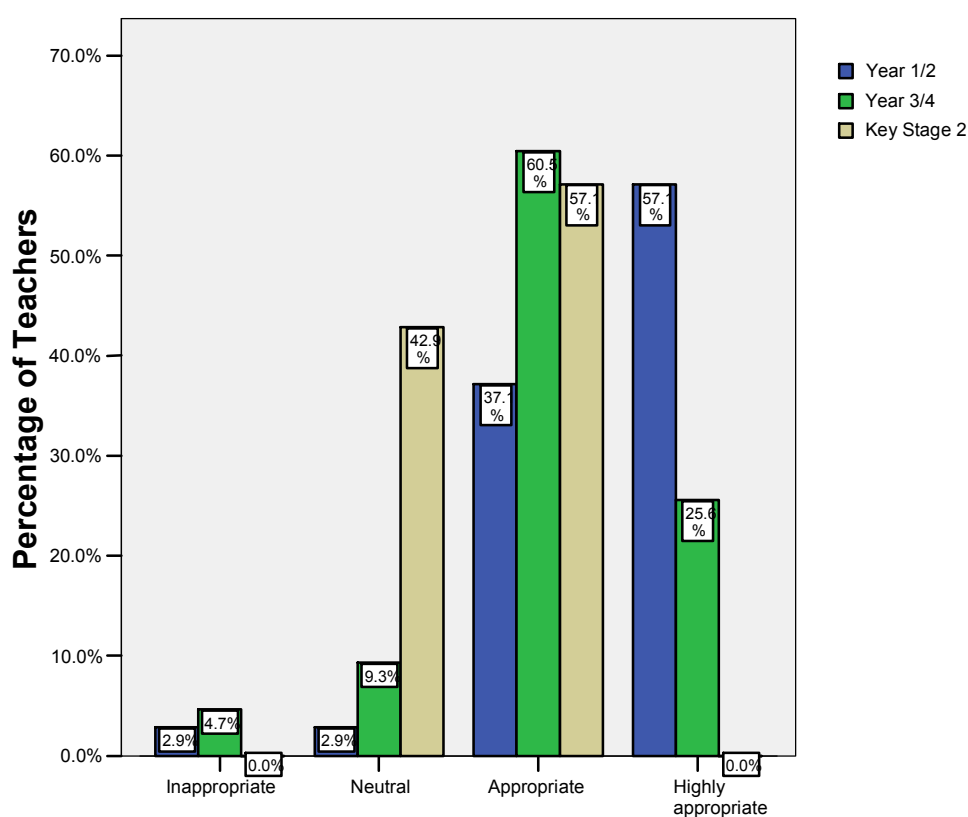
Q9: There is a trend for the Year 1/2 teachers to rate the resources as more satisfactory compared to the Year 3/4 and KS2 teachers. The majority of Year 1/2 teachers rated the resources as being ‘just adequate’ or ‘completely adequate’. Fewer Year 3/4 teachers rated the resources as ‘completely adequate’ and a greater percentage rated them as ‘inadequate’ compared with Year 1/2 teachers. Teachers gave a wider range of responses from ‘completely inadequate’ to ‘completely adequate’, which suggests that there are differences in resources in different schools and different areas. This is supported by information given during the teacher interviews which suggests that more funding was given to the teachers in the Year 1/2 compared to the teachers of the older year groups.

Figure 9. Teachers’ responses to Question 9



Q10: The majority of teachers in all groups rated the appropriateness of the EC favourably. However, there is a trend for the Year 1/2 teachers to rate the appropriateness of the EC more favourably than the Year 3/4 teachers. The great majority of Year 1/2 teachers rated the EC as being ‘appropriate’ or ‘highly appropriate’ for their class. Similarly, the majority of Year 3/4 teachers rated the EC as ‘appropriate’ for their class. Four of the KS2 teachers considered the EC to be ‘appropriate’ for their class, while three expressed a ‘neutral’ attitude.

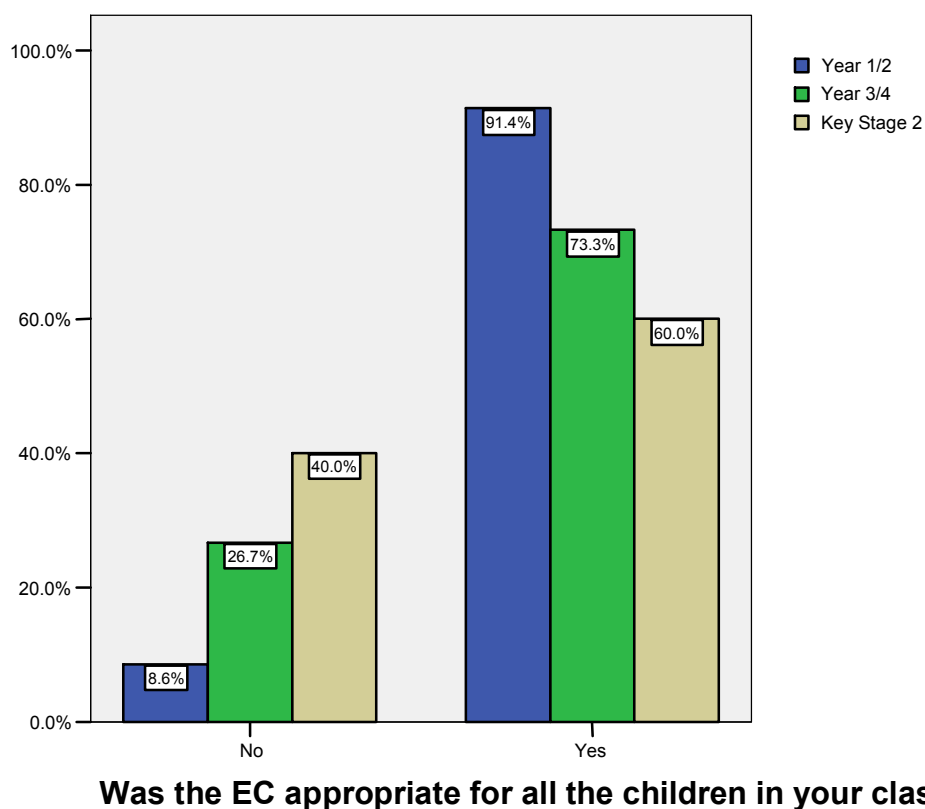
Figure 10. Teachers’ responses to Question 10



How appropriate do you think the EC was for your class?

Q11. The majority of all teachers in the three groups considered the EC to be appropriate for all of their children. However, the pattern changed across the key stage groups with an increasing percentage in Year 3/4 stating the EC was not appropriate for all of their children. Three of the KS2 teachers considered it appropriate for all children while two teachers did not consider it appropriate for all children.

Figure 11. Teachers' responses to Question 11



Summary: The Enriched Curriculum over stages; Year 1/2, Year 3/4 and KS2

In general, teachers give less positive answers to our survey as we move from Year 1/2 through KS1 and on to KS2. To an extent, the story is complicated by the fact that some teachers consider themselves to be part of the Enriched Curriculum project right up into KS2 and others do not: Whether they do or not depends largely on whether the school has regarded it as a school-wide project. Taken together with other evidence from interviews, it appears that the survey reflects teachers' beliefs, *in general*, that:

- They can eventually cope with the new methods of teaching that have been engendered by the Enriched Curriculum or have followed in its wake, given a few months of implementing the new pedagogy;
- The Enriched Curriculum is of benefit to all children up to the end of KS1;
- Enriched Curriculum ‘methods’ or ‘approaches’ are less appropriate as children get older;
- Training is needed for teachers of older children, whether or not they believe that the Enriched Curriculum extends into KS2, because they are faced with children who respond differently from those taking the pre-existing curriculum;
- New resources for activity-based learning are required throughout primary schools to deliver the new curriculum successfully.

3. Interview evidence from teachers and other professionals

Procedure for gathering data

During each academic year (2000-2001 to 2003-2004), all of the teachers of the first cohort of EC children in the six Shankill Schools and six Contrasting Area Schools were asked to participate in interviews. During the 2004-2005 school years, the Year 5 teachers in the six Shankill schools and Year 4 teachers in the first group of six Contrasting Areas/Mainstream schools were interviewed. For the twelve New Mainstream Schools that were introduced to the study, all teachers who had taken or were taking an EC class (Years 1-3 and Years 1-4 in two of the schools) were invited to participate in interviews. In cases where there were large numbers of teachers in one school focus groups were used. Some principals have also given informal interviews to research staff. In addition, staff who were administering our attainment tests and who were also qualified teachers were invited to make written comments about their perceptions of the children’s progress.

The interviews/focus groups involved questions designed to sample the teachers’ views on oral language, literacy, handwriting and numeracy, resources, demands of teaching the EC, structured play, suitability for ability groups, parents’ attitudes and preparation and training for teaching the EC. Interviews were based on an interview

on a given topic, one nearly always corroborates the other. Interview evidence also tends to corroborate the survey evidence. We can therefore be very confident that our findings are representative of Enriched Curriculum schools in general, especially in KS1.

When reading any adverse comments below, it is important to remember that, for the most part, the great majority of teachers pointed out advantages of the Enriched Curriculum in their responses. It would be repetitive to include a representative sample of such responses in each section. The findings reported below can paint an unduly negative picture if they are not read in this context.

As we have said in the Year 5 summary report, one major theme this year was teachers' varying conceptions of developmentally appropriate practice (DAP). There is no single piece of evidence to adequately illustrate this finding. It was a matter of considering the whole picture from the evidence of each teacher in turn. Taken together, this evidence demonstrated widely differing conceptions of developmentally appropriate practice, with teachers' mental models usually being held implicitly rather than explicitly. Some teachers took a strongly maturational view, leading them to appreciate individual differences in readiness for certain aspects of learning but possibly leading to a policy of waiting for children to develop certain skills rather than preparing them to move on: Other teachers considered that the most important aspect of DAP lay in adopting certain (appropriate) pedagogical techniques. Rather fewer teachers were able to discuss how children learn, either in the early years or at KS2. The consequences of teachers' conceptions of DAP are discussed further in Section 6.

Even those teachers who were initially reserved about some aspects of the EC became more positive as time passed but by the time of interview, a few teachers still expressed a reluctance to change from the traditional methods of teaching in some domains. Some of the Year 4 and Year 5 teachers stated that they felt part of the EC project while others did not. (It was never specified by us whether they should do so or not but we have previously reported on how the new curriculum has impact further up the school). Either position had an effect on teacher attitudes. Here are a variety of their responses when asked about their overall view:

It was my first year in P4. I felt positive and just hoped that everything I had heard about the Enriched Curriculum was true.

I think this Enriched Curriculum programme can only do good. I think for the children who are not academic it is essential; they might not get anything else out of school except for the social aspect.

I suddenly realised (that the EC was working.) These children are learning and these children still are reading. Their mathematical language and their ability to speak about what they are doing is fantastic.

It took me a year to realise that this does work.

I do agree with the practical aspect but I do think we need some more formal work in the early years.

I can see some benefits but I would make some modifications.

The greatest thing that these children have had is that they haven't met failure yet.

Straight away from these comments, we can get a flavour of several different viewpoints on the new curriculum.

Which teachers feel part of the Enriched Curriculum project? Teachers in different schools had different input into the decision for implementing the EC. For example, in one school the principal asked the Year 1 teachers to make the decision of whether to become involved in the pilot. In another school the vice principal made the decision. Some junior teachers were thus more involved in making the decision than others. In addition, teachers in some schools had more interaction with colleagues and greater knowledge, before the EC children arrived with them, of how the children had previously been taught in the more junior EC classes.

I honestly thought the Enriched Curriculum was only following P1, P2 and P3, and once they hit P4, it would be the traditional curriculum.

If I'm being honest I don't know a lot about what goes on in KS1, I know there is a lot of structured play but I don't know what the process is. I would like to know how you develop it then through to KS2.

I know a lot of work goes on in KS1 but I don't know what the implications are for me moving from KS1 into KS2.

We also had an open-door policy, where we encouraged all our teachers to go and see what everybody is doing. That was a really good way to find out what was going on.

There is a lot of communication between all the classrooms. We would pretty much have known what was going on in each of the rooms. We would have worked very closely together and that has made the whole thing a lot easier.

We were very aware of what was going on in P1 and P2 and we knew what would come into us.

It is as much our job as anybody's to prepare our colleagues in KS2.

In some cases, just being part of the evaluation seems (unintentionally on our part) to have signalled to some teachers in Year 3 and above for the first time that they were part of the Enriched Curriculum project, or to have crystallised a similar feeling that they had not previously made explicit to themselves. The lack of a written specification for the Enriched Curriculum per se allowed such an inference to occur. We have tried to set teachers minds at rest about their role, characterising the Enriched Curriculum as having an impact further up the school but not necessarily being part of the EC project as such. Unfortunately, some of them seemed to remain confused.

Did teachers believe the Enriched Curriculum was appropriate for all children?

Most teachers pointed out that the EC and its knock-on effects on pedagogy were appropriate for all children. Different groups of teachers felt that the top, middle or lower ability groups had been advantaged by it. Some teachers mentioned suitability for boys, and some talked about the youngest children in the class with May and June birthdays. Here are some examples across the spectrum:

All children have in some way benefited. More able children have had opportunities and freedom to progress at their own level. They are being challenged and provided with opportunities to extend their learning. The middle groups are benefiting from a more practical approach with less emphasis on written activities, thereby reducing the pressure that they might otherwise have felt. The less able children are able to experience success because they are working and progressing at their own pace and have at no time experienced the feeling of being a failure or being behind the others.

I would say it's good for boys and for the younger children. I would say it's good for all of them as children are not held back, they are moving at their own speeds.

I would say the top groups have had an advantage. The bottom groups are just the same but the top group you can see are benefiting greatly from it.

It hasn't made any difference to the capable children. They are no further on than any other year. But I feel the weaker children would have benefited more from more structured formal work rather than games.

There is research evidence to support this last comment, that weaker children need carefully structured work to balance less formal activities (Torgesen, 2002, EPPI 2004).

The teachers in one school suggested that they had an increased number of children with special needs who would be helped by the EC approach, reporting that the EC had been recommended by a social worker.

And we are beginning to discover, someone within social services is beginning to say to parents of preschool children that this EC suits children with special needs.

Children's responses to/demeanour in school under the Enriched Curriculum regime
Teachers described the children's attitudes and experience of school as very positive and outlined their enjoyment, even among those with weaker ability for whom, in the past, school was often a negative experience. Teachers often made this point in relation to weak readers who were often reluctant to read in the past. Teachers highlighted the children's confidence and enthusiasm.

I am teaching a different type of child now. I am not teaching a browbeaten, work driven, target led child. I am teaching a child who is coming in P1 new and fresh and finding that learning is fun, that school is fun.

I think the most striking thing I would say about them is they were more confident... They certainly weren't in anyway fazed by coming into a P3 class.

What I love with the EC children was (the) ones who have very poor reading skills still have a great enthusiasm for reading. Whereas normally coming into P3 in previous years those with poor reading skills had no interest and that was a big difference.

I think there is more enthusiasm; particularly in the lower end of the class... They have a bigger interest in reading, than previous years.

They certainly weren't in anyway fazed by coming into a P3 class. They were very confident in their manner and their verbal skills were excellent.

Perceived attainment and its relation to pedagogy in the Enriched Curriculum

Oral language skills Teachers strongly agree that the Enriched Curriculum supports oral language development in the first two years.

We have previously reported that teachers, even in mainstream schools, are concerned at deteriorating standards of oral language skills in children starting school. In the twelve schools new to the project in the current year, we have found additional evidence in support of this finding. As we reported earlier for Shankill schools, teachers in areas of high social disadvantage outside Belfast are reporting some instances of children arriving at school with speech skills that would previously only have been considered to be appropriate for toddlers. However even in areas of high social advantage, teachers believe oral language skills are declining. Research in other areas has documented similar findings. See, for example, the findings in Wales (Basic Skills Agency, 2002). Research also shows the possible adverse outcomes from such a scenario, especially for disadvantaged children (Snow 2001). Teachers therefore regard the emphasis accorded to oral language development in the Enriched Curriculum as entirely appropriate and necessary for all children; many would like to extend it further up the school.

After the Year 1/2, teachers report that as children get older, there is less and less time for oral language development. Most teachers would like to do more whole-class work on language but find it is squeezed out by written activities and activity-based learning. These activities obviously engage language practice too, but often they involve interchanges with peers rather than an adult, good in itself but not a substitute for adult-led language practice and development, especially when the class as a whole is weak in language and peers are not providing good models to stretch the weakest children.

Literacy attainment Although the majority of the teachers believed that progress in reading in the Enriched Curriculum was as good as or better than that in previous years, this remains the greatest area of concern for teachers in some schools. The variety of experience is illustrated by the following comments:

My children in P2 are reading at a standard as well as, if not even better than I would have had comparatively in P2. The children are reading with expression, but they have the skills to tackle the print. They can break down words, they can decode, and they can look at the context. Their reading skills are very good.

I feel that their reading... when they came into this class they were at a higher reading level than last year's P4 and I have more children now that are through the scheme and onto shorter novels, which is what we aim for at the end of P4. Again there is a bigger gap; my two weakest children are further behind than last year's.

Their reading is very good and even the less able children [are making good progress with reading]; things are starting to click into place. They have really progressed.

Well in any class there is a range of abilities and that is still displayed but the reading skills had caught up by the end of P3.

Two children couldn't read, one of them couldn't recognise any high frequency words and one of them could only recognise one high frequency word, I have never come across that before and I have been teaching since [for many years]

Teachers in the great majority of schools are impressed with the deeper understanding of text by EC children, their independence in tackling new words and their motivation

to do so. Teachers also reported increased fluency and expression in EC readers, a finding which is strongly supported by evidence from many parents. One teacher neatly summed up the change by comparing these new behaviours favourably to those of children taking the pre-existing curriculum, who were often “just barking at print”. Many teachers reported the confidence of EC children in tackling unfamiliar text. On the other hand, the suggestion that a small minority of very weak children in a very few schools are not making any real progress in reading is very worrying. However, it is not borne out by our data. There are a few children not making progress but they are not to be found in any single school or in an identifiable subgroup of the schools.

(They are) much more willing to tackle words that they are not sure of, much more confident in their reading. A lot of my P6s would just stop at a word whereas the P5s seem to have more confidence to tackle a word, even if they don't get it right.

We felt that the children were very competent, confident readers and were able to use a variety of cues when they are presented with unfamiliar words. They are not afraid of tackling things they haven't seen before.

The better able children are able to read much more fluently from unfamiliar material than we would have found children previously.

Many teachers in the group of schools new to the evaluation have independently observed the ‘take-off’ in reading skills, which occurs for the majority of EC children in Year 3 and which we have previously reported in the twelve original schools (Sproule, McGuinness, Trew, Rafferty, Walsh, Sheehy, and O’Neill 2003). This finding is in agreement with the pattern of PIPS scores found in reading in Year 3/4, in which differences in group mean scores between EC and controls have almost all disappeared by the end of Year 3 and have all completely disappeared by Year 4 (See the Year 5 report or the Year 5 technical supplement for extra detail on this).

A few teachers suspect that Enriched Curriculum children have still equalled the performance with spelling by the end of KS1. Most of them did not think this would be an ongoing problem, merely a slight early lag because of the later start to formal spelling. In perusing the completed PIPS booklets, we had also come to suspect that such might be the case. It may even be the case that EC children’s superior

understanding of text does not yet show in PIPS scores because it is counterbalanced by somewhat poorer spelling skills as yet.

Taking the data from all 24 schools together, there is a weight of interview evidence accumulating that the Enriched Curriculum can lead to teachers perceiving an improvement in aspects of reading skills, albeit not an improvement that is captured by the PIPS tests as yet.

Literacy pedagogy in relation to stated goals of the Enriched Curriculum In relation to the pedagogy of literacy and writing, there is some evidence that many teachers of Years 3 to 5 age groups have not adopted one of the original important goals of the Enriched Curriculum; there may be insufficient emphasis on extending the child's experience of literacy to a variety of genres. Miller and Smith (2004) identify the following behaviours as undesirably limiting literacy exposure;

- too much concentration on narrative alone in reading lessons,
- prohibition or discouragement of certain kinds of reading material, such as magazines, comics, or any material perceived as trivial,
- extensive free choice in reading together with little teacher encouragement to try the unfamiliar,
- a limited choice of genre for shared reading experience, and
- insufficient emphasis on writing in a variety of genres (especially with more able children who are proficient enough in writing to progress beyond recounting their own experience and writing simple lists towards activities such as simple report writing, putting an argument, specifying a procedure).

As with earlier groups interviewed, almost all teachers gave due weight to the importance of enjoyment of literature as a motivator. However, there were several reasons why this might not lead to opportunities for children to enjoy a range of texts. After Year 2, many teachers described the pressures of covering the curriculum as gradually limiting the extent to which they could implement reading for pleasure as children progressed up the school. This limitation could act with the restriction on reading material to counteract earlier work done on giving the children diverse reasons to read. In contrast, one school that is performing especially well in literacy

had dedicated silent reading time in every class on a regular and frequent basis. The children there also had easy classroom access to a wide range of texts suitable for their ability.

Sometimes the teachers reported that they were prevented from extending the children's literacy experience by a lack of money for new resources. As we found in some of the original twelve schools, some teachers explicitly drew our attention to a lack of money for much needed books, with teachers often making up some of the shortfall from their own pocket, sometimes spending considerable sums. There is also indirect evidence on literacy resources; researchers are often in the classroom and in the library during testing of the children. In some classrooms and libraries, there was a lack of visible material that might be expected to engage children, especially children from disadvantaged areas. For example, one very rarely saw any magazines or any non-fiction in the classroom or library other than that on 'worthy' subjects such as the environment or topics on the science curriculum. Some of the topics that would engage many of these children in KS2, such as fashion or sport, were almost totally absent from view in many schools.

Changing the pedagogy of literacy In the additional twelve schools, we have found further evidence that teachers do not always adhere to Enriched Curriculum literacy training guidelines, especially when those guidelines are not in accord with their strongly held beliefs. Some teachers find it very difficult to articulate their pedagogy, even though they are given some weeks to prepare answers to our questions beforehand. It is possible that this reflects either an underlying lack of theoretical knowledge with respect to pedagogy of reading or uncertainty about whether they are 'doing it right'. We also found further confusion about the role and nature of phonics pedagogy in some schools. Taking this evidence together with evidence from previous years, we strongly suspect that there is a wide spectrum of practice in operation in the teaching of reading in general and phonics in particular but we could not confirm the extent of the variation without extensive classroom observation, such as case in-depth studies would provide. In moving to a research-based pedagogy of literacy, teachers will be best supported by training that recognises the teacher's current position and seeks gradual change. This issue is discussed further in Section 5 of this report.

Numeracy As a group, teachers were much more in agreement about mathematics. Most teachers reported that it had improved in the Enriched Curriculum classes compared with the traditional classes, although there was still some diversity in opinion. The following extracts reflect the distribution of responses:

I think their maths is much better than last year's (class). Their mental maths is better.

My top group is my P5 in maths and they seem to be able to grasp concepts a lot quicker than the P6s last year in my top group.

Very good mental maths this year. Again, it might just be this class but I definitely noticed that.

Four of the children in this (P4) class are still working on the numbers 1 -20, which I have never had before either but as I have said before it is a weak class. Is it the curriculum's fault or is it a weak class? I don't know, I can't tell.

Training in the pedagogy of numeracy We have again found evidence of teachers' belief in the importance of training in this domain. Those teachers who had had the advantage of training in the 'Ready, Set, Go' mathematics with Eunice Pitt (Pitt 1999) or other similar courses were very confident. They were often able to make their own resources where funds were not available, in one case to the point where "*We almost have more ideas than we can actually use.*" Such teachers also understood the importance of children recording using informal notation in Years 1 and 2, as Eunice Pitt emphasises, thus providing a sound basis to gradually move on to formal mathematical notation in Years 2 and 3. Other teachers, who had not had that training or any similar training, found it difficult to identify sufficient activities for the more advanced concepts being taught in Years 4 and 5.

A few teachers provided further indications that some children may not have been getting sufficient practice with formal notation towards the end of KS1.

We haven't used the books that I used last year with P3, but they are still at the same level as they would have been if they had been writing it down and not doing it practically.

The implication here and from other teachers was that a great deal of mathematics work is unwritten. Once children have grasped the basics of addition and subtraction, teachers need to understand and accept that the curriculum still allows for regular practice with written forms as well as frequent opportunities for activity-based learning.

Handwriting The twelve new schools provided additional evidence that handwriting had originally been a problem with the Enriched Curriculum, although this was not the case in every school.

The handwriting on the whole is good; we have been practicing our joint writing from September. There are some lovely examples and they are very proud of it and they love to have it pinned up all round the place.

I think their handwriting is okay. At first they were really slow rather than untidy but now most of them are coping with their joined up writing and most of them are quite tidy but some just don't take any care over it or pride in their work, but I think you get that every year.

The handwriting was not as good as it was before and we have worked on it. We start joined up writing in P4 and it's still not great. It's better now and has come on but I don't think it's as good as other years', even going out of P4 now.

I had to start from scratch for handwriting, they came in and the majority of the children were forming their letters from the bottom, they couldn't form the letters correctly at all.

As in previous years' interviews, there was evidence that for some teachers, good handwriting was not accorded high importance, rather seen as something which would be resolved eventually.

