

**The Early Years
Enriched Curriculum
Evaluation Project: Third year report**

*This report should be read in conjunction with
previous reports*

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1. Introduction

The Early Years Enriched Curriculum Project is now well into its fourth year. The first cohort of children, from the Shankill group of six schools, is currently in Year 4. The first cohort of children from the Contrasting Areas group of six schools is now in Year 3. The two groups of schools are demonstrably different on many of the baseline measures and with respect to many of the characteristics of the intake. There are therefore two studies in operation, one in each group of schools. These will be referred to henceforth as the Shankill study and the Contrasting Areas (CA) study. This report deals with the findings from the third year of the project, that is to say from the school year 2002 – 03.

In the third year of the project, evaluation again comprised five strands:

1. Documentation of the nature and form of the Enriched Curriculum across all the Education and Library Boards in Northern Ireland from data obtained in interviews, through training documents supplied to teachers and through informal discussions with personnel connected with the project.
2. Attainment testing on the children in the intervention (Enriched Curriculum) and control groups.
3. Comparison of the child's experience in the intervention and control groups through structured observation using Walsh's Quality of Learning Instrument.
4. Exploring the views of teachers about the Enriched Curriculum via questionnaires and interviews.
5. Accessing the views of parents about the Enriched Curriculum via a survey and interviews.

This current report will present the analysis of the data on attainment measures gathered at the end of the school year 2003 – 03, together with analysis of the views of teachers and parents and the findings from the observation study carried out in February 2003 in the classrooms of teachers new to the project last year.

It will be reported, in Section 2 of this document that Enriched Curriculum children in Shankill schools have caught up with control groups on tests of reading and mathematics. In line with the pattern of data from Shankill Enriched Curriculum children in their second year, Year 2 children in Contrasting Areas schools have not yet caught up with controls on tests of reading and mathematics.

It will become evident, that support for the programme from teachers and parents remains very strong in both groups of schools. This evidence will be presented in Section 3 and Section 4 for teachers and parents respectively. The great majority of teachers remain positive but support for the programme is more measured than in previous years. Year 3 teachers in Shankill schools continue to have concerns expressed last year by their Year 2 counterparts in relation to literacy and handwriting. A number of Year 2 teachers in Contrasting Areas schools have some concerns over literacy and handwriting but are otherwise very supportive of the programme. The great majority of parents who responded were very supportive of the programme. Only a tiny minority of parents are negative but a few other parents have nuances of concern, also around literacy and handwriting.

We believe that publication of the results in this report will do much to reassure teachers and parents alike.

In Section 5 of this report, it will be demonstrated, using Walsh's Quality of Learning Instrument, that the classroom experience of children under the Enriched Curriculum in Year 3 in Shankill schools has not been rated as highly in many classes as in other years of the project. In Contrasting Areas schools, there is also more variability in scores but this is mostly explained by the absence of the trained teachers on maternity leave.

In Section 6, the key recommendations which the evaluation team believes are the most important in terms of formative assessment of the project will be summarised.

It is intended that this report should be read in conjunction with the previous reports in June 2001 and June 2002.

Key findings

- **In the Shankill group of schools, there is no significant difference on average between Year 3 Enriched Curriculum children and Year 3 control group children on performance in reading and mathematics attainment tests.** Enriched Curriculum children have equalled the performance of controls.
- In relation to children tested on reading at the end of Year 3 in Shankill schools, high-ability children are doing relatively well compared with high-ability children in control groups who followed the pre-existing curriculum. The high-ability children in the control group did not perform as well as the low-ability children in the same control group relative to the United Kingdom national profile. This suggests that the Enriched Curriculum may be helping high-ability children in the Shankill schools to fulfil their potential to a greater extent than the pre-existing curriculum.
- In relation to children tested on reading at the end of Year 3 in Shankill schools, low-ability children have yet to match the performance of comparable controls in the year-ahead group. This is believed to be due to a combination of factors: Children in this group have not been doing guided reading for a sufficient time for their performance to 'take off' and many have not received the additional support in Year 2 which would have been provided under the pre-existing curriculum. It is anticipated that there will still be a small group of children in Year 4 who will require more intensive help in reading, as research shows to be the case for any system of teaching reading. Nevertheless, it is expected that a proportion of this low-ability group will "take off" in Year 4.
- In the Contrasting Areas group of schools, Year 2 Enriched Curriculum children have not yet caught up with Year 2 control group children on performance in reading and mathematics attainment tests. The pattern of data is very similar to that which emerged from the Shankill schools last year, suggesting that the majority of children have not been on guided reading or recorded arithmetic for a sufficient length of time to close the gap with control groups.

- In Year 4, there was a variety of evidence to suggest that the early focus on oral language in the Enriched Curriculum has fallen away to some extent.
- **Overall, teachers continue to be very positive about the project but in a more measured way than in earlier years.** Some teachers in both groups of schools have concerns about literacy and handwriting skills. The evaluation team believes this unease is at least partly due to external pressures to produce high performance in literacy as children approach the end of Key Stage 1, coupled with a perception on the part of teachers that expectations for the outcomes for the Enriched Curriculum have been set at an unrealistically high level by senior staff and/or outside professionals. Teachers continue to be very positive about numeracy skills.
- **The great majority of parents continue to be very supportive of the project but as with teachers, the support is more measured than in earlier years.** Almost all parents are extremely positive about perceived achievement in mathematics and about the social and emotional development of their children. Some parents have concerns about literacy but at present, most believe that the perceived gains for their children outweigh the perceived disadvantages. Again, the evaluation team believes that parents are feeling the impact of the public pressure to achieve in literacy. When the Year 3 results are released to the public, this should ameliorate parental anxiety.
- **The provision of adequate training and support for teachers remains as issue of vital importance for the future success of the project.** At the time of interview, Year 3 teachers in Shankill schools felt that training had been very inadequate, although further training has since been given. There is some solid supportive evidence for that lack of training in poor scores for Walsh's Quality of Learning Instrument in those classes and in Year 1 and Year 2 classes in which teachers have not received full training.
- Happily, the mixed messages evident in training for teachers in 2001-02 have not been a feature of the 2002-03 year. However, **teachers need further clarification on a number of matters. The nature of play, the role of ability groups, the role and importance of oral language development, advice on how to deal with parental concerns and the promotion of parents as co-educators are the most important issues for staff training.**
- Classroom assistants remain a very desirable resource in Year 3, particularly for schools in the Shankill area.
- If the project is not to suffer from curriculum dilution in practice, the evaluation team believes that **authorities such as CCEA, the school inspectorate and school principals must be agreed on policy and be proactive in promoting it.** If this course of action is not pursued, teachers and/or parents may lose confidence in aspects of the curriculum. Teachers and parents have to deal with a context of negative comments from those in the wider community who are misinformed about the nature of the curriculum and about its outcomes.
- Education and Library Boards outside Belfast may find it helpful to take advantage of the experience of Belfast Education and Library Board in regard to training and implementation of the Enriched Curriculum. Teachers experienced and capable of demonstrating good practice in the Enriched Curriculum are also a very valuable resource.
- It would be helpful to have a named person in each Education and Library Board to whom teachers, schools or parents could refer inquiries.

- In recent times, it has become increasingly unacceptable to keep parents at arm's length in relation to anything which affects their child/ren in either health or education. Our research shows that parents are hungry for information about what is happening in school. A great deal of information is already available for those who know how to look for it but not all parents can access it. A centrally conceived information programme for parents about schools, teaching methods, curricula, new education projects and guidance for parents working with children at home, would therefore seem to be a sensible way to move forward. It would be ideal if all organisations with authority in the field of education in Northern Ireland could subscribe to this information programme. Information should be available in a variety of formats.
- Given the success of outcomes in Year 3 in the Shankill schools, it would provide important encouragement if teachers and parents were informed about that success as soon as possible.

2. Progress in attainment

2.1 Section summary

Progress in attainment in the school year 2002 – 03 has been marked by Enriched Curriculum children in Shankill schools ‘catching up’ with control groups on reading and mathematics tests. It is pleasing to note that the higher ability children in Shankill schools, who did not do as well as expected under the more traditional curriculum, did particularly well in reading under the Enriched Curriculum at the end of Year 3. It is important for the reader to bear in mind that this success has been achieved in the pilot group of the project. All teachers in the project have said that they expect to do better during the second and subsequent years.

In line results from the previous year in Shankill schools, children in Contrasting Areas schools have not yet caught up with controls groups on reading and mathematics tests at the end of Year 2. *The pattern is very similar to that found in Shankill schools:* There is every reason to suppose that children in these schools will also catch up with controls over their third year.

The testing programme continues on schedule. There are now 1072 children on the database, when both groups of schools are included. All children, rather than just a sample of half the children, in Year 3 and Year 4 of Shankill schools were tested on the age-appropriate version of Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPS). This test yields standardised scores in reading and mathematics. Similarly, all children in Years 2 and 3 in the Contrasting Areas group of schools were also tested on PIPS. The reason for increasing the size of the sample was to minimise the possibility of missing significant effects through failing to have a sufficiently large sample. There was no difference between the results of statistical tests taken from the small and large samples. The evaluation team is now satisfied that we can rely on the results from the smaller sample.

Those children in Contrasting Areas schools who were in the original sample were tested on the Boehm Test of Concept Development.

NB: Many factors influence progress in reading and mathematics. Many of these are beyond the control of the teacher and/or school. No certain predictions can be made about individual or group outcomes at a later stage from these data. However, sometimes the data show trends or patterns which set up expectations of probable future performance. These are discussed where appropriate.

A grand summary of PIPS results is presented in Table 2.3 on page 15.

2.2 Shankill Schools: End of Year 3 results

PIPS is a test of reading and mathematics attainment which is standardised on a huge national sample (tens of thousands). It is administered by the Curriculum, Evaluation and Management Centre (CEM Centre) at the University of Durham. PIPS is standardised on a mean of 50 and a standard deviation of 10 points. It is important to remember, when interpreting PIPS data, that a child who scores say, 45 standardised

points, and makes average progress, will score 45 points again at the next occasion of testing. For a child's score to rise, he or she must make more than one year's average progress in a year.

Results on PIPS tests are summarised in Table 2.1, including comparison with controls (who took the Year 3 tests at the end of the previous school year). **Over the school year 2002 – 03, Enriched Curriculum children's scores in mathematics improved by 5.2 standardised points on average and in reading by 3.8 standardised points.** The standard deviation in reading continues to be lower for the Enriched Curriculum group than for the control group, indicating that the teachers are addressing a more homogeneous class in terms of attainment. **None of the differences between Enriched Curriculum groups and control groups is statistically significant**, either in terms of attainment at the end of Year 3 or in terms of progress over the first three years in school.

Table 2.1: Summary of PIPS results in Shankill schools

	Mean standardised score	Standard deviation
EC end Year 3 reading	43.8	8.0
Control end of Year 3 reading	45.0	9.2
EC progress* in reading over 3 years	-4.2	
Control progress in reading over 3 years	-2.5	
EC end Year 3 maths	44.9	9.3
Control end of Year 3 maths	46.1	7.5
EC progress* in maths over 3 years	-2.8	
Control progress in reading over 3 years	-2.1	

EC- Enriched Curriculum group

*Progress refers to the difference between end of Year 3 scores and baseline scores

Ability effects in reading

Differences between Enriched Curriculum children and controls were not even across the ability range in reading. Figure 2.1 illustrates the attainment at the end of Year 3 as a function of the baseline total score. Baseline total score is used rather than baseline reading score because the former is a better predictor of future performance. In Figure 2.1, it is apparent that the regression lines which model the behaviour of the average child in the group show high-ability Enriched Curriculum children are on average doing better than their control counterparts. Looking at the low-ability end of the spectrum, it is apparent that there are a few low-ability children doing very poorly, whilst others are doing very well. One of the reasons for the appearance of a very low achieving Enriched Curriculum group is that these children would, in former years, have been getting special needs tuition in reading by this stage. Teachers in some schools reported that this was no longer the case. Special needs tuition has been cut or severely reduced. It is apparent that some of these children will need special needs tuition next year. As Torgesen (2002) has reported, there is no method of teaching reading which will obviate the requirement for special needs teaching altogether: A

minimum of 5% of children will need more individually tailored tuition, whatever the method of teaching.

It is appropriate to remind the reader of the levels of difficulty teachers often face in Shankill schools. One teacher in Year 3 had 11 out of 14 children in her class designated as having special needs. In addition, many of the schools are affected by the social unrest in the area.

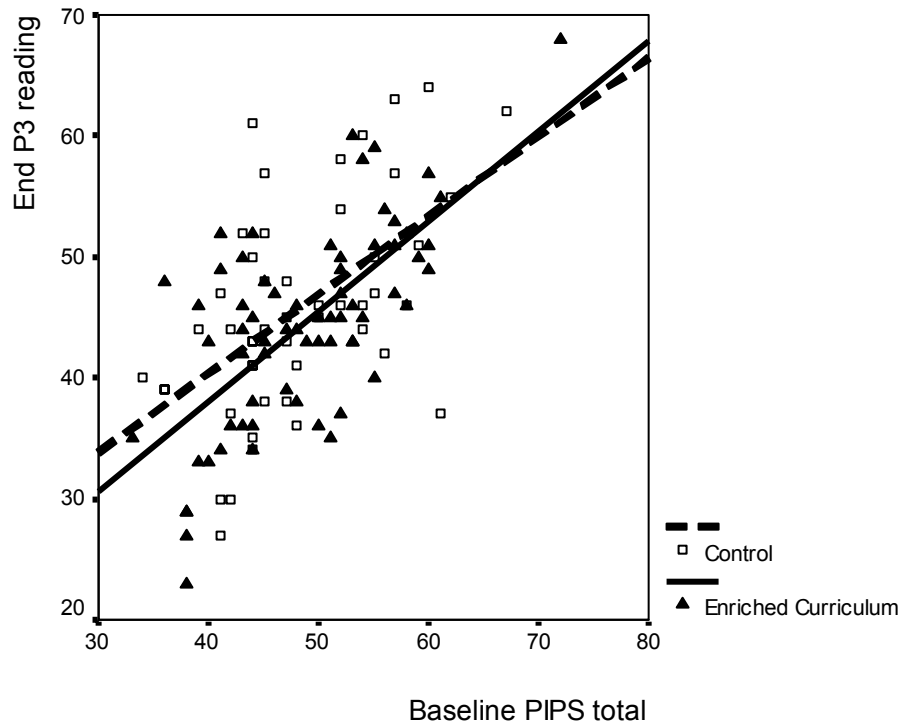


Figure 2.1
Reading attainment in Enriched Curriculum and control groups as a function of baseline

Ability effects in mathematics

Ability effects in mathematics were minimal, as Figure 2.2 confirms.

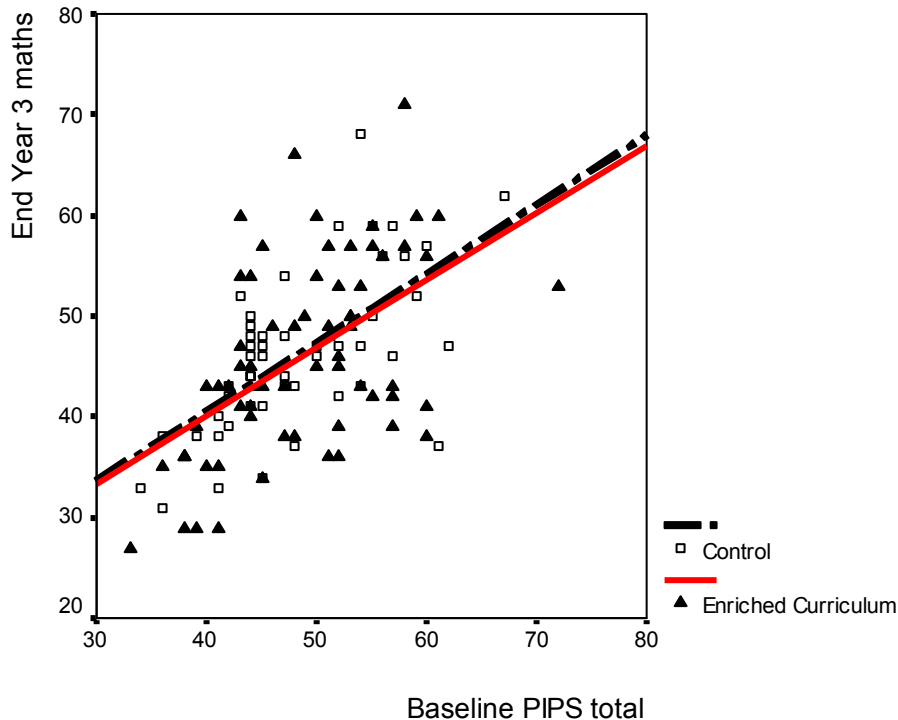


Figure 2.2

Mathematics attainment in Enriched Curriculum and control groups as a function of baseline

Gender effects

In the Enriched Curriculum group, 57% of the sample are boys and 43% are girls.

There was no significant difference between boys and girls on progress in reading between baseline and the end of Year 3. There was no significant difference between boys and girls in attainment in reading at the end of Year 3.

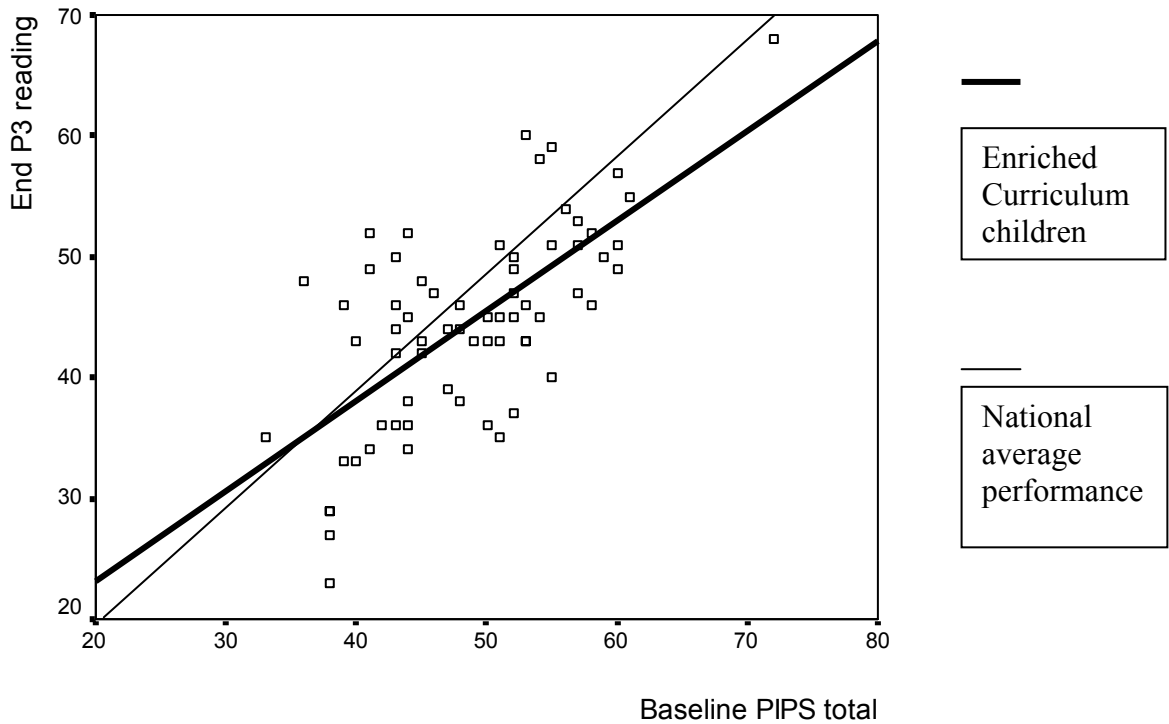
There was no significant difference between boys and girls on attainment in mathematics between baseline and the end of Year 3. There was a trend (significant at the $p = 0.1$ level) for boys to do better than girls in progress in maths¹. Boys had a shortfall of only 1.3 points from their baseline on average whereas girls had dropped 4.8 points.

