

UNIVERSITY OF SUNDERLAND
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OUR PARTNERSHIPS AROUND THE WORLD

Sunderland Reflective Action in Education Journal (SunRAE)

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to the first issue of the second volume of SunRAE



Welcome to the second volume of the Sunderland Reflective Action in Education (SunRAE) journal.

This open access journal was the brainchild of the University of Sunderland's International Initial Teacher Training team. The team, working with internationally based trainee teachers since 1999, had long discussed the fascinating insights into international practice that were shared through the formal assignments built into the master's-level modules within the Postgraduate Certificate in Education programmes. They saw the great wealth of knowledge that the assessment process produced, but of course, this was private to the trainees and graduates. The team wanted a way to collate, curate and share work so that international teachers could learn from others around the world. The idea for the journal was born. The idea was that trainees and recent graduates could submit their work to the journal, experience a supportive and developmental review process and have their work published through the journal.

In the 2021-2022 academic year, the team was awarded a Vice-Chancellor's Teaching Fellowship for the SunRAE project. The initial project scope included a conference and an open access e-journal. Thanks to further internal funding it grew to include a podcast series, posters and TeachMeet videos at the conference, and in effect, the development of a community and culture of practice around research and teaching in international schools from the perspective of those involved in international initial teacher training through the University of Sunderland.

This first issue of the second volume commemorates the June 2023 conference and acts as conference proceedings as well as an archive of the event. Where material is accessible online, it provides hyperlinks.

We hope that you enjoy exploring SunRAE and all it has to offer.

Dr Elizabeth Hidson

On behalf of the International Initial Teacher Training Team
Faculty of Education and Society
University of Sunderland
Summer 2023


CONTENTS

Conference Programme June 2023

Time	Live Sessions (all recorded)	Additional material and links
10:00	<p>Conference welcome</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Full session recording includes welcome from Dr Elizabeth Hidson and opening remarks from Vice-Chancellor of The University of Sunderland, Sir David Bell. Greg Macur presentation - leadership and teacher development - talk begins at 11 mins 41 secs - direct link here. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Slides Link to virtual book launch (on YouTube) of Greg's latest book Teaching Online for Kindergarten and Primary Teachers
11:00	<p>Dr Lorna Caputo-Greenall presentation - multilingualism in international schools – recording here</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Slides Link to Lorna's website - Exploring Multilingualism Link to Naldic (free membership for PGCE students)
12:00	<p>Joanna Kolota presentation - supporting multilingual learners</p> <p>James Royal presentation - motivation, metacognition and self-regulation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Slides from Joanna Kolota's presentation Slides from James Royal's presentation
13:00	<p>TeachMeet live session</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Angles and shapes with Geoboards Raffle tickets and task choice boards Reading skills Small shifts in language Helicopter stories 	<p>Slides</p>
14:00	<p>Workshop video</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Writing for the SunRAE journal - Closing remarks and conference close 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Our SunRAE podcast series Links from TeachMeet – recommendations Classroomscreen - lots of tools on one site

PRESENTATIONS IN THE VIRTUAL CONFERENCE HALL

[Visit the virtual conference hall here](#)



Title:
Pathways into Leadership in Schools

Speaker: Greg Macur
Author, school leader, professional practice tutor
@Gregory_Macur

Recording: 14:55 minutes

Additional material

- [Slides](#)
- [Link to virtual book launch \(on YouTube\)](#) of Greg's latest book: *Teaching Online for Kindergarten and Primary Teachers*

Dr Lorna Caputo-Greenall presentation



Title:
Multilingual Learning in International Education

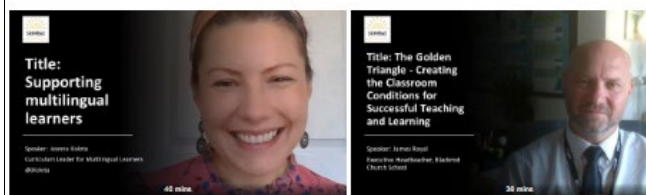
Speaker: Dr Lorna Caputo-Greenall
Multilingual researcher, Head of Multilingual Academy, NALDIC International Schools SIG convenor
@Lorna_Caputo
<https://exploringmultilingualism.com.wordpress.com/>

