The Ant Club Evaluation

Final report

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A research report prepared for Booktrust by the Institute of Education, University of London

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Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Executive summary

Background

The Ant Club was developed by Booktrust as an enhanced, targeted intervention that aims to support the development of children's language, reading and writing during the early years and infant phases of education in schools. The programme was developed by a Strategic Advisory Group drawn from national organisations and harnessing the expertise of Local Authority Literacy Advisors, Heads of English and Public Library Staff.

The Ant Club programme and its resources were designed to help schools focus on improving skills in language, reading and writing. The approach to improving these skills is based on a series of resources being sent to schools on a termly basis, as follows:

Booktime, a universal programme for reception children, in which they receive two books to keep (this is evaluated separate to this evaluation);

The Rhyme Challenge, which involves children learning a number of rhymes (there is a version for reception and one for Year 1);

Stories for Drama, which involves teachers exploring a story with their class using drama activities (there is a version for reception and one for Year 1);

Create Your Own Book, in which each child receives a high quality book to populate with their own content (this resource is for Year 1 only).

Schools receiving The Ant Club resources were selected by the DfE using the criteria that 20% or more of pupils receive free school meals, and where there is a 20% attainment gap between those who are eligible for free school meals and those who are not. In this way the programme is firmly targeted on schools where a sizable proportion of the school community is suffering significant disadvantage.

Key research questions for the research project were:

- What is the evidence base from previous research on the best practice to support children's speaking & listening, reading and writing skills during the transition from Early Years Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1?
- How effective are The Ant Club resources in engaging and developing children's skills in speaking and listening, reading and writing?
- How do teachers, parents and other stakeholders evaluate the impact, if any, of The Ant Club programme on reception and Year 1 children with regards to supporting and developing their speaking & listening, reading and writing skills and their general literacy attitudes and behaviours?

5

- In what ways can The Ant Club programme, including communication about the programme, be improved to help ensure that teachers and children's needs are being met, and that the programme is providing value for money?
- What tools can be developed and used for further future evaluation of The Ant Club programme?

The review of research and other literature in this report locates The Ant Club evaluation in an interdisciplinary theoretical framework. For example, research from both psychological and socio-cultural perspectives is synthesised. It is recognised that children in the early years and infant stages come to their formal educational settings with a wide range of language backgrounds, and with many speaking more than one language. Hence the evaluation was also built on understanding of language use and linguistics.

In addition to the interdisciplinary linguistic framework of the research (which is consistent with the holistic nature of The Ant Club resources) research on reading and writing is also synthesised in the report. Three concerns are paramount: a) that children's motivation for reading and writing is targeted; b) that parents have a vital role in supporting children's language and literacy; and c) that the communication of meaning is central to language and literacy. Hence vital elements such as knowledge of the alphabetic code and transcription skills such as spelling and handwriting are seen as carefully contextualised within the overall goal of understanding and composing texts.

The research adopted a mixed methods design that comprised a number of elements:

- a questionnaire that was emailed to all schools engaged with The Ant Club intervention at three points during the research period
- in depth qualitative research with a selection of schools working with The Ant Club resources
- telephone interviews with a further sample of schools engaged with the intervention looking at the intervention as a whole
- expert reviews of The Ant Club resources.

The data gained from this range of quantitative and qualitative methods provided a multi-layered and rich set of data for analyses.

Main Conclusions

The majority of teachers regarded The Rhyme Challenge (reception and Year 1) as good or excellent. In general, it was felt to be of greatest value to the development

of speaking and listening, and to a lesser extent of value for reading and writing (this is consistent with the main focus of this resource). There was a general perception that The Rhyme Challenge was of significant value for developing links with parents. However, the evidence of work with parents ranged widely from minimal contact to invitations to performances of the rhymes. There were mixed views about the teacher guidance with some evidence it was useful and about the right length, but some concerns about the level of prescription. For the reception resource, there were mixed responses to the match between the resources and the year group. However, in our opinion The Rhyme Challenge (reception) was not sufficiently challenging for *all* reception children. For the Year 1 version, there was strong quantitative and qualitative evidence that the resources were deemed to be very well matched to the age group.

The Stories for Drama (reception and Year 1) resource was regarded by the majority of teachers as good or excellent. There was strong quantitative and qualitative evidence that the resources were deemed to be very well matched to the age group. The teacher guidance was more highly rated than it was for both Rhyme Challenges, potentially reflecting teachers' lower confidence with drama teaching than with teaching based on nursery rhymes. The perception was that the resources were of greatest value to the development of speaking and listening, and to a lesser extent of value for reading and writing. For the reception resource, the observations of drama sessions in school revealed the high levels of children's engagement and powerful learning opportunities. The observations of the Year 1 resource revealed more mixed reactions to the resource by the children and by the teachers.

The majority of teachers regarded the Create Your Own Book resource as good or excellent. There was strong quantitative and qualitative evidence that the resources were deemed to be very well matched to the age group, although some greater flexibility in formatting was suggested. The high physical quality of the resource was noted, and the impact of this quality on children's motivation. There were mixed views about the teacher guidance with some evidence it was useful and about the right length. Consistent with the aim of the resource, teachers' responses suggested its effectiveness for developing writing and to a lesser extent reading. However, speaking and listening was also judged to be very well supported by the resource. There was less engagement with parents through use of this resource than for the other resources. However, in spite of the lack of data supporting parental involvement prompted by this resource, this should not be regarded as indicative of lack of value but more that the challenge of supporting writing is more demanding even than reading and speaking and listening.

Taken as a whole there is clear evidence from empirical data and expert reviews that The Ant Club resources are high quality teaching and learning resources. The

teachers' views of their effectiveness were consistently high, particularly recognising the excellent contribution to teaching and learning that the resources made, and the positive impact on children's engagement. The resources were seen to be well planned, well produced, resulting in successful engagement of children, and with considerable potential to help the schools engage with parents. They were seen by teachers as particularly effective in areas where pupils arrive at school with particular language needs.

The resources were designed by Booktrust to each focus on different areas i.e. language and reading or writing. However, the evidence particularly from school visits suggested that schools should be more strongly encouraged to plan for the use of all The Ant Club resources in a holistic way. Speaking and listening was particularly well served by the resources, and all three language modes were well served by different resources, but even greater attention to supporting writing would be beneficial.

The researchers were impressed with the ways that Booktrust had focused on the engagement of parents as an integral part of the resources. Not unexpectedly, in relation to previous research on the engagement of parents, there was a mixed picture of parental involvement. However the important highlights, for example The Rhyme Challenge performances and the impact of the high quality children's books being sent home, show that the resources have great potential in supporting schools' wider attempts to engage with parents.

The evidence on the importance of home-school reading schemes is well established but The Ant Club is a potentially powerful model of a holistic language and literacy approach, and one that includes attention to the ways that parents might engage in this. In view of the last decade of top-down focus on work in classrooms, including the high stakes testing systems, it is possible that attention to the vital role of parents has diminished somewhat. Booktrust is providing a vital service in this regard, and one that in the context of The Ant Club is worthy of even more attention in practice, policy and research.

Recommendations

- The Ant Club resource should continue to be used with as many schools as possible. They are particularly valued in schools who perceive their pupils to have limited speaking and listening skills.

- There is scope for greater differentiation of rhymes in The Rhyme Challenge (reception) to accommodate those children who would benefit from an even greater challenge.

- Greater attention to how writing might be supported by all The Ant Club resources would be beneficial (not-with-standing the particularly strong emphasis on writing in the Create You Own Book resource).

- Greater flexibility in the Create Your Own Book resource to encourage children to make more choices over their writing (in line with the realities of book writing and publication) should be considered, possibly also as extension activities.

- Introductory guidance to The Ant Club could highlight the importance of its holistic pedagogy, and the need to plan for the use of all resources in order to complement each other. It would be useful to include a rationale for this use based on rigorous theory and evidence.

- Further opportunities for use of IT to support, not supplant, the printed materials of all The Ant Club resources should be considered, for example opportunities for electronic drafting and publication in relation to the Create Your Own Book resource (see expert review of this resource).

- Although resources available on the Booktrust website continue to develop, interviews suggested that teachers were insufficiently aware of these. We suggest that Booktrust review the way in which they publicise the website with a view to improving their communication with teachers who are using the resources, recognising that teachers who use the resources with children may not be as well informed as The Ant Club coordinator in school.

- Booktrust should consider greater attention to support for different languages (in relation to Stories for Drama in particular, but also across all the resources). In addition a review of the accessibility of materials and guidance for parents should be undertaken.

- Further research taking account of the suggestions in the report should be undertaken

Introduction and Background

The Ant Club, developed by Booktrust, is an enhanced, targeted intervention that aims to support the development of children's disposition and achievements in language, reading and writing during the early years and infant phases of education in schools. The Ant Club was launched in November 2011 and currently has 1,192 schools registered to take part. The programme was developed by a Strategic Advisory Group drawn from national organisations and harnessing the expertise of Local Authority Literacy Advisors, Heads of English and Public Library Staff.

The Ant Club programme and its resources were designed to help schools focus on improving skills in language, reading and writing. The approach to improving these skills is based on a series of motivating activities including drama through stories, rhyme challenges and the writing of books.

Schools receiving The Ant Club resources were selected by the DfE using the criteria that 20% or more of pupils receive free school meals, and where there is a 20% attainment gap between those who are eligible for free school meals and those who are not. In this way the programme is firmly targeted on schools where a sizable proportion of the school community is suffering significant disadvantage.

Following the competitive tendering process two departments of the *Institute of Education* (IOE), *University of London* were commissioned to carry out research to evaluate The Ant Club. The two departments are the National Research and Development Centre for adult literacy and numeracy (NRDC) and the Early Years and Primary Education (EYPE) department.

The Department of EYPE is an internationally recognised centre for post-graduate study and research into the development and education of children between the ages of 3-11. It encourages and supports coherent academic endeavour across a broad spectrum of issues that impact on policy, provision and practice in early years and primary education. EYPE provides high-quality professional development both for teachers and for an expanding range of professionals working in various educational settings.

NRDC is an independent centre dedicated to research and development on adult literacy, language and numeracy, established by the Department for Education and Skills in 2002 as part of the Skills for Life strategy for England. While specialising in adult literacy the Centre also has extensive experience with literacy issues across the life course. NRDC has conducted ground-breaking quantitative research on the intergenerational transmission of literacy-related disadvantage, and has led

research funded by the European Commission on family literacy initiatives and issues throughout the European Union, including an investigation into gifting programmes.

The primary aim of the research was to investigate how The Ant Club programme and its resources supported the development of children's dispositions and achievement in language, reading and writing during reception and Year 1.

Key research questions

1. What is the evidence base from previous research on the best practice to support children's speaking & listening, reading and writing skills during the transition from Early Years Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1?
2. How effective are The Ant Club resources in engaging and developing children's skills in speaking and listening, reading and writing?
3. How do teachers, parents and other stakeholders evaluate the impact, if any, of The Ant Club programme on reception and Year 1 children with regards to supporting and developing their speaking & listening, reading and writing skills and their general literacy attitudes and behaviours?
4. In what ways can The Ant Club programme, including communication about the programme, be improved to help ensure that teachers and children's needs are being met, and that the programme is providing value for money?
5. What tools can be developed and used for further future evaluation of The Ant Club programme?

This report presents the findings from the evaluation of The Ant Club intervention that took place from 2012 to 2013. The first section highlights some key theory and research in the field of language and literacy. This is followed by the methodology section that describes that methods used in the research evaluation. A detailed account of the findings is then given drawing on the analysis of all data collected during the evaluation. Finally the discussion and conclusions section brings the report to its main conclusions and recommendations.

Supporting English, language and literacy in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1: A literature review

The learning and teaching of English, language and literacy is the main priority for the education systems of many of the world's nations. The role of language as fundamental to learning in all other areas; the high priority given to literacy teaching; the argument that nations' economic futures are closely aligned with literacy skills; the emphasis on reading, and the continuing interest in the evidence base for educational policy and practice are ideas that many nations are addressing. In order to benefit from the wealth of international research of relevance to the teaching of English there is a constant need for expert synthesis and interpretation so that teaching can be informed by these insights.

What do we mean by the words 'English', 'language' and 'literacy', and how do we distinguish between them? 'English' is perhaps the easiest to define; it is also the loosest definition. We do not primarily mean the English language, rather, our principal focus is on English as taught as a curriculum subject in schools, largely where English is a first or first-choice language. 'Language' is used to mean the way that learners learn to use spoken and textual language, and the way these are taught. Our definition of language, therefore, has a bearing on how we see 'literacy'. A narrow definition of that term would see a focus merely on the technical capacity to read and write words, which we see as important; but we also understand literacy (or literacies) as a socially embedded semantic system, in a co-evolutionary relationship with new technologies, and as part of a multimodal framework that considers writing, reading, talk and listening alongside other modes of communication. Our central concern in relation to teaching is pedagogy, particularly with a focus on teaching and learning in reception and year one classes.

The main methodological orientation that underpins the approach to this literature review is interdisciplinarity. In a broad sense, interdisciplinarity has been used to refer to a range of practices, from borrowing and solving problems across disciplines to the actual emergence of an interdiscipline. But central to the interdisciplinary methodology that informs our understanding is integration, the combining of theoretical perspectives from different fields of knowledge. The process of integration that is key in interdisciplinarity entails a step in which the disciplinary perspectives are seen in a new configuration. The substantive areas of the interdisciplinary orientation in this report are cognitive, socio-cultural and educational.

The breadth of international attention to language and literacy in policy and practice is matched by the very wide ranging nature of research and scholarship that is located in many disciplines. However, two strong areas of research and scholarship with particular relevance to classroom practice are in the cognitive and socio-cultural domains. For example work in psychology and neuroscience continues to explore children's cognitive development in relation to language and literacy, and there is evidence of this perspective having influence on policy and pedagogy expressed at the national level in England (Rose, 2006) and internationally (Abadzi, 2006). Concurrent with developments in these fields socio-cultural work has continued to advance our understanding of the contextual factors that are at play in any language or literacy event. Key educational research and scholarship extends cognitive and socio-cultural work in order to fully understand the implications of research in relation to classroom and school practice, and the policies at national level that impact on such practice.

Interdisciplinary theory of the teaching of English, language *and* literacy (TELL) is the grounding for this review of literature (Wyse, 2011a; coupled with a new approach to pedagogy built on the theory, Wyse and Parker, 2012). Reading, writing, language and literacy are conceptualised holistically reflecting the educator's role in supporting these modes within the school curriculum, and learners' holistic experiences and conceptions. In order to understand the interaction between pupils' ideas and experiences, and the curriculum to be delivered, the theory is built on the philosophy of pragmatism (Dewey, 1902) which is important for two reasons. Firstly it identifies the importance of engagement of the pupil, and by implication questions inappropriate top-down forms of curriculum implementation. Secondly it can be seen as linked to the move to dialogic teaching in education (e.g. Mercer. 2008) that increasingly sheds light on the features of productive teacher-pupil interaction. The theory is built on understandings of English as a local and global phenomenon and delimits its focus through linguistic principles. Interdisciplinary analysis of neuro-psychological and socio-cultural work is the basis for fine grained elements of the TELL. The theory privileges the holistic over the partial, the theorised vs. instrumental, the complex versus the simple, the nuanced vs. the crudely straightforward. It recognises the socio-cultural context in which teaching is located but emphasises the pedagogical aspects of the socio-cultural context.