Comparison with national average progress between baseline and end of Year 3

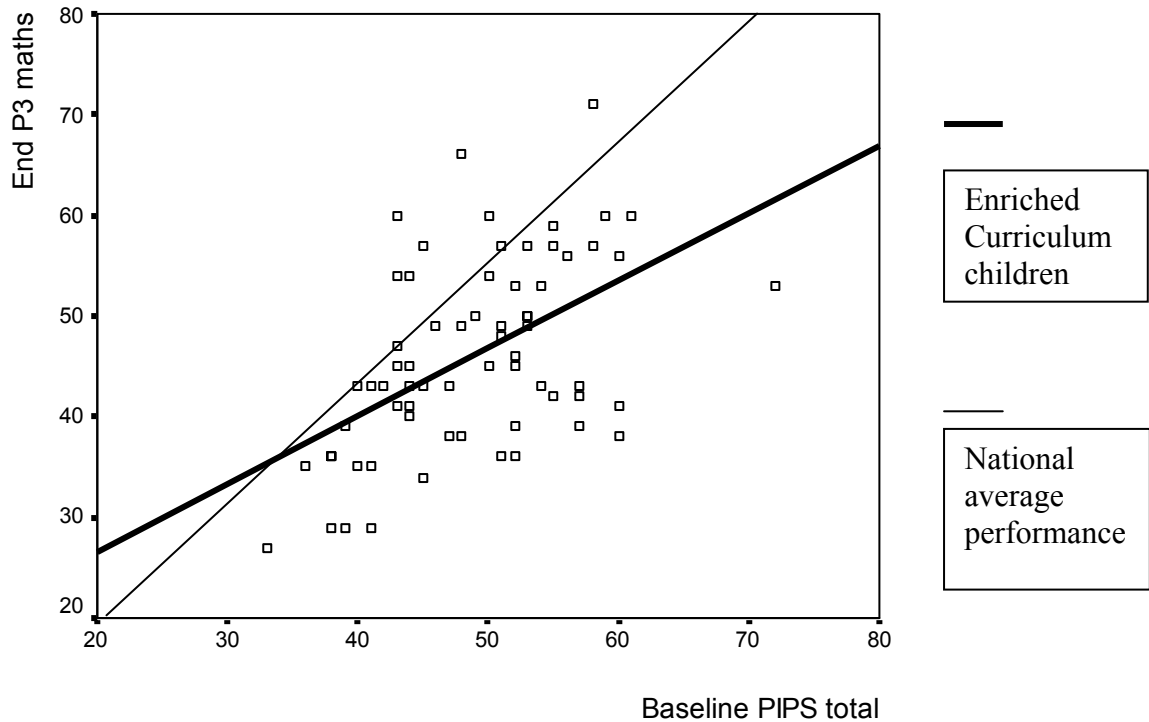
Figures 2.3 and 2.4 display the comparison with national average performance in reading and mathematics respectively. As was the case for controls, the higher ability children have not yet caught up with national average performance in either reading or mathematics. As we have mentioned in previous reports, it is normal for schools in

¹ Girls start with slightly higher scores but boys have closed the gap.

areas of deprivation to show this level of underperformance at this age. Enriched Curriculum children are still improving year on year. It is possible that they may get closer to national average performance in Year 4. It is notable that a sizeable minority of children is doing better than national average performance in reading already. In mathematics on the other hand, a relatively small number of children are reaching national average performance and yet teachers (and parents) are unworried about performance in mathematics. Whilst literacy is of crucial importance, this may be another indication that more training in mathematics is needed at this stage for teachers.



*Figure 2.3
Reading attainment at the end of Year 3 in the Enriched Curriculum group
compared with national average performance*



*Figure 2.4
Mathematics attainment at the end of Year 3 in the Enriched Curriculum group
compared with national average performance*

Contrasting Areas Schools: End of Year 2 results

Results on PIPS tests are summarised in Table 2.2, including comparison with controls (who took the Year 2 tests at the end of the previous school year). In interpreting the results in Contrasting Areas schools, it is important to note that two of the teachers of Year 2 classes were absent on maternity leave for a large part of the year. The young teachers who covered their absence were not able to take advantage of all the training which was available; *one teacher did not have any training at all before the start of the year.* This did have a noticeable effect on scores in these classes.

Over the school year 2002 – 03, Enriched Curriculum children’s scores in mathematics had a shortfall of 3.1 standardised points on average compared with end of Year 2 scores. In reading, there was a shortfall of 0.8 standardised points over the year. The standard deviation in both reading and mathematics continues to be lower for the Enriched Curriculum group than for the control group, indicating that the teachers are addressing a more homogeneous class in terms of attainment. It is important to note the similarities of the pattern of results compared to that of Shankill schools last year. This is more easily seen in the grand summary in Table 2.3 on page 15. Last year, we noted that the higher ability children were still further behind at the end of Year 2 in the Shankill schools. As with last year, we attribute this to them ‘having had further to fall’. We believe there is a similar pattern of progress taking place in Contrasting Areas schools to that in Shankill schools. As these schools are

even more weighted towards the high ability end in terms of their intake, the effect is somewhat more pronounced.

Table 2.2: Summary of PIPS results in Contrasting Areas schools

	Mean standardised score	Standard deviation
EC end Year 2 reading	45.1	9.8
Control end of Year 2 reading	48.8	10.9
EC end Year 2 maths	43.7	8.6
Control end of Year 2 maths	47.7	10.6

EC- Enriched Curriculum group

When we look at Figure 2.5, we see what has happened to individual children in terms of mathematics performance over the second year. Around 20% of children have made better than average progress during the year, since they lie above the upper grey line which shows national average performance over that time. A given point on the grey line indicates the progress which would be expected of children who were performing at average compared with a national sample and who started school with a standardised score vertically below that point. For example, a child with a baseline of 40 would be expected to maintain this score if they made average progress. **We may infer that this group of children, above the grey line, have made better progress in mathematics under the Enriched Curriculum than would have been expected on average under a traditional curriculum.** This group have ‘turned the corner’ in mathematics. We believe that other children will turn that corner in the current school year.

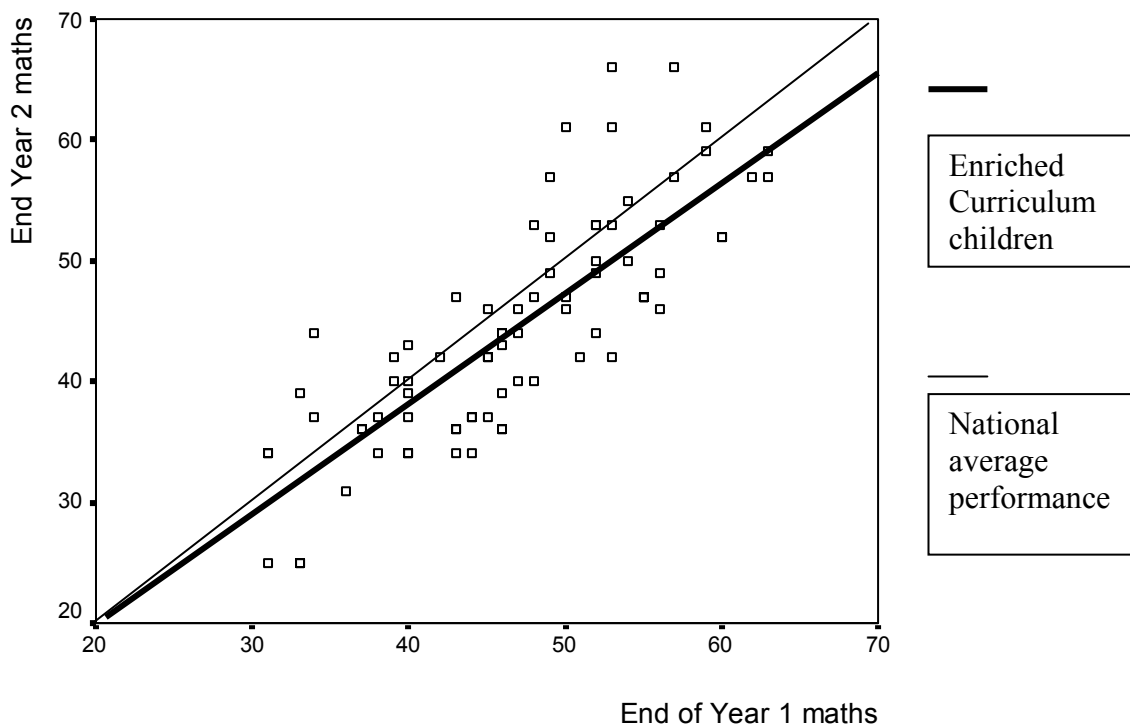


Figure 2.5
Mathematics progress over the second year in the Enriched Curriculum group in Contrasting Areas schools compared with national average performance

Similarly, **looking at reading progress in Figure 2.6, we can see that almost half the children made better than national average progress over their second year.** This group have ‘turned the corner’ in reading already and there is every reason to suppose that they will be joined by others during the current school year, as happened with the Shankill group in their third year. Most Year 2 teachers were confident that this would be the case. Some are hoping to see considerable gains.

In Figure 2.6, we can again see evidence of a very small group of very low ability children who are not making progress in reading and indeed are falling much further behind. Again, we believe these children will fall into the group of children needing individual attention in reading tuition, as described by Torgesen (2002). The much smaller size of this group in Contrasting Areas schools reflects the much lower incidence of special needs in this group of schools compared with Shankill schools. In our final report next year, it is hoped to present a more detailed analysis of children with special needs.

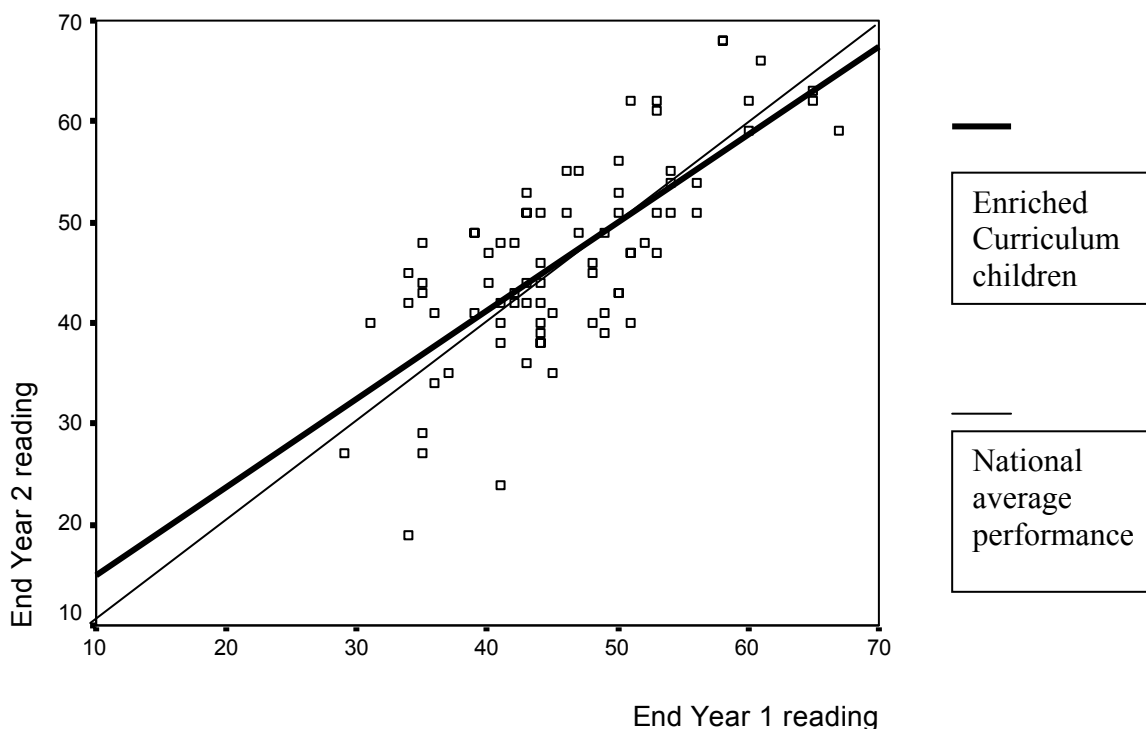


Figure 2.6
Reading progress over the second year in the Enriched Curriculum group in
Contrasting Areas schools compared with national average performance

Gender effects in PIPS scores

In the Contrasting Areas schools 46% of the Enriched Curriculum sample are girls and 54% are boys. Gender effects are summarised in Table 2.3.

There is a very highly significant difference in attainment in reading in CA schools at the end of P2 { $p = .007$, $df = 97$ }, with girls being about 4.5 standardised points ahead. Again, I would attribute this to the boys having a later start on guided reading

because there is no significant difference in progress on either reading or maths. The difference in attainment now is therefore almost all explained by the superior scores of girls at baseline.

There is no significant gender effect in attainment in mathematics.

Table 2.3: Summary of PIPS gender effects in Contrasting Areas schools

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
End P2 maths	male	46	42.304	9.5682	1.4107
	Female	54	44.185	7.6011	1.0344
End P2 reading	male	46	43.261	9.3558	1.3794
	Female	53	48.698	10.2405	1.4066

Gender effects in reading in detail

Figure 2.7 illustrates the gender effects in reading over the ability spectrum. As we can see, the regression lines showing average progress for girls and boys illustrate that the gap between girls and boys increases on average as we move up the ability range. This is line with our hypothesis that attainment at the end of Year 2 partly reflects the length of time the child has been on a guided reading programme.

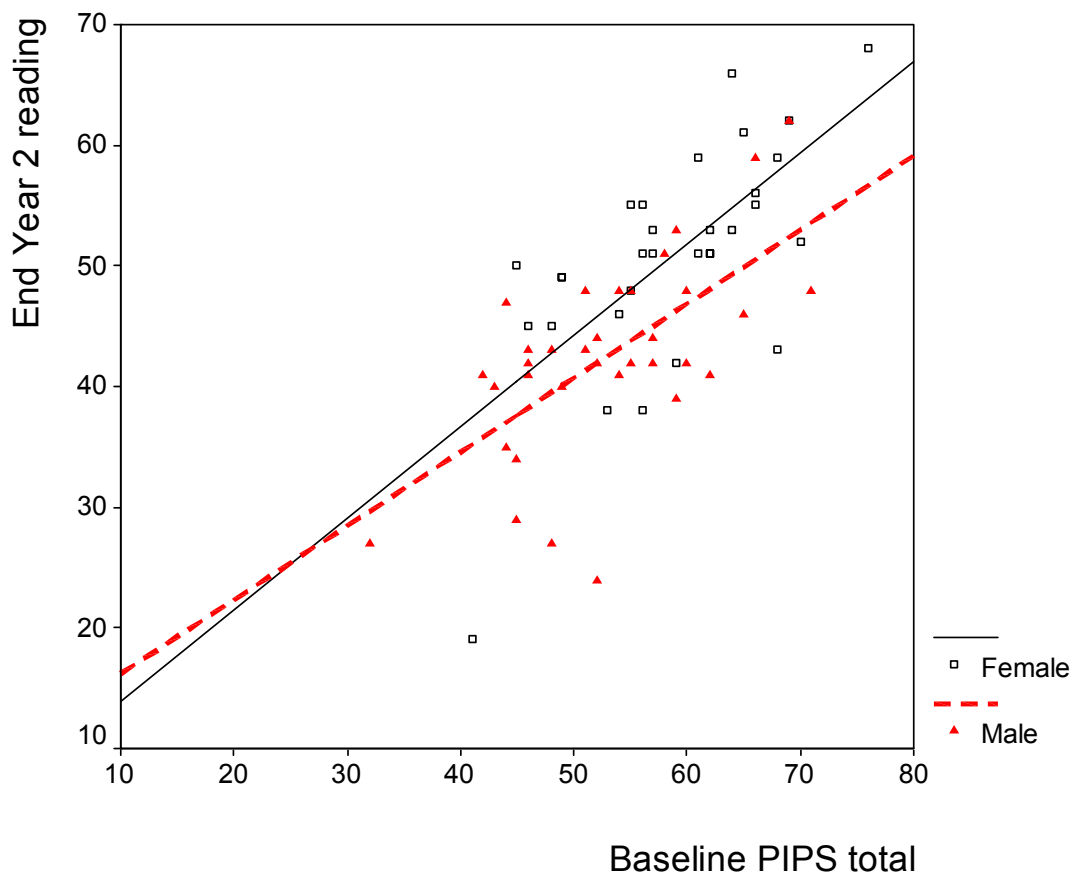


Figure 2.7
Reading progress over the second year in the Contrasting Areas schools
as a function of gender

Table 2.3: Grand summary of PIPS results in both groups of schools

	Mean (Standard deviation)					
	Mathematics			Reading		
	Baseline maths	End Yr 1 maths	End Yr 2 maths	Baseline reading	End Yr 1 reading	End Yr 2 reading
Shankill Enriched Curriculum	48.9 (7.9)	41.5 (6.8)	39.7 (7.8)	48.3 (7.3)	38.9 (6.2)	40.0 (8.4)
Contrasting Areas (CA) Enriched Curriculum	55.5 (10.0)	46.8 (8.2)	43.7 (8.6)	57.2 (9.0)	45.9 (8.1)	45.1 (9.8)
	Baseline maths	End Yr 1 maths	End Yr 3 or* Yr 4 maths	Baseline reading	End Yr 1 reading	End Yr 3 or* Yr 4 reading
Shankill year ahead (1 year older than EC group)	47.4 (7.9)		46.1 (7.5)	47.9 (7.2)		45.0 (9.2)
Shankill 2 years ahead (2 years older than EC group)	48.8 (8.5)	42.8 (8.5)	44.3 (7.3)	48.5 (7.7)	41.1 (8.1)	43.9 (8.5)
		End Yr 2 maths	End Yr 3 maths		End Yr 2 reading	End Yr 3 reading
CA year ahead (1 year older than EC group)		47.5 (10.7)	51.7 (9.1)		48.6 (11.0)	53.3 (9.7)
CA 2 years ahead (2 years older than EC group)			50.3 (9.7)			51.4 (9.9)

The Boehm Test of Concept Development: Advanced form

This test was administered to 71 Year 2 children in Contrasting Areas schools. The majority of children performed very well in the test. The test has a maximum score of 50. Figure 2.8 shows the spread of achievement.