Recording: 14:52 mins

Additional material

- [Slides](#)
- [Link to Lorna's website - Exploring Multilingualism](#)
- [Link to NALDIC](#) (free membership for PGCE students)
- [Invitation to NALDIC International Schools SIG meeting \(free\) on 15th June - register here](#)

Joanna Kolota and James Royal presentations



Title:
Supporting multilingual learners

Speaker: Joanna Kolota
Curriculum Leader for Multilingual learners
@Joanna_Kolota

Title:
The Golden Triangle - Creating the Classroom Conditions for Successful Teaching and Learning

Speaker: James Royal
Primary Headteacher, Redland Church School

4:02 mins | 3:58 mins

Additional material



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Title: Live TeachMeet
International initial teacher training
@PGCEIDL @UoS IQTS

OUR PARTNERSHIPS AROUND THE WORLD

Recording: 14:55 mins

Pre-recorded material submitted by members of our community



TeachMeet: Angles and shapes with Geobords - a spontaneous classroom idea
Speaker: Sarah Lloyd
Video: 4:30 mins

TeachMeet: Battle Robots and task choice boards for inclusive learning
Speaker: Rachel
Video: 4:30 mins

TeachMeet: Reading skills
Speaker: Jenny Wright
Video: 4:15 mins

TeachMeet: Helicopter Story action research in the EFL classroom
Speaker: Maria Butler
Audio: 14 mins

TeachMeet: Small shifts in language
Speaker: Graham Ross Taylor
Audio: 1:5 mins

TeachMeet: Helicopter Stories
Speaker: Michaela Baxby
Video: 2 mins

Posters and podcasts – external links for viewing & listening



Submitted Posters
[Link to Box](#)

Podcast episodes
[Link to Spotify](#)

14:00 – Workshop Session with Dr Elizabeth Hidson

- [Writing for the SunRAE journal](#)



Title: Writing for the SunRAE journal

Improving Year 8 students’ learning outcomes through differentiation techniques

Anna Veremyova
Hong Kong & Ukraine



wp.sunderland.ac.uk/sunrae

Introduction

The key focus of this study is differentiating teaching methods within the same English classroom.

The researcher observes that the higher ability students dominate the classroom discussions and therefore hinder the possibility for middle and lower ability students to express themselves. In addition, the accuracy of formative assessment through classroom discussion is jeopardized by underrepresenting the lower abilities students. The lower ability students keep silent and for the teacher it becomes impossible to evaluate their learning progress.

This action research aims to switch this dynamic and helps to establish fairer and more productive relationships between the teacher and students of different levels within the same English classroom.

The teacher focuses on collaborative learning with different randomized groups, collaboration where one student is middle or high ability student and another one is of lower ability (peer-scaffolding) and also when peer-scaffolding is combined with the distributing glossaries to the lower ability students.

The researcher narrows her focus to differentiating teaching for lower ability students group in Year 8.

Literature review

Based on McNamara and Moreton (1997), collaboration is a very useful differentiation technique for the students of all abilities. Through talking to each other students become involved in deep thinking. It is also true that students with lower abilities often struggle with self-esteem and through working with a more knowledgeable classmate in a group and being invested in the learning success of the group, this issue of low self-esteem can be reduced. It is also easier for a teacher to accommodate the learning tasks to the Zone of Proximal Development, or ZPD (Vygotsky, 1986) of a group rather than an individual student.

The researcher argues that the pairing based on random assignment is not the most effective. She believes that in a pair there should be one student of lower ability and another student has to come from middle/high ability group. Hence, Vygotsky’s scaffolding (1986) is possible and there would be more practical learning use to such pairing.

The teacher also notices that although peer collaboration can significantly improve the quality of learning and understanding among the students, it is very important to take into consideration the difficulty of the tasks. If the task is outside the ZPD of one or both students, it brings frustration to the students instead of achieving educational goals (Sousa & Tomlinson, 2011; Vygotsky, 1986; Willis, 2006). Hence, in order to conduct differentiated teaching through class collaboration, the teacher needs to take into consideration the ZPD of the students involved

Methodology and methods

The researcher uses action research methodology of McNiff (2004).