Language and Multilingualism
One of the most important developments of the context for language and literacy in the curriculum of different countries has been the global growth in the use of English as a language. The growth of English is played out in the contexts of continent, country, state, district, city, town, school and classroom. This global phenomenon may seem a somewhat distant idea in relation to the daily lives of

pupils and teachers in the UK, but if you pause to consider the language backgrounds and experiences of the pupils in any class then these issues have a significant bearing (for research evidence on this see Wyse *et al.,* 2011). In all cities in the UK, and in many rural areas, there are populations of students who are multilingual. The range is broadest in London contrasting with the larger homogenous communities in other cities who have, for example, British Asian origins.

If we accept that multiple linguistic influences, including different languages, accents, dialects etc., are a feature of all societies then there are implications for teaching and learning approaches. One of the most important implications is how we should understand the multilingualism that all pupils will experience and/or encounter in their lives. As part of his *developmental interdependence hypothesis* and other work Cummins (1979) proposed that the particular features of school discourse, such as the emphasis on particular forms of literacy learning, are part of what can make things difficult for bilingual pupils. Kovelman, Baker & Petitto's (2008) research showed that bilinguals have differentiated representations in the brain of their two languages. They also found no evidence to suggest that exposure to two languages might be a source of fundamental and persistent language confusion. Reese *et al.*'s (2000) study found that even if parents were not able to speak the dominant language (English in this case), and therefore used a second language (Spanish), parents' engagement with books and reading was beneficial for their children's learning to read in the first language and their education more generally. Research clearly shows that support for home languages benefits the learning of another language, and that impeding the use of home languages is damaging.

The breadth of scholarship in relation to TELL requires further focus to elements that are most appropriate and applicable to classroom teaching. Linguistic principles are one means to enable such a focus. The following principles were derived from analyses of research and theory related to linguistic and pedagogic aspects:

- Communication of understandable meaning is the driving force of language
- Analysis of language in use is the basis for appropriate knowledge for pupils and teachers
- As a consequence of the natural processes of language change descriptive accounts of language are more appropriate than prescriptive accounts
- Experiencing and reflecting on the processes of reading and writing are an important resource to enhance teaching and learning
- Language and social status (or power) are inextricably linked

(For further explanation and examples of these principles in practice see Wyse, 2011b)

Young children learn language with remarkable speed: by the age of five, provided they do not have language difficulties, all children have acquired the grammar for the main constructions of their native language (Peccei, 2006). This is true across all cultures and in all languages (Kuhl, 2004). The term 'acquired' in this context is important because linguists make a distinction between emergent language constructions and ones which are acquired fully.

Reading

The texts that children choose to read, and that teachers select to inspire children, are a vital part of language in the curriculum. But also of importance is how we might view the processes or *transactions* that take place when children engage with texts. As Rosenblatt (1985) says, "we need to see the reading act as an event involving a particular individual and a particular text, happening at a particular time, under particular circumstances, in a particular social and cultural setting, and as part of the on-going life of the individual and the group" (p. 100). Rosenblatt argued that her notion of the transaction was not the same as the separation of text and reader that is a feature of cognitive views of transaction that include information processing models. For example psychologists look at what they call reading comprehension in a rather different way to Rosenblatt's transactions, and yet both shed light on the same reading processes.

Irrespective of the preferred way of thinking about reading processes, unless someone is motivated to read then learning to read is less likely to happen. Wigfield and Guthrie (1997) found that children's motivation for reading was correlated with the amount and breadth of their reading. They also found that intrinsic motivation predicted more strongly amount and breadth than extrinsic motivation. In other words if children are motivated through their own experiences of reading, including the choices of reading materials that they make, this is more beneficial than external imposition. The implications of these findings for supporting children are first and foremost the importance of encouraging children's motivation, for example by providing texts that are likely to interest them. However, there is of course a dilemma in relation to intrinsic motivation. When does encouragement to read by teachers become extrinsic motivation? This implies a subtle balanced between the *requirement* to read, and *encouragement* to read.

Text transactions, then, involve cognitive and socio-cultural factors but what happens over time as reading develops? Stanovich (1986) characterised different amounts of reading experience as the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer. He showed that there are gains for vocabulary growth and reading skill attributable to increased volume of reading alone, so those children who do not

experience enough opportunities to read are at a disadvantage. Motivation, confidence and engagement are intricately and reciprocally linked to reading achievement (OECD, 2010). In particular, there is a symbiotic relationship between engagement and proficiency: children and young people who are motivated to read will read more, and by doing so will improve their skills. Improved skills allow children to enjoy reading more and get more out of the process, thus further increasing their motivation – and so on, in a virtuous cycle. As researchers have shown, even small differences in motivation at one point in time can lead to large, long-term gaps in reading proficiency and enjoyment, in part because motivated readers who see their skills improve develop a self-identity as a reader, while less motivated children develop a self-identity as a non-reader (Stanovich, 1986). This means that in the space of only a few key years disadvantaged young people may go from being only slightly behind their peers in terms of motivation and proficiency, to being very far behind. Opportunities to read for pleasure, and to do so often, are essential if schools are to avoid this process.

The gender achievement gap in reading is a cause for concern in all developed countries. However, international evidence indicates that if boys were as motivated to read as girls, this achievement gap would shrink by more than half (OECD 2010). Many researchers argue that such a revolution in boys' reading motivation will only come to pass if schools devote more attention to providing a broader range of reading materials to their pupils. Currently, in-school reading materials are more likely to mirror the leisure time preferences of girls than boys, unwittingly demotivating the latter (Sulkunen, 2007; Young and Brozo, 2001). If schools would offer a broader variety of different types of reading materials, giving young people more choice about what they read, this could lead to improvements in boys' motivation to read, increases in the amount of time they spend reading, improved self-identities as readers, and gains in reading achievement (Brozo, *et al.,* 2007).

Socio-economic status also plays a role. According to international research, the main reading-related benefits of socio-economic advantage are the inculcation of a greater love for reading, greater self-efficacy as a reader, and a stronger self-concept as a reader (Artelt *et al.,* 2003). These motivational traits translate themselves into behaviours: in OECD countries, 76% of high-SES students read for pleasure, while only 56% of low-SES do. However, socio-economically disadvantaged students tend to work just as hard as their peers, and to be motivated to succeed (Artelt *et a*l., 2003). Effort is not the issue, nor is ambition. The keys are opportunity and support: socio-economically disadvantaged pupils are less likely to see their parents and peers reading for pleasure, and are less likely to have access in the home to materials they want to read. Therefore it is essential that schools and other settings provide well-planned, well targeted programmes for such pupils; for example programmes like The Ant Club. Many researchers argue that schools should be assessed not just on reading

achievement but on those schools' ability to improve reading motivation, particularly among groups suffering low levels of engagement (Snow, 2002 – see Hall chapter).

Although important developments have taken place in reading research, once attention turns to how research might inform the teaching of reading a further series of complexities arise. It is the tension between research, recommendations for teaching, and teaching policy on reading has been at the centre of some of the fiercest debates about education, so much so that it has sometimes even been called 'the great debate' (Chall, 1983). In brief, the argument centres on a difference of opinion about how children learn to read and how they should be taught. When this is played out in the media, polarised positions are suggested and an unhelpful simplification of what is a complex picture often emerges. However it is the case that at the heart of the arguments is a basic difference of beliefs. Some people have as a core belief that the main thrust of reading teaching should be 'top-down', where the whole text is the starting point and teaching about smaller linguistic elements such as words, syllables, alphabet etc. follows from the whole text. Others believe that teaching reading should be mainly oriented to 'bottom-up', by focusing on teaching the alphabetic code first and foremost and that this will lead to reading comprehension. These opposing beliefs have also been linked with particular approaches to the teaching of reading. For example the *whole language* approach in the US or the *real book approach* in the UK have been linked with top-down, and *synthetic phonics* has been linked with bottom-up. A questionable assumption, made by some, is that whole language teaching does not involve phonics instruction, but as Dahl, *et al.* (1999) show, that this is not necessarily the case. They challenge the idea that systematic phonics instruction must be a predetermined sequence of skills, and provide evidence that whole language teaching can be effective.

Overall, what the research evidence shows is that engagement with whole texts *and* teaching of the alphabetic code are important (Wyse, 2010). Reading research over the last twenty years has clearly demonstrated the importance of knowledge about letters and phonemes (sounds) as a small but vital part of learning to read, but although children can learn to read without systematic phonics (Durkin, 1966; Clarke, 1976) they cannot learn to read without engaging with whole texts.

A further difficulty with translating research evidence into classroom practice has been the lack of attention paid by some researchers to the realities and complexities of classroom practice. For example, an important strand of research evidence comes from analysis of teacher-pupil interaction. Given that all teaching is mediated through dialogue between teachers and pupils this is an important element of any consideration of effectiveness of teaching. Working in this area, Juzwik, *et al.* (2008) identify the importance of what they called "oral narrative

events". Effective teaching encouraged pupils to share "small stories" about their lives and things that interested them.

Another feature of classroom practice is the fact that teachers are faced with pupils who differ markedly in their experience of reading: their understanding, their attainment, and their knowledge. This is the realm of *differentiation*, including children who struggle with reading and those who learn to read earlier than most. The work of Marie Clay, which focused on children with reading difficulties (Clay, 1979), is internationally renowned. Clay argued that early intervention was vital to help children with reading difficulties. In the New Zealand context, where she did her early work, she said that if a child was not reading by age six then extra support was required. Unlike many programmes aimed at supporting children with reading difficulties, Clay's *reading recovery* lesson (a 30 minute one-to-one session between teacher and pupil) begins with the reading of whole texts and progresses to letter work before finishing with reading of whole text. Even greater effects for Clay's approach have been found with the inclusion of systematic phonics rather than the letter work that Clay originally intended. Although there have been some differences of opinion about the effectiveness of Clay's methods there is unusually strong research evidence from a range of countries to support it (D'Agostino & Murphy, 2004). Further evidence from research and practice showing the powerful benefits of reading recovery has come from the internationally renowned centre for reading recovery based in the EYPE department at the IOE (http://www.ioe.ac.uk/research/4399.html).

At the other end of the differentiation spectrum are precocious children who read at home before formal education begins. Seminal studies by Durkin (1966) in the US, and Clark (1976) in the UK, researched the factors that led to these children being able to read so early. One of the most important factors was having parents who took an active interest in their children's learning and who engaged in interaction that was conducive to learning. There was also evidence that parents' support tended to be non-systematic. This evidence clearly shows, once again, that some children do not need systematic phonics in order to learn to read. The implications for teachers are that systematic phonics teaching will be required for most children but not all, therefore reading teaching has to be differentiated, as recent research has shown (Connor, 2009).

The important role of parents in supporting their children's literacy development has resulted in a range of approaches designed for schools to support parents to help their children's reading improve. However, a series of studies of young children's literacy have revealed what is a frequent disjuncture between the language environment of the home and the language environment of the school or early years setting (see, for example, Marsh, 2003). The suggestion that the reason for such disjunctures can be simply attributed by deficit models of the home

context has been challenged by research such as that by Purcell Gates (1996) who showed that the idea of homogeneity of literacy practices in homes of low socioeconomic status was inaccurate. Amidst considerable variation, the factors that effected literacy were frequency of literacy events in the home, parents' engagement with literacy for themselves, and the influence of formal literacy lessons at school. One of the largest scale longitudinal studies of early years practice in the world (carried out by colleagues in the EYPE department at the IOE) underlined the importance of appropriate home learning environments (e.g. Siraj-Blatchford, Taggart, Sylva, Sammons, & Melhuish, 2008). Evidence that programmes developed by teachers and schools to support parents can have a positive impact on pupils and their families has been acquired in some of the poorest communities internationally (Shah, Wyse, Chaplain, 2012).

Writing

The concept of *emergent literacy* came about due to growing interest in young children's learning and a dissatisfaction with deficit theories of children and their language. Clay's work was influential (in addition to her contribution to reading, see above) in recognising that children's early attempts at mark-making are a form of writing distinguished only by lack of experience and understanding rather than a form of non-writing (see also Bradford & Wyse, 2010). Yang & Noel (2006) identified the common patterns of mark-making in four and five-year-old children and noted the importance of drawing as a contributor to writing development. For emergent writers, writing their own name is a very important part of their emergent literacy. Bloodgood (1999) showed how name writing was linked to a range of important early literacy learning. Links were found between name writing and learning of the alphabetic code, although individual children differed in the extent to which they could form letters and/or name letters. It was theorised that learning the alphabetic code and name writing reinforced each other.

A key area of debate with regard to writing has been the distinction between the processes of writing and the products and forms of writing. Although Graves' (1975) original research received some criticism (e.g. Smagorinsky, 1987), there are few who doubt the influence his ideas had in practice, particularly in the United States. Graves articulated the *process approach* to writing, the key features of which are: generation of writing topics by pupils; regular writing workshops; 'publishing' in the classroom; teacher-pupil writing conferences; skills teaching in 'mini lessons' and embedded in one-to-one support for pupils' writing. Wyse's (1988) early research focused on the process approach and showed the ways that teachers integrated some of the ideas of the process approach with other approaches (including more 'structured' teaching). He argued that this integration of teaching approaches was a particular characteristic of the teaching of writing in England at the time.

A challenge to the process approach came from those who felt that the approach was too informal and that teaching of written genres needed to be more systematic. Since that time clear evidence of the challenges for pupils of what is called 'argumentative' writing has continued to emerge (Andrews *et al.*, 2006; Yeh, 1998). An important consideration for teaching writing is how to strike the appropriate balance between an emphasis on teaching and supporting composition, as opposed to the transcription elements such as spelling, grammar and handwriting. The importance of processes, environments, ownership, etc., for writing combined with individual children's cognitive development are supported by recent empirical work on effective teaching of writing. Research such as that by Graham (2006) has provided experimental trial evidence that the combination of a focus on writing processes, and instruction for writing strategies, is the most effective way to teach writing. As Wyse and Jones (2013) explain, pupil ownership (that is related to motivation) is the other vital aspect of such writing teaching.

If phonics has often been the catalyst to ignite debate on the teaching of reading then grammar, to a lesser intensity, has done the same for writing. Historically there was once a time when grammar teaching was the be-all and end-all of English teaching. In modern times it has been seen by some as an essential and dominant requirement to help pupils' writing. Andrews *et al.* (2004) in their systematic review and meta analysis, clearly showed that decontextualised teaching of grammar to improve writing at secondary level was ineffective. They cited work by Wyse (2001) who came to the same conclusion and who reviewed evidence to show that decontextualised grammar teaching is very unlikely to be beneficial at primary level.

The transcription elements of writing continue to attract significant attention, particularly spelling. A seemingly minor point, but one that in fact turns out to be significant, is the decision by teachers, early years' workers, and parents, about whether to use letters' names to identify letters, or common sounds to identify letters. Treiman, *et al.* (2008) provide evidence that children use letters' names as a source to help them learn about sounds. The use of letter names not common sounds helps to make clear the distinction between letters' correct names and the ways in which letters represent phonemes.

Another feature of transcription is the nature of the tools that are used in order to compose, or *design*. The *new literacies* movement is in part concerned with technological change. Continuing interest in multiliteracies and multimodality has prompted debate between those who see the need for greater theoretical exploration and those who argue that it is time to research what kinds of teaching, involving new technologies, is likely to support children's learning more effectively (for different views see Jewitt& Kress, 2010, and Reinking, 2010). Our view is that

new technologies are tools that still require the age-old capacities to compose text and compose visual images in order to communicate meanings that satisfy the composer and the reader. Alvermann (2008) is quite right in her argument that new technologies used by pupils at home cannot simply be ignored in school.

Conclusion (of literature review)

In summary, there are significant themes that have been addressed in this literature review that have a clear relationship with The Ant Club approach. One of the significant features of The Ant Club is its holistic character. It is built on recognition that language is at the heart of literacy, for example in the attention to nursery rhymes that precedes the later foci on reading and writing. This holism is also represented by the attention to language, reading *and* writing as opposed to many schemes that isolate reading in particular, and less commonly, writing.