I have noticed that handwriting hasn't been as good as previous years. Handwriting has been a lot messier; the children aren't writing on the lines, they are all over the place ... which is probably a good thing because they are not hung up on handwriting. It's not slowing them down; they are getting really good ideas on paper.

Nearly all EC evaluation schools have now decided to teach letter formation from the beginning of the child's school career, although not usually in the same way as it was done previously. Normally, children are now first shown how to scribe letters when it becomes appropriate for their stage of development and their desire to write. Rather than writing pages of the same letter, letter formation is reinforced as part of story writing and during shared reading and writing sessions. There is an appreciation by teachers that those children whose motor skills are not sufficiently developed to use a thin pencil may be able to use thick chalk or something similar in order to get them started into mark making. Even these weaker children are encouraged to follow the correct way to form letters as soon as they show any signs of wanting to write. However, the pace of introduction of new letters is dependent on individual progress.

Just as a good phonics programme starts with a small number of sounds that are easy to discriminate, there are now handwriting schemes available, based on beginning with those letters which are easiest to write and proceeding to add letters in a systematic manner. Several schools, in which there had been concerns about handwriting in the EC initially, are now using such a scheme and finding it useful. This is one instance of the greater degree of structure used in schools with a strong plan for implementing the Enriched Curriculum. Given the number of innovations in schools, listed in our Year 5 summary report (Sproule, there is so much that is new for teachers to remember that structured systems provide a necessary prop for even the most excellent EC teachers. They are best used when teachers use them sensibly, that is, they are not overused such that they become stale, nor are they used haphazardly. Ideally, a phonics program and a handwriting program should be linked.

The role of assessment for learning

In the context that the new curriculum is process driven rather than content driven, the teachers have talked about "*slowing down*" as new ways of assessing the child have revealed new insights into conceptual difficulties. Assessment is no longer mostly written; it also occurs continuously through exchanges with the child. As this change has happened, teachers report having realised that the children were still learning and in fact, "*learning in a better way than before*". Many teachers believed that children were now more independent learners, with greater responsibility for their own progress.

Many teachers have reported that assessment for learning has also been a very helpful agent for change in this direction and have welcomed the greater insight it has brought. “*This is a curriculum where you are really getting to know the children and can really see the progress.*” Teachers who would not previously have considered sharing the goals of a learning session with the children now find that this makes the learning more meaningful for the children; the children become goal directed. As an indication of the misconceptions that have been addressed by the new assessment methods, consider the following quotation:

(Through using methods, learned in Reading Recovery and assessment for learning, with the class as a whole) I was flabbergasted to discover that some children who were well into their second year had a confusion between letter and word.

Such a source of confusion could be difficult to detect by just listening to a child reading or by written methods, as might have been all that was available in the past. However, not every teacher had appreciated the advantages of new methods of assessment. Again, this is a skill that has to be developed over time, and teachers will best make progress in a supportive environment backed up by adequate training.

The effect of Assessment Units at the end of KS1 and/or the transfer procedure

End of KS1 assessment units EC teachers in many schools complained that the assessment units (known as AUs)¹ were not well matched to the Enriched Curriculum and should be changed.

I had real concerns this years as I had to do AUs, for 2 months beforehand I was giving them traditional teaching for the AUs.

I wouldn't share the concerns about AU s because I think a lot of them have it there (pointing to her head).

If the AUs at the end of Year 3/4 were going to be changed, teachers deemed it necessary that they should be kept informed because “(we) *would begin to prepare for those assessments as early as Year 3*”. To some extent, this issue is obviously confounded by the question that we have raised in previous reports of when to move to more

¹ Since this report was first submitted, this type of assessment has been changed.

formal written work. We are not in a position to confirm or refute the teachers' criticism of the assessment units but our observations of completed PIPS booklets do suggest that EC children seem to be disadvantaged in completing them at times because the format of certain mathematics questions is unfamiliar to them. Scores of EC children in mathematics do not demonstrate this disadvantage, probably because EC children's conceptual understanding appears to be better than that of controls and this compensates for the unfamiliar formats. We believe this improved conceptual progress is demonstrated by a superior performance on items requiring deeper understanding, such as mathematical word problems and questions about place value. Similarly in reading, EC children may be better at items requiring comprehension, this being offset by a poorer performance on spelling during KS1. If statutory assessment units are indeed unbalanced in this respect, the case for change should be considered.

The transfer test² Year 5 teachers occasionally mentioned that they were already working towards the transfer procedure. Teachers reported that this could and did skew the pedagogy towards the pre-existing methods in some instances, when teachers would not otherwise have chosen them. On the other hand, other teachers felt that, because the children understood the concepts better, it would be easier to teach for these assessments.

I would agree with (the EC) all in principle and I do think play is really important... But they are getting older and we still have the eleven plus.

Notice above the implied suggestion that the key thing about the Enriched Curriculum is play, even for older age groups. Such a message was probably never intended by training staff. This finding illustrates how unintended messages can be absorbed during training.

I want to emphasize that it is more difficult up in KS2 because we have the transfer to teach. It's hard to incorporate the Enriched Curriculum, when you are having to teach stuff just because of the transfer; it will not lend itself to the Enriched Curriculum.

The implied suggestion in the last comment was that the Enriched Curriculum was still active at KS2, albeit difficult to implement under pressure.

² The transfer test is now under review.

The home school partnership

With 24 schools in all in the project this year, the diversity in the nature and strength of home-school relationships was very apparent. Information on this topic came from several sources. Beside teacher evidence, there was evidence from some principals and from parents. Examples of good practice included:

- Home-school links book. This was sometimes just a homework diary but in the better practice, both teachers and parents could write comments for the purpose of informing one another.
- Evaluation forms for parents. This was still a step too far for most schools but those who had used it were very pleased by the degree of parental support revealed. In one case, using it with the parents of Enriched Curriculum children was the school's first venture into survey methods. However, another school regularly consulted parents by this method.
- Open door policy for parents, for all age groups.
- Shared reading programme for parents and their children. In the best practice, the principles of shared reading were explained to parents from the first year and they were given guidance for support of the school's programme.
- Evening courses for parents, such as 'Read to Succeed' and 'Count on Success'.
- All schools had parent evenings. However, in many schools, this did not include information about how the teaching of Enriched Curriculum children was changing as the children got older.

Unfortunately, not every school was fully informed of best practice in relationships with parents. In the first year of the pilot project in Shankill schools, parental involvement in shared reading was an important feature of the Enriched Curriculum. Parental participation was empowering for parents and reportedly led to an improvement in the duration and quality of parental interaction with children (Sproule, McGuinness, Trew, Rafferty, Walsh, and Sheehy, 2001). Principals from many schools have informed us that they had run the courses for parents mentioned above. However based on teacher reports, **it seems that in many schools, this participation of parents in shared reading activity has been lost from the EC.**

Many teachers and schools did not fully appreciate the value of parents as a resource.

Teachers believed that most parents are supportive in assisting their child with reading and homework. However, most teachers said they were aware of some children who did not enjoy such support:

They are more involved because the homeworks have changed to allow for more investigations at home so they have had to work alongside their children.

There are some of them whom you know aren't getting any help at home.

There was further evidence that teachers receive little training on dealing with parents, particularly distressed parents. There is a suggestion in the evidence from many teachers that they are afraid of engaging with parents, based on the 'Let sleeping dogs lie' principle.

Resources

As with the original evaluation schools the twelve schools new to the project there was again great diversity in the resources available for play, literacy and numeracy. **We must emphasise again our previous and current finding that some schools do not have enough books or enough variety of texts, especially for weak readers.**

As in previous years, the teachers emphatically expressed the need for classroom assistants for teaching the EC, especially at KS1. Some stated that it was impossible to teach without more than one adult present in the room. Perhaps the most crucial support for learning described for classroom assistants is in working with and providing scaffolding for one group while the teacher works with another and the remaining one to three groups work independently. Teachers believe this allows the right balance of adult support and independence. Many teachers supported our earlier findings about classroom assistants taking a more professional role in EC classes than they had previously adopted.

Here are some comments illustrating the diversity in resourcing and teachers feelings:

We have plenty; we went through the literacy strategy and the numeracy strategy (training) so we have got number of resources in our school. We are very lucky.

P1 and P2 have lots and lots of resources but I feel that the money didn't pass on.

[Resources are] very limited, for example a topic on weight, we had to share scales and things round the school. It's fine if everyone's doing things at different times, but you don't necessarily know everyone else's plans I have had to make up a lot of my own resources and bring things in which is time consuming in itself.

I am still borrowing, I borrowed from P2 at the beginning of the year but they are still at the beginning of the P3 books. In a way it is hard to send them round (to the children). They know these books are coming from P3 and I would prefer if I had my own books that were maybe for children with special needs where the stories were less (tailored towards infancy) to boost their confidence.

It does amaze me that P3 which is a critical transition and the funding for classroom assistants stops, certainly in our experience here. To make (the EC) work, as well as it could work, requires a classroom assistant.

Occasionally, it was surprising what was already in schools but not being used prior to the introduction of the Enriched Curriculum. One teacher reported finding Cuisenaire rods “at the bottom of the store”, having been forgotten after some previous initiative failed to persist into the longer term. It might be sensible for schools to carry out an audit of such resources, perhaps with training staff later making suggestions as to whether or how they could be useful in the context of ‘activity-based learning’³.

There was further evidence of the important and more professional role of classroom assistants.

³ By ‘activity-based learning’, teachers mean learning via a number of different activities. These would include manipulation of concrete objects in support of mathematical concept development, role play and group project work. As the children become older, many teachers describe how structured play morphs gradually into these more focussed activities that mostly allow children less choice than in structured play.

Classroom assistants are essential as well. You couldn't do it if you didn't have a (classroom assistant).

We have a great staff here and a great set of classroom assistants as well; we couldn't do this without our classroom assistants. They are phenomenal. They are now teaching assistants.

Training for teachers

Training was an issue for many teachers. Teachers knew that the amount of training decreased as the Enriched Curriculum children went up through the year groups. Our survey shows that in encountering the first cohort of EC children for the first time, each group of teachers felt that the amount of training was insufficient and that it came too late (see the survey of teachers). Many teachers believed that extensive training should be provided in the year before teaching the schools' first EC cohort is due to start rather than in the September of the first teaching year. Teachers also pointed out that students from teacher training colleges varied in their knowledge of the EC, and believed that the colleges would not change their teaching regarding the EC until it was rolled-out fully.

In various circumstances, such as covering for maternity leave, we again found evidence that it was possible to miss training completely.

I have never been on any training to do with (the Enriched Curriculum) and I have never received any kind of handouts or booklets or anything.

I think (students and new teachers) would need training. I would hope the money would be there to give them training like we have been given, I think that would be so essential. Good work has started. If it is going to go on, they deserve the training to be given to them.

I found the training courses were not connected to reality...and then they tell you to (impractical suggestion from training staff which caused resentment). It's not practical...I think when you go to the courses you have to think, 'Yes that's wonderful but what part of that can I implement?'

We have fourth year and second year students in at the minute and they haven't heard of (the Enriched Curriculum).

They are the first cohort through and we are looking at what we need to be teaching the Enriched Curriculum at this stage and none of us know what we should be doing and for me it is just a normal class and we try to teach normal things and try to use as many resources as possible with maths and literacy and keeping science as practical as possible.

Cluster groups As in the original schools, teachers from the twelve new schools reported strong support for cluster groups, as a non-threatening environment for enabling teachers to support one another. Teachers' enthusiasm stems from the novel opportunity to exchange and test ideas with their peers, to give and receive social and emotional support at a time of dramatic change and to validate their approach to the Enriched Curriculum. **In the longer term, the evidence suggests that cluster groups could be an effective strategy for helping to roll curriculum reform**, providing the groups were organised on a local basis so that teachers would not have too far to travel.

Teaching attention skills

Whilst all teachers apparently understood the importance of good attention and short-term memory skills in the child, very few have a well thought out or systematic pedagogy for developing these skills. One school was an exception. Their approach was identified as being part of the Language and Learning Project. Children who were identified as having problems were first presented with simple instructions, building up to greater complexity gradually as the child became more proficient. An autistic child who was still having difficulty in Year 3, for example, had a classroom assistant who still broke down tasks into manageable chunks, with supporting pictorial illustration where necessary.

The development of attention and short-term memory skills was one of the stated goals in the pilot year of the Enriched Curriculum project. Teachers' evidence suggests that this area has not been given the same importance across all Education and Library Boards and/or that some teachers have not realised the importance of explicitly developing these skills.

Special groups of children

The news that the Enriched Curriculum provides a gentle transition into primary school appears to be spreading by word of mouth; between parents, between teachers or by recommendation by outside professionals. Parents who feel that their child is mildly disadvantaged in some way, through being young for their year group, slightly hyperactive, emotionally immature or difficult to settle, are beginning to seek out EC schools. Parents are reported to be willing to travel quite a distance to put their child in an EC school because they believe it would be in the child's interest. Equally, teachers remark on the ease with which such children can be settled into the EC classroom.

Similarly, EC schools may be attracting children who have English as a second language. The emphasis on oral language is reported to be of great benefit to these children.

If there is one of a child's parents who is of a different European nationality, the parents tend to be strongly approving of the Enriched Curriculum because they see the correspondence between the Enriched Curriculum and the continental model of early years education.

Myth and fact about the Enriched Curriculum

Some teachers reiterated an opinion we had heard in earlier years of the evaluation, that the Enriched Curriculum was just good practice and nothing more.

It wasn't a new curriculum that we are teaching. We are still following the NI curriculum until new documents are published to say that that is what we are doing. But we are teaching it in a changed way. So it is not new things that we are teaching it is how we are delivering them that has changed.

Many teachers remain concerned that public conceptions of the Enriched Curriculum are at odds with their experience:

There are a lot of myths floating about... 'They're not doing any work, they are just playing all day.' I think the word needs to go out how positive it is and what benefit it is

to the children. You need to get rid of all these myths and things to make it easier for schools to implement it.

4. Survey evidence from parents

Procedure for gathering data

Parents' attitudes were sampled using questionnaires. During the first four years of the project (years 2000-2001 to 2003-2004), the survey was distributed to all parents of the first cohort of EC children in both of the original school groups, then known as Shankill and CA groups. Therefore in the Shankill Schools, parents were asked to complete the questionnaires each year as their children progressed from Year 1 through to Year 4 (from the first year of the evaluation). Similarly, parents in the Contrasting Area Schools were also surveyed as their children progressed from Year 1 through to Year 4 (from the second year of the evaluation). The response rate from the Shankill parents had decreased over the course of the study and these parents were not asked to participate in the fifth year, as it was felt this would be vexatious to many parents; they had said all they wanted to say. We will survey this group again in the child's final year, to ask them to sum up their child's experience. In this fifth year of the evaluation (2004-2005) the parents of children in the first and second EC cohorts (Year 4 and Year 3) of the Contrasting Areas Schools were surveyed. In addition, the group of 12 new schools was added to the project and the parents of children in the first and second EC cohorts (Year 3 and Year 2 and Year 4 and 3 in two of the schools) were surveyed.

While some parents volunteered their own name or the name of the child and/or the name of the school, other parents remained anonymous. Because of the anonymity, it is difficult to find out exactly how many parents made separate responses each year. Table 3 therefore shows the numbers of parent responses from each group of schools during each year without attempting to analyse repeat responses at this stage. The most recent survey (2004-2005) included 298 questionnaires from parents in the two groups of 18 Mainstream Schools.

Table 3: Number of parents completing survey during each year of study

Year of Study	Shankill Schools n=6	Contrasting Area Schools n=6	New Schools n=12	Total number of responses n=623
2000-2001	42 (Year 1)	---	---	42
2001-2002	27 (Year 2)	68 (Year 1)	---	95
2002-2003	20 (Year 3)	70 (Year 2)	---	90
2003-2004	19 (Year 4)	79 (Year 3)	---	98
2004-2005	---	105 (Year 3/4)	186 (Year 3/2)	298*

* Includes a few parents who submitted responses on the web survey. The web survey will be advertised more widely next year.

The questionnaire was changed over the course of the project. As the children progressed through year groups and new issues were highlighted throughout the study, the questions were modified. Therefore some of the questions were asked in the first years and were replaced by others in the latter years. Some of the questions overlapped across the years. In the earlier years of the study, the questionnaire contained questions assessing parents' views of the reasons for the EC, effects on future success, child happiness, preference for EC or traditional methods, and parents' contribution to education. As the study progressed, the questionnaire was developed to include questions to assess parents' views of the child's achievement and attitudes in reading and number work, the amount of formal work and practical work, information provided by the school and the child's attitude to learning. Descriptive statistics (bar charts and frequencies) were used to summarize the results. Clustered bar charts and cross tabulation were used to make comparisons for different groups e.g. Education and Library Boards and Key Stages.

Results

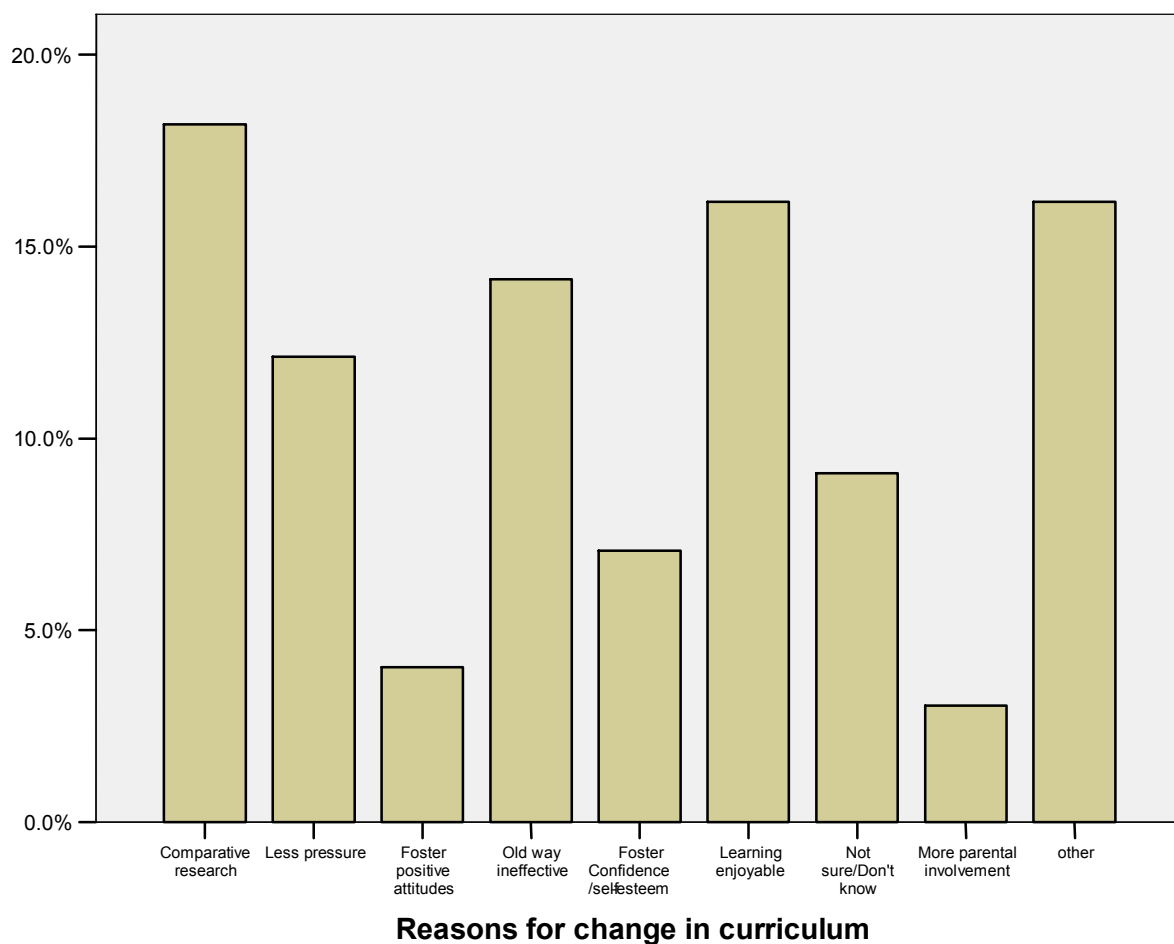
Complete Survey

Early Questions

The results show that the parents expressed positive attitudes regarding the EC. In the first years the parents were asked about the reasons for changing to the EC and as can be seen on the graph, they gave a variety of responses. As Figure 12 shows, the most

common reasons given were that the changes were based on ‘comparative research’, making ‘learning enjoyable’ and ‘old way ineffective’.

Figure 12. Reasons given for schools adopting the Enriched Curriculum



At the beginning the parents were very positive about the effects of the EC and virtually all of the parents stated their belief that it would help their child succeed. A similar question was asked in later years with a different choice of answers. These are combined in Figure 13.

Figure 13. Will the Enriched Curriculum help children succeed?

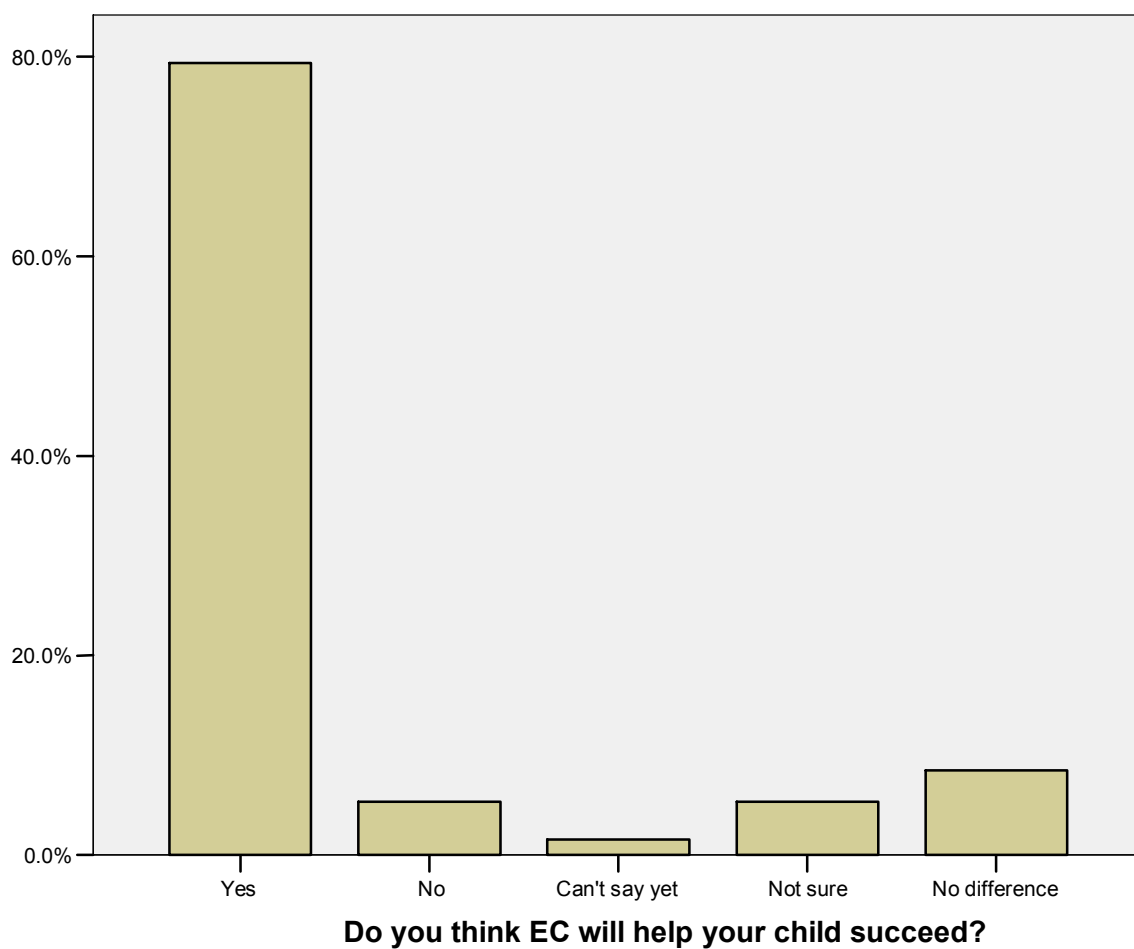
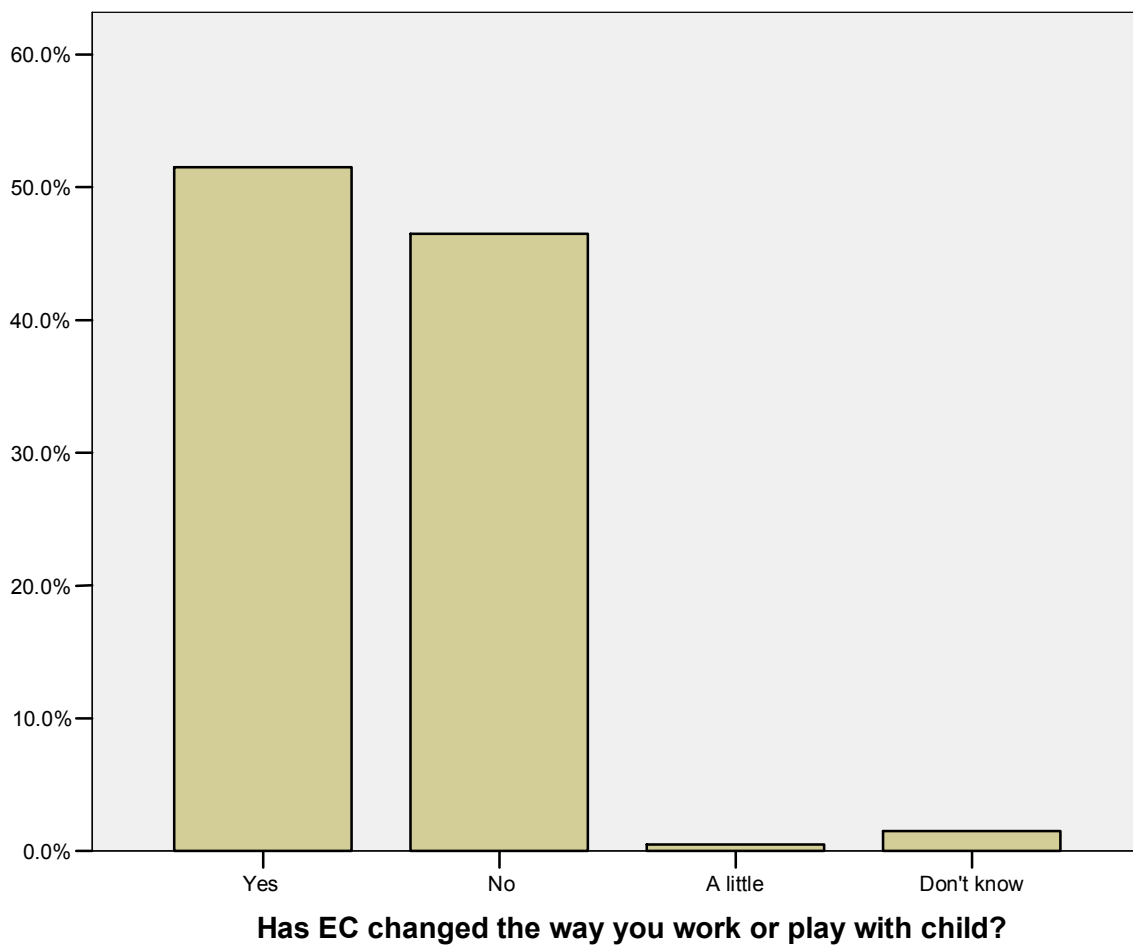


