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RESEARCH FOR
TEACHERS

Research for Teachers
Deprivation and education

published: Fri Nov 19 10:36:26 GMT 2010

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What can teachers and schools do about the effects of deprivation on children's learning?
Numerous studies have shown that the relationship between deprivation* and education is crucial for understanding the significant impact deprivation has on later outcomes in adulthood. Deprivation can leave young people with fewer qualifications and skills, which in turn can affect their future employment and earnings, health and social well-being. But as this review reports, there are strategies which schools and individual practitioners can use to help tackle this problem.

This Research for Teachers summary describes the findings of a research review that set out to examine the link between deprivation and education. The review is:

Deprivation and education: The evidence on students in England, Foundation Stage to Key Stage 4. Schools Analysis and Research Division, Department for Children, Schools and Families (March 2009)

The review emphasised that what schools do is important in redressing the imbalance between deprivation and low educational achievement, and that if all schools could achieve the same success for students from deprived backgrounds as the best schools, we might expect to see significant change. Several studies identified examples of strategies that schools and teachers had used successfully to counter the disadvantages experienced by students from deprived backgrounds and to narrow the gap between them and non-free school meal (FSM) students.

The review drew together evidence about a number of key issues for schools and teachers, including:

- which students are deprived

- the impact of deprivation on educational outcomes

- why deprived students can fall behind

- strategies at a classroom level that have been found to be effective for improving achievement outcomes, and

- whole school approaches that supported the achievement of vulnerable students.

We think that teachers of students whose learning is, in one way or another, affected by deprivation, will find the ideas and practice explored in this summary useful. School leaders who have responsibility for allocating students to groups or who provide strategic direction for the teaching of students who are attaining well below the average, and those who manage TAs or other resources aimed at supporting those students will also find this Research for Teachers helpful in exploring effective approaches for their school.

Consequently most of this summary explores what schools and their staff have done to counter the effects of deprivation on the learning of a significant number of children. We give details of whom is most affected by deprivation and the main effects, such as the opening up of an attainment gap at key stage 1 between many students from deprived backgrounds and other students, which subsequently widens throughout their time at school. This summary also discusses why many disadvantaged students fall behind, including factors related to material deprivation, ill health, family stress and low levels of parental education.

*Deprivation is defined by the study authors as 'adverse economic circumstances in a child's family and/or local area'. The main measures of deprivation used in the study were eligibility for free school meals and the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI). The IDACI score for each student does not relate directly to their individual family circumstances, but is a proxy measure based on their local area.

Overview

Why is this issue important?

Everybody agrees that the relationship between deprivation and education is crucial for understanding the significant impact deprivation has on later outcomes in adulthood. Deprivation can leave young people with fewer qualifications and skills, which in turn can affect their future employment and earnings, health and social well-being. But as this review reports, there are strategies which schools and individual practitioners can use to tackle this problem.

What did the research show?

The review identified a number of strategies schools and teachers had used successfully in the classroom to counter the disadvantages experienced by pupils from deprived backgrounds, including:

- learning in small group supported by teaching assistants, learning mentors and sometimes older pupils;
- customising lessons to individual students' learning needs;
- assessment for learning (AfL);
- providing extra-curricular learning and study support; and
- engaging and supporting parents in supporting students' learning.

How was this achieved?

The review identified a number factors that helped to create and sustain positive attitudes to learning, including:

- a school ethos that promotes high standards and insists on good behaviour;
- students (and staff) believing students can make a difference to their lives through effort and persistence rather than through innate ability;
- enabling learners to help shape learning, e.g. through pupil voice;
- supporting pupils' social and emotional development through, for example, Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL); and
- school leadership that is open-minded and flexible within a system of core values.

Where did the evidence come from?

The authors conducted an interpretive review of over 170 studies published in the last 20 years. The review was mainly based on the most recent available data (2007/ 2008) but also used data from previous years where this was not possible. In carrying out the review the authors defined deprivation as 'adverse economic circumstances in a child's family and/ or local area'.

What are the implications?
The review suggested that teachers and schools could improve learning for these vulnerable children in a number of ways, including:

- supporting parents in engaging with their children's learning;
- providing high-quality teaching based on teachers knowing what their students' individual needs were;
- creating a school ethos that raised teachers' and students' expectations of learning;
- ensuring homework was well planned and encouraged the development of students' independent study skills, supported by homework clubs and guidance for parents; and
- addressing students' complex multiple needs through multi-agency working and behaviour improvement programmes in order to prepare them for learning.

What do the case studies show?
The case studies illustrate:

- an integrated approach to the curriculum that promoted Year 7 students' sense of well-being and behaviour for learning;
- effective communication about learning between teachers and their students;
- teachers enhancing students' learning through homework and supporting out-of-school study;
- mentoring that raised standards of achievement of disengaged students; and
- how teachers set out to bring together home and school to support the children's learning.

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Study

The study
The study has been divided into 13 sections:

- What specific impact does deprivation have on students' educational achievement and/or attainment?
- Why do many disadvantaged students fall behind?
- What did schools do that helped the learning of students from deprived backgrounds?
- How did teachers enhance classroom learning for vulnerable students?
- What were the benefits of student voice for students from deprived backgrounds?
- How did teachers enrich the curriculum for vulnerable students?
- What did schools do to foster a positive learning environment?
- Which features of leadership helped promote vulnerable students' learning?
- How did schools engage parents effective in supporting vulnerable students' learning?
- What other means of support were helpful?
- Which children are affected most by deprivation?
- How was the evidence gathered?
- What are the implications?
- Gaps in the research

What is your experience?
Do you have any evidence regarding strategies for improving the educational outcomes for students from deprived backgrounds? Do you have action research or enquiry-based development programmes that are designed to explore what schools and teachers can do to effectively support the learning for this group of vulnerable students? We would be interested to hear about examples of effective approaches, which we could perhaps feature in our case study section.