The Ant Club resources have been targeted at schools in areas of socio-economic disadvantage. Frequently these areas are located in cities where many languages are spoken and where different dialects are a feature of children's lives. The expectation that children should be motivated by the resources is evident in the use of well loved texts that are very attractively presented. Similarly the use of drama, as a means to draw children in to engagement with texts, is likely to motivate them.

An emphasis on meaning is represented in The Ant Club resources by their use of whole texts for enjoyment and learning, as opposed to decontextualised tasks. Although the different elements of the resources focus more on one or other language modes, i.e. language, reading or writing, they frequently combine a focus on two or three modes.

Some of the activities recommended as part of the resources require open ended responses from children. The opportunity for open ended responses to texts, whether read or written, is one way to differentiate for children's different experience of language and literacy. However differentiation has to be planned in other ways when texts are pre-determined, for example by differentiating the texts themselves according to their readability.

Finally, the emphasis on parents through consideration of their involvement in the processes of learning inspired by The Ant Club resources is an important element. The engagement of hard to reach parents has long been recognised as a challenge for early years and school settings. The care and consideration that Booktrust pays to the involvement of parents is clearly visible in the resources and their guidance.

Methodology

The research design for the evaluation was a mixed methods design that comprised a questionnaire that was emailed to all schools engaged with The Ant Club intervention, and qualitative research in a selection of schools engaged with The Ant Club intervention which were selected to represent a geographical spread nationally supported by a series of telephone interviews with other schools working with The Ant Club programme.

The Ant Club resources had been sent to schools for implementation according to the timetable in Table 1.

Table 1: Timetable showing Booktrust's intended schedule of use of resources[1]

Age Group	Autumn	Spring	Summer
Reception	Booktime (not the focus of this report)	Stories for Drama (reception): Chicken Licken	The Rhyme Challenge (reception)
Year 1	The Rhyme Challenge (Year 1)	Stories for Drama (Year 1): Stone Soup	Create Your Own Book

In more detail, the resources consist of the following:

Booktime (reception)
- Booktime is a national free books programme for all reception-aged children. Every child receives a free book pack for children to share and enjoy with their family and friends, with supporting resources available online. This was not the focus of this evaluation. It has been evaluated separately, and the report is available at http://www.booktime.org.uk/schools/resources/.

Stories for Drama (reception and year 1)
- Each resource helps teachers explore an engaging story using drama with their class.
- Teachers receive:
  - A retelling of a story (Chicken Licken or Stone Soup),
  - Ready-to-use session plans for using drama in class related to the story,

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[1] Please note: the research started in the summer term, so the summer term resources were evaluated first, followed by autumn term and finally the spring term resources.

- o A colourful poster and four stickers linked to the story for each child to take home to stimulate discussion with parents.
- The resource aims to support:
  - o Confidence in speaking
  - o Listening skills
  - o Increased parental involvement in their child's learning

The Rhyme Challenge (reception and year 1)
- Each Rhyme Challenge consists of ten nursery rhymes and early years poems for children to learn in school and at home. Teachers can choose how many rhymes to learn and are encouraged to hold a celebration event involving parents and children at the end of The Rhyme Challenge.
- Teachers receive:
  - o Rhyme sheets and posters of classic rhymes to learn as a class
  - o High quality reward certificates for every child
  - o Resources and guidance on how to involve parents
- The resource aims to support:
  - o Familiarity with rhythm and rhyme
  - o Confidence with words that rhyme, increasing phonological awareness
  - o Repetition and recollection skills
  - o Increased home-school links and parental engagement
  - o Transition into Year 1 through having a similar resource in reception and Year 1

Create Your Own Book (Year 1)
- Each child receives a high quality book to populate with their own content, designed to promote child-led content and creativity.
- Teachers receive:
  - o A book for each child
  - o Resources and guidance on how to help children make use of the book.
- The resource aims to support:
  - o Creativity
  - o Positive attitudes towards books
  - o Familiarity with different genres
  - o Parental involvement in their child's own learning

Sampling

The questionnaire was emailed to the total population of schools using The Ant Club intervention three times (Waves 1-3): summer term, 2012; autumn term, 2012; and the spring term, 2013, as can be seen in Table 2. The Booktrust

coordinator in all schools participating in The Ant Club[2] were sent links for the questionnaires towards the end of each term and the survey remained open for a further two weeks after the end of term. Reminders were emailed to schools two weeks after the initial invitation.

Table 2: Summary of the survey data

Wave number and resource evaluated	Term survey sent	Number of schools survey was sent to	Number of replies	Response rate
1 – Rhyme Challenge (reception) & Create your own book	Summer 2012	737	194	23%
2 – Rhyme Challenge (Year 1)	Autumn 2012	1119	191	17%
3 – Chicken Licken & Stone Soup	Spring 2013	1064	101	10%

Eight schools were recruited to take part in the qualitative research: six primary schools, one lower school, and one first school from seven geographical regions of England. Because of the timing of the research programme, schools which were marginally outside of the criteria for inclusion in The Ant Club programme were invited to join it if they were prepared to assist us in the qualitative research. In each case the Head teacher of the school agreed to participate in the programme.

The schools' Ofsted inspection grades ranged from grade 1 (outstanding) through to grade 3. All the schools were situated in areas of high social deprivation, related to the eligibility criteria for participation in The Ant Club programme, and so we expected the parents to have relatively low social-economic status (SES). As can be seen in Table 3 most of the schools had a relatively high number of pupils eligible to claim Free School Meals[3] (FSM) and a range of proportions of children categorised as having Special Educational Needs[4] (SEN). The proportion of pupils who did not have English as their first language[5] (EAL) varied from a high of 62% to a low of 3%.

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[2] The current mailing list was provided for us by Booktrust ahead of each survey.
[3] The average rate of FSM pupils in primary schools in England is about 18%
[4] The average rate of SEN pupils in all UK schools is about 20%
[5] The average rate of EAL pupils in primary schools in England is about 12%

Table 3: OfSTED grades and socio-economic indicators for schools in qualitative sample

School	Region	OfSTED Grade at last inspection	SEN/EAL/FSM[6]
A	West Midlands	3	SEN: 20.2% EAL: 8.2% FSM: 44.0%
B	West Midlands	1	SEN: 12.2% FSM: 24.7%
C	East of England	2	SEN: 18.3% EAL: 9.6% FSM: 46.8%
D	North East	3	SEN: 14.3% EAL: 2.6% FSM: 52.9%
E	South West	2	SEN: 9.1% EAL: 33.1% FSM: 30.3%
F	East Midlands	3	SEN: 5.9% EAL: 61.6% FSM: 31.0%
G	Yorkshire & Humber	3	SEN: 6.4% EAL: 33.5% FSM: 28.9%
H	North West	3	SEN: 19.0% EAL: 3.3% FSM: 51.5%

The case study schools data was supplemented by 14 telephone interviews with other schools involved with The Ant Club (see page 56). These schools were self selecting having responded directly to Booktrust following an invitation to participate in the evaluation. The staff interviewed included Deputy heads and Literacy Coordinators, teachers and teaching assistants. The focus of the questions was on the overall impact of The Ant Club on the school rather than an in-depth analysis of specific resources.

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[6] From Department for Education website, 2011 data.

Data sets

The data sets included a questionnaire sent to all schools involved in implementing The Ant Club, observations of teaching and assemblies/performances, and interviews with teachers and parents (and a questionnaire for parents in one school).

The questionnaire for schools was drafted by the IOE team then modified according to suggestions from Booktrust. The questionnaire was sent at the end of each term to Booktrust's contact in each school that was taking part in The Ant Club, with a request for the email to be forwarded to all teachers involved in The Ant Club. The questionnaire focused on the frequency of use and the effectiveness of the resources and included questions on, for example, the opportunities the resources provided for engaging parents in the home learning environment (HLE), and the appropriateness for the age and needs of the class.

The main qualitative element of the research involved work with eight case study schools as a means to better understand the use of The Ant Club in the realities of schools and classrooms and to triangulate the survey data. The visits to the schools included observations of lessons and/or assemblies/performances. The focus of the lesson observations was on how teachers used the resources, and their potential impact on children's learning. Semi-structured interviews were held with teachers who had been observed, or who had used the resources prior to the visit, covering many of the themes from the survey in greater depth and giving teachers opportunities to raise issues. The average length of time was about 25 minutes per interview. A questionnaire proforma was used to note answers and discussions in the interviews.

The researchers visited seven schools a varying number of times, and carried out telephone interviews with one other school. In total, 27 interviews were conducted with teachers (24 face-to-face and three by telephone), and 22 observations of classroom sessions and/or assemblies/performances. In addition, researchers held three focus groups with parents, and administered one parents' questionnaire. Table 4 summarises the case study school visits.

Table 4: Case study school visits and research methods used

School	Resource evaluated	Term of visit	Method of data collection
A	Rhyme C - R Rhyme C -Y1 Create Your Own Book – Y1 Drama – R Drama – Y1	Summer '12 Autumn '12 Summer '12 Spring '13 Spring '13	Observation/interview Observation of class assembly/interview/ parent focus group Observation/interview Observation/interview Observation/interview
B	Rhyme C – R Rhyme C – Y1 Create Your Own Book – Y1 Drama - R	Summer '12 Spring '12 Summer '13 Spring' 13	Observation/interview Observation of class assembly/interview (x 2 teachers)/parent questionnaire Observation/interview Observation/interview
C	Rhyme C – R Rhyme C – Y1 Create Your Own Book – Y1 Drama – Y1	Summer '12 Autumn '12 Summer '12 Spring '13	Observation/Interview Observation of class assembly/parent focus group) Observation/Interview Observation/Interview
D	Rhyme C – R Create Your Own Book	Summer '12 Summer '12	Interview by telephone Interview by telephone
E	Rhyme C – R Create Your Own Book Rhyme C – Y1	Summer '12 Summer '12 Spring '13	Observation/Interview Observation/Interview Observation/Interview
F	Rhyme C – R Create Your Own Book Rhyme C – Y1 Drama – Y1	Summer '12 Summer '12 Spring '13 Spring '13	Observation/Interview Observation/Interview Observation/Interview Observation/Interview (x 2 teachers)
G	Rhyme C Y 1 Create Your Own Book- Y1 Drama R Drama Y1	Spring '13 Summer '12 Summer '12 Spring '13	Interview/ parent focus group Interview Interview Observation/Interview
H	Drama – R	Spring '13	Observation/Interview

The schools involved in the research were welcoming and accommodating, however one or two schools were experiencing some challenges so were harder to engage with.

Analysis

The approach to the analysis across both quantitative and qualitative data was to evaluate the effectiveness of The Ant Club resources for teaching and learning in the areas identified in the research questions from the perspectives of: a) the teachers using them; b) the researchers' observations and reflections on the use of the resources in practice; and c) the researchers' expert review of the resources. In all three areas researchers contextualised their findings in the light of relevant research evidence in the field that was addressed in the literature review. The data relevant to each resource was analysed separately then key trends across all the data sets were used to inform the conclusions and recommendations.

There was a wide difference in responses to each wave of the survey; in particular, Wave 2 was dominated by Year 1 teachers, because the Reception resource for the Autumn term was Booktime, which was not the focus of this evaluation. Booktime is a universal programme run by Booktrust and Pearson and has been evaluated separately. Wave 3 responses were fewer than the other waves, possibly because the Spring term 2013 was very short and schools were struggling to fit in all their activities.

The survey did not require respondents to answer all questions, but they were invited to answer questions where they felt able to do so. This means that there are different numbers of responses to each question. For the sake of completeness, and due to small sample sizes, the proportions of answers to survey questions are given both as a percentage and as the number of respondents that this refers to (n).

For analysis typically respondents were grouped into those who had used the resource, those who were intending to use the resource and those who had not and did not intend to. Information on both how resources were used and the views of teachers as to their effectiveness could then be analysed by respondents' use or intended use of resources, and subsequently compared across resources.

Despite the differences in numbers of responses to different questions, comparing findings between resources builds a coherent picture of teachers' use of and attitudes to the resources which complements the findings in the qualitative data.

The qualitative data from school visits was categorised into arrays of data using text spread sheets to compare the answers to interview questions. The quantity of respondents' views on particular issues was taken into account in addition to more subtle perspectives that particularly served to illuminate and test the effectiveness of the resources. Observation data was used to triangulate the views of teachers expressed in interviews and to ensure the researchers had fully informed knowledge of the resources and their use.

At the end of the Spring Term 2013 telephone interviews were conducted with a further 14 schools in England, with the focus on looking at the impact of The Ant Club as a whole on schools. This provided a valuable tranche of further qualitative data. In particular it provided greater information of how effective teachers found the resources in each individual element of literacy and was able to probe further the efficacy of the materials for engaging with parents. It was also an opportunity to probe for schools responses to the administrative processes, how and when schools liked to receive resources, style and level of teacher guidance and use of the Booktrust website.

The expert reviews of resources (included as an appendix) brings further independent perspectives to the evaluation, from experts in the field of early literacy.

Findings

This findings section of the report addresses each of the resources, starting with The Rhyme Challenge (reception) and The Rhyme Challenge (Year 1), moving on to Stories for Drama (reception) and Stories for Drama (Year 1), and finishing with Create Your Own Book, the final resource for Year 1 children. For each resource similar sections are addressed although these vary slightly according to whether additional data sets such as observations of performances were relevant to the resource in question. The key themes across all the resources are ultimately drawn together in the discussion and conclusions section.

The Rhyme Challenge (Reception)

General impressions and effectiveness

From the survey, 56 responses about general impressions of the resource were received. A total of 36% (n=20) of the respondents had used The Rhyme Challenge (reception) resources and another 37% (n=21) indicated that they intended to use them. Respondents were generally positive about the resources: 54% (n=30) of the respondents rated The Rhyme Challenge resource as 'good', while 29% (n=16) judged it to be 'excellent' and 18% (n=10) as 'OK'.

Nearly all of the teachers in the qualitative research really liked the resource and the activities, including the certificates and posters. During her interview, one teacher at School F spoke about how she was already appreciating how good this resource was:

> We have been using all of the 10 rhymes. We love them all. Like Row, Row, Row Your Boat, you can all sit on the carpet and hold hands with your partner and you can do all of that - coordination, working together, simple movement, put movement to music. It's helping with rhythm, coordination, listening and all those things. I think they are fantastic. We have always done rhymes but we've really raised the profile as a result of having these because you realise parents can't always read a book every night but you can do a rhyme every night, you can do a rhyme in the car, on the bus, you can sing as you're walking up the street. Already I can see the value.

From the survey, 77 responses were received to the question about speaking and listening. With regard to the development of children's speaking and listening, 58% (n=45) of the respondents thought that the resource was 'very effective', 41% (n=32), 'quite effective' in developing children's skills in speaking and listening and no respondents said they were 'not very effective'. A total of 75 responses were

received to the question about reading and writing. As far as developing reading skills were concerned, 24% (n=18) thought it was 'very effective', and 67% (n=50) 'quite effective'. In relation to developing writing, 13% (n=10) perceived it to be 'very effective', and 60% (n=45) 'quite effective'.

The teachers we interviewed, both in person and as part of the telephone survey, thought the rhymes were particularly effective in helping speaking and listening and underpinned reading by emphasising rhythm and beat. Another teacher thought the rhymes were very good for helping children with vocabulary and patterns of language including patterns in maths. During an observation, a researcher noted that some of the vocabulary in the rhymes was being discussed with the children, and that they were encouraged to think about things relating to the rhymes such as the different animals they had seen on a farm visit, which were then incorporated into the rhyme. During the singing of Five Currant Buns, they stopped and worked out together how many had been sold and how many were left.