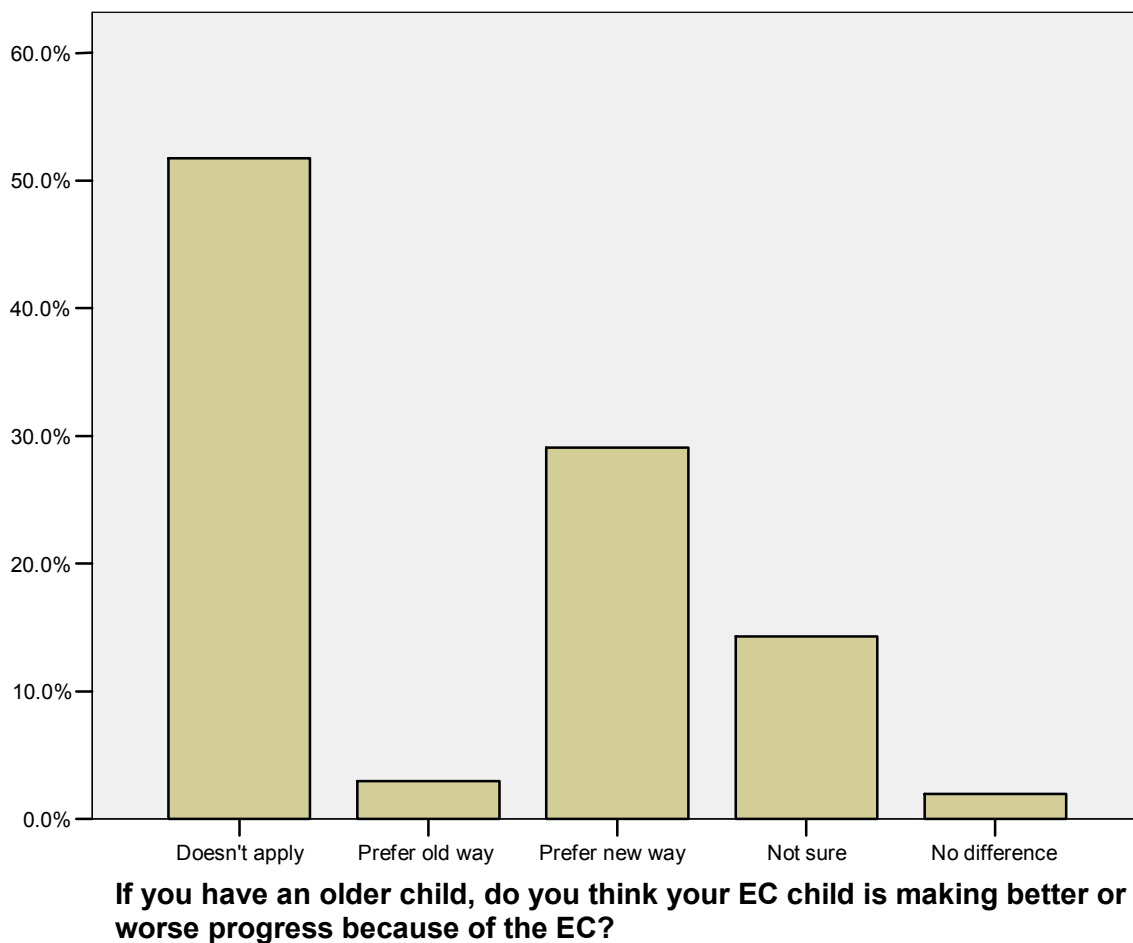
Figure 14 shows that just over half of the parents believed that the EC changed the way they worked or played with their child, while under half did not feel that there was any change.

Figure 14. Has the EC changed the way you work or play with your child?



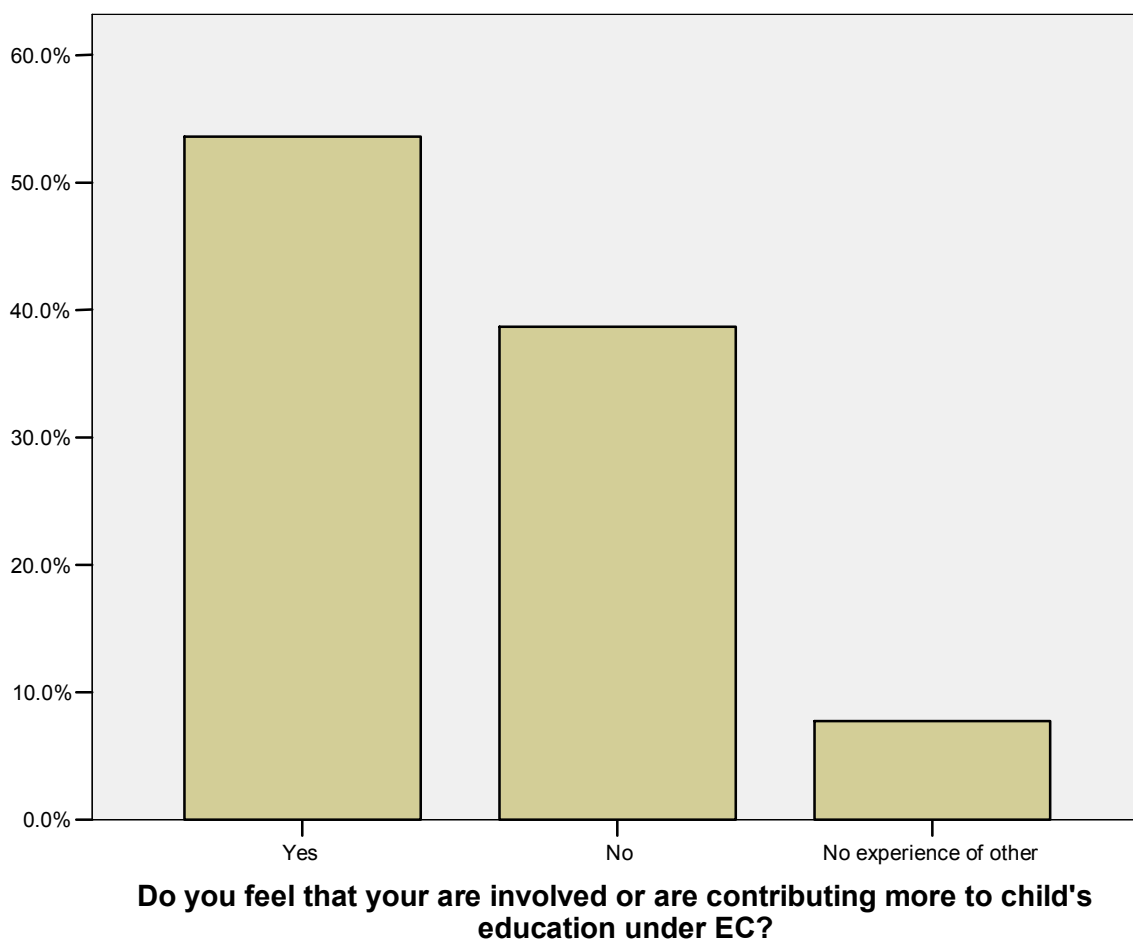
Of those parents who had older children the majority rated their EC child as making better progress because of the EC (Figure 15). Only a small percentage preferred the old method.

Figure 15. Is your child making better or worse progress because of the EC?



According to Figure 16, while just over half of the parents considered themselves be more involved or contributing more to their child's education, the rest did not state this difference.

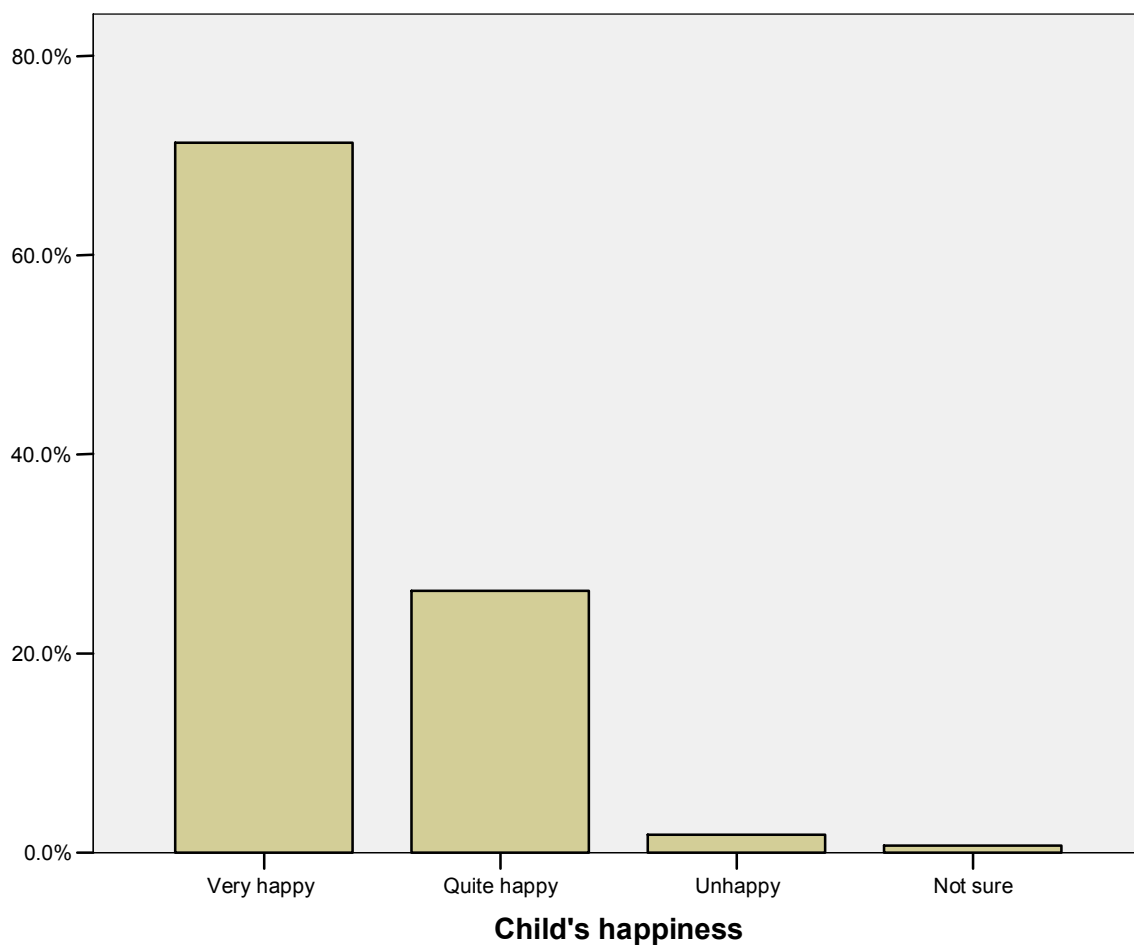
Figure 16. Are you more involved or contributing more to your child's education?



Later Questions

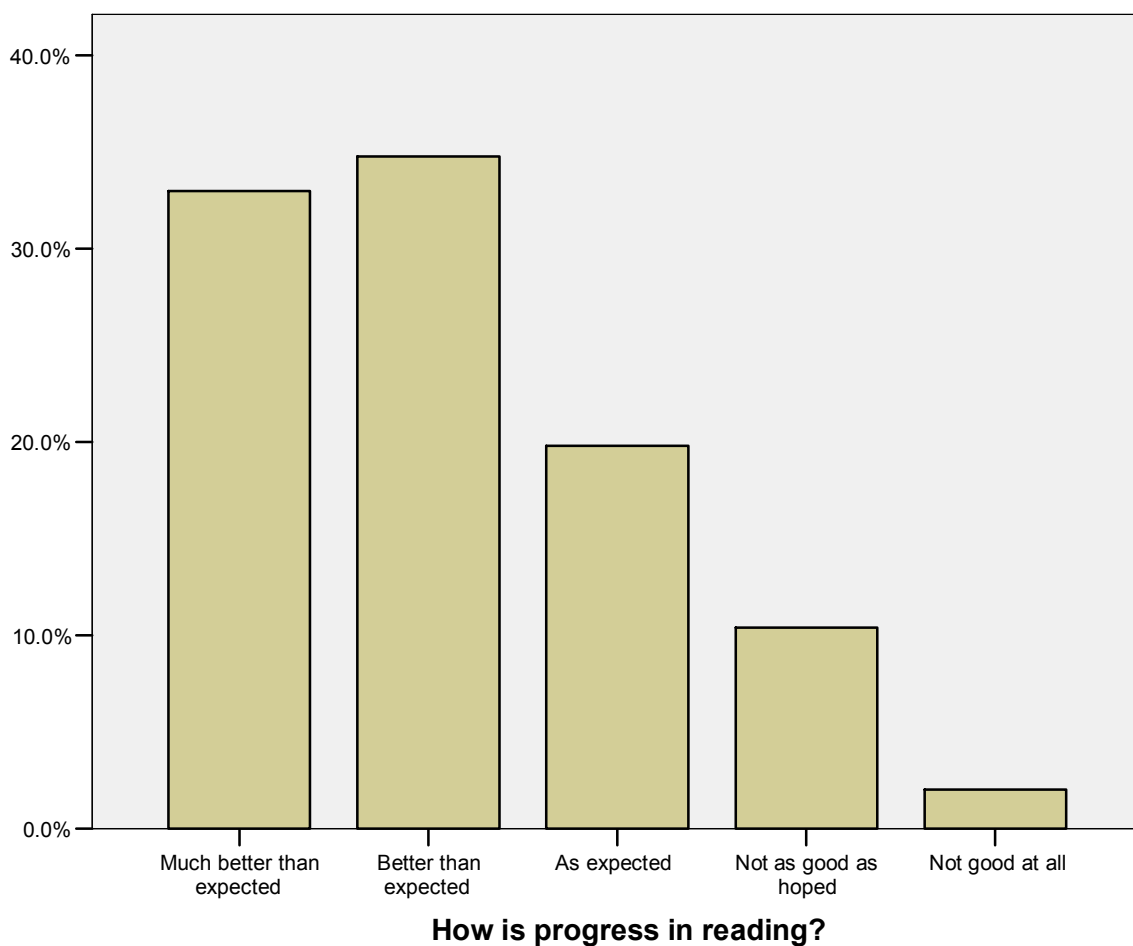
These questions were asked over two years of the study only (2003-2004 and 2004-2005). The responses were similar in both those years. Figure 17 shows that the vast majority of parents rated their child as being 'very happy' or 'quite happy' at school only a small percentage considered their children to be 'unhappy'.

Figure 17. How did your child feel about school this year?



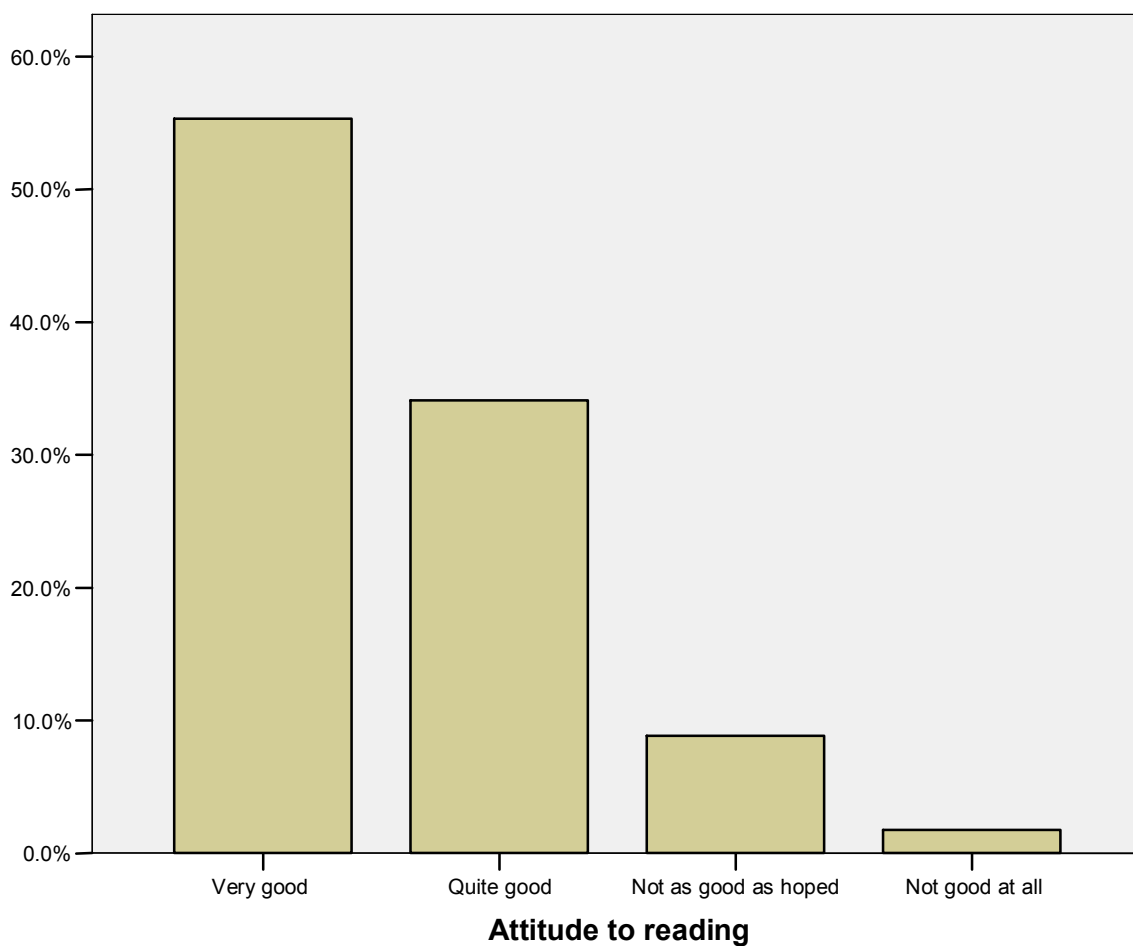
Most of the parents had positive views of their child's progress in reading (Figure 18) considering it to be 'as expected', 'better than expected' or 'much better than expected'. Only a small minority rated this progress as poorer than expected.

Figure 18. Which of the following best describes your child's progress in reading?



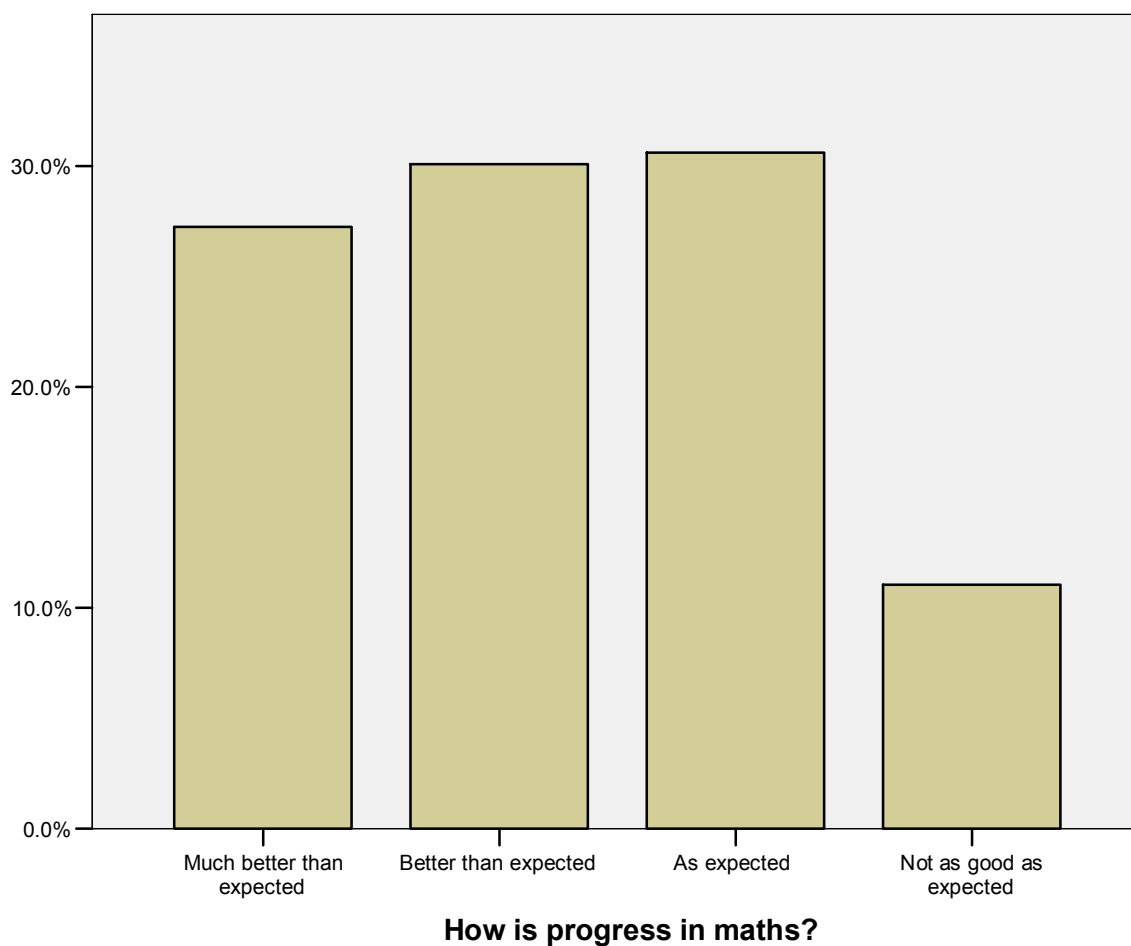
Similarly, the vast majority of the parents rated their child's attitude to reading (Figure 19) positively considering it to be 'very good' or 'quite good'. Only a small minority responded less favourably.

Figure 19. Which of the following best describes your child's attitude to reading?



Most of the parents had a very positive attitude regarding their child’s progress in maths (Figure 20) considering it to be ‘as expected’, ‘better than expected’ or ‘much better than expected’. Only a small minority stated that progress was less than they expected.

Figure 20. Which of the following best describes your child’s progress in maths?



Similarly all but a small percentage of parents rated their child's attitude to maths (Figure 21) favourably and they considered their children to have a 'quite good' or 'very good' attitude.

Figure 21. Which of the following best describes your child's attitude to maths?

