Every Child Counts

Posted on Tuesday 5th April 2011

Birmingham has a reputation both nationally and internationally for the work our School of Education undertakes; resulting in advancements and changes to the ways in which education is delivered. Along with Durham and York the University introduced a numeracy programme into English primary schools in 2008, which has shown a positive short term effect on children's numeracy skills. The evaluation conducted by researchers from the three universities, equated the improvement to seven additional weeks' progress in numeracy skills for each child.

The independent evaluation was not able to derive strong conclusions about the medium-term impact of on children and schools, although the programme was considered to be well designed and received strong support from the participating schools however it was relatively expensive to deliver.

Every Child Counts (through the Numbers Count intervention) provides intensive support to the lowest-achieving Year 2 children. Children are taught on a one-to-one basis by a specialist teacher for half an hour a day over the course of a term. The programme is currently being provided to over 20,000 children in about 1700 schools.

The research, led by Birmingham's Professor of Medical Education, Carole Torgerson, Andy Wiggins (Durham University) and David Torgerson (University of York), brings together the results of two randomised trials and secondary data analyses to assess effectiveness. The team also conducted an economic evaluation of the programme and evaluated its implementation in schools.

A randomised controlled trial (RCT) involving 409 children in 44 schools across England assessed the effect of receiving Numbers Count (NC) teaching compared with not receiving the programme. Children receiving Numbers Count showed a greater level of improvement - when measured using the GL Progress in Maths (6) test - compared with control children. This improvement was consistent across all groups irrespective of gender, free school meal status, age, and prior achievement.

Professor Carole Torgerson comments: "We conducted a rigorous evaluation of NC to give a robust assessment of the effect it has on children. Our trial showed that the programme made a moderate improvement in children's numeracy. However, this improvement needs to be assessed in the context of the programme's cost, which was high, and the fact that we don't know if the effect is maintained beyond a single term.

The DfE is to be congratulated for funding a large-scale independent evaluation of ECC using a randomised controlled trial design. Large scale randomised evaluations of educational initiatives have an important role to play in supporting policy in education."

A second trial involving 129 children in 15 schools assessed the effectiveness of delivering the programme in groups of two rather than on a one-to-one basis. The trial concluded that similar levels of improvement were made with the children that received Number Count.

Medium term impact (2 years) of ECC was assessed using quasi-experimental methods with data from the National Pupil Database. However, no significant impact either at the pupil or the school level was found.

The economic evaluation found that the positive effect equates to about £193 per extra week of progress. However, only about 9% of children achieved their expected age related level due to the programme, which given that the programme costs £1353 per child, equates to about £15,000 for each additional child to reach their expected level.

The process evaluation found that schools and children were very positive about the programme. Local authorities and schools highlighted a number of wider benefits from adopting ECC including helping to improve mathematics in the schools more generally.

Further information can be found in the **press release (/news/latest/2011/04/04AprEveryChildCountsRelease.aspx)** for this story.

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