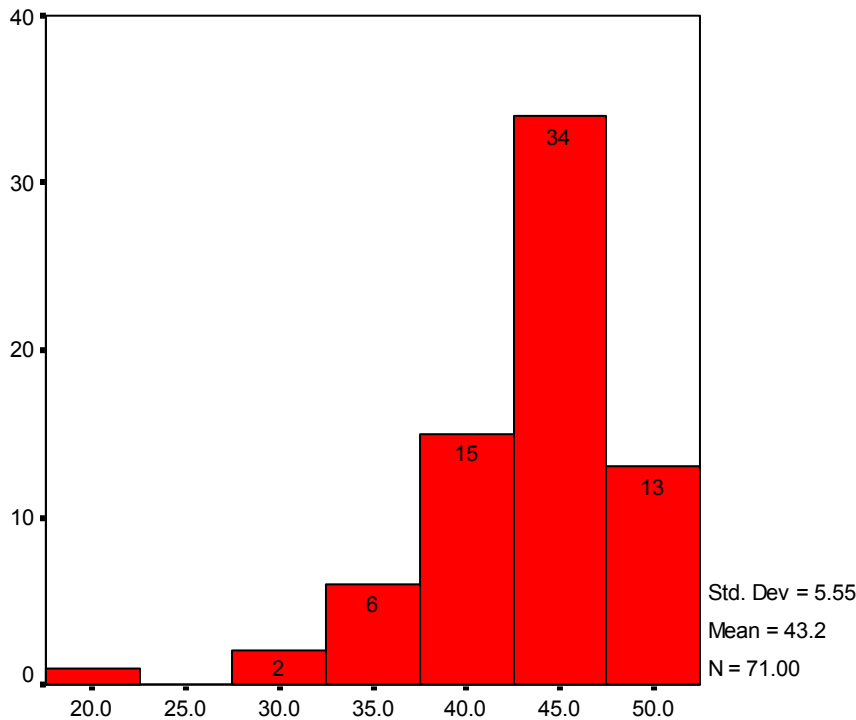


Figure 2.8
Histogram of attainment in the Boehm Test of Concept Development
in Year 2 children in the Contrasting Areas schools

It may be seen that 47 of the children scored 45 or more. Nine children have relatively poor scores. Due to ceiling effects, a meaningful comparison cannot be made between Enriched Curriculum children and controls². **As with controls, Enriched Curriculum children in Contrasting Areas schools are 4 – 6 months ahead of American norms on this test on average.**

The most difficult concepts for the children were, in order of difficulty with the most difficult first:

- an equal number of
- left
- fewest
- skip one and circle the next
- between
- separated
- right

² Ceiling effects make this test technically somewhat unreliable in this instance and so we do not report the statistic, but the distributions are very similar for both groups.

Again, this list is similar to that for the American children on which the test was normed, except that ordinal numbers do not appear. **We strongly reiterate our advice that teachers are informed about this list.** It is likely that the disparity between answers for left and right is due to preferential guessing of the preferred hand by some children. The consequences of not being able to tell left from right are potentially catastrophic for reading and for mathematics. While it is likely that children can learn to read from left to right before they can label the concepts correctly, one cannot assume that this does not affect their ability to absorb information about the written word, as when for example, the teachers asks the class to look at the left-hand page. Furthermore, twenty-one children did not know the meaning of ‘an equal number of’. Obviously, this adversely affects their mathematical understanding at this stage.

The Bus Story Test of Oral Language

The Bus Story Test is part of the Renfrew Language Scales, published by Winslow in Bicester. It is a test of the receptive and expressive aspects of oral language proficiency. A short story with picture prompts is narrated to the child and then retells the story for the researcher, with the aid of the prompts. Thus, the test also probes attention and memory skills. The child’s story is recorded on tape. Analysis of the transcript yields an information content score and an average sentence length score (the average of the five longest sentences used by the child). The test has been used in a longitudinal study of early language delay by Bishop and colleagues (Bishop 2000; Bird, Bishop & Freeman 1995). It was found to have excellent predictive validity for later difficulty in language development. Difficulty in language development has obvious implications for reading development.

As some children were showing signs of getting bored with this test during the previous round of testing, it was decided to use the alternate half of the population for the test this time. The mean age of Year 3 children at testing was 7y 6m and the mean age of Year 2 children was 6y 6m.

The results for the test this year are summarised in Table 2.4. **The results show that children in the Enriched Curriculum group in the Shankill schools are reaching well above age norms on the information score, but not on the sentence length score. They have not maintained their superiority over Shankill control groups on either of the scores but they are *equalling* the performance of controls. They have made relatively little progress on sentence length since the last round of testing.** In statistical terms, there is no significant difference between Enriched Curriculum groups and control groups on either the information score or the sentence length score. The table shows that all groups are doing particularly well on information scores. For this reason, and for technical reasons connected with the test, the evaluation team believes the age norms may be somewhat unreliable in the upper age range in such a way as to somewhat inflate the performance of all groups. Nonetheless, information scores seem to be better than sentence length scores for all groups. The information score of the test reflects attention, memory and narrative skills, but not the sophistication of sentence construction. The latter is more important in the sentence length score. The findings on sentence length scores in the Shankill Enriched Curriculum group support our hypothesis, formulated from the

poor PIPS picture vocabulary results and the reports from teacher interviews of their perceptions of the oral language skill levels in the children (see page 24), namely that oral language skills may still not have improved as much as was hoped. The relative failure to improve on sentence length score to any great extent suggests that the emphasis on some aspects of oral language, which was a focus of particular effort at improvement in the Enriched Curriculum in the first two years, may not have been maintained in Year 3 in Shankill schools. If these children are not exposed to increasingly complex grammatical and syntactic structures in school, many of them will not meet them at all. Given the research about the effects of poor language skills on later learning noted above, this finding is somewhat disappointing.

In the Contrasting Areas schools, there was no significant difference between the between Year 2 Enriched Curriculum groups and control groups on either the information score or the sentence length score. However, both Enriched Curriculum and control groups in CA schools perform at age norm levels³ of approximately 7y 7m on average on information scores and 6y 6m on sentence length. Thus, they are very much above age norms on information scores and well above in sentence length.

Table 2.4 reveals that although the differences are too small to be statistically significant, there is a pattern of Enriched Curriculum children doing better than controls on information scores. It is possible that with larger sample sizes, statistically significant differences might be found.

Table 2.4 also reinforces the finding of earlier years that children in Shankill schools are disadvantaged in oral language compared with children in Contrasting Areas schools.

*Table 2.4
Summary of scores in the Bus Story Test
Mean (Equivalent age norm*)*

	Shankill EC	Shankill control	Contrasting Areas EC	Contrasting Areas control
Year 2 information	36.8 (8y 3m)	31.6(6y 10m)	42.3 (>9y)	40.0 (>9y)
Year 3 information	40.4 (>9y)	38.3 (>9y)	**	45.8 (>9y)
Year 2 sentence length	10.0 (6y 1m)	9.3 (5y 3m)	10.7 (6y 5m)	10.8 (6y 6m)
Year 3 sentence length	10.4 (6y 3m)	10.7 (6y 6m)	**	11.8 (7y 0m)

* See footnote

**Enriched Curriculum children in CA schools have not yet reached Year 3

³ Norms are only given over intervals of several months, so some estimates are calculated by interpolation.

3. The views of teachers

3.1 Section summary

Project teachers and other professionals continue to be very positive about the Enriched Curriculum. Many persist in the use of superlatives and intensely felt comments to describe aspects of their experience with the programme, such as “I am thrilled with it.” This is true in both groups of schools. One teacher in a Contrasting Areas school reported that she had told her principal, “Never, in [twenty] years of teaching, have I seen children jump up and down with excitement at the prospect of maths task time!” Nevertheless, the predominant tone to teachers’ responses this year was more measured than in previous years.

Even those teachers displaying evident enthusiasm teachers had some important concerns. Year 3 teachers in the Shankill were worried that expectations for the positive effects of the Enriched Curriculum were too high. They would wish to remind all authorities and interested parties that children in the Shankill area are still faced with all the difficulties associated with an area of deprivation together with the complications of the problematical social context unique to the area.

Some teachers in both groups of schools remain concerned about outcomes and teaching methods in literacy. The evaluation team believes this is a natural consequence of perceived pressures from the authorities and from parents to show early success in literacy. **The evaluation teams suggests that a consensus on the part of all authorities on the question of best practice in teaching literacy is absolutely essential for the peace of mind of teachers and to enable excellence in practice.**

Year 3 teachers would also welcome clear guidance as to when more formal work should be introduced, making comments such as “You feel you need to toughen them up for Year 4, although they may not be ready”. This really applies mainly to very low-ability children whom teachers believe might still benefit from a less formal approach, even into Year 4 at times. If, within the constraints of classroom management, this is what is intended, teachers need permission to put it into practice.

The majority of teachers again felt that their first year in the project was a time for “finding our feet”. They believe they will do better next year. This draws attention to an important limitation of the evaluation: It looks only at the performance of novice teachers.

3.2 Procedure

All teachers taking Year 3 classes in the Shankill group of schools and all teachers taking Year 2 classes in the Contrasting Areas group of schools were surveyed and interviewed. The schedules are found in Appendices A and B respectively. Some principals also gave informal interviews. The researcher also took advantage of any opportunity to talk informally with teachers or senior members of staff when visiting schools.

This year, we also had the advantage of informal observation by our testing staff, who were administering the various tests in June 2003. In 2002-03, all of our testing staff were retired teachers or teachers not currently employed full time. These ladies were favourably impressed by the demeanour of the children in general, and for those who were able to make meaningful comparisons with their own experience in teaching at Key Stage 1, by the children's abilities also. Two of these staff wrote letters to the evaluation team and their comments are quoted when appropriate below.

3.3 Analysis of responses

Overall, the teachers remain very positive about the Enriched Curriculum but frequently, their optimism is expressed in a more measured way than in previous years. The first rush of enthusiasm about the project is now over and teachers on the whole feel more isolated as the project becomes larger and

Teachers' views are summarised under the following headings:

- Teacher training, teacher support and resources
- Oral language and listening skills
- Reading and wider literacy skills
- Handwriting
- Numeracy
- Play
- Children's personal and social development
- The Enriched Curriculum and specific groups of children
- The effects of the Enriched Curriculum on the wider school culture
- The relationship between school and parents

Teacher training, teacher support and resources

Shankill schools

At the time of the interviews, which fell in January and February 2003, Year 3 teachers in Shankill schools had received only two full days of training in addition to the cluster group meetings. This was not felt by teachers to be at all adequate. One characterised it as "virtually no training or advice". Teachers were realistic about conflicting demands for funding of training but felt that their needs had been grossly underestimated. It is only just to point out that the Belfast Education and Library Board has since rectified the situation by providing two further days of training with the promise of additional INSET training to come. Nevertheless, it must be mentioned because outcomes for children must be judged in the context of the training. In addition, other Education and Library Boards should have the advantage of the experience of the pioneers of the project.

In terms of the content of the training, some teachers were somewhat disturbed to find they were being asked for their opinion as often as they were being exposed to the message of others:

“We have been asked about what we have found out but I’d like to know what we should have found out. They were asking us what to do. We felt they should be telling us!” (Interviewee’s emphasis)

This was an unavoidable situation for the pioneers of the project. **The evaluation team suggests that teachers who are pioneers might find it somewhat less daunting if those in authority acknowledged the pilot-project nature of the situation at the commencement of training and explained that they would welcome contributions and suggestions from the pilot teachers themselves.**

Teachers should also be told that teachers in the same situation in previous years in all schools have also been very anxious at the beginning of their first year but have been much happier at the end of it.

There was a feeling amongst some Year 3 teachers that they did not receive as much proactive support from senior members of staff or board officers as teachers in the earlier years of the project had done. They all agreed that their principals supported the project and that they knew that could call on Education and Library Board officers and senior members of staff for help. Nonetheless, as is perhaps natural, there is a perception by the teachers in some schools that the project has a somewhat lower profile in the minds of those in authority than was heretofore the case. For example, senior members of staff are less likely than formerly to ask on a regular basis, “How are things going? Are you managing?” The evaluation team does not want to overstate this point; the teachers all agreed that there was excellent passive support. For example, principals tried to give them whatever they asked for in terms of resources or time for planning.

Nonetheless, there seems to be a feeling that authority figures believe that the Enriched Curriculum is a fait accompli. From the perspective of the Year 3 teachers themselves, the changes for them are almost as daunting as they were for Year 1 teachers. In such a situation, teachers appear to want explicit acknowledgement of their difficulties and frequent overt expressions of support. In other words, they need reassurance.

Provision for new resources appeared to be limited for Year 3. There was obviously bad feeling about this, “Years 1 and 2 got £x000, but we got nothing!” And “Year 3 are lacking in resources compared to Years 1 and 2. They miss out especially on larger items.” Sometimes, there was the opportunity to share appropriate resources with Year 2 classes, but teachers often expressed the opinion that it would “be much easier if I had my own”. Space was an issue for some teachers, “The class is so big and the room is so small.”

One very worrying development in one school concerned the provision of reading material. Teachers were making use of books from a variety of reading schemes, not in the traditional manner of using reading schemes, but to supplement an inadequate supply of banded story books⁴. They had been told that this was not appropriate and there was talking of introducing a new reading scheme. Teachers were very confused by this message. In this situation, and in other situations of similar confusion, **it would have been helpful to teachers to have a named person in the Education**

⁴ Banded by difficulty level. There are some commercial schemes but teachers also do it themselves.

and Library Board responsible for the Enriched Curriculum to whom they could refer as an authority on the Enriched Curriculum.

There was some patchy and erratic provision of classroom assistants to Year 3 teachers. Teachers would continue to welcome any classroom assistance which could be provided as the single most important resource to make the new curriculum work to best advantage.

Some of the teachers pointed out that classroom assistants themselves often had poor language and numeracy skills. During observation in classrooms, the researcher observed this to be the case for some, but not all, classroom assistants. This job is one of the few jobs with some professional standing open to women who find it difficult to travel outside the Greater Shankill area. It would be a pity to have to look outside the area for candidates. This finding therefore again highlights the need for selection of the best candidates available and for suitable training. **We reiterate our suggestion from last year's report that Education and Library Boards consider training classroom assistants alongside teachers.**

Contrasting Areas schools

Year 2 teachers in Contrasting Areas schools had had varied amounts of training from one Education and Library Board to another.

Teachers had very different opinions as to the degree of support from Education and Library Board staff. Some mentioned people by name, saying that they had been “a great help” or a “tower of strength”. Others had difficulty remembering whether they had been visited at all, which does not suggest that any visit which did take place was of great assistance to the teacher. One teacher stated categorically that she had had no visits. The evaluation team understands that, with 80 schools now taking part in the project, the degree of support evident in the first year cannot be maintained. Nevertheless, we believe that **it is vital for the success of the project that those in their first year of teaching the Enriched Curriculum should receive as much support as possible.** At least two visits from experienced personnel for the purposes of assessment and support would seem to be a minimum requirement.

Classroom assistance was very patchy. It was not generally provided as of right to Year 2 teachers, but money had often been found from somewhere to provide some help. One teacher might have a very well trained, very supportive classroom assistant who understood and supported the Enriched Curriculum: Another teacher had help for only two periods during the year for a few hours each week from relatively untrained personnel.

Provision of resources varied across boards. Also, individual schools varied in their ability and/or willingness to divert funding into resources. Some felt that resources were inadequate or minimally adequate. The researcher saw examples of good provision of resources. In several schools, not only money but staff time had been devoted to ensuring adequate provision. For example, many new books had been ordered for early readers and staff devoted their spare time to banding these into reading levels in order to give each child a wide choice of books at the appropriate level.

Many teachers are finding a digital camera a useful means of keeping records of children's work. It may also be an aid to assessment because teachers can observe and interpret the results at leisure. It is also useful as a means of displaying children's work and informing parents.

Oral language and listening skills

Shankill schools

Some Shankill Year 3 teachers and some senior member of staff believe that, despite the significant improvements in oral language detailed in our earlier reports, many children in the Greater Shankill area continue to suffer from deficits in oral language skills. Teachers believe that because many children move "in two different worlds" linguistically speaking; they are disadvantaged in all aspects of language. Picture vocabulary scores on PIPS confirm that vocabulary scores remain around 43 standardised points for both Enriched Curriculum classes and control groups in the Shankill schools. This is well under the national average of 50 points and 3-4 standardised points lower than their non-verbal test scores. Although the Bus Story tests showed that Enriched Curriculum children had made significant improvements in oral language compared with controls in Year 1, this test did not investigate vocabulary directly.

Teachers pointed out that for some children, the length of time they are exposed to oral language of high quality in the classroom is swamped by the time spent in a more impoverished linguistic environment. Given this information and the fact that teachers clearly felt the pressure to devote as much time as possible to literacy and numeracy, the researcher felt that the original strong focus on oral language within the Enriched Curriculum was being lost to some extent. **In the light of this judgment, the evaluation team recommends that training for all Enriched Curriculum teachers continues to be explicit about the value of oral language both in itself, and as a vehicle for other learning.**

In the modern context, it is recognised that variety of expression within a given language contributes to the richness of that language. Research has demonstrated that dialects do not represent a category of language which is inferior in any respect. Rather, dialects tend to develop the vocabulary and modes of expression suited to their context (Hazen 2001). Nonetheless in order to take full advantage of the curriculum, students must also have adequate knowledge of the forms, pronunciation and vocabulary of Standard English simply because so much information, particularly written information, will be presented to them in that format during the education.

Diction

Many children in the Greater Shankill area have mild or moderate speech difficulties (See the report of the earlier Greater Shankill Project). This is likely to have an impact on the child's phonological and phonic skills and these skills are a strong predictor of later performance (see the section on reading below). Teachers believe that many children's speech is characterised by "lazy diction" which does not encourage the children to pay attention to the beginnings and endings of words.

During testing and during classroom observation, the research team have seen strong evidence to corroborate some of the teachers' observations. Teachers believe that because many children move "in two different worlds" linguistically speaking; they are not getting enough reinforcement of Standard English skills at home or in play with their peers. Teachers believe that this operates at all levels of language and affects the children in many aspects of literacy learning; the children have difficulties with diction, vocabulary, syntax, semantics and the pragmatics of oral language.

Vocabulary

Teachers believe that the children move most of the time in a social context in which a restricted vocabulary operates. It may be that the vocabulary is not truly as restricted as it appears, rather that the child's vocabulary needs are more suited to the social context in which they normally move. On the other hand, picture vocabulary scores on PIPS show that that teachers are correct in terms of Standard English vocabulary scores. These average around 43 standardised points for both Enriched Curriculum classes and control groups in the Shankill schools. This is well under the national average of 50 points and 3-4 standardised points lower than their non-verbal test scores. (See the section on attainment for more details.) Although the Bus Story tests showed that Enriched Curriculum children had made significant improvements in oral language compared with controls in Year 1, this test did not investigate vocabulary.

Syntax

Teachers believe that many children often use different constructions from Standard English. This would not matter provided they had sufficient experience of Standard English also, but teachers believe that their exposure to the standard form is limited. This is again supported by test data. Many instances of non-standard constructions have turned up in the Bus Story Test and in the WOLD test of written expression. For example, consider the statement, "We will go till Bangor." This is used in place of the standard sentence "We will go to Bangor." Another frequently used type of expression in the tests is the double negative, such as, 'He didn't pay him no mind.' This translates as, "He didn't pay him any attention." Non-standard plural forms such as "childer" for "children" are more rarely seen.

Semantics and pragmatics: The role of conversation

Teachers believe that some children are not sufficiently introduced to the social rules of conversation at home or in interaction with their peers. They believe that these children are seldom given a chance to take part in an extended conversation with an adult outside school. Instead, they take part in more limited interactions. For example, they are asked to comply with an adult's request or to answer a closed question. It is difficult for teachers to supply this deficit in class, since it ideally requires one-to-one attention within the context of meaningful conversation.

Similarly, the learning of complex semantic constructions is best accomplished within meaningful conversation. Even if teachers were to dedicate additional time within the curriculum to conversation on a variety of topics, it would be likely to be insufficient to make good the time lost in this activity outside school.

