

Impact case study (REF3b)

<p>Institution: Stranmillis University College</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: 25 - Education</p>
<p>Title of case study: Evaluative research: innovation, impact and reach</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Research conducted by Stranmillis University College (SUC) has significantly contributed to the effective teaching of literacy skills to children aged 4-6 in the first two years of primary school in Northern Ireland (NI) [1]. Informed by the evaluation, the Linguistic Phonics Approach (LPA) is currently employed by 461 schools in NI affecting some 25,000 children per year. The research provided a cost-benefit analysis, created innovative assessment instruments to assess children's written skills and evidence of the positive impact of LPA on children's literacy development [2]. SUC is the only institution in Ireland to deliver certified LPA training to 90 BEd and 15 PGCE students per annum.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>The underpinning research conducted by SUC contributed significantly to the phonics versus whole language debate in the NI context [1,2]. Commissioned by the Belfast Education & Library Board (BELB) and funded by the Belfast Regeneration Office (2004/2006), the report affirmed the University College's position as an institution of excellence with the conceptual and technical skills necessary to produce the highest quality research to determine the effectiveness of new and existing programmes, procedures and/or interventions aimed at improving academic standards. The North Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB) (2007) subsequently commissioned SUC to evaluate the impact of the Jolly Phonics approach on children's literacy development. In 2007/2008, the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment (CCEA) contracted the team to undertake an extensive evaluation of the status of English in Irish Medium Schools. The LPA project was extended in 2007/2008 to offer a cross-sectional analysis of pupil performance. Dr Gray was employed at Stranmillis University College over the full period under consideration in this case study (2000-2014).</p> <p>Professional Development for Early Childhood Professionals: Examining Pedagogy in Early Childhood (2008-2010)</p> <p>The Department of Education and Science commissioned SUC to evaluate Early Years Pedagogy in the Republic of Ireland (RoI), to develop a model to support early childhood educators/teachers to examine and enhance their own pedagogy and to disseminate models of good practice across the sector. An extensive audit of Early Years provision for preschool and junior infant children (aged 0-6) in RoI was undertaken, supported by evidence from interviews, focus groups with practitioners and stakeholders, and case study video recordings of practice in 16 settings. The investigation was co-managed with Dr Walsh and colleagues at SUC and single led by Dr Colette Gray during a maternity leave [5,6]. Findings from the study led to the development of pedagogical resources for Early Years practitioners and teachers.</p>
<p>3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. BBC News http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/6731899.stm 2. Northern Ireland Audit Office. (2006) <i>Improving Literacy & Numeracy in schools in Northern Ireland</i>. http://www.niauditoffice.gov.uk/improving_literacy_and_numeracy_in_schools.pdf 3. ETI Inspection Report (2009). <i>Education and Training Inspectorate Stranmillis University College, Belfast: An Inspection Report on Literacy and Numeracy across the BEd Programmes</i>

<http://www.etini.gov.uk/index/inspection-reports/inspection-reports-higher-education-initial-teacher-education/inspection-reports-higher-education-initial-teacher-education-2009/stranmillis-university-college-an-inspection-report-on-literacy-and-numeracy-across-the-bed-programmes.pdf>

4. Holy Trinity School. <http://www.holytrinitybelfast.co.uk/policy/englishpolicy.pdf>
5. McMillan, D., Walsh, G., Gray, C., Hanna, K. Carville, S. & McCracken, O. (2012) 'Changing mindsets: the benefits of implementing a professional development model in early childhood settings in Ireland.' *Professional Development in Education*, Vol. 38:3, pp. 395-410.

Plus final reports to local funders:

6. Walsh, G., Gray, C., McMillan, D., Hanna, K., McCracken, O. and Carville, S. (2010) *Professional Development for Early Childhood Professionals: Examining Pedagogy in Early Childhood*. Dublin: DES.

Funding For Evaluative Research projects

2004/2005 (**£25,950**) An Evaluation of the Linguistics/Phonics Project. *Funder* Belfast Regeneration Office.

2007 (**£10,000**) A qualitative evaluation of a synthetic phonics approach. *Funder* NEELB.

2007/2008 (**£19,500**) The impact of the Linguistic Phonics Approach: A cross-sectional approach. *Funder* Belfast Education & Library Board

2008/2009 (**25,500**) An evaluation of the status of English in Irish Medium Schools. *Funder* CCEA

2008/2010 (**€90,000**). Professional Development for Early Childhood Professionals: Examining Pedagogy in Early Childhood Dept of Education & Skills, Republic of Ireland.

2012/2013 (**£5000**) An audit of preschool transition practices for young children with special needs in Ireland. *Funder* SCoTENS.

2013/2015 (**£18,750**). An evaluation of handheld devices in raising young children's literacy and numeracy skills. *Funder* BELB.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Research from SUC is impacting the lives of children, parents and teachers in Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland: Policy and Practice

Evaluations conducted by SUC feature prominently in discussions about raising literacy standards in NI [2,3]. *Every School a Good School: A Strategy for Raising Literacy & Numeracy Standards* produced by the Department of Education (2008, p.14), notes that the SUC evaluation highlights the added benefits this programme has for higher and lower ability pupils. The evaluation informed and reshaped the delivery of literacy skills in four education and library boards comprising 461 primary schools in NI. The SUC evaluation of the LPA retains prominence on more than 50 primary school websites. In affirming the close correspondence between this programme and the revised early years' curriculum, the Jolly Phonics evaluation led the NEELB to implement the programme in all 209 primary schools within the board area [1].

