SUMMARY

This systematic literature review focuses on cultural diversity in the classroom and strategies that teachers can use to raise attainment of pupils from culturally diverse backgrounds. We used a methodological approach based on the Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre (EPPI-Centre) model and incorporated the views of practitioners who are the primary audience for this work. Over one thousand potential studies were identified in our search, 50 of which met the inclusion criteria, and these studies formed the basis of a systematic map of the area. In addition, five studies were analysed in depth to assist in identifying strategies to raise academic performance. Implications for research, policy and practice are also highlighted in light of the review findings.

Background

Cultural diversity in the classroom is changing because of the arrival of new immigrant groups, such as asylum-seekers and refugees. The importance of this area is evidenced by the fact that the annual Teacher Training Agency (TTA) report on the follow-up survey of newly qualified teachers (NQTs) has regularly recorded English as an additional language (EAL) provision as an area where they would have liked better preparation during their initial training (TTA, 2002). This impacts on the knowledge base needed to help train teachers and support them in the classroom. For example, in Derby City, children bring to the schools more than 38 different languages, including Somali, Czech and Afghani (Derby City Access/Ethnic Minority Achievement Service, 2003). Responding to the educational needs of children from war-torn countries also has implications for a pupil's emotional and behavioural problems. These cannot be properly understood without an understanding of the child's cultural and linguistic heritage (Wagner and Lodge, 1995).

Going back 15 years, the area of diversity in the classroom was given a particularly high profile by the work of Barry Troyna (1986, 1989). His legacy helped extend the concepts of multi-culturalism, as articulated earlier by Craft (1981,1984). He moved the debate on by advocating that education be used as a tool not just to celebrate multi-culturalism – described tokenistically as 'steel bands, saris, samosas' (Massey, 1991) – but to challenge racism in the curriculum, both formally and informally. In this review, we map studies that we have selected for their relevance in building on this legacy, exploring issues of ethnicity and bilingualism/multi-lingualism, and providing practical support for teachers and trainee teachers.

Aims of the review

1. To identify and describe studies of cultural diversity in the classroom relating to primary and secondary level pupils

2. To conduct in-depth analysis of a tightly defined selection of these studies to highlight the nature of diversity in the classroom with particular reference to EAL and ethnic minority pupils

3. To highlight strategies for supporting pupils and to make tentative recommendations for policy and practice about what can help to improve attainment

Review question

What strategies can be used by initial teacher training (ITT) providers, trainees and newly qualified teachers to raise the attainment of pupils from culturally diverse backgrounds?

Methods

The following methods were used for the review:

- User involvement – consulting with a sample of trainees, headteachers and providers who are the primary audience and whose needs, in terms of knowledge on 'supporting diversity', helped inform the project
- Systematically identifying studies – through searching electronic databases, professional networks and contact sources. Exploratory searches were initially conducted using wide-ranging search terms (e.g. race or racism or racial) and schools. Following the first tranche of results, the team discussed the findings and which search terms were being most productive in identifying relevant studies (i.e. meeting the inclusion criteria), and we then developed a search strategy based on a combination of terms relevant to our research question.
- Screening abstracts and articles using pre-established inclusion and exclusion criteria
- Mapping the field by applying the keywording process of the EPPI-Centre and review-specific terms based on qualified teacher status (QTS) principles
- Identifying and describing a tightly defined selection of studies
- Writing an in-depth review of included studies, using EPPI-Reviewer, online data-extraction and quality assessment tool, and synthesising the findings
- Using quality assurance mechanisms as co-ordinated by the EPPI-Centre

Results

- Initial searches resulted in 1,795 articles potentially relevant to the review.
- Applying the inclusion/exclusion criteria, 86 studies were considered (first stage inclusion, after screening titles and abstracts).
- 50 studies were identified applying the same criteria but more strictly with fuller information on the studies (second stage inclusion, after screening full papers) – see appendices.

- Systematic mapping of these studies.
- Selection of five studies for in-depth analysis through applying narrower inclusion criteria.
- In-depth review and synthesis of five studies on the topic to date, using the EPPI-Centre data-extraction tool (EPPI-Centre, 2002) and initial analysis of studies by hand.

