



University of  
**Strathclyde**  
Education

# How researchers & educators can create kinder literacy interventions

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# What do we want for children living in poverty?

My mission in life is not merely to survive, but to thrive; and to do so with some passion, some compassion, some humor and some style”

Maya Angelou

# Pedagogy of poverty

“...tightly controlled routine in which teachers dispense, and then test students on, factual information; assign seatwork; and punish noncompliance.” (Haberman 1995)

‘Star’ teachers with particular qualities  
(persistence, organisation & planning, ability to survive in a bureaucracy, fallibility, perspective on successful students/teachers & learning, ability to connect and to put theory into practice.

## I will talk about:

- One successful intervention to raise literacy attainment and narrow the gap with 800 teachers in one Scottish local authority
- Some theoretical issues; knowledge as a lever for change
- Some of the tools that supported change

# Scotland: policy context

**Christie:** single-outcome devolved policy model premised on co-production: service providers must collaborate & co-produce with each other & service-users (e.g. *Child Poverty Strategy: Pockets, Places, Prospects* and *Curriculum for Excellence: non-statutory guidelines*)

**Challenge: How to frame effective co-production**



# Lenses on literacy

**Psychological**, psycho-linguistic, cognitive-psychological...

**Linguistic**: pragmatics, semantics, syntactic, lexical, morphological...

**Sociological**: socio-cultural, social capitals; power, funds of knowledge & reproduction of inequality...

**Literary**: Affordances/constraints of texts & reader response to texts...

**Psycho-social**: identity, agency and motivation...

**Economic**: human capital; commerce...

**Anthropological... Behavioural science...**

**Political... Historical...**

# Literacy: a contested space

Different ideas about:

- What it means to be literate
- The aims of the literacy curriculum
- What matters in becoming literate - the evidence to be ruled in, ignored or prioritised
- How to measure it.
- Methodologies, standards of proof required for robust professional action /intervention

Teachers experience these pushes and pulls not as research perspectives, but in how conversations are framed in the media and in politics. They experience them through the administrative choices that impose a particular logic of system designs and data use, and they experience them through the resources they must use, the curricular programmes, and the assessment systems which direct them to notice, to count and to prioritise in different directions.



# Theoretical perspectives on the struggles

- A struggle between “methodologically weak horizontal knowledge frames around HOW to teach losing out to stronger vertical knowledge frames around WHAT to teach” (Morais 2017)
- or
- An inequality in the rights of different disciplines to define what counts as relevant knowledge in educational policy communities (Moss 2013)
  - Note: home-literacy policy community has shifted (Nutbrown et al 2016); school hasn't (yet)



# Embracing the “mix”: professional knowledge

Wenger-Treyner et al (2015): Professional knowledge looks seamless but...

- A dynamic ‘landscape of practice’ not a fixed cannon – working across knowledge landscapes.
- Explicit focus on aligning & deepening knowledge frames to make professional judgments and imagine alternatives in a specific context of use
- Knowledgeability or ‘knowing-in-practice’
- Professional knowledge is not certain – a complicated pathway to a ‘meaningful moment of practice’;

# In schools...

- Teachers must negotiate and navigate this landscape
- Inherent instability: finding a balance & keeping a balance is hard
- Classroom practice can become the battleground for other people's questions, evidence, debates and careers.

Teachers get no help in reconciling the disciplinary perspectives, and often little recognition that reconciliation is even required.

# Strathclyde's '3 Domain' model: Navigating different KINDS of evidence

**Cognitive knowledge skills**, phonological aware; phonic/alphabetic;  
Decoding cues & strategies, concepts abt print; comprehension skills.



**Cultural /social capitals:**  
home practices, values & beliefs;  
funds of knowledge; texts/resources  
available; ideas/ experiences/  
people/ activities/ home literacies

**Personal/social identity:**  
aspirations; reader  
Identity; friendships; view  
of self as a reader& how  
positioned by others;  
entitlement

# Features of this tool

- Deliberately intuitive and lightly specified (avoid a tick-list mentality that interferes with agency).
- Explicitly acknowledges the kinds of evidence that different domains rule in
- A tool to help teachers notice, and orchestrate across, different kinds of evidence domains – educate the whole child
- Helps relevant knowledge kick in at key points to inform actions.
- A well-rounded, “Noticing teacher”

Different lenses give different insights:

- Social class and gender – located in bottom domains, but addressed through cognitive
- Streaming and setting – look fine through cognitive, but not identity
- Links between show pathways to impact – identity has potential to impact on cognitive and cultural capital; cultural capital can impact on identity and cognitive.....

# We worked with

One middle-sized local authority :

- 49 primary schools
- around 800+ primary staff
- serving just under 13,000 primary pupils.