Your feedback

Have you found this study to be useful? Have you used any aspect of this research in your own classroom teaching practice? We would like to hear your feedback on this study, which we can share and use to inform our work. Click on the link 'Tell us what you think' above to share your views with us.

Impact of deprivation on achievement/attainment

What specific impact does deprivation have on students' educational achievement and/or attainment?

The reviewers found that deprivation was strongly associated with poorer performance and lower attainment on average, at every Key Stage. There were many examples of these effects, including:

- At the Foundation Stage in 2007, only 35% of students in the most deprived areas reached their expected level of attainment, compared to 51% of students in other areas.
- FSM students were less likely to achieve the Key Stage 4 threshold measures of 5+A*-C and 5+A*-C including English and Mathematics. 21% of FSM students achieved these grades, including English and Mathematics in 2007, compared with 49% of non-FSM students. A non-FSM student was more than three times more likely to achieve these thresholds compared to an FSM one.
- The size of the attainment gap between FSM and non-FSM students was most significant among White British children, and White British FSM pupils were the lowest attaining group.
- Although FSM girls outperformed FSM boys, deprivation appeared to have a similar impact on boys and girls - both show poor performance compared to non-FSM students.
- FSM students were more likely to be absent from school than non-FSM students, particularly in secondary school, and more likely to be excluded from school.
- The FSM group contains disproportionately high numbers of students with special educational needs.

An attainment gap opened at Key Stage 1 and subsequently widened partly because at the end of each Key Stage FSM students begin the next Key Stage with lower prior attainment than non-FSM students and so have lower starting points. Other factors influencing the attainment gap included material deprivation, ill health, family stress and low levels of parental education and parental involvement in their children's education.

Even when students from deprived backgrounds started their academic career well, the early achievement slowed down and 64% of FSM students in the highest performing group fell from this group between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3, compared to 38% of the top performing non-FSM students. In a similar vein, only 22% of students with FSM moved up from the lowest achieving group against 32% of non-FSM students who did so.

Whilst this evidence paints a grim picture of the educational outcomes for many students from deprived backgrounds, it was also clear from the study that schools take the issue very seriously and many have devised and implemented strategies that were effective in tackling the problems associated with deprivation. These strategies are explored later in this RfT.

Why disadvantaged students fall behind

Why do many disadvantaged students fall behind?

A number of factors were linked to poorer educational outcomes for students from deprived backgrounds, including:

- income and material deprivation
- low levels of parental education
- cultural and social factors, and
- low aspirations amongst parents and children.

Material deprivation influenced educational outcomes by reducing the number of educational resources that families provided for their children, such as computers and internet access, books, newspapers and magazines. FSM students were also less likely to have desks of their own.

Having a low income sometimes had an adverse effect on parents' health and well-being, which in turn affected the quality of their parenting. This 'family stress' can lead to problems with children's educational and emotional development. Children from deprived backgrounds were also at risk of poorer diets with potential effects on their physical and mental growth.

Low parental education affected not only family income but also influenced how parents spent their money. For example, parents with higher levels of education were more likely to spend the same income in different ways than those chosen by parents with lower education and so were better able to mitigate the effects of poverty on their children's learning.

Social and cultural factors were identified as key to children's educational development. Children from lower socioeconomic groups were less likely to have the kinds of social connections which offered inspiration, information and further opportunity. Even where young people from deprived communities had relatively high aspirations, they often lacked awareness about what to do. Children from deprived backgrounds had different experiences of schooling than their peers and many saw schooling as 'controlling and coercive'. These students did not experience cooperative relationships with teachers and other adults. They felt less in control of their learning at school than other students, through being put under pressure to perform tasks in which they lacked confidence.

Whilst children from deprived and non-deprived backgrounds were equally likely to believe in the importance of education, those from deprived backgrounds were more likely to feel they lacked the means of gaining maximum advantage from it. High aspirations of both parent and child, particularly regarding staying on in full-time education after 16, were linked to students' achievement at Key Stage 3, after other factors had been accounted for.

Early failure to develop reading, writing, speaking and listening skills limited these students' access to the curriculum; poor reading and writing achievement in primary school was strongly linked with low achievement at Key Stage 4, particularly for White British and Black Caribbean students.

How schools helped students from deprived backgrounds

What did schools do that helped the learning of students from deprived backgrounds?
The review emphasised that many schools and teachers have been effective in addressing the needs of children affected by deprivation. Several studies identified examples of strategies that had effectively countered the disadvantages experienced by students from deprived backgrounds and narrowed the gap between them and non-FSM students. These approaches fell broadly into two categories.

Classroom strategies
Teachers helped their students to achieve using a wide range of processes and strategies including:

- creating and supporting small groups that enabled teachers to provide greater individual attention
- customising teaching to specific learning needs of students
- implementing interventions for students who fall behind
- creating positive learning environments
- using assessment for learning (AfL)
- providing emotional and social support
- listening to students through student voice approaches and responding effectively, and
- enriching the curriculum through study support and extra-curricular activities.

Whole school approaches
These approaches aimed to create and maintain positive attitudes to learning among all students including the most vulnerable, and included

- creating positive self-esteem by promoting mutual respect and value for the contribution of all students irrespective of

attainment groupdeveloping effective leadership that engaged staff and responded effectively to the needs of students, and
- using outside agencies to support children and families.

These strategies and processes are discussed in more detail in the following sections.

Enhancing classroom learning

How did teachers enhance classroom learning for vulnerable students?
The sections below describe classroom strategies that helped to improve students' learning, including the learning of the most vulnerable.

Small groups
Smaller class sizes were most effective for disadvantaged students when staffed by well qualified and experienced teachers supported by TAs, learning mentors and sometimes older students. Small groups with particular needs were also created and supported within whole class contexts.

