Dialogic Teaching

Dialogic teaching aims to improve pupil engagement and attainment by improving the quality of classroom talk. Teachers are trained in strategies that enable pupils to reason, discuss, argue and explain rather than merely respond, in order to develop higher order thinking and articulacy. The programme uses video review, print materials and in-school mentoring to support teachers’ practice across English, maths and science lessons.

Key conclusions

1. Children in dialogic teaching schools made 2 additional months’ progress in English and science, and 1 additional month’s progress in maths, compared to children in control schools, on average. The 3 padlock security rating means we are moderately confident that this difference was due to the intervention and not to other factors.

2. Children eligible for free school meals (FSM) made 2 additional months’ progress in English, science and maths compared to FSM children in control schools. The smaller number of FSM pupils in the trial limits the security of this result.

3. The intervention was highly regarded by head teachers, mentors and teachers, who thought that the dialogic teaching approach had positive effects on pupil confidence and engagement.

4. The majority of participating teachers felt that it would take longer than two terms to fully embed a dialogic teaching approach in their classrooms. It could therefore be valuable to test the impact of the intervention over a longer period.

5. This intervention requires teachers to change classroom talk across the curriculum, supported by training, handbooks, video, and regular review meetings with mentors. Future research could aim to differentiate the effects of these different elements.

EEF summary

We know that the nature and quality of teaching practice in the classroom has a big impact on pupil learning. Pilots of dialogic teaching in the UK have suggested that it can change teachers’ practice, and there is other evidence that cognitively challenging classroom talk can lead to gains for pupils in language, mathematics and science, but this is the first trial of this approach.

This trial found consistent, positive effects in English, science and maths for all children in Year 5 equivalent to about 2 months additional progress. The result was similar when looking only at children eligible for free school meals. This is consistent with other EEF trials focusing on cognitively challenging talk, such as Philosophy for Children, and Thinking, Doing, Talking Science. The consistent results across subjects and the lack of any subject specific content in the training suggest that the approach may improve children’s overall thinking and learning skills rather than their knowledge in a given topic.

The majority of teachers felt they needed more than two terms to fully embed the approach in their classrooms and thought it would have more impact over a longer time period.

EEF will explore options for testing the approach using a model that could be made available to a large number of schools.
Challenge the Gap

Challenge the Gap (CtG) is a school to school improvement programme that aims to break the link between disadvantage and attainment through collaboration and the sharing of best practice between schools. The approach is influenced by the London Challenge, which has been credited by many with raising the performance of London secondary schools.

### Key conclusions

1. The project found no evidence that Challenge the Gap (CtG) increased average attainment for either primary or secondary school pupils, overall. The security of the primary school results is low to moderate, and the security for the secondary school results is low.

2. The findings are different for children eligible for free school meals. FSM-eligible children in CtG primary schools made 2 months’ additional progress compared to similar children in other schools, while FSM-eligible children in CtG secondary schools made 2 months’ fewer progress compared to similar children in other schools. The smaller number of FSM-eligible students in the trial means that these results are less secure than the overall findings.

3. Teachers and non-teaching staff from participating schools were extremely positive about the involvement of their schools in the CtG programme and valued both the professional development opportunities it provided and the opportunity to collaborate with partner schools.

4. CtG is a flexible programme that allows lead schools to share best practice. There was large variation between the strategies that were adopted by the schools in the programme.

### EEF summary

The aim of this intervention was to narrow the attainment gap. The study found no evidence that CtG had an impact on attainment overall, but some exploratory results suggest that there were different impacts on pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM). In primary schools the gap seemed to narrow, with FSM eligible students in CtG schools making 2 months’ additional progress in comparison with similar students in schools that did not receive the intervention. In secondary schools, however, the gap seemed to widen, with FSM eligible students in CtG schools making 2 months less progress. It may be that conditions in primary schools allowed CtG to have a greater impact on FSM eligible pupils. These sub-group analyses, however, include lower numbers of pupils and are therefore of low security. Staff members that took part in CtG valued the opportunity to collaborate with other schools and were positive about the approach.

EEF has no plans for a further trial of CtG. The CtG approach has been developed and continues to develop since this evaluation.
Success for All

Success for All (SfA) is a whole-school approach to improving literacy in primary schools. All teachers and senior leaders are involved, with the school receiving a total of 16 training and support days. Teachers receive pedagogical training - for example on effective phonics teaching - and teaching materials such as structured lesson plans. For the school leadership team there is support in areas such as data management, ability grouping and parental engagement.

Key conclusions

1. Children who took part in Success for All (SfA) made 1 additional month’s progress, on average, after two years, compared to children in other schools. The 3 padlock security rating means that we are moderately confident that this difference was due to SfA.

2. Children eligible for free school meals (FSM) made 2 additional months’ progress after two years, compared to FSM children in control schools. The smaller number of FSM pupils in the trial limits the security of this result, though combined with other findings in the report it provides some evidence that SfA does improve literacy ability for children eligible for free school meals.

3. Of the 27 schools receiving SfA, 7 dropped out of the programme completely, and 5 did not implement it to the minimum expected level. There is some indication that lack of engagement with the programme resulted in poorer implementation which may have affected the programme’s impact.

4. Some schools found SfA prescriptive and adapted the content and delivery of the programme. However, there is some evidence that schools’ delivering SfA as prescribed by the developers saw larger gains in children’s literacy after two years than those that completed fewer aspects of the programme.

5. Overall, schools that successfully delivered SfA were enthusiastic and valued the programme in their school.

EEF funded this project – the first independent trial of Success for All in the UK – because of the large body of US evidence showing positive effects on children’s literacy, and growing interest from UK schools in the programme. If found to be effective, SFA could offer struggling schools a comprehensive and structured approach to improving children’s literacy.