A 2-stage project:

- Understanding, scoping and framing the project - a HT and T from each school
- Roll-out to all primary staff

# Scoping and framing the project

- **CPD** (key research; specific pedagogies that link/ support it; professional reading; school-based mini-enquiries)
- **Literacy Clinic** (as a thinking/exploring/ sharing space - not a model for practice)
- **Classroom application** (which ideas fly/ get parked/ get adapted, and why)

# Four half-day CPD sessions

- **Cultural/social capital:** What no bedtime story means (Brice-Heath) ; Virtual schoolbag (Thomson) ; Concerted cultivation/natural growth (Lareau); funds of knowledge ( Moll)Talk differences
- **Cognitive:** Teaching as coaching to orchestrate all the cues (Goodman); getting text level right (Clay); fluency on a variety of texts; throughput; comprehension (Cain)
- **Social identity:** intrinsic motivation/growth mindset (Dweck) & engagement (Guthrie); literate identities (Janks); social spaces and choice (Moss); reader response (Chambers)

# An Example: Lareau's Concerted Cultivation Teaches Entitlement

- Young M/C children badger teachers for help. W/C in the same classroom raise hands.
- M/C children speak, interrupt, ask for help, and argue. They take the 'talk time' in schools
- W/C & poor children are silenced, they are given, and take, fewer opportunities to develop their language skills



# The 3 domains helped student teachers frame the gap - Connecting to children's lives in the Strathclyde Literacy Clinic (poverty)

I was quite disturbed by it. A real eyeopener. I was shellshocked by what he couldn't do and most of all his negative view of reading. I still worry about his future. I did find the experience enjoyable in a strange way though it was upsetting ... and I wanted to try really hard for him. “  
ST 07A

Well you need to know your children. I've been aware of that before, but on placement you don't really think about the child's home life so much ... Their parents might be illiterate ... What's that say to school about 'sending the reading homework out'?"



# Literacy clinic: Teaching as bridging

Now I understand the importance of contextualizing things.

Developing activities based on the child's need – I already knew that mattered - but what I think now is you need more because that's not enough. You need to put it into context for her too – lots of context. Otherwise it is like teaching someone to swim without going in the water – without lots of context she can't get enough purchase to push her own way through. ST 11B

It made me realize that when something doesn't work, you need to find another way. As a professional you don't always follow the crowd – you have to go back and see what else can be done.

ST 07B

# **Strathclyde students: Professional knowledge + Identity + Values = Action**

I always wanted to help – that's why I wanted to be a teacher in the first place, but now I have actually changed my probationer choices to Glasgow. Because of this project I know I can make a real difference to children's lives. We are told that at uni but now I know its true for me.

**ST 07B**

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# Research & Implementation Outcomes from Phase 1

- How experienced educators used the ‘3 Domains’ tool (HTs and Ts)
- Understand the shifts in professional thinking
- Informed ‘theory of change’ to help ideas ‘land well’ on roll-out (pragmatic and necessary)



# Results: Not new knowledge, but new attention

*“[The] cognitive domain. That’s what I focussed on [before]. Didn’t pay attention to the other two, certainly not consciously. Not in my planning or teaching. I may have aware of children who didn’t go to library or some parents not getting so involved but I didn’t do anything with that information. I didn’t really think about it”*

- **Reframed as evidence which required action**
- **Move from deficit models**

## A different *kind* of attention

*“I always used to check the vocabulary and teach them the meanings of any words they didn’t know for their comprehension of the piece. But now I know that the vocabulary teaching, well it’s doing a bigger job. It isn’t just about teaching them that word, it’s teaching them all the social living and general knowledge stuff that goes alongside that. Telling them wider stories about the world outside Ferguslie”*

# Professional learning: Diary analysis

- Cultural / social capitals needed most “cooking time” to be useful in practice
- Head teachers were generally quicker to see how to use it than class teachers
- Within-domain understanding deepened and ruled-in a wider range of evidence – what ‘progress’ looked like
- Class teachers slightly more likely to do this

# Implementation: outcomes from Phase 1

- Tailored checklist - core things to shift
- Support networks - reader response; literacy coaching; management
- Literacy champion in each school & monthly meetings sharing strategies/ success/challenges.
- Resources; organisation; timing; spaces
- Skill in specific pedagogic tools & activities
- A shared vision of how things could be (and should be) NOT based on programmes or resources: the 'mix' matters; different paths to a common outcome

## Year 2: roll-out to all 800+ staff

**Quantitative data** (longitudinal cohort comparison data; same cohort data )

- raised overall attainment from 96.4-101 (Paired T-Test)
- decreased the numbers in 'below average' and 'low' stanine grps
- narrowed the gap (Goodman and Kruskal's Gamma Test)