Five out of six of the teachers we interviewed said they appreciated the quality of the certificates and the posters, although half of the teachers we interviewed thought they should have been size A3. Nevertheless it was felt that they were bright, attractive and colourful, and were good for attracting parents' interest. For example, one teacher stated 'I think [the resources] are super - very colourful and child friendly'. Some teachers said that, given more time, they would have made more use of the posters by laminating them and creating a special corner in the classroom.

The A4 sheets with all ten rhymes were also thought to be the correct size: 'I like the size, which is small enough to photocopy and send home'. Some teachers said that many children knew most of the rhymes already, from nursery or from home, and so they did not have to learn all ten. At School B, the teacher said the children already knew nine of the rhymes. This was not seen as a problem, however as long as some of the rhymes were new to the children.

Organisation and general use

Most of the rhymes were learned as a whole class activity, although the teacher in School E had set up an interactive display on a table in the classroom with the rhyme sheet on where the children could work independently and tell each other rhymes. Not all the schools were able to integrate the rhymes into the literacy curriculum and other cross-curriculum subject areas, but two schools were able to do this. For example, in School E the rhymes had been used in whole class sessions as well as being extended through consolidation using a computer programme. The class had played games based on the rhymes, for example how many rhymes could the children recite in a certain length of time. The teacher had also made videos and audio recordings of the children performing different rhymes.

At School F the teacher had been able to link the rhymes with the topics they had covered during the half term including a visit to a farm. She had also used the counting rhymes to help with maths. She said that on occasions she stopped half way through the rhyme and gave the children a maths challenge. She would have used them a bit differently - more group based work - if she had been sent them earlier. The use of rhymes at the other schools was independent of other work, carried out typically in discrete sessions that generally lasted ten minutes or sometimes in spare time before lunch or break times. This indicates that the resources could be used flexibility within the school day.

In some of the classes, the singing of the rhymes was accompanied by a series of actions and in some rhymes (e.g. Five Currant Buns) the children acted the story out. As the teacher in School E pointed out: 'When you have actions to go with the rhyme, the children that perhaps don't know all the words can at least feel part of it. That's been very good.'

During an observation a researcher noticed a girl with English as an Additional Language (EAL), who had not been in the class very long, and although she did not know the words she was still able to feel included by joining in with the actions.

Time and use of the resources

From the survey, 37 responses were received in relation to time and use of the resources. Of the respondents, 54% (n=20) said they used The Rhyme Challenge resources for less than 15 minutes per session, 38% (n=14) used them between 15 and 30 minutes per session and only 5% (n=2) used then for over an hour at a time. In terms of frequency of use, 54% (n=20) of respondents stated they used the resource five times or more although 19% (n=7) had only used it once or twice. The total amount of time a school spent teaching the rhymes was largely dependent on when the resources arrived in school and how far they were able to be integrated into the school curriculum. Over 93% (n=34) of respondents reported that they had used the resource at least once a week or more, up to and including every day.

In the observed lessons the longest time a teacher spent in a single session was 25 minutes, at School F. Most of the teachers who were interviewed spent around 10 minutes at a time teaching the children the words and the tune of the rhymes. The teacher at School A worked on two rhymes a week over about three weeks; School B worked on the rhymes over three to four weeks; the children at School C, learned a few rhymes a week; School D spent 10 minutes every day on The Rhyme Challenge, including an intense two-week period when rhymes were incorporated into literacy hour and a few sessions were completely dedicated to the rhymes; School E spent a few weeks and the teacher told the researcher that she would have 'loved to have done more' if the resources had arrived earlier; and,

finally, the teacher at School F said she had used the rhymes over the past few weeks, 'pretty much everyday' since receiving them.

Parents' involvement and use at home

From the survey, 37 responses were received in relation to use of the resources at home with 62% (n=23) of the respondents reporting sending home activities connected to The Rhyme Challenge. In terms of effectiveness, 43% (n=31) of those surveyed saw the resources as being 'very effective' in providing opportunities for teachers to engage parents in their children's learning, while 47% thought they were 'quite effective' in achieving this objective. 75 responses were received in relation to use of the resources. In terms of engaging with parents, 52% (n=39) of respondents reported having talked about the resources with parents 'sometimes', although 25% (n=19) said they had never discussed them.

Five of the six teachers who were interviewed told the researcher that they had sent the letters and the rhyme sheets home but said they would have done more if they had been given more time. However, two schools in the sample did hold events based on the resources and invited parents to them. Five out of the six saw The Rhyme Challenge as being a very good way of promoting parents' engagement and enhancing parent-school relations. The teacher in School A thought that the rhymes were particularly good for parents who did not read books with their child. The Rhyme Challenge offered the parents a different way of interacting with their child during a school recommended activity that enhances literacy:

> The realisation of what they [the parents] have got, their own knowledge of rhyme is an asset, which they can actually use. I mean some parents actually sang along. I know one child who rarely shares a book at home - the reading record is never filled in or dated - but his mum was coming to school saying 'Oh golly, he got me singing that [rhyme] in the bath last night' and you think, that's really nice, you're doing that and that takes the pressure off reading of books.

The children at School F had taken rhyme cards home and some had apparently put them on their bedroom wall and sung them with their parents. For around 60% of the pupils in this school English was their second language: the teacher thought that rhymes were a really good resource for many of the parents in the school, particularly those who were still learning English or were not confident at reading, and who may be put off reading a whole book with their child.

While most teachers we spoke to thought it was too difficult to make a judgement on how frequently the children were interacting with their parents at home related to the resources, two teachers (at School A and C) thought that a little over half of

parents were using the rhymes with their children at home. In the survey, 67% believed that the resources were being used at home 'a bit', although 28% thought they were not being used 'at all'. These data need to be interpreted cautiously in view of the history of research showing mismatches between teachers' perceptions of parents and their home lives and the reality.

Match between resources and pupil year group

From the survey, 91% (n=98) of respondents thought that the resources were appropriately matched with the age group they taught. Of those that did not, there was an almost even split as to whether they thought the materials were aimed at too high or too low an age.

Some of the teachers who were interviewed thought that the rhymes were too easy and could have either been used in nursery or in the first (autumn) term of the reception year. However, this was not generally the view from schools visited. The teacher in School F felt that the resources were very well matched to her particular age group and this was the general finding from interviews:

> Definitely very well matched. As part of the school assessment in Foundation Stage children need to be aware of rhyme and alliteration and it is quite exciting to have something based on nursery rhymes that is familiar to the children that they can use straight away.

Teachers interviewed on the telephone were also split as to whether the level of the rhymes in both this resources and the Year 1 version were set at the right level. Several requested that more rhymes be made available (perhaps via the website) so teachers could better select appropriate levels on an individualised basis.

Teacher guidance

From the survey, 71% (n=55) of respondents said they followed the teachers' guidance 'a bit', while 18% (n=14) said that they followed it 'closely; and 10% (n=8) 'not at all'.

In the interviews, four teachers reported that they found the teacher guidance very useful. The points were generally clear and succinct and one teacher particularly said she liked the learning objectives and the simple message that 'Great Rhymers Make Great Readers'. Many of the teachers were experienced teachers and only seemed to have read the guidance once; they saw it more as a resource to check to see that the ideas were complementing what they knew and was already part of their practice. There was no evidence that any teacher was keeping records (as suggested in the guidance) but this was possibly due to the time factor, although one teacher thought that 'the suggestion to keep simple records [is] too vague'. At least two teachers said they would jot down whether individual children knew the

rhymes at the beginning and the end of The Rhyme Challenge. One teacher said that she would prefer guidance to be on the internet (this suggests a problem with communications: the guidance is available on the website as well as in hard copy), while another said that she had found nothing useful in it.

These positive findings about the guidance were confirmed in the telephone interviews, where most of those interviewed stated that while they liked the guidance, they tended to look it over for ideas then adapt it for their own classes in quite specific ways.

Strengths and Weaknesses

The majority of the teachers rated The Rhyme Challenge highly and thought it an effective resource for helping children's skills in speaking, listening and reading. They also liked the quality of the resources but some felt that it could be targeted to reception children in the first term or even at the nursery age year group. Many of the children knew most of the rhymes already and some teachers wondered if it would be possible to provide a set of between 15-20 rhymes from which teachers could choose (Booktrust have acted on this recommendation). Although the need to produce standardised A4 sheets and posters makes this challenging, some of the teachers suggested there could be a few more unusual rhymes, and at least two teachers suggested an accompanying CD to help teachers (and the children) learn the tunes. One teacher said she would 'probably not' use the resources again or recommend them to others, as she felt they were 'nothing particularly new or exciting' However, Five of the six teachers that we spoke to said that they would be happy to use the resources again and would definitely recommend The Rhyme Challenge to other schools. .

The Rhyme Challenge (Year 1)

General impressions and effectiveness

Responses to the survey were received from 109 teachers who had used the Rhyme Challenge (Year 1), and 73 who were intending to. Just 9 respondents had not used the resource. Responses were received from168 respondents in relation to the question about overall quality of the resource; 86% (n=144) of responses rated the resources as either excellent or good.

Researchers interviewed seven teachers (at Schools, A, B, C, F and G), and two teaching assistants at School B. All seven teachers said they would recommend it to other schools.

The survey received 100 responses to the question about general impressions of the resource. With regard to the development of children's speaking and listening, 70% (n=70) of the respondents thought that the resource was 'very effective 'and 30% (n=30) thought it was 'quite effective'. As far as developing reading skills were concerned, 27% (n=27) thought the resource was 'very effective', and 65% (n=64) 'quite effective'. In relation to developing writing 11% (n=11) perceived it to be 'very effective', and 59% (n=57) 'quite effective'. These figures are very similar to those reported about The Rhyme Challenge for reception children.

Those interviewed as part of the telephone survey were very positive about the way this Year 1 resource built on the previous reception version and saw great advantages for their pupils from this. They also felt the emphasis on rhyme was very effective at helping develop the confidence of pupils with poor speaking and listening skills.

Most of the teachers that were interviewed emphasised the way the resource could be used to develop speaking and listening, but also sequencing and grammar. Few mentioned reading and writing. The teacher at School E thought that focusing on simple language and rhyming words was an excellent way to help children to hear patterns. Rhymes were easy for the children to pick up and learn, helping with confidence as well as skills. In her class they had really helped with word level and word order work in particular. At School F, the teacher also highlighted the way the resource developed children's social skills and the actions helped some of the less confident children to become more outgoing. The class assembly was a good way of improving children's idea of performance, and performing to a particular audience. One teacher at School C recollected how one child would normally cry at the thought of being on stage but for this they were confident and held a picture and joined in.

It was perhaps because the rhymes had been memorised that the children could concentrate on the actions and other aspect of their performance, which was beneficial for their confidence.

Organisation and general use

In the qualitative sample, four of the schools used a mixture of whole class and ability groups, but at School E the resource had been incorporated into the school's literacy strategy. At School E it was used as part of four guided reading groups, each learning one rhyme each. Most teachers used a mixture of formal whole class sessions, ability groups over shorter periods (e.g. with phonic work), and a number of informal sessions where the children practised the rhymes whilst lining up for playtime, PE, home time etc.

Time and use of the resources

The majority of those who have used The Rhyme Challenge did so five or more times (77%) (n=60). Almost two-thirds (62%) (n=45) were planning to use it either once or a few times a week, and the overwhelming majority (90%) (n=74) for 30 minutes or less each session.

In the qualitative sample, the range of time varied between three to four hours per week over three weeks (total of 12 hours), to ten minutes a session three times a week over two weeks (two hours). Some teachers said they liked the way the resource could be adapted and used to fill the small amounts of time available, for example: 'It's very useful because we can use it when we have the odd five or ten minutes and just dip in and out of the different rhymes'.

Parents' involvement and use at home

The survey results indicate that 89% (n=89) of the teachers saw The Rhyme Challenge as providing parents with opportunities to engage in their child's learning. Over half (53% (n=45)) of respondents had sent activities home and a further 49% (n=33) reported that they planned to do so. Respondents held mixed views about resource usage; 72% (n=73) of the teachers thought that the activities were being used at home 'a bit', but only 6% (n=6) said 'a lot', and 22% (n=23) felt that they were not being used 'at all'. However, 45% (n=45) said they had discussed the resource with parents 'sometimes', although almost half (47% n=47) reported that this was 'hardly ever' or 'never'. Only 8% (n=8) of teachers discussed this resource with parents 'a lot'.

At School B the teacher estimated that between two-thirds and three-quarters of children were involved, and the parent's assembly was a very good strategy to get parents into school. At the parent assembly at this school the researcher witnessed about 40 parents attending from two classes. School B provided drinks and light refreshments, which was an added draw, and demonstrated that the school recognised the importance of encouraging parents to attend. At School A the researcher estimated there were 25 parents to watch one class. The teacher from School A guessed that around half the parents were using The Rhyme Challenge at home, to at least some degree. However, the teacher commented that these were the parents that they expected to be involved and the real challenge was to reach the more disaffected ones. Three of the teachers that we interviewed had not used the resource to promote parental engagement. For one, the teacher reported that this was because the school already sent home a lot of homework.

Match between resource and pupil year group

From the survey, 95% (n=158) of respondents saw The Rhyme Challenge as being well matched to their Year 1 age group. All the teachers in the qualitative interviews thought it well matched to the age group they were teaching.

Teacher guidance

From the survey, 77% (n=77) of respondents reported that they used the teachers' guidance 'a bit' and 20% (n=20) said they 'followed the guidance closely'. Only 3% (n=3) had not looked at the guidance.

Four of the five teachers who were interviewed had only glanced at the guidance, but thought it looked useful and about the right length.

Strength and weaknesses and suggested improvements

The main theme about the strength of the resource was that it was a good mixture of new and known rhymes, for example one respondent wrote that:

> The five well known rhymes enable those with less ability to achieve success in the challenge, while the brand new rhymes were challenging enough to those children who were ready for them.

The resource was described as attractive and high quality, which engaged the children's interests. The certificates were particularly popular and the teacher guidance was simple and easy to follow, above all it was fun. One teacher in the qualitative sample made the point that the images were very good for children who spoke English as their additional language.

> They're really good, and they really encourage the skills I would think this class particularly need because there are a lot of EAL and even our children that aren't EAL, the language and speaking and listening skills are poor, so having something like this, something fairly basic, and something they enjoy, really hones in their language skills.

The main weaknesses were as follows: some of the rhymes were too long; some were too similar to The Rhyme Challenge (reception); and there needed to be a greater choice. To improve the resource further, teachers suggested a CD with some of the rhymes to use in class and at home, particularly as some parents had literacy difficulties themselves; and a link to an internet site to make the resources more interactive. Some teachers also wanted the rhymes to be linked more closely to units in the literacy framework (although as the national curriculum in England changes it is difficult to predict how this would best be done).

The CD and link to an interactive website were also strongly endorsed by the teachers who were interviewed. They said a CD would allow teachers and children to hear the tunes of the more unfamiliar rhymes, and one teacher at School C recalled how she had used Google and YouTube to find the rhymes being performed. This teacher also pointed out that few teachers played a musical instrument and so a CD would give the chance for the rhymes to have a musical

accompaniment. A web link could enable the text to be placed on an interactive whiteboard and used to develop reading. Some of them also recommended that the posters should have larger text, which would also enable them to be used to develop reading.