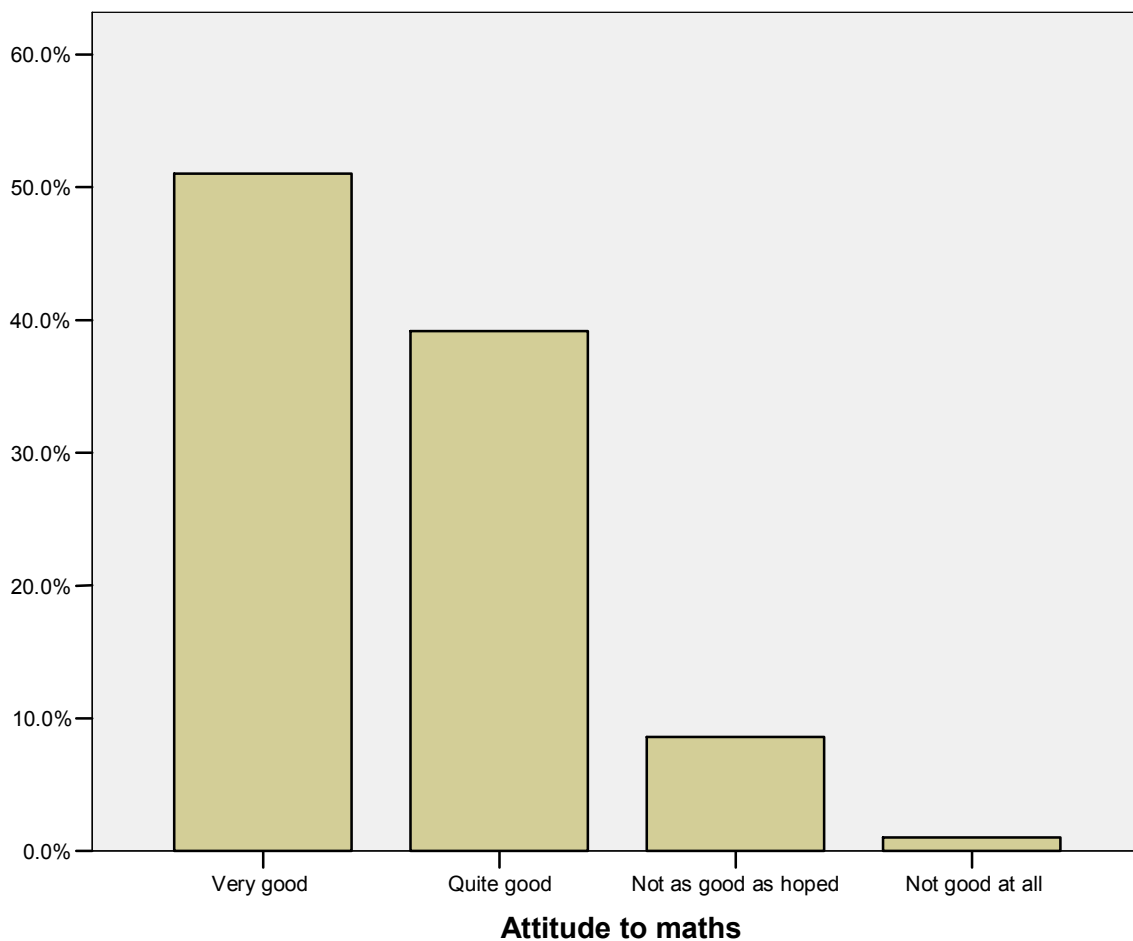
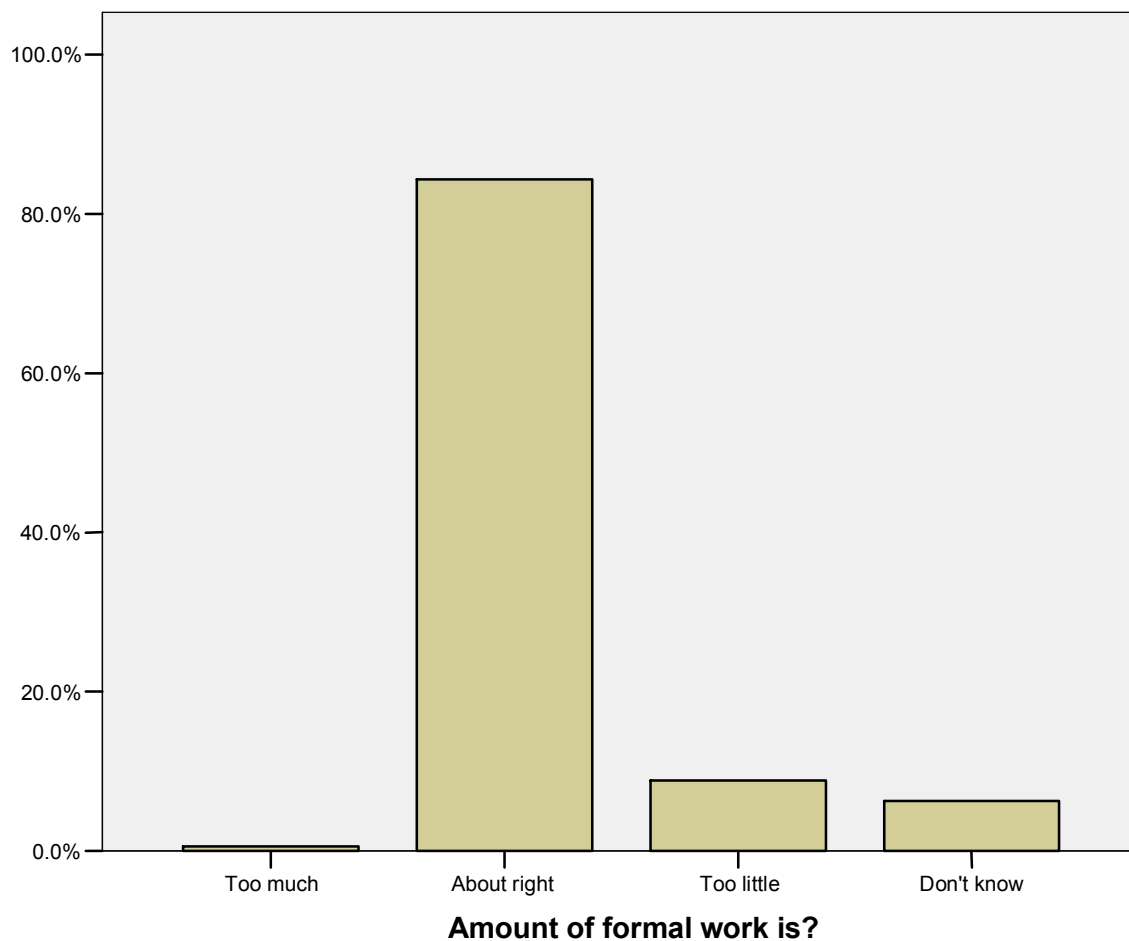


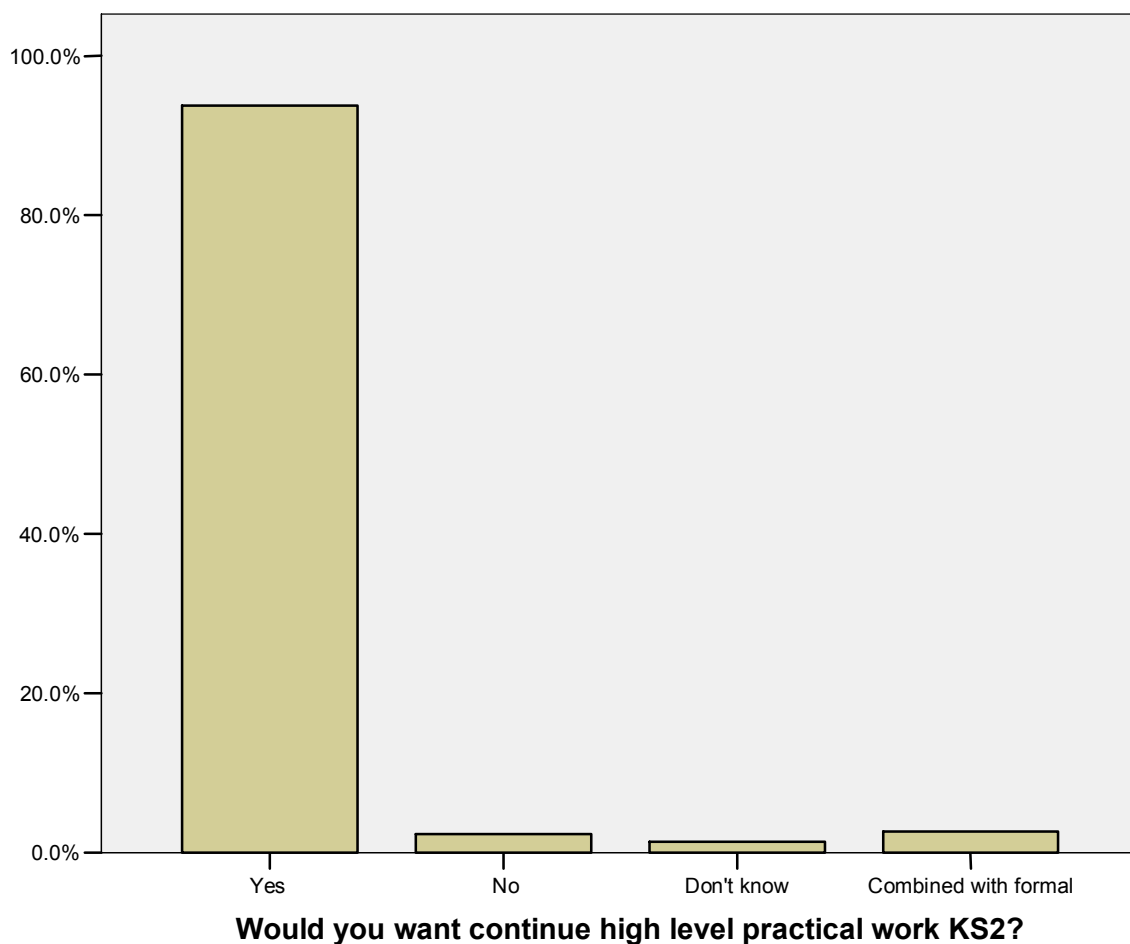
Figure 22 shows that virtually all of the parents considered the amount of formal work to be 'about right' and few considered that it was 'too much' or 'too little'.

Figure 22. What do you think of the amount of formal work your child is doing in class?



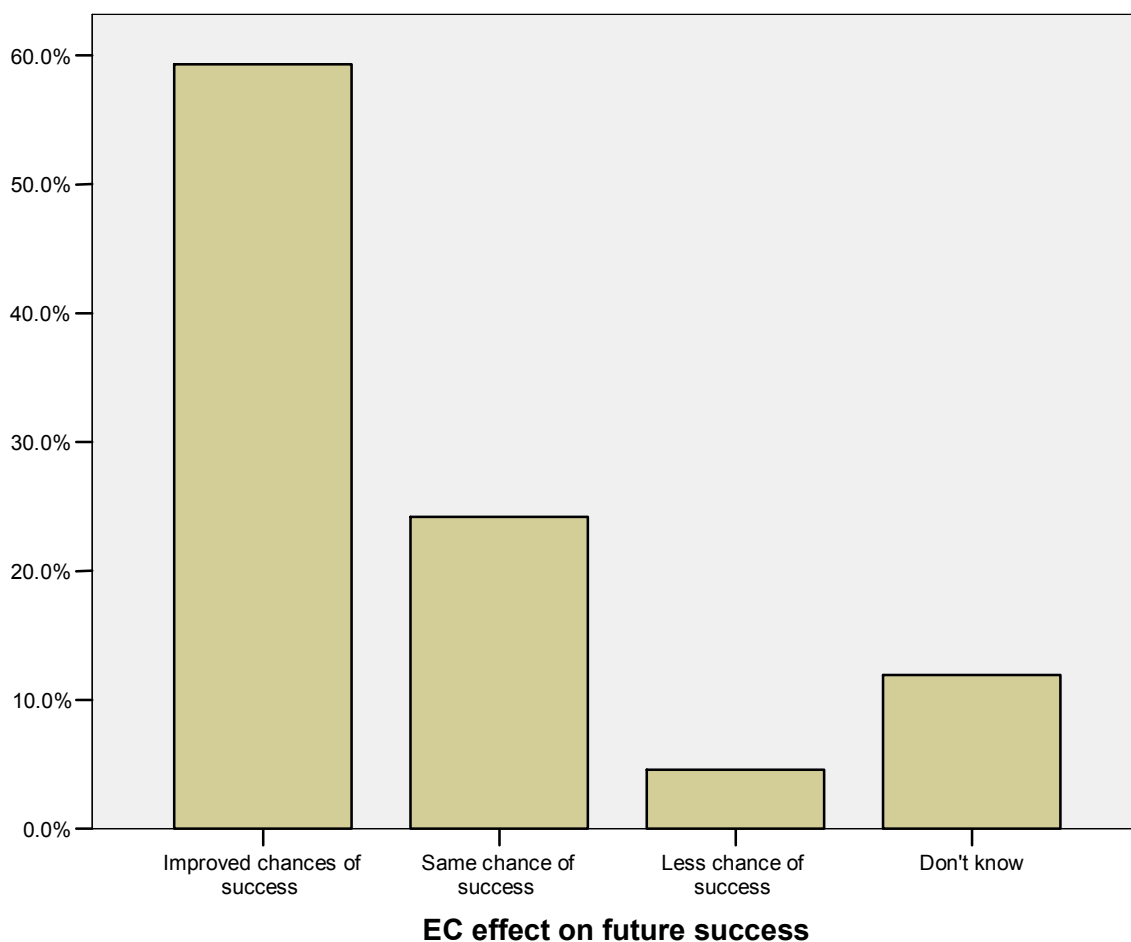
The great majority of parents stated that they would like their child to continue with practical work (Figure 23). A few stated that they would not like the formal work to continue although some stated that they would like it to continue alongside more formal work.

Figure 23. Would you like your child to continue with a high level of practical work in KS2?



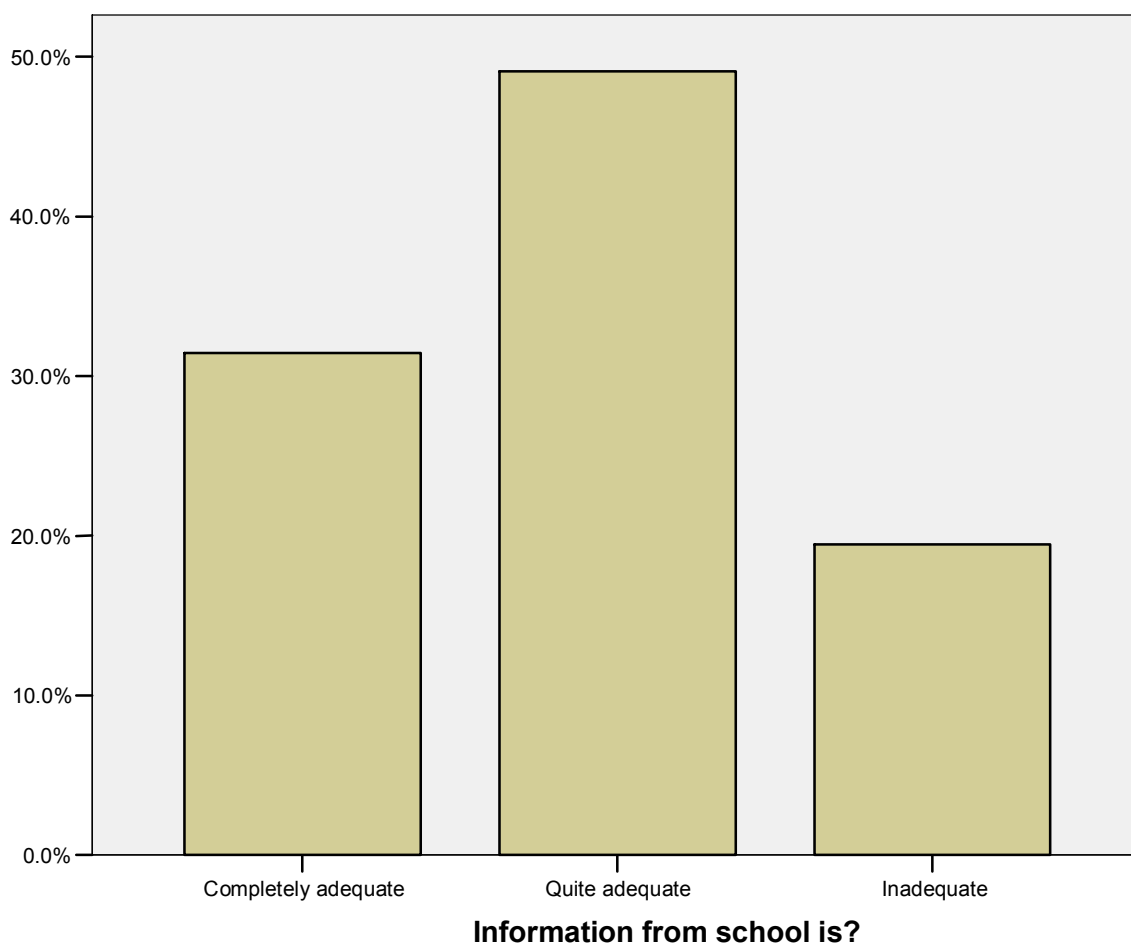
Over half of the parents suggested that the EC ‘improved chances of success’ (Figure 24). This is similar to the response given in the earlier question about success, which also generated a positive response.

Figure 24. What has been the effect of your child’s education on your child’s chances of future success?



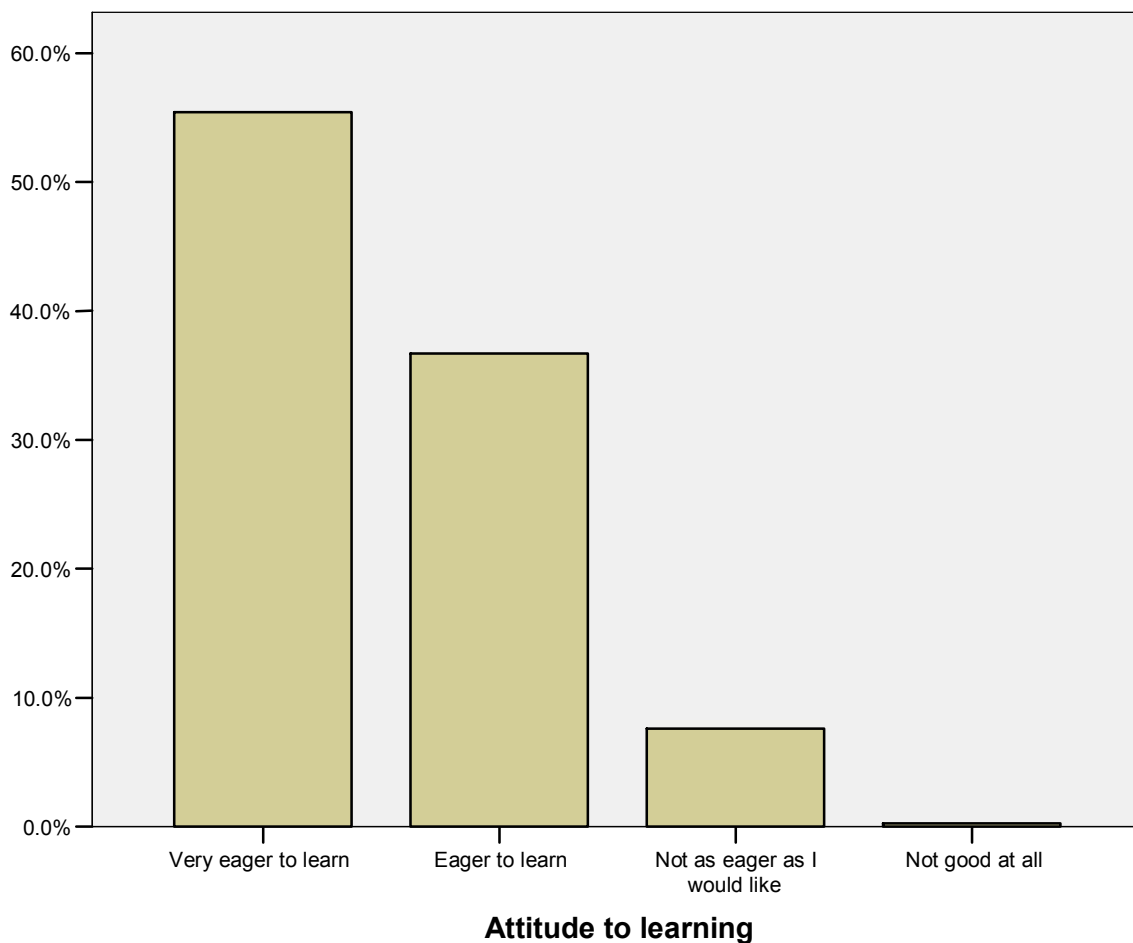
While the majority of the parents rated the information provided by the school about the EC as ‘quite adequate’ or ‘completely adequate’, a minority considered it to be ‘inadequate’ (Figure 25).

Figure 25. How do you rate the amount of information the school has given you about the curriculum and your child’s progress in it?



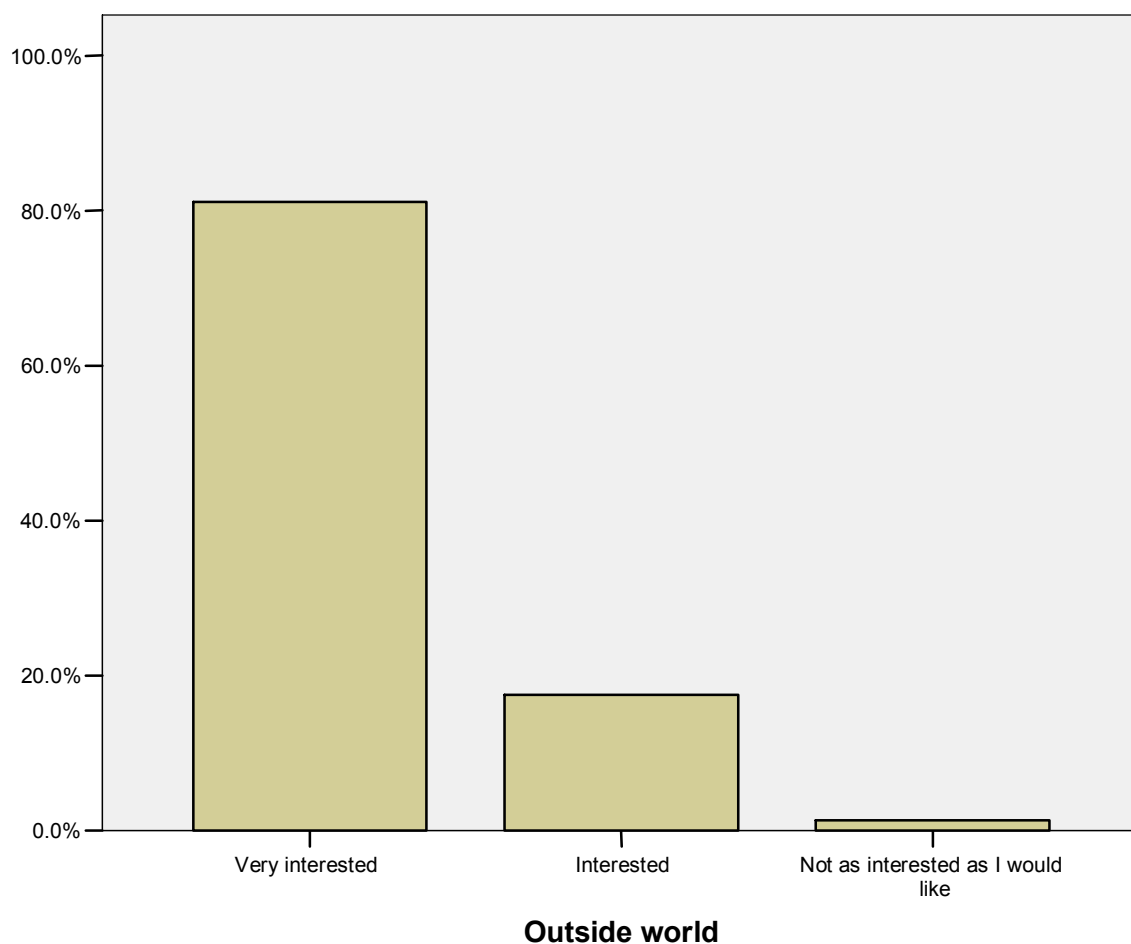
According to Figure 26, the vast majority of parents considered their children to have positive attitudes to learning rating them as ‘eager to learn’ or ‘very eager to learn’. Few rated their children as having less positive attitudes.

Figure 26. How do you rate your child’s attitude to learning?



This question about the child’s interest in the outside world (Figure 27) was added in the fifth year of the study. Virtually all of the parents rated their children as being ‘very interested’ or ‘interested’ in the outside world.

Figure 27. How would you rate your child’s attitude to and curiosity about, the outside world?



Education and Library Boards

The pattern of responses in the different Education and Library Boards (ELB) was examined. Notice that the patterns are different for different aspects of the Enriched Curriculum. For example, the perceived attainment in maths has a different pattern across ELBs from perceived attainment in reading.