Oral language and thinking skills

Teachers believed that the poor oral language skills of many children often reflected less mature thought processes than would be expected for children of this age group. For example, one teacher remarked, “Yesterday is the same as last week to them.” Another said, “There is no sequence [in their thinking].” Still a third said, “They don’t remember where something happened. They don’t have the whole picture.” This is one area in which the evaluation team believes the Enriched Curriculum might be modified in the future. Explicit teaching of thinking skills is emerging as an important contribution to early years education. In addition to the Key Stage 2 project being currently funded by CCEA⁵, Shayer and Adey (2002) have designed lessons in thinking skills for children in the early years age group. Further research would be required but the idea of separate lessons in thinking skills is possibly not the best option. We believe that the Enriched Curriculum, as it stands, naturally lends itself to infusion of the learning of thinking skills into the curriculum. For example, the Enriched Curriculum already places emphasis on much of the language needed for thinking skills because this language would also be necessary for early mathematical skills. It may only be a matter of extending this work and making it somewhat more explicit in the mind of the teacher in terms of thinking skills.

Is the focus on oral language in the Enriched Curriculum being lost?

In the first year of the Enriched Curriculum in Shankill schools, improvement in oral language skills was an oft repeated goal of the project. In reviewing the evidence from teachers and other professionals in 2003-03, it is apparent to the researcher that teachers remain aware of the importance of good oral language skills. Against that, there are indications that teachers find themselves under time pressure in regard to fulfilling the rest of the curriculum. It is impossible to say without extensive classroom observation study whether oral language is being squeezed out by these pressures, but seems possible from Year 3 teachers’ comments that they were unable to focus on it to the extent they would have wished. **The evaluation team recommends that training for all teachers continues to be explicit about the value of oral language both in itself, and as a vehicle for other learning. This is particularly true for later literacy development.** Shankill teachers should be made aware that their views on the deficits in the children’s oral language are supported by the evidence. They should be given explicit support in their efforts to improve the situation; including giving them permission to concentrate specifically on oral language improvement if they feel this is necessary. We know that at least some schools have a written strategy for improvement in oracy. In the light of these findings, schools may wish to consider creating or updating such a strategy.

One would not wish to give too bleak a picture in regard to oral language in the Shankill schools, only to caution against too high an expectation of the degree of improvement. Some teachers did give examples of how oral language skills were continuing to be targeted and how oral skills were believed to be improving. For example, one teacher talked about using (and enjoying using) a lot more drama. She also said that as well as the teacher herself questioning children during big book sessions, Enriched Curriculum children were more likely to question each other, even

⁵ This is the ACTS project, run by Professor C. McGuinness, a member of the evaluation team.

learning to use W5⁶. Another teacher related improving language skills to improved oral comprehension of stories with greater attention to detail.

Not all teachers mentioned Circle Time spontaneously and they were not asked directly about it. Those who did mention it expressed confidence about its continued value for talking and listening skills.

Contrasting Areas schools

Year 2 teachers were very struck by the improvement in children's oral language and communication skills and their confidence in "speaking out". **The majority of teachers in Contrasting Areas schools believe the improvement in the children's oral language skills has been one of the greatest benefits of the Enriched Curriculum.**

Reading and wider literacy skills

When the evaluation team produced its literature review in the second year of the project (Sproule, Murray, Spratt, Rafferty, Trew, Sheehy & McGuinness 2001), it was asserted that a consensus was becoming well established in research into the best methods of reading instruction. Over the subsequent two years, this view of the best approach to literacy learning has continued to accrue added support from further studies. In a recent review article, Torgesen (2002) assembles the evidence. It is appropriate here to summarise the main findings:

1. Most children who experience reading difficulties "experience early and continuing problems acquiring **accurate and fluent word identification skills**."
2. "Skilled word recognition is heavily dependent upon a detailed knowledge of the letters used to spell individual words."
3. The most common cause of poor word recognition lies in "individual differences in children's **phonological knowledge and (phonics) skill**." Children who are weak in this area require systematic and explicit instruction from a knowledgeable teacher which continues until a reasonable level is reached. This is usually the level at which the class uses reading for other academic work.
4. In reading comprehension, two types of skill are important. In addition to word identification skills, **good oral language** is a prerequisite for progress.
5. Early difficulty is compounded by lack of practice. "Opportunities for extended practice with phonemically decodable texts are particularly beneficial for children at risk of reading failure." Ironically, the children who need the most practice usually experience the least. Once solid foundations have been established, "further reading growth is dependent almost entirely on the breadth and depth of the child's reading experience and practice (Snow et al. 1998)."
6. Instruction that is inconsistent with the child's level of oral language ability will fail to make efficient progress.
7. Spelling and writing skills are important in developing reading skills.

⁶ Using 'who, what, where, when and why' to give a structure to seeking information.

8. Peer tutoring is a useful adjunct to intensive teacher intervention. It can benefit tutor and tutee alike.
9. Small (3-4) group teaching for weak students is just as successful as individual tutoring. Either must be supported by reinforcement within the normal classroom context.
10. Whatever the instructional content or style, studies still report around 5% of children who fail to learn to read without specialist help. One recent study has suggested it may be possible to improve on this with a system of graded instructional levels (Scanlon, Vellutino, Small & Fanuele 2000).

The Enriched Curriculum fosters practice which is in accord with the findings in points 2 – 8 above. However, at the time of interview, Year 3 Shankill teachers had received only two days training, and this was insufficient to establish all the skills for teaching reading to the Enriched Curriculum children coming into Year 3. (The Belfast Education and Library Board has since provided additional training. Other Education and Library Boards may wish to take note that four days training is considered by teachers to be a minimum requirement.) Although teachers in the Shankill were accustomed to having a fairly large group coming into Year 3 with reading difficulties, they were unprepared to find so many children having what appeared to be a low level of reading skills. They had not geared their planning for such an eventuality. They were extremely distressed to discover the situation and immediately began to worry that they “would be blamed if these children were not reading well by the end of the year”. They were very concerned that “expectations about the Enriched Curriculum were far too high” and therefore, parents and teachers were bound to be disappointed. As things have turned out, the children made wonderful progress during the year but one can imagine the degree of pressure felt by Year 3 teachers at the beginning of the school year.

The level of literacy of children entering the class in September 2002 was the greatest source of apprehension for Shankill Year 3 teachers. Typically, they were somewhat taken aback. One teacher went so far as to describe her reaction as “very disappointed”⁷. The evaluation team believes that teachers’ reactions were understandable in the circumstances. Teachers were very aware of the outcomes expected for children entering Year 4 and they were unaccustomed to having so many children entering their class who were not following a reading scheme⁸ and very specifically, who had not been taught high-frequency words as a specific goal. **It is apparent that teachers had insufficient warning about what to expect in terms of reading levels for children coming in to Year 3.**

Points 1, 9 and 10 above, from Torgesen’s (2002) review, deal with children who are having difficulty learning to read. Point 10 above reports that whatever the method of instruction, **no normal classroom programme succeeds in teaching all children to read.** The average failure rate across all kinds of intervention was 5% (Torgesen 2002, p.10). Torgesen believes this group largely corresponds with the 5% of children who are diagnosed as learning disabled. Under the Enriched Curriculum, we

⁷ This teacher was following on from the Year 2 teacher who scored lowest in the Quality of Learning Instrument (QLI) in that group in the preceding year. In our report last year, we recorded quite a large variability in QLI scores within that group.

⁸ Children followed a reading scheme in previous years. Most schools call the replacement for this activity ‘guided reading’.

must expect that 5% of children will be the minimum failure rate across the board. It is likely to be higher in areas of high social deprivation.

It also follows from the findings in Torgesen's (2002) review that Reading Recovery alone is not the most efficient approach to special needs; it must be supported by good class teacher training in phonological skills and oral language skills. Further, the weaker the student the more intense and expert the one-to-one or small group special instruction is required to be to effect improvement.

Shankill schools

By the time of interview, teachers conceded in most cases that children were making fair or good progress in reading despite their low attainment on entering Year 3. Teachers conceded for example, that the children were "reading for meaning now" rather than using such strategies as had been useful in earlier years, for example, picture cues. Teachers acknowledged that children were "willing to take the challenge of taking a harder book home, even the weaker ones", a point confirmed by the reports of parents. In the case of the teacher who had been most disappointed in the children in September, it had been "a slow and exhausting haul" to bring the children to this level of competence. This teacher explained that she believed some children had been moved forward too quickly and she "had had to take them back to the level of Reading Recovery books". There is no evidence from the tests however that this class performed badly on average compared with the other classes at the end of Year 3. On the other hand, there is evidence that this class was characterised at the time of testing by some high-ability children doing very well and some low-ability children performing below average compared with the Enriched Curriculum group as a whole. With the advantage of hindsight therefore and having knowledge of the very satisfactory outcomes of PIPS testing in reading in June 2003, it is possible to speculate that some teachers were too focussed on the group of lower ability children, who do still have to make some improvement in order to catch up with controls⁹ of equal ability, when making their judgements of how children were progressing. This concentration on those making slower progress could have led to pessimism. There may also at that time have been too great an emphasis on the ability of Enriched Curriculum children to sight read high frequency words in isolation: Enriched Curriculum children would be expected to do better at reading within a meaningful context and may take some time to get to grips with the high frequency words as these words often do not have intrinsic concrete meaning. Reading within a meaningful context is one of the aspects of reading in which the PIPS test later demonstrated the highly satisfactory ability of Enriched Curriculum children. Finally, some of the children would have 'taken off' between the interviews and the tests. In spite of these possible explanations, at least some of the teachers are likely to have been pleasantly surprised by the outcomes. At the time of interview, a fairly typical judgement of progress was, "You feel like you should be saying they are greatly improved [in reading] but I can't say that. Maybe next year. It is a poor year group." The reassurance which will come with the knowledge that children did move forward at an

⁹ The year-ahead group who are following the traditional curriculum. See Section 4 for details of progress in reading attainment.

accelerating pace during the second half of the year¹⁰ should help teachers to go forward with increased confidence in the coming years.

Contrasting Areas schools

For Year 2 teachers in the Contrasting Areas group of schools, there was much greater variability in their reactions to the reading level of children in September 2002. Some teachers found the level to be much as they had expected, others were disappointed.

Those who were satisfied with the reading level of children coming in to their class were more likely to be highly approving of the Enriched Curriculum approach. At the approving extreme of the spectrum, a teacher characterised Enriched Curriculum literacy teaching as follows:

At the end of the day, it's just good teaching after all. I have never met a teacher who enjoyed hearing lines of children reading. That's not [making the best use of your time]. That's what structured play used to be – an opportunity to hear your reading groups. Now we do literacy work in so many different ways, during big books and structured play and task time. The children are getting immediate feedback. [The Enriched Curriculum] is a licence to do what you believe in your heart is right!

On the other side of this divergence of opinion, one teacher was “taken aback – disbelieving” at her perception of the children’s low level of reading skills in September. She believed that some children were unable to pick out their own name on the task board at that time. By the time of interview, the teacher estimated her top group were about ‘one stage behind’ what she would normally have expected at this time. Although all children were reading “with a degree of independence” by the time of the interviews, she did not expect them to have caught up by June. Her prediction was borne out by the results of PIPS testing in June for Contrasting Areas schools on average, but not for her own class. In fact, this particular teacher has the highest achievement in reading in the Enriched Curriculum Contrasting Areas group across the whole ability spectrum at the end of Year 2. Not only have children in this class a higher class average than that of the year ahead control group in the same school¹¹, they are performing well above the national average at the end of Year 2 across all ability levels. **This finding suggests that even if we suppose the teacher was correct and some children did have very poor reading skills on entry into Year 2, there is no suggestion whatever that this affected outcomes adversely at the end of Year 2. Rather, the evidence points in the other direction, although at this stage, the results are inconclusive because of the small sample size.** For the benefit of teachers in the future however, we must still consider the experience of this teacher. She was “upset” at the beginning of the year and three of her parents were also “very upset”, possibly partly because the teacher communicated her own uncertainty. Some parents did report that teachers seemed unconvinced of the value of the programme. She reported that she tried hard to reassure the parents but she

¹⁰ Once children have grasped the basics, a ‘take-off’ phenomenon in early reading learning is well documented in the research (ref).

¹¹ The sample size is very small. Statistical comparison is not therefore reliable. However, the results are an indicator that there is no evidence whatever at this stage that the children have suffered as a result of the Enriched Curriculum.

must have had great difficulty in doing so in these circumstances. If parents and teachers were properly prepared for what to expect, they would be much less likely to suffer this anxiety. That is the reason why the evaluation team recommends that training is explicit to teachers about expectations for the children as they enter a given year group. The final note on this teacher's experience is a happy one; she made a point of seeking out the researcher during the June testing period and communicating her delight in the children's progress since the time of the interview. Both she and the parents had become convinced that the children's progress had not suffered as a result of the Enriched Curriculum.

In some Education and Library Boards, the future of special needs tuition for reading has not been clarified; Reading Recovery had been used in Year 2 in some schools and not in others. Teachers were anxious to know, "What are they going to do about Reading Recovery?" It was widely recognised that some children would still require more intensive help with reading. Our research on attainment confirms this viewpoint. We reiterate the finding that, whatever the method of instruction, no normal classroom programme succeeds in teaching all children to read. The average failure rate across all kinds of intervention is 5% (Torgesen 2002, p.10). Torgesen believes this group largely corresponds with the 5% of children who are diagnosed as learning disabled. The Enriched Curriculum cannot be expected to deal with these children without help from special needs experts.

We believe that the comments of other professionals constitute good evidence of reading ability also. The following is a quotation from one of our testers, who administered tests in Contrasting Areas schools and who is a qualified teacher with many years of experience of teaching this age group:

I was very impressed by the ability of the children to both speak knowledgeably and especially, to read. A high percentage of Year 3 children were able to read the [test] booklets without assistance.

Other testers, who are qualified teachers also, commented verbally to the researcher on their favourable impressions of the oral language and reading skills of the children in Contrasting Areas schools. They were impressed not by the children's sight vocabulary, but by their fluency, their willingness to attack difficult words and by the evident enjoyment of even the less skilled children.

Creative writing

The great majority of the Year 2 teachers in Contrasting Areas schools have great hopes for improvement in creative writing skills; the majority of teachers feel this is one academic area in which they are certain that the Enriched Curriculum is making a difference. Typical comments from teachers and senior staff are:

"You should see the stories my children are producing!"

"We are so excited [about creative writing skills]! That's where we really notice the difference. They are so much more creative."

"If I could show you the stories my children have written."

These teachers believe the freedom to develop their creativity has given children a confidence to expressed themselves which is far superior to that seen under the pre-existing curriculum. Unfortunately, the WOLD test of written expression is not suitable for children until Year 4: Under our present remit therefore, Enriched Curriculum in Contrasting Areas will not be tested in creative writing. An attempt was made to administer the WOLD to some Year 3 children in control groups this year to see if a comparison would be feasible but children had too much difficulty in following the instructions and the attempt was abandoned. If the evaluation is extended, this would obviously be an important outcome to be examined in the future.

Teachers in Shankill schools conceded that children were less worried about tackling creative writing tasks but they were not confident that there had been any improvement in performance in Enriched Curriculum children compared to previous year groups. When the researcher has administered the WOLD test to Year 4 control group children, she has found that the great majority are excited about the task but have great difficulty with beginning it. This is borne out by the results for control group children, which are very poor with a large group resting on the bottom of the scale. The task is deliberately designed to engage the children, but their apparent lack of expertise with the task is at odds with their markedly excited response at being asked to undertake it. This has led the researcher to question whether the creative writing tasks they are normally given in class are just as exciting for them as the one used in the test. It may be that this is another area which could be addressed by further teacher training.

One must also note that expertise in creative writing is strongly linked to expertise in oral language and any deficit in the former in Shankill schools is likely to be related to the poor oral language skills described above. Alternatively, teachers may be requiring the children to always write in Standard English, which could stifle their natural creativity.

Handwriting

There was a division between those teachers who considered good handwriting skills to be a central goal and those who didn't. One teacher went so far as to say that when these children were grown, she believed that handwriting would no longer be such an important skill, as typing and computer voice-activated packages would replace it. Increasing use of computers in the higher levels of education would seem to confer at least partial justification to this viewpoint.

Teachers who were concerned about handwriting believed that children had got into bad habits in letter formation and there was no room in the timetable for lessons in handwriting. At present, the evaluation team have no way of knowing whether handwriting standards have fallen. Some evidence will become available next year when Enriched Curriculum children in Shankill schools undertake the WOLD test of written expression in Year 4. The writing displayed by control group children could be summarised as almost always legible but rarely neat or controlled. This concern on the part of some teachers is echoed by parents in both groups of schools. This is another area in which a policy decision is required from the authorities.

Numeracy

As was true at the time of our last report, teachers in both groups of schools are unworried about progress in numeracy and believe that parents are unworried also. At the time of interview, teachers in both groups of schools felt that the children were still a little behind in recorded arithmetic but this was more than balanced by the improvement in mental mathematics skills and conceptual understanding. Teachers believed strongly in the importance of establishing strong number bonds before children went on to formal recording of their work.

Some teachers in Shankill schools felt that they had now had a lot of training in literacy (including training unrelated to the Enriched Curriculum project) but relatively little training in early mathematics. In Year 3 classes in Shankill schools, many children are moving beyond the level of teacher training in early number work, such as that contained in Eunice Pitt's Ready, Set, Go project. Teachers are now tackling topics such as place value and early multiplication with many children and would appreciate a similar level of guidance to that supplied for the earlier work. There was a feeling that they were fully converted to and wished to continue with the very practical approach as far as possible, at least whenever a new topic was first introduced. They are asking for further guidance on activities of this nature in comments such as, "We need training on how to progress and how to move on now."

One teacher had a support worker in once a week from a Belfast Regeneration Organisation funded project for practical work in mathematics. This was felt to be an invaluable source of ideas.

Play

The interview data on play was supplemented by a pilot video/observation study on play which was undertaken by the research team. Informal opportunities to observe play were also available to the researcher on many occasions.

We gratefully acknowledge the contribution of Grainne McKenna, a qualified early years teacher, in the preparation and analysis of video data. The video data has been viewed and analysed by a variety of psychology and education professionals, including educational and cognitive psychologists, social psychologists, teachers and a lecturer in education. The analysis is not yet complete, as we have many hours of video from each classroom and the analysis is very time-consuming. In 2003-04, we hope to obtain video from more classrooms.

From these data, it is evident that teachers have widely different conceptions of the nature of play. Purists would characterise all play as a completely spontaneous child-led activity (Bruce 1997, 2001) and in some academic education circles, spontaneity is a criterion of the definition. The researcher believes however, that most of the professionals involved in the Enriched Curriculum project would accept some limitation on the degree of spontaneity. At one end of the spectrum, there are those who would accept only minimum limitations such as the need for safety, the resources which are made available to the children on that day by the teacher and the need to ensure that one child's freedom does not preclude the freedom of another. In some classrooms, there is very little spontaneous play of that nature. At the other extreme, there are those who are only comfortable with play-like teacher-directed activities and

very little or no choice of activity for the child. Whilst such activities are likely to be very enjoyable and obviously have a valuable place in the curriculum, the evaluation team believes they cannot be characterised as play in the purest sense.

