

Teaching and Learning Research Programme

Mapping the Ripples: a taster

An evaluation report of research
capacity building through TLRP

TLRP

www.tlrp.org



Contents

Foreword	3
Introduction	4
Section 6. Evaluation of Capacity Building by TLRP Projects	5
Interpersonal support	6
Engagement with multiple communities of practice	7
Multidimensional model of expertise	8
Balance between project outputs and researcher professional development	9
Access and encouragement to attend off-the-job training	11
Ongoing commitment to researchers' futures beyond the completion of the project	12

Foreword

This pamphlet offers a tantalising glimpse inside a significant empirical evaluation of TLRP's capacity building efforts. It presents the Executive Summary of the whole report, but then just one, illustrative section – section 6. The full report from Zoe Fowler and Richard Procter, both of whom worked as researchers on major TLRP projects, is available on-line.

Educational research continues to face major challenges, but tremendous efforts have been made in recent years and significant progress has undoubtedly been achieved. TLRP has tried to play a constructive part in this and has, among other things, tried to encourage reflexivity as a means towards collaborative self-development.

The selection of Fowler and Procter's report which is printed here is arresting. It shows how social practices developed within research projects can facilitate or constrain the development of career researchers. Using terminology derived from research on learning in workplaces, it analyses how projects can develop 'expansive' or 'restrictive' social practices. It has much to say therefore to research staff and to research managers.

Other parts of the full report apply a similar analysis to institutions and to the TLRP itself. Further, the concept of 'capacity building' is itself challenged.

Why not take a look at: www.tlrp.org/mappingtheripples

Andrew Pollard, Director, TLRP
July 2008

Fowler, Z. and Procter, R. (2008)
Mapping the Ripples: a taster.
A TLRP occasional paper.
London: TLRP,
ISBN: 9780854738359

Mapping the Ripples

Executive Summary

Demographic data show that 70% of staff in Education are aged over 45, with many senior academics nearing retirement. There is a relative dearth of young, skilled researchers of UK nationality. This has consequences for the future of the field of Educational research across the UK, with concerns of the sustainability of the field to produce high quality research. Building research capacity within Educational research is complex. Many educational researchers have had previous careers in practice or policy, only a minority of researchers have progressed directly through doctoral study to research careers. While this diversity is a strength of the field, it also has repercussions for considering the most effective research capacity building strategies for this population.

The Economic and Social Research Council's (ESRC) Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP) represents the largest research initiative in the UK. The Programme started work in 2000, and one of its principle purposes was to enhance research capacity in Education. This report presents an evaluation of the TLRP's capacity building strategy in relation to the experiences of research staff and project directors.

Evidence from our surveys show that the TLRP has had a significant impact upon the professional development of Educational researchers working on TLRP research projects. The Programme was valued by researchers for being an inclusive, approachable and supportive organisation. Involvement with the TLRP has influenced researchers' ways of doing research, contributed positively to individuals' professional development, provided significant training opportunities, and created and developed educational research networks which would not have otherwise existed. Researchers generally feel that their involvement with the TLRP will benefit their future career.

The TLRP set up a range of capacity building 'structures'. These include regular conferences, a Research Capacity Building Network (RCBN) which provided formal learning opportunities and workshops for researchers, the recent development of on-line capacity building resources, and the Meeting of Minds Research Fellowship. Overall, these were very positively evaluated by researchers and were seen to be formative to the development of their research capacity. The conference was particularly

favourably evaluated and was seen by many to be a transformative experience within their research career.

Individual research projects were expected to provide capacity building opportunities to research staff and to explicitly identify these within their annual and end of project reports. Researchers' evaluations of individual projects were varied. The most positive evaluations tended to identify features similar to those of 'expansive workplaces'. Specifically, researchers valued having access to multiple communities of practice and having access (and encouragement to attend) 'off the job' training. Research staff felt most valued within projects which maintained multidimensional models of expertise across the research team, rather than those which were perceived as having rigid hierarchies.

The evaluation of institutions' commitment to and provision of capacity building opportunities was varied. While some institutions exemplified good practice through a range of provision, training and both professional and personal support, other institutions had little interest or commitment to the professional development of their research staff. In some cases the lack of effective communication between the institution and the TLRP and ESRC as the funder created problems which negatively impacted researchers' capacity building.