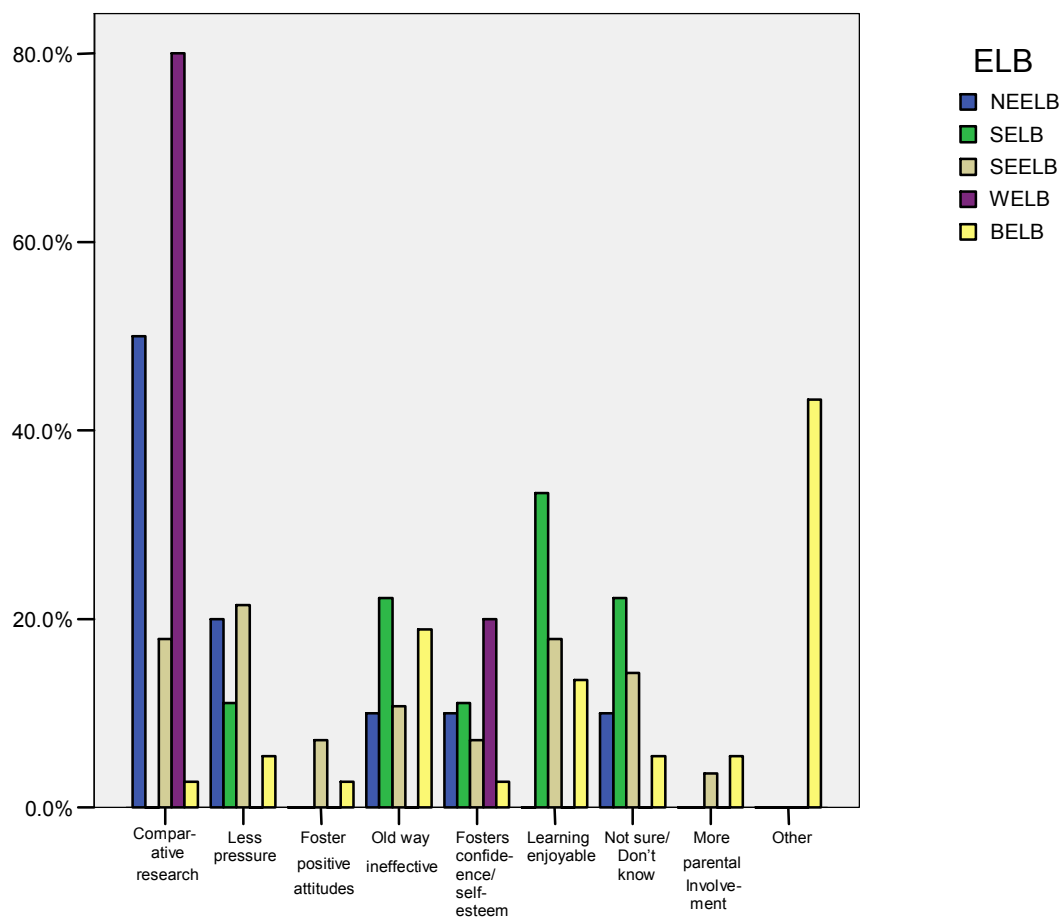
Of those parents who identified the ELB, 107 were from BELB, 137 were from NEELB, 87 were from SELB, 46 were from WELB and 159 were from SEELB. Eighty-seven were unidentified. Although numbers for WELB were small, this only reflects the smaller sample in that ELB.

It should be remembered that all the BELB schools were from the Shankill group. These parents' responses may therefore differ for reasons unconnected with BELB.

Early Questions

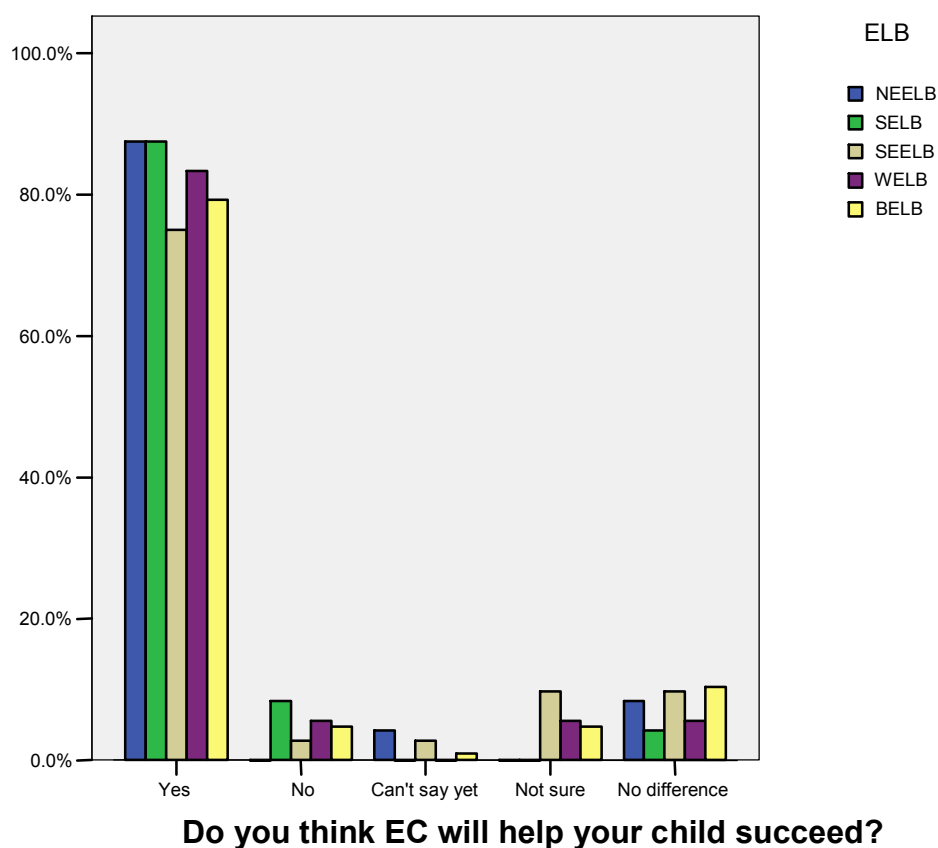
Figure 28 shows that in relation to reasons for the change in the curriculum, ELBs differed in the explanation given to parents. More parents (80%) in the WELB considered this to be related to comparative research, this compared to less than 5% in the BELB. This suggests that those parents in the WELB were well informed about the reasons for the EC, with many NEELB parents also rating research as important. In comparison to other ELBs, a greater percentage of parents in the SELB (approximately 30%) considered the reason to be related to making learning more enjoyable.

Figure 28. Reasons given for schools adopting the Enriched Curriculum in each Education and Library Board



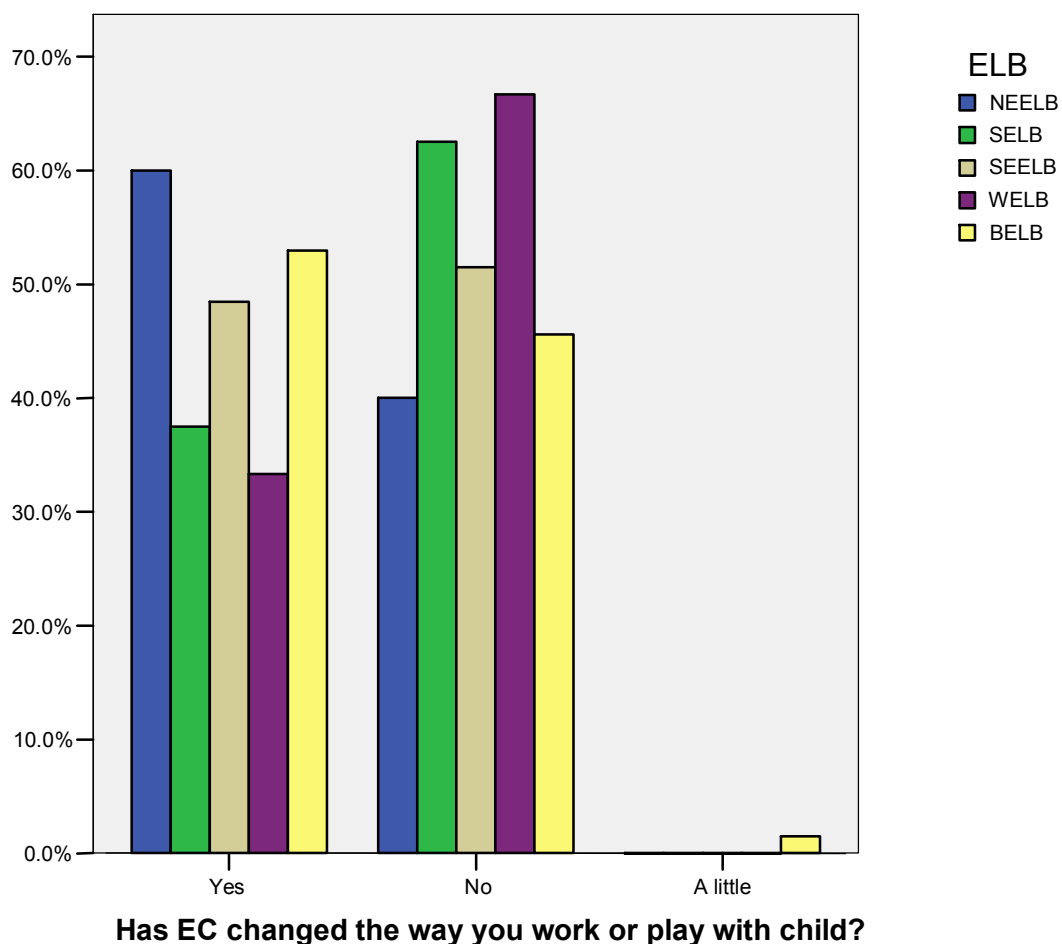
In all of the ELBs the great majority of the parents considered that the EC would help their child to succeed (Figure 29). Those in the SEELB were marginally less positive.

Figure 29. Will the Enriched Curriculum help children succeed?



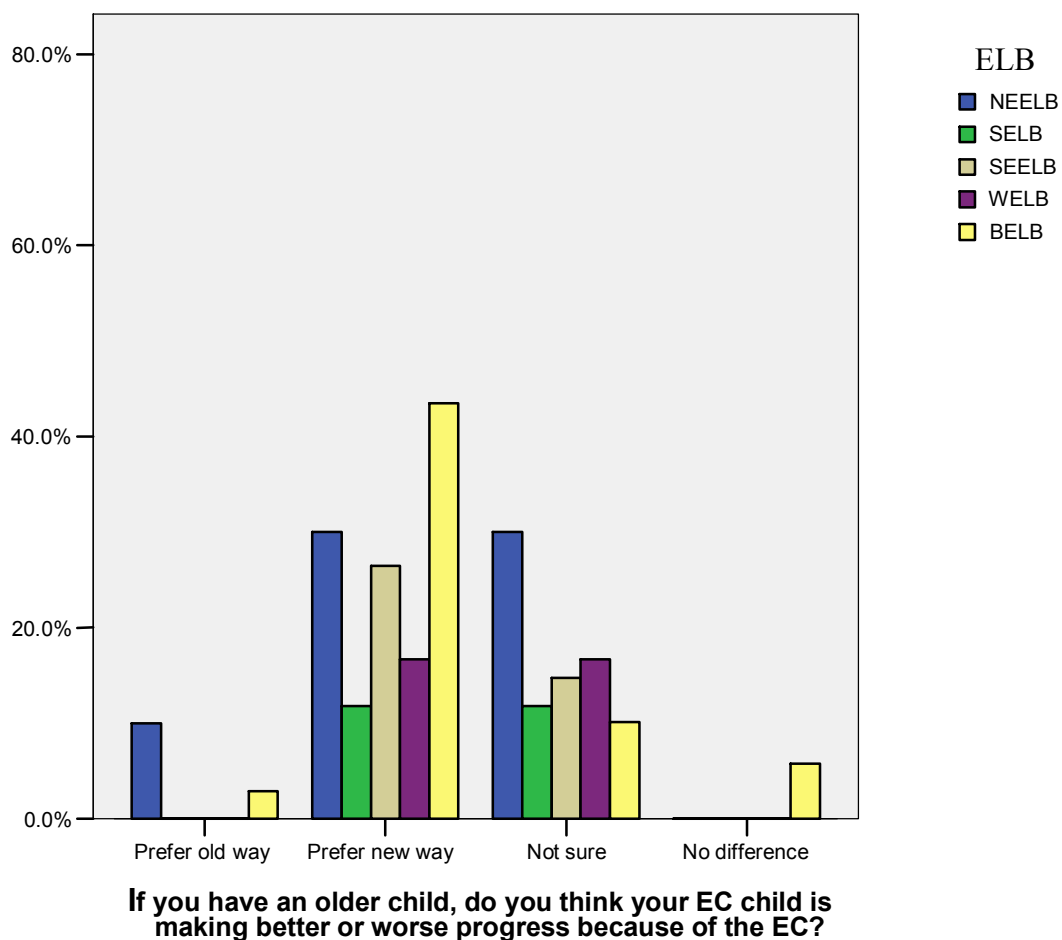
As Figure 30 shows, a greater percentage of parents in the NELB and BELB said that the EC had made a difference to the way that they work or play with their child in comparison to the other ELBs, whereas the majority of parents in the SELB and WELB considered that it had made no difference.

Figure 30. Has the EC changed the way you work or play with your child?



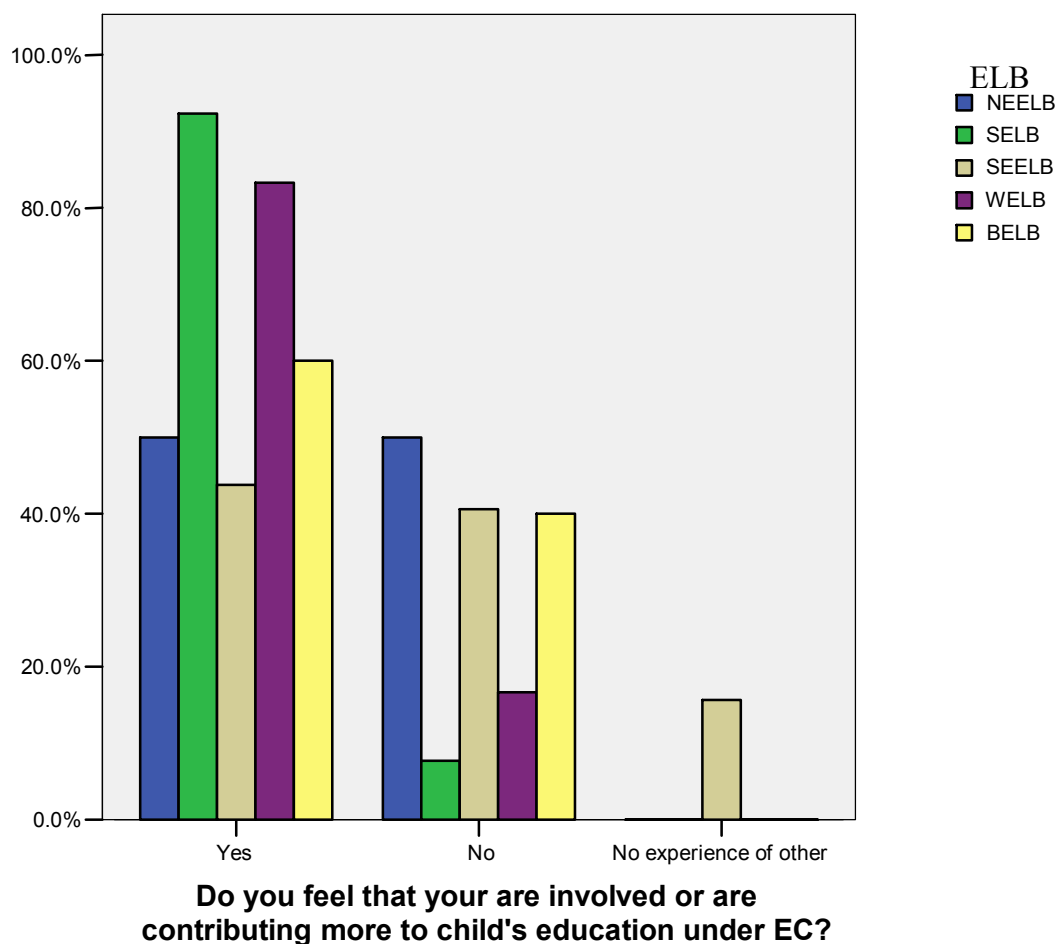
Parents who could make comparisons with older children were asked if the EC child was making better or worse progress because of the EC (Figure 31). The only boards in which a small number of parents preferred the old curriculum were NEELB and BELB. Compared to the other ELBs, more parents in the BELB preferred the new curriculum.

Figure 31. Is your child making better or worse progress because of the EC?



Parents were asked if they felt that they were involved or contributing more to the child's education under the EC (Figure 32). Parents in the SELB and WELB were most positive with over 80% of parents in each board agreeing. Fewest parents in the SEELB considered themselves to be contributing more to their child's education.

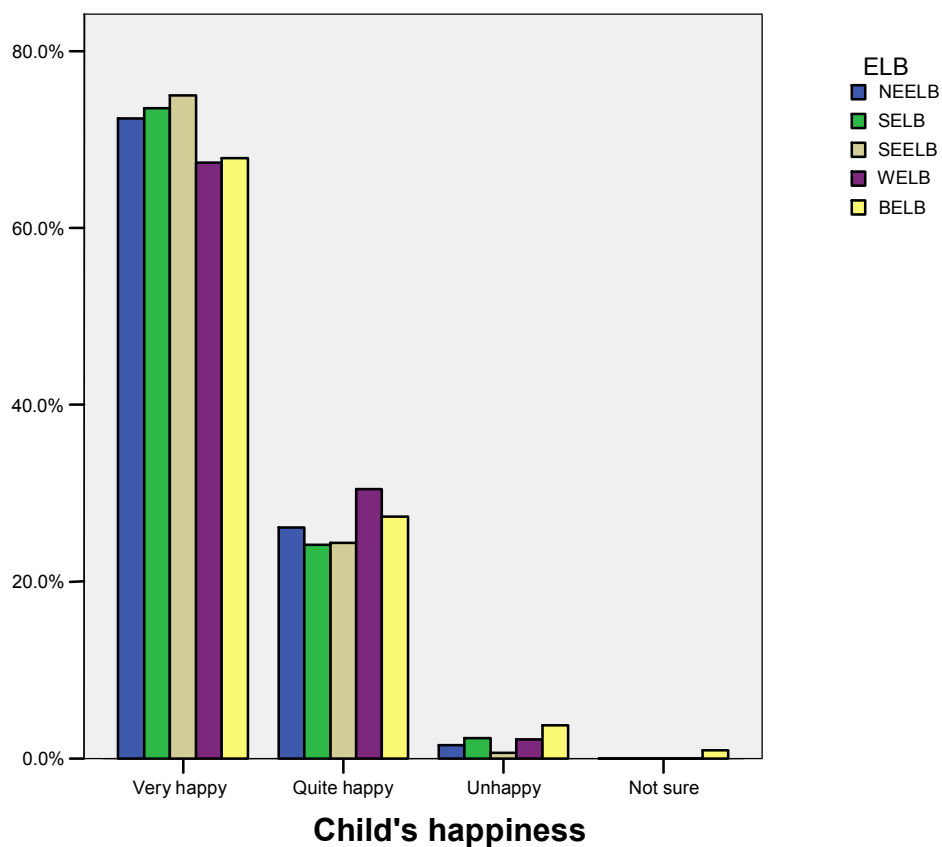
Figure 32. Are you involved or contributing more to your child's education?



Later Questions

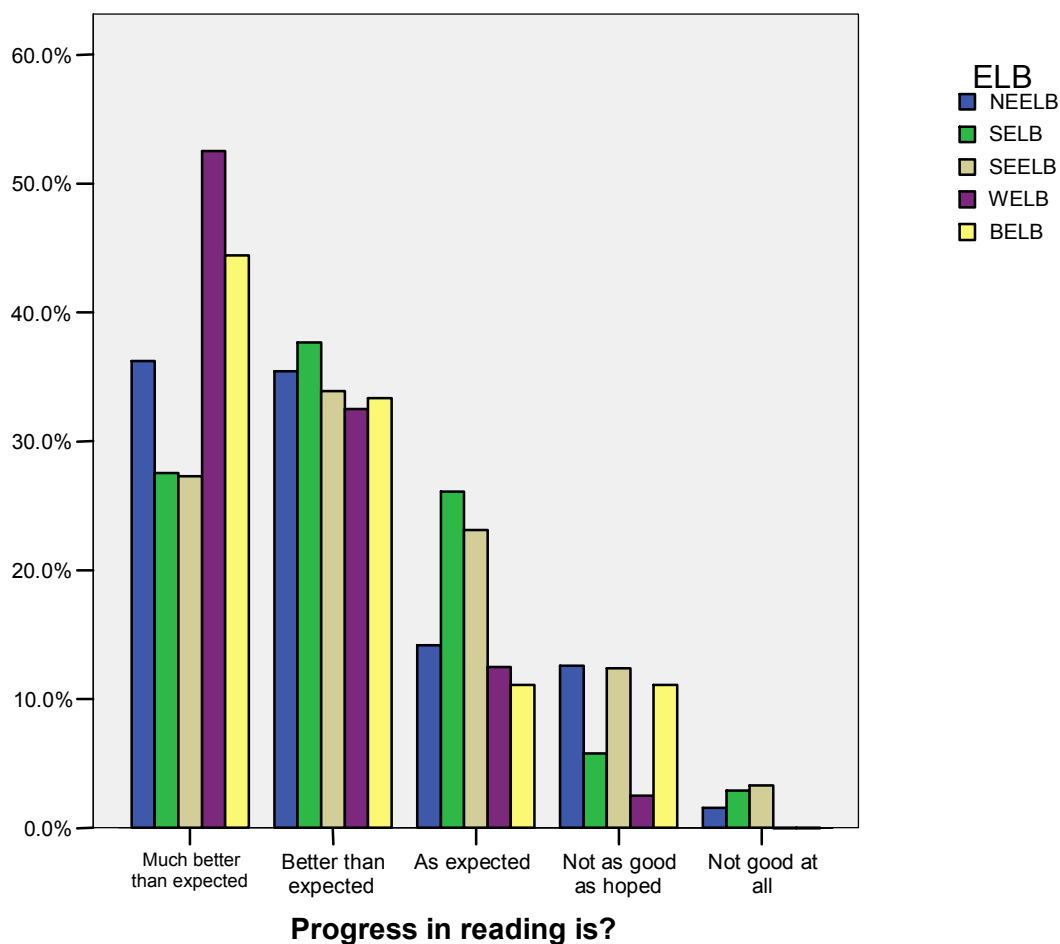
Figure 33 shows that the majority of parents in all ELBs considered their children to be happy at school, there were no differences between those in different ELBs.

Figure 33. How did your child feel about school this year?



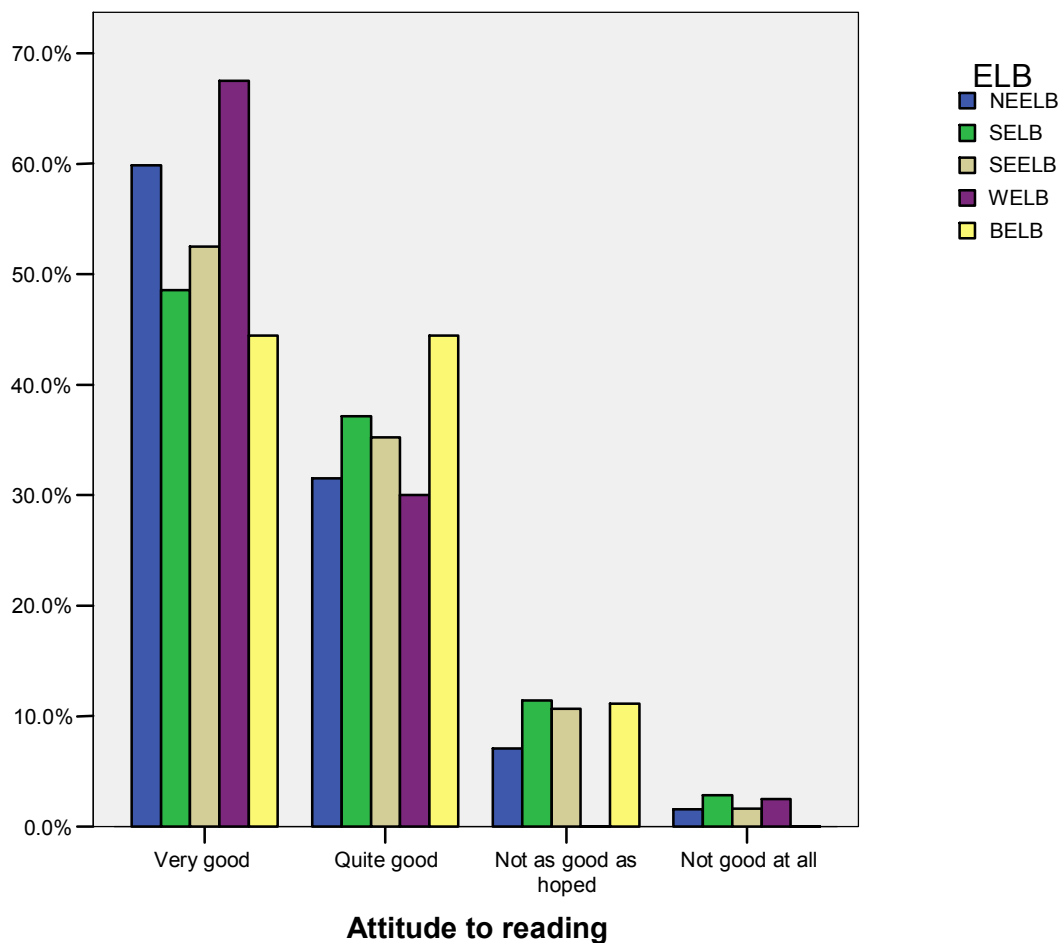
Progress in reading was considered to be most favourable by parents in the WELB, in which the smallest percentage of parents considered progress to be poorer than expected compared to those in other ELBs (Figure 34). Over 50% of those parents rated progress as ‘much better than expected’.

Figure 34. Which of the following best describes your child’s progress in reading?