1. Review of the current practice.
2. Identifying areas for improvement.
3. Implement the techniques
4. Track the progress and analyse
5. Adjust the plan depending on the reflection results. Analyse what went wrong and adjust the techniques.
6. Analyse the modified version.
7. Continue practice until the result is satisfactory

Conclusion

1 Group collaboration that pairs a student with LA and MA or HA student in combination with the relevant glossaries provides the best learning outcomes, in comparison with random pairing or LA+HA students’ pairing without glossaries.

2 Blackburn (2018) and Marzano (2001) highlight the importance of effort among the students in order to develop a growth mindset among the students. The researcher does not underestimate the role of effort in success in improving learning. If a student does not put enough effort, the evaluation of the efficiency of differentiation methods would not be accurate.

3 It is challenging to measure the success of the differentiating techniques since some students have a very shy disposition and are quite reluctant to work collaboratively.

Data, analysis and discussion

Research cycle 1

Peer scaffolding based on random pairing

The teacher realizes that random pairing has its limitations and plans to pair the lower ability students with middle or high ability students to implement peer scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1986).

Research cycle 2

Peer scaffolding based on pairing HA/MA student and LA student

Group pairing that combines students of different abilities proves to be a more effective model than random pairing. However, differentiating the teaching approach through group collaboration has its limitations when the LA students lack the necessary basics in English. Limited operational vocabulary and low mastery of key literary concepts significantly hinders the efficiency of group collaboration approach. It is suggested to combine group collaboration with providing glossaries to LA students.

Research cycle 3

Peer scaffolding based on pairing HA/MA student and LA student. In addition, LA student uses a glossary.

The researcher observes that combining differentiation techniques has positive effects on LA students’ learning improvement. They also appear more engaged and more willing to cooperate if a HA peer provides assistance to them, rather than an adult teacher. The researcher plans to explore more differentiation techniques and how they can be combined together to enhance the efficiency of learning

References

1. Blackburn, B. (2018), *Rigor and Differentiation in the Classroom : Tools and Strategies*, Taylor & Francis Group, *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/sunderland/detail.action?docID=5430825>.
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3. Marzano R., Pickering D., Pollock, J. (2001). *Classroom instruction that works*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
4. McNamara, Sylvia, and Gill Moreton (1997), Taylor & Francis Group, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/sunderland/detail.action?docID=4605366>.
5. McNiff J. (2016). *You and your action research project* (4rd edition). London: Routledge
6. Sousa, D., & Tomlinson, C. (2011). *Differentiation & the brain: How neuroscience supports the learner-friendly classroom*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree
7. Vygotsky, L. (1986). *Thought and language* (A. Kozulin, Ed. & Trans.). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. (Original work published 1934.)
8. Willis, J. (2006). *Research-based strategies to ignite student learning : Insights from a neurologist and classroom teacher*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Three cycles of research data		
	Correct answers %	Number of students
Cycle 1	100%	0
	66,7%	1
	33,3%	2
	0%	3
Cycle 2	100%	2
	50%	3
	25%	1
	0%	0
Cycle 3	100%	2
	75%	3
	25%	1
	0%	4

Cycle 1 - Peer scaffolding, LA students paired with a student randomly

Cycle 2 - Peer scaffolding, LA students paired with HA or MA student

Cycle 3 - Peer scaffolding, LA student paired with HA or MA student, LA students are provided with glossaries

Glossary	
King Arthur By Deborah Tempest	
Archbishop	the highest-ranking bishop who is in charge of other bishops in the church
Knight	soldier in the past who had a high social rank and who fought while riding a horse and usually wearing armour
Glittering	shining with a sparkling light
Effortlessly	achieve with ease
Westminster	place in Greater London, on the River Thames



POSTER

Impactful, efficient, timely: Incorporating Assessment for Learning in KS3/KS4 ICT and Computer Science lessons

Daniel Jones
Vietnam



wp.sunderland.ac.uk/sunrae

Introduction

This action research study focuses on teaching practice at an international K-12 school in Vietnam, including lessons in ICT, Computer Science, and CALL to classes of KS3 and KS4 students. Its goal is to explore ways to improve the author’s practice of teaching through the incorporation of Assessment for Learning into lesson planning and classroom practice.

