

BACKGROUND

Significance

There is significant international activity in relation to reading for pleasure support and book gifting programmes, utilising substantial amounts of financial and human resources. There have been a few randomised controlled trial (RCT) impact evaluations focused on reading for pleasure outcomes including: The 'Reach Out and Read' programme which provides a suite of reading support and education services, and includes the provision of free age-appropriate books; the 'Little Books' programme which combines book gifting and literacy support between home and school; and several Booktrust book gifting interventions (Bookstart, Bookstart+, Booktime, and the Letterbox Club). Emerging evidence from these evaluations is that the book gifting and reading for pleasure interventions require additional support to produce measurable effects and those effects are usually small to moderate in size (between 0.2-0.5). However, overall there is remarkably little rigorous RCT evidence into the effectiveness of the range reading for pleasure and book gifting programmes, particularly programmes outside the US and ones looking at the additional benefits of literacy support. This evaluation begins to address these research gaps.

The evaluation is one of a suite commissioned by the EEF to assess the effectiveness of interventions on reading comprehension for children in their transitional summer in which they move between primary and secondary schools. The interventions being evaluated are being funded via a Department for Education grant to the EEF to help improve the literacy levels of disadvantaged pupils in England who fail to reach the expected level of English by the end of primary school. Improving the literacy levels of the 100,000 children who do not currently meet the expected standards in English is seen, by the government, as crucial to improving transition and ultimately improving social mobility.

Intervention

The Unitas TextNow Transition Programme comprises:

- A literacy programme with 1:1 coaching sessions occurring 20 minutes a day, 5 days a week. This will occur at two time points: in year six, the final year of primary school -for five weeks; and at the beginning of year 7, the first year of secondary school, - for ten weeks. The role of the mentor is to support the three TextNow core principals of 'choose, enjoy and understand'. Coaches usually are: teachers; teaching assistants; non-teaching staff such as technicians or administrative staff; parents; university students; community volunteers; or older year group pupils (usually Years 10-13). Schools are free to timetable the sessions whenever suits them best. This could be achieved through withdrawal from lessons, during registration/tutor periods or in break/lunchtime/after school.
- Access to the online resource 'MyChoice' will be made available to the intervention group pupils. 'MyChoice' aims to support the pupils' independent reading. The website has news, quizzes, competitions etc., to engage the young people in fun activities to do with reading, as well as giving them access to a book store. They will have been given credits to choose books for summer holiday reading at the beginning of the pilot and will earn credits during the five week programme in Year 6 and the ten week programme in Year 7 through their attendance. These credits can be used to buy books for reading at home and to build their own personal library.

RESEARCH PLAN

Research questions

1. What is the impact of the programme, at post-test, and following the delivery of the programme, on a number of specific reading outcomes for participating children?
2. Is the programme having a differential impact on children depending on:
 - their gender?
 - their socio-economic status?
3. Does the impact of the programme vary significantly with any variations in implementation found?

Design

The trial will comprise an intervention group of 300 pupils who will receive the TextNow intervention and a control group of 300 pupils who will not receive the intervention. Randomised allocation of pupils to the intervention and control groups will be conducted using a list of eligible pupils who will be starting in year 7 in September 2013 from the 30 secondary schools across England. The randomisation process will be conducted by the research team and an independent observer.

Participants

Eligible participants will be drawn from pupils in Year 6 in primary school at the start of the intervention in June 2013, who will be making the transition to the 30 secondary schools involved in the study. Unitas will recruit the 30 secondary schools to take part in the trial, selecting schools where the proportion of pupils in receipt of pupil premium is well above the national average. Only pupils identified not likely to achieve level 4, or likely to achieve a fragile level (4b or 4c), in reading by the end of KS2 will be eligible. Parental or carer consent will be required for pupils to take part in the trial.

Outcome Measures

Primary outcome measure: Increased in assessed literacy ability

Key Stage 2 results (standardised national school literacy assessment) will act as a pre-test measure and the New Group reading test will be used as a post-test reading ability measure.

Secondary outcome measure: Improvement in reading attitudes

Key Stage 2 results (standardised national school literacy assessment) will act as a pre-test measure. The Reading Enjoyment and Confidence scale from a measure used in Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) will be used as the post-test literacy attitudes measure of reading for pleasure.

