

## Impact case study (REF3b)

<b>Institution:</b> University of Exeter
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> Education
<b>Title of case study:</b> Improving the Teaching of Pupils with Special Educational Needs
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>Successive research studies carried out by Professor Brahm Norwich in the Graduate School of Education have <b>addressed the development of policy</b> for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN), <b>shaped professional understanding</b> of how best to teach pupils with SEN, and <b>generated a resource</b> to support teacher-educators and teacher trainees in meeting the needs of pupils with SEN. The research has driven a fundamental re-appraisal of how children with SEN should be taught, showing that many children with SEN do not require specialist teaching, but rather an intensification of the same general teaching methods used for non-SEN pupils. The research has resulted in the creation of a practical training tool for SEN teaching and a teacher-training tool designed on this basis has been disseminated nationally to teacher training providers. Testimonials indicate that the tool has contributed directly to <b>improving the quality of teaching</b> for pupils with SEN.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>Approximately 1.5 million pupils in the UK, or 21% of the total, have been identified as having Special Educational Needs (SEN), defined as learning difficulties or disabilities that make it harder for them to learn or access education than most children their age. There is widespread uncertainty over how best to provide education that enables them to reach their full potential. The traditional position assumes that each category of pupil difficulty has distinct teaching needs, justifying specialist teaching provision and specialist teacher training. More recently, the so-called commonality position has gained ground, which assumes that the specialisation that pupils with SEN require is linked to good teaching that works for all pupils; there is no clear boundary between specialist and general teaching.</p> <p>The research programme led by Brahm Norwich, Professor of Educational Psychology and Special Educational Needs (and Professor Ann Lewis: University of Birmingham), therefore addressed a key issue: how specialist is the teaching children with SEN receive in our schools, and how specialist should it be? The research began with two narrative reviews of international empirical research literature that examined the relationship between the various areas of SEN (ranging from different forms and degrees of learning difficulties to dyslexia and sensory impairments) and distinctive teaching approaches. The first ran from 1998-2001 and was completed after Norwich's move to Exeter in 2000. The second, more comprehensive, one was completed in 2007. Both reviews were undertaken drawing on the experience of leading UK academics within each of the identified fields (Lewis and Norwich 2004; Norwich and Lewis 2007).</p> <p>The main finding was that it is not useful to see the teaching of SEN and non-SEN children as a dichotomy, with one group requiring specialist and the other general teaching methods; rather, the needs of SEN children lie along the same pedagogic continuum as those of other children, with the specialization required being an intensification of regular teaching approaches (Norwich, 2008). This implies that in their initial training, teachers could learn to extend their knowledge and skills along this pedagogic continuum, making not just the 'normal' adaptations that invariably occur in class teaching, but also the greater degree of adaptations required for those with more significant learning difficulties.</p> <p>The next research project was a practical translation by Professor Norwich of these findings, the development and evaluation of a SEN teaching tool – a SEN personalised task for initial teacher trainees on one-year Post-Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE). The task involves supervised experience of teaching a pupil with SEN over a number of teaching sessions, with trainees being introduced to a model of teaching based on the principle of a continuum of pedagogic approaches and intensified teaching. Funded by the Training and Development Agency (TDA) in 2007-08, the national trial took in 6 primary and 5 secondary PGCE programmes involving 550 trainees overall. The evaluation found that most participants were positive about the value of the task. On this basis, Norwich and Nash (2011) made recommendations for implementing the task to the funding agency.</p> <p>A further stage of the research, funded by the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation in 2010/11, examined the process and outcomes of different models of preparing PGCE trainees. This compared the</p>

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processes and outcomes of using the SEN personalised task, a different SEN task (focussed on monitoring and observing pupils with SEN) and where no tasks were undertaken. This found that trainees using both kinds of SEN task compared to no task developed greater awareness about understanding the pupils' perspectives and the learning needs of pupils with SEN. In addition, many of the trainees using the SEN personalised task learned about specific strategies that could be used in class teaching (Lawson, Nash and Norwich, 2013).

The key idea that teaching specialisation involves an intensification of regular teaching approaches was also pursued in another large scale development and research project (funded by the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation 2010-13) for pupils with moderate learning difficulties. This project used Lesson Study with secondary school subject teachers to show in detail how regular subject teachers intensified their teaching approaches across a range of pedagogic dimensions and that Lesson Study is an appropriate method to develop intensified class teaching (Ylonen and Norwich, 2012).