The researchers who had the most positive experiences of engaging with the TLRP capacity building structures and gained the most value from these had key people who acted as catalysts within their capacity building. These key people provided a combination of gate-keeping which provided access to relevant networks, mentoring and professional advice. For some researchers, key people had a transformative effect upon their careers and/or their professional identity as a researcher. The value of this catalysis would benefit from future research. Ways to strategise for this process should be considered in future funding programmes.

The diversity of researchers' backgrounds and previous professional lives suggests that a diversity of approaches to research capacity building will be necessary in the future. As with previous research in this area, we strongly agree that capacity building strategies in the area of Educational research cannot assume a 'one size fits all' provision.

Mapping the Ripples: a taster

Section 6. Evaluation of Capacity Building by TLRP Projects

All TLRP projects were expected to detail the capacity building opportunities that had been provided to their research staff in the pro forma that they completed annually and at the end of the project. Generally researchers were positive about their experiences of working on TLRP associated research projects, although not all research teams operated in the same way.

Interviewees who most valued their research projects touched on most of the elements of an ‘expansive’ workplace in their description of the project and its working practices. For example, one interviewee had a long history of contract research posts in Educational research but felt that her TLRP project far exceeded the experiences she had had on other research projects. She is enthusiastic about research work: “I’ve loved that variety and the skills that you pick up along the way”. Principal investigators on these research projects have been key influences upon her career and she considers that the TLRP project has had

the greatest influence amongst these. Within the survey, this interviewee had commented:

A very supportive and collaborative PI and other research colleagues made this project one of the best experiences of my research career to date. I felt valued throughout the project and the cooperative and collaborative approach of the research team was invaluable both emotionally and professionally. This was a very democratic project which was the most collaborative of my research career. I enjoyed tremendous support from the PI and the rest of the project team and my fellow researchers in particular. The project enhanced my research skills considerably.

In interview, she talked about learning a great deal from both the PI and the project director, particularly in relation to project management. The project was non-hierarchical and the interviewee particularly valued the “democratic nature” of the project which provided many learning opportunities and chances to share expertise through regular fortnightly meetings. Because she felt valued within the research team, she felt that she had the autonomy to decide which capacity building events to attend.