Summary of key findings

A key finding from our review is that there has been little research on attainment and cultural diversity in the post-1995 period. Through the systematic review process, we developed a map of the area amounting to 50 studies and selected five of these in which the authors had reported their work in a way that allowed them to be data-extracted using the EPPI-Centre criteria. These five studies concerned the attainment of children of Caribbean background (Nehaul, 1996); Asian pupils (Chawdhry, 2002); Asian/Bangladeshi pupils (Wrigley, 2000); and bilingual learners from diverse backgrounds with reference to literacy (Gravelle, 2000) and numeracy (Virani-Roper, 2000). From these, we tentatively identified a range of strategies possibly instrumental in raising academic attainment:

- raising pupil confidence and motivation
- selecting curriculum reflective of pupils' backgrounds
- ensuring effective school leadership
- involving senior management in classroom observation and teaching
- having high expectations of pupils
- incorporating team teaching
- having a whole-school commitment to raising attainment
- securing parental support in school and homework activities
- monitoring lessons with a focus on equal opportunities and anti-racist teaching
- introducing a Foundation Programme in Year 7 at secondary level to foster a
- culture of learning
- using first language and dual language texts in the Numeracy and Literacy Hours
- providing opportunities for small group work in literacy
- involving bilingual classroom assistants

Conclusions

The number of publications on raising attainment of pupils from culturally diverse backgrounds in the post-1995 period has been disappointing and far more research is required to explore the issue of under-performance among diverse groups in different subject areas, and at different levels. We identified and mapped studies which draw on research findings and which are relevant to practitioners: five of these met the criteria for in-depth analysis to help examine the issue of raising attainment. From these studies, strategies were identified at the pupil, classroom, school and parental levels.

Strengths and limitations of the review
The strategy of applying detailed systematic synthesis methods has the advantage of identifying the weight of evidence in each study and the map can be interpreted on the basis of a number of themes through running cross-tabulations and frequencies which help to explicate the nature and diversity of studies within the topic area, and with reference to QTS principles. However, the labour-intensive nature of the data-extraction tool meant that only a few studies could be analysed in depth given the timeframe of the project and therefore findings can only be tentatively drawn from such a small group. Also, the five included studies were not designed to answer a 'what works' question and therefore our conclusions and recommendations are tentative.

Implications for policy
The government should ensure that all providers actively enskill future teachers for the challenges presented by working with pupils from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and this should be a substantial core of their training and not a separate, additional, one-off module. The small sample of users we interviewed for the project amplified this point and, whilst the trainees particularly expressed a desire for recent and accessible information, such as information packs, we feel that the issues of under-performance go deeper and wider, and that practitioners need to be encouraged to engage with issues of racism. For example, Sewell (1997) notes the importance of teacher perception and peer pressure as contributing factors of under-achievement, Brown (1998) discusses the impact of discrimination on pupil attainment, and Gaine (1995) explores the role of educators in challenging hostile attitudes towards minority ethnic groups.

Implications for practice
There is a need to disseminate 'good practice' as described in some of the case studies in this review (for example, Green, 1999; Spafford and Bolleten, 1998). There is a need for on-going professional development in order to raise the attainment of both literacy and numeracy. It is important that strategies for raising attainment take into account factors signalled by writers such as Nehaul (1996) regarding pupil confidence, motivation and application to task. Teachers need to incorporate these factors into their plans and classroom management strategies to respond positively to motivate pupils (TTA, 2002). It should also be a high priority for the government to raise the attainment of minority ethnic pupils and this should be reflected in government strategies at both national and local education authority (LEA) level.

Implications for research
Our work so far tentatively suggests that, in order to raise attainment, we need a range of strategies, and solutions also should come from outside the classroom, particularly in the form of parental involvement. There also needs to be more research into attainment concerning specific groups, and we need to differentiate more carefully between the categories 'Black African', 'Black Caribbean' and 'Asian', and to develop better understanding about which groups within the umbrella term 'minority ethnic pupils' are under-achieving. This would point to more studies of particular under-achieving groups such as Black Caribbean, Bangladeshi and Pakistani pupils. Other groups that are under-performing, such as pupils of the British traveller community, also require more research, especially at secondary level

(Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), 2001a). Overall, we do not know enough about why pupils fail to attain academically: in which groups, at which levels and in which localities. Until this depth of research is conducted, we can only rely on the findings and strategies for improvement from a relatively small number of studies.