Research question

The question which this case study seeks to answer is: **Which methods of formative feedback result in the greatest impact for students, while still being efficient to produce in a timely manner?** To address this question, it examines literature related to the use and planning of Assessment for Learning, and presents and analyzes qualitative and quantitative data collected from a first cycle of action research. Finally, considerations are presented for the next cycle, planned for the first term of the following school year.

Literature review

Assessment for Learning

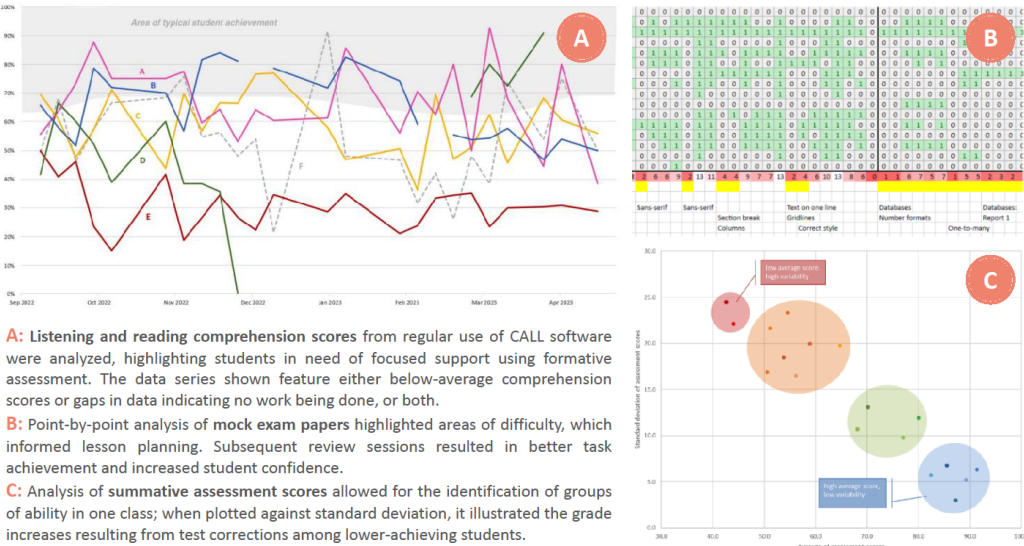
Assessment for Learning (AfL)—the use of formative assessment in order to promote learning (Black et al., 2002)—aims to support learning “by activating students as owners of their own learning” (William, 2009). Atkin, Black and Coffey (2001) phrase Sadler’s (1989) conditions for student success as questions: “Where am I going?”, “Where am I now?”, and “How can I close the gap?” To promote success, Black et al. (2002) offer findings on four categories of formative assessment: questioning; feedback through marking; peer- and self- assessment; and formative use of summative tests. Black and William (1998) find significant effects from in-class formative assessment, particularly for lower-ability and SEND students.

Evaluating formative assessment methods

Black and William (1998) show clear evidence of AfL’s effectiveness and impact; effect size is used as a standard measure, with Hattie and Timperley (2007) contributing considerably in this regard. Further, William (2009) notes the timeliest interventions—those with the shortest cycle—have the greatest impact.

Planning

Bruner’s (1960) spiral curriculum and learner-centred approach of discovery learning form a constructivist backdrop for unit and lesson planning, along with scaffolding (Bates, 2019; Burton, 2019). Booth (2019) states that scaffolding constitutes formative assessment, and names feedback as a key consideration.



A: Listening and reading comprehension scores from regular use of CALL software were analyzed, highlighting students in need of focused support using formative assessment. The data series shown feature either below-average comprehension scores or gaps in data indicating no work being done, or both.
B: Point-by-point analysis of mock exam papers highlighted areas of difficulty, which informed lesson planning. Subsequent review sessions resulted in better task achievement and increased student confidence.
C: Analysis of summative assessment scores allowed for the identification of groups of ability in one class; when plotted against standard deviation, it illustrated the grade increases resulting from test corrections among lower-achieving students.

Methodology and methods

This study was carried out as an initial, six-week cycle of action research, which involved multiple data collection methods triangulated for cross-validation.

Non-participant observations

Repeated observations were carried out during regular lessons with a single class; these provided an understanding of the progression of teaching practice through the first cycle, allowing the author to highlight blind spots.