You might like to read another TLA research summary called *Raising achievement through group work* which highlights effective practice in this area. This research explores what teachers can do to help students work collaboratively using dialogue both to communicate with each other and to reason together.

Customisation to specific learning needs of students
Customising or personalising learning involved teachers in specifically identifying students' starting points, a key point for all students and particularly those who are most vulnerable and lacking in confidence. It also involved teachers responding to their needs by drawing curriculum materials from multiple sources and building in a range of cognitive demands to allow students to select their own level of challenge.

Intervention for students who fall behind
Effective forms of intervention included:

- one to one and/or small group support provided by the teacher or another trained adult
- personalising learning for the students, based on diagnosis of their individual learning needs, and
- integration of the intervention with ordinary classroom teaching so that students can reinforce their learning outside of the intervention.

One study reported that 84% of Year 5 students who took part in a Further Literacy Support programme, designed in this way, achieved Level 4 by the end of Key Stage 2, against teachers' expectations.

Positive learning environments
The learning environments were developed specifically to allow students more responsibility for their own learning. Teachers constructed a positive environment in which pupils took more responsibility for their own learning and could make mistakes without ridicule or disruption by peers. In some cases it was also found to be effective to create a more relaxed disciplinary regime in class, with an emphasis on participation and teamwork. Praise and positive affirmation were used to encourage and motivate students' active participation and engagement in learning and teachers sought students' views about their learning and well-being.

Assessment for learning (AfL)
Using evidence from assessment to adapt teaching to meet the needs of the learners has been found to be effective for all learners, but particularly lower-achieving ones. Key components of effective AfL included:

- feedback that focuses on the particular qualities of a student's work and how it can be improved

- training students in self- and peer-assessment techniques, so they can understand what they need to do to progress, and
- opportunities for dialogue between students and teachers that promotes reflection and helps students identify next steps for their learning.

You might also like to find out more about the practicalities of effective AfL approaches in our TLA research summary *Assessment for learning: Putting it into practice.*

Providing emotional and social support
Strategies for supporting students' social and emotional development were reported to have positive effects. Some schools had opted for using the SEAL project which teachers perceived to enhance their confidence in their interactions with students, and to benefit students by enhancing their social, communication and listening skills. In addition the project was believed to have improved students' behaviour for learning.

You might like to read case study 1 that shows how teachers used an integrated approach to the curriculum to promote Year 7 students' sense of well-being and behaviour for learning.

Benefits of student voice

What were the benefits of student voice for students from deprived backgrounds?
Student voice was identified as an important means of engaging learners, including those from deprived backgrounds who have probably not had their views sought before, by giving them the opportunity to share their views about learning with their teachers. Student voice was perceived to have a range of positive effects, including:

- raised self-esteem, social, personal and emotional confidence, and sense of responsibility
- improved behaviour and attendance
- development of a positive approach to learning
- greater awareness of civic processes
- improved skills in working with others, and
- sharing learning with their teachers by giving them feedback.

There were a number of ways in which students contributed their views, including representation on a school council; active involvement in decision making; and giving feedback about their learning to teachers and each other. A key challenge was to ensure equality, so that all voices were heard, not just the voices of school council members or those who were comfortable expressing their views. Student voice made students feel happier and more in control of their learning; and when they gave feedback on teaching and learning, it increased students' awareness of the learning process and helped teachers improve their practice for all students.

You might like to read case study 2, which describes how teachers set out to identify effective ways of engaging students in communicating with teachers about their learning.

You might find it helpful to look at TLA research summary *Consulting students about teaching and learning.* This summary explored students' perspectives on several different aspects of teaching and learning, including factors affecting students' engagement with learning and their confidence in their ability to learn. In addition the TLA research team developed and produced a Pupil Participation Anthology which contains a large number of research based strategies aimed at improving students' engagement with learning.

Enriching the curriculum

How did teachers enrich the curriculum for vulnerable students?
Schools tried to motivate and enhance the learning of students from deprived backgrounds who were under-attaining, by approaching the curriculum in different ways, including offering:

- extra-curricular learning
- study support, and
- alternative curriculum provision.

Extra-curricular learning involved cultural trips, science and geography fieldwork, environmental and countryside education, outdoor and adventurous group activities. Such activities were found to benefit vulnerable students, particularly those who were disaffected.

Study support that included homework clubs helped to provide additional learning opportunities for vulnerable students. One way in which it did so was in providing the students with educational resources, e.g. a place to work and books and computers that they didn't have access to at home, which enabled them to do their homework. More active forms of after hours study support were also effective, particularly when they were based on:

- small groups with individual attention
- flexible content reflecting students' interests and needs
- activities structured and run in a different way from lessons, and
- staff who were skilled at communicating and negotiating.

You might also like to read our earlier TLA research *The impact of study support*. This summary explored out-of-school activities such as subject-focused activities in exam-related subjects as well as non-subject focused activities, such as study skills, 'drop-in' activities, peer support, and sport and aesthetic activities.

Good quality education outside the classroom was linked to improved outcomes for vulnerable students, including better achievement, standards, motivation, personal development and behaviour.

In some cases, schools attempted to offer alternative provision to those who were disengaged and at risk of exclusion, such as the Key Stage 4 Engagement Programme, which provided vocation-based learning for disengaged students.

You might like to read case study 3 showing how secondary school teachers identified and implemented ways of enhancing student learning through homework and supported study.

Fostering a positive learning environment

What did schools do to foster a positive learning environment?
The review found evidence that learning was more effective for vulnerable students when it took place in an atmosphere of trust, high expectations and respect for the contributions of all students. Key factors that helped to raise students' motivation to learn and their achievement included:

- students believing they can make a difference to their lives - self-efficacy
- students believing they can achieve academically - high academic self-concept, and
- attributing success to effort and persistence rather than to innate ability.