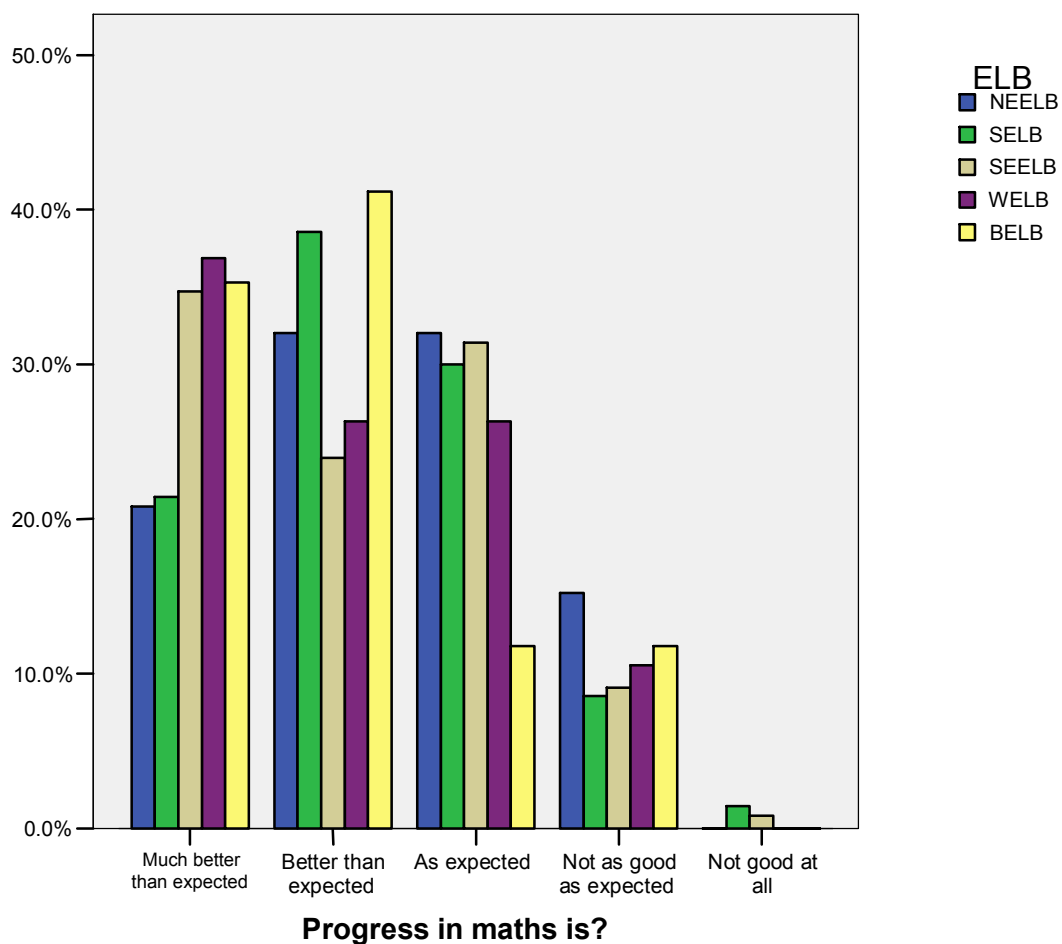
Parents in WELB also rated their child's attitude most favourably with almost 70% considering their child's attitude as 'very good' (Figure 35).

Figure 35. Which of the following best describes your child's attitude to reading?



There were no noticeable differences between the boards in the parents' views on maths progress (Figure 36).

Figure 36. Which of the following best describes your child's progress in maths?



The percentage of parents who considered their child's attitude to maths to be 'very good' was greatest in NEELB, SEELB and WELB (Figure 37).

Figure 37. Which of the following best describes your child's attitude to maths?

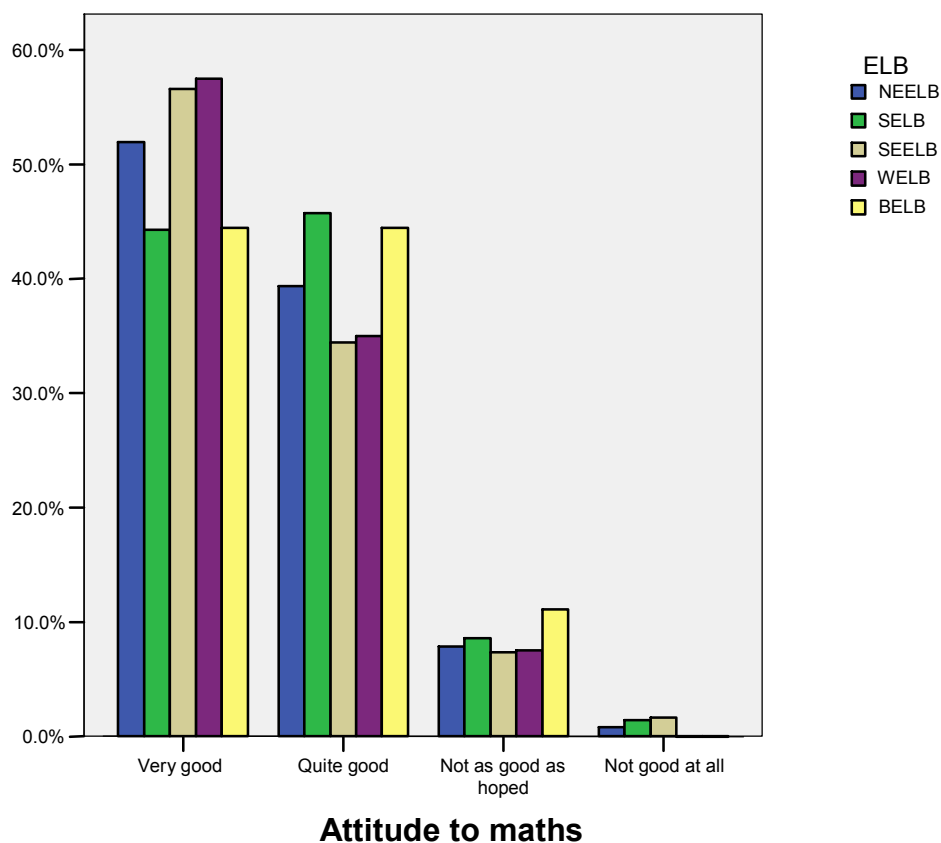
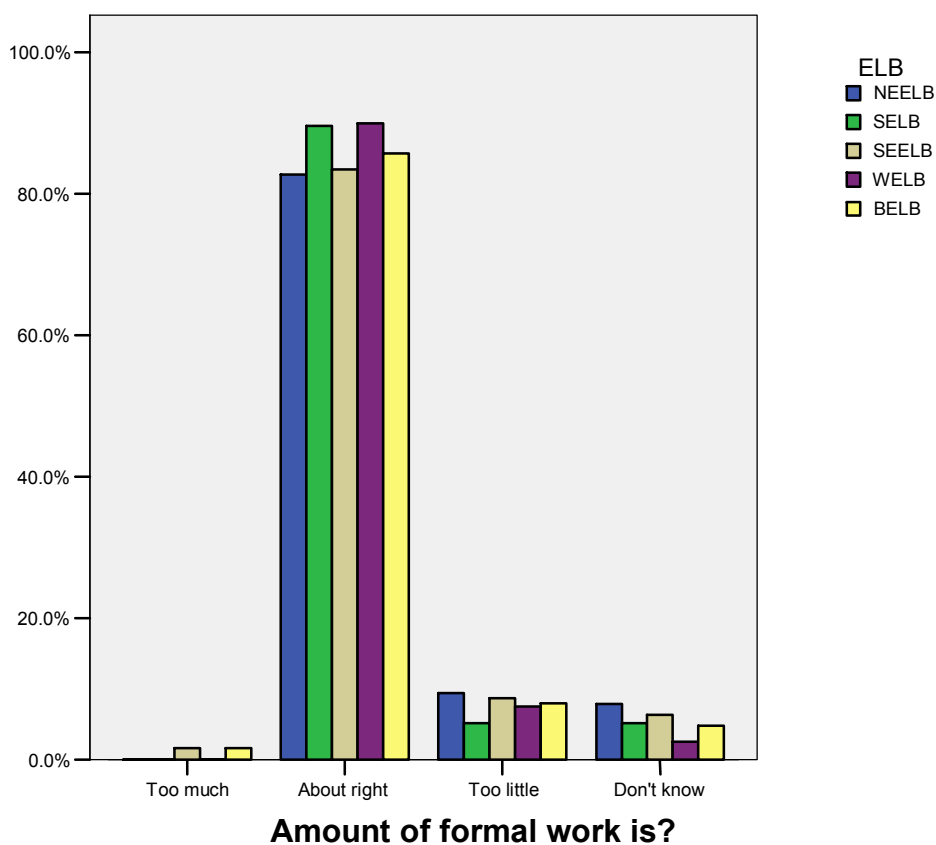


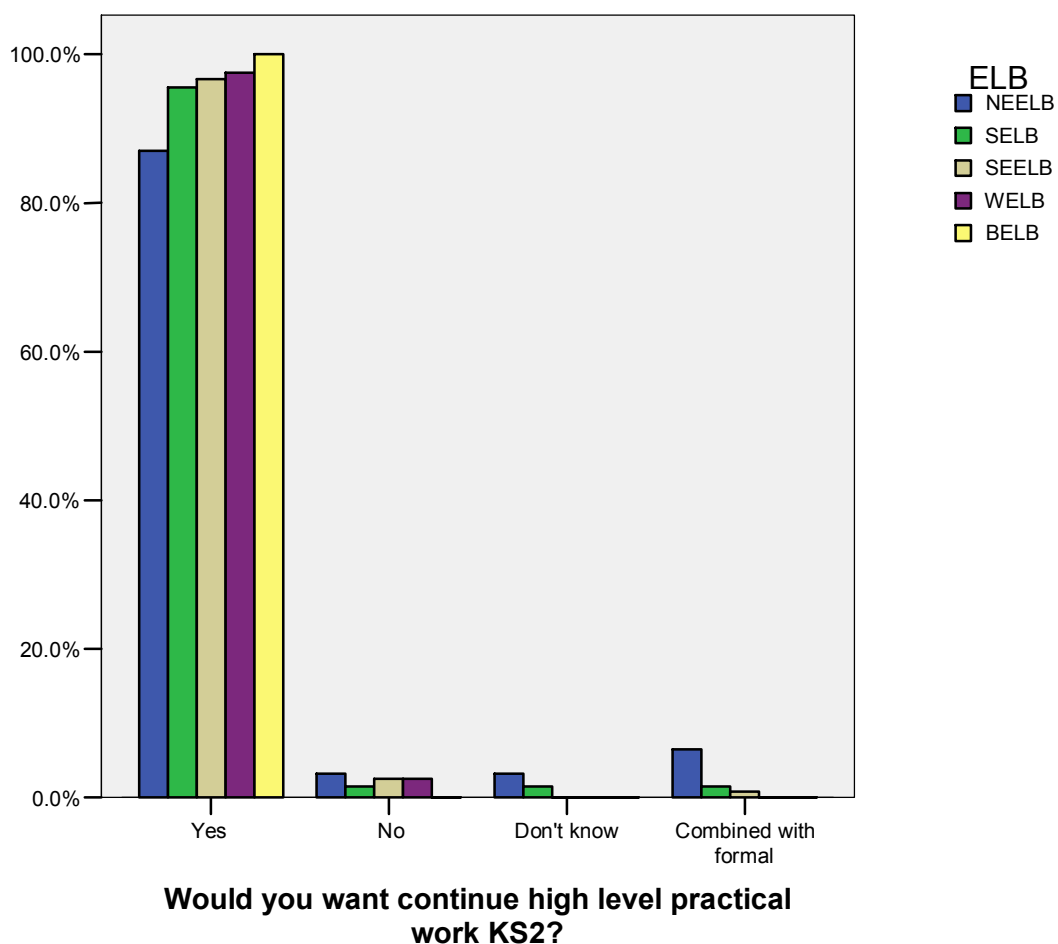
Figure 38 demonstrates that there were no differences in parents' attitudes to the amount of formal work in different ELBs, the majority in all ELBs considered the amount of formal work to be appropriate.

Figure 38. What do you think of the amount of formal work your child is doing in class?



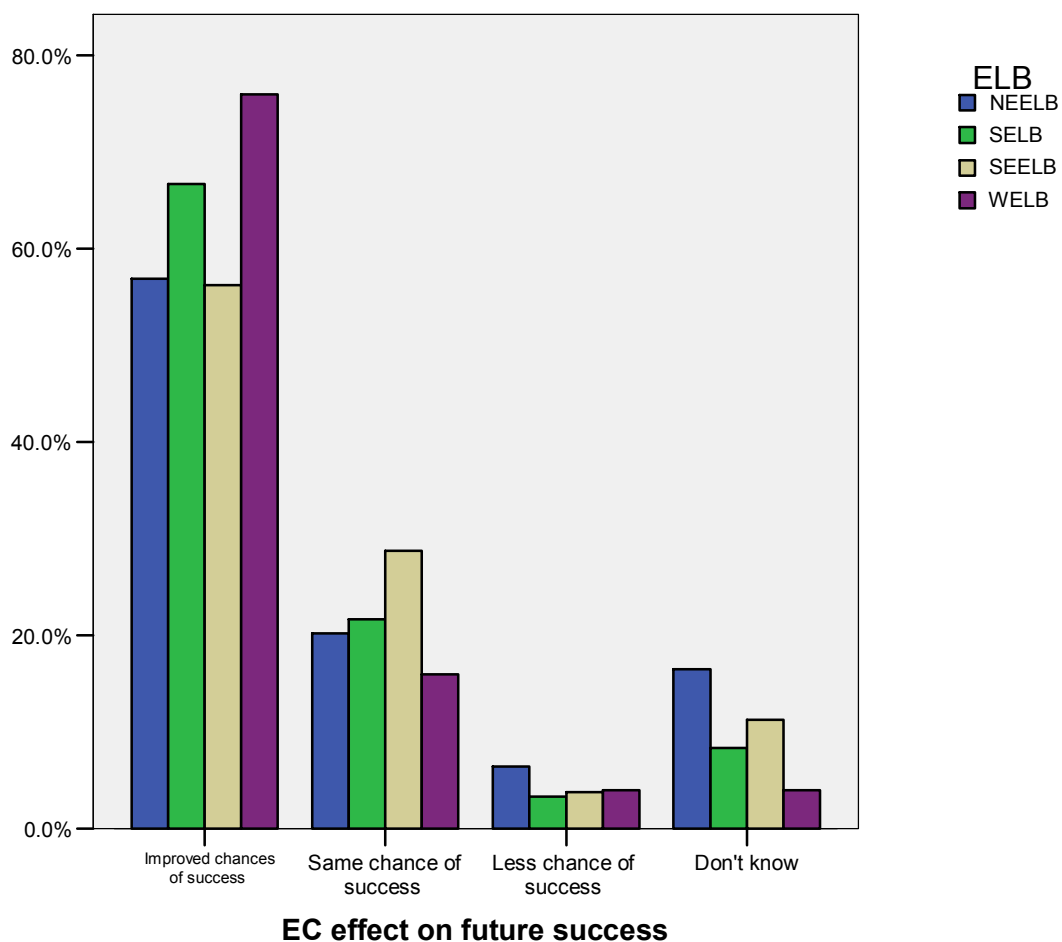
Most parents in all ELBs suggested that they would like their child to continue with a high level of practical work (Figure 39). All of the parents in BELB wanted the high level of practical work to continue. A smaller majority of parents in the NEELB agreed and a few of those parents suggested that they would prefer practical work to be combined with formal work.

Figure 39. Would you like your child to continue with a high level of practical work in KS2?



The percentages of responses shown in Figure 40 indicated that in comparison to other ELBs, more parents in the WELB considered the EC to have improved their child's chances of success.

Figure 40. What has been the effect of your child's education on your child's chances of future success?



There were interesting differences between ELBs in the parents' satisfaction with the information provided by the school (Figure 41). In comparison to other ELBs, more parents in WELB rated the information as 'completely adequate'. Fewest parents in the SELB and more parents in SEELB rated the information provided as 'inadequate' in comparison to other areas.

Figure 41. How do you rate the amount of information the school has given you about the curriculum and your child's progress in it?

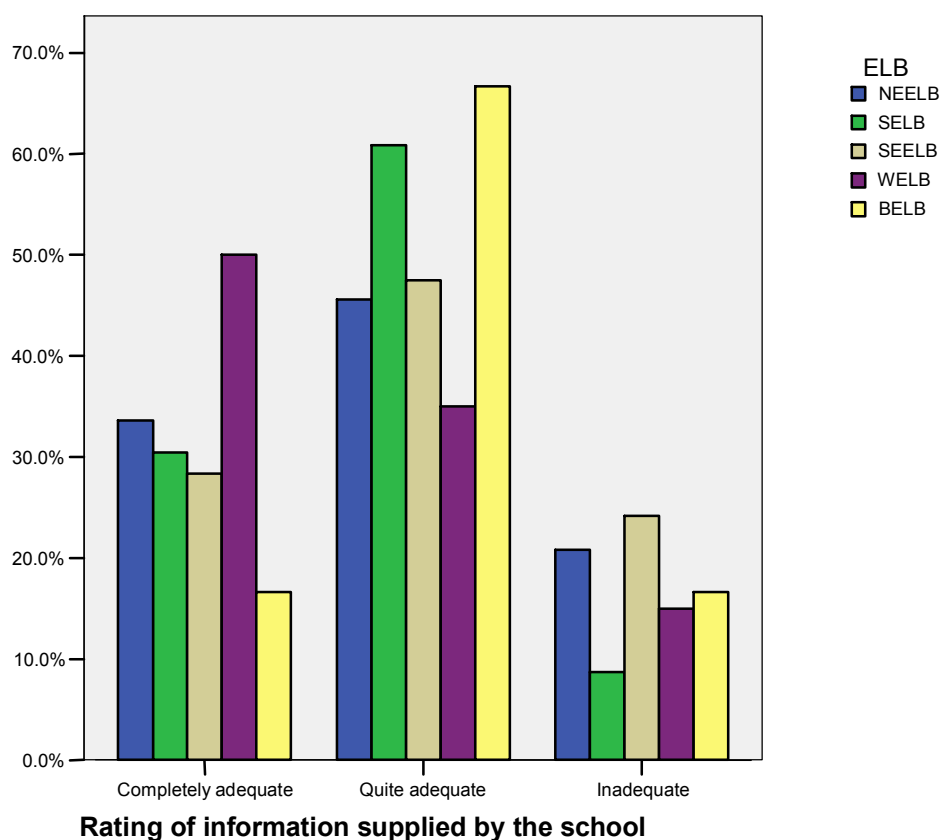
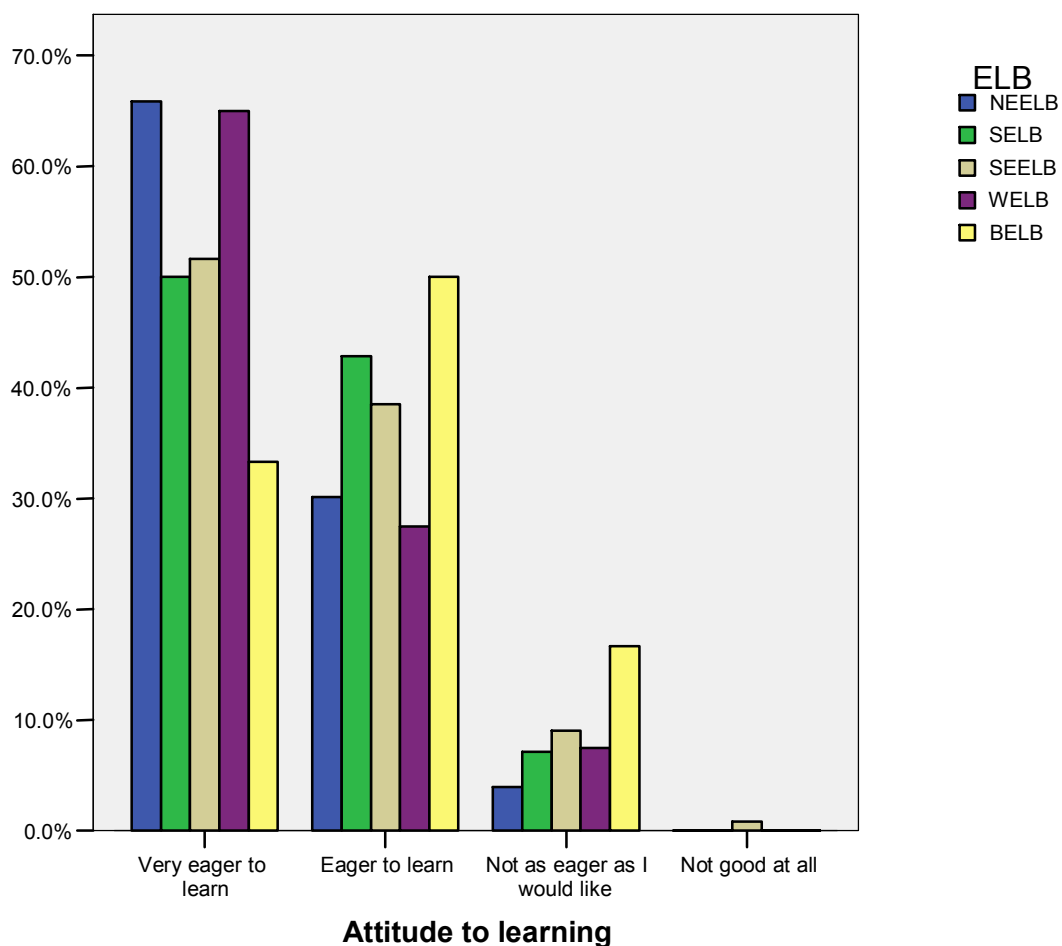


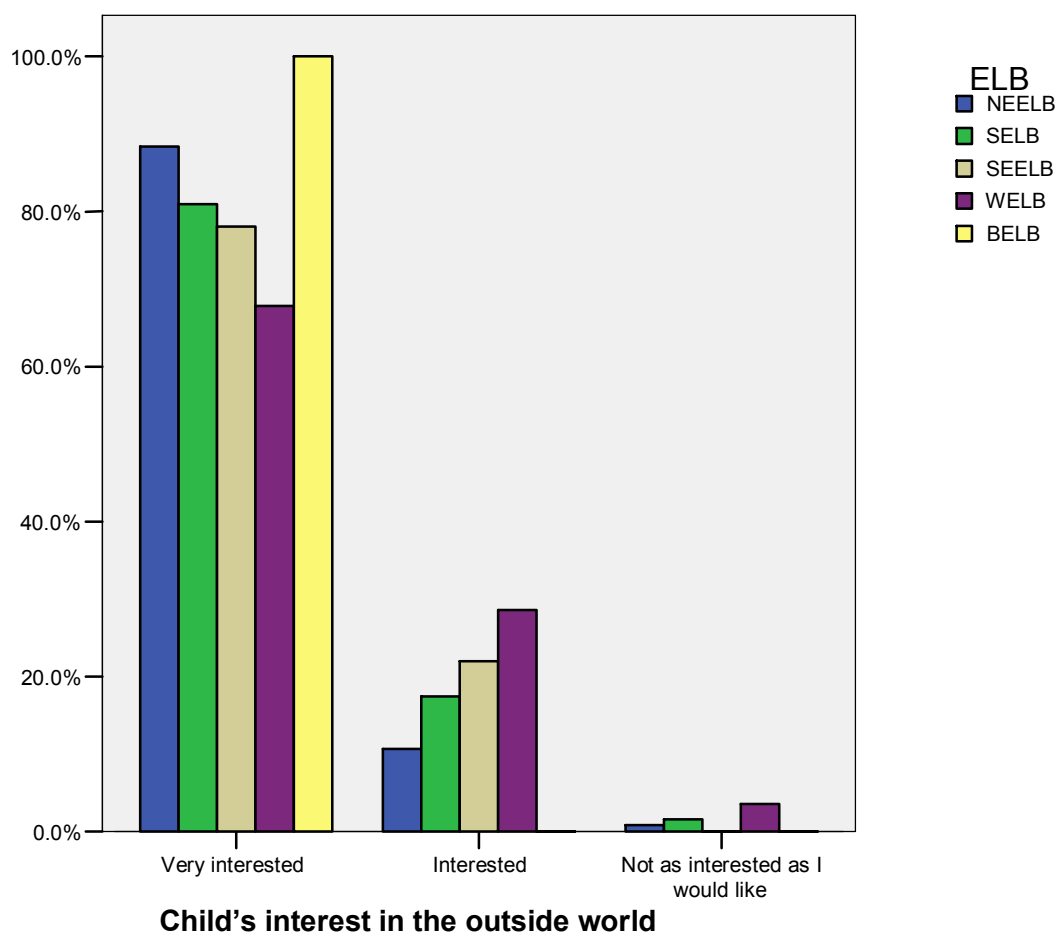
Figure 42 shows that greater percentages of parents in the NEELB and WELB (approximately 65%) considered their child to be ‘very eager to learn’. While in comparison to other ELBs, more parents in BELB considered their child as ‘not as eager as I would like’.

Figure 42. How would you rate your child’s attitude to learning?



The majority of parents in all ELBs rated their child as being ‘very interested’ in the outside world. A tiny percentage of parents in NEELB, SELB and WELB rated this less favourably (Figure 43).

Figure 43. How would you rate your child’s attitude to and curiosity about, the outside world?