Research Consultant PRAXIS CARE 2006 to present

2005/-As a result of her extensive experience with evaluative research, Dr Gray was invited to act as a consultant in educational research to PRAXIS CARE (PC). PC is the largest provider in Ireland of services for adults and children with a learning disability and mental ill health. Dr Gray works with a small team of researchers in PC to involve children with learning difficulties in research that affects aspects of their lives. Children have been taught techniques for peer interviewing and observations and reported their findings to service providers. These projects have produced educationally appropriate resource materials for children with learning disabilities.

The Republic of Ireland

2010. Dr Gray was the invited consultant to quality assure the new Early Childhood Education degree (2011) offered by The Froebel Department of Primary Education at the National University

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of Ireland, Maynooth. Her comments were used to refine and reshape the degree programme. 2011/2014. She was subsequently invited to act in the role of external examiner to Maynooth.

United Kingdom

2009/2013. Visiting Professor (Child Development), by invitation, Dr Gray was appointed to St Mark and St John University Plymouth (Marjon) in 2009. Her appointment reflected the University's strategic imperative to strengthen its publication profile and increase the corpus of staff engaged in research. [5] Dr Gray gave bi-annual keynote addresses to invited audiences including local stakeholders, disseminated her research findings to students on the MEd special needs pathway, led research workshops for staff, gave one to one mentoring sessions to early career staff, reviewed research proposals and advised on articles for publication. The success of her appointment can be measured in the extension of her appointment from 3 to 5 years and the increase in staff actively involved in scholarly activity.

Internationally

2011/-. Dr Gray currently holds the prestigious position of Editor to *The International Journal of Early Years Education* which publishes four editions per year. Formally the Chair of *Child Care in Practice*, her expertise in journal management has led to a significant increase in the number of articles received from internationally renowned academics and a noticeable increase from international scholars to edit specialist journal editions. Approaches to join the editorial board are regularly received from international academics keen to support the work of the journal.

2013-. She was recently co-opted onto the board of the Centre for Research in Early Education (Birmingham, 2013) and, with a group of international scholars (Professors Bertram, Pascal, Formosinho), is working to produce the first set of Ethical Guidelines and Code of Conduct specifically for researchers, practitioners and scholars working in the Early Years field. The team will launch the Code at the European Early Childhood Research Association Conference (EECERA) in Cyprus, September 2014 and publish it in both the *EECERA Journal* (2014) and the *International Journal of Early Years Education* (Vol. 21, Iss. 3, 2014).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

1. Department of Education (2008) *Every School a Good School. A Strategy for Raising Achievement in Literacy & Numeracy*. http://www.deni.gov.uk/literacy_and_numeracy_strategy_-_english.pdf
2. Linked Connecting Learning (September 2009) http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk/docs/linked/linked8_sept09.pdf
3. Nursery World (2009). EYFS best practice: All about ... Linguistic Phonics <http://www.nurseryworld.co.uk/nursery-world/feature/1093538/eyfs-practice-about-linguistic-phonics>
4. Boyadzhyan, A. (2012). *A Systematic Approach to Teach Phonics Skills by Incorporating the Interactive Whiteboard: A Handbook for Second Grade Teachers*. <http://www.sierranevada.edu/assets/ABoyadzhyanfinalproject.pdf>
5. Marjon News (25.06.09) 'Appointment of new Visiting Professor.' <http://www.marjon.ac.uk/about-marjon/news-and-events/marjon-news/appointment-of-new-visiting-professor.html>
6. Gray, C. & Behan, S. (2006a) Invited presentation: *Raising Standards: In Support of the Linguistic Phonics Approach*. CCEA. Belfast, January 2006.
7. Gray, C. & Behan, S. (2006b) Invited Conference Presentation. *Evaluating partnership-based teacher education*. SCoTENS Annual Conference. Ramada Hotel, Belfast October 2006.
8. Gray, C., Behan, S., Dunn, J., Dunbar, C., Ferguson, J. & Mitchell, D. (2006). *The Impact of the*

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Linguistic Phonics Approach on Children's Reading, Writing & Spelling. Report Commissioned by the Belfast Education & Library Board. Stranmillis University Press.

9. Gray, C., Behan, S., Dunn, J., Dunbar, C., Ferguson, J. & Mitchell, D. (2007). 'Added Value or a Familiar Face? The Impact of Learning Support Assistants on Young Readers.' *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, Vol. 5, Iss. 3, pp. 285-300.

<http://ecr.sagepub.com/content/5/3/285.full.pdf+html>

10. Gray, C., Ferguson, J., Behan, S., Dunn, J., Dunbar, C., & Mitchell, D. (2007). 'Starting with the child's native language: the case for the Linguistic Phonics approach.' *International Journal of Early Childhood Education*, Vol. 15, Iss.1, pp.15-33.

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09669760601106869#.UpX58ycmx8E>