You might like to read our earlier research summary *Promoting students' persistence in meeting challenges* to explore these factors further. This TLA research highlighted, for example, the importance of helping students develop an incremental view of learning which makes them more inclined to engage with challenge and take risks that enable them to grow.

Across a number of studies, whole school factors that helped to create and sustain positive students' attitudes to learning, included:

- a school ethos that promoted high standards and insisted on good behaviour
- encouraging staff to believe that all students can learn and succeed
- offering students effective help and guidance, and
- engaging and supporting parents.

The creation of a positive school culture was a key factor in the improvement of schools in socio-economically disadvantaged areas. A school ethos that promoted positive aspirations and expectations of students and teachers was found to be important to supporting students' achievement.

You might like to read case study 4 in which teachers raised standards of achievement of disengaged students through a process called 'Assertive mentoring'. Raising aspirations and expectations was a key part of this mentoring.

The review authors also suggested that accessible, high quality information, advice and guidance services were important for countering disadvantage. They helped to both form and reinforce positive attitudes to learning among students. Such advice was found to be a key factor in students' decision making, by giving them an insight into the choices available to them and helping them develop the knowledge and skills they needed to make them.

Features of leadership

Which features of leadership helped promote vulnerable students' learning?
Evidence cited in the review suggested that school leadership is second only to classroom teaching in having an effect on the learning of vulnerable students. The review highlighted a number of features of leadership linked with positive achievements for students from deprived backgrounds. Evidence from across the studies suggested that characteristics of effective leadership of this kind included:

- an ability to combine a moral purpose and clear vision with willingness to be collaborative and to promote collaboration amongst colleagues
- a readiness to extend the boundaries of decision making and leadership
- making improving teaching and learning a high and visible priority
- supporting professional development with an emphasis on classroom practice
- using evidence - internal and external - to stimulate change and encourage staff to innovate, and
- seeking to build a community within and outside the school.

Successful leaders tended to display similar leadership practices regardless of context, but a common factor was that the leadership was open-minded, flexible within a system of core values, persistent (e.g. in coping with unpredictability and conflict), and 'people-centred'. The ways in which leaders applied these practices also demonstrated their responsiveness to, rather than dictation by, the contexts in which they worked.

School leaders improved teaching and learning indirectly and most effectively through their influence on staff motivation, commitment and working conditions. School leadership had a greater influence on schools and students when it was widely distributed.

One study found that head teachers in more disadvantaged contexts made greater efforts than head teachers in more advantaged contexts to:

- engage parents in school improvement
- restructure their schools to facilitate the work of staff
- explain the reasons for school policies aimed at improvement, and
- ensure wide participation in decisions about school improvement.

You might like to read our research about leading learning: *Leading learning effectively*. This TLA research explored questions such as how school leaders can get a positive response from fellow professionals in a way that will focus attention on learning and diffuse good models of professional practice through their schools.

Engaging parents

How did schools engage parents effectively in supporting vulnerable students' learning?

Engaging and supporting parents was reported as having a large and positive effect on student outcomes, even larger than the effect of schooling itself. There were indications from the research that factors that supported parental involvement included:

- strategic planning which embeds parental involvement into whole school development planning, such as planning for teacher/Teaching Assistant training in working with parents and carers, or organising effective home-school liaison during transition
- sustained support from teachers for parents and carers to help their children learn, such as giving guidance to parents on how best to support their children when they have homework to complete
- building trusting, collaborative relationships amongst teachers, families and community members that are sensitive to the needs of families from different backgrounds, and
- using new technologies to inform parents and carers about, and engage them in, their children's learning, progress and behaviour.

The vast majority of parents, of all socio-economic backgrounds, expressed positive attitudes about education. In addition, the study found that most parents wanted to be more involved in their children's school life. The desire to be more involved was more strongly apparent among those from lower socioeconomic groups, although studies in the review recognised that involving parents at all constituted a substantial hurdle for some schools. This suggests that if parents and carers want to help, they may not know how to go about supporting their children's learning, or may face barriers to becoming more involved.

The review found that where schools make an effort to engage with 'hard to reach' parents and carers, it had a positive impact on students' behaviour and learning. However, whilst keeping parents informed and engaging them in school life is important for social reasons, evidence indicated that parental engagement in learning (i.e. activities which promote their children's learning outcomes, such as conversations between children and their parents at home) had the greatest impact. Overall, what was important was what parents did with their children, not what their socioeconomic status was. Helping parents and carers help their children learn also implied that teachers treat the adults as learners too.

You might like to read our TLA research *Parental involvement* which explored the key features underpinning effective parental involvement in children's learning, including how to foster parental involvement, such as setting interactive homework that is specifically designed to encourage children to talk with adults at home.

Case study 5 illustrates how teachers set out to bring together the worlds of home and school, so that both could work together to support the children's learning.

Other means of support

What other means of support were helpful?

Up to this point we have described some of the ways in which teachers, schools and leaders can work, and in some cases are already working, to help narrow the gap between students from deprived backgrounds and their more affluent peers, whilst raising achievement for all. There are also many sources of support on which schools can draw if they need to. The review included an exploration of studies about the role and effectiveness of supporting students with multiple needs through multi-agency working. Coherent interventions and support systems that involved multiple agencies were found to be helpful in supporting the often complex needs of children and families living with deprivation. Key factors in the effectiveness of this approach, included:

- sensitivity to local communities and flexibility in responding to changing priorities
- a single multi-agency action plan led by the school
- professional development for teachers, learning mentors, social care workers, linked to the needs of parents and their children
- a named lead professional or key worker allocated to each student who is responsible for coordinating a package of support across agencies
- joint assessments of need, mapping of service provision and gaps, and joint target setting, and

- effective systems for data-sharing.

