



What's Hot, What's Not 2009

What experts say about literacy issues

January 2009

In the second annual UK survey, phonics and assessment continue to be very hot topics, while reading for pleasure, literacy in the early years and parental involvement in their children's literacy should be the hottest topics in 2009

In December 2008, 35 professionals from research, policy, practice and the media participated in our online survey about a range of key literacy issues. This is the second time that this annual survey has been carried out in the UK. Participants were asked to indicate whether a certain topic was "hot" (i.e. currently a topic of debate and research) or "not hot" (i.e. not currently receiving a lot of attention). In addition, they were asked to indicate whether these topics should or should not be a focus of research and debate in 2009. A similar survey has been conducted in the U.S. since 1996. The most recent U.S. findings will be reported by Jack Cassidy in the February/March 2009 issue of *Reading Today*. Watch for a link in the Reading Today section of the IRA website at <http://www.reading.org> early in February.

While there was no "extremely hot topic" this year, *phonics* and *assessment* continue to occupy the literacy landscape in the UK by being voted the hottest topics in 2008 (see **Table 1**). Seven topics were "hot" this year: *reading difficulties*, *reading interventions*, *writing*, *speaking and listening*, *personalised learning*, *early literacy intervention* and *literacy in the early years*. *Writing*, *speaking and listening* and *reading difficulties* were topics that moved into the "hot" topics this year, with all three having been "very cold" or "cold" topics last year.

The "not hot" topics

The coldest topics this year are *reading motivation*, *adolescent literacy*, *popular culture and literacy*, *literacy to support health and well-being*, and *literacy to support participation in society*. Two of these topics are remarkably colder than they were last year. *Adolescent literacy* and *popular culture and literacy* changed from a "hot" topic last year to a "very cold" this year. *Reading motivation* also cooled compared to last year when it was seen only as a "cold" topic. Our respondents believed that all five topics should be hot in 2009.

The shift in adolescent literacy is also reflected in one comment about literacy in secondary schools, which is related to our concept of adolescent literacy. One

respondent said that: *It seems to be totally ignored and the incorrect assumption is made that kids finishing secondary school can definitely read and write properly. Our experience of current students and recent school-leavers clearly shows that this isn't the case.*

What should (not) be hot in 2009

Reading for pleasure, literacy in the early years and parental involvement in their children's literacy are the three topics that should be the hottest in 2009. Respondents indicated that both *literacy in the early years* and *parental involvement in their children's literacy* should be hotter this year than they were last year. That these topics should be the hottest in 2009 is encouraging for the National Literacy Trust, as these topics are at the core of our work.

Apart from *phonics* and *political / policy influences on literacy*, all other topics in the survey should receive more attention in 2009. Of these, *comprehension, reading difficulties, reading motivation, writing, speaking and listening, adult literacy, English as an additional language, early interventions* (i.e. preventative measures in the early years, such as Sure Start), *family literacy* (formal joint teaching approaches), *literacy to support participation in society, initial teacher training and professional staff development* should be very hot topics in 2009 and should therefore receive considerable more attention than they currently do. Similar to last year's survey, *political / policy influences in literacy* was the only topic that should not be hot in 2009.

Background to the survey

This survey has been conducted in the U.S. each year since 1996. The original data collection method in the U.S. is by telephone interviews. For our second annual survey we decided to change our data collection. Instead of telephone interviews we opted for an online survey. This was due to staff time limitations and other resource issues. Emails inviting respondents to take part in the survey by following a link were sent out at the end of November 2008. A follow-up email with a repeat invitation was sent out to those who had not responded by 10 December.

In line with the original methodology, the survey explains what we mean by "hot" and "not hot", and explains that the respondents' ratings do not necessarily reflect their personal interest in a given topic. Instead, their ratings should refer to the level of debate and research a topic currently receives. The respondents were then asked to indicate for each issue, of which there were 32, whether they thought it was currently "hot" or currently "not hot". Respondents were also asked to indicate whether each of the issues "should be hot" or "should not be hot" in 2009. Respondents were also given opportunity to leave comments.

The survey was live for two weeks until 15th Dec. In line with last year's survey, 35 respondents from research, policy, practice and media took part. Our respondents were chosen because of their national or international knowledge of literacy.

Table 1: What's hot what's not 2009

	What's Hot	What's Not	Should Be hot	Should Not Be Hot
Comprehension (-)		■	■■	
Phonics (-)	■■			
Struggling and gifted readers		■	■	
Reading difficulties (+)	■		■■	
Reading interventions	■		■	
Reading for pleasure		■	■■■	
Reading motivation		■■	■■	
Wider aspects of reading		■	■	
Writing (+)	■		■■	
Speaking and listening (+)	■		■■	
Assessment (-)	■■		■	
Personalised learning	■		■	
Gender issues in literacy (-)		■	■	
Adolescent literacy (-)		■■	■	
Adult literacy		■	■■	
English as an additional language		■	■■	
Literacy support for ethnic groups		■	■	
Early interventions (-)	■		■■	
Literacy in the early years	■		■■■	
Parental involvement	■		■■■	
Family literacy		■	■■	
Reading volunteers/ buddies		■	■	
New literacies (-)		■	■	
Popular culture and literacy (-)		■■	■	
Social cohesion (*)		■	■	
Literacy for health and well-being (*)		■■	■	
Literacy for participation in society (*)		■■	■■	
Political / policy influences (-)		■		■
Support for LA literacy strategies (*)		■	■	
Initial teacher training		■	■■	
Professional staff development (+)		■	■■	

Key

- indicates that more than 50% of respondents were in agreement (“hot” or “not hot”)
- indicate that at least 75% of respondents were in agreement (“very hot” or “very cold”)
- indicate that at least 90% of respondents were in agreement (“extremely hot” or “extremely cold”)
- (+) indicates that the topic was hotter for 2009 than 2008
- (-) indicates that the topic was colder for 2009 than 2008
- (*) indicates that the topic was new for 2009

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