5. Interview evidence from parents

Procedure for gathering data

During each year of the study the attitudes of parents were also assessed by conducting structured interviews. This supplemented the free-response written information obtained in the questionnaires. The parent questionnaire contained a section in which parents were asked to tick a box to demonstrate their willingness to participate in parent interviews. While some parents preferred to remain anonymous, a large number provided contact information and expressed a desire to take part in interviews. A greater number of parents agreed to take part than it was practical to interview, necessitating selection. The questionnaires were separated into those who had written comments and those who had not. This enabled the selection of parents who had strong views about the EC and were able to articulate them. In the fifth year of the study (2004-2005), 12 parents from the parent group as a whole were selected for interview. These took place in the parent's home or by telephone, as the parent chose. The researcher took notes; parents were not recorded. They included six parents who had written particularly positive comments on the questionnaire (four from the new group of schools and two from the first Contrasting Area Schools group) and six parents who had written particularly negative comments (four from the New Schools and two from the first Contrasting Area Schools). The parents had children at different stages of their school career, with several parents having more than one child in the Enriched Curriculum and several having an older child not following the Enriched Curriculum. In reading the findings from these interviews, it is necessary to consider that the parents were carefully selected to represent both extremes of opinion and were not randomly selected.

In general, the findings reinforce the findings in previous years from the original twelve schools and support data gathered from teachers and other sources.

Analysis

The findings from interviews and from the open section of the questionnaire were analysed together.

The interview schedule contained questions about the parents' knowledge about the EC, parents' attitudes, children's attitudes, interaction with the school, family literacy and family interaction. Parents' interviews were recorded, transcribed and content analysed to highlight recurring themes and attitudes shared by the parents.

Findings from parental interview data

It is important to remember when considering the interview data that some very negative parents were deliberately selected for interview. Taking into account the interview and survey evidence from this and previous years, the great majority of parents were positive to very positive about the Enriched Curriculum.

We report on the following themes from these data;

- parental attitudes to the Enriched Curriculum,
- concern about participating in a pilot,
- appropriateness of the EC and its relation to the child's ability
- child's attitudes to school and work,
- child's emotional and social development,
- child's achievement
 - literacy
 - numeracy
 - handwriting
 - other achievement issues
- knowledge about the Enriched Curriculum,
- knowledge about play,
- information given to parents prior to the beginning of the Enriched Curriculum,
- continuing information to parents about the Enriched Curriculum,
- the parents' role in early years education,
- assessment of learning difficulties, and
- the home-school partnership.

General point to note

Although we had deliberately chosen for interview parents who were negative on the survey, these parents often proved to be more positive than expected when they were interviewed. This happened because their written comments were sometimes an imagined worst case possibility or because a teacher had dealt with their concerns in the interim.

Researcher's additions to or interpretations of parents' comments are given in brackets.

Parents' attitudes to the Enriched Curriculum

Some parents strongly expressed great satisfaction with the EC and strongly stated their desire for younger siblings to have the same experience. Other parents expressed concerns about the EC. Some parents expressed concerns that their children were taking part in a pilot and they did not know what the outcome would be. The comments illustrate the great difference between the pro-EC and anti-EC parents.

It would be the only way forward I think for every child, and certainly for my child.

I boast about it and tell others that it is brilliant. All new things are not good, but (the EC) is good - to encourage children to like school, and not to just keep things traditional.

I wasn't concerned about it because I had complete confidence in the principal. I have complete confidence in the EC.

I wouldn't have liked to see her in a traditional curriculum. I think the EC is better.

I really strongly would love it to be made law and for every school to have the EC.. I can really see the benefits because my child originally went to a traditional school. I've seen what it did to her confidence and self-esteem. I think it is criminal that that can happen.

I think that parents are mad sending their children to any other (non-EC) school

I would be disappointed if they went back to the traditional method for when my baby is going to school. I think it would be out of sync with experts, educational research,

European examples and children's development. What I do worry about is government league tables etc. They could throw a spanner in the works.

I think that the traditional curriculum would have been better for my daughter. In the traditional curriculum she would have been better. She would have been 'conditioned' and used to formally sitting in chair etc.

It would be hard to change her back to the traditional curriculum. She would find it difficult but I think that it would be more beneficial for her.

At the moment I would like her to have more formal teaching. But they could be doing it and maybe she is not telling me. I am not sure.

If I'd have had a choice, if there had been two schools together, I probably would have picked the one that was doing more formal teaching.

She is capable of being at the same level but she is not pushed in school to the same level.

Concern about participating in a pilot

A few parents pointed out that one area of concern is that not all children in Northern Ireland are involved in the EC. They naturally fear that if it is unsuccessful, their children will be disadvantaged as a result.

It would be hardest to say that it would be wrong, because at the end of the day you have to try new things. It would be a bit silly to say no we are staying with the old system and that is that. Again it is very selfish to say not to try it, try it by all means but not on my child...I don't really have any major concerns.

It is always right that the school should try something different if it is going to benefit people. The thing about being one of the first to do it is that we are unsure of where we should be with this.

Yes we are doing the EC but if it doesn't work, to the school it may be just a project that didn't work the way they wanted it. But to us it is more important. It is our child. Nobody can give you any certainties about whether it is going to work or not. We are not expecting our child to turn out to be an Einstein, but we are unsure about where he is.

It goes back to whether it is fair for some children to be on it and for others not. If it was across the board we would be happier to endorse it.

We are not against the school or the curriculum. We are just concerned about what is the best thing for our child. I know we keep going on about it but is it fair for some children to be on an Enriched Curriculum and for others not to be?

I was a bit dubious at the start because it was unknown. My child is bright and I was a bit worried that all the play would have held her back. But as it went on and on they didn't hold her back, (I saw that) they actually pushed her forward, which was good.

I think we would recommend it if somebody were to prove (that it works), but the proving of it is difficult.

Notice how the last comment and some others indicate how the failure to disseminate adequately the research findings about the efficacy of the curriculum to parents has led to unnecessary worry.

There was much evidence that parents' views were influenced, perhaps even skewed, by the knowledge of the selection procedure for secondary school ahead for the children.

Our concerns are if it doesn't work, .. is he going to be at a disadvantage? At the end of the day, he will be the first year of whatever replaces the eleven plus. And there will still be assessment of some degree and they are all facing the same assessment. Will he be at a disadvantage because he has come through the EC and it maybe didn't suit him?

I would like her to continue with a practical curriculum but the set up in Northern Ireland is that she will be in the first year group that doesn't do the eleven plus. I am worried that CCEA won't have an alternative and she will have to do (the transfer) and that the (EC) curriculum will affect it. I am concerned whether the EC is disadvantaging them against other children.

Because our older child is in P7 we are slightly more focussed on the eleven plus but it is there. It is ahead of him. It is something that we have to take into consideration. If our younger child was an only child or our first child we might be sitting thinking that it is fantastic and that we love it. And if we hadn't been talking to another child's mum,

about what he was doing, we would be thinking that it is great and that he loves school, no problem.

Probably in the back of my mind is because she will still have to do the eleven plus, my main concern is that the older child found it difficult although she passed it. That is my only concern, will she catch up enough that she will be able to do the eleven plus? Probably if there was no eleven plus, I wouldn't be as concerned. I can't say I am worrying about it all the time, but I do think about that, if she will catch up.

Appropriateness of the EC and its relation to the child's ability

Some parents suggested that the EC is suitable for all children, and some stated that the children's individual needs are met. Other parents felt the EC would be more suitable for less able children. Some of these parents did not recognise that brighter children should not be restricted by the EC.

I think a practically based curriculum is suitable for all children and can cater for all.

It seems such a natural way for kids to engage in learning.

They got it right. She was never bored and she never felt she couldn't cope or that the work was too much. She is now in 'proper schooling' (i.e. she is older) and is able to do anything. And it hasn't been a chore. I think people should trust the school and get the rewards. They are not pushed but they are doing so well.

All of the work is well laid out and it is a broad and balanced curriculum. The work is suitable for her level and there is a good balance.

The EC is fantastic because they look at each child as an individual. The teachers know the children individually and what they are capable of.

The homework is aimed at the right ability and she can do it independently.

I feel it is good for less able children and boys who aren't ready for formal education. I think that better children are held back. The EC is all geared to lower ability and average children.

The whole system discriminated against brighter kids. [Researcher's note: From the context, this comment implies that children are held back.]

I would recommend it to other parents if the above average and bright children were pushed further.

Child's attitudes to school and work

Numerous parents described their child's enjoyment of school. Even some of those whose overall attitude was quite negative acknowledged their child's happiness at school. None of the parents described their child as being unhappy at school and none described their child as disliking any particular subjects or topics, although a few parents mentioned that their child does not like homework. Here is a selection of the most interesting comments:

She loves it. We have never had a day where she hasn't wanted to go in or was nervous about it. I was frightened of some teachers when I was at school. It is complete enjoyment now. She loves every aspect of school.

She loves it. If she has to be off sick, it is devastating. I actually have to go to school and bring work home for her.

He loves school, and doesn't make excuses to avoid going to school. If he says he is sick, he really is sick. He misses school over the summer; he misses the teachers and the experience.

She loves it and there is never any bother. She adores school and runs in. She is very happy and contented.

She loves going to school, no problem at all.

I've never heard her complaining, and she has never said that she doesn't want to go to school or that she is bored or anything like that.

Both of my (EC) children talk excitedly about school.

She talks a lot about her friends and about what happened during the day and what they are doing in school.

Child's emotional and Social Development

Several parents expressed the advantage of the EC in terms of social and emotional development and highlighted the importance of this for their child. Several parents pointed out how confident their children are and attribute this to the EC. Only one parent considered that the traditional curriculum would have fostered confidence in her child.

It is beneficial and I have seen a big difference. Her confidence has returned. She lost that in the first (non-EC) school.

I think she is doing a lot better, not just academically but in terms of her confidence, self-esteem and her whole attitude.

I think that the child developing at his/her own pace and learning through play is a good idea, and not pushing them. They are time enough with academic work. At this early stage they need to develop emotionally.

I know that children need the academic stuff to get on, but they also need to learn in the right environment and the social stuff.

There are other children around here. I would say the way she is doing better is that she is a lot more responsible. They know the consequences of their actions.

I really do think that they have looked at their individual needs. And they have been able to match those needs all along. She has now come to P4, and I do feel that in those foundation years she has been supported well, particularly in her social and emotional development, which I think is the crucial factor. I honestly think that if she had entered a more traditional set-up, with more homework, I really do think that she would have been struggling particularly socially and emotionally. Her daddy died and her social and emotional development has always been, for me, number one. The EC has facilitated that. It has been perfect, because she has been supported by the teachers.

My child is shy but she is more outgoing since the EC.

Yes I think that the EC has made her more confident.

That is one thing that I have found with the EC. She has a lot more confidence than my older daughter.

I think it (traditional curriculum) would have done her confidence a lot more good, because she would have realised how capable she is. I don't think she realises how capable she is.

Children's achievement

Literacy Some parents expressed satisfaction with their child's progress in literacy, and were able to make comparisons to siblings and other children of similar age. Interestingly, one insightful parent described her child as being in a weak reading group, but considered her to be progressing well. As in previous years, some parents described their children as 'taking off' in achievement, indicating that they suddenly noticed rapid improvement. Parents made comparisons between older siblings who had learned to read using flashcards and some felt that their younger (EC) children had better ability to read unfamiliar words. As with previous years parents also commented on their child's pleasure in reading. Some mentioned that their children did not want to continue with shared reading as they wanted to read independently and had the skills to do so.

Brilliant! She is in the top group in the class. Towards the end of P2 her group had actually moved onto P3 books. They didn't say that they had reached the end of their [curriculum] and stop; they brought the books down from P3 for them so that they could carry on and weren't held back in any way whatsoever.

She would be in the weaker group. There are 5 groups, and she would be the second one up. She gets on really well. She is making progress and she will be reading fine. You can't relate that (weakness) to the EC; she is bilingual. In everybody's eyes, she is doing well.

My older child took off in reading at the start of P2.

She can sound out words. My other kids couldn't read a word if it wasn't on their word list. My older child could memorise the word list and knew what word was coming next. My youngest child is reading it. I am not saying that she is a genius and she is not above average. I think it must be too do with the EC..

The school my older girls were at had word boxes and they learned to read by recognition. They just learned the words off. Although the younger girl didn't have word boxes, her reading just happened. She can read anything. If she comes across a word she doesn't know she works at it until she gets it.

She is a fluent reader and reads with expression. She is happy to read and loves reading. She reads to her younger sister and brother. She still enjoys me reading to her at night.

A big thing is that they enjoy it and don't feel under pressure to do it (reading).

When he took off (it took a year and a half at the start) he seemed to read and read and there was no stopping him. He begs to go to Eason's to look for new books. I can't keep up with the demand.

For most of the early years we did a paired reading and numeracy scheme at home. It got to the stage when I was happy with him reading on his own. He prefers to read by himself than for me to read for him. He can tackle almost any word.

Other parents in the negative group expressed concerns about their child's progress in literacy. Two parents were concerned that their child may have special difficulties and that these were not being addressed by the teachers or school. Some of the comments below indicate that parents did not think their child was challenged enough. **This may be an indicator that some children are not challenged effectively or it may mean that parents have not been given the information to enable them to support progress.** Over the years of the project, so many parents have made similar points about challenging high achievers that there is strong evidence building that a few teachers may not realise that children could move on more quickly. Such a reluctance to move forward might be due to a failure in assessment, leading to low expectations by teachers. Some of the negative comments also suggest that there is a lack of phonics instruction and as a result, children lack word attack skills.

She is not pushed enough with her reading. All of the children do the work which is suitable for the bottom children.

She doesn't like the basic reading books and gets bored with them. It is a fight for homework because the books are too simple.

She doesn't read as much as the oldest would have done. She would start a book and read a couple of pages and then just leave it.

I think the old flash card system worked brilliantly.

My son went through Letterland. He learned the letter and its sound and a character such as 'a' is for 'Annie Apple'. She got words first without the letter sounds. (My EC child) can't sound out letters.

I think they should learn letters, for example, 'a' and then to add another letter, such as, (adding) 't' or 's' to make bigger words.

They (children in other schools) seem to be a lot further ahead on their reading and writing and spelling. Our child couldn't get an eye test because he couldn't read the chart recently; it had to be done with symbols.

He hasn't moved on from high frequency words. We haven't moved onto bigger words yet. We are quite concerned about his reading.

Reading is a chore, she doesn't get any enjoyment. I think she is behind in reading.

She would ask me for the spelling of everything. She wouldn't try to spell for herself and couldn't sound it out for herself.

Last night I was doing some reading with her. When she came to a particular word, she was looking to the ceiling and trying to remember that word rather than sounding out the word. [Children often look to the ceiling to tune out distractions while they are thinking. Only if it is prolonged can it be certain that it is an avoidance tactic.]

Notice the evidence in the quotations above that the range of literacy pedagogy is very wide. For example, some parents say children can sound out words confidently: Others say that their children can't do it at all.

Numeracy While some parents seemed to be satisfied with numeracy others expressed concerns. On the other hand, one parent even acknowledged that her child has difficulty with numeracy but stated that she thought that the child would make progress by P5. Obviously, this parent trusted the teacher and the school. There was

some evidence that worksheets had not disappeared in all classes. Most parents thought mental maths was good, but not all did so.

Brilliant! It is all built up gradually. A lot of it is through basic practical things.

She likes everything. She enjoys the practical activities. At home she does formal work such as a sheet.

My older girl is nervous about maths. My younger child looks at a more complicated problem as a quiz that she works out. I know every (child) is different but I think it has been a great start for her.

She would struggle a bit with that. When she comes to P5 I think she will know it. I am not overly worried. She doesn't have a natural ability with numbers.

She is weak. She hasn't really grasped the concept of mathematical terminology, as in what is the difference between. That requires reading, so she would be slightly behind, because of her reading. She is making progress. She is doing really well. If it wasn't for the EC she would not have come as far. It would have required a lot of hard work for a traditional school to bring her to the level that she is.

I don't know whether it is due to the EC or the Numeracy Strategy but they are pulling them back. What a teacher did in P3 before they don't have to do until P5 now. Their knowledge of basic concepts is good and understanding is good. When I was doing maths I didn't understand it but they do now. I don't think mental maths is as good.

Sometimes when she is even sitting doing maths in front of me she seems to be dreaming. I wonder how she is working it out. It is almost like pot luck when she comes to the right answer. Sometimes she comes to something and I think that she has got to this stage in maths, but she can't remember the steps that she took before she got to this advanced stage. In mental maths she would be quick, as quick as I would expect her to be. But then no different, with the old system she would be just as quick and quicker.

My son applies maths more to everyday life. If my son goes to the shop he works out how much things will cost and the change. The other night they were working on their Christmas lists. My son worked out how much Santa would be spending. He worked out how much his presents would cost and how much her presents would cost and he worked

out that her presents would cost £52 more! My daughter [following the pre-existing curriculum] doesn't have those skills.

Handwriting Some parents were worried about the quality and teaching of handwriting. Some pointed out that they preferred the more formal approach to teaching handwriting.

Her hand writing skills are really poor. I think at age four they should be told to practice holding a pencil, regardless of what level they are at or what their abilities are at that stage.

Her handwriting is not as good as my older son's, but she enjoys writing. Her work can be messy and she would say herself that her work is 'scribbly'.

When she was writing her letters, she was starting her "e" at the bottom and working up, and the teacher said that would come to her this year, the proper way. To me by P3 she should have been writing her letters properly. I had asked if I should work with her at home, but they said that would come to her in P4.

My other children were concerned about the appearance of their work, and they were proud of it. She has got a laid back attitude towards it, which worries me in case she is like that in the classroom as well.

Sometimes what she offers as homework is just ridiculous - half rubbed out, written over again, capital letters stuck in the middle of it. And she does know those fundamental things that she should do with her handwriting but she is getting away with that.

Parents' views here are in accord with the growing belief of teachers that children should be taught to form letters properly from the beginning. However, parents may not know that children are allowed to make drafts and then do the work out neatly later.

General comparison to children educated in the traditional curriculum Some parents compared their children's general progress as better compared to children in the traditional curriculum. On the other hand, a number of parents believed that children in the traditional curriculum do better. Some parents were clearly torn between their

concerns from comparison with traditionally educated children and their tangible evidence that their children are making good progress.

For his ability, he is doing better. I don't think he could have done any better in any other school and still have been as happy.

She doesn't seem to be as advanced as my boy was at that same stage. It is hard not to compare them.

Worse (in the EC), most definitely. This might not be totally relevant to your question but there are other mums in school who do have concerns about it as well. I think in every way, he is just behind.

I feel that she would be more behind other people.

I don't think there will be any problem in the future with her. But I do think that she would have come on leaps and bounds with the old system.

All parents would benefit from being told about the pattern of achievement in EC classes, with no differences in reading and mathematics found by the end of KS1 in comparison to the children traditionally educated.

Knowledge about the Enriched Curriculum

The interviews provided information about parents' knowledge of areas relating to the EC including the reasons for changing to the EC, the use of play in learning, and the role of the school in informing parents about the EC.

Reasons for the change to the Enriched Curriculum Parents were asked whether they knew the reasons that the school changed to the Enriched Curriculum. Some parents appeared to be more knowledgeable about the reasons for the change to the Enriched Curriculum while others were quite vague.

Not really, I don't really know why. I thought maybe it was because of funding or something, maybe they got more funding, but I don't know for definite why they would have done it.

It was explained to us that this is the European's model that is used in Austria and Germany. I know that it goes back to cognitive development and the psychology of it all.

The principal always used the example of Denmark or Scandinavian country. They played for ages 4-6, they did this learning through play and then when they were 7 there was a massive jump, and they basically take on these two years within six weeks.

I have no idea.

Notice above the period of six weeks the parent describes. To the research team's knowledge, nobody responsible for teacher training has claimed such a short time frame, although a single term has been mentioned to researchers on more than one occasion. Taking all responses over the years of the project together, there is evidence that some parents have been told more detail on expected progress, but have not always fully understood the significance of what they were told.

Knowledge about play Some parents expressed their understanding of the value of play in learning in the early years. One parent who was generally negative did not value play and expressed the opinion that children should begin formal learning at an early stage.

If you ask her what she likes about school she tells you that she likes playing. She doesn't even know that she is learning. She is going to school, she likes playing, and she learns.

P1 does not just involve play; they are learning so much about literacy and numeracy without even realising it.

We were reassured that if they were ready for formal work they wouldn't be held back, I realise that structured play involves learning and not simply play.

It seemed to be what you would expect from a nursery class. When you hear sometimes what they are doing in nursery, he was P2 last year, and they are very similar.

Information given prior to the beginning of the Enriched Curriculum

One mother pointed out that she knew well in advance that the EC was in place in the school. Some parents felt that they had not been informed that the school would introduce the EC, and there was resentment that they did not have any choice about it.

My daughter had been in nursery before P1 and we knew it was in place. The principal explained about the EC in P1, for example, about reading and writing.

We didn't know that it was going to happen. It was just when we went to the pre-school meeting in the June before she was due to start P1.

We weren't told about the EC, until she started in P1, that the EC would be commenced.

Part of my concern would be that this was thrown at us. We were not given an option to opt out. We were not given the choice. And we had already enrolled at that stage. It was too late to be changing schools.

If you didn't want to do it you would have to take your child to a different school.

Continuing information about the Enriched Curriculum

Furthermore, although some parents felt informed about the progress of the Enriched Curriculum as their child moved through the year groups, many others felt that information decreased as the child progressed further up the school and were not happy about it.

There was an induction for P1 and it was very informative. I have been informed up to P5 as there are written reports etc.

The principal will explain the EC or give literature at any time. We don't get specific information now. There was a lot in P1 and P2, but nothing (since) apart from the questionnaire.

I think there appears to be a lack of information going out to parents, for example, about the EC. I feel happy enough, but I think that they could do more in terms of informing the parents.

We don't receive any information about the EC now.

I don't get information about the EC.

I think you could have a greater role with more information. My role is to support the school. But you could have a greater role if you had a better understanding to reinforce what teachers do. You could implement it in your own home.

I am not kept informed enough. I would prefer to have updates or letters more regularly. There was a meeting before she started about the EC but nothing since. I would like a specific evening about where the EC is going etc. At the start the principal had a meeting and he presented information about reading etc. It is very vague now. The meetings are more about the child's progress and not about the EC. They still provide information for the new intake but they should renew the information for the parents with children already in the system.

The parent's role in early-years education

Parents were asked to describe their role in their child's early-years education. They stated that their role was to provide a supportive environment and to assist the teachers and the school.

I think as a parent it is up to us to start before they go to school and to make sure they enjoy it. Then when the child is at school parents support them and help the school.

We are there to back up the school, as an extension of what happens in the school, and learning through activities at the weekend and going to the library.

I would say there was a lot expected of the parents, more so than in the traditional curriculum. More work has to be done at home. I don't think we were sent home adequate literature to tell us how we should be doing work at home, so I was doing it the traditional way.

Assessment of learning difficulties

Some parents were concerned that their children have certain difficulties and that these were not being recognised or dealt with.

I don't want to blame them and the way they are teaching for him being slow because he might have been like that anyway. One of the things is that with children who do struggle and are well behaved, the problem is not picked up. Whereas if he was causing mayhem in the classroom there would be something said about whether he has a problem, or his eyesight is poor, or his hearing is defective, or he has a problem.

I know for a fact that primary schools are not keen to pick up on special needs because they do not have the money and resources to deal with it.

We would be happier with them if they were telling us that he is not okay, and if they said that certain things are not right here.

One parent stated strongly that she queried the interpretation of the EC by the school and teachers.

They give up good work for the EC. I think schools' interpretation of the EC is incorrect. They say things like you shouldn't teach formal handwriting. I know that a child who is doing incorrect letter formation will have difficulty undoing the habit. They make blanket statements.

The home - school partnership

In 2004-2005 as in previous years, a small number of parents have reported difficulties in relations with the teacher or the school. These troubles range widely from a problem with bullying⁴, which the parent didn't feel was properly handled, to complaints about the same reading book being sent home time after time.

Relationship with teachers There was variation in the relationships with teachers. Some parents described the teachers as very approachable, and the school having an 'open door' policy, while others felt that they had more difficulty in discussing concerns with teachers.

There seems to be an open door policy.

⁴ It should be noted that this is the first time we have had a complaint related to bullying in an Enriched Curriculum class.

The teachers are very approachable. The principal is also very approachable and he knows every child as well as their family and background.

I would like to see the teacher more often.

We are told to make an appointment to see the teacher.

We would like to know where we are with this. And we don't have the opportunity.

Failure of the teacher to change books being taken home by the child is a complaint we have heard frequently from parents over the years of the project. In part, teachers believe it stems from the parent not understanding that books are sent home for different purposes on different occasions, implying a failure in communication to the parent. In a few cases, it does genuinely seem to be the case that children are not being kept provided with a supply of interesting books sufficient to maintain their motivational levels as high as possible. Some teachers may not appreciate that even the weakest children must be kept interested with a variety of reading material.

Parental complaints In asking teachers about parent complaints, it has become clear that they receive no training in handling parental complaints or requests for information. The road towards conflict is often exacerbated by the real, and often understandable, fear that some teachers have of parental pressure and anger. From the other perspective on this relationship, parent survey and interview data frequently highlight lack of information from school. It is the most common complaint, even from schools with which parents are otherwise delighted. Teachers would welcome guidance on dealing with parents.