The review highlighted evidence which suggested that effective multi-agency working in the area of early intervention and prevention helped to narrow the gap in outcomes for vulnerable students. As an example of the impact of multi-agency working, one of the studies in the review reported evidence that the behaviour of some vulnerable groups had been significantly improved when schools worked with other children's services partners, for example, to deliver therapy-based interventions or school-based family social work services.

Studies that evaluated initiatives based on multi-agency teams working to support schools, families and children had a positive impact on students' attainment, attendance, behaviour and well-being and led to improved parenting skills, parents' access to services, and links between the home and school. These studies identified the positive roles played by members of the wider workforce, including key workers, attendance officers, behaviour improvement mentors, learning support staff and student counselors, in supporting vulnerable students and/or establishing links with families and other agencies to support their social and emotional needs.

Children affected most by deprivation

Which children are affected most by deprivation?

Students who were found to be subject to deprivation, included:

- 17% of primary students and 14% of secondary students (2008 figures) who were eligible for free school meals (FSM)
- members of specific ethnic groups such as Traveller of Irish Heritage and Gypsy Roma, Black African, Black Caribbean, White and Black African, White and Black Caribbean, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi - who all have higher than average FSM eligibility, and
- white working class children, although they were less likely to live in areas of highest deprivation.

Academies had a significantly higher proportion of students who were eligible for FSM than students from other schools. Grammar schools, by contrast, had a very low rate of FSM students.

Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Black African, Black Caribbean and Traveller of Irish Heritage students were the most likely groups to live in areas of greatest deprivation.

Approximately a third of students with Special Educational Needs linked to behavioural, emotional and social difficulty (BESD), moderate learning difficulty (MLD) or severe learning difficulty (SLD) were eligible for FSM, much greater than the national average.

Implications for teachers

What are the implications?

In completing this digest the author began to ask the following questions about the implications for teachers and school leaders.

Teachers

- One of the most significant factors limiting the achievement of children from deprived backgrounds was found to be lack of access to resources to support their learning such as books, magazines, and the internet. To what extent does lack of educational resources affect students in your classes? How can you work to counteract this - are computers available in school, can you arrange for students to work at lunchtime or after school under an appropriate level of supervision, are laptops available for home loan?
- Small groups seemed to offer advantages to vulnerable, less confident learners. How do you organise students for group work? Could you experiment with different sizes and compositions of groups to find out what sort of organisation worked best? Would it be helpful to train students in the use of group work skills such as listening, taking turns and questioning, in order to make small group work more effective for all students?
- Low attaining students in particular benefited from assessment for learning (AfL). What is your experience of using

AfL strategies in your lessons? Comments only marking is shown to be one of the most effective AfL strategies. Would it be useful to try out giving low attainers more personalised feedback in writing, rather than giving them marks?

- Engaging parents in their children's learning was found to be highly significant in relation to positive educational outcomes for these students 'but at the same time parents did not always know how to do this in an effective way. How might you draw parents into the work your pupils do? Could you try out the idea of joint homework club sessions for parents and their children, provide guidance notes for pupils to take home, and/or organise homework tasks that invite parents and pupils to work together with some level of monitoring on the part of the parents?

School leaders

- Evidence showed that out-of-school programmes and extra-curricular activities offered students from deprived areas greater access to educational resources to support their learning. What type of out-of-school learning activities might help disadvantaged students in your school? Are there adults or organisations in your local community who would be willing to broaden the range of activities on offer after school, such as sport, art, music, or looking after the environment?
- Building flexibility into the curriculum allowed for more open-ended activities and challenge for students. In your school, how effectively do you exploit the opportunities for flexible curriculum planning? Could you, for example, provide training for TAs or Learning Support Assistants to help them effectively use alternative learning activities that provide vulnerable students with appropriate amounts of choice and challenge?
- The learning support needs of vulnerable students can vary with time and with individual subjects and teachers. Could you work with individual class teachers to use student performance data and informal observation to identify more closely the level and type of support these students need?
- One of the key factors in supporting students from deprived backgrounds was the allocation of named personnel to support for individual children. Would it be possible for you to provide vulnerable students with key workers, such as teachers with skills in supporting students with disadvantages, TAs, or Learning Support Assistants? Perhaps you could involve skilled and trusted members of the local community, taking into account any safeguarding issues that might be necessary?
- Being able to respond effectively and sensitively to the often changing needs of students and families with different backgrounds was recognised as a significant factor in supporting disadvantaged learners. How do you provide appropriate professional development for these staff? Would it be helpful to seek support from professionals with expert knowledge of the needs of children and families in deprived circumstances to enable you to do so?

Gaps in the research

Gaps in the research

Gaps that are uncovered in a piece of research have a useful role in making sure that future research builds cumulatively on what is known. But research also needs to inform practice, so practitioners' interpretation of the gaps and follow-up questions are crucial. We think the following kinds of studies would usefully supplement the findings of the summary:

- case studies of approaches by teachers and schools which have a significant positive impact on enhancing the learning of disadvantaged students
- research which explores and evaluates the effectiveness of schools' involvement with external agencies for supporting the learning of students from deprived backgrounds, and
- studies that evaluate the impact of individual parental involvement initiatives on students' achievement.

What is your experience?

Do you have any evidence regarding strategies for improving the educational outcomes for students from deprived backgrounds? Do you have action research or enquiry-based development programmes that are designed to explore what schools and teachers can do to effectively support the learning for this group of vulnerable students? We would be interested to hear about examples of effective approaches, which we could perhaps feature in our case study section.

Your feedback

Have you found this study to be useful? Have you used any aspect of this research in your own classroom teaching practice? We would like to hear your feedback on this study, which we can share and use to inform our work. Click on the link 'Tell us what you think' above to share your views with us.