Lesson reflections

Journaling (per Kemmis and McTaggart, 1992) gave the opportunity for regular written reflections after lessons; special focus was given to Black et al.’s (2002) four types of formative assessment.

Documentary search

Records of student performance focusing on past and current progress were consulted, including class work, assessment records, and progress records from the school’s CALL program.

Results of data collection

- Good use of **scaffolding**, **feedback** and **use of HAs as MKOs** was noted with subsequent student improvement
- Some success with **adapting activities for SEND** using visual-motor exercises and scaffolded peer support
- Application of **questioning strategies** was suggested to reduce teacher talk.
- Better resources needed for genuine **self-assessment**
- Better **consistency** needed in many areas, especially with use of learning goals and adaptive teaching

References

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- Bates, B. (2019). *Learning theories simplified : ...and how to apply them to teaching*.
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- Bruner, J.S. (1960). *The process of education*.
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- Hattie, J. and Timperley, H. (2007). *The Power of Feedback*.
- Kemmis, S. and McTaggart, R. (1992). *The Action Research Planner*.
- Sadler, D. R. (1989). “Formative assessment and the design of instructional systems”.
- William, D. (2009). *Assessment for learning: why, what and how?*

Data analysis and discussion

- Though lessons were seen as **well planned**, issues were noted in several areas, including questioning, whole-class behaviour for learning during targeted support, pre-reading, peer- and self-assessment, and adaptive teaching. Better **consistency** through better time management was seen as crucial.
- Echoing Black et al. (2002), questioning and discovery learning were proposed to **reduce teacher talk**; generally, a move from teacher-centred to student-centred learning was anticipated.
- While the author’s use of scaffolding and use of HAs as MKOs were praised, a need for behaviour management during **group work** was identified. **Peer- and self-assessment** were seen as well structured but in need of improvement, e.g. through scaffolding (Booth, 2019) and provision of better resources.
- The author found that **one-on-one feedback and support** and the **formative use of summative quizzes** provided the timeliest feedback for a relatively modest level of effort; their impact is attested by Hattie and Timperley (2007) and Black et al. (2002) respectively. Moreover, the use of tests and quizzes provided valuable data for **longer-term formative assessment** feeding back into future lesson plans (*example data seen at left*).

Conclusion

- One-on-one feedback** through the process of scaffolding and **formative use of summative tests** were seen to offer the greatest impact for students, while being efficient to produce in a timely manner
- Teacher talk should be reduced through **questioning**, **discovery learning** and other cooperative techniques
- Adaptive teaching** should be leveraged to better promote behaviour for learning and increase the success of **group work** and **peer assessment**



A small group pulled-out SEN-specialist led writing intervention of KS3 pupils with dyslexia from a local Hong Kong Secondary School

Hilton Alfred Chong
Hong Kong



wp.sunderland.ac.uk/sun

A unique background to the research

The school's location on the outskirts of a city in Hong Kong significantly impacts the student population, with most students speaking Mandarin and Cantonese as their primary languages and English being of little significance in their daily lives (Das, 2009). Approximately 25% of students are diagnosed with special educational needs (SEN), with dyslexia being the most common difficulty (McBride-Chang et al., 2011). The school receives approximately one million Hong Kong dollars in government funding annually to provide SEN-related services, including a pull-out writing intervention program for four dyslexic Key Stage 3 students. The intervention comprises two back-to-back 40-minute lessons, one on a Tuesday before lunchtime and the other during the first and second lessons on Thursdays, aimed at equipping the students with tailored writing and learning strategies (Ledford & Gast, 2014). The study will evaluate the effectiveness of the current writing intervention and determine whether a revision of the approach is necessary based on the perceived success criteria of the intervention's objectives (Ledford & Gast, 2014). The findings will provide insights into the unique needs of dyslexic students in this school setting and inform future interventions to support their learning.

