



Project 2a: use of ICT by leading literacy teachers

The School House Partnership carried out the research on which this summary is based.

Background

In the Standards Fund of 1999–2000, LEAs were invited to bid for funding to support dissemination of good practice and some chose to spend this funding on ‘demonstration’ teachers or ‘demonstration’ schools. Explicit funding for National Literacy Strategy (NLS) ‘leading’ or ‘expert’ teachers in all LEAs began in 2000–01.

With effect from the Standards Fund of 2000–01, NLS issued annual guidance related to methods of working and national priorities. However, LEAs were encouraged to develop their own approaches based on local priorities and geographical and organisational considerations. NLS provided guidance to Literacy Strategy Managers regarding the selection criteria for leading teachers and leading head teachers and suggested a range of operational models. NLS also provided advice on training.

Introduction

This research project looked at the use and deployment of ‘expert’ literacy teachers by LEAs in line with the introduction of the NLS scheme. In all of the local authorities studied, a conscious decision had been taken at the outset of the NLS scheme to use the title ‘leading’ teacher or ‘demonstration’ teacher rather than ‘expert’. Therefore, this report uses the terms leading literacy teacher (LLT) and leading literacy headteacher (LLHT).

This small-scale project sought to evaluate:

- the effectiveness of the different LEA models in their deployment of leading literacy teachers
- the factors influencing their success
- the role of ICT in supporting the personal and professional practices of this community of leading teachers.

The NLS provided the research team with a list of LEAs in which particularly good use was made of LLTs. From this list, the research team randomly selected four LEAs to take part in the study. The selection produced models that were very different – each model having ‘grown’ to meet the needs of the participating schools, teachers, and LLTs.

Methodology

The project invited the four LEAs to take part and thereafter made appointments to interview the senior manager responsible for each authority’s LLT scheme (usually the Literacy Strategy Manager or a Literacy Consultant). The interviews sought to establish:

- how the LEA’s model operated
- the rationale behind the development of the model
- the administrative processes used to monitor and manage the LLT programme
- a list of LLTs who might be willing to take part in the project.

Data collection

The project invited the selected LLTs to take part and thereafter arranged to visit each respondent. The purpose of the visit was to:

- observe lessons
- interview the leading literacy teacher(s)
- interview the teachers who observed the lessons given by LLTs (the 'observing teachers').

Researchers collected quantitative data by observing the amount of time LLTs spent on various aspects of each lesson. The lesson observations were designed to answer the following questions:

- Does the LLT focus on classroom organisation and management, teaching and learning styles, differentiation or subject knowledge?
- Is this in direct response to the identified needs of the observing teachers?
- How is the focus of the lesson identified?
- Does the scheme allow opportunities for discussion between the LLT and observing teachers before and after the lesson?
- How do observing teachers respond/react to the input from the LLT?
- After periods of reflection, do perceptions and views change?
- Do the observing teachers follow-up on any of the suggestions? Have the suggestions been effective?
- Has the input brought about lasting change in the classroom practice of the observing teacher?
- Is ICT used effectively to enhance the support provided by the LLT?
- Does the LLT use ICT to improve productivity and capability and to enhance their teaching repertoire?

The interviews with observing teachers also addressed these issues thus enabling the research team to make qualitative comparisons on the differing perspectives of benefits and impact. Most of the evidence about effective models and impact came from interviews with participating teachers.

To complete the data collection, the research team administered two questionnaires. One was given to the LLTs and sought to determine their use of ICT both professionally and personally. The other was targeted at a random sample of 20 primary schools in each LEA and sought to establish:

- whether they knew about the scheme
- how they found out about the scheme
- whether they found the administrative aspects of the scheme easy to manage
- whether they had participated in the scheme and how valuable the experience had been
- the effect on teacher and/or pupil performance
- specific details or evidence of improvement.

Overview of the participating local education authorities

Type of authority

The following table shows the status of each authority.