One teacher had had a “specialist in play” into her classroom, under another innovative project. She stated that the activities prepared by this person were very organised and did not embrace a lot of choice, unlike most Enriched Curriculum training staff. **It is important that all the authorities organising training show high levels of agreement as to the criteria for good classroom practice in play.**

In the course of our observations, we viewed some excellent practice during play. At its best, the Enriched Curriculum classroom at play was characterised by:

- Children having sustained opportunities for interaction with the teacher and with each other.
- Children deeply engaged with their activities, very much on-task.
- Children experiencing rich opportunities for learning, which included voluntary literacy and numeracy activities and problem-solving.
- Children playing in co-operative groups as opposed to just side-by-side.
- Children being assessed and having their behaviour monitored unobtrusively via teacher observation.
- Children seeking and receiving warmly expressed praise for their efforts. Their efforts often included work of excellent quality, even comprising voluntary written work of a high standard. However in good practice, teachers gave equal value to the efforts of low-ability children, which might appear careless and lacking in imagination, but which represented progress for that particular child.
- Children embracing challenge either of their own volition, or with the help of carefully targeted encouragement on the part of the teacher.
- Children showing respect for their teacher and their peers.
- Children showing low levels of undesirable behaviours.

Good practice was observed at times in all classrooms but teachers are all individuals, and some teachers were noticeably finding it very difficult on occasion. We are indebted to those teachers who had the courage to allow us to observe them in this situation. In addition, still other teachers discussed their difficulties with play during interviews. We hope our findings, described below, will help the Education and Library Boards to target training in this area.

What are the problems we observed in play sessions? It is clear that some teachers are temperamentally suited to a more structured environment; they are more at ease when they feel in full control of the situation. This was not just our interpretation of our observations: Some teachers reported feeling that way. When teachers were uncomfortable with play, we either observed or heard about the following problems during interviews:

- The teacher appeared to have difficulty entering into play activity to help further the children’s learning without adopting a didactic style. We believe this is one of the most important difficulties, as it can lead to the appearance of lack of warmth on the part of the teacher. It was also unlikely to allow the

type of sustained interaction between teacher and child which includes open questioning by the teacher, cognitive challenge when the child shows incorrect thinking and scaffolding of the child's learning.

- When the teacher experienced difficulty providing learning support during play, it was more likely to happen with a low-ability child. The work such a child produced could be disappointing for the teacher. In turn, this could lead to a difficulty for the teacher in expressing open enthusiasm to the child. To the teacher, the disappointment might also appear as evidence that play does not have the same value as other activities.
- The teacher intervened in play without first taking time to assess the situation. This could lead to an inappropriate intervention, one which interrupted a fruitful activity unadvisedly or one in which the children's difficulties were misunderstood. One can see how this scenario would also affect assessment of the child/ren.
- The teacher attempted to exert the same level of control as in a more traditional lesson. For example, children were directed to stay at particular activities even when bored with it or the teacher tried to control the level of noise beyond what seemed necessary.
- The teacher had difficulty in trusting the children to be independent learners. For example, time was wasted in getting the play session started because children were closely supervised in identifying which areas they chose or were directed towards, rather than teaching them a routine which could be carried out independently. Such independent routines were seen to work very well in other classrooms, even in classes with a high level of children with special needs.
- Planning was insufficiently detailed or was not flexible enough to take advantage of good learning opportunities which had been unforeseen by the teacher.

The first point above, relating to the quality of teacher intervention, has been shown to be a predictor of excellence in early years' learning at pre-school level (EPPE Technical Paper 8a 2003). Other research would lead us to believe that it would be important at Key Stage 1 also. The EPPE study stresses the importance of sustained interaction because it allows the child to become sufficiently engaged to think deeply about a topic and for sufficient time for learning to become established.

The difficulties in play described above were not in any way associated with schools in a particular area or with the ethos of any school overall.

We believe that training which consists solely of lecture or workshop activities may be insufficient to help teachers having these kinds of difficulties during play. Ideally, teachers should be able to spend time in a classroom which has been identified as a centre of excellence. Often, this will be available within the teacher's own school but it might entail visits to other schools and therefore necessitate the provision of additional cover. If visits are not possible, we suggest that training incorporates videos of good practice to supplement existing methods. The video should be accompanied by material which points out how the accomplished teacher achieves her success. Teachers should get copies of videos, so that they can watch them again and again. In watching the video material we have obtained, professionals

were struck by the fact that each time they observed a clip, they tended to notice another action or response of importance.

We believe that teachers who have the opportunity to immerse themselves in a classroom in which the characteristics of successful play are present will be able to benefit in two main ways. They will be able to observe the technique of the accomplished teacher, but they will also be able to observe the response of the children. We believe this would help them to have faith that the children can and will take advantage of play to make progress in all aspects of their learning.

On a different point, there were problems with getting enough time for play in Year 3 classrooms. Teachers typically allowed up to three hours per week. This was not regarded as ideal. As one teacher said, “I’d like to play more but we’re covering a content-based curriculum.” Curriculum planners may well find it disturbing that teachers have extracted the message that Year 3 in the Enriched Curriculum is content-based. The evaluation team understood that there was to move to a more process-based curriculum in line with that of the first two years.

Children’s personal, social and emotional development

Teachers in both groups of schools generally remarked on the noticeable difference in confidence in Enriched Curriculum children coming into their classroom at the beginning of the school year, as compared with control groups in previous years. Only one teacher strongly demurred from this viewpoint. She found her class “very immature and unsettled – not used to sitting for any length of time and working independently”. This is the same teacher who has been recorded above as having problems with her class in many ways. Another teacher in the Shankill schools found the children more lively, chatty and interested but said that there were “conflicting dynamics” amongst the boys and that the boys were much less able to stay focussed than the girls. This particular class has an unusual imbalance in numbers between boys and girls; it consists preponderantly of boys. Regrettably, their behaviour may be partly the result of peer pressure to behave undesirably¹², coupled with the lack of the moderating influence of girls.

In some Year 3 classes, teachers were very explicit about the pressure on the curriculum. Activities which address social and emotional development, such as Circle Time, will be more quickly abandoned for special events, such as a sports day, than other activities such as literacy.

One teacher mentioned the benefit of using ‘Feelings cards’ during Circle Time to encourage children to express themselves. Other teachers felt the children were now old enough to give socially acceptable answers during these discussions. “They will tell you what they think you want to hear, how nice they should be in the playground etc. But they don’t carry it out.” Another teacher added, “They see a lot of aggression outside school.” This obviously contributed to the value judgement of Circle Time made by such teachers.

¹² Peer pressure tends to begin to have a more marked effect on behaviour around the age of six (Brendt 1979) and peer pressure is increasingly more effective at producing anti-social behaviour from then until the age of 15 (Steinberg & Silverberg 1986).

In Contrasting Areas schools, there was a trend¹³ for teachers rating children on aspects of their behaviour to rate Enriched Curriculum children as making more effort with their work than older control group children. Next year, when we have gathered all the data, we will be able to make comparisons in behaviour ratings between Enriched Curriculum and control group children when they were the same age¹⁴.

There is anecdotal evidence reported to us that special needs teachers are finding Enriched Curriculum children coming for special tuition have improved attitudes compared with control group children in previous years. The children do not appear to special needs teachers to have such poor levels of self-esteem. They have more confidence in their ability to learn.

Teachers reported many instances of improved behaviour which they attributed to the Enriched Curriculum. For example, there were “fewer tears” or children were “better at taking turns”. Children continued to show more independence than in previous years:

“If we set them a task, they will go away and do it without constantly coming back for help. They will bring the finished product to you. They make choices actively, independently and imaginatively.”

There is a high level of use of reward and punishment systems in both groups of schools, such as the Traffic Light System and Shining Circles. Teachers who use them believe them to be effective.

Some teachers in both groups of schools felt the children were over-confident, to the point of fault. They did not consider the children accorded the teachers sufficient respect. Obviously, individual teachers will set and feel comfortable with their own boundaries. One teacher in a Contrasting Areas school who wished to move the boundaries a considerable distance conceded that there was little difficulty in getting the children to accept the changes. Nevertheless, during training, it would be beneficial for teachers to have time to discuss this aspect of classroom management, perhaps during cluster groups, and try to arrive at some sort of consensus about limits.

The Enriched Curriculum and specific groups of children

The findings echo those of previous years. The great majority of teachers continue to believe that the Enriched Curriculum is suitable for all groups of children. A minority of teachers in Contrasting Areas schools worry whether there is sufficient challenge for high-ability children: No teacher expresses a certain view on this question.

It has become apparent that there are widely differing views on the use of ability grouping. These may be summarised as follows:

¹³ ‘Trend’ here refers to statistically significant at the $p = .01$ level. This is not as statistically strong as the word ‘significant’ but it does raise the question as to whether the result would be significant with a larger sample.

¹⁴ At present, we have teacher ratings for Enriched Curriculum group children in Years 2 and 3, but only next year will we have data for Year 4. The control group data is for Year 4.

- All teachers seem to operate ability groups at some level but manner of implementation varies greatly.
- The extremes of implementation of ability groups may be characterised thus:
 1. Hard grouping: Ability groups are the same for all activities and children sit at group tables from second week of Year 1. Group membership seldom changes.
 2. Soft grouping: Groups are loose, flexible for different activities and not apparent in normal seating arrangement. Group membership changes in line with changes noticed by the teacher in ongoing assessment.

It is clear that the amount of whole-class teaching has increased relative to the pre-existing curriculum. However, all teachers would find it very difficult to work without some sort of ability grouping at times. Rather than teacher training putting all the emphasis on reducing ability grouping to the minimum, the evaluation team suggests helping teachers to move towards the soft option by education about the adverse effects of ability grouping, the advantages of mixed-ability groups and techniques for operating the latter successfully.

Some teachers had large groups of low ability children. For example, one teacher had 11 out of 14 children with special needs. In these circumstances, it was difficult for the teacher to organise high-grade work that some children could be trusted to do in order that the teacher might concentrate on a different group. One teacher stated, “They spend too much time on mundane tasks. I don’t like it but what can I do?” The removal of or cut in special needs teaching in Year 3 in Shankill schools has exacerbated the situation. Teachers require training to help them to cope with such a situation. Even so, it is desirable for classes with very high levels of low-ability children to be entitled to preferential funding for a classroom assistant. It is unrealistic to expect teachers to provide an adequate level of teaching in such a situation without extra help. Teachers made complaints about what they were asked to cope with compared with other countries such as, “In those countries, they have a ratio of one to eight in early years.”

At the other extreme, those schools with no streaming and reasonable sized classes found that the gap between the top and bottom was widening. **Teachers will increasingly need guidance on dealing with those ready and wanting to move to more formal work and those still needed a more informal approach.** We have already pointed out in previous reports that those children needing challenge in Shankill schools will need to be given that challenge but the point bears restatement.

Teachers continue to believe that the curriculum is particularly useful for the following groups of children:

- Young-for-year (summer-born) children
- Children who are shy or lacking in confidence
- Low-ability groups
- Highly active and hyperactive children, especially those with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

For the first time in the project, two teachers, one from each school group, suggested one group of children who might not benefit from the Enriched Curriculum, those

with Autistic Spectrum Disorder. These children can find noise difficult and they prefer very settled routines.

The effects of the Enriched Curriculum on the wider school culture

One teacher of a composite Year3/Year 4 class was so impressed with the work of her weak Year 3 children that she felt “tempted to give up spellings with my weak Year 4s.” This is an example of how teacher experience will gradually affect practice further up the school but mostly, the tone of school is set by senior members of staff. Their beliefs and actions form the main engine of change. In this context, schools continue to be widely divergent in the extent to which the Enriched Curriculum has affected the culture throughout the school.

Some schools were perceived as treating the Enriched Curriculum as very much a whole school endeavour. The following characteristics of such an approach were identified as contributing to teachers’ enthusiasm and dedication to the project:

- All members of staff are well informed about the project.
- All members of staff know that the Enriched Curriculum has or will have implications for all the year groups and for the content and style of teaching therein. For example, some schools are introducing an increasing number of practical activities for pupils in KS2 as well as in KS1. The Enriched Curriculum is the subject of frequent discussion in the school, both formally and informally.
- Future resourcing for the project is planned on a school-wide basis and members of staff feel they have their fair share of resources.
- Training for the Enriched Curriculum project is regarded as essential. The principal facilitates release of members of staff for training, over and above that provided by the Education and Library Board if that is considered necessary.
- Enriched Curriculum teachers in their first year are released from afternoon teaching of older groups to give time for planning.
- It is recognised that planning for the Enriched Curriculum project is very time consuming and in the beginning, very daunting for the teacher. The principal is sensitive to the pressures on the teacher and does what he or she can to support them. This support ranges widely, for example, from verbal expressions of confidence of the teacher’s ability to make progress within the classroom to arranging for a senior member of staff to assist if the teacher requires help.
- The principal or other senior member of staff visits the classroom at reasonable intervals to assess how the new curriculum is working.
- Teachers’ concerns are taken seriously. Teachers feel they have a voice in future developments.

The evaluation team believes that recognition of the school-wide effects is developing gradually over the lifetime of the pilot project. Some schools have been slower in their response to this development. As a result, teachers in some schools feel somewhat abandoned, not completely neglected but largely “left to get on with it” and to “[find out about things] on the grapevine”. The first year of the project was one of overwhelming enthusiasm. By the second year, this enthusiasm was tempered by

recognition that there was still much work to be done to develop the curriculum to its full potential. By the third year, some schools may have felt that things should be beginning to move forward with minimal input from outside the classroom. Senior members of staff need to recognise the scale of the challenge for teachers of older groups in future years. As this report details, Enriched Curriculum children continue to present different challenges and competencies from those characterising children following a traditional curriculum. Teachers will continue to feel the need to markedly adjust their approach to meet Enriched Curriculum children's needs and to preserve the improvements in active learning style, self-confidence and attitudes which have been reported by the great majority of teachers. Senior staff needs to be alert to any difficulties a teacher may have in making that adjustment.

The relationship between school and parents

A most unexpected viewpoint arose during discussion with Shankill Year 3 teachers in connection with relationships with parents. The first said that:

“The interest teeters off after Year 2 with parents. They are starting to lose interest at this age. They think of [the children] as grown.”

Other teachers agreed with this assessment and added, “Some don't or can't help with homework, especially past Year 4.” Another chipped in with, “They almost seem to wash their hands off them and say they can't do anything with them.” Whatever the truth of this statement, some teachers clearly believe that they cannot have cooperation from parents at this stage.

On the other hand, a teacher in a different Shankill school believed parents were still co-operating with shared reading and enjoying doing so. She said that her parents were mostly unworried, although one had expressed concern. When the teacher explained to that parent that the child hadn't done “the breadth of the work” to make it right for him to progress, there was “no more problem”.

It is very likely that the parent's attitude affects the teacher's attitude and vice versa. It is therefore important that teachers are prepared to deal with parents and that parents are prepared to deal with teachers. Feedback from parents has shown that at least some of them are still trying to assist their children in Year 3. This assistance is an important resource for children and should not be squandered. As we have mentioned before, some schools are already holding courses for parents as co-educators. We believe that schools and teachers would benefit from further advice on how to foster and retain the interest of parents. Courses for parents could usefully include advice on how to approach the child's teacher in a positive spirit of cooperation.

3.4 Concluding remarks

The report this year has not contained as many quotations from teachers in an effort to keep it to a manageable size. Nevertheless, the evaluation team hopes that there is still sufficient evidence of the continued enthusiasm of teachers for the project. Of necessity, an evaluation report must document areas in which things have not gone as

well as they should have done. It would be wrong to conclude from this that teachers have lost their passion for the project. It remains true that teachers do not wish to return to the old methods. They may wish to clarify or even modify some aspects of the new curriculum but they fully recognise its value.

4. The views of parents

4.1 Section summary

All parents of Year 3 children in the Shankill group of schools and all parents of Year 2 children in the Contrasting Areas group of schools were surveyed in late May/early June 2003. A selection of parents who had given contact information was interviewed. This selection was as representative as possible, given the contact data supplied by parents. Teachers also supplied reports of parental attitudes during their own interviews. These data tended to confirm what parents had communicated to the evaluation team directly.

Very few parents from the Shankill group of schools responded this year. There is no evidence that this is indicative of any dissatisfaction with the Enriched Curriculum: It may just be that most parents have said all they want to say. Parents from the Contrasting Areas schools again responded in force, often in great detail.

For the most part, parents who returned the survey continue to be positive or very positive about the Enriched Curriculum. However, they did not use as many superlatives as last year to describe aspects of their children's experience with the programme. Rather, they were positive in a more measured and realistic manner. A considerable group of parents had had concerns about literacy at some time in the past, but those concerns are now resolved because the children have 'taken off' in reading. Some parents, whose children have not reached this point, still continue to have concerns about literacy. The evaluation team considers these findings in the context of public pressures to achieve in literacy and in the light of the fact that some parents in any programme would be likely to have concerns about their child's reading skill. Taken from this perspective, we do not feel that the evidence shows widespread serious discontent among parents about literacy as opposed to nuances of concern. A smaller number of parents have concerns about handwriting skills. No parent is worried about numeracy. In fact, many parents remark on the excellent mental mathematics skills of their children.

As in other years, a very small number of parents are deeply opposed to the curriculum. Across all three years of the project to date, the number of parents who contacted us and were deeply opposed to the project remains under fifteen in total. The evaluation team believes that this level of opposition would be likely to arise in the case of any programme producing such extensive change in the classroom. In addition, this group of parents tend to present their case in an emotional rather than a rational manner, which leads one to suspect that they do not consider the evidence of their child's progress objectively in relation to his or her ability. At the same time, these parents represent a group in deep distress. The evaluation team is concerned that the authorities should prepare to give public reassurance to this group and all other parents, both for the sake of their own wellbeing and the reputation of the project. We believe this would entail a process of informing parents on all aspects of learning in the Enriched Curriculum classroom, but particularly in the skills necessary and the processes involved in learning to read. Parents are explicit in their requests for further information and are displeased when they feel the school has not supplied

sufficient detail¹³. A public presentation of the Enriched Curriculum would also benefit those parents who have nuances of concern and would help them to support the work of the teacher. From parents' responses and teachers' reports of parental enquiries, it is clear that many parents have a model of learning to read as process taking a limited amount of time. They view it as largely complete by the end of Year 3 in the case of children of average ability and above. They do not understand that learning to read is a lifelong process, encompassing increasingly sophisticated conceptual understanding within more and more complex syntactic structures. Further, they do not know that once the basic skills have been mastered, one of the most important predictors of progress is practice (Snow et al. 1998, p211, p314, p324 and for older children, PISA 2000) and hence, it follows that all other factors being equal, those children who love reading will be the most accomplished readers.

A considerable number of parents had concerns about literacy, but felt that the benefits of the programme far outweighed any perceived disadvantage. The evaluation team feels this is only natural in the light of public concern over literacy in general and the weight of negative uninformed comment to which parents are exposed outside school. We feel that publication of the attainment results at the end of Year 3 would do much to ameliorate parental concern on this point but we recognise the wisdom of limiting publicity until the end of the current phase of the project.

4.2 Procedure

All parents of Year 2 children in the Contrasting Areas schools and Year 3 children in the Shankill schools received a questionnaire about their views on the Early Years Enriched Curriculum Project during late May or early June 2003. These questionnaires may be found in full in Appendices C and D for the Year 2 and Year 3 parents respectively. The package included a stamped addressed envelope for return of the questionnaire directly to the evaluation team. Parents were not required to put any identifying details on the questionnaire unless they wished to make themselves available for interview. This process assured parents of complete anonymity if they so desired.

Some of the parents who signified their desire to participate in interviews were followed up in the ensuing weeks. The sample was as representative as possible given the contact details supplied by parents. The interview protocol is found in Appendix E.

4.3 Characteristics of the response population

Contrasting Areas schools: Year 2 parents

Of Year 2 parents, 41.5 % responded to the questionnaire (n = 68). Of those who responded, 72.5% were happy to identify themselves fully.

