

Heads and teachers regret their response to reforms

Primary school staff feel they gave in to 'imposition' of Numeracy and Literacy Strategies

Primary heads and teachers feel they gave in too easily to pressure to introduce the Government's literacy and numeracy strategies in 1998 and 1999.

A paper presented at the British Education Research Association's annual conference last month reports how most teachers submitted to the changes 'even if they had misgivings about what they were doing.' The author, Dr Rosemary Webb, of York University, added that if teachers 'did deviate from recommended practice, they did not publicise the fact to colleagues.'

Dr Webb and her fellow researchers collected evidence from speaking to staff in 50 schools in England as part of a research project commissioned by the Association of Teachers and Lecturers. 'With the benefit of hindsight, most heads and some literacy and numeracy co-ordinators were critical of themselves for giving in

to national and local pressure,' said Dr Webb. Staff interviewed criticised the government for 'imposing' the strategies. And those schools which decided not to implement the strategies felt embattled and besieged.

The researchers also observed lessons and found the strategies have changed teaching practices. Much more attention is paid by teachers to stating the objectives at the start of a lesson and to what children have learned during the session. Teachers also do more whole-class teaching than before the implementation of the strategies.

After the government encouraged schools to take more 'ownership' of the strategies in 2003, schools reshaped the literacy strategy far more than the numeracy strategy. The report says that teachers' support for the latter has increased over time. The researchers found that while only 16 per cent of heads 'strongly liked' the literacy strategy, 53 per cent of them 'strongly liked' the numeracy strategy.

What children think of school

Research findings report on what pupils want and what they learn

Any parent comforting a child who is unhappy at school knows it's worth trying to find out what's going on in the playground. The cause of her misery might just lie in the state of her relationships with other pupils.

A paper on children's views of key stage 2, given at the British Educational Research Association's annual conference last month, backs up parents' suspicions. Professor Cedric Cullingford, of Huddersfield University, interviewed more than 250 children for his book *The Best Years of their Lives? Pupils' Experience of School* (Kogan Page). He concludes that we should not underestimate the importance of the personal lives of pupils at school.

His interviews show that children long to make personal connections – and not only with their fellow pupils. They also want to establish rapport with a teacher. So a thoughtless casual aside from a teacher can cause deep pain. And the jeers and taunts outside the classroom make the day an ordeal for many.

Children would also like to share their ideas with teachers. But they soon learn that it is better to guess what it is that teachers want. They realise that they are of low importance whilst 'teachers are put into the position of being imposers of facts and organisers of the day.' They also realise that teachers' status in the educational pecking order is low. 'It only takes an Ofsted inspection for children to realise where real power lies,' says Professor Cullingford.

The child-unfriendly curriculum, together with hidden playground bullying and their lack of power, means that children learn 'many things we would not want them to – insecurity, lack of self-belief, loss of motivation, indifference and cynicism,' he concludes.