	Type of LEA
Authority 1	Unitary
Authority 2	County Council
Authority 3	Metropolitan Borough Council
Authority 4	Unitary

Ratio of schools to leading literacy teachers and leading literacy headteachers

Although NLS identified all the LEAs in the project as having effective models of literacy support via a LLT scheme, the ratio of LLTs to schools differs substantially between the authorities.

	Authority 1	Authority 2	Authority 3	Authority 4
Number of primary schools in the LEA	28	282	71	66
Number of consultants supporting LLTs	1	1	2	1.5
Number of LLTs in 2002–03	9	19	29	11
Number of LLHTs in 2002–03	0	0	1	2

Questionnaire result: use and impact of the LLT scheme

The following table shows the responses collected from telephone and postal questionnaires administered to 20 primary schools in each LEA. It shows the number of schools familiar with the scheme, whether they had used it, and the perceived impact on the school.

	Knew of scheme	Used it	Thought it had a positive impact
Authority 1	10	7	7
Authority 3	10	4	4
Authority 4	7	0	0
Authority 2	5	3	2

Authority 1

The basic LLT scheme and its administration

This LEA publishes an annual directory that includes details of booking procedures and guidance on the use of the two services offered:

- observing a demonstration teacher
- paired planning and teaching with a demonstration teacher.

The directory includes details about each LLT, their areas of expertise, the lessons they offer and preferred times and dates for observations. Teachers wishing to attend a demonstration are

required to complete an 'observation request' form and send it to a central administrative point. The administrative staff liaise with the LLT, suggesting to the applicant(s) alternative dates if necessary. The administration point sends confirmation of the booking and a 'post-observation feedback' form to each applicant.

The applicant's school arranges half a day of supply cover from an appropriate fund and supply cover is paid to the LLT's school. The LLT's school sends the visiting teacher an information pack about ten days before the observation. There can be up to three visiting teachers per lesson. After the demonstration, the LLT and the visiting teacher(s) discuss the lesson, filling in the post-observation feedback form. Teachers must return this form to the central administrative point within a week of the observation. It is expected that the 'observing' teacher will inform their Staff Development Co-ordinator and/or Literacy Co-ordinator of any targets generated during the visit.

The directory details a similar process for arranging the two sessions necessary for paired planning and teaching. Some schools do not follow the system but apply directly to the LLT's school. This means that evaluation forms are not completed and sent to the administrative point, which in turn means that the supply funding is not released to the LLT's school.

LLTs: their training, role and management

In this authority, the LLTs have a broad role that focuses on local priorities and encompasses elements of the following:

- opportunities for paired planning and teaching
- review of resources
- writing for the LEA Literacy Newsletter
- speaking at courses.

A LLT network enables participants to share ideas and resources amongst themselves and with the Literacy Consultant from the LEA. This network provides half a day of training per term and has a business/update/review meeting each half term. The LLTs are expected to attend these meetings and funding is provided. Apart from demonstration lessons, LLTs also provide support through a range of documents and often lead workshops at events organised by the Primary English Co-ordinator Network (PEN).

The Literacy Consultant has initiated a series of quality assurance visits during the past year. Schools have raised some issues but these were addressed speedily through the LLT network meetings.

Additional features

Two of the LLTs are working with a researcher from the London Institute of Education on a 'Boys and Literacy' project. The LEA is currently planning to run a series of twilight sessions by LLTs from September 2003. Once a term there is a half-day update for literacy co-ordinators. LLTs frequently contribute to these events, and often initiate and lead workshop sessions.

Authority 2

The basic LLT scheme and its administration

This LEA publishes details of the LLT scheme as paper-based and web-based material. These sources provide information about the LLTs, the dates and times when each individual is available for observation and the age range of the pupils being taught. They also includes some details about the host school.

To observe a lesson, the scheme asks individuals or schools to contact the host school to reserve a date. The scheme considers it inappropriate to have more than two observers at any one session. At the back of the directory is an observation pro-forma that helps the observing teacher gain maximum benefit from the visit.

LLTs: their training, role and management

As the authority has over 280 primary schools spread over a wide area, co-ordination and collective training becomes challenging and time consuming. There are 19 LLTs currently teaching year groups covering the whole primary spectrum from Reception to Year 6. A project manager (consultant) runs the LLT scheme and the LEA provides some administrative support for the scheme.