¹³ One parent went so far as to locate the principal researcher using an internet search in her quest for further information.

For those who identified the school, the rate of response for each school was roughly in line with the size of the year group in that school; no school dominated the responses or had an unreasonably small response rate. The identified respondents were all mothers except for one father. Forty-seven percent of those respondents for whom we could identify the gender of the child were the parents of girls.

Shankill schools: Year 3 parents

Only 13.2% of Year 2 parents responded to the questionnaire (n = 20). Of those who responded, 45.5% were happy to identify themselves fully.

Three of the schools returned at least one fully identified response. The majority of the identified responses were from the three largest schools. All respondents who could be identified were mothers.

In view of the small number of questionnaires returned from Shankill schools and the lack of any issues raised specific to Year 3, it was not thought necessary to analyse these comments separately. In Section 4.5, they are identified with an asterisk (*) at the beginning of the quotation.

4.4 Analysis of closed questions

Shankill schools

1. How does your child feel about school this year?

The results are summarised in Figure 4.1. No parent reported that their child had been unhappy. Nine parents said that their children had been very happy in school during Year 3; ten reported that the children were quite happy. One did not reply to this question. In view of evidence presented last year, this is an important finding: Parents are well aware that happy children are more likely to learn and are concerned that

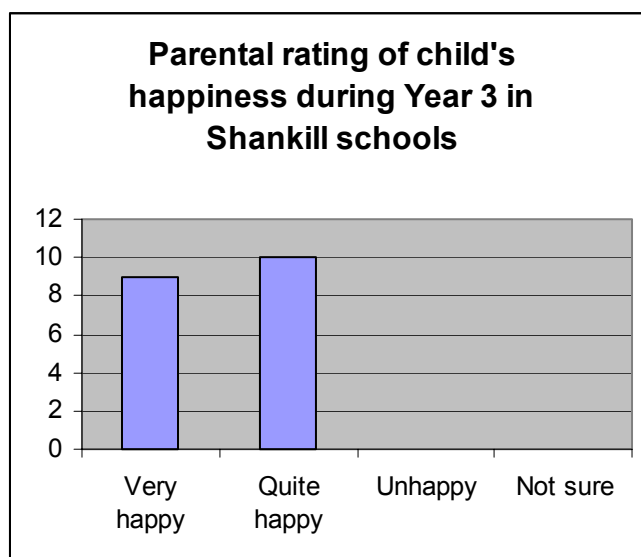


Figure 4.1

2. How do you feel about his or her progress?

The results are displayed in Figure 4.2. Almost half the parents rated progress as better or much better than expected. Eight rated progress as good as expected. Three parents reported progress not as good as expected. One of these parents was the mother of a child who had transferred from another school; the parent believed the child had been much further on. Another parent had a child with learning difficulties and did not blame the Enriched Curriculum for the child's lack of progress. From her other comments, she really meant that progress was not as good as she had hoped.

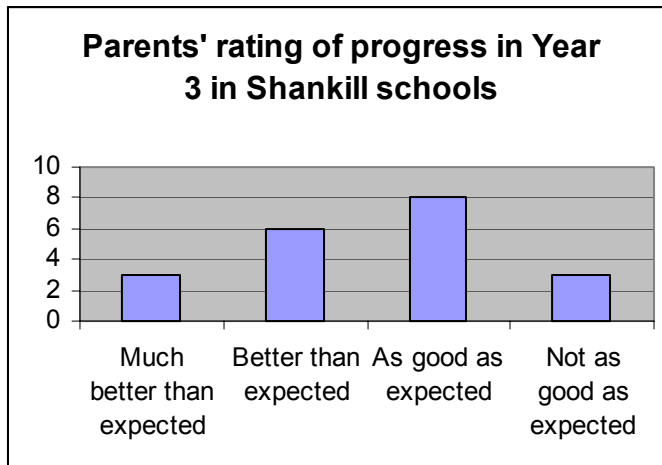


Figure 4.2

3. What do you think of the amount of formal work your child is doing in class (e.g. written worksheets)?

The results are displayed in Figure 4.3. Overwhelmingly, parents believed that children were doing the right amount of formal work in Year 3. One parent did not reply to this question.

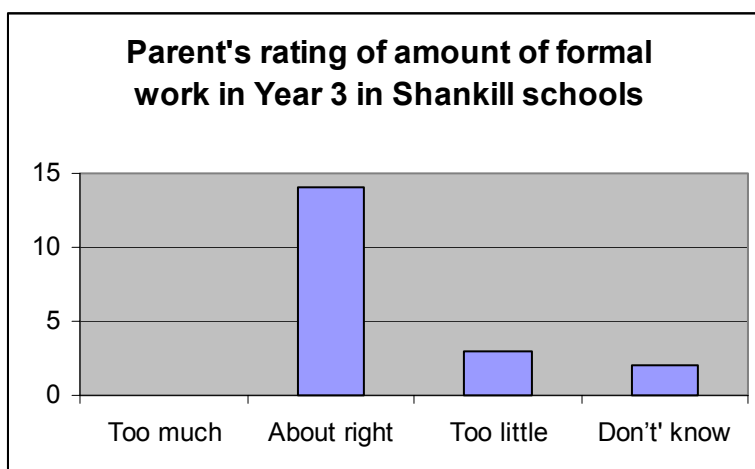


Figure 4.3

4. What has been the effect of the Enriched Curriculum on your child's future success?

The results are displayed in Figure 4.3. The great majority of parents believed that the Enriched curriculum had improved their child's chance of success or made no difference. Only one parent thought it had had a detrimental effect. Two parents did not reply. One of these parents put a question mark against the question.

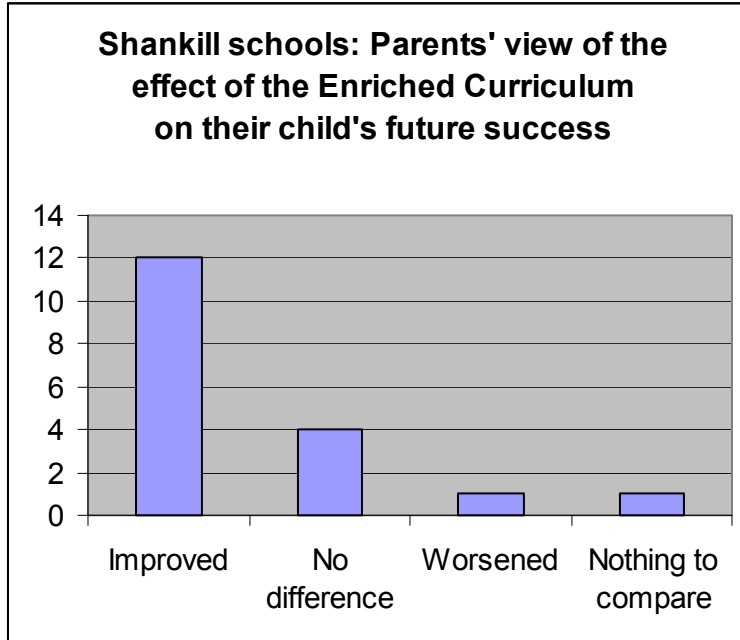


Figure 4.4

5. How much is your child interested in books?

The results are displayed in Figure 4.5. The great majority of parents rated their children very interested or quite interested in books at the end of Year 3. In view of the project's goal of creating and preserving an interest in books, this is an important positive finding.

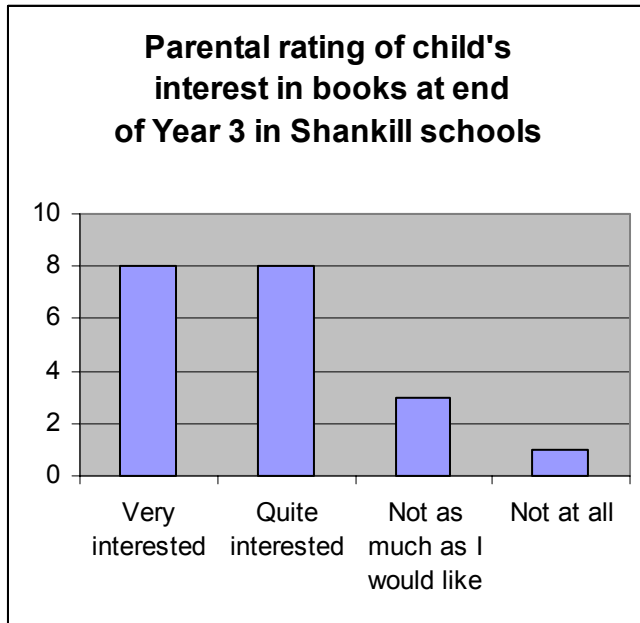


Figure 4.5

6. How much do you feel you can help your child's education?

The results are displayed in Figure 4.6. The great majority of parents reported that they felt the Enriched Curriculum had made a big difference or some difference in the degree to which they could contribute to their child's education. Again, in an area in which adults often feel disempowered, this is an important positive finding.

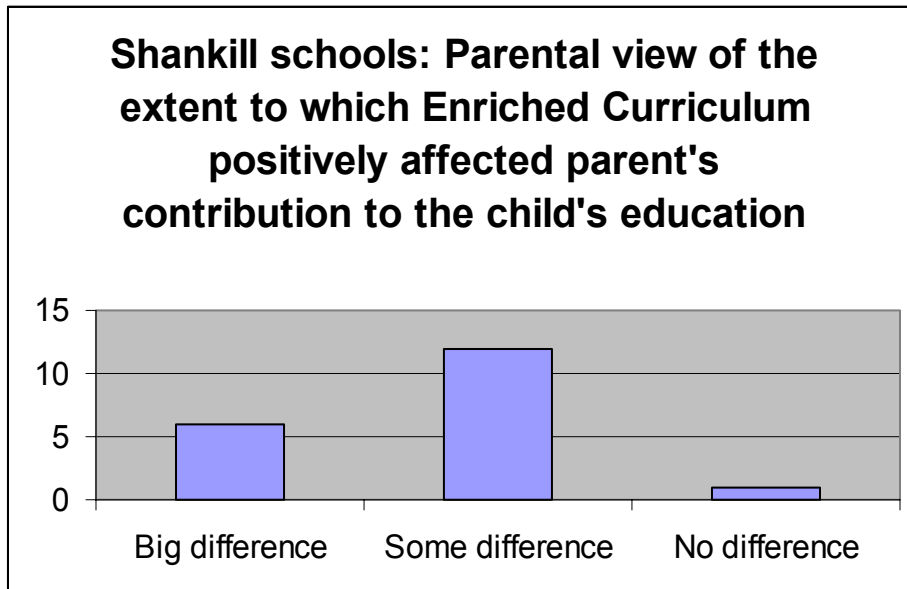


Figure 4.6

Contrasting Areas Schools

1. How does your child feel about school this year?

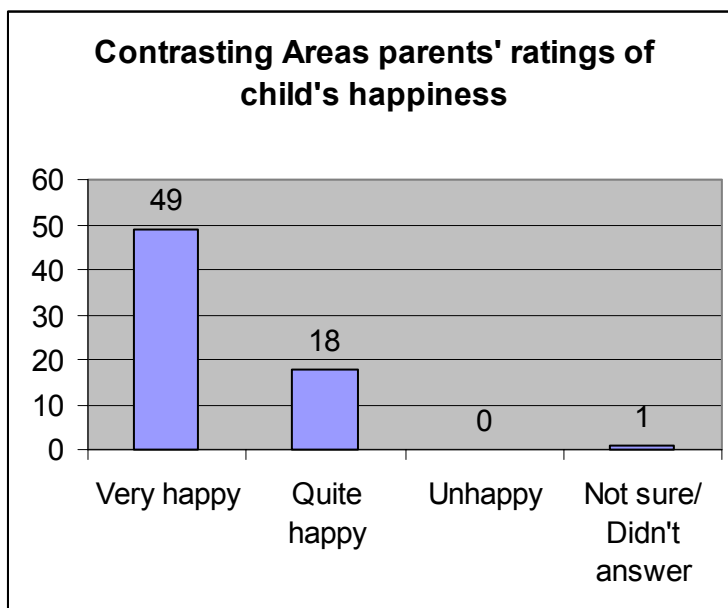


Figure 4.6

It is evident from Figure 4.6 that the great majority of children were happy in school. Parents made it clear in their comments that the child's happiness was important to them.

2. If you have an older child, do you think your P2 child is making better or worse progress because of the new way of teaching than they would have done under the old system?

This question applied to only 46% of parents. Of those to whom it did apply, a majority preferred the Enriched Curriculum, as Figure 4.7 demonstrates. Quite a number indicated that they weren't sure. These parents all indicated support for the new curriculum elsewhere in their response, especially in regard to Question 5, as we shall see below. Parents who had some concerns, usually around literacy, tended to tick this box. Of the three parents who said they preferred the traditional curriculum, one also indicated that she felt the Enriched Curriculum would help her child to succeed in her education.

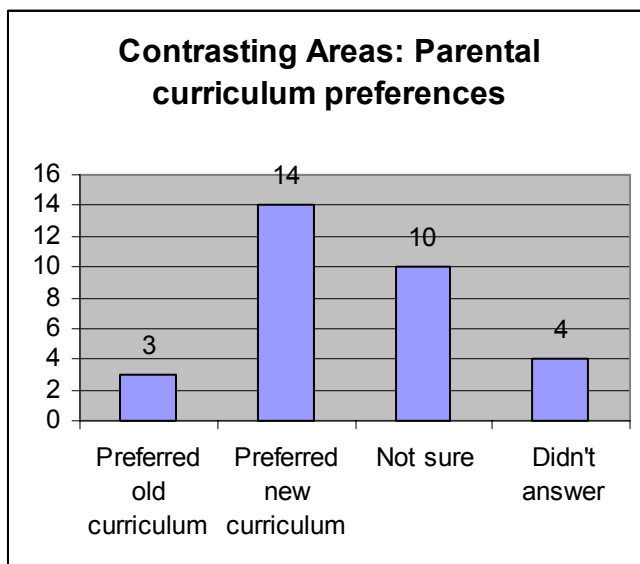


Figure 4.7

3. The amount of formal work, such as written worksheets, my child is doing in class now is (choose one option box)

Figure 4.8 indicates that most parents believed the amount of formal work was about right. Those who indicated they had not been informed by the school about the work the child was doing were clearly upset about it.

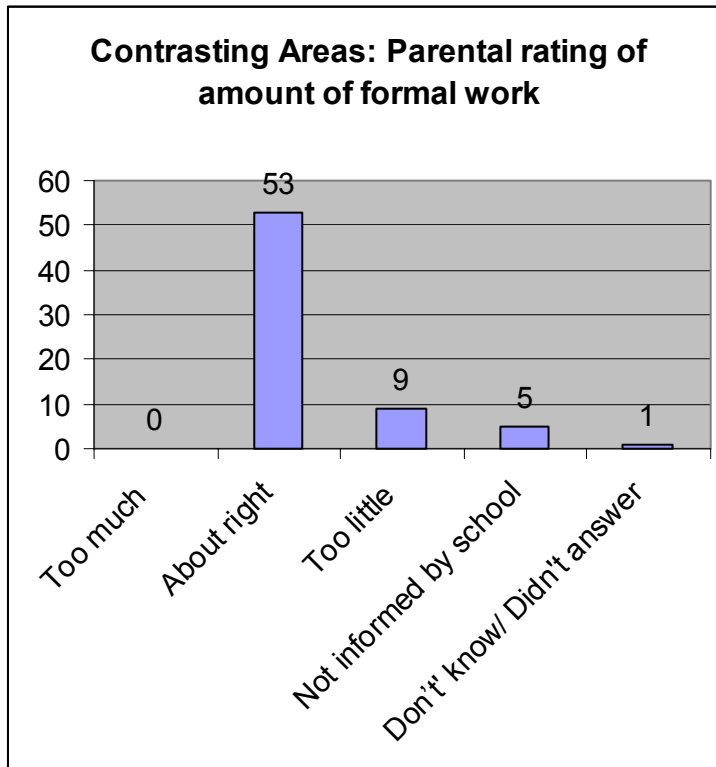


Figure 4.8

4. Last year, did you think this new programme in P1 would help your child to succeed in his or her education?

Yes No

Have you changed your mind and if so, why?

Figure 4.9 makes it clear that the great majority of respondents had supported and continued to support the Enriched Curriculum. One who answered 'Yes', but indicated she was now uncertain and was recorded as having changed her mind (as 'Yes to No'). Eight parents **had not supported the Enriched Curriculum last year** but of these, three had definitely changed their minds. Others who were less certain that they had changed their minds were not recorded as 'No to Yes', even though two of them made supportive comments elsewhere.

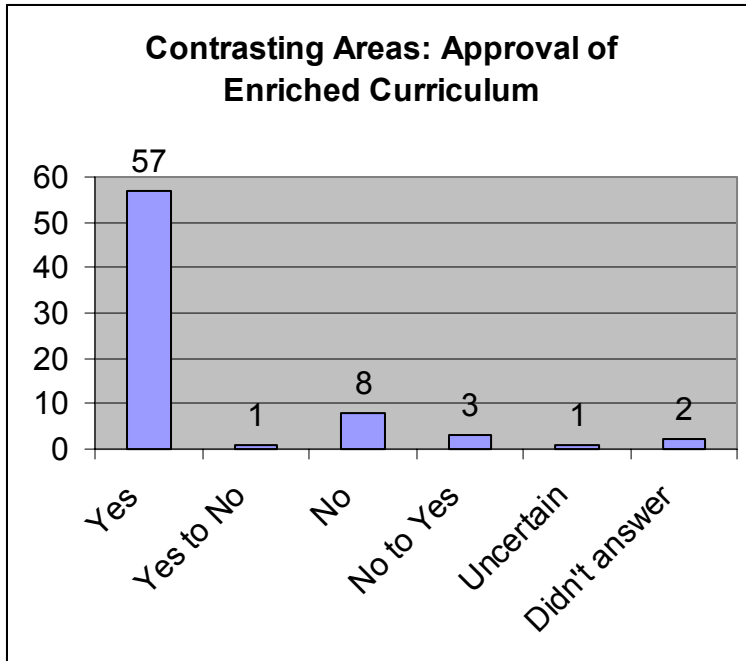


Figure 4.9

- Is the new programme continuing to make any difference to the way you work or play with your child?

Exactly half the parents reported that the Enriched Curriculum had changed the way they worked or played with their child. Many parents reported playing more number games, or names to improve literacy skills such as 'I spy'. A considerable minority of parents reported just being more generally aware of how learning could be painlessly incorporated into everyday activities.

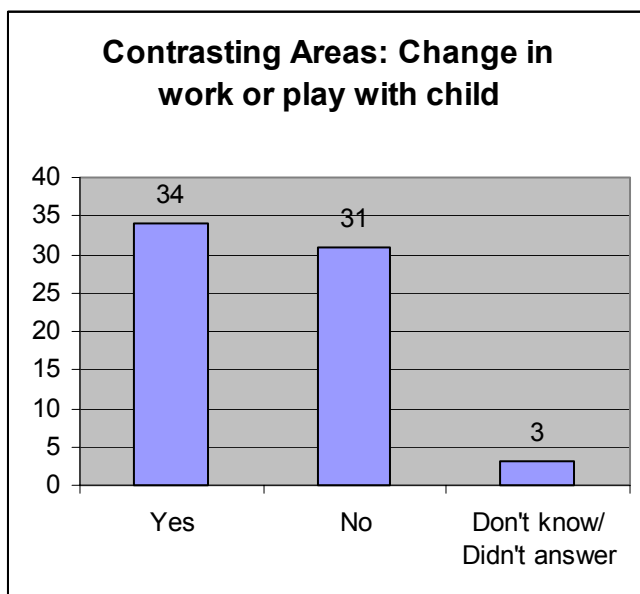


Figure 4.10

6. Do you feel that you are more involved in or are contributing more to your child's education under the new programme than you would have been under the old system?