Literature review

Dyslexia in context

Dyslexia is a neurobiological disorder that affects reading, writing, and spelling skills and is associated with difficulty in converting written texts to speech and vice versa (Vellutino & Fletcher, 2007; Mather, 2011). People with dyslexia tend to think in pictures and in a multidirectional way, which can be accommodated through explicit and differentiated instruction, content enhancement, and learning strategies (Quigney & Studer, 2016). Dyslexia affects individuals differently across different languages, and Chinese-speaking students tend to struggle with phonological and morphological awareness in English (Chung & Ho, 2010; Mather, 2011). Dyslexic students may face challenges in writing due to deficits in cognitive processing and sequencing of sound patterns. They may rely on phonological coding or direct visual access to spell words (Das, 2009). Effective writing interventions for dyslexic students should consider the physical aspect of forming written words and letters and the cognitive process of transcribing or translating thoughts into coherent texts (Das, 2009).

Methodology and methods

This case study focuses on the needs of dyslexic participants and aims to increase understanding of the intervention being studied. The study uses various qualitative data collection methods, including unstructured and semi-structured observations, interviews, questionnaires, and quantitative data such as end-of-unit assessments. Triangulation of data is achieved through the use of multiple data collection tools from different perspectives. The study is conducted cautiously to avoid biases in the data collection methods. The study draws on Merriam's (1998) three qualitative perspectives, which resemble the research, and Pollard's (2011) approach to data triangulation. The observations are unstructured and semi-structured, using field notes with pre-planned headings and sub-headings to note specific information. Qualitative interviews are used to collect detailed information about the intervention, and questionnaires are used to gather facts and verify information. Quantitative data is also collected through end-of-unit assessments and numeracy data.

Conclusion

Summary findings:

- The considerable gap in the group's English foundation must be bridged in the long term.
- The intervention improves motivation and confidence for learning and social skills in the short term.
- Teachers should assist the trained SEN counsellors in handling the workload of caring for many pupils with dyslexia. (Mercer & Pullen, 2009).

Recommendations:

- Collaboration between English and SEN departments is essential for a consistent improvement approach (EDB).
- Investigate further training for staff to support dyslexic students (SENCO).
- Incorporate typing practice in interventions, as it benefits dyslexic students (Das, 2009).
- Extend writing interventions for lasting effects, following EDB guidelines and EEF reports.
- Implement a reading program and consider an adapted Orton-Gillingham approach or combine with a dedicated reading program.
- Include Slavin et al.'s (2019) five writing strategies in interventions.
- Ensure time-bound solutions with stakeholder involvement.

References

Bell, J. and Waters, S. (2014) *Doing Your Research Project: A Guide For First-Time Researchers*. Milton Keynes: McGraw-Hill Education. / BERA, (2018) *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*, fourth edition. / Chung, K.K.H. and Ho, C.S.-H. (2010) 'Second Language Learning Difficulties in Chinese Children With Dyslexia: What Are the Learning-Related Cognitive Skills That Contribute to English and Chinese Word Reading?', *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 43(3), pp. 195–211. / Cohen, L. et al. (2018) *Research methods in education*, Eighth edition, Routledge. / Das, J.P. Jagannathan, K. (2009) *Reading difficulties and dyslexia: an interpretation for teachers*, Delhi: Sage. Chapter 6 / EEF, (2019) *Guidance Report on Special Education Needs in Mainstream Schools*, 2022 / Hamilton, L, Corbett-Whittier, C. & Fowler, Z. 2012, *Using Case Study in Education Research*, SAGE Publications, Limited, London. / Hong Kong Government Education Bureau (EDB) Operation Guide on Whole School Approach to Integrated Education, 2014, 3rd Edition / Leford, J.R. & Gast, D. (eds) 2014, *Single Case Research Methodology : Applications in Special Education and Behavioral Sciences*, Routledge, London. / Mather, N. and Wendling, B.J. (2011) *Essentials of dyslexia assessment and intervention*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley. / McBride-Chang, C. et al. (2011) 'Early predictors of dyslexia in Chinese children: familial history of dyslexia, language delay, and cognitive profiles', *Journal of child psychology and psychiatry*. Manuscript accepted 24 May 2010, 52(2), pp. 204–211. / Mercer, C. D., & Pullen, P. C. (2009). Students with learning disabilities, 7th edition. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill-Peince Hall. / Orton-Gillingham Training Manual, M. A. Rooney Foundation. (2009) *Quigney, T.A. and Stender, J.R.* (2011) *Working with students with disabilities: a guide for school counselors*. Routledge. / Selby, L. (2021) *An Introduction to Morph Mastery: A Morphological Intervention for Reading, Spelling and Vocabulary*. / Slavin, E.R., Lake, C., Inns, A., Baye, A., Dachtel, D., Haslam, J. (2019) *A Quantitative Synthesis of Research on Writing Approaches in Years 3 to 13*. London: Education Endowment Foundation. / Wong, A.M.-Y. et al. (2015) 'Disconnections between specific language impairment and dyslexia in Chinese'. *Reading & writing*, 28(5), pp. 699–719.