**Qualitative data** - shifts in professional understandings supported educators to

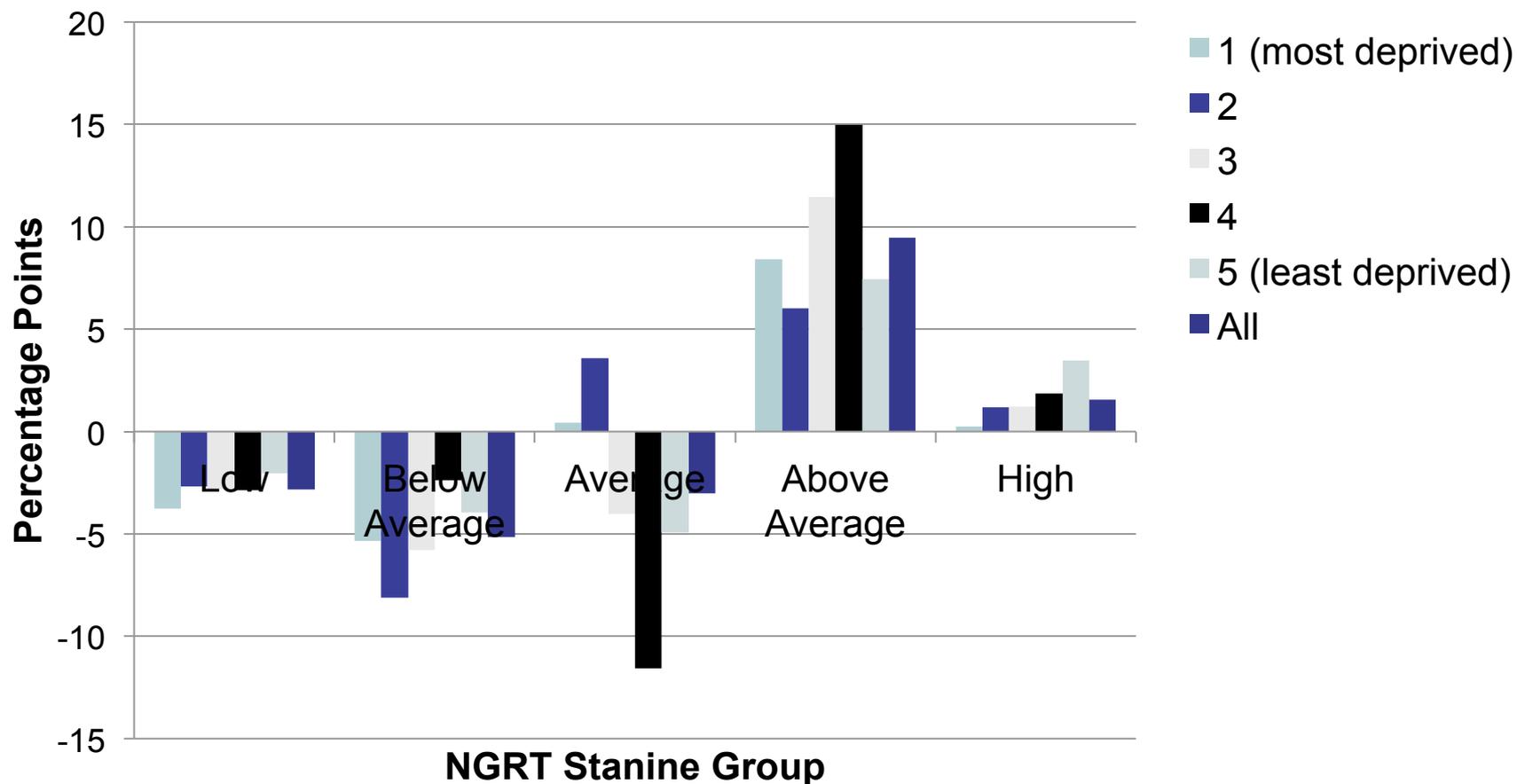
- **Become “noticing teachers”**
- **Articulate their own theory of change – for class and individuals**

# NGRT results: Changes in Average Attainment

NGRT A SAS	NGRT B SAS	N	Mean difference	Paired sample t-test	P value
96.6	101.1	3,632	4.5	30.0	0.00