Providing there is sufficient funding available, all LLTs receive three days of training per year. The authority expects LLTs to offer a minimum of four and a maximum of eight demonstration lessons per term. When the scheme asks LLTs to support the delivery of courses or workshop sessions during the twilight meetings (see below), the LEA makes a payment of one day of supply cover to allow the LLT to prepare. In the past year, LLTs have offered over 200 observations.

The Project Manager and LLTs see the high attendance figures at twilight sessions as an indication that they are providing what teachers need. However, they are aware of the need to formalise their 'needs identification and evaluation' processes and a questionnaire has been designed which will form the basis for their quality assurance mechanism.

The Project Manager and the LLTs work as a close-knit team and opportunities to discuss issues or respond to an identified need can quickly be organised. Collectively, they decide what the focus for developments should be - guided reading is currently high on the agenda.

Additional features

The LLT scheme also offers twilight sessions on a drop-in basis and each of these events regularly attracts nearly one hundred teachers. These sessions offer a general overview of the scheme (given by the LLT Project Manager) followed by a number of workshop sessions led by LLTs. The workshops are based on lessons delivered by LLTs and focus on specific areas of local interest or need.

The LEA and the Project Manager would like the LLT support materials to be available via the website but funding is not forthcoming. Nonetheless, the Project Manager now collects example resources electronically so that the task is easier when funding and staff are available.

The LLT Project Manager firmly believes that the success of the scheme is attributable to the extremely good relationship that the 'advisory service' has with its schools, and the culture of sharing good practice throughout the LEA. Before this initiative, LEA support was well structured, and so schools are familiar with accessing all available support.

Authority 3

The basic LLT scheme and its administration

In this authority, the LLT scheme is part of the Sharing Good Practice scheme. The LEA advertises the scheme to schools through a paper-based directory sent out annually in April. The primary Sharing Good Practice Scheme supports both literacy and numeracy. The Standards and Effectiveness Unit in the authority's Learning and Culture Department run this scheme. A Literacy Consultant oversees the LLT scheme.

A number of leading teachers have been identified to support different phases or areas of need:

Phase/area of need	No. of leading teachers
Key Stage 1	3
Key Stage 2	5
Whole department (Foundation and Key Stage 1)	1
Whole school (Key Stages 1 and 2)	2
Leading Intervention Strategy Assistants	4
Language units	2
Centres of Early Excellence	2
Leading literacy co-ordinators	6
Literacy associates	3
Leading Literacy Headteachers	1
Total	29

The LLTs in the categories Key Stage 1, Key Stage 2, 'whole department', 'whole school', and in the Language Units and Centres of Early Excellence, are those who are prepared to allow colleagues to observe their literacy planning and practice and discuss issues pertinent to the observing teacher's visit. They also undertake to disseminate that which they have learned to their own staff.

The scheme provides support through a variety of other approaches including:

- Leading Literacy Co-ordinators (LLCs) act as 'buddies' to colleagues newly appointed to the role, and advise them regarding the role and responsibilities of Literacy Co-ordinators as well as the content and organisation of their co-ordinator files. This helps to promote consistent good practice, as well as developing the confidence of those new to the post.
- Two teachers from the eight language units within the LEA, which cater for pupils excluded from mainstream schools, are available through the scheme for observation.
- Teachers and teaching assistants can observe good practice throughout the foundation stage in two Centres of Early Excellence.

Schools are invited to participate in these aspects of the scheme by sending interested teachers and/or classroom assistants to observe an appropriate leading practitioner working in their own environment and to engage in professional follow-up discussion. Arrangements for 'observation visits' are made by negotiation between headteachers. Headteachers of host schools keep a register of all requests and this allows the workload of the teachers involved in the scheme to be closely monitored/filtered by their respective headteacher.