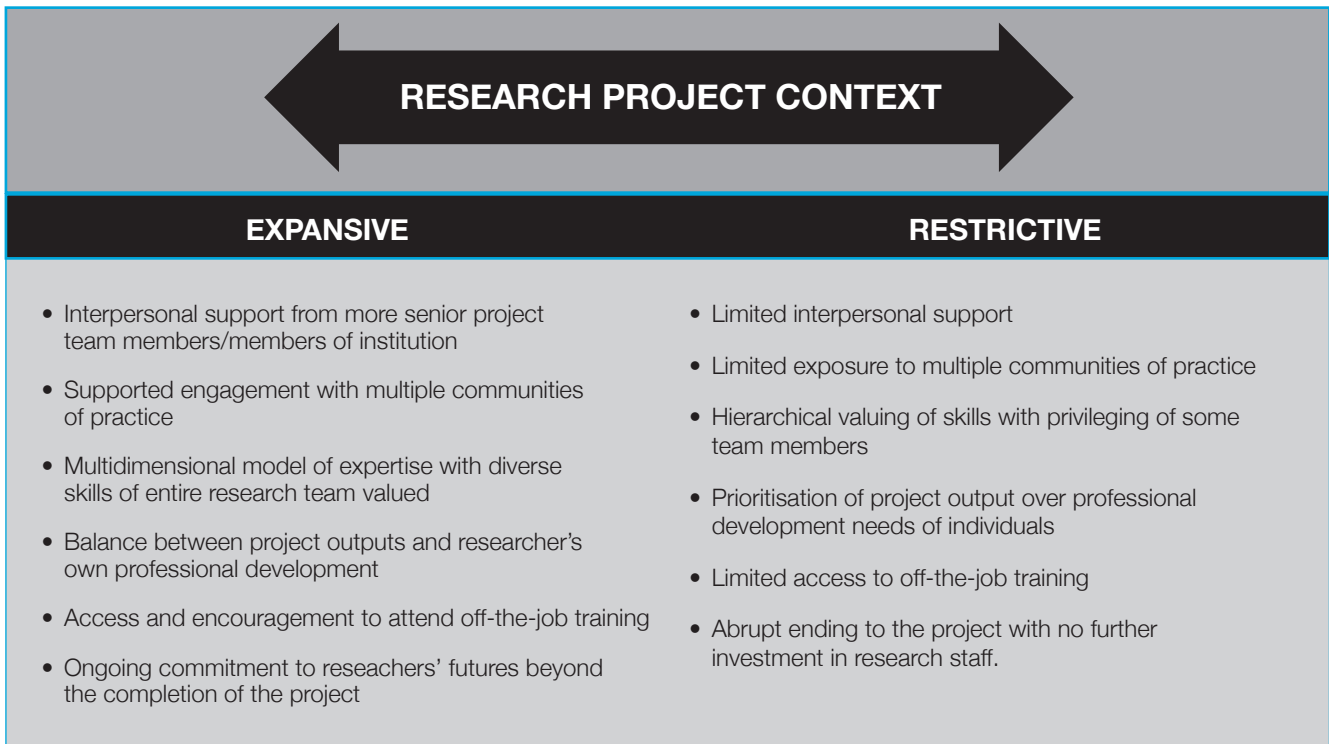


Figure 5: Expansive-restrictive continuum of research project working practices

This case study fits closely with many of the aspects of an expansive workplace (Evans et al, 2006): the research team fostered “an expansive view of expertise [which] entails the creation of environments which allow for substantial horizontal, cross-boundary activity, dialogue and problem solving” (Fuller and Unwin, 2004: 136), knowledge was shared and mutually created, and the researcher’s participation within the project meant that she felt that she could elect to participate in multiple communities of practice through accessing a range of training opportunities. The researcher related the democratic nature of her research team directly to the influence of the TLRP: *“I don’t feel divorced from the funder at all, and the funder has a facilitating touch”*. Evans et al’s expansive-restrictive workplace continuum (see, Evans et al, 2006: 34) informed the development of the survey tool, with particular reference to Section B of the survey which explored project working practices. In turn the survey responses allowed us to reflect, refine, and build upon the restrictive-expansive workplace continuum within the context of Educational research projects (see figure 5). Our intention was to elicit examples of good practice from the survey and interview data. Each of the categories in the expansive column were identified by researchers as central to their positive experiences of capacity building, and each will be discussed below.

Interpersonal support

Interpersonal support from members within the project team and/or institution facilitated opportunities to engage with capacity building structures. These relationships also provided researchers with career guidance, professional development advice, and personal support. A recurring theme across the researcher dataset, in relation to both positive and negative evaluations, was the role of key people within the team and their interactions with the researcher.

Capacity building could be successfully facilitated by the role of a key person providing face-to-face support and guidance. The importance of this catalyst role are explored in more detail later in the full report, but a few examples from the data demonstrate its recurrence as a theme. The previous section provided a case study of a researcher who felt that she had received exemplary interpersonal support from her PI, and that this had contributed to her sense that the project was one of the best experiences of her research career. In contrast, the following case studies demonstrate how the absence or loss of support from key individuals can detract from the capacity building

of the researcher. One practitioner researcher had previously worked on several research projects, but at the time of our conversation lacked confidence in the extent of her own research skills. At the start of her research project, she had been allocated a research champion within her institution who had acted as a gatekeeper into the institutional research base and the research sites outside of the practitioner researcher’s own organisation. However, early within the project this “research champion” moved to a different institution, and the interviewee felt that this had had a detrimental effect upon her own research career: she no longer had the opportunity to access training opportunities and the visibility of her research within her own institution was reduced.

Another career researcher became increasingly angry during the course of the interview in relation to her experiences of working with the project PI. This PI had been hierarchical and dictatorial in management style: the interviewee repeatedly qualified that she personally liked him, but found him inflexible and rule-bound to work with. At the end of our conversation, this interviewee explained: *“the reason why I applied for this job [her current position outside of Educational research] actually, and the only reason that I saw the advert, was because I was so angry about the way that I was being treated that I looked for another job.”* In this instance, the final straw was the realisation that the PI had no long term interest in her future after a period during which the interviewee had become aware that she had lost any autonomy within the project, that she was being told what to do and what to write, and that the project had no interest in the substantive and methodological avenues that she wanted to pursue. Both the practitioner researcher and career researcher of these two case studies are no longer working within Educational research, although both said that had circumstances been different they would have been interested in pursuing this career.