Classroom Observations

Two classroom observations were carried on The Rhyme Challenge (Year 1). The children's level of engagement was high and it was clear that they were enjoying themselves. The two sessions lasted 20 minutes and 35 minutes respectively. Below is an extract from the researcher's field notes[7] which provides an insight into the kinds of activities that children were engaging with:

> The teacher asked the children to sit on the carpet then she began by asking them if they could remember all the rhymes they had learnt - the children put their hands up to suggest the rhymes. She then asked them which their favourite rhymes were. The following three rhymes were mentioned and then sung in turn: First, Row, Row, Row Your Boat - the children rowed the boat initially on their own then found a partner. The children were all singing and seemed to know the rhyme really well. Next, Ten in the Bed - the children used fingers to count and rolled their hands. Then, 5 Hot Cross Buns – the teacher chose 5 children and gave them a penny each. They came and gave it to her in turn during the singing and she gave them a pretend bun.

> After singing these three rhymes (all seemed very popular and all of the children were singing and joining in with the actions) the teacher then told the class they were going to be 'rhyme detectives'. She asked the children what 'rhyme' means - one girl said it means the words 'sound like each other'. The children then had to identify rhyming words in 5 Currant Buns: away and day, shop and top, etc. Then they wrote the whole rhyme together on the whiteboard - the teacher writing but asking for help with remembering and spelling some of the words. The children had to put their hands up when they saw two rhyming words on the board and the teacher then underlined the words. She also asked the children what made the words rhyme. (e.g., shop and top - one child said they both had a /p/ [sound rather than letter name] on the end and another child said there was an /o/ in the middle).

> After they had gone through the rhyme finding the rhyming words, the teacher said they were going to 'look for sound patterns in their groups' and 'search for rhyming words in the nursery rhyme sheet on their table'. She said that the rhymes might be at the end of the sentence and if they thought

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[7] Minor changes to field notes, such as to grammar or line spacing, have been made to aid clarity.

they had found a couple to say them to their friends who would look at their mouths and see if they thought the words rhymed or not. They quickly sang Hickory Hickory Dock because this was the rhyme on their tables. The teacher emphasised the rhyming words as they were singing and many of the children put up their hands to show that they had heard the rhyming words.

After a 5-10 minutes group session where the children worked in groups of about 5 underlining the rhyming words on the sheet together and then writing in their books other words they thought would rhyme with those they had found (e.g., three, wee, yippee etc.), they came back to the carpet and the teacher asked them what words they had found in their groups. She wrote them on the board (with the help of the children identifying the letters and sounds) and underlined the bit of the words that rhymed.

This was a really good session and all of the children seemed really engaged throughout both during the whole class and the group work, they were really keen to find as many words as possible.

The above extract shows how the teacher used the rhymes creatively and really demonstrated the potential of the resource. There were many rhyming words displayed around the classroom linking in with their topic on fairy tales. The teacher also had a little wall display of The Rhyme Challenge rhymes with some fabric and paper collages depicting hot cross buns round the edge.

Parents Assembly Observations

Researchers observed three class assemblies, at Schools A, B and C. At one school the assembly was a joint assembly, at the other two schools one class performed to their parents. The attendance figures were around 40 for the joint class assembly, and 35 parents and about 25 parents (some with babies on laps) respectively for the single class assemblies. The parents were generally enthusiastic although at one school the focus group revealed that most were not very interested in anything beyond their own children. The assemblies were presented as 'The Rhyme Challenge'. Although not all ten rhymes were sung or recited almost all of the ones that were recited were accompanied by children's actions, with some rhymes presenting more opportunities for this than others. The teachers told us that the assembly was a big motivation for the children to learn the rhymes as well as they possibly could. The researcher's field notes from the joint parent assembly at School B are as follows:

The children sat very still at the beginning and were very well behaved. A TA sat on each bench (3 for each class). The children acted out some of the rhymes with hand actions. Not all the children did actions - some were

looking out for their parent and lost a bit of concentration but all in all they performed all 10 rhymes very well. I reckon about 1/3 did all the actions, 1/3 did some, and 1/3 hardly any. Some rhymes required more actions than others - e.g. 10 in the bed, row, row, row your boat, 5 currant buns.

For Old Macdonald, one child (playing the farmer) accompanied some of 'the animals' and walked with them up and down in front of the benches. The child who played the animals wore animal masks. The words were on a screen and the changes were made on a lap-top by a child. For Ten in the bed, one child shouted out the words 'roll over, roll over' every verse and this worked well. There was a mixture of rhymes being sung and said.

The parents seemed to really enjoy the performance and were asked to join in the last verse of Heads, Shoulders, Knees and Toes. They applauded after each rhyme.

Parent focus groups

Researchers held three focus groups with parents at Schools A, C and G. At two of the schools only two to three parents attended, while at the third school the parents were organised by the class teacher and 35 attended. The main themes that emerged were that the children had a lot of fun with the resource and enjoyed learning and reciting the rhymes. They were easy to learn and singing was seen as a particularly effective way of developing language skills.

The children said or sang the rhymes to their parents, but also to their siblings, and happened in a variety of places in the home particularly at bath-time or bed-time or in the car on the way to school. Most recognised the benefits that the Rhyme Challenge had for their child in terms of speaking and listening, memorisation, character building and vocabulary building. However, few parents could detect any particular progress or development in their child's literacy. The main perception was that saying/singing rhymes was not a new activity. For many parents there were no particular changes because rhymes had been a consistent part of their lives since their children were young. One parent said that her son had begun noticing rhyming words while reading and had pointed these words out to her. In one of the schools, the parents had not seen the rhyming sheets because the school had not sent them home.

Parents' questionnaire

At School B, it was decided to administer a short questionnaire to the parents. This was suggested by the Deputy Head teacher who thought that few parents would have the time, and possibly confidence, to attend a face-to-face focus group with an unknown researcher. It was therefore decided to hand the parents a short

questionnaire after they had attended the joint class assembly. There were about 40 parents of which 22 responded. The main finding from this questionnaire was that the parents thought that the resource contained about the right number of rhymes, and they were pitched at about the right level. Eight parents rated the quality of the resource as excellent and nine rated it very good. All but one parent had been saying or singing the rhymes with their children (nine parents had a set time but the others were more flexible). All of the parents had heard their own child sing or say the rhymes to themselves. Six parents estimated that the time their children spent on practising the rhymes was about 15 minutes, nine estimated about 30 minutes, and six said it was over 30 minutes[8].

Stories for Drama (reception): Chicken Licken

General impressions and effectiveness

Responses to the survey were received from 31 teachers who had used Stories for Drama (reception): Chicken Licken and a further 22 who intended to do so. For those who had not used the resource, the main reason given was that it did not fit in with other work.

A total of 26 responses were received about the overall judgement of the resource, with 89% (n=23) respondents reporting that they felt it was either Excellent or Good.

All four of the reception teachers who were interviewed rated the drama resource and the accompanying activities very highly and they said they would all recommend it to other teachers without hesitation.

> The resources are brilliant. I've really enjoyed using them and the parents have been really engaged. The children went home everyday and spoke about what they had done and told their parents about the characters they had learned about. The children loved the stickers – they were a good quality and the posters were also great, bright and colourful (Teacher from School B).

All the teachers particularly liked the stickers and posters and these were also very popular with the children.

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[8]It is important to acknowledge that these positive responses come from parents who participated in The Rhyme Challenge activities, and supported their children in learning the rhymes. The data may well have been different from the parents (who were the majority) who did not respond.

One teacher (School A) recounted how in general she struggled to get the children to bring their book bags to school. On the first day that she gave out the stickers she told the class that she only sent stickers home to the children who had their book bags with them. The next day every child came to school with their book bag which, she said, showed how motivated the children were to receive one. Another teacher (School H) made the point that she would not have been able to replicate the quality of the resources herself. The teacher from this school had not been involved in the earlier Ant Club resources and told the researcher how much she welcomed the chance to work with high quality resources. The teacher at School H thought that the activities could really help develop the children's understanding of literacy, through making up different characters, changing bits of the story, acting plots out, re-telling stories, etc. The repetition in the text of the story also made it a really good choice as the children could all join in and it helped to keep them engaged.

All the survey respondents thought the resources were 'quite' or 'very' effective for developing children's speaking and listening skills, and over 90% (n=23) 'quite' or 'very' effective for developing reading skills. For writing skills, 73% (n=55) of the respondents indicated that the resources were quite effective or very effective.

The teachers also thought it was a particularly good resource to improve children's speaking and listening, and the teacher at School A said she could see that some children had developed these skills within a week, and also had greater awareness of sequencing and knowledge of events and characters. However, there were also opportunities to use the resource for reading and writing (see below).

Organisation and general use

Some teachers worked with the whole class, although in School A the teacher worked with small mixed ability groups on the carpet. At School B the class was divided into three ability groups of approximately ten children each.

The teacher at School B used the resource to promote reading and writing. She asked the children to choose a sentence from the story then enlarged the text and put it on the white board. She then asked them to tell her which part of the story the sentence came from. The class was divided into three ability groups and the top two groups learned to write a story using finger spacing while lowest ability group read the sentence and looked at initial sounds for the beginning of each word.

The teacher at School A taught a split reception/nursery class and the TA used the resource with both morning and afternoon groups with 10-11 children in each group.

Time and use of the resources

Survey responses suggest that most teachers, 92% (n=11), were using the resources once a week or more, and for between 15 and 45 minutes (77%, (n=10)).

Most of the teachers appeared to use the resource intensively over a week for a period of about 20 minutes each day. Three of the teachers allowed the children to work independently during free play where they could continue to act out the story and make further resources. The TA in the nursery at School A told the researcher that she used it for about 15 minutes each day over a period of up to three weeks.

Parents' involvement and use at home

Almost half of survey respondents (47% (n=14)) had or intended to send materials home with pupils and 80% of those who had sent resources home (n=19) thought the materials effective in helping to engage with parents.

Two of the teachers said they sent the posters and stickers home every day. The teacher at School B created a sheet, which was sent home over half term asking parents to read the story and discuss it with their children (see example: figure 1). At the time of the visit the teacher had already received 20 back and expected to get all 30 back after 'some nagging'. She also said she knew that parents had been engaged as children told her what they did every day at home.

Figure 1: School B question sheet sent home to parents

Homework

Thank you for helping the children with their homework during the Christmas Holidays.

Over the last week we have been exploring the story 'Chicken Licken'. We have acted it out, sequenced it and retold it. The children are bringing home a copy of the story which they would like to share with parents, carers and family members.

Over half term please read the story and then discuss it with your child. Can they talk about the characters and how they might have felt? Can they tell you what happened in the story in the correct order? Were they excited to share the story and what they know about it with you?

We would also like to know what favourite stories they enjoy at home so we can build these into our school activities.

Please write some feedback and return on Monday 25th February.

Grace has read chicken licken several times over the holidays. Grace was excited to share the story with us and she especially loved acting out each characters moves. She understands the feelings of each character and can tell the story in the correct order. At home, at bedtime Grace likes to listen to little miss + Mr Men stories. She especially likes it when you make up stories yourself

Thank you for your continued support! Mrs Evans and Mrs Rosser

Her favourite book is called "You Choose"

The teacher at School H had held a 'launch' session/event and a further session where parent/carers had been invited in to make a paper plate puppet with their child based on a character from the story. The parents had given her some positive feedback after the 'join in session' saying how much the children had enjoyed the story and the resources.

Although the teachers thought the resource was being used at home, and a number of parents had spoken to them about it, they stressed that it was hard to estimate numbers.

Match between resources and pupil year group

From the survey, 100% (n=25) of respondents indicated that the resources were well matched to the age group that the teachers' taught.

All the teachers from the case study schools thought the resource was 'perfectly' matched with the reception age group, and two teachers said how much better matched it was than The Rhyme Challenge, which they thought was better suited to nursery children. As we have seen above, the drama resource was also used with nursery children in School A.

Teacher guidance

Compared with the other Ant Club resources, more teachers followed the guidance 'closely' (36%) (n=9) and every teacher used it to at least some extent.

The teachers who had been using the resources said that they found the guidance very clear and helpful: it simplified the activities and made doing drama seem easy. One teacher made the point that, although she did not follow the teacher guidance 'to the letter', she really liked all the ideas. She confessed that she was not very confident with drama and found that the resource gave her real impetus and belief that she could teach drama.

Strength and weaknesses and suggestion for improvements

The main strengths of the resource for the teachers were the choice of story, the high quality stickers and posters, and the opportunities it afforded to children to develop their speaking and listening, and to a lesser extent their reading and writing. The teachers also experienced how drama can be a powerful vehicle to stimulate and improve children's general confidence and interactional skills. The children learned about how stories are constructed and about sequencing, vocabulary, plot, character etc. The only suggestions for improving the resources were to have a larger text version (teacher at School H), which could challenge more able children as they could read it themselves, and a big book version (teacher at School A) so that the children could follow the words as she read the story aloud. Another suggestion (from the teacher at School B) was for some

additional time at the end of sessions for cool down activities. In the session that was observed in the same school the teacher used time at the end to ask the children a series of open questions, e.g., 'has anyone got anything to say about the story?' 'What did you like about it?' and the children shared their views with the rest of the class.'

Observations

Three sessions of Stories for Drama were observed. Two involved individual class sessions of between 10 and 20 minutes (at School A and B), and one (School H) involved all three reception classes (approximately 20 minutes whole class work and 15 minutes independent work). The School A session took place in the classroom, the School B session in the hall, and the School H session was a 'launch' of the resources with the children and parents across three open-plan classrooms. In the first half of the School H session all the children were in one room (with parents). In the second half of the session the independent activities were spread across the three rooms (The Ant Club materials were in the middle room on the carpet). At all observations the children used many physical actions to accompany their movement and acting, and it was clear that the children were highly motivated and found these sessions very enjoyable.

For the launch of the resources in three open-plan classrooms the teacher read the whole story with the help of the children. The teacher had made paper plate puppets in advance. She chose some children to come to the front to help her tell the story using the puppets. The children made their own puppets at a later session (the researcher did not see them make puppets but the teacher mentioned it in the follow-up phone interview). The teacher told the parents that the children would be taking posters of the story home to put up on their door or the fridge, for example. After the story session the children went off to do some independent activities that had been set out through the open plan unit. For example the teacher put a bag with the puppets, the book of Chicken Licken and a couple of other props (acorn etc.) on the carpet for the children to use as one of the independent activities, which lasted for about 15 minutes. Some of the children used the resources and were retelling the story together (independently) using the puppets and remembering key phrases from the story for example, "Oh no, the sky is falling down …". The parents stayed for this session too and some joined in the activities with their children.

The field notes from the observation at School B were as follows:

> 10 children (C) sat on the carpet. The teacher (T) had been teaching the
> drama by dividing the class of 30 into three groups of 10 children of mixed

ability. However, today I saw the top ability group and in many ways it was a performance for me. The T began by recapping the story. The class then did a warm up, using different parts of their body. T used 'freeze' command to good effect. She also called out 'acorn' and the C made the smallest shape they could. The class went on a walk around the classroom, imitating the actions of the T (marching; long strides; clapping etc.). T then chose 2-3 different C to lead and the other C copied these actions. Class returned to the carpet. T said, 'the last thing we were doing was improvising; can you remember what this means?' T read parts of the story and the C made up their own actions. E.g. 'an acorn fell on his head' When they meet the various characters the T asks, 'where are you going?' and, C all chorus 'The sky is falling down, we're going to tell the king'. The T asks lots of open questions: e.g. 'what is the cat doing?' C answer, 'he was stretching'. Finally they meet the fox. Afterwards, the C sit on the carpet again and the T said, 'has anyone got anything to say about the story? C1: I didn't like the bit when they get eaten up'; C2 'I did like it when they all got eaten'; C3 'I really liked the actions'; C4 'I liked it when I was the king'; C5: 'I liked all the characters' - T: 'that is a very grown up word [name of child], I'm very impressed that you picked it up by listening so carefully'.

The field note shows how the children were developing and using their speaking and listening skills, and how the teacher was able to introduce new vocabulary. It also illustrated how the children learned some basic elements of drama, how to act and improvise, and think both creatively and deeply about the story they had been working with.