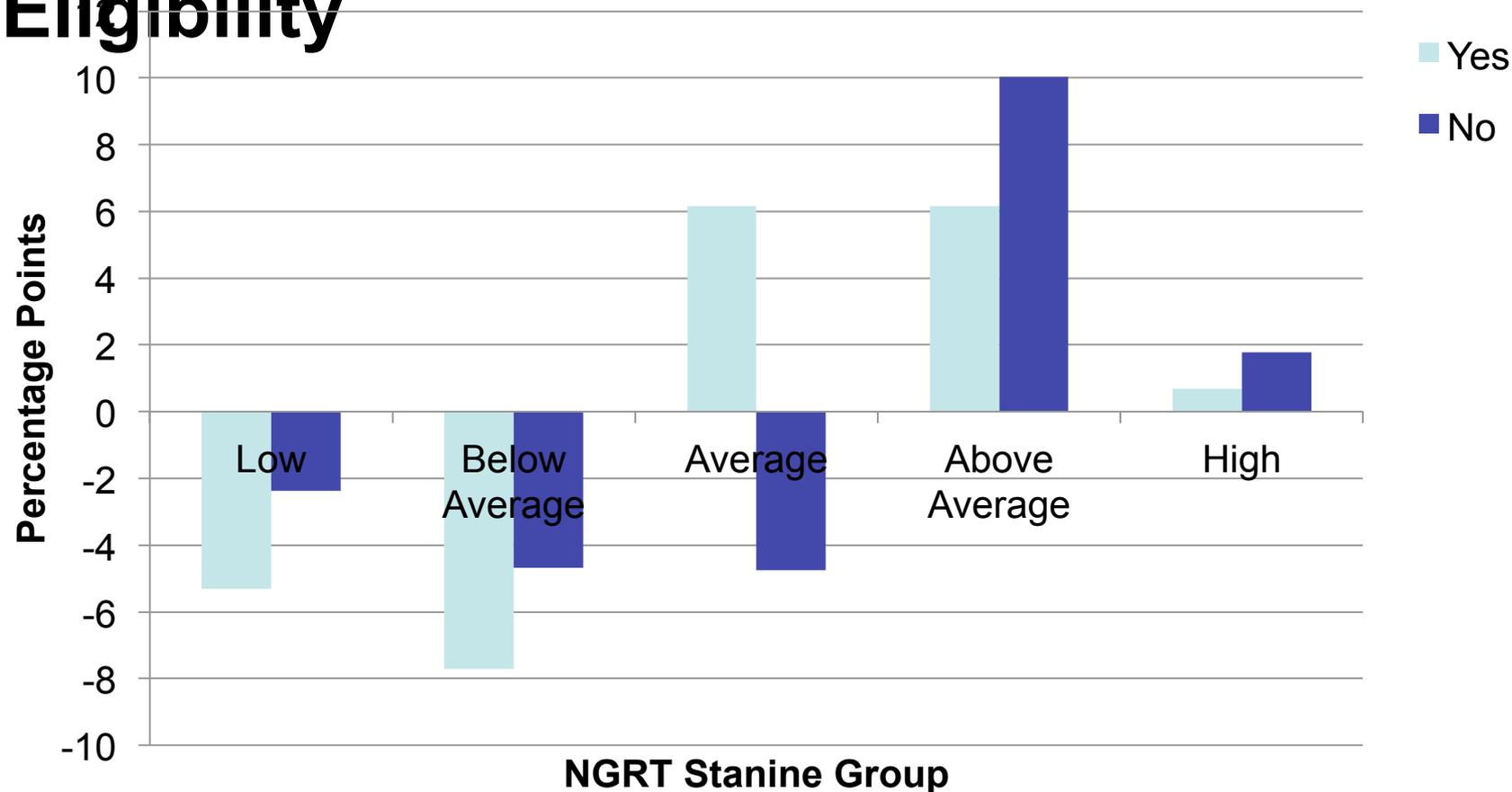


# The Pattern of Movement: Differences in NGRT Stanine Groups by SIMD quintile





# The Pattern of Movement: Differences in NGRT Stanine Groups by Clothing Grant Eligibility



# **Sustainable, grounded re-definitions of what matters – social change**

**Responsive teaching:** meaningful conversations that embrace difference

**Pathways to impact:** identify points of intervention, levers for change & pathways to impact.

**‘Show don’t tell’ shifts purpose** e.g. relaxation and pleasure

**Understand where parents are coming from:** less judgemental; more realistic

**Reading & writing as part of the social fabric of classrooms:** active management -prompts, resources, spaces & contexts

*Dear Class,*

*I am now happily married and living with my Prince. However, my ugly sisters want to come and live in the palace with us. They say they will change their ways. Should I let them?*

*I need your advice.*

*Yours faithfully,*

*Cinderella*



# Our duty and our privilege

- To make education equally rewarding for all
- To locate the best research knowledge out there, **and develop tools to help professionals use it**
- To explore and use evidence across domains, its relationship to professional knowledge, its capacity to underpin creative teaching and the key role it has in delivering equity.
- To teach literacy in ways that allow young people to navigate their way in the world and in their worlds, not just in school