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Case studies

We have selected five case studies to illustrate approaches used by teachers and schools that have the potential to counter the effects of deprivation on the educational achievement of children and young people. The five case studies describe in turn:

- an integrated approach to the curriculum to promote Year 7 students' sense of well-being and behaviour for learning
- effective ways of communicating about learning identified and used by teachers with their students
- how secondary school teachers identified and implemented ways of enhancing student learning through homework and supported out-of-school study
- a mentoring process that raised standards of achievement of disengaged students, and
- how teachers set out to bring together home and school, so that both can work together to support the children's learning.

Case study 1: opening minds

Case study 1: Opening Minds: promoting students' well-being and behaviour for learning
This study was chosen because it showed how teachers used a new approach to the curriculum to promote students' sense of well-being and behaviour for learning, which are key factors for successful learning for the most vulnerable. The programme was designed to help children from Year 7 settle into secondary school after transfer from their primary school. The study was conducted over two years and involved two staff teaching the Opening Minds (OM) programme to 60 students in the first year and another 60 students in the second year. The study authors compared the progress of children learning through Opening Minds with other children in Year 7 who did not follow the programme.

How did the teachers change the curriculum for the new Year 7 students?
The OM projects were mapped against the National Curriculum with a focus on the skills rather than the content. The teachers found much similarity in subject requirements, e.g. all subject areas require students to evaluate, describe, explain etc., strategies which are also useful to students later in life, too.

The course began with a focus on Learning to Learn (L2L) and in the first OM project 'Smart Brain' students identified how they learned best and needed to develop their thinking abilities. This part of the course placed an emphasis on emotional intelligence, team work, listening skills, note taking and mind mapping techniques using ICT. The teachers hoped that by starting with this project OM embedded from the start the importance of L2L and set up the skills needed for students to become successful independent learners.

What strategies did the teachers use to develop creative learning environments?
The subjects delivered through the OM programme were English, Citizenship, Learning to Learn, Geography, History, ICT, Religious Studies and PHSE. The OM curriculum combined these subject areas and delivered them in a project-based format. Students had a smaller number of teachers and had fewer books to carry around to fewer classrooms. Planning and assessment of the curriculum were underpinned by skill development in the following areas: citizenship, learning, managing information, relating to people and managing situations (often abbreviated to CLIPS).

Teachers were encouraged to make sure they created positive learning environments. They were also encouraged to provide emotional support by:

- greeting students by name and with a smile
- playing music to support learning when appropriate
- creating bright and relevant wall displays for peripheral learning experiences
- using circle time, and
- engaging children in Philosophy for Children (P4C) approaches.

Students were regularly encouraged to 'give praise and advice' to each other. Active teaching and learning methods were embedded in the Opening Minds programme. Many students took part in the leased laptops for students scheme which they used to support their learning across the subjects. Assessment for Learning strategies were used throughout the course, including self and peer assessment.

What did the study find out?
Teachers found that the two forms in the study (Ash and Oak) were engaged in their learning and keen to learn more:

" ...(Students in Oak & Ash, the pilot groups) seem to understand instructions more quickly."
(MFL teacher)

Teaching staff described how much easier it was to differentiate and use assessment for learning techniques more effectively. The main reason given by teachers for this was the increased amount of contact time they enjoyed with their students.

" Teaching the same class, in the same room for the majority of the curriculum has had an amazing impact on students...."
(Class Teacher)

Parents were positive about the Opening Minds approach and noted the increases of confidence shown by their children:
"OM is a favourite, it has boosted my daughter's confidence."

Since the introduction of the pilot the school believes it has improved transition from Year 6 into Year 7, as shown in improved progress in English, based on optional SATS results and value added data.

Reference
Boyle, Helen. *Opening Minds: A competency-based curriculum for the twenty-first century*. National Teacher Research Panel: 2006

Research summaries from the Teacher Research Conference 2006

Case study 2: communication between teachers and students

Case study 2: Communication between teachers and students about their learning
This study was selected because it describes how secondary school teachers set out to improve communication with students about their learning. It focused on 61 students in two Year 9 tutor groups and involved 37 teachers. A group of teachers planned and implemented the study which involved engaging colleagues in trying out various strategies in order to find out how effective they were in promoting effective communication with students. Data were collected through a teacher questionnaire, semi-structured interviews with six teachers and a sample of students, and a checklist completed by students. The study highlighted key features of communication held to be important by teachers and students.

What did students' views about communications with their teachers show?

The study found that:

- all the students were keen to improve their learning through better communication with their teachers
- the students could identify helpful and unhelpful actions from teachers
- the students were sensitive to the ways in which teachers treated them, and
- they valued focused and personal, written or spoken, communications with teachers.

In large classes in which students had few opportunities to communicate with teachers, the communications that did take place were important, not just in terms of learning, but also in how they affected students' sensitivities and feelings. Students tended to remember and reflect upon these particular communications for a long time afterwards.

Students accurately interpreted the intentions behind communications, even when they were not directly involved in those communications. In addition, many students, unprompted and independently, raised issues relating to 'respect'; some teachers treated them with respect, others did not. They believed that they were unlikely to be successful learners when they considered that the teacher treated them badly.

What communications strategies did teachers find to be effective?
Teachers' responses suggested that:

- using checking questions to make sure the student was saying what they meant to say helped discussion and deepened students' thinking, e.g. -"Say some more", "So what I think you are saying is .... is that right?", "Can you say why you think [what they have just said] is true - can you tell me what makes you know that?"
- using eye contact, smiles and affirmative nods helped teachers to engage with students during discussion
- taking up a position on the same physical level as the student (e.g. teacher squatting down to the seated student) helped to break down barriers during one-to one discussion
- using a 'U' shape for seating helped to reduce the isolation of students from the teacher, although this was not always possible due to space constraints
- students writing comments and questions for the teacher in their books informed teachers about students' concerns (some teachers preferred Post-it notes or comment sheets to do this), and
- collaboratively developing checklists helped students identify learning points.

