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talk2learn highlights

Inspiring leaders;
improving children's lives

Issue 14b

In case you missed it...

Recent highlights from NCSL in Dialogue, talk2learn's
online community for national education debate

Also available as a podcast

Successful practice in the primary framework

Putting fun into problem solving in order to make maths more relevant to children was top of the agenda in a recent talk2learn hotseat discussion on literacy and numeracy teaching.

Key maths issues that were flagged up included progression, accountability, using and applying mathematics and consolidation of learning. Concerns about the lack of grounding for very young children in fundamental skills and concepts were also voiced by contributors to the debate hosted by Sally Rundell, Senior Director for the Primary National Strategy and Nigel Bufton, Primary Programme Director, Mathematics. They welcomed comments and feedback as they continued to develop the resources and guidance on the Framework.

Steph Harvey, Primary Strategy Consultant (Numeracy) for Devon Education Services, said that problem solving continued to be an issue because it was seen as an 'add-on' and not at the heart of mathematics teaching.

"One of the elements we recommend is to develop the use of probing questions as a start to a lesson, opening up the enquiry rather than closing it down into right or wrong answers," she said.

Dave Woodcock, an AST in a primary school in Blackpool, described his school's 'Fun Friday', a weekly problem-solving activity that produced positive results.

"It takes many forms – huge board games where children are counters, shape hunts, measuring. The co-operation and teamwork are remarkable and children not only remember more and use higher level thinking, but love it too."

Several contributors were concerned that very young children were not being given a good grounding in maths which held them back later on. Louisa Kenzie, a year 6 primary teacher in south Cambridgeshire, felt key concepts were not getting enough attention early on, which could hamper their progress through Key Stage 2.

"It worries me that when we rush children through objectives they can end up at year 6 with a very sketchy understanding of the key ideas of the relationship between addition and subtraction, for example. I find as a year 6 teacher I have to spend time plugging the gaps. The longer units in the Primary Framework with their emphasis on making connections across areas of maths should help with this."

One contributor said he found the best way to improve standards was to raise the children's own expectations of themselves.

"So many of them don't seem to care whether they can add up, spell or read. *Lots of work on careers and futures, as well as constant reminders about how we would use the things taught in real life, seems to help.*"

On the literacy front, Helen Pearson, a Literacy Co-ordinator in Halifax, found the primary framework was encouraging children to improve their word skills, especially when ICT was the medium.

"The working wall and the whole new style of planning is working for my children and has improved the writing. The use of ICT in units such as the piano really makes the boys and other reluctant writers want to work, though one problem is ensuring that the ICT skills of staff are adequate."

Another school leader, said she and her colleagues had made writing a focus after disappointing SATs results.

"After finding that we had not produced enough level 5s, we have decided to monitor writing much more closely. We have also included all the faculty headteachers in monitoring writing and numeracy across the school. Let's hope this works!"



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