The scheme encourages observing teachers to reflect positively on the work they have seen and to provide feedback to the headteacher and co-ordinator in their own school. The LEA expects observing teachers to share information with colleagues and to engage constructively with any implications for developing their own teaching practice. To this end, the observing teacher

completes a brief record of salient points immediately after the observation. The host teacher may add comments if he/she wishes to. Both teachers sign this record. Each keeps a copy and, at intervals, the NLS team randomly samples these records to help monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the scheme.

Additional features

Within the authority there is a major emphasis on networking and sharing and two large events were organised for 2003. At these events, trained teaching assistants demonstrate activities from the 'intervention programmes' to any interested parties. Link advisers, supply teachers, pupil support assistants, learning support assistants, teachers, governors, youth service librarians, advisory teachers and others attend these types of event. In addition, there are also regular support group meetings for literacy co-ordinators and senior management teams.

The Literacy Associates provide in-service training (Inset) through an outreach programme. The Literacy Consultant supports each associate to develop their individual area of interest and expertise, for example, guided writing, extended writing or phonics into a short Inset session. Once each associate's presentation has been agreed upon and all materials created, a set programme of 'outreach' delivery at specific venues around the LEA is drawn up and advertised. These sessions are free and all teachers are welcome – particularly newly qualified teachers (NQTs). For the associates, there is some personal financial recompense for doing this work as they always deliver the training at the end of the school day.

Authority 4

The basic LLT scheme and its administration

In this authority, the NLS Strategy Manager has lead responsibility for the LLT scheme. The scheme advertises its services to schools through an annual mailing. This consists of a directory of LLTs and a guidance document on getting the most out of a visit to a LLT. Observing teachers decide on a focus for the demonstration through discussion with a member of their senior management team. They then contact the LLT to arrange a date and time for the visit. After the lesson they complete the joint evaluation sheet and return a copy to the NLS Strategy Manager. The Strategy Manager, the headteacher, and link advisers evaluate the impact of this intervention strategy by monitoring outcomes from lessons.

LLTs: their training, role and management

The NLS Strategy Manager oversees the work of 11 LLTs and two LLHTs. Locally identified needs largely determine the focus of the LLT's work. For two years the focus has been on developing writing but in 2003–04 the emphasis shifts to developing boys' achievement.

The LEA is adamant that schools that allow their teachers to become LLTs must not be disadvantaged in any way. External consultants provide top-level training and support and the NLS Standards Fund provides the funding.

Additional features

The Literacy Support Team is currently working to develop teaching assistants and LLTs. New groups of LLTs are involved in different stages of the process – this is a deliberate strategy to encourage recruitment and retention.

There are two LLHTs. One is in an infant school, which is also a 'beacon' school. This infant school has provided case study material for national use. Locally, the case study material is used

to support the training of special educational needs co-ordinators (Sencos). LLHTs support training and projects and their support tends to be targeted at other headteachers. They may be involved in lesson observations, interviews, analysing data and identifying priorities for the future.

In addition to the support from LLTs and LLHTs, there is a specialist centre for literacy support based in one of the LEA primary schools. An intranet is currently being developed and this will host case study materials about how ICT can promote literacy development.

Key findings

Data from leading literacy teachers

A number of common themes arose from the interviews with LLTs. For example, LLTs offering demonstration lessons in all of the LEAs identified two main categories into which visiting teachers fell:

- teachers who were having trouble with some aspect of literacy teaching
- teachers who came with a very clear focus, such as organising the literacy hour in Reception class.

In some instances, Literacy Consultants or headteachers provided additional information about the particular needs of teachers experiencing difficulties, and in some cases a Literacy Consultant would participate in the visit to provide additional help and support.

All of the LLTs interviewed were keen to express their admiration for the support and inspiration provided by the key literacy person(s) in their LEA. Comments included words such as inspirational, creative and dynamic.

LLTs generally felt that one of the most rewarding aspects of the role was the encouragement it provided to try out new ideas and to develop materials for others to share. In many instances the LLTs developed such materials in their own time. Where the LEA commissioned specific materials, perhaps for a course or conference, funding, either for supply cover or as a personal payment, was often available.