During the study some key issues emerged in relation to the way teachers implemented changes in practice, including that teachers:

- interpreted suggested changes to practice in different ways and needed to be involved in the change process from its inception, not just at the implementation stage
- tended to reject strategies which required extra time, and
- needed to consider in more detail how students respond to changes in teachers' practice.

Reference
Hines, J.N. *Communication Between Students and Their Teachers About Learning*. The Effective Learning Group. NTRP: 2000.

DCSF Standards site: Communication Between Students and Their Teachers About Learning

Case study 3: homework and study support

Case study 3: Homework and study support in Year 7
This study was chosen because it shows how secondary school teachers identified and implemented ways of enhancing student learning, particularly for the most vulnerable, through homework and by exploring student, parent and teacher perceptions of homework and the types of

homework set. Data were collected using student and parent questionnaires, homework logs by selected students in each class, and follow up interviews with students and tutors. The teacher-researchers also undertook an analysis of attendance registers, including details of work undertaken by students at the school's study support centre.

What did the study show about students' engagement with homework and study outside the classroom?

The teacher-researcher reported a number of findings including:

- students experiencing conflicting demands in their family life found the study support centre valuable in providing peer and teacher support and facilities for developing independent learning skills
- motivation and confidence to undertake homework tasks were promoted when they were carefully explained, when examples were provided and when sufficient time was allowed for details to be written in student planners
- students enjoyed tasks which had a longer time-span, required independent study and could be presented in a variety of ways for the chosen audience, and
- students particularly enjoyed tasks that enabled them to work together and, unsurprisingly, were more likely to enjoy homework set for subjects that they were good at and enjoyed.

For parents, students and teachers, homework was perceived as important in enhancing achievement, ensuring coverage of the curriculum and in providing opportunities for the development of independent learning skills. Parents valued homework for the discipline it required and the work habits that it encouraged.

"It is important that children learn to work independently and to develop self discipline".
(Parent, Year 7 student)

Findings from this study suggested that teachers needed to provide parents with the information and guidance - through workshops for example - to effectively support their children's out of hours learning.

The overwhelming majority of students in this study used the school's Study Support Centre to complete homework and take advantage of the teacher and other support provided. A significant number of students attended to read.

"It helps me when I have a lot of homework and I know I won't be able to get it all done at home".
(Year 7 student)

What were the messages for teachers?
The findings suggested a number of messages for teachers, including:

- setting homework at an appropriate point during the lesson, not at the end, and, where appropriate, providing opportunities for students to begin the task in class
- ensuring students have correctly written homework tasks down in their planners
- providing wall size versions of homework planner sheets for group completion and display in the form or tutor group room
- providing exemplars and writing frames which guide and motivate students to greater achievement
- setting tasks which encourage collaborative learning, and
- providing opportunities for students to undertake work which requires them to consult or work with parents and other family members.

Reference
Wilson, Diane, Megan Elliot and Kieron Burke. *Homework and Study Support in Year 7*. NTRP: 1998.

DCSF Standards site: Teacher research grant summaries

Case study 4: mentoring and achievement

Case study 4: How mentoring can raise standards of achievement

This case study was selected because it illustrates how teachers used a particular style of mentoring, 'Assertive mentoring', which aimed to tackle boys' - and some girls' - underachievement. By doing so the teachers hoped to counter issues of 'laddishness' without threatening their status in the eyes of their peers. The study involved students from a wide and diverse range of backgrounds, some of whom were amongst the most deprived in the country. On-going achievement data were used to track students and inform the monitoring process.

What approaches did the school use to counter under-achievement?

The teachers aimed to engage under-achievers in their own learning using the following approaches, in which mentoring informed by targeting-setting and tracking played a key role.

Student target setting

At the very beginning of Year 7 and Year 10, the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) calculated end of Key Stage target levels or grades for students for each subject using a formula which added value to each student's most recent SAT scores. Subject teachers were given the targets and were encouraged to change their students' targets upwards, in order that underachievers were pulled up towards the aspirational targets. Targets were never revised downwards towards the under-achiever.

Tracking

There were pre-scheduled times throughout the Key Stages when teachers and students agreed levels or grades based on the students' current quality of work and effort. Teachers were required to justify their judgements to their heads of departments (HODs). Once this had been done and agreed the predicted levels/grades were entered onto an electronic departmental spreadsheet and then onto a central spreadsheet. The Assertive Mentoring Senior Leader (AMSL) interrogated the spreadsheet and challenged HODs where appropriate. Tracking increased in frequency the closer students get to public examinations so that in Years 9 and 11 it occurred monthly.

Mentoring

All students in both Key Stages were assigned mentors. Qualities looked for in potential mentors included:

- common sense
- being respected
- an ability to relate well to people
- good communication skills
- good problem-solving skills, and
- the capacity for hard work.

Once selected the school provided ongoing training and guidance to mentors (see below).

Meetings between mentors and their mentees were characterised by a number of features, including:

- working together to identify the gap between a student's predicted grades and target grades
- mentors using predictive data to challenge their mentees in an assertive way, and
- students being made aware that the one-to-one conversations aimed to achieve direct benefits in learning for the students.

Mentors set up appropriate interventions designed to break down students' barriers to learning. They checked to ensure the interventions were being implemented and were having the desired impact. If the intervention didn't work, students were seen again by mentors and new interventions agreed.

How were teachers trained to be mentors?
The training was based on learning to use six 'Key Principles of Influence' to get under-achievers to change their attitudes and, by doing so, their attainment. The six principles were:

- reciprocity, i.e. obliging a student to return a 'favour'
- social proof, i.e. drawing students' attention to good things others are doing
- authority, i.e. using your authority as an 'expert' to create a leadership position in the relationship
- liking, i.e. helping to encourage positive friendships among students
- consistency, i.e. getting the student to commit and encouraging loyalty to you, and
- scarcity, i.e. highlighting the special value of the mentor-mentee relationship.