Stories for Drama (Year 1): *Stone Soup*

General impressions and effectiveness

Responses were received from 32 teachers who had used Stone Soup and a further 22 who intended to do so. A total of 27 responses were received about the overall judgement of the resource, of which 93% (n=25) felt it was either Excellent or Good.

A total of 29 responses were received about the affects of the resources on speaking and listening, reading and writing, and 100% (n=29) of the respondents indicated that Stone Soup was very or quite effective at developing children's speaking and listening skills. Similarly high numbers (90% (n=26)) thought the resource was very or quite effective for developing children's reading skills and

90% (n=26) found the resource to be very or quite effective for developing children's writing skills. The similarity of responses about Stone Soup's effectiveness in developing both reading and writing skills seems surprising. It is impossible for us to judge whether this positive response indicates positive views in general about the resource, or, for example, whether most of those who responded had adapted the resource for writing exercises.

All the teachers in the qualitative sample thought that the Stone Soup drama resources were really good quality and well presented. The story was well chosen and the children had all been engaged from the first session onwards. The teachers said that they particularly liked the stickers and the posters and the interactive nature of the activities, as did the children according to the teachers. All the ideas had worked, including the ice-breakers and warm-up activities. The teacher at School A said that she and her class were enjoying using the resources as they were 'something different' and were easy to fit in with the curriculum. She was in her first year of teaching and said that she had not been trained in drama at her teacher-training institution. The resources had really inspired her to continue to use drama in the future and embed it into her general practice. The teacher at School F pointed out that the resources could also be extended/adapted and used elsewhere.

The teachers saw the resource as being particularly good for developing the children's speaking and listening and imaginative thinking. One teacher (School F) pointed out that the resource was also good for children who had English as an additional language, through focussing on grammar and the structure of language. One of the teachers at School C also pointed out that some of the children with special needs, who it was claimed often find it difficult to concentrate in some more formal activities, enjoyed the singing and dancing and moving about and so drama was seen as particularly good for them. However, unlike the reception teachers, few talked about using the resource for reading. One of the teachers at School F mentioned that she was planning to extend the ideas in the story and get the children to write 'soup' recipes; the other teacher at this school pointed out the lack of ideas for writing activities in the guidance, which, she said, were central to her school's Year 1 literacy objectives. Both these teachers did mention, though, how much the children had gained in confidence.

Organisation and general use

Each school that was visited was in the middle of using the resources, and had not completed the four lessons. They all used the resource with the whole class and, unlike some of the reception teachers, they did not group their class by ability or work with small groups of children. Whereas most of the schools used Stone Soup as a stand-alone resource, which was primarily for literacy, School F tried to embed the resource into its general teaching curriculum, including Personal, Social and

Health Education (PSHE) and Physical Education (PE). One of the teachers said she would get the children to write speech bubbles about how each of the travellers felt. She also planned to ask the children to write a recipe and cooking instructions for making stone soup, and maybe even ask parents to come in and make the soup if she got the time.

Time and use of the resources

Survey responses suggested that almost all teachers were using the resources once a week or more, and for between 15 and 45 minutes. Teachers had in general used the resource four or more times.

Most of the four lessons were thought to be the right length and the most common time range was between 30 and 45 minutes. In total the four lessons were designed to take about two to three hours over a period of three to four weeks. Two of the Year 1 teachers (School A and C) taught the Stone Soup activities once a week. In School F both teachers were mainly using the resource daily for a total of one week (with the thought that they would return to it at other points in the school year, maybe even for an assembly).

Parents' involvement and use at home

From the survey responses, 75% (n=15) of survey respondents had sent materials home with pupils. In addition, most of the teachers that were intending to use the resource but hadn't yet also intended to send materials home.

From the visits, all the teachers thought that the posters and stickers were a really good way to get the parents' attention and to get the children interested in telling their parents what they were doing. However, none of the teachers had talked directly to any parents at the time of the interviews. Although some said that the children had told them that they were speaking about the drama activities at home the evidence on the use of the resources at home is inconclusive.

Match between resources and pupil year group

From the survey, 96% (n=28) of respondents indicated that the resources were well matched to the age group they taught. This finding was backed up by the views of teachers noted in the school visits, and in the telephone interviews.

Teacher guidance

Teachers who responded to the survey followed the guidance notes more closely for this resource than for any other, with 48% (n=14) following them closely and 52% following them 'a bit' (n=15).

The teachers appreciated the guidance. They thought the lessons were well thought out and broken down so that it was easy to follow. One of the teachers at

School C mused that it was good for getting 'the gist' and then you could add your own ideas (e.g. for the warm-up activities). The first teacher at School C said that although the guidance was very prescriptive this was an advantage because teachers felt they could just pick it up without having to think too much and use it as it was. This teacher liked the way the lesson format had a recap at the beginning of the sessions, then warm-up, the main activity, and cooling down - it flowed really well. The second teacher at School C liked the timings because it helped her understand the way the activities were weighted - what the important focus of the particular session was. Echoing some of the above, the teacher at School A again stressed that the booklet was full of ideas and easy to use:

> I like the fact that it's an idiot's guide. It is full of ideas and is easy to use. All the ideas are good including detailed suggested for ice- breakers and warm-up activities. I used them all.

The only mild criticism was that the lessons could be linked more closely to the literacy framework, and one teacher (School A) found that the timings given for learning the poem in lesson 2 were unrealistic for her children (see below).

Strength and weaknesses and suggested improvements

The teachers liked the choice of story, the high quality stickers and posters, and the opportunities the resource afforded to stimulate children's language and imagination, and particularly to develop their speaking and listening and interactional skills.

The NQT teacher at School A recalled how her children struggled to learn the poem in lesson 2. The guidance gives 9 minutes she said that she found this totally unrealistic:

> There is not one child in my class who could learn this poem, even if they were given double the time. This is the only thing I think that needs to be taken on board.

As was mentioned above, one teacher at School F drew attention to the lack of writing activities, and the other teacher at this school suggested the resource be linked more closely to the literacy framework. She also suggested the pack could include a CD with a variety of music, and with the story being read by a 'professional' story teller, with links to a website (links are in fact made to the Booktrust web site as part of the resources). The teacher also suggested that Booktrust might create a forum where teachers could share views and make suggestions. She would also like a couple of translations of the story – e.g. into Bengali.

Observations

At School A the researcher joined in with the first part of lesson three which took place on the classroom carpet. At School C the researcher saw two classes work together in the hall. The two teachers at School F used their own classrooms for the sessions. At School G the teacher used the hall for the first lesson. Two of the observations lasted around 30 minutes while two others were 45 minutes.

Researchers noted that two of the teachers were not well prepared because they were too reliant on the lesson guidance during the lesson. Researchers judged the level of the children's enjoyment and their engagement as being between middle to high (high for enjoyment and engagement in three out of the five lessons observed). It was noticeable that the level of both enjoyment and engagement dropped when the children began to learn the poem at one school in lesson two.

The drama sessions generally involved lots of actions: many were suggested in the teachers' guidance and some others came from the teachers and children themselves. For example in School F the children had thought of shaking salt and pepper rather than grinding it. They also incorporated actions for high frequency words they used on a daily basis.

A field note from School F was as follows:

> T is following some of lesson two from the teacher guidance. The session started with the teacher (with the help of the children who were all sitting on the carpet) re-telling the story. She asked two volunteers to come up to the front and be the villagers, and one child to be the traveller etc., and they had to say 'hello' and so on to each other. She had the poster for the story up on a white board at the front. The children on the carpet also joined in all the actions, for example making a bowl shape, grinding salt and pepper, etc. The children all seemed to be really engaged and had obviously remembered the previous day's session well.
>
> After the retelling of the story, the teacher put on some pop music and told the children they were going to dance in pairs. She played the music while they danced touching first hands, then feet, elbows, hips etc., and used the commands suggested in the guidance: "soup spoon" and "stone soup". This worked quite well although a couple of the children seemed to be left out each time they had to find a partner - one ended up dancing with the teacher and one with a TA. The children did seem to really enjoy it however. She mentioned that she was going to look at the poem with them later in the day - at 'story time' (I didn't see them using this).

At School A the researcher sat on the carpet and joined in with the activity that involved the children passing around an imaginary spider (from lesson 3). One of the teachers during interview had said that she had not used this idea as she thought the children would regard it as being 'too babyish' but the class here became deeply involved as this field note fragment shows:

> We then all sat in a circle and the T passed round the imaginary spider. This worked really well. T asked some C to describe the spider - some said it felt hairy, some said, cold. T had to remind some to cup their hands to make sure it didn't escape. Two C seemed worried and didn't want to touch the spider as they didn't like them. It was interesting that, despite being so involved in imaginary play, some C called out that there was no need to worry as it was just a game. Almost all were really involved and played out their roles very well.

Create Your Own Book

General impressions and effectiveness

A total of 69 survey respondents had used Create Your Own Book and a further 27 indicated that they intended to use it. From the survey, 55 responses were received in relation to the question about general impressions of the resource: 53% (n=29) of respondents rated Create your own Book as 'good', 29% (n=16) judged it to be 'excellent', and 18% (n=10) as 'OK'[9]. No teacher rated Create Your Own Book as poor.

All of the teachers who were interviewed really liked the Create Your Own Book resource, and commented that the children had really enjoyed using them: 'it is not often that they have something so fancy' (Teacher, School D). Teachers reported that many children were very excited about the prospect of taking them home to show their parents. This was despite an initial scepticism from one teacher, at School B, when a researcher asked her about her first impressions:

> Well, hand on heart, I thought we do this anyway, we do make books already and there was nothing in particular in there that gave me any new ideas. But, as soon as they [the children] saw them, because of the quality of the paper and because it is a proper book, I mean they don't normally say 'can we put them in the book corner?'; they were definitely more motivated at the sight of these and the fact that the it is just that bit thicker and it feels more substantial, and there are more colours … meant that there was a wow factor.

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[9]These figures are very similar to those for The Rhyme Challenge.

Teachers and the children appreciated the physical quality of the books:

> I like the quality of them, the thickness, they're better than anything we could have made. I think it's really good that it's got the title, the author - things you talk about all the time but they never get a chance to write their own titles, be the author and the illustrator of their own book. It would take a long time for us to make a book like this ... it's good that it's already done and of a good quality. So I think it's improved everything (Teacher, School D).

Of the teachers that responded to the survey, 38% (n=25) judged Create Your Own Book to be 'very effective' in developing children's skills in speaking and listening, while 58% (n=38) saw it as being 'quite effective. Furthermore, 66% (n=44) thought this resource was 'very effective' for developing children's writing skills and 34% (n=23) thought it was 'quite effective'. Finally, 26% (n=17) stated it was 'very effective' for developing reading skills and 68% (n=44) stated it was 'quite effective'.

All the teachers that we spoke to judged the resource as being effective. They saw the books as being particularly useful for developing sustained writing, for reading, and also for discussion, and therefore, speaking and listening. It promoted opportunities for group and collaborative work and was a good vehicle for children learning about, and teachers reinforcing, the different features of a book and the terminology involved, such as author, illustrator, title, blurb, etc.

Organisation and use of resources

Two of the five teachers we spoke to and observed were using the resource as a whole class activity. Three teachers had divided the class into groups. The following observation note was recorded at School G:

> The activity began with the teacher talking about the author, Julia Donaldson, and it was noticeable that there was differentiated input: The 'lower ability' children suggested words, which were scribed onto a board by a TA and then they copied them into The Ant Club book resource. The 'middle ability' worked with teacher, coming up with ideas together and then wrote independently. The 'high ability' group started off writing independently. Overall, perhaps this was too much directed by teacher, and the class seemed rather passive, if you asked them for ideas they didn't come up with them (Researchers' field notes).

At School E the teacher said she would have used the resources differently and got more out of them if she had had more time. She would have planned it to go better

with the topic that they were working on in school, but instead she based the sessions on a book they already knew:

> The session started with the whole class on the carpet. The teacher showed the book, discussed author, illustrator etc. and read the story. She then showed a book that one of the children had completed and talked about the author blurb - this was to be the focus of group work for children who were making books. The group work consisted of two groups of six children working semi-independently finishing off books and writing an author blurb. They carried on with a mixture of pictures and writing and there was lots of talk and working together (Researchers' field notes).

At this school, and at School D, the class was divided by ability, and the lower ability group had not made books, which is of some concern. At School D the teacher did not think there was enough time for the lower ability children to have completed a book and told the researcher that she would have done a group book with these children if she had received the resources earlier in the term.

Five of the classes were using the book to write a story (one inspired by the author Julia Donaldson) and two were writing a poem or spell.

Time and use of the resources

In the survey 34 responses were received in relation to time and use of resources. The most common response, given by, 35% (n=12) of the survey respondents, was that they used the Create Your Own Book resource for between 15 and 30 minutes per session. There was a degree of variety in terms of the length of time that the resources were used: 12% (n=4) said they used them for less than 15 minutes per session; 27% (n=9) said they used them between 30 and 45 minutes per session; 15% (n=5) for between 45 and 60 minutes and 12% (n=4) used them for over an hour per session.

In terms of frequency of resource use, 27% (n=9) reported that they had used the Create Your Own Book resource on over five occasions in total but 42% (n=14) said they had only used it once or twice. The majority, 35% (n=10), reporting using Create Your Own Book a few times a week, and 24% (n=7) said they used the resource every day, but the data does not indicate total number of days individual teachers actually used the Create Your Own Book resource.

The maximum time the interviewees had used the resource was ten times for an hour per session. Three of the 12 teachers said that they needed more time and would have made more of the resource if they had had more time.

Some of the more developed writers finished the book quite quickly; for instance the teacher at School E said that one child had finished her book in an hour.

Parents' involvement and use at home
Of the survey respondents, 49% (n=17) reported sending home activities connected to the Create Your Own Book activity.

Interviewees reported less involvement with parents with Create Your Own Book than with The Rhyme Challenge but this was mainly due to the late arrival of the resource, and two teachers said they would definitely involve parents if they used Create Your Own Book again. Two of the other teachers said that the books were going to be sent home and believed they would help promote engagement. The teacher at School A estimated that 50-75% of parents would look closely at the books and make comments. They felt that 25% would not, but children could still be proud of their book. The teacher at School C felt sure that the solid looking book would create more interest with parents than if more flimsy things were sent home. In two schools where there was no time for the books to be sent home the teachers had arranged for the children to read their books to the reception classes. One teacher said that, given more time, she would keep the books as part of the class library and only send them home at the end of the term, which although very beneficial for the children in the class perhaps misses the point of using them to encourage parental engagement throughout the project.

Match between resources and pupil year group
All interviewees thought the resource was well matched to their Year 1 children and the spring or summer terms were the best time to introduce it. The teacher at School A told the researcher that, 'If they [the books] were used in the autumn, many children's writing would not be developed enough and eight pages would seem daunting to them.'

There is evidence that very young children can write books using emergent writing, but the teacher's comment above perhaps suggests that flexibility in things like the total number of pages would be beneficial.

Teacher guidance
A total of 68 responses were received about the teacher guidance; 71% (n=48) of the respondents said they followed the teachers' guidance 'a bit', while 13% (n=9) said that they followed it 'closely'; and 16% (n=11) 'not at all'.

Of the five teachers who were asked to comment on the guidance in their interview, three thought that the guidance was 'OK', one said that they did not find it 'particularly useful', while one teacher said that they would have preferred the guidance to be available on the web. The guidance is available on the website already; therefore this is perhaps a communications issue. All of the teachers'

interviewed had read the guidance, some more thoroughly than others. However, the teachers were all experienced and three made the point that an NQT or less experienced teacher would probably appreciate the guidance much more: it was about the right length and, although it seemed a little prescriptive, its purpose was to offer guidance only, so taking that into account it was felt there were some good points.