Figure 4.11 demonstrates that a majority of parents believed they were more involved with their child's learning under the Enriched Curriculum. Even some of those who fell into this category would have liked to have done more, given additional information from the school. Those who answered, "No", often felt that they could have done more and complained that they weren't given enough information. Many parents indicated that they were happy to help.

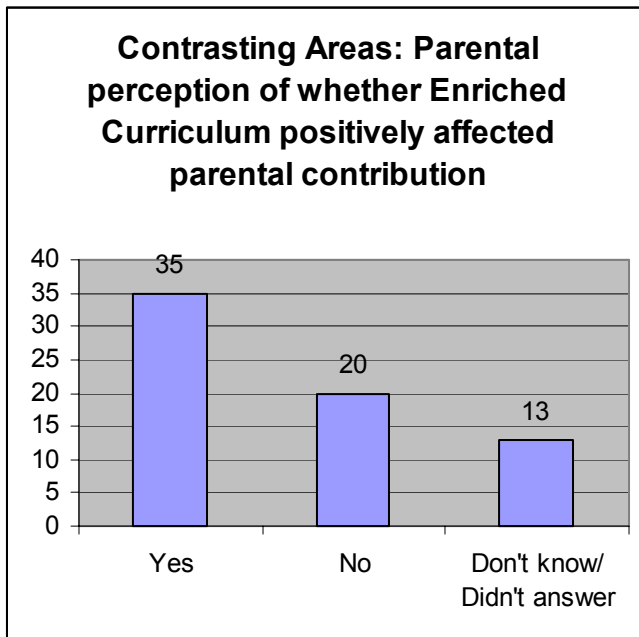


Figure 4.11

4.5 Analysis of written responses and parent interviews

Parents' views are summarised under the following headings:

- Overall assessment of the programme
- Comparison with older siblings
- Reading and wider literacy skills
- Handwriting and creative writing
- Numeracy
- Children's personal and social development
- The Enriched Curriculum and specific groups of children
- Year 2/3 issues (whichever was appropriate)
- The relationship between school and parents
- Homework

Overall assessment of the programme

In the Contrasting Areas group of schools, the tone of all the responses except three could be described as very positive or positive. One response was from a very distressed parent, who wrote a very long, detailed and emotional response. She had been told that her child had learning difficulties.

Fifteen of the parents from Shankill schools wrote comments, but in all but a few cases, these were very brief. Most parents just wrote that they had no concerns or worries. Three had some concern around literacy but within a framework that was positive overall. One parent was mostly negative about the programme in her comments, although this was not reflected in her answer to closed questions.

One parent summarised her perception of the general view of parents for the researcher:

Every now and then, there is discussion among parents comparing the Enriched Curriculum to other schools. Generally, the view is that the benefits outweigh any worries.

Many parents in both groups of schools were still expressing their gratitude to teachers and/or the school:

The teachers are a strong bunch. They all want the best for the children.

She has come a long way from starting school and has progressed very quickly.

The school works very hard to achieve the best for all their pupils.

I thought Valerie was slow in learning simple things but now she has improved tenfold thanks to the school and the new system.

The teachers and the helpers put a lot into it. I do not think it would work without all their effort.

Many parents commented on the good progress they observed in their children, but not everyone felt that it was as good as it might be:

I feel it has been an invaluable grounding.

He isn't a big fan of school life in general. He would prefer to be at home, so he needed to find it an enjoyable experience. Progress became clearer halfway through P2. He has definitely caught up with [where his older siblings were] at this stage.

I think the play-based learning suited my son. He is now interested in reading, sitting at a table writing and colouring in. He was not before!

Last year I was concerned but now I am more than happy with her progress. She plays a lot at home at counting and rhyming words.

I felt she would not be stretched enough but I was wrong. Andrea enjoys it all. When we go the teacher, she can tell us about her development in each individual area.

I taught in Key Stage 1 for nine years and I always valued play. However, I taught activity-based learning when it was not as popular, especially with Key Stage 2 teachers. I know my son has gained from the larger play activities and all the discussions.

My daughter is slightly bored. She wants to write on paper and show off her work. I feel she is capable of more.

As in previous years, many parents were still showing pleasure over children's happiness and enjoyment in school, which they clearly believe to be important:

I wasn't worried as they were always happy to go.

This Enriched Curriculum has made school fun and not a chore.

She is just happy with the teachers and what she is learning. She likes to talk about school.

She enjoys going to school every day.

She is very well motivated and happy.

Many parents in the Contrasting Areas group of schools again commented favourably on the holistic nature of the Enriched Curriculum approach. They appreciated the benefits of that approach; they frequently remarked on the wider range of interests shown by the children.

The breadth of work the Enriched Curriculum embraces far exceeds any other alternative approach. We tend to integrate teaching into our everyday lives as opportunity arises. My daughter regularly 'reads the clouds' for the weather. It makes for very interesting conversations.

My daughter has covered a wide range of things. She is happy and I am happy.

She is learning to be much more observant about things around her and is asking questions related to this. Her concentration is more focussed and clearer.

She repeats information [she has learned at school] such as how electric pylons work and why they are dangerous.

Much research has remarked on how school learning often fails to transfer into other areas of life or is not applied appropriately outside the classroom. Many parents are pleased that this is not evident with the Enriched Curriculum:

She is able to apply learning to everyday things easily.

He can transfer his learning into everyday situations. As a boy with a June birthday, I feel this programme has been very supportive to him.

There were a few negative comments, although this did not necessarily mean that the parent had a totally negative view:

I don't feel the teacher was always as confident as I would have liked. I do support it but it can be quite nerve wracking when your older children have gone through the National Curriculum.

At least one parent was swayed by the research base of the project. Perhaps other would be similarly impressed if they knew more about it:

I feel it is well evidenced and researched. Finally, education in Northern Ireland is (now) "less parochial".

Comparison with older siblings

As happened in previous years, parents with older children who had followed the pre-existing curriculum often commented favourably on the Enriched Curriculum when making a comparison:

She can come home and show her big sister and get her to do things. In some ways, my older child didn't seem to do as well.

I have two older boys and they would certainly have benefited.

My older one felt much more pressure and was probably pushed when not entirely ready. The teacher tells me he is making good progress and having turned six recently, [the Enriched Curriculum child] shows much more interest in writing.

Reading and wider literacy skills

Many parents indicated that their children had good, confident reading skills and read avidly for pleasure:

She now reads everything - instructions for games, things off the TV and no words seem to be too difficult for her. I am very impressed.

Reading is a pleasure for him rather than being seen as work. My child is able to read this as I am writing. He is willing to take risks in spelling and reading.

She reads and attempts words which are not familiar by sight. She is not put off just because she has not met it before. I feel she sees a new word

as a challenge and she will try to pronounce it using the skills she has learnt. I feel it has boosted her confidence; she is not naturally forward.

He has learnt to read fluently and enjoys doing so.

He was reading fluently at the end of P1.

She is always wanting to read "to the end of the book".

Of equal interest, was the number of parents who had had their concerns about reading assuaged over the year:

I had concerns about the pace of learning but any concerns have disappeared. David's progression in reading was slow at the start but recently, I have never ceased to be amazed at his ability to read through sounding out. And, he can transfer his learning into everyday situations. As a boy with a June birthday, I feel this programme has been very supportive to him.

Lately, he has excellent phonics understanding.

We are aware of the lower level of reading and writing ability between my child and others attending schools not doing the Enriched Curriculum. Lack of reassurance and information given by school made this a concern for me. However, I have changed my mind over the last month or so as she appears to have made great strides with her reading and writing and I feel she will be ready for P3 when September comes.

Child was unable to read or recognise numbers very well. Has improved greatly in the latter part of P2.

I have changed my mind. My child did not seem to have any grasp of reading for quite a long time but all of a sudden, he could read very well and has continued to progress in leaps and bounds.

I wasn't convinced that the new system of reading by phonics would work because they didn't seem to get the easy words. e.g. for, but, also, from with when etc. but apparently, these would be the last thing they tune in to. Both boys are quite confident in reading now. They like to read their magazines and even pick up the newspaper on occasion.

We (the parents) are more accepting of the child's pace. Then he suddenly 'took off' in P2 without any pushing or prompting.

As with the child above who picked up the newspaper, several parents were aware of their child's interest in environmental print or a wide range reading material. These parents mentioned the child's pleasure in such activities:

She certainly notices things out and about, billboards, road signs etc. She takes an interest in what's on them.

*He loves information books.

*She likes to get very involved in her reading and writing.

Parents are very aware of any difficulty in reading:

Adam is very happy at school although he does have some difficulties and is learning through the **Reading Recovery** system. I have a niece who is the same age and she is way more advanced as regards reading and writing. She is under the old system. I do my best not to compare the two systems but sometimes, it is hard. His teacher was quick enough to act when she realised there might be a problem and for that we are grateful. I find it very helpful that we can approach the teacher with our concerns and she takes them on board and would have a follow-up chat with us. I am very aware that all parents of teachers in P2 do not have this luxury.

Unfortunately, if the child is not making good progress, many parents will naturally blame it on the Enriched Curriculum:

Older child was reading by this age. I am concerned about this. I would prefer my child was following the old system.

Numeracy

Like teachers, parents did not report any difficulty with mathematics. The fact that this is so even though the attainment levels in mathematics are also behind in a further reason to believe that public pressure is the cause of much of the parental concern about literacy. The tone of the few comments about mathematics tended to be very positive:

Her numeracy skills are excellent. As a teacher in this subject at higher levels, I perceive a very sound foundation being laid for later skills in pattern recognition and number skills generally.

He is very good in mental maths.

Two parents echo a response found in previous years which is related to children who have a specific difficulty in reading but no problems in other domains:

The Enriched Curriculum allows children with a problem in reading to make good progress in other areas, because they do not feel a failure.

*The Enriched Curriculum has made a difference to my son because he is slow in reading and spelling but he is very good at maths. If he had had to do more recording, he wouldn't have done so well in maths. This has given him a chance to catch up.

Homework

Parents reported a wide range of set homework and greatly divergent opinions about it. Parents' responses reflect the individuality of children and remind us how difficult it is to cater for everyone to their satisfaction:

She actually wants more homework.

Any more homework would have put him off. We can't do it until after 6pm and he is quite tired.

The worksheets she brings home are very easy and do not pose a challenge for her.

I thought because they didn't bring homework home they wouldn't learn as much. Now I know how wrong this was.

She enjoys doing her homework.

Although my son hasn't been given formal homeworks in his first two years, he has always been very keen to read books, write and draw pictures at home. I believe the lack of pressure makes my son more likely to work at home without being asked.

Parents had learned from the programme how to extend homework in a fun way. They realised they had a contribution to make and usually enjoyed making it.

The new programme relies on the parents doing what the teachers ask; reading to then with the child the child, listening to them. The more we read to her, the more she gets to know about spelling and meaning.

I do more reading with my boys instead of reading to them.

I can help a lot more than what I did with my son.

At Year 3, attitudes to homework may be changing for some:

He enjoys school but hates having homework.

Some homework is mind boggling for me but the teacher always explains the homework to him and he can do it without any problems.

Personal and social development

Many parents again made comments about the child's level of confidence. For one child, this knew no bounds:

My son is very ambitious. He wants to become 'President of the United States'.

A number of parents mentioned teamwork and obviously approved:

She is learning to share and respect other people's feelings through circle time and group work.

I feel they are encouraged to help their peers and to work alongside one another. Teamwork means a lot to them all.

Some parents again mentioned their child's ability to speak out:

They are really encouraged to express themselves.

The Enriched Curriculum and specific groups of children

Many parents, like teachers, believe that the Enriched Curriculum is good for specific groups of children. Parents cite the same groups of children as teachers do:

She has made much better progress than I expected because she has a learning disorder.

He gained a lot of confidence and learned how to mix with the rest of his class very well, considering he was a very shy little boy at the start. He went into Year 2 much more confident.

My son has had speech problems and has had speech therapy since he was 2½ years old. I feel the new curriculum has been excellent in his development. He also has some problems in motor skills, such as running and climbing, and the new curriculum has helped his confidence.

Two parents drew attention to the possible plight of children moving into and out of the Enriched Curriculum:

Hannah was at a different school before this and was much further on than she is now.

What would happen if we had to go back to England? Would they struggle? I think it is excellent but we may have to move.

The relationship between school and parents

Many parents seemed to be satisfied with the information they had been given and with access to teacher:

I have received a lot of information in advance from the class teacher, telling us what is going to happen next.

However, parents were often in two minds about their attitudes. The following two comments are from the same parent:

Unfortunately, the school, for whatever reasons has not involved the parents in this.

I am aware of what he is going to be taught and I am made to be involved. I feel my child and myself have a closer bond and I can help him more.

Lack of communication between school and home can do a lot of damage:

I feel as parents we were not given enough information about the new system. I feel it would have been helpful if we had been given a written outline of the curriculum detailing what would be done in P1 and P2.

I do not know how much formal work my child does in class. The school has not informed me. I feel I cannot really talk to my child's teacher because if you disagree with anything, then you are excluded from school activities. My child complains that he cannot hear what the teacher is saying because the class are talking and messing about. My child had the same reading book for at least a month but when I told the teacher, she said she had not realised it. The reading books are supposed to be changed every week.

I do feel that not enough communication was done between school and parents. I also feel at times that the teacher was unsure herself.

But these comments below were made about the same teacher as in the previous quotation, so some parents may be at fault at times in the communication process:

He seems to be getting more help than in previous years and is doing better than I expected.

He seems to get on well with everyone from pupils to teachers. Maybe it's the atmosphere in the class. The teacher is always very nice to me if I need to ring her. When I have an interview, apart from telling me how he is doing, she gives me the opportunity to talk and discuss issues regarding him and his progress.

The above comments show how communication has to be a two-way street. Perhaps information for parents could include advice on how to approach teachers in a manner calculated to get a positive response.

4.4 Concluding remarks

This section of the report has presented a melange of positive and negative comment from parents. The reader does not have the researcher's advantage of being able to see each comment in the context of the parent's entire response. **It should be emphasised again that the tone of the great majority of responses was positive overall.** Parents who made negative comments even contradicted themselves in another part of the response at times. The researcher's overall impression was of the majority of parents being solidly behind the project. Some of these parents had the

concerns around literacy and/or handwriting that we have discussed above but it was often evident that these concerns stemmed from a lack of information and/or external pressure on parents. In recent times, it has become increasingly unacceptable to keep parents at arm's length. A centrally conceived information programme for parents, to which all Northern Ireland education authorities could subscribe, would therefore seem to be a sensible way to move forward.

5. Classroom observations study

5.1 Section summary

As in the first year of the project, a number of structured observations were undertaken using Walsh's Quality Learning Instrument (QLI) in order to gain an insight into the quality of the learning experience on offer in Enriched Curriculum classrooms.

It was not possible to gain access to all the teachers new to the project this year for various reasons, including maternity leave at the time of the assessment.

The lack of training of one of the substitute teachers in Contrasting Areas schools, who was very recently qualified and had not attended Enriched Curriculum training, was evident in the QLI results. Otherwise, the results for Year 2 classes in the Contrasting Areas group of schools were high on average, comparable with those in the first year of the project in these schools, although with somewhat more variation.

The QLI results for Year 3 classes in Shankill schools were well down on those of previous years on average, and showed considerable variation. The evaluation team believes this reflects the lack of training reported by the teachers themselves.

5.2 Walsh's Quality Learning Instrument

The QLI was designed as a process measure of quality which aims to capture the quality of the learning experience on offer, taking into consideration the children's actions, the teaching strategies and the role of the environment. It draws on an experiential model of how young children learn where it is believed that:

- children should be actively engaged in their learning;
- children need some control and autonomy over their learning;
- children must feel secure in their learning environment;
- children learn in the company of others;
- children's learning is holistic, rather than based on subject areas; and
- children's metacognitive powers must be considered.

Based on this understanding nine key themes were generated to form the content of the QLI namely:

- Motivation
- Concentration
- Respect
- Confidence
- Independence
- Well-being
- Social interaction
- Higher-order thinking skills
- Multiple skill acquisition

Each theme is then rated under three headings; children actions, teaching strategies and the role of the environment.

As we have explained in previous reports, QLI is an instrument of high validity and reliability. This year, the test was adapted for Year 3 classes in the same manner as it was adapted last year for Year 2 classes, including a revalidation exercise.

5.3 Procedure

A team of fourth-year undergraduate students from Stranmillis University College, who have specialised in Early Years Education and who were trained to use the QLI, conducted the evaluations. Researchers were each asked to observe a snapshot of early years practice in each classroom over a single day. They made notes to illustrate every aspect of QLI in each class on a rubric designed by Dr Walsh. Dr Walsh discussed the findings of each researcher before they assigned a final rating for each section in the rubric.

Unfortunately, it was not possible to gain access to all Year 3 classes in Shankill schools this Year: Only six of the classes were assessed. Repeat observations were also made in five Year 1 classes, four Year 2 classes and two composite Year 1/Year 2 classes.

It was also not possible to gain access to one of the Year 2 classes in the Contrasting Areas group of schools. Seven out of the eight classes were assessed. Two of the assessments which were carried out related to teachers who had come in to cover maternity leave. One of these had no Enriched Curriculum training before she started teaching.

This year (2002/2003) the observations concentrated on Year 2 (n=10) and Year 3 (n=6) classes in the Shankill schools as well six Year 1 classes in Contrasting Areas throughout Northern Ireland. Repeat observations were carried out on 5 Year 1 classes.

Year 1 (n=1), Year 2 (n=6), Year 3 (n=3) and Year 2/Year 3 (n=1) comparison classes (i.e. where the traditional curriculum was being implemented) were also evaluated using the QLI.

The main aims for this aspect of the study were:

- To evaluate whether the quality of the learning experience in the Shankill Year 1 classes had changed since the previous year;
- To examine the quality of the learning experience in the Shankill Year 3 classes as compared to traditional Year 3 classes in a similar area; and
- To assess the quality of the learning experience in a sample of Year 1 classes throughout Northern Ireland whose socio-economic status was less deprived than that of the Shankill schools.

5.4 Shankill study results

Year 3

The findings, as tabulated in Table 5.1, would suggest that the third year Enriched Curriculum classes in the Shankill schools did not provide as good a quality of learning experience compared with those classes in the first and second year of the project. Whilst there was considerable variability in the scores, there was no class which was an obvious outlier bringing down the average scores.

*Table 5.1
Walsh's QLI mean ratings for nine indicators across the six Shankill Year 3 classes
with Year 2 classes for comparison*

Indicators	Shankill Year 3 Classes (2002/2003)	Shankill Year 2 Classes (2001/2002)
Motivation	3.2	4.2
Concentration	2.9	4.1
Confidence	3.5	4.4
Independence	3.8	4.6
Well-being	3.5	4.9
Multiple skill acquisition	3.0	4.1
HOTS*	2.9	3.9
Social interaction	3.1	4.6
Respect	2.9	4.5

*Higher order thinking skills

How should we interpret these findings? The QLI is designed to respond to indications of quality of the kind which should be found in the Enriched Curriculum environment, that is, a developmentally appropriate curriculum with a play-based or practical approach. We cannot therefore conclude that there is only poor teaching going on in some of the classrooms. Rather, **the findings constitute evidence that the teaching in Year 3 classes is not as clearly in accord with the practice which would be expected in Enriched Curriculum classrooms.** It is likely that it is more didactic and content driven in style, as in the pre-existing curriculum. This is exactly what we would expect from teachers who have not had sufficient training in the Enriched Curriculum. This interpretation receives further support when we look at findings for Year 1 and Year 2 classes in Shankill schools for the year 2002 – 2003. These findings are contained in Table 5.2 and Table 5.3.