What effect did mentoring have on students?
The school reported that students' achievement scores in national tests rose:

- from 38% of Year 11 students achieving 5+ GCSE A*-Cs in 1998 to 96% of students achieving 5+ GCSE A*-Cs (81% including English and Mathematics) in 2007, and
- from about 65% of Year 9 students achieving level 5+ at the end of KS3 to around the 90% mark.

In order to give us an idea of what the scheme achieved for individual students we present a brief story about a student who benefited from the mentoring scheme.

How RECIPROCITY helped Gus
Gus was a laddish character in Year 10 who became easily frustrated and then messed around in lessons, normally when, in his view, the teacher was 'boring', or the teacher 'picked on him' etc... In a mentoring session, Gus revealed his frustrations with his Mathematics teacher's continued negative expectations of him. He said that lessons were dominated by teacher talk and worksheets.

Actions
The mentor met the Mathematics teacher and suggested a number of other strategies the teacher could employ such as more Mathematics challenges in lessons, friendly competitiveness, and rewards linked to performance. Gus valued the efforts being made and in return he promised to "give it a go". Gus's mentor told him that in return for improved Mathematics grade predictions from his teacher, he would be rewarded with the opportunity to take part in school trips/fun activities which were run at the end of every term.

Results
Gus stopped flaring up in lessons which had a calming impact on the others in the class. Teaching became easier and the teacher became more ambitious in his teaching. Gus saw himself "getting somewhere" and his predicted GCSE grade improved. Gus accepted that his Mathematics teacher might have a "different and more legitimate view" of a situation than he did which represented quite a shift in attitude. In June of Year 10 Gus had been predicted by his Mathematics teacher to get a GCSE E grade and later achieved a B grade in the actual GCSE.

Reference
Farrar, Eamonn. *Using Assertive Mentoring to counter laddishness*. NTRP: 2008.

Case study 5: Exchanging knowledge between home and school to raise attainment

We chose this case study to illustrate how teachers set out to bring together the two worlds that a child inhabits, home and school, so that both can work together to support children's learning. The main study found evidence that parental support was a key factor in improving vulnerable students' motivation towards learning. The research and development project covered by the case study featured 12 primary and four secondary schools in English cities. The study was based on action research aimed at encouraging and supporting parents, teachers and children to develop ways to share knowledge about learning. Data collected included parent questionnaires, evidence from parent focus groups, and interviews with children, head teachers, senior staff and teachers. The data enabled teachers to identify what worked in their current practice and helped inform their future actions.

What were current home-school links like?

The study began with an exploration of the present state of home-school links:

- teachers tended to ask parents for information that was very narrow and reflected the school curriculum e.g.: 'How much reading/writing children do at home'
- as children got older there was less communication between home and school, and
- many schools sent newsletters out in one language only although the students come from different ethnic backgrounds.

What did parents want?

Parents wanted:

- more focused information, e.g. on their individual child or child's class. "It would be helpful if we knew more about what they're doing - say on a monthly basis"
- more frequent and informal communication: "Parents to be informed of progress on a more informal basis, not just at parents' evenings", and
- events that opened up dialogue between them and teaching staff. More regular contact, beyond traditional open evenings, stopped issues building up and allowed information of a different kind to be exchanged.

How did the teachers use the evidence to develop new strategies for engaging parents?

In the light of the findings described above, a number of interventions were used to attempt to improve the exchange of knowledge between home and school. These are described briefly as follows.

Photographs

Children used disposable cameras to bring their experiences at home into school, including:

- Year 6 children taking photos during the summer holidays of themselves and of the people, places and things that were important to them, and
- Year 1 students taking photographs at home that linked to a science topic on plants and growth.
- The photographs then became starting points for further learning, such as writing, that usually included families.

Video

Videos were used to give parents a view of life in school and in some cases parents were invited into school to receive a personalised literacy video and booklet, showing their child learning in a variety of contexts. For example, children produced videos for their parents, which illustrated methods they had been taught in school to aid mental calculations.

Artefacts

Teachers asked children to bring in and talk about artefacts. For example, in one class every child filled a

shoebox with items they thought would motivate their writing. Parents were asked to discuss the children's choices at home. The contents of the boxes were used in a variety of ways, including oral presentations to the class and story writing.

Responding to diversity

Teachers used a number of approaches to reach students of different ethnic backgrounds, including:

- issuing parents with free publications, written in different community languages
- a teacher-researcher visiting parents at home together with a bilingual support assistant from the local authority. As a result mothers came into school to work with their children
- EAL parents attending activities in small groups and with translators, and
- preparing a home-school book, in which weekly information and suggestions could be exchanged.

Reference

Burke, Stephanie, Leida Salway, Mary Scanlan and Vick Stinchcombe. *Exchanging knowledge between home and school to raise attainment*. NTRP: 2004.

DCSF Standards site: NTRP Publications

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Further reading

Related research

Cuthbert, C.D. and R. Hatch. *Educational aspiration and attainment in deprived communities*. Centre for Research on Families and Relationships: 2009.

Social Policy Association conference papers

Callanan, Meg, Rachel Kinsella, Jenny Graham, Ola Turczuk and Steven Finch. *Pupils with declining attainment between key stages 3 and 4: profiles, experiences and impact of underachievement and disengagement*. DCSF: 2009.

DfE Publications: Ref DCSF-RR086

The Research Informed Practice digest: Training parents to help their children read

DfE Research digests: Behaviour

The Research Informed Practice digest: Supporting students through behaviour improvement programmes

DfE Research digests: Behaviour

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