Strengths and weaknesses

School D's response to Create Your Own Book was indicative of the positive feedback more generally: The teachers regarded it as a high quality resource, and the children were highly motivated. They wanted more time to build into planning (School D), and on a minor point recommended that the yellow and orange lines on the pages for children to write on were a little difficult to see.

Consistent with the positive response to the resource there were few improvements suggested. School B's suggestions included having less space between lines, and a different colour for the cover because children were used to white and it was felt to be boring, but they would like a light colour which they could draw and write on, and which would make it look better.

School A reflected on having a range of books included in the pack (narrow and wide-spaced lines) and different sizes (A4 and A5) but recognised the practical difficulties this would pose and the risk of waste. The teacher also mentioned the use of cut and paste technology in relation to pictures of animals.

Another idea suggested was that once the books have been sent home, they could be returned and used as part of the class library, giving children the opportunity to look and learn from the other children's books, and read them together. This would make the publishing process seem more realistic for the children.

The telephone interviews

During the final four weeks of the Spring Term 2013, a number of telephone interviews were conducted with staff at schools using The Ant Club resources. These were schools which had volunteered to be interviewed, but not the same schools that had been visited. Staff from 14 schools were interviewed, and the questions were aimed at gaining a greater insight into how the resources as a whole had been used by the schools and how Booktrust might make the resources easier for the schools to use. The questions tended not to be about the use or effectiveness of specific resources.

The schools
Although the schools were located in all regions of England, the majority were in the North East and North West. All the schools were located in areas of deprivation, with four schools having over 50% of their roll on free school meals. Over half of the pupils did not have English as their first language in four of the schools. Six of the interviewees described themselves as either a Deputy Head or Literacy Coordinator and the rest as reception or Year 1 teachers. On average interviews lasted 25-30 minutes.

The Resources
All interviewees were asked what resources had been used in their schools. The responses were as follows:

Resource	No of Schools
The Rhyme Challenge (reception)	9
The Rhyme Challenge (Year 1)	8
Stories for Drama (reception): Chicken Licken	13
Stories for Drama (Year 1): Stone Soup	11
Create Your Own Book	2

In response to the question about who used the resources, 11 respondents said teachers, and four reported Teaching Assistants or cover staff. Eleven schools said that the resources were used in whole class settings while four responded that they were used for small group work. Two schools, both single form entry, reported that they did whole school projects based on The Ant Club resources. The positive views of interviewees was clear from their general responses to the programme which were only positive and typically described as 'really good', 'very useful' or

'fantastic', and the general question on their quality received only positive responses.

Responses to resources

All respondents felt that the resources were good and useful and all reported that children reacted very positively towards them. Several mentioned the high quality of the resources and the level of presentation, and several spoke of them being enjoyable to use. Most schools felt that they fitted well with the curriculum with only three interviewees suggesting they needed work to fit them in.

All respondents were enthusiastic about the effectiveness of the speaking and listening aspects of the resources. Almost half of the interviewees mentioned that speaking and listening was a major concern for the schools and that The Ant Club resources were a great asset for them. The emphasis on rhyme and rhyming was singled out as being of particular importance.

Five schools reported using the resources for reading 'a lot' and a further six said that 'some' reading had been done using the resources. Four schools had used the resources 'a lot' for writing (including two which mentioned 'Create Your Own Book') and three had done 'some' writing work with them.

The qualities which were identified as making the resources effective were the quality of the materials, the way they engaged with the children's interests and the emphasis on repetition.

> *These resources were really helpful for us. Our children have very poor speaking and listening skills and needed to work hard on these activities*
> - Reception teacher

Parental involvement

All interviewees appreciated the emphasis on involving parents within The Ant Club programme. Four schools had not sent any of The Ant Club materials home; all of these identified parental engagement as a difficulty for the school and stated that they rarely or never sent materials home with the children. On the other hand six schools said they had sent all the materials home, and a further two schools (i.e. eight in total) had sent the drama resources home. Although the reactions from parents were reported as largely positive, several interviewees were concerned about the literacy and language levels of parents; while some felt using the materials at home was too challenging for parents, others reported great success with the 'family learning' approach and that parents and children had been learning rhymes together.

> *We struggle to involve parents generally, but Chicken Licken has really involved them* – Deputy Head

Administration of resources

Interviewees were asked if they used the resources 'as intended'; in other words with the classes indicated and at the time Booktrust intended. Four replied that they did, but the majority reported that at least some of the time they have used the resources in different terms from those Booktrust suggest. One school also talked about using a mix of reception and Year 1 resources with reception, Year 1 and Year 2 pupils.

When asked when would be the ideal time to receive The Ant Club materials six schools liked receiving them termly while six preferred to receive all of them at the start of the school year i.e. either July (Summer term) or September (Autumn term).

The concept of repeating the type of resources in Year 1 and reception was seen as a good idea by all those who felt able to respond. Asked if projects should be smaller or larger in size, most preferred smaller and gave as their reason that it was easier to accommodate smaller projects into the curriculum.

All respondents felt that the teacher guidance notes were good, clear and easy to use and that the tone was exactly right. Most teachers thought their staff followed the guidance 'quite' closely while three reported using them 'very' closely and a further three 'not very closely at all'.

> *Lovely to get everything you need in one go – it makes life so much easier!* Reception teacher

When asked about their preferences for receiving teacher guidance there was a large majority in favour of receiving hard copy, with only three preferring online notes. One stated very clearly that they would not use the resource if it was only delivered online.

A small majority of interviewees had used the website, but none had used it extensively. The reason given by most who had not used the website was not having a login or password or having forgotten it[10]. Only one respondent had used any of the additional materials available from the website.

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[10] This is despite Booktrust providing all coordinators with a log-in. Either this information is 'forgotten' or the log-in does not get passed on to those in the school who need it.

Comments and suggestions

There were very few critical comments made during the interviews. One which was repeated was that the resources need to take more account of the language levels of parents (as opposed to children). Adult language and literacy levels are clearly an issue for the schools in this group and the view was expressed that the resources should take more account of this. It should be noted that adult literacy levels are not as easy to predict as children's, and using any of the standard 'reading level' tools (e.g. Niace's SMOG test) will still lead to inconsistencies according to the life experience of intended readers.

As noted elsewhere in this report, there were differing opinions about the level of rhymes selected for the two Rhyme Challenge resources, with schools finding the level both too high and too low. Added to this was the request for 'more rhymes to allow for more differentiation' so allowing teachers to select the rhymes they feel most appropriate for their classes. One way of doing this may be to make greater use of the website to supply additional resources to schools, with the caveat that usage of the website seems to be fairly limited.

Several smaller schools requested Year 2 resources of a similar style to allow the entire school to do Ant Club themed work; this aspiration could potentially be met by creating further differentiated materials available online. However, this is currently outside of the remit of the programme.

Despite the large majority who preferred to receive resources and teacher guidance as hard copy, there was a view that the website was underutilised, and that more use would be made of it if 'it were more useful'. There were a number of suggestions: opening up teacher forums, for instance, where customised versions of the resources could be shared, or creating version of resources which could be used on a Smartboard. While it is true that many of the resources are already available in formats compatible with Smartboards, this data suggests those using the materials are unaware of the range and scope of the electronic resources available through the website. There was also a view that Booktrust could and should supply greater information about forthcoming resources on the website so that schools could plan their use more efficiently. This was felt strongly if The Ant Club materials continue to be sent termly, as it would allow schools that plan on a yearly basis to accurately integrate the resources. These points, many of which have been addressed during the course of this research, suggest a problem with communication between Booktrust and the schools rather than a real need to change the resources on offer.

This can again be see with the request from a large four form entry primary for more resources per school; the interviewee was clearly unaware that the number of

sets of resources sent to schools is based on data sent by them and all they need to do is ask for more.

Discussion and Conclusions

The Rhyme Challenge (reception) encouraged teachers and children to engage with the learning and performing of nursery rhymes with perceived benefits for children's thinking, enjoyment and learning. The majority of teachers regarded the Rhyme Challenge (reception) as good or excellent. The perception was that it was of greatest value to the development of speaking and listening, and to a lesser extent of value for reading and writing (this is consistent with the main focus on language and reading in this resource). The resources are high quality, only requiring consideration of minor changes to their format (see suggestions throughout report and in appendices). There were mixed views about the teacher guidance with some evidence that teachers welcomed the thoroughness and completeness but also some evidence from experienced teachers that they did not require the level of prescription. There was a general perception that the resources were of significant value for developing links with parents. However, the evidence of work with parents ranged widely from minimal contact to invitations to performances of the rhymes. In other words there was an uneven picture of enhancement of parental involvement as a result of the resources. Although there were both positive and negative responses to the match between the resources and the year group, in our opinion The Rhyme Challenge (reception) was not sufficiently challenging for *all* reception children.

The Rhyme Challenge (Year 1) was regarded by the majority of teachers as good or excellent. There was strong quantitative and qualitative evidence that the resources were deemed to be very well matched to the age group. The resources are high quality, only requiring minor changes to their format. There were mixed views about the teacher guidance with some evidence they were useful and about the right length. The perception was that The Rhyme Challenge (Year 1) was of greatest value to the development of speaking and listening, and to a lesser extent of value for reading and writing. The evidence from the case study visits confirmed that writing was much less developed as a result of the resources compared to speaking and listening and reading. The option to use the resource as a way of filling smaller periods of time in the school day was advantageous, however only if there was an appropriately well planned focus on the resource over all. There was a general perception that the resources were of significant value for developing links with parents. However, the evidence of work with parents ranged widely from minimal contact such as sending activities home to invitations to performances of the rhymes. In other words there was an uneven picture of enhancement of parental involvement as a result of the resources. The evidence suggested the value of trying to engage with parents but at the same time the considerable challenges of reaching out to all parents.

The Stories for Drama (reception): Chicken Licken resource was regarded by the majority of teachers as good or excellent. There was strong quantitative and qualitative evidence that the resources were deemed to be very well matched to the age group. The choice of the story was highly rated by most teachers, and the high quality of the resources was welcomed. The teacher guidance was more highly rated than it was for both Rhyme Challenges, potentially reflecting teachers' lower confidence with drama teaching than with teaching around rhymes. The perception was that the resources were of greatest value to the development of speaking and listening, and to a lesser extent of value for reading and writing. The observations of drama sessions in school revealed the high levels of children's engagement and powerful learning opportunities. The case study visits revealed that supporting writing was indeed possible but this was a rare occurrence. The examples of carefully planned engagement with parents above and beyond the basic use of the resources showed the considerable potential for parental engagement.

The Stories for Drama (Year 1): Stone Soup resource was regarded by the majority of teachers as good or excellent. There was strong quantitative and qualitative evidence that the resources were deemed to be very well matched to the age group. The choice of story was highly rated by most teachers, and the research team noted that this story was less well known than the other texts that were part of The Ant Club, something they regarded as positive because it introduced the children to new material. The high quality of the resources was welcomed. The inspirational impact the resource had on a teacher in her first year of teaching underlines how good this drama resource was. The teacher guidance was highly rated and was used more closely than any other resource. The guidance was felt to be prescriptive, but this was perceived as a strength. The perception was that the resources were of greatest value to the development of speaking and listening, and to a lesser extent of value for reading and writing. The observations of drama sessions in schools revealed more mixed reactions to the resource by the children and by the teachers than was the case for Chicken Licken. The evidence showed that the resource was of value to speaking and listening but that unlike any of the other resources there was little engagement with writing in particular, but also reading to a lesser extent. This may have been because of the greater demands on teachers and children that the resource placed on them. This level of demand was a positive feature but one that perhaps required greater levels of planning by teachers, and the opportunity to repeat the experience in a subsequent year. Three quarters of survey respondents had sent materials home linked to this resource, but there was only minimal direct engagement with parents. In view of the relative success in engaging parents with the other resources, in future it may be possible to increase this engagement.

The majority of teachers regarded the Create Your Own Book resource as good or excellent. There was strong quantitative and qualitative evidence that the resources were deemed to be very well matched to the age group, although some greater flexibility in formatting was suggested. The high physical quality of the resource was noted, and the impact of this quality on children's motivation. There were mixed views about the teacher guidance with some evidence it was useful and about the right length. However, as for the other Ant Club resources the nature of teacher guidance, particularly the extent of prescription and the balance between printed and electronic forms, needs continued thought. One possibility is to have both short guidance notes with experienced teachers in mind, and more extensive notes for less experienced teachers possibly differentiated across printed vs. internet versions. Consistent with the aim of the resource to support children's writing development, teachers' responses suggested its effectiveness for developing writing and to a lesser extent reading. However, speaking and listening was also judged to be very well supported by the resource. The evidence from the case study visits confirmed that writing was a significant and valuable focus for work in classrooms as a result of the resource. There was less engagement with parents through use of this resource than for the other resources. In part this was because of the arrival of the resources the week before half-term, leaving less time for planning. It may also be the case that teachers' experience (both newly qualified and experienced teachers) of literacy teaching has been very much dominated by lessons based on the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) (1998-2010) which continues to have an influence on teaching methods. Opportunities for extended writing in the NLS were limited (although greater attention to this was paid in the later years of the NLS), and bookmaking was not advocated. Hence, significant attention to bookmaking and engagement with parents in relation to extended writing have perhaps not had the attention they deserve with consequences for teachers' knowledge and confidence in these areas.

Conclusions

Taken as a whole there is clear evidence from empirical data and expert reviews that The Ant Club resources are high quality teaching and learning resources. The teachers' views of their effectiveness were consistently high, particularly recognising the excellent contribution to teaching and learning that the resources made, and the positive impact on children's engagement. The care that Booktrust took over appointing an advisory board of highly qualified educators to support the development of the resources appears to have been very beneficial. The resources were seen to be well planned, well produced, to engage very successfully with children and had potential to help the schools engage with parents.

One of the most important features of the resources is their holistic nature, for example the varied emphases on speaking and listening, reading and writing that were a feature of all the resources and part of the coherence of The Ant Club as a whole. Booktrust quite correctly point out that the different resources are designed to have different main focuses: language and reading or writing. However, the evidence particularly from school visits suggests that schools should be more strongly encouraged to plan for the use of all The Ant Club resources in a holistic way. Speaking and listening was particularly well served by the resources but all three language modes were well served by different resources, although even greater attention to supporting writing would be beneficial.

Most schools used the resources for whole class lessons taken by teachers, and felt the current extent of activities was about right, though they preferred small projects which it was suggested are more easily integrated into the curriculum than larger ones. Teachers preferred to receive their guidance notes as hard copy and, although they liked the guidance, most adapted the resources for their own classes often extending the work to include other skills such as writing. Overall The Ant Club website has not been extensively used, although it does offer the types of resources which many teachers suggest they need. Thought needs to be given as to how teachers may be better able to understand the scope of the extra materials available from the website.

Timing issues were a challenge for schools, particularly in relation to when the resources were received but also in relation to schools' planning. In part this perhaps represents the normal conditions of first use of a resource. In telephone interviews there was an even split between schools that wished to receive the resources all together at the end of the previous school year and those that enjoyed the stimulus of receiving them termly. A possible way forward may be for Booktrust to consider changing the teacher guidance to offer both a clear expected progression but also recognition that the resources can be used in ways that suit school contexts.

The researchers were impressed with the ways that Booktrust had focused on the engagement of parents as an integral part of the resources. Not unexpectedly, in relation to previous research on the engagement of parents, there was a mixed picture of parental involvement. However the important highlights, of for example The Rhyme Challenge performances and the impact of the high quality children's books being sent home, show that the resources have great potential in supporting schools' wider attempts to engage with parents. In telephone interviews teachers who had not sent materials home recognised the worth of doing so, but had not done so because of school policy.