The general view among those interviewed was that the scheme had raised standards in the schools with LLTs. This was partly because the schools had direct access to the expertise of the LLTs, and in several cases the school relied very heavily on the LLT to lead their literacy development. Where the LLT was not the Literacy Co-ordinator, this had occasionally given rise to problems. In some instances, colleagues had reflected on their own practice and then endeavoured to improve it. Only very occasionally had colleagues felt 'as good as' the LLT or been unable to see what was 'so much better' in the LLT's practice. In the instances mentioned by headteachers, careful intervention prevented problems from escalating.

In some LEAs, because of the lack of funding, supply cover was not provided to enable LLTs to talk to observing teachers before or after lessons and host schools usually tried to cover this internally. In some instances, the teachers fitted the discussions in before school or during playtime or lunchtime.

Data from interviews with participating teachers

Teachers reported that taking part in the scheme had been a valuable experience, allowing them to observe colleagues, discuss teaching methods, resources, classroom management – in fact, the whole range of issues that can arise in the average classroom on any day. Those that had the

opportunity to observe LLTs in a special school said that it had been particularly valuable and had enabled them to learn how to support literacy in children with diverse or special educational needs (SEN). Some teachers had made repeat visits to build upon their knowledge and understanding. Teachers felt that the LLT scheme had a positive impact on their schools and colleagues through the sharing of good practice in staff meetings and briefings.

In some instances observing teachers were able to borrow the artefacts used by the LLTs in order to replicate the activities in their own classroom. In all cases, LLTs provided visiting teachers with copies of the lesson plan and the paper-based materials used in the session. One aspect that many teachers commented on was the ability of the LLT to differentiate the work in terms of learning styles and the materials/resources used. In addition, where an interactive whiteboard was used to model literacy processes, teachers felt that the impact on pupils' learning was greater.

For many teachers the opportunity to visit a leading practitioner was very reassuring because it was set in a classroom situation and the context was familiar. Pre-lesson discussion helped to put things into context by explaining the rationale behind the approaches used. Similarly, talking through the lesson afterwards enabled teachers to ask further questions and sometimes to ask for advice on how to modify the lesson to suit their situation. For most teachers, it was the opportunity to see different approaches and resources used in a very practical context.

Use of ICT

All four LEAs had consciously decided to invest in more high quality LLTs, rather than in ICT equipment and resources to support their LLTs.

All of the LLTs had access to ICT hardware at school and many had a home computer. Most of the LLTs were confident and competent users of ICT. Most of the LLTs used ICT as a productivity tool to create high quality teaching and learning resources, to record their planning, and to enhance and support teaching and learning in the classroom. In some LEAs, a significant number of LLTs used interactive whiteboards daily to model literacy activities in the classroom. Many LLTs were also using presentational technologies as a teaching aid.

The level of hardware in schools and across the LEAs varied considerably. Three of the authorities had ICT suites and networked computers in all classrooms. In the fourth, the level of hardware was significantly lower and appeared to limit pupils' access to ICT.

Many leading teachers have used the internet to find web-based resources to support literacy and they pro-actively promote such resources, if appropriate, in demonstration lessons. (A number of LLTs are also investigating the range of resources that are becoming available through Curriculum Online.)

Although the level of ICT expertise amongst LLTs tended to be high, it was not used to facilitate communication with colleagues in the same role or with similar responsibilities. Small groups, particularly in one authority, used email to communicate but this tended to be because of personal friendships that had developed or because people were working collaboratively on a project.

Conclusions

LEAs have been encouraged to develop approaches appropriate to their particular situation. The four LEAs studied illustrate how very different approaches can be very effective. All of the schools

involved in this project had a very positive view of their LLT scheme. Although the amount of data available is small, it indicates how teachers involved in a scheme perceive its value. Among this group, it is clear that pockets of excellent practice are developing and that colleagues perceive leading teachers as valuable sources of inspiration and advice.