Engagement with multiple communities of practice

Researchers valued opportunities to engage with multiple communities of practice, and this harmonised with project directors’ discussions of the value of this engagement. Through their involvement with the TLRP, many researchers felt part of a wider community of Educational researchers: they felt “part of a bigger thing” (survey response B2) and related this to their developing identity as a researcher:

"I have developed as a researcher on the project but also enjoyed the networking and social opportunities through TLRP that provide a great support and give huge credibility to the research and to developing as a researcher" (Survey response B2).

While the processes of engaging with multiple communities was seen by some to be "very hard work", it was valued by many:

I have had the great fortune of working with some of the leading researchers in the field, have made new contacts and carried out some inter project work. So I have learnt from more experienced colleagues on other TLRP projects". (Survey response B2)

Events such as TLRP conferences, RCBN courses, Thematic Seminar Series and thematic groups provided opportunities for researchers to engage with multiple communities within the TLRP, and the availability of funding to attend national and international conferences and wider training events also promoted engagement with multiple communities of practice beyond the projects. Figure 6 shows how the majority of researchers felt that their involvement with the TLRP had provided them with access to a network of researchers who they would not otherwise encountered, despite the fact that on average these researchers had been active in this field for seven years.

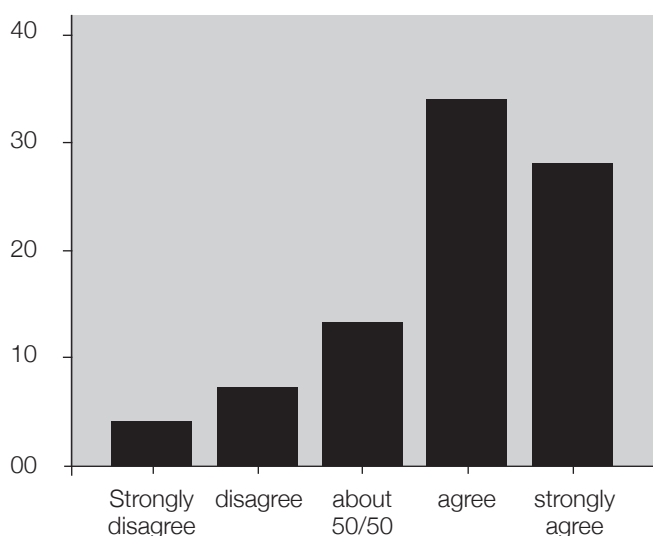


Figure 6: Being involved with the TLRP has provided me with access to a network of researchers who I would not otherwise have encountered (TLRP Researcher Survey question Ej) (n=92)

The value that researchers attached to networking evidences the value of engagement with inter-institutional, inter-project communities as a key element of capacity building. We would argue that alongside skills-building, another important aspect of capacity building is feeling part of a community or network. Rees et al (2007: 765) identify opportunities to interact "with professional colleagues both within and outside of the workplace" as one of the most important aspects of capacity building. This is also recognised as an important aspect by researchers on TLRP projects: 60% of the respondents felt an affinity with other TLRP researchers and this affinity was described in relation to three key attributes:

1. A shared affinity of social values. This was articulated in relation to the value of opportunities to meet other researchers who were working in similar jobs and who shared similar commitments to and passions for Educational research. This linked to earlier demographic observations on similarities existing across the field more in relation to political and ideological commitments, rather than in terms of backgrounds and career paths. Researchers valued the opportunity to interact with 'like-minded' people.
2. An intellectual affinity. For many researchers, being part of the TLRP provided them with access to larger groups which could provide the opportunity to gain knowledge and insight into current research and to develop a network which would act as a professional resource. This resource, based on association and meetings through TLRP events, was anticipated to have longer-term benefits beyond the end of individual projects. This emerging affinity linked to some project directors' aims of helping to create "a critical research culture", or "a growth in the collective capacity of the research community."
3. A pragmatic affinity. Researchers valued being part of a community of people who faced similar working conditions and potential pitfalls, and who face similar challenges in the future. Researchers cited instances of reflecting upon their career, or engaging with their institution over fixed term contracts as outcomes from this 'affinity'. The major problem for many researchers, which had direct implications for their level of commitment to the field and their professional development, related to working conditions for contract and early career researchers. The development of a pragmatic affinity with other

researchers enabled some researchers to engage more effectively with the shortcomings of their employment status.

Generally researchers felt included within the broader TLRP community, and valued their participation in this for the reasons given above. Perceptions of inclusion within HE institutions were more varied with some researchers feeling part of a community within their institution or department, while others felt that they lacked institutional visibility: one researcher was not even given a pigeon hole for mail and office staff remained distant: *"It was difficult: you couldn't really feel full staff membership in that setting."* This researcher felt neither valued by nor visible within the institution. When the project came to an end she received no support in relation to finding new contracts: *"I would have liked to have been asked"*.