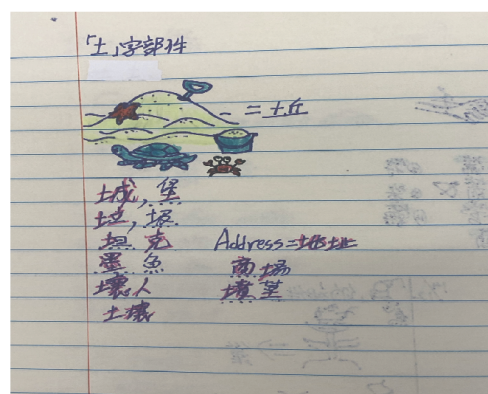


Image 1: The process of writing the Chinese character for 'address'

Samples of work by SEN pupil's in a Chinese writing le

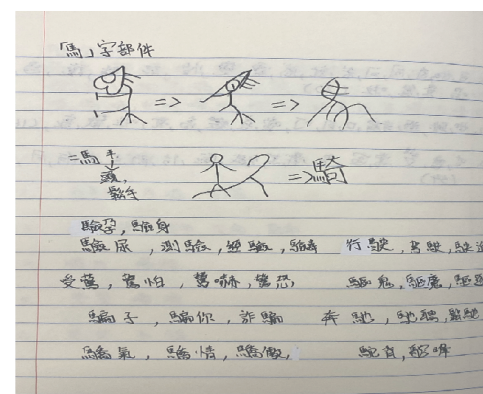


Image 2: The process of writing the Chinese character for 'ride' shows the logographic nature of writing Chinese characters.

Data, analysis and discussion

The pulled-out aspect of the intervention adheres to the tier-two procedure, which is similar to the targeted approach suggested by the EEF Guidance Report on Special Education Needs in Mainstream Schools (2022). The SEN practitioner helps pupils be more autonomous in their learning by showing them practical strategies for using technologies and tools. However, no formalized reading intervention negatively impacts pupils when they must follow written instructions for written tasks independently. The lack of a reading program negatively impacts pupils when they are required to follow written instructions for written tasks independently. The analysis suggests that the intervention needs to be extended, and collaboration and coordination between the English and the SEN departments would help streamline a consistent approach for improvement purposes. The analysis also highlights broader issues that need to be addressed for the long-term effectiveness of any program or intervention.



POSTER

Insights gleaned from a virtues-based post-COVID wellbeing initiative for KS3 students

Daniel Jones
Vietnam



wp.sunderland.ac.uk/sunrae

Introduction

This case study examines a set of whole-class, virtues-based interventions with a cohort of KS3 students following a prolonged period of school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The cohort spent several turbulent years transitioning between in-person lessons and online learning, all during the critical period of young adolescence. Beyond taking on more demanding academic challenges, children at this age begin to undergo a wide array of physical and mental changes; the social isolation and other unique challenges brought about by the pandemic only served to compound the anxiety and disorientation felt by many young adolescents during this time. In response, interventions were selected to support students socially and emotionally and promote better relationships with themselves and their peers.

Research question

The question which this case study seeks to answer is: To what extent can targeted, intensive, whole-class interventions support wellness and behaviour for learning in young adolescents following pandemic-related isolation?

Literature review

Student protection and well-being in Vietnam

MOET's Code of Conduct for educational institutions (MOET, 2019) addresses violence and bullying in schools, a topic of prominence in educational discourse in Vietnam (Ha, 2017; Nguyen et al., 2018). The COVID-19 pandemic took a grievous toll on Vietnamese families, which saw violence increase due to lost jobs, reduced income, social isolation and other challenges (Ngoc et al., 2022; Chakraborty and Samuels, 2021).