The evidence on the importance of home reading schemes is well established but The Ant Club suggests a potentially powerful model for a holistic language and literacy pedagogy in the early years, and how parents can engage in this. In view of the last decade of top-down focus on work in classrooms, including the high stakes testing systems, it is possible that attention to the vital role of parents has diminished somewhat. Booktrust is providing a vital service in this regard, and one that in the context of The Ant Club is worthy of even more attention in practice, policy and research.

Limitations of the Evaluation

It is important to acknowledge that the timing of the arrival of the resources into the schools may have affected findings. This was particularly acute in the summer and autumn terms. For example, the summer term resources (The Rhyme Challenge and Create Your Own Book) were set to arrive in schools in April, but due to production delays they were sent to the majority of schools taking part in the programme in May. The schools for the evaluation were recruited during May and not confirmed until June (as the summer term is a challenging time to recruit for research), and they did not receive their resources until then. This meant that the teachers had to incorporate the resources into their current term schemes of work, which had already been planned. It also caused difficulties for researchers in terms of arranging observation visits. Most of the schools were very helpful and fitted the resources into a tight time frame, generally in the last 2-3 weeks of term[11]. However, this meant that, in many of the schools that were visited, the resources were not used to their full potential. A similar situation occurred in the autumn term where the resources arrived in schools one or two weeks before half term; teachers did not have sufficient time to incorporate them into their curricula schemes of work, and researchers found their visits clashing with Christmas time activities. Indeed, a key finding from the qualitative research was that teachers strongly emphasised that they needed the resources to arrive in schools towards the end of the previous term so that they could build them into next term's plans. The other implication of the timing of the arrival of the resources was that some schools felt the need to 'perform' for the research visits. However, the reality of these practical problems serves only to further underline the strongly positive findings about the resources once they were put to use.

The questionnaire survey can of course only acquire data on teachers' perceptions. These perceptions are valuable in their own right but only offer uncorroborated evidence on the use of the resources, and their impact on children's learning. To some extent the case study data, through triangulation, allowed the views in the surveys to be further interrogated. The sample of case study schools was relatively

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[11]The majority of the visits were carried out in mid-July, and two visits were in the last week of term when the teachers and the children were winding down towards the holiday period.

small, but the opportunity to visit the schools several times did provide for much better insights into the use of the resources, both positive and negative.

The team's suggestions for further evaluation (see Appendix 2) offer further details that indicate the limitations of the research.

Recommendations

- The Ant Club resource should continue to be used with as many schools as possible. They are particularly valued in schools who perceive their pupils to have limited speaking and listening skills.

- There is scope for greater differentiation of rhymes in The Rhyme Challenge (reception) to accommodate those children who would benefit from an even greater challenge.

- Greater attention to how writing might be supported by all The Ant Club resources would be beneficial (not-with-standing the particularly strong emphasis on writing in the Create You Own Book resource).

- Greater flexibility in the Create Your Own Book resource to encourage children to make more choices over their writing (in line with the realities of book writing and publication) should be considered, possibly also as extension activities.

- Introductory guidance to The Ant Club could highlight the importance of its holistic pedagogy, and the need to plan for the use of all resources in order to complement each other. It would be useful to include a rationale for this use based on rigorous theory and evidence.

- Further opportunities for use of IT to support, not supplant, the printed materials of all The Ant Club resources should be considered, for example opportunities for electronic drafting and publication in relation to the Create Your Own Book resource (see expert review of this resource).

- Although resources available on the Booktrust website continue to develop, interviews suggested that teachers were insufficiently aware of these. We suggest that Booktrust review the way in which they publicise the website with a view to improving their communication with teachers who are using the resources, recognising that teachers who use the resources with children may not be as well informed as the Ant Club coordinator in school.

- Booktrust should consider greater attention to support for different languages (in relation to Stories for Drama in particular, but also across all the resources). In addition a review of the accessibility of materials and guidance for parents should be undertaken.

- Booktrust should consider the timing of the resource deliveries to schools, to ensure that they arrive in schools with adequate time for teachers to plan for their use. This could mean either the end of the term prior to their recommended us, or all resources delivered at the end of the school year ready for use in the year following. The small sample involved in this research suggest that teachers are divided about which of these is ideal and a possible way forward may be to offer schools a choice of delivery windows.

- Further research taking account of the suggestions in Appendix 2 should be undertaken

Appendix 1: Expert review of the resources

Please note that these expert reviews represent the views of members of the team and are intended to include views that are independent from the data acquired as part the research although some of the points are corroborated by the views of teachers expressed as part of the empirical study.

Expert Review: The Rhyme Challenge (reception) and the Rhyme Challenge (Year 1)

Letter to reception teachers
Useful and appropriate. It may not be necessary to include reference to summer term as teachers will be able to make their own decisions about when to use.

Two A4 posters
Useful and appropriate.

Letter for parents
- The tone of language and colouring of the letter are good.
- In view of the ethnically diverse pupil population it would be good to have translations for example into Urdu. If cost is prohibitive then other language versions could be made in black and white, and languages could be chosen in order of the highest numbers of speakers in order to prioritise on the basis of cost.
- The phrase: "you don't need any musical equipment, or to be in tune!" might be better as: 'Rhymes can be shared anywhere through talking or singing, and even using musical instruments if you feel confident', or some similar wording. This would avoid the mildly low expectation about families capacity to sing in tune which should be encouraged because singing and music also contributes to children's learning and is a central element of nursery rhymes.
- Format of the letter is perhaps somewhat 'busy' and wordy.

Rhyme sheets (complete sets)
- A4 size useful for children who want to quickly check their memory of more than one rhyme.
- Font of A2 version not really big enough for classroom display. Each rhyme on one poster this size would be better.

Rhyme sheets (single rhyme on each A4 sheet)
Useful for individual and paired reading/singing.

Certificates

Appropriate.

Information and guidance booklet/Tips and Suggestions

- The amount of information seems about right. The instructions on the first pages are quite flexible, something which encourages teachers to find their own paths. However some teachers may welcome something more definite, for example a suggested timetable of activities and/or a mini case study of how another school did the challenge.
- More systematic attention to links between guidance in printed version and web might be good. For example an even more succinct printed version could direct the teacher to the web site for greater detail. Explicit reference to the web information is not currently made in the printed sheet.
- The section marked "The benefits of getting involved" features a diverse range of claimed benefits. One aspect that has been omitted is attention to the meanings of the rhymes and how they relate to/reflect children's and people's lives. For example the meaning of "currant bun" could be explored to check if children are familiar with this food, including hopefully baking and eating currant buns. This kind of semantic attention should be at the heart of all reading teaching. There is also research evidence to show the important role rhymes have to play in developing children's phonological awareness – this could be said more explicitly possibly by explaining the links with the importance of syllable recognition as a precursor to phoneme recognition.
- There is always a difficulty in deciding the readership for such guidance. If it is aimed at teachers then the professional/academic level could perhaps be raised a little, including the use of a few further reading suggestions and/or references on the research and practice of the use of nursery rhymes.

General observations

- The decision to aim at reception class children is interesting. Perhaps it would be more developmentally appropriate to target at nursery phase?
- All of the examples originate from western culture. In view of Britain's multi-ethnic society it would be good to include at least one example originating from a different source. For example Wyse and Parker (The Early Literacy Handbook) feature use of the simple Urdu song *Dhobi Eyer!* (Washer man Coming!). The inclusion of rhymes from different cultures could also be usefully linked with appeals to the local community to tell teachers about rhymes/songs they are familiar with from their childhoods.
- Is the resource sufficiently challenging for those children who are already reading simple texts by the time they are in reception or who already know the rhymes? At least one more challenging example could perhaps be added, or a second set added that are all more challenging. For example traditional songs

could be added or nursery rhymes that are much less well know (the Opie's collection is a fascinating source).

- A selection of rhymes (say around 15, and some more challenging than others) would allow the teacher to choose the level most suitable for their children.

Expert Review: Create Your Own Book

The idea of pupils creating a book of their own is a really excellent one. The main issue is the balance between providing a model format vs. encouraging open formats and responses from pupils. There are pros and cons for both approaches.

The Create Your Own Book booklet

- The ant illustration is likely to be appealing. The card is good quality, something that allows for more durability than paper.
- The lines need to be closer together, or the spacing could vary on different pages.
- Although the labels "Title; Author, and Illustrator" clearly signal elements that should be included the way they are represented is not an accurate representation of how real books look. A representation more likely to generate learning about writing (particularly composition of writing) might be to have, a) a division of the front cover page into boxes/other shapes with sizes appropriate for either title and author text or illustrations; and/or b) an imaginative example created by a pupil and/or professional author using the recommended format.
- To help the 'real feel' (or authenticity) of the book, a barcode and price could also be added, and an 'Ant Publisher' logo?
- Better still would be to have simple electronic formats that pupils could use to orchestrate their own book design to be printed and laminated. The other advantage of this approach is the flexibility that is possible in numbers of pages and in font sizes something more representative of how books are written. However, we recognise that the electronic approach would require much more time for teachers and pupils to complete their books.
- The labels "Finish" and "The end" are particularly artificial.

Teachers' Guide

- The length is appropriate and in general the guidance is useful.
- The "objectives" section is not really teaching objectives but more some general aspirations about how children might "develop". These are very important in their own right but a different subheading would be appropriate.

- The idea of using the format like a scrap book is a good one but would be better described as 'drafting' text and illustrations for pasting into the final version.
- The suggestion to use cut and paste from comics, magazines, newspapers etc. is likely to result in lower level learning and is generally regarded as less good practice.

General comments

- It might be better if the aim was to write a story/narrative book rather than offering the possibility of non-narrative as well. The way the two genres are formatted is so different (e.g. non-narrative sub-headed thematic sections; use of index; text boxes, etc.) that it is difficult to accommodate both in models and guidance. A subsequent Booktrust Ant Club activity could be to create a non-narrative text. However, a more flexible approach, such as using electronic formats, opens the possibility for a wide range of genres to be explored and offers genuine open choice.
- The page by page guidance on the second page of the teacher's guide is not really useful. It is more important to offer guidance on the processes of bookmaking including the key components, a number of which have been addressed in this review.

Expert Review: Stories for Drama (reception): Chicken Licken and Stories for Drama (Year 1): Stone Soup

In general this is a very useful resource. Many teachers are not naturally confident with drama but this resource is likely to help teachers involve their children in drama beginning with straightforward activities supported by excellent resources.

Letters to parents

Generally useful but rather wordy. Perhaps a simpler version that could be shared with children then taken home by them to share with their parents could reinforce fewer key messages, and help with children's reading. Typo in question 3 of letter.

Stickers

Good idea, particularly the link with a question.

Story booklets

Useful but quite basic. As *Chicken Licken* is such a well known story perhaps the use of real book versions could also be recommended, then the booklet could be a fall back.

A3 posters

Attractive and useful.

Could there be a version where children frame their own questions then seek to answer them? Possible extension activity for school use.

Teacher Guidance

Generally very useful.

- If the phrase "research shows" is used it would be better if a footnote was provided with a reference to research that underpins the point. The phrase should not be used loosely without sound evidence.
- Is it really necessary to "<u>always</u> start with a physical warm up" (p.6). For example the teacher may want to continue directly with the more sophisticated aspects of drama that had been started in a previous lesson. Also very little drama is physical to the degree that PE should be so warm up for reason of muscle readiness is perhaps not essential.
- Ice-breakers are usually used to introduce people who are new to each other or at the beginning of a sequence of lessons. It might be better to combine warm-up and ice-breakers as one part of each session (not separate sections).
- Where is the evidence that music should be used "in every lesson"? The connections between music and drama are subtle and should be carefully matched to create particular effects/moods etc. This principle should be reflected even with young children. Nor is music always an accompaniment, for example in ballet, opera and some theatre it is central.
- The strength of the level of detail about sessions is that under confident teachers have everything they need. However for most teachers the idea of professional autonomy and flexibility should be explicitly part of the design of the teachers' guide. This means less prescriptive detail with more recognition that the particular school and class context will make an important difference to the exact nature of the sessions, including the suggested timings. More detailed guidance could be available online.
- Warm-up missing from lesson 3.

Appendix 2: Future Evaluation and Assessment Tools for The Ant Club: Recommended Approach

It is generally accepted that the most rigorous test of the effectiveness of an approach to teaching, in relation to learning, is the randomised controlled trial (RCT). But RCTs are expensive and have many challenges in the context of the 'real world' of education. Justification for an RCT also requires there to be sufficient warrant to carry out an RCT in the first place to justify the cost. Therefore, a quasi experimental design is the most likely initial precursor to a RCT.

Large schools can provide opportunities for cost effective quasi experiments (and even RCTs) although generalisation of the findings from such contexts is limited in relation to the large number of medium size and small schools across the primary education sector. In large schools, of two form entry or more, experimental groups and control groups can be allocated in the same school. However, true random allocation may be in tension with school priorities to allocate pupils to classes. A *waiting list* design (where the control groups have access to the intervention teaching approach after its implementation with the experimental groups) can ensure that the control group receive the resources at a time that does not confound the experiment.

If sufficient large schools are not available then the sample of schools would need to ensure comparability between intervention schools and control schools based on socio-economic indicators and Ofsted grades of schools. A waiting list design could again be used.

The measures of children's learning would most likely include a standardised reading test and a measure of oral language. There are a range of standardised measures of reading and oral language that vary in their emphases (these are numerous and varied, with each having strengths and weaknesses). The assessment of writing for very young children is less straightforward. The team has experience of a range of children's writing assessments including use of Gorman and Brooks' (1996) seven-stage emergent writing assessment, which has been widely used with three-year-olds to six-year-olds in family literacy research. Another possibility would be to have suitably qualified and trained assessors rate samples of writing according to the EYFS Profile, national curriculum, and/or *Assessing Pupil Progress* (APP) (but see below with regard to changing assessment arrangements).

A quasi experiment would also need to evaluate fidelity to the Ant Club approach. This could be done through qualitative work including lesson observations by

sufficiently qualified observers, and interviews with teachers and head teachers. There are pros and cons for systematic observation vs. naturalistic observation.

Assessment

The assessment of The Ant Club approach in the early years is in theory more straightforward than in the years covered by the national curriculum. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Profile provides a measure of oral and written English that has been in use for some years. This could be used by teachers to carefully track pupils' progress once they have been exposed to The Ant Club resources.

An alternative approach to evaluation could be to adopt a measurement period beginning with the EYFS Profile used as a baseline, up to the time of the KS1 statutory teacher assessments. Individual pupil matching could be carried out using the National Pupil Data Base but the problem with this approach lies in the changes proposed to the national assessment system.

There was no evidence in the empirical data for this study that teacher assessment of The Ant Club outcomes, beyond unrecorded day-to-day reflections, was carried out. Hence an emphasis on assessment could be a priority, possibly before approaches such as quasi experiment are tried. The expected continuity of assessment of the Profile compared to other changes to national curriculum assessment at primary level means that decisions on how tracking data might be used have to wait until implementation in 2014.

There is likely to be a time of considerable controversy caused by the proposals for the national curriculum. The statutory consultation period is due to finish at the end of April 2013. Very little is known about the proposals for assessment but these will attract significant debate in view of the recent history of problems over statutory assessment of England's national curriculum. In the short term teachers will continue to assess according to the current national curriculum in many cases supported by Assessing Pupil Progress (APP). APP could provide a framework for assessing the use of The Ant Club resource in NC Years 1 and 2, but once new proposals for assessment are released then schools' attention will quickly turn to those.

Finally, none of the above measures take into account the impact on parental engagement which is another key feature of The Ant Club. Further research could beneficially look in more depth at the nature of parental involvement with the resources.

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