**3. References to the research**Key publications:

1. Lewis, A and Norwich, B. (2004) *Special teaching for special children? Pedagogies for inclusion* (eds.) Maidenhead, Open University Press.
2. Norwich, B, and Lewis, A (2007) How specialised is teaching children with disabilities and difficulties? *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 39(2), 127-150.
3. Norwich, B. (2008) Perspectives and purposes of disability classification systems: implications for teachers and curriculum and pedagogy, in Florian, L. and McClaughlin, M. (eds.) *Disability classification in special education*. Corwin Press
4. Norwich, B. and Nash, T. (2011) Preparing teachers to teach children with special educational needs and disabilities: the significance of a national PGCE development and evaluation project for inclusive teacher education. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 11, 1, 2–11
5. Lawson, H., Nash, T. and Norwich, B. (2013) What trainees learn about teaching pupils with special educational needs / disabilities in their school based work: the contribution of planned activities in PGCE programmes. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 28:2, 136-155
6. Ylonen, A. and Norwich, B. (2012) Using Lesson Study to develop teaching approaches for secondary school pupils with moderate learning difficulties: teachers' concepts, attitudes and pedagogic strategies, *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 27:3, 301-317

Evidence of the quality of the research:

The above research (2, 4, 5, 6) was peer reviewed, one was important in the School's high rating by the Education panel in the last RAE (2), one highly cited, translated into Arabic and short listed for an book award (1), and two the result of external grant funding (5 and 6).

Grants:

- TDA grant: B. Norwich (PI) Adaptation of ITT Resources Relating to Teaching Pupils with SEN/disabilities (£138,000) 2007-08.
- Esmee Fairbairn Foundation: B. Norwich (PI) How and what PGCE trainee teachers learn about teaching pupils with SEN in their placement schools. (£70,793) 2010-11.
- Esmee Fairbairn Foundation: B. Norwich (PI) Raising Levels of Achievement through lesson development for pupils with Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD) in Secondary School (KS3) using Lesson Study (£424,320) 2010-2013

**4 Details of the impact****Addressing the development of policy**

Norwich's research on SEN pedagogy reflects his wider research about the SEN category that has addressed the development of current policy proposals for children with SEN (he has made contributions to SEN Policy Research Forum<sup>1</sup>). He gave expert testimony to the House of Commons Education Committee in June 2012<sup>2</sup> in relation to legislation following the SEN and Disability Green Paper and also provided further written evidence in November 2012<sup>3</sup>.

### Generating a resource

One outcome of the research has been its practical translation into a resource to support trainee teachers and teacher educators in addressing the teaching of pupils with SEN on PGCE or other pre-service courses. This took the form of a SEN task drawing on the key principles from the research – the pedagogic continuum and the intensification of general teaching methods for SEN pupils – which were trialled by 550 teacher trainees across the country in 2007/8. Following the positive outcome of these trials<sup>4</sup>, they were then adopted by the TDA<sup>5</sup> for national dissemination to all PGCE providers in 2009, with two years' funding (2009-2011) to support the dissemination process through regional hubs.

A small-scale national survey led by Nash and Norwich of 19 ITT providers' use of the personalised SEN task in 2011-12 showed widespread awareness and uptake of the task or some variation of it in their ITT (15/19 of these Employment-based, School-centred and University PGCE ITT providers). The task was mostly used for all trainees rather than as a trainee option on these programmes and tutors' planned to continue using it; 17/19 reported that the task had some or great value in their programmes. As one tutor reported:

*It is an opportunity for trainees to demonstrate how they can have an impact on children's progress over time. The data was very convincing with some children making huge steps forwards in their reading attainment and in their attitude to reading in general.*

Many trainees reported that the task had value for them, as these typical examples show:

The task – 'helped raise awareness of the children's individual needs and strategies that can be implemented'.

- gave 'a lot about individual needs and barriers to learning'
- showed 'how to plan my lessons so that individual needs could be met for all children; to recognise how to plan for personalised learning'.