Engagement with multiple communities of practice was valued by both research staff and project directors. The sustainability of these networks post-TLRP might be an area worthy of future research and some researchers felt that their access to these communities was not sustained beyond their project. For example, only 15% of the overall population of TLRP researchers attended the 2007 BERA conference.

Multidimensional model of expertise

Some of the TLRP research projects operated around a flattened inclusive management structure, which generated a perceived equity of value across the team, creating the sense that each person's contribution to the research process had been valued. Researchers who had been involved in this kind of a structure frequently spoke highly about their experiences, valuing the perception of collaboration and cooperation across their research teams, and linking this to their own professional development as a researcher. 80% of project directors thought that it was very important to a 'good' research project that research staff feel that their contributions are valued. Researchers who had worked within more rigidly hierarchical teams often considered themselves to have been poorly managed. Some researchers spoke of doing the *"donkey work"*, being at the *"bottom of the work hierarchy"*, feeling marginalised and having a lack of status within the project team. Within some projects this contributed to a perceived two tier project structure, encapsulated, perhaps, by Reay's (2000) metaphor of senior academics doing the "head work" while more junior colleagues did the "leg work". This polarisation might have a very negative

impact upon researchers' capacity building. One researcher described how her project had separate meetings for project directors, followed by whole team meetings. She felt that this meant she was exposed to only a limited perspective of what was happening within the project. In turn, this would limit her experiences of project management. Rather than a gradual progression towards taking on more senior academic positions, this suggests a rift emerging between researchers and more senior colleagues in the field. This could be described as two communities of practice coexisting within the research team with little space for the researchers to participate with the more senior academics.

The following case study details some of the consequences of a particularly hierarchical team. This interviewee entered educational research following a long, and relatively senior career, within Further Education. She was passionate about the possibilities of Educational research:

"I was very strongly committed to the idea that research should be part of the professional practice of teachers in Further Education: it ties in with arguments about professionalism. I thought that teachers in FE should be able to do it, should have control of it, and that in the long run the only way you really get any improvements in what goes on in practice is through people who are willing to undertake those practices."

The researcher was disappointed that neither research project team members nor members of her FE institution seemed to be committed to these beliefs. It is relevant that in interview this person struggled to identify any people who might have provided a key influence on her career: when I asked this question she paused for a significant amount of time before, reluctantly it seemed, identifying her PhD supervisor because he was "incredibly conscientious". The interviewee then went on to explain that individuals have not been particularly formative in the development of her identity as a researcher, identifying instead key experiences and communities of practice. Describing the research project, this interviewee was critical of her project's pedagogic approach, which was "pretty primitive", and towards the end of the interview she reflected that had the project director been more interested in the interviewee's professional development she would have attended more workshops, courses and events provided by the TLRP.

The research team's working practices and the lack of opportunity for professional development of more junior researchers was linked to the working practices and "machismo" of the host institution: *"The research culture here is quite atomised – maybe atomised isn't quite the right word – it's quite dispersed. [...] When you get a lot of professors together, all with their own territories to defend, it tends to crowd out*

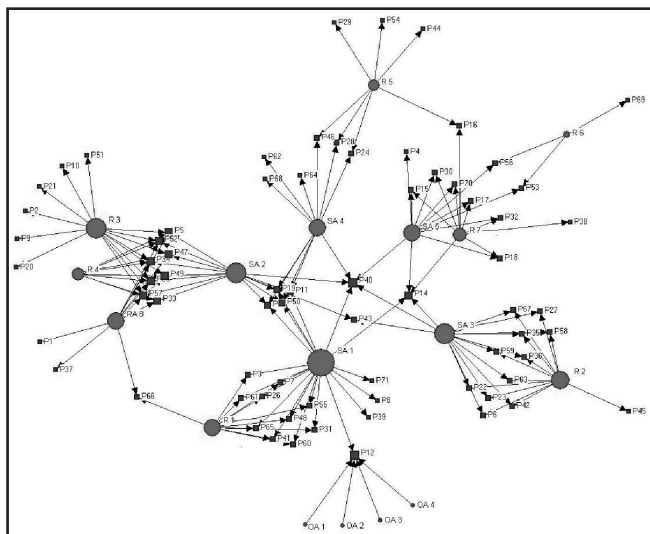


Figure 7: Co-authorship network diagram for project with atomised publications policy