Administration of the post test New Group Reading Test and the PIRLS reading enjoyment and confidence test will be overseen by an independent assessor who will be blinded to the intervention and control groups.

Sample size calculations

The following estimates were utilised to identify the sample size for a single level, person randomised trial:

- An effect size = between .02 -.03 (expected effects as determined from literature).
- at a probability of = .05
- for a power = .8
- with a proportion of variance explained by the covariate at $r^2 = 0.50$ (based on literature)

According to Optimal Design software, using these estimates a total sample size of $n = 213 - 475$ is required (based on the effect size range identified above). The proposed sample size of 600 is over this figure but allows some scope for attrition.

Analysis plan

The first part of the analysis will examine the main effects of the programme. Analyses of the data will be conducted using linear regression. There will be one primary outcome measure and one secondary outcome measure. A dummy variable representing group membership (intervention or control group) will also be added. The New Group reading test will be used as a post-test primary outcome reading ability measure. KS2 results (standardised national school literacy assessment) will act as a pre-test measure. The Reading Enjoyment and Confidence scale from a measure used in Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) will be used as a post-test literacy attitudes measure (reading for pleasure). Again, KS2 results (standardised national school literacy assessment) will act as a pre-test measure.

The second part will be an exploratory analysis. The quantitative data will be used in an exploratory analysis to examine whether the intervention has differential effects for different sub-groups of pupils.. Sub groups will include: boys/girls; single parent families; low income families; and minority ethnic families. In each case, the main linear regression models will be extended to include interaction effects between the subgroup variable in question and the dummy intervention/control variable.

Process evaluation methods

The process evaluation will comprise online surveys of the coordinators, who organise and monitor the Unitas programme in schools, and of the coaches who work one to one with the pupils. In addition there will be scrutiny of monitoring data collected by held by Unitas and a small sample of pupil focus groups.

PERSONNEL

The evaluation is being undertaken by the Centre for Education and Inclusion Research at Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) and the Centre for Effective Education at Queens University, Belfast (QUB).

Role	Responsibility		
Project Directorship	Co-Director responsible for overall direction and process evaluation	Dr Bronwen Maxwell	SHU
	Co-Director responsible for impact evaluation	Professor Paul Connolly	QUB
Project Management	RCT Manager	Dr Liam O'Hare	QUB
	Project Manager: day to day organisation/ meeting objectives and deadlines	Lucy Clague	SHU
Project Advisor	Expert literacy advice	Professor Guy Merchant	SHU

Teams	
RCT	Professor Paul Connolly and Dr Liam O'Hare (QUB); Sean Demack and Anna Stevens (SHU)
Process evaluation	Dr Bronwen Maxwell, Lucy Shipton and Anna Stevens (SHU)

DATA PROTECTION AND ETHICS

The evaluation has been approved by the ethics committees at Sheffield Hallam University and Queens University, Belfast. Data storage, sharing and reporting processes will conform to all legal requirements and protect participant confidentiality.

Unitas: TextNow Transition Programme

11/2/13



	Jan 13	Feb 13	Mar 13	Apr 13	May 13	Jun 13	Jul 13	Aug 13	Sep 13	Oct 13	Nov 13	Dec 13	Jan 14	Feb 14	Mar 14	Apr 14	
RCT																	
Earliest likely access to SATs results via DfE																	
Access DfE Databases for pupil characteristics and and Key Stage 2 SATs																	
Blind administration of Hodder New Reading Test and Reading for Pleasure PIRLS test																	
Cleansing test data and matching to pupil dataset																	
Data analysis																	
Process evaluation																	
Unitas to provide contact information or mechanism for online administration of surveys of co-ordinators and coaches in primary.																	
Design surveys																	
Administer surveys of primary coordinators and coaches																	
Unitas to provide contact information or mechanism for online administration of surveys of co-ordinators in secondary.																	
Administer survey of secondary co-ordinators and coaches																	
Pupil focus groups																	
Analyse all surveys																	
Reporting																	
Final report																31 st Draft	30 th Final