Feedback for parents In our tender for Phase 2 of the evaluation, we mentioned the possibility of the evaluation team giving feedback to parents. As part of that exercise, it may be possible to go some way towards allaying the fears of parents that have resulted from poor communication. Simple information, such as the slower maturity rate for boys, would make a big difference to parents' understanding.

The parent's role in early-years education

Parents were asked to describe their role in their child's early-years education. They stated that their role was to provide a supportive environment and to assist the teachers and the school.

I think as a parent it is up to us to start before they go to school and to make sure they enjoy it. Then when the child is at school parents support them and help the school.

We are there to back up the school, as an extension of what happens in the school, and learning through activities at the weekend and going to the library.

I would say there was a lot expected of the parents, more so than in the traditional curriculum. More work has to be done at home. I don't think we were sent home adequate literature to tell us how we should be doing work at home, so I was doing it the traditional way.

6. Issues arising from the teachers' and parents' evidence

Section 5 concludes the exposition of the supplementary evidence. In this section, the evidence from a wide variety of the evaluation sources is drawn together to illuminate more global issues that are of interest to many stakeholder groups. Four main issues are considered here; developmentally appropriate practice and the level of teacher skill it demands, the pedagogy of literacy and finally, parents as a resource for supporting children's learning. The section concludes with the recommendations.

6.1 The nature and role of developmentally appropriate practice

What does 'developmentally appropriate practice' (DAP) mean?

The seminal work in this field in regard to the early years is Bredekamp (1987), an exhaustive review undertaken for the American National Association for the Education of Young Children. However, considerable work has taken place since that review (National Association of the Education of Young Children, 1997). Whilst the core meaning of developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) is still the same, it is open to several different emphases. For some people, the term primarily implies a

maturational aspect to development. For others, it chiefly implies suitable teaching approaches/strategies for a given age group, particularly play-based and child-led/child-centred learning in the early years. Still another emphasis concentrates on the media through which children learn at different stages of development. The child's earliest learning is often through action (whence comes eventually comes activity-based learning), gradually moving towards increasing levels of discourse and social interaction and leading ultimately to increasing learning through the written word and other symbol systems. Immediately, one can see that there is overlap between these positions and most authorities and practitioners adopt an eclectic mix from them, either implicitly or explicitly. However, people still argue about the *precise* meaning of the phrase DAP. This lack of complete consensus has arisen because the situation is much more complex than it would appear at first sight. Research has thrown up a number of questions to which we cannot get truly definitive answers about what is best for young children, without undertaking studies that would be very costly and complex because of the number of factors that can impact on a child's progress. For example, the question of what is the best content for the early-years curriculum is difficult to explore. With this context in mind, let us therefore explore some differing models of DAP and examine the likely effects of these models on teachers' practice.

The maturational view This view of DAP is tied up with the idea that children only become able to assimilate certain types of knowledge when their brains are 'ready'. At the broadest level, there has been much research to support this finding in the past, language being the most often cited example. There is a wealth of evidence that children's brains are best adapted to learn certain aspects of language, such as grammatical structure, in the pre-school years (See Kuhl, 2000, for an excellent review of the history and recent work). However, more recent findings tend to emphasise that the brain is more plastic than we used to think. It is no longer considered as completely appropriate to refer to 'critical windows' for certain domains of learning; rather we should point to a specific age when it is easier to learn certain things, although not impossible to learn them at other times. In this context, people are able to argue that children should be taught letter knowledge and other pre-reading skills in pre-school, any time from three years upwards, provided these things are taught mainly through stories, games and play. It is clear that it *is* possible for

many children to begin to assimilate this knowledge even before the age of four (Sammons et al., EPPE Technical paper 8a, 2002 and similar findings for the related Northern Ireland project, EPPNI). Such tuition is also a normal part of the home experience of some children. The question remains, ‘Is it wise to teach such things at that age or would they be displacing other learning that might contribute more to the child’s cognitive development in the longer term, by means of fostering good learning dispositions for example?’ Only long-term longitudinal studies would answer these questions, even in part, with long-term in this case implying following the children into adulthood. The long duration and detail necessary for such studies has already been amply demonstrated by the EPPE study (EPPE Final Report, 2004): Early cognitive gains arising from pre-school education have been shown to persist until the end of KS1 but are reducing in size as the child gets older (See EPPE Technical Paper 11, 2004). These gains may or may not wash out completely in the longer term (The EPPE 3-11 project continues the work of EPPE and is exploring this question further). Significantly, the EPPE study has demonstrated that on the evidence so far, the best pre-school centres in terms of both cognitive and social progress are balanced; “they view cognitive and social development of the child as complementary”.

When is DAP appropriate? A further view of DAP, less often seen in Enriched Curriculum Year 1 and Year 2 teachers but evident in some Year 3 and Year 4 teachers, concerns a lack of full appreciation of the role of activity-based learning as children get older; some teachers accept the Enriched Curriculum model of DAP for the earliest years but thereafter consider it less appropriate. However, although there will certainly be some big differences in a developmentally appropriate approach as children move towards the end of KS1 and into KS2, play or activity that involves children in doing something *related to deep conceptual learning* still remains very important. Some people can erroneously assume that oral activities are sufficient early preparation for the introduction of a new concept at this stage in the child’s career; this is not always so. To fully appreciate best practice in pedagogy, one must understand the conceptual underpinnings of cognitive growth. Consider mathematics as an example. There is very considerable research work on children’s mathematical development, including the specified order in which conceptual growth takes place in domains such as addition and subtraction; the pathway is the same in all children, although some go through the stages quicker than others. (See Wright, Martland and

Stafford, 2000 for a good summary related to early mathematics.) An understanding of this pathway⁵ enables teachers to provide the most appropriate scaffolding for facilitating learning progress. In addition to showing the order of acquisition of concepts, there is excellent research on the mechanisms by which children progress from the enactive⁶ or instrumental⁷ stage of understanding a given concept to full deep understanding of that concept (See for example, Gray and Tall, 1994). To put it another way, one can say that children understand a lot about adding in procedural terms before they understand addition as the concept of combining two sets; they know that you get the answer by counting before they acquire the deeper understanding. This ‘procedural first, conceptual later’ pattern of development remains the same whether children are doing basic addition, fractions or even higher level concepts. Turning back to the enactive phase of learning, it is not until children are about seven or eight (depending on individual development) that this phase of learning can *begin* to take place easily in imagination. In this context, learning through symbols alone (including pictures and diagrams) cannot take the place of manipulation of real objects for children of this age. Even amongst older children, suitably designed hands-on activities will always be helpful in furthering understanding because (i) they reduce the cognitive load on memory and processing in the brain and (ii) they can often provide several alternative visual representations of the concept in question. In coming to a clear understanding of this theoretical model of concept acquisition, one may see also why assessment of procedural aspects of learning alone will not be sufficient; it is only through direct interaction with the child that the informed teacher can detect and correct the barriers to continued conceptual growth. Hence, one is led to envisage the value of Assessment for Learning.

The effect of different models of DAP on the teacher’s pedagogy

An extreme model of DAP, for example a purely maturational model, will impact on teacher behaviour. In previous reports, we have drawn attention to teachers who apparently waited for children to be ‘ready to read’ instead of *preparing* the children to be ready to move on (Sproule et al. 2003). This misunderstanding of DAP has been noted in other studies (Bodrova, Leong and Paynter, 1999). It can lead to the

⁵ Eunice Pitt’s (1999) work on early mathematics learning is clearly informed by a deep understanding of the early maths pathway; that is one of the reasons why EC teachers have found it so valuable.

⁶ Learning by manipulation of real objects.

⁷ Learning by using a procedure to achieve a given goal.

erroneous perception that the EC is intended to hold children back. Teachers who misperceive a DAP curriculum as holding children back may argue, perhaps with a strong body of personal evidence behind them, that at least the brighter children *can* be taught to read at the age of four, and therefore *should* be taught to do so. They believe, quite rightly, that this approach is fine provided it is done without putting inappropriate pressure on the children and within a rich literacy environment. Obviously though, if such teachers attach undue importance to moving all children on to guided reading and phonics within the first year, they will be in more danger of putting undue pressure on some children. On the other hand, confident teachers who are well informed about DAP understand that all children are being taught reading in Year 1 in the EC classroom; it is just that some are at the emergent literacy stage and lack the prerequisites for moving on to guided reading in the first year. The numbers who are ready to move on in any particular class will depend on the profile of that class, with some weak children being well in to the second year before moving on. As we have previously reported (*ibid.*), knowing when to move children on is a difficult balancing act for teachers; good theoretical knowledge and sufficient experience make these decisions easier for them but central guidance needs to be very clear in order to support those who are less adept.

In a point related to when to start guided reading, those teachers who take the short-term view of DAP and believe in an early start to reading for some children may underestimate the importance of activity-based learning and its role in building conceptual growth. That view may lead them to value only written work and perhaps assume that there is a pressure to get on as soon as possible to ‘real’ learning, where this implies the written word and symbolic representation of mathematics. On the other hand, DAP gradually becomes compatible with more ‘formal’ work depending on the rate of the individual’s development rather than on the year group. For example, when children have grasped early addition and subtraction *conceptually*, it becomes appropriate to slowly but surely introduce the learning of number facts because automaticity begins to become crucial in reducing the cognitive load when moving to higher level concepts.

To be totally child-centred is another extreme view of DAP. It implies, for example, that boys who want to spend the whole of playtime at the computer will be allowed to

do so, thus limiting their experience. Some teachers have reported to us that during training, they became confused as to whether the Enriched Curriculum was meant to be completely child led. No teacher went so far in her practice as to fully embrace this extreme but for many, it was an underlying tension and a source of distress because it was very much at odds with their professional judgment. More explicit emphasis placed on the EC as a balanced curriculum during training would address this misunderstanding.

Section summary In conclusion, the evidence has shown that some teachers have very strong views about appropriate content, appropriate teaching strategies and appropriate media for learning in the early years. These teacher viewpoints are underpinned by the teacher's mental model of DAP. Although all teachers have moved their practice towards the DAP model to some extent, each teacher's mental model is likely to affect the extent to which it moves towards the balanced EC model. At present, it appears unlikely that training has addressed DAP explicitly. Guidance would be more supportive for teachers if the nature of DAP could be discussed openly in training sessions, such that each teacher could feel their experience and contributions were valued. Ideally, training sessions could move teachers closer to a consensus on a balanced model of DAP, whilst allowing for some individual differences in teachers' beliefs and temperaments.

DAP and curriculum review From the beginning of the project, the evaluation team appreciated that the Enriched Curriculum was intended to take a balanced approach to DAP. A lack of pressure on children for early academic achievement and an emphasis on keeping the pace such that it would not hinder the development of good learning dispositions was evident but equally, sufficient challenge for children at any age was the ideal. Curriculum review has very largely confirmed that model.

6.2 Level of teacher skill required in a DAP classroom

In asking teachers to be developmentally appropriate in their approach, we are also asking them to have a very high level of skill. This is true whatever the emphasis in the teacher's model of DAP. Many instances of high-quality practice have been observed during the evaluation (Sproule et al., 2003, 2004) and we are now in a position to examine what that entails. Research has also moved forward during this

period. The role of direct interaction with the child has assumed increasing importance in early-years pedagogy in recent years (Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva, 2004). Let us consider what the teacher must do during an ideal developmentally appropriate interaction as an example of teaching skill.

The nature of teachers' interaction with children in DAP in Years 1 and 2 To teach successfully in a DAP model, teachers must regularly update their assessment of each child's current state of knowledge or skill but it is also implied that this will particularly often happen just prior to undertaking an interaction with a child, that is, the teacher will make a judgment on the spot. Not every early-years teacher will find this easy. In the first place, the youngest children in school are less articulate about what they know or can do than their older peers. As formal written assessment has been deemphasised in the EC, the teacher must rely on assessment through observation and interaction. The evidence from teachers is that not all have been accustomed to undertake such assessments before the Enriched Curriculum was in place. Many teachers reported continuing to find it very difficult, even after some experience of the EC. Following such an on-the-spot assessment, the teacher's first decision is whether to intervene or to leave an educationally fruitful activity to continue. Having determined that an intervention would be wise, perhaps during structured play time, the teacher must plan as she works. During an interaction, teachers must be able to work out the right questions to ask, comprising such considerations as, (i) whether an open or closed question would best fit the circumstance, (ii) what its content should be, and (iii) how to frame it in appropriate language for a given child. All the while, the teacher must have in mind a mental model of that child's stage of development and achievement. In a group situation, every child will have different needs and a compromise is often necessary. Having assessed the situation, teachers must design an intervention, usually an immediate response by the teacher. The response may be to scaffold the learning, extend the learning, encourage critical reflection, correct misconceptions, model thinking skills or any one of many other types of response. Again, this intervention/interaction should ideally be tailored to the individual, implying in theory a slightly different intervention for every member of the class or every group. It is desirable that it has additional qualities. The latest research at pre-school level has also pointed to

*sustained shared thinking*⁸ between teacher and child or small group, as being very important for optimum progress (Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva, 2004). As the word ‘sustained’ suggests, this implies more lengthy interactions than may have been customary under the pre-existing curriculum. The Enriched Curriculum is more flexible in this respect but let us think about how the classroom circumstances may limit opportunities to put it into operation.

The context of interactions These high quality teaching events must be achieved in the context of the teacher having many other tasks at hand. She feels she must watch her time in order to ‘get round’ the whole group or class and keep to her timetable. She must monitor whether groups are still on-task, manage the class discipline and she must often keep an eye on another member of staff. Clearly, these considerations tend to limit the time available for sustained shared thinking. Ideally, the EC requires that the teacher’s planning will also be flexible, able to take account of the children’s enthusiasms whilst maintaining a cohesive strategy for the lesson or activity.

Interaction and assessment When an intervention is finished, there is still often one more step; the teacher must record her assessment of the child and the intervention itself in some form, if not immediately, then at the end of the day⁹.

The value of teacher experience in DAP The level of multi-tasking required for much of this pedagogical process is of a very high order. Even experienced and gifted teachers freely admit that they cannot operate at such a high level all the time; rather, they strive towards an ideal, learning as they go. It is therefore not surprising that teachers have reported that student teachers find it very difficult to achieve this level

⁸ “An interaction, where two or more individuals work together in an intellectual way to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate activities or extend a narrative.” (Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva, 2004). This major UK government funded study and the associated Northern Ireland project, EPPE and EPPNI respectively, also highlighted the importance of a balance between freely chosen, yet potentially instructive, activities and adult-initiated focussed group activities. It is likely that best practice in early years school provision will eventually be recognised in England as providing for a gradual transition from this ideal pre-school environment towards more formal work in Years 3 and 4, exactly as the Enriched Curriculum describes good practice.

⁹ Many teachers carry a pad of Post-Its for this purpose.

of expertise for even a single lesson; it follows that many teachers believe that new teachers will find a DAP curriculum very challenging in their probationary year and will require a high level of support and guidance from senior staff.

Positive effect of DAP interactions on pedagogy On the positive side, there is evidence that the ongoing assessment and planning requisite in DAP can be characterised by deeper understanding of the child's capabilities and needs, once the teacher has learned to make the most of it. Thus interventions that are better matched to the needs of the child are enabled. One good example of this deeper assessment was the teacher who found Year 2 children confusing concepts of words and letters, a crucial piece of information which might never have come to light through formal written assessment or mere listening to the child reading. In mathematics also, we have many reports from interviews of teachers' better understanding of conceptual progress in their students; they have recognised the limitations of assessment through worksheets, which can disguise conceptual errors.

DAP for the teachers The pace of training should ideally acknowledge the high levels of skill required for effective DAP pedagogy and allow for individual teacher differences in pre-existing practice, underlying model of DAP and the individual's capacity for change. In essence, this would be bringing DAP to the training of the teachers themselves, that is, practicing what we preach.

6.3 The pedagogy of literacy

The current research model of best practice in brief

The evaluation findings on pedagogy of literacy must be read in the context of research on this topic. As has previously been pointed out in our 2001 literature review for CCEA (Sproule, Murray, Spratt, Rafferty, Trew, Sheehy and McGuinness, 2001), research into the pedagogy of literacy instruction no longer supports over reliance on any single component or method of teaching reading. Rather, very many studies have pointed to the importance of balance and the eclectic employment of any one of the variety of available pedagogical tools, as appropriate in a given set of circumstances (Snow, Burns and Griffin, 1998; Torgesen 2002). Torgesen, in agreement with numerous other researchers, points to the necessity of including high quality phonics in the teaching of reading, as an essential approach to decoding skills.

Equally, Torgesen points out that children need to be taught to enjoy reading if they are to engage in practice. Importantly for designing teacher training, he presents the evidence that the differences between different types of phonics programmes are very small compared with the difference between skilled and unskilled use of any given programme; teacher expertise in the implementation of a programme is more important than the exact form of the program, for example synthetic versus analytic programmes.

Pedagogy of phonics in EC schools

Although the evaluation team observed or heard about much high quality literacy pedagogy during the evaluation, there were instances of teachers using phonics in ways that did not amount to best practice. For example, teachers might use a phonics scheme but not use it in the systematic way that was intended. Sometimes a particular scheme was used in one year group in a given school and a different scheme in another. Some teachers found it difficult to discuss phonics at all during interviews; their understanding of the subject seemed to be too restricted to allow meaningful exchanges with the researcher. It would be fair to say that elements of phonics programmes are employed by all teachers but with greatly varying degrees of understanding and structure in their pedagogy. Such a finding is not particular to EC schools or to Northern Ireland schools. Similar findings were reported in a recent Ofsted HMI report for England (Ofsted 2001, p7). Nevertheless taken as a whole, the evidence suggests that relatively few EC or control children are likely to have been receiving *systematic* quality phonics instruction of the kind favoured by international consensus in the research community and recommended in recent research reviews (Torgesen 2002).

In the twelve schools new to the evaluation, the question of when to introduce phonics was once again a source of confusion, as it had been in the early years of the Enriched Curriculum. During training, a few teachers are still being left with the impression that they should not be using phonics at all *in the first year* (whether that was intended by training staff or not), and are at a loss as to how they should be teaching decoding skills. There was very little evidence that Enriched Curriculum training had addressed phonics explicitly (although other training may have done so). This precluded discussion during EC training sessions of important barriers to implementation of

phonics programmes, some of them related to teacher's implicit models of DAP and others not. For example, teachers often expressed preferences for a particular phonics scheme and were occasionally somewhat aggrieved if the school demanded that they use another one. Other teachers had some difficulty with integrating phonics seamlessly into the new approach. Most importantly of all, based on teachers' responses it appears that there is some resistance to implementing phonics programmes at a very early stage in the child's development in some of the classes in Enriched Curriculum schools, even for children who have acquired all the emergent reading skills that are a prerequisite for benefiting from phonics instruction. This may be due to these teachers perceiving tension between any phonics programme and the Enriched Curriculum approach. The teacher's opinion on this question is likely to be mediated by the teacher's model of DAP as described above. This perception that early phonics is wrong could impact on future implementation of phonics programmes across all Education and Library Boards. We suggest that teachers be made aware of the research endorsing phonics and reassured that it can be employed as part of a developmentally appropriate programme, provided it is implemented under three conditions, (i) when it is developmentally appropriate for individuals in terms of prerequisite skills being in place, (ii) when it is employed as one element of a rich and balanced approach to the teaching of reading, and (iii) when it is done systematically.

Pedagogy for weaker readers

There are two main barriers to progress for weaker readers that have been consistently identified during the evaluation. Firstly, there is the necessary special quality of phonics instruction for weak readers and secondly, the question of suitable literature for weaker children.

Phonics for weak readers Even in otherwise exemplary practice, any unsystematic or confused approach to the teaching of decoding skills could be impacting most adversely on the low ability group of children. **Torgesen (2002) identifies three key requirements for the instruction of children at risk of reading failure; it must be more phonemically explicit, more intensive and more supportive.** The evidence suggests that many teachers do not understand the extent of these requirements. All practitioners we have interviewed understand that brighter children will learn to read

whatever the method (and this is supported by the research literature); they know that brighter children are quick to observe patterns in decoding and to generalise from them. They may not realise the extent to which weaker children need to have letter-sound patterns systematically and explicitly brought to their attention, although all do have some appreciation of the value of repetition for weak students.

What is meant by a systematic programme? Developmentally appropriate (often commercially available) structured phonics programmes start with a small number of easily distinguished letter-sound correspondence patterns and build them up *in order of difficulty*, providing plenty of practice and recapitulation along the way. They do not follow the order of the alphabet.

Being explicit with children has a lot to do with sharing the learning goals with them, but it also means providing repeated clear simple explanations of the concepts of phonics, such as the difference between a letter's name and the sound it makes or the nature of a syllable. Furthermore, it is about the recognition that if the weak reader misses a lesson or a longer period of instruction, he or she has no resources to fill in the gap for themselves. It is increasingly important to explain to them as they get older that they have missed something and that they should try to catch up. Thus, they are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning.

For a very gifted teacher, it may not be quite so important to follow a structured programme exactly because a gifted teacher is monitoring progress almost automatically and changing her approach as needed. For a less gifted or less experienced teacher, a suitable phonics programme provides a structure around which she can organise her planning, without having to think about the order in which new orthographic relationships should be presented.

Practice for weak readers Unfortunately, **it is well established that the children who most need practice in reading are the least likely to engage in it** (Torgesen 2002). Typically, good readers engage in ten times or more the amount of practice compared with that engaged in by weak readers. It is thus easy to see that the weak reader will have difficulty in closing the gap on their stronger peers, even if all the pedagogical support desirable is in place.

Weaker children also require more repetition in order to embed learned skills to the point where they become automatic thus eventually acquiring fluency; they need to expand their experience at a given level before moving on, thus needing a greater number of books available at the lower levels. The judicious use of resources; whole-class teaching, small-group teaching, individual teaching, parent support, buddy schemes and peer tuition can also help to realise the high degree of repetition needed (Torgesen, *ibid.*).

There is an appreciation in almost all schools that there is a need for a variety of reading material requiring only lower level reading skills, obviously for beginning readers but also for older weak readers. However, some schools accord it less priority than others. Most schools are placing emphasis on building and renewing stocks of books but others face competing demands on their limited budget. Some schools therefore continue to struggle with very limited reading resources for weak readers, sometimes not realising sufficiently the great importance of children reading a variety of texts in fiction and non-fiction. Non-fiction was felt by several EC teachers to be particularly important for boys and is reported to be underrepresented in stocks in some schools. Lack of resources to give breadth of reading experience will impact on weak readers more than on able readers, as they need to build confidence and fluency with texts that are at their 95% level, that is, only one word in 20 is unknown to them (Torgesen, *ibid.*). Many weak readers are also less likely to have suitable books available at home.

Use of available resources Too many parents complained to the evaluation team that children brought home books that were too easy. This may reflect a lack of information to parents, as we have reported before, in that they are not being told how to use these texts. (These texts may be sent home in order to use them in comprehension activity.) However, several parents did report children taking home the same book for a longer time (weeks) than was reasonable for useful comprehension or any other activity that the researchers could imagine. This suggests that some teachers are not encouraging independence and/or private practice in reading skills. Again, this supplementary practice is of paramount importance to weaker readers.

6.4 Parents as a resource for supporting learning

Taking all the evidence together, it appears that many schools are not realising the degree to which parents can support their child's learning: They don't realise the potential of parents as a useful resource. Parents are not normally skilled pedagogues but they have the advantage of being able to offer extensive one-to-one support for learning, whereas a teacher will have very limited one-to-one time with each child. Given the right encouragement and information, research has repeatedly shown that parents can make a difference and books are being written about it how it could be done (Weinberger, 1966 is one example but there are many others equally good). A small outlay in terms of teacher time informing parents can thus have real advantages in the long run.

Section 6.3 and 6.4 summary Given that reading is fundamental to accessing almost every other part of the curriculum, all stakeholders accept its central importance, as the evaluation has shown. As well as implementing phonics training therefore, we reiterate our recommendation that the authorities find ways to ensure that all children have access to a wide variety of reading materials, that teachers are made aware of the importance of reading practice and that parents are recruited to support their children's learning wherever possible.

Recommendations

Many of the recommendations included in the Year 5 report are directly related to the issues discussed in Section 6 above. We therefore reproduce them here for convenience.

By those responsible for central policy and implementation:

1. 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.
2. 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 (including phonics), 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.

3. 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 as and when children become able.
4. Ideally, KS2 teachers should receive more information about the ways in which EC children have been taught in KS1 and how their stage of the curriculum can be adapted both to accommodate and to build on the experiences of EC children.
5. 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. In relation to the forthcoming changes, it should be borne in mind that all our previous reports have drawn attention to the central importance of making available sufficient resources and training to implement developmentally appropriate practice successfully. It is appropriate also to remember the success of teacher cluster groups in this context.
6. 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:

7. 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.

8. There should be clear, proactive leadership from the principal and senior management, demonstrating confidence in the Enriched Curriculum and support for its implementation. Senior staff should visit classrooms as often as is feasible and monitor progress.
9. The school should have a short written plan for implementing the Enriched Curriculum at all levels, making links with KS2.
10. There should be arrangements for formal dissemination of ideas and experience of training between teachers within and across schools, for example through staff training days. Articulation of and reflection about practice appear to be important for change (Moyles, Adams and Musgrove, 2002). Informal dissemination of ideas should also be encouraged.
11. There should be peer coaching for teachers who are new to an Enriched Curriculum school or are having difficulties implementing the Enriched Curriculum.
12. Teachers should be advised to reflect on their practice frequently, both formally and informally. They should be encouraged to video themselves privately and to use the videos to improve their practice.

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