Virtues education in schools

Character education, which emphasizes virtues, promotes better academic outcomes and decreases in violence and other behavioural issues (Watts, Fullard and Peterson, 2021). Like the pervasiveness of Ellis and Tod's (2015) behaviour for learning framework and the Jubilee Centre's "caught, taught, and sought" learning (2017), the Virtues Project (Popov, 2000) encourages educators to recognize and affirm virtue and conduct at all times. The Virtues Project has been used successfully in such settings as rural Mongolia and Malaysia, showing its usefulness in non-Western contexts (Haslip & Haslip, 2013; Hancock, 2015).

Methodology and methods

A case study was carried out involving multiple data collection methods triangulated for cross-validation.

Semi-structured interviews

A total of four interviews were conducted involving staff who had various levels of contact with members of the cohort under study, to provide a diversity of perspectives.

Unstructured in-class observations

Notes were taken after regular lessons, which informed a summary narrative focusing on the evolving social, emotional and mental well-being of the class.

Documentary review

A variety of sources were used to ascertain the exact nature of the interventions used and to provide quantitative data by examining school behaviour, attendance records and English grades before, during and after the pandemic lockdowns.

Conclusion

- 1 School staff acknowledged a positive effect from the interventions, while also crediting the end of school closures and a return to relative normalcy as providing needed stability
- 2 As moral and character education are a long-term pursuit, it may be too early to discern to what extent such a short-term initiative supported students, especially when considered in isolation from other variables
- 3 As the school is working to develop its own formal curriculum to support student well-being, lessons from this initiative are likely to be applied to a longer-term programme, broader in scope, that brings to bear more of the benefits of virtues education

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Data, analysis and discussion

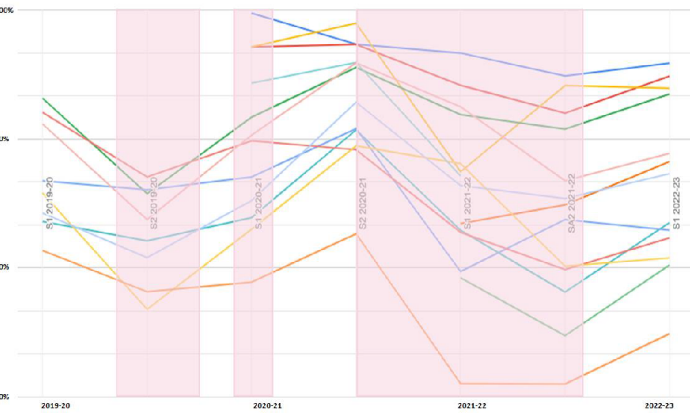
The interventions

Some of the specific learning objectives addressed included:

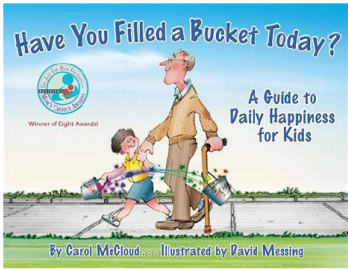
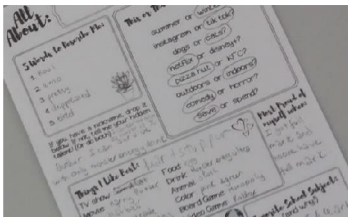
- Enabling students to live well with each other's differences
- Providing a framework for understanding empathy
- Helping students explore the virtues of kindness and respect
- Giving students language to express self-worth and inward motivation

Before and after intervention

Affected by the pandemic, members of the cohort showed many of the same responses seen in similar contexts elsewhere, including disengagement as well as lower attendance and grades (Ngoc et al, 2022), of which the latter is correlated to poorer mental health (Brännlund, 2017); effects were seen as especially marked for SEND students (Chakraborty and Samuels, 2021). The atmosphere in class, initially described as "disoriented" and "demotivated" immediately post-COVID, was observed to improve significantly following intervention, aided by the end of school closures and a return to relative normalcy and stability.



Above: Documentary review confirmed that the cohort's English grades decreased during prolonged periods of social isolation due to pandemic-related school closures.
Right: "All About Me" sheets (top) were used to promote students' self-esteem; other activities based on the book "Have You Filled a Bucket Today?" (bottom) promoted kindness and empathy.





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