This trial found that Year 1 pupils in SFA schools made a small amount of additional progress compared to pupils in other schools. The effect was slightly larger for pupils eligible for free school meals, but in both cases it was smaller than those found in previous evaluations. One possible reason for this is that some schools struggled to implement the programme as intended. For schools with high quality implementation, the effect of the programme appears to have been higher. The comprehensive, highly structured nature of Success for All means that schools need to make substantial commitments to deliver it properly. This was a challenge for some schools in this trial.

EEF has no plans for a further trial of Success for All. Schools considering Success for All should be aware of the commitment involved in adopting the programme and that higher quality implementation was associated with greater impact in this trial.
Achieve Together

Achieve Together is an initiative devised and delivered by three education charities - Teach First, Teaching Leaders and the Future Leaders Trust - supporting leadership development and collaboration within schools in disadvantaged areas. Achieve Together offered subsidised leadership development training for teachers in middle and senior leadership roles, and placed graduates into schools. Beyond the programmes, Achieve Together offered a range of support to facilitate collaboration and alignment across these programmes, with participants working together on a school improvement impact initiative.

Key conclusions

1. Pupils in Achieve Together Schools made no additional progress on average compared to other children in the trial, as measured by GCSE results. The 3 padlock security rating means we are moderately confident in this result.

2. Similar results were found for children eligible and not eligible for free school meals, and children with higher and lower prior attainment, although these sub-group results are less secure because of the smaller numbers of pupils.

3. Participating schools reported a lack of clarity over the aims of Achieve Together and how the collaborative project should relate to the individual leadership programmes. The differing timelines of the individual programmes also appears to have hampered the collaborative projects.

4. Views on the collaborative project were mixed. Some participants found that the process increased reflective practice and provided impetus for further school improvement. Others felt that it was resource intensive and had minimal additional impact.

5. Some teachers felt Achieve Together would have a positive impact on pupil attainment, once new teaching skills and new initiatives were embedded. The EEF data archive allows analysis of future results for these schools, to assess whether this is the case.

EEF summary

EEF funded this evaluation to test whether schools in disadvantaged areas would benefit from three leading education charities – Teach First, Teaching Leaders and Future Leaders – working together to improve school outcomes.

The study provides no evidence that pupils’ GCSE outcomes improved in the participating schools, compared with a comparison group of similar schools. While all of the schools used the individual programmes offered by the charities, approaches to the accompanying school improvement collaboration differed. Some schools were positive and teachers felt it improved their reflective practice. In other schools participants considered it resource-intensive and found it difficult to align the individual programme activities into a single project. Overall, the study provides no evidence that this version of Achieve Together is an effective way to improve GCSE results over and above any impact of the individual charity programmes.

This study accompanies a separate evaluation of an area-based version of Achieve Together, funded with J.P. Morgan, which was piloted in Bournemouth. The EEF has no plans for a further trial of Achieve Together, but would consider evaluating the impact of the individual programmes, something that was beyond the scope of this evaluation.
Achieve Together Bournemouth

The Achieve Together Bournemouth Partnership was a pilot collaboration between Teach First, Teaching Leaders and The Future Leaders Trust and funded by JP Morgan and the EEF. It was a new initiative that aimed to work with primary and secondary schools in two socially deprived areas of Bournemouth to test the feasibility of improving the educational outcomes of children by placing and developing high quality teachers in participating schools; delivering leadership development programmes in a coordinated way; and uniting a broad community of stakeholders outside the schools to collaborate to achieve area-based change.

Key conclusions

1. The Achieve Together Bournemouth Partnership model is not suitable for trial because of difficulties in engaging sufficient schools with all elements of the model.

2. Aligning projects undertaken by participants of the different leadership programmes was challenging, despite being a key aim of the model. Of the four school-led projects taken forward, none involved participants on all three of the individual programmes.

3. Stakeholders thought a longer timescale was needed to embed area-based change and questions were raised over whether schools have the capacity and are best placed to take the lead on area-based change.

4. Average attainment in participating schools has not changed dramatically since involvement with the pilot. However, given the small-scale and area-based nature of the project, it would have been difficult to identify impact with confidence.

5. The programme changed and developed over the course of the three-year pilot. Initiatives of this type are likely to need to continuously adapt, making it difficult to specify the core components for future evaluations.

EEF summary

The Achieve Together Bournemouth Partnership was a new initiative that worked with 3 primary and 6 secondary schools in two socially deprived areas of Bournemouth from 2013 to 2016. Bournemouth was an area of interest to the funders and providers due to its diversity in student outcomes. It has a selective system, but had a relatively high proportion of schools performing around the Government’s “floor standard”.

EEF funded the development of the initiative, which was the first time that the charities had worked in the area or had formally worked in schools in such an aligned way. The partnership placed 17 Teach First participants in the schools over the 3 years, and a further 26 staff participated on programmes from Teaching Leaders and the Future Leaders Trust.

Schools struggled to engage fully with the partnership. They had difficulties in funding the individual programmes and identifying suitable participants, and then in aligning participants’ activities. Beyond the in-school elements, the project also aimed to work with the broader community, but it proved challenging to link the wider community work with the school-based initiatives. The findings yield useful lessons for other area-based partnerships, about schools’ capacity to engage with such programmes and the time that it takes for such initiatives to embed.

At its current stage of development the Achieve Together Bournemouth Partnership is not ready for trial. EEF undertook a separate efficacy trial of the school-based elements of Achieve Together.