LEAs are identifying and promoting leading practitioners as a source of professional development in order to extend their capacity for targeted literacy support. However, if the LEAs in this project are representative, there is huge variance between the number of LLTs and consultants in relation to the number of primary schools across LEAs. The availability of funding has enabled some LEAs, like Authority 3 in this study, to develop and extend the LLT scheme to support specific new literacy initiatives. In that instance, because different people are involved in different aspects of the support, they are able to focus and develop specific areas of expertise.

All of the LEAs studied have developed simple, manageable systems that allow teachers to gain access to leading practitioners. Although each approach is different, and the control and monitoring systems are diverse, a common theme seems to underpin the success of the schemes. There appears to be an important person or group of people within each LEA who can inspire and motivate leading practitioners to feel sufficiently confident and competent to share their expertise with others. Each of the key personnel in these LEAs has demonstrated their ability to devise appropriate and flexible approaches that can be modified or developed to meet changing priorities at local and national level.

All of the models have been pro-active in meeting local needs. The culture within each of these LEAs is one of sharing and caring. All those involved in the schemes are willing to share ideas and resources with others. Those in positions of responsibility, such as strategy managers, literacy consultants and headteachers, are very careful to ensure that undue demand is not placed on individuals supporting the literacy initiatives. In terms of human resource and project management, the emergence of 'key' or 'pathfinder' personnel is an interesting area of study. It shows some similarities to findings about the role of 'leadership' when ICT has a positive effect on standards in schools¹.

Despite the many positive aspects of the schemes studied, there were areas where significant issues either remain unresolved or require more robust, longer-term solutions:

- Management structures: frequently the key person in the LEA has a broader range of responsibilities than simply managing the LLT scheme. As schemes and teams develop and expand to support the various literacy support initiatives, the task of the key manager becomes more challenging. What kinds of management structure and support systems are suited to these types of scheme?
- Quality assurance (QA) systems: implementation and management of QA systems seemed to be a relatively low priority. (This may be due to the rate at which new national initiatives are introduced, as often there is insufficient time to modify existing QA systems to cover new ways of working.) What simple but effective QA systems might be developed for this and other such schemes?

¹ See ICT Resources and School Standards

[<http://www.becta.org.uk/research/research.cfm?section=1&id=538>].

- ICT to support LLTs and their work: in the LEAs studied, LLTs and scheme managers are still not using ICT to effectively support their work. Neither do they use ICT to disseminate good practice across the LEA or regionally and nationally. Similarly, huge numbers of resources and case study materials are being developed but, in some cases, only a limited number of individuals or schools seem to be aware of what is available. What practical steps could be taken to:
 - Ensure that LLTs, scheme managers and others use ICT appropriately and consistently to support their work?
 - Ensure the adequate dissemination of information locally, and the sharing of resources both locally and nationally?

Despite the issues that would benefit from review, all of the individuals and schools in the study appear to have gained advantages because of the LLT scheme in their area. All of the LLTs interviewed felt that their scheme produced significant professional development, which had come about through the training and support provided, and through working closely with colleagues on a very specific focus with clear outcomes in mind.

Recommendations

The project offers the following set of recommendations:

- Conduct research to answer the following questions:
 1. What are the most effective methods of measuring the impact of such schemes?
 2. What are the most effective methods of managing such schemes?
 3. What are effective and practical forms of quality assurance?
 4. How have LEAs developed and managed their intranet or website, and how have they promoted its use to schools and support schemes such as leading teachers?
 5. How are online communities used to support professional activity?
 6. How effective could online communities be in sustaining LEA support teams?
- Provide funding to ensure that all LLTs have personal access to ICT equipment to enable them to contribute to local and national resource banks and to the professional sharing of expertise.
- Provide funding specifically for the dissemination of LLT support materials and good practice through the National Grid for Learning (NGfL).
- Devise a simple system of collating NLS materials nationally so that they can be available to all. (For example, encourage each LEA to submit to the NLS website the case study material from one observed lesson per term. Such material to be 'meta tagged' in such a way that a user could search for materials related to a specific age/phase or a specific aspect of literacy.)
- Provide regular information updates to all LLTs through a national electronic mailing system and encourage LEAs to promote and support systems through which LLTs can share ideas, information and resources electronically within their LEAs.