### Shaping professional understanding

The cumulative research from studies led by Norwich have shaped professional understanding of inclusive pedagogies and how best to teach pupils with SEN. Feedback from trainees who have used the SEN teacher-training resource indicates that using the task achieved a shift in their sense of professional identity, moving away from the idea that only those with specialist training can and should teach pupils with SEN, to a much more inclusive model which has left them feeling empowered to work with SEN children<sup>4</sup>. This, in turn, supports the current trend towards more inclusion of pupils with SEN and disabilities in mainstream schools. Tutors working with trainees mostly believed that the task contributed to trainees' knowledge and understanding about the educational needs of these children, the SEN Framework, how to assess and adapt teaching, to manage support and to be more positive and confident about teaching pupils with SEN.

More broadly, the programme of research conducted by Norwich has informed professional discussion about SEN provision, including in specialised professional contexts. Norwich was a proposer for a debate at the National Children's Bureau in 2008<sup>7</sup>, considering the saliency of the concept of Special Educational Needs. The SEN Policy Options Group publish a summary of this debate. In 2011, Norwich gave a keynote presentation for NALDIC<sup>8</sup>, which addressed inclusive education making connections between SEN and EAL provision. He has contributed to various debates and professional sites, including an article on Teaching Expertise, a conference paper on Inclusion on the TES website section for teaching resources, (which has had 1364 viewings since 2010), a NASEN blog and an Ambitious for Autism 2011 panel discussion about future national policy directions<sup>9</sup>.

### Improving the quality of teaching

Norwich's research has had a direct impact on the quality of teaching of pupils with SEN. The Department for Education website supporting the dissemination of the SEN personalised task<sup>5</sup> makes direct reference to Norwich's research and offers five video testimonials from practitioners explaining how much the task has helped their practice. The coordinator of the National TDA ITT SEN programme summarised the contribution of the task in these terms<sup>10</sup>:

"The task contributes to the initial training of teachers by giving trainees and those supporting them a clear conceptual framework and an easy to understand task to test it out

in practice”.

Similarly, the final TDA project report<sup>4</sup> includes a positive evaluation of its impact and feedback from trainees and teachers. The following examples taken from this report are typical:

**Primary school trainee** talking about the task’s impact on their teaching:

*“It has given me more confidence to take risks with them, I’ve gotten to know them, I’ve opened it up and we’ve started using different teaching styles, which they’ve taken well and I’m able to use that and implement it into my lessons a bit more.”*

**Secondary school trainee** who saw positive effects of the task on pupils:

*“I do think it’s helped him. He’s a lot more focused. I mean [...] his attention span is still very small but he’s lot keener, he’s a lot more enthusiastic than he was. [...] This seems to have got him back on track and he turns up very early in the mornings.”*

**Teacher trainers’ comments** about the task:

*“I think there was an enthusiasm for the idea of students actually working with one child and actually having the time to really analyse what this child’s needs were and then to put something in place and again reflect on it.”*

The wide take-up of this task by the TDA (re-named Teaching Agency in April 2012) and the testimonials by educational practitioners indicate that it met a need and has improved the quality of SEN teaching nationally. Although the progress achieved by SEN children taught by trainees using the task was not the focus of Norwich’s research, the evidence provided by trainees indicates that the children made very considerable progress in their learning.

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact** (numbers below refer to superscript numbers above))

1. <http://goo.gl/iX9LgZ>
2. Evidence before the House of Commons Education Committee, June 2012: <http://goo.gl/ZU4N54>
3. Uncorrected transcript of this evidence including Prof Norwich’s contribution: <http://goo.gl/dpLXxy>; Written Evidence: <http://goo.gl/L5UOgO>
4. TDA (2008) Final report to the TDA: Adaptation of ITT Resources Relating to Teaching Pupils with SEN/disabilities. University of Exeter. Sets out how the task was designed and the trial across several PGCE programmes evaluated.
5. TDA adopted programme and materials about the task, its use and pedagogic model
6. <http://goo.gl/eqTGcu> (This website corroborates the national roll-out of the SEN personalised task and offers testimonials from practitioners on the value of the task.)
7. Appearance at a debate at the National Children’s Bureau about the future place of the concept of SEN: <http://goo.gl/KtC7nC>. As a result the SEN Policy Options group published a report.
8. Prof Norwich’s presentation at NALDIC, 2011 <http://goo.gl/vVwp4v>
9. <http://goo.gl/jG24Cw>; <http://goo.gl/YMI9WU>; <http://goo.gl/buJP9O>; <http://goo.gl/kMR9zT>
10. [Name supplied] Coordinator of TDA ITT programme and its dissemination.