In Table 5.2, when we look at the individual teacher ratings which go to make up this table of results, we find that teachers who have had training have maintained or improved their high performance levels. When we include all six teachers observed in their third year of teaching Year 1 classes, we see a drop in some average scores in 2003 – 2003. This is due to two teachers new to the project, who presumably have not had the same level of training¹⁴ or perhaps none at all. When we look at the experienced teachers, we see an improved performance on average, with individual teachers either maintaining or improving their performance.

¹⁴ It is outside our remit to look at the performance of experienced teachers but Dr Walsh wished to gather as much information as possible.

Table 5.2
Walsh's mean QLI ratings for nine indicators across the Shankill Year 1 classes over the three years of the project

Indicators	Shankill Year 1 Classes (*) (2002/2003)	Shankill Year 1 Classes (2001/2002)	Shankill Year 1 Classes (2000/2001)
Motivation	4.6 (5.1)	4.2	4.0
Concentration	4.6 (5.0)	4.1	4.3
Confidence	4.3 (4.8)	4.4	4.5
Independence	4.2 (5.1)	4.6	3.8
Well-being	4.3 (5.2)	4.9	4.3
Multiple skill acquisition	4.7 (4.9)	4.1	4.6
HOTS	4.1 (4.8)	3.9	3.8
Social interaction	3.7 (4.4)	4.6	4.5
Respect	4.1 (4.8)	4.5	4.3

*Note: * Average results for experienced teachers only are given in brackets.*

In Table 5.3, we see the results for Shankill Year 2 teachers over the two years of the project. Unfortunately, researchers did not record the name of two of the teachers, so we cannot be certain about their status in terms of experience. However, we can say that three teachers known to be experienced in this group maintained or improved their high scores, whereas the results from the two unidentified teachers were much lower.

Table 5.3
Walsh's mean QLI ratings for nine indicators across the Shankill Year 2 classes over the three years of the project

Indicators	Shankill Year 2 Classes (2002/2003)	Shankill Year 2 Classes (2001/2002)
Motivation	3.7	4.2
Concentration	3.1	4.1
Confidence	4.0	4.4
Independence	3.9	4.6
Well-being	3.8	4.9
Multiple skill acquisition	3.6	4.1
HOTS	2.7	3.9
Social interaction	3.7	4.6
Respect	3.7	4.5

5.5 Contrasting Areas study results

Year 2

The findings, as tabulated in Table 5.4, would suggest that the second year Enriched Curriculum classes in the Contrasting Areas schools (first column) did not provide as good a quality of learning experience compared with the Year 1 classes last year. However, the teacher covering maternity leave who had no training was an obvious outlier. When the results are recalculated to exclude this teacher, they are more comparable with the results in the previous year. However, they are still down on seven of the nine markers. Again, we hypothesise that this partly reflects lower levels of training in some cases.

*Table 5.4
Walsh's mean QLI ratings for nine indicators
across the Contrasting Areas Year 2 classes
with Year 1 classes for comparison*

Indicators	Contrasting Areas Year 2 Classes (2002/2003)	Contrasting Areas truncated sample* Year 2 Classes (2002/2003)	Contrasting Areas Year 1 Classes (2001/2002)
Motivation	4.5	4.9	5.3
Concentration	4.1	4.4	4.9
Confidence	4.7	5.1	5.2
Independence	4.9	5.3	5.2
Well-being	4.7	5.1	5.3
Multiple skill acquisition	4.1	4.5	5.1
HOTS	4.0	4.5	5.0
Social interaction	4.6	4.8	5.1
Respect	4.6	4.9	4.7

*Note: *Excluding the teacher who had no training*

5.6 Concluding remarks

As populations of classes in the various groups are small, any conclusions must be tentative at best. However, looking at the trends accumulating across all groups together, it would seem that there is a relationship between QLI scores and the degree of training. The gradual reduction in the level of training in moving from Year 1 through to Year 3 in Shankill schools is reflected in the results and a similar pattern may be emerging in Contrasting Areas schools.

A more definite conclusion is that higher-order thinking skills remains a difficult area for teachers. Scores in this domain are consistently lower than others throughout. We would suggest that this is further support for our suggestion¹⁵ to consider updating the Enriched Curriculum in this area.

¹⁵ See the section on oral language and thinking skills on page 22.

Over the years, those teachers who reported during interviews that they regarded themselves as having a more formal or didactic style have tended to do very well on multiple skill acquisition, but at the expense of motivation, concentration and independence. This may mean that these teachers produce good immediate results but we cannot predict the outcomes for the children in the long term. In our final analysis, we will try to apply multi-level modelling to the data which may shed light on this question, but we are not yet certain that the number of classes is large enough to give any definitive answers.

6. Formative Assessment of the Project

In our report of November 2002 on the project, the evaluation team made a number of recommendations. The analysis contained in this report has not given rise to any finding which would cause us to reconsider. Rather, additional analysis has given added support to many of these recommendations. Accordingly, these recommendations are re-presented, together some modifications and additions emerging from this year's analysis.

1. The CCEA curriculum review document (CCEA 2002) should serve as a basic framework document for implementation of the Enriched Curriculum. However, **most teachers would welcome some written amplification of the framework document**, especially in regard to assessment in general and in particular, to guidance on criteria for assessing the child's readiness to proceed to more formal reading and number work. The amplified guidance should now extend into Year 3¹⁶ work, with particular attention being given to what teachers should do with very low-ability children who would still benefit from a very practical approach while the rest of the class was ready to move on.
2. In view of the continuing message from teachers that aspects of the Enriched Curriculum are being adopted further up the school, **policymakers within schools or having wider responsibilities should continue to give serious consideration to the implications of the project at Year 3 level and above**. Again, the CCEA curriculum review begins to address this question (CCEA 2002), but the issues are not just about content. The issues entail preparing teachers at the higher levels to anticipate the needs of children who have begun their schooling in a radically changed system and who may have very different expectations and behaviours from those of their traditionally educated counterparts.
3. Even though it is impossible to foresee accurately funding demands for future years, **funding for schools in socially disadvantaged areas should receive special consideration**. In regard to the evaluation, in order to assess the maximum impact of the project under the most ideal conditions achievable in schools which face so many diverse difficulties, funding in the Shankill group would have to be preserved. For example, most of the Shankill schools face falling rolls and thus have difficulty with forward planning. They may be forced to make redundancies in either teaching staff or classroom assistants. There have now been several instances of members of staff trained in the Enriched Curriculum leaving a position in one of the project schools. If such difficulties act so as to confound the evaluation of the project, it may be impossible to make informed judgements as to the cost-effective channelling of funds in the future.
4. **We have previously noted that ideally, sufficient funding should be made available to provide trained classroom assistants in all Enriched Curriculum Year 1 and Year 2 classrooms**. Teachers with special circumstances in their classrooms, such as composite classes or a high level of special needs still need extra support in Year 3. If full-time classroom assistance is not possible, efforts

¹⁶ We would expect that the Year 4 teachers will request the same level of guidance next year.

should be made to provide assistance part-time, whether through sharing classroom assistants between classes or through special needs provision.

5. **We recommend a programme of education and information for parents which would be available across Northern Ireland as a whole**, perhaps accessible on the internet. This programme should include information on:
 - a. A description of a model of learning to read which portrays it as a lifelong activity and describes in lay language the early skills a child needs to acquire in that process.
 - b. The nature and value of play in school.
 - c. How parents can act as co-educators in the early years.
 - d. How best to approach the teacher and the school for information.

The website could include film clips, carefully chosen to illustrate children's activities. For those parents who have no access to a computer, the school might provide access at specified times after school.

This programme would not be intended to replace training courses, such as Read to Succeed, which are currently available for many parents and give much more detailed help. However, many parents have indicated that they cannot attend such courses because they are at work: They would welcome another source of information. Schools should also welcome information which might help some parents to approach schools in a non-confrontational style.

6. At present, each Education and Library Board is undertaking a completely separate programme of training. Given the difficulties of travelling long distances to training sessions, some duplication of effort is probably inevitable. However, it would be desirable to have as much training as possible centralised within fewer locations in order to make better use of resources.
7. In the context of the roll out to all schools, **it is now becoming extremely desirable to involve the teacher training colleges in the project**. In college, teachers are not at present receiving the levels of education in early childhood development which are needed to implement the Enriched Curriculum.
8. **We recommend that any further evaluation is partly used to identify centres of excellence in Enriched Curriculum classroom practice**, either in the Shankill schools or in other schools around Northern Ireland. These teachers would then constitute a valuable resource for training staff new to the project.
9. **Education and Library Board officers should make all teachers in the project aware of the messages contained in this report** as quickly as possible.
10. There is pleasing evidence from Enriched Curriculum classes in the Shankill schools this year that higher ability children have shown signs of moving forward quickly. **If the Enriched Curriculum is to succeed, schools must challenge these high ability groups as they move into a more formal learning environment**. Teachers would welcome guidance on new methods of presenting challenge to these children.

11. Comprehensive data is available on three sequential cohorts of children in the Shankill schools. These data constitute an important resource and **consideration should be given to following up these children in the long-term**. It would be especially important to look again at these children at the end of Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3. Research has shown that the benefits of early interventions are often only apparent in the longer term (Garcia et al. 2000).
12. **The evaluation team recommends an audit of training in two domains; oral language development and number work suitable for those children moving beyond the basics.**
13. The evaluation team is aware that a great deal of effort has been put into standardising advice on best practice in literacy teaching across all the Education and Library Boards in Northern Ireland through the Literacy Working Group. This work has already shown its value in that there were no reports from teachers of mixed messages in training for literacy this year. This highlights the importance of agreement amongst authorities; it does much to alleviate stress in teachers. **We strongly support the formation of the body (PICS) which will bring together all of those responsible for education and teacher training in Northern Ireland.**

In conclusion, the evaluation team would like to thank all the principals and teachers for their heroic efforts to facilitate our work, especially towards the end of the four-week period when Christmas events were beginning and towards the end of the summer term. We are also very grateful to the teachers and parents who generously gave their own free time for interviews.

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Appendix A
EYECEP Teacher Questionnaire
School year: 2002/2003

Name _____ School _____

Please indicate whether you are teaching a P1, P2, P3 or composite class.

Straight P1 Straight P2 P1/P2 composite P2/P3 composite
 Straight P3 P3/P4 composite

No. of years teaching experience _____

No. of years teaching your current year group _____

Please tick only one response

1. Think back to the start of the school year in September. On the following scale, how do you rate the preparation you were given for teaching the Enriched Curriculum children at that time?

Very Well Just Poorly Very
 wellpreparedadequately preparedpoorly
 preparedpreparedprepared

2. On the following scale, how well do you consider you are prepared now for teaching the Enriched Curriculum children?

Very Well Just Poorly Very
 well prepared adequately prepared poorly prepared
 prepared prepared prepared prepared prepared

3. How do you perceive the demands of teaching this class compared with those who started under the old-style curriculum?

Much more More Equally Less Much less
 demanding demanding demanding demanding demanding

4. What do you think is the attitude of parents of children in your class to the Enriched Curriculum?

Very positive Positive Neutral Negative Very negative

5. What do you think is the attitude of your principal to the Enriched Curriculum?

Very positive Positive Neutral Negative Very negative

6. What do you think is the attitude of your colleagues to the Enriched Curriculum?

Very positive Positive Neutral Negative Very negative

7. What do you think is the attitude of Education and Library Board officers with whom you have contact to the Enriched Curriculum?

Very positive Positive Neutral Negative Very negative

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

Very positive Positive Neutral Negative Very negative

9. How do you rate the resources which have been supplied to your classroom and/or school to support the teaching of your class in the current year?

Completely Inadequate Just adequate Completely
Inadequate adequate

10. How appropriate do you think the Enriched Curriculum was for your class?

Highly Appropriate Neutral Inappropriate Highly
Appropriate inappropriate

11. Do you think the Enriched Curriculum is appropriate for all children?

Yes No

If any, which groups did you think unsuited to the Enriched Curriculum? _____

Appendix B
Early Years Enriched Curriculum *Evaluation* Project
Year 3 Teacher Interviews
Sample questions

Number of years teaching Year 3 _____

Number of years of teaching in total _____

Do you have a classroom assistant? _____

How did you feel when you realised you were going to be involved in the Early Years Enriched Curriculum Project?

Last September, did you find the children coming into your class different in any way to what you expected?

When the children arrived in September, how did you feel about their reading skills? How do you feel they are progressing in reading now?

When the children arrived in September, how did you feel about their mathematics skills? How do you feel they are progressing in mathematics now?

What do you consider is the most important way or ways in which you support oral language development in your classroom?

What do you consider is the most important way or ways in which you support literacy development in your classroom?

What do you consider is the most important way or ways in which you support numeracy development in your classroom?

What do you think are the main objectives of the new curriculum?

Briefly outline a typical day in your classroom. If you do not have any typical days, please describe yesterday.

Did you perceive a need to alter your classroom routine or teaching style much this year?

Did the content of the curriculum have to change much this year?

Which aspects of the training, if any, given to you in preparation for teaching the children who had participated in the Enriched Curriculum have been most helpful?

What written documentation, if any, explaining the Enriched Curriculum was supplied to you prior to beginning teaching the Enriched Curriculum children?

In what ways if any, could you have been better prepared?

In what ways have you relied on the following people for support in teaching the Enriched Curriculum children?

- Your principal
- Your CASS officer
- Your classroom assistant if you have one
- The Year 1 and Year 2 Enriched Curriculum teachers.
- Your other colleagues in school – is there another teacher in the same position as you, teaching Year 3?

Have your beliefs about how children learn and develop in their early years in school changed since you heard about the Enriched Curriculum and if so, how have they changed?

Are Enriched Curriculum children demanding in different ways from those who followed the old-style curriculum? If yes, how?

Are the children less demanding in any way?

Which resources, if any would you rate as essential for teaching the Enriched Curriculum children?

Which resources, if any, would you rate as desirable for teaching the Enriched Curriculum children?

Which resources, if any, would you rate as not as useful as you had hoped?

What are the three best things about teaching the Enriched Curriculum children?

What are the three worst things about teaching the Enriched Curriculum children?

Are there any groups of children you think have particularly benefited from the Enriched Curriculum?

Are there any groups of children you think have been disadvantaged by the Enriched Curriculum?

How have the parents responded to the Enriched Curriculum?

What advice would you give to teachers embarking on teaching the Enriched Curriculum children for the first time in September?

Have you noticed any differences in emotional behaviour under the EC?

Are there any relevant points you think we have not covered?

Appendix C

1. How does your child feel about school this year?
Very happy Quite happy Unhappy Not sure how he or she felt
Why do you think he or she feels that way?

2. How do you feel about his or her progress?
Much better than I expected Better than I expected
As I expected Not as good as I expected
Can you give any reasons for your answer?

3. What do you think of the amount of formal work your child is doing in class (e.g. written worksheets)?
Too much About right Too little
Don't know
Can you give any reasons for your answer?

4. What has been the effect of the Enriched Curriculum on your child's future success?
Has improved my child's chances of success No difference to chances of success
Has worsened my child's chances of success Nothing to compare
Have you changed your mind about the Enriched Curriculum, and if so, why?

5. How much is your child interested in books?
Very interested in books Quite interested in books
Not as interested in books as I would like Not interested in books at all

6. How much do you feel you can help your child's education?
- Enriched Curriculum made me feel I could make a big difference
- Enriched Curriculum made me feel I could make some difference
- Enriched Curriculum made me feel I could not help
- Can you tell us how you feel you are making a difference to your child's progress?

If there is anything else you would like to tell us about your child's school experience, please write it on the page below. For example, you might like to tell us which activities the children talk about and seem to enjoy or the ones they don't like. Or, you might want to tell us about talking to the teacher about your child. Or, you might want to describe the skills your child has learnt.

Thank you for your time!

Appendix D

Follow-up questionnaire for parents of P2 children who followed the Enriched Curriculum in P1

1. How does your child feel about school this year?
Very happy Quite happy Unhappy Not sure/Didn't know how he or she felt
Why do you think he or she feels that way?
2. If you have an older child, do you think your P2 child is making better or worse progress because of the new way of teaching than they would have done under the old system?
Doesn't apply to me Better under old system Better under new way
Not sure which method I prefer
Can you give any reasons for your answer?
3. The amount of formal work, such as written worksheets, my child is doing in class now is (choose one option box) Too much About right
Too little Not informed by school Don't know/Didn't answer
If too much, do you think he or she was given enough time to make the change from a more play-based type of learning, if too little, why do you think it should be more?
4. Last year, did you think this new programme in P1 would help your child to succeed in his or her education?
Yes No
Have you changed your mind and if so, why?
5. Is the new programme continuing to make any difference to the way you work or play with your child?
Yes No Don't know/Didn't answer
If yes, what difference has it made?

6. Do you feel that you are more involved in or are contributing more to your child's education under the new programme than you would have been under the old system?

Yes No Don't know/Didn't answer

If yes, can you tell us how you feel you are making a difference to your child's progress?

If there is anything else you would like to tell us about the new programme, please write it on the page below. For example, you might like to tell us which activities the children talk about and seem to enjoy or the ones they don't like. Or, you might want to tell us about talking to the teacher about your child. Or, you might want to describe the skills your child has learnt.

Appendix E

Parent interviews protocol

Themes

Knowledge about the project
Child's attitude to school
Parental concerns/ attitudes
Interaction with school
Family literacy
Family play

Knowledge about the project

Do you think your child's school was right to introduce the new curriculum?

Why do you think the school decided to change the way of teaching in your child's class this year?

What, if anything, do you think the children do in Year 2/3 that they didn't do in previous Year 3 classes?

What do you think they no longer do compared with previous Year 2/3 classes?

Child's attitude to school

How does your child feel about going to school?

Does your child seem to enjoy his/her schoolwork?

Does your child make excuses to avoid going to school?

How much does your child talk about school at home?

Does he/she talk about:

- Circle time
- Music/ singing/ rhythm games
- Playing with shop/ theatre/ other large pieces of equipment that encourage pretend play
- Physical/gymnastic play
- Pretend/role play
- Books

- Stories
- Counting and/or numbers
- Jigsaws or shapes

Parental concerns/ attitudes

Is there anything about the work your child does in school that you like/ think is a good idea?

Is there anything about the work your child does in school you don't like/ don't think is a good idea?

Do you think your child is doing better, worse or the same as children of similar age but who did not receive the new curriculum?

What activities do you think your child enjoys most?

What activities do you think your child enjoys least?

Would you recommend the new curriculum to other parents?

Interaction with school

Do you feel you can see the teacher as often as you want to?

Can you talk to the teacher easily about your concerns or worries?

Does your child have a homework book or diary in which you confirm that he/she has done his/her work?

Do you get many communications i.e. letters/ forms/fact sheets from school? Do they help you to understand what's going on?

Family literacy

How often are you able to go over the shared reading book with your child?

How much interest does your child show in books.

Does your child ask you for books?

Do you ever get the chance to go to the library?

Family play

Do you get much time to play with your child?

Does your child ever ask you to play with him/ her?

Do you play any differently from the way you did last year?

Would you like to have the teacher suggest any games which could help your child?

Do you have any concerns?