many other discourses". The hierarchies in place within both the research team and the institution, the lack of opportunities for reflective discourse within team meetings, and the lack of commitment to the professional development of research staff were all significant factors within this interviewee's critique of her research project. The outcomes are twofold: on the one hand, the researcher regrets that she did not have many opportunities to build research capacity through her involvement in the TLRP research project; on the other hand, she has realised that she needs to conform to this world: *"I wouldn't say that I've bought into the values of Educational Research, but I have come to terms with them and I have accepted them."* She does not anticipate a long future career in Educational Research.

We triangulated this researcher's survey responses, interview transcript, and the co-authorship networking diagram from the project outputs and we were struck by how the researcher's perception of an 'atomised' culture was visually represented by the project's publications. As is discussed in detail in Appendix 1 of the full report, project publications and outputs were stored on TLRP's D Space. This data was queried so that the list of

papers and authors for any project could be found, and this information was then used to construct a co-authorship network for that project. This researcher's project is depicted in Figure 7. The circles represent the members of a research project team; the larger circles indicate the more connected members of the team and the smaller circles represent the less connected members. SA is used to denote directors and PIs, R for the researchers, and OA is used for authors who were not members of the project. The boxes are publications that have arisen from the project. The lines radiating from each publication link to each author named on the publication. This project (figure 7) shows that the constellations of co-authorships are limited to working relationships between individual senior academics and the researchers working closely with them: this is suggestive of the project team being formed of distinct 'tribes' (Becher and Trowler, 2001).

Other diagrams, some of which are included later in this paper, show much greater levels of collaboration across the entire research team, this diagram hints at a lack of collaboration across the team. While this is not to question the value of the project outputs, it suggests that fewer opportunities existed for the individual researchers to develop their capacity than would have been possible in a more inclusive team. Researchers welcomed the opportunities to access expertise from across their research team; this limited association of researchers to one or two team members suggests a more restricted experience. Projects which supported multidimensional models of expertise were valued by many researchers, and criticisms were made about projects which had rigid hierarchies. This was seen to restrict researcher's opportunities to engage fully with their research project.

Balance between project outputs and researcher professional development

The need for a balance between the outputs from the research project and the individual's longer term professional development was returned to repeatedly across the researcher dataset. Annual reports also highlighted a potential tension between project outputs and individual researchers' capacity. This is illustrated, for example, in the following quote from a research project: "A number of the researchers have been involved from the very early stages of the project and attended a variety of events at the beginning. Consequently, there is less need for them to attend generic training events, but they are made aware of and encouraged to participate in local and national training events that are more focused." Here

the wording suggests that training has been focused upon the needs of the project, and this was the case for several projects. This might be a consequence of the pro forma where research capacity building has, perhaps, been understood in relation to ensuring high quality outputs from the project in terms of project findings, rather than in terms of outputs relating to researchers' longer term professional development.

Following the Concordat on Contract Research Staff Career Management (1996) BERA published a charter detailing good practice in the employment of contract researchers (Freedman et al, 2001). This charter focuses extensively upon the actual nature of the contract and working conditions of the research and the implications that this has for the field of Educational research. They highlight project teams' responsibilities towards the professional development of the research staff – 'research contracts should make explicit that what is being financially supported is not only the research output but also the fostering and development of high quality transferable research skills.' The BERA charter also recommends that research staff should receive 1/5 of their time for staff development activities relating to their own professional development. This was the case for a small number of TLRP researchers, but in conversation many researchers did not perceive this to be a viable option.

The tension between projects' research outputs and progressing individuals' professional development is illustrated particularly well by case studies relating to project's publication strategies. This issue recurred across the researcher sample, both through open-ended sections of the survey and within interview conversations. It was not a recurring issue in relation to the project directors' survey. Some researchers spoke very positively about their project's publications strategy, others were more critical. Not all projects have explicit publications strategies. Researchers welcomed publications strategies which encouraged collaborative writing and which provided opportunities for researchers to be included in the list of authors . These strategies enabled researchers to benefit from the collaborative processes of co-authoring publications as a capacity building activity in its own right. However, there was also a recognition that researchers needed to generate sole-authored publications as a means of enhancing their future employability: that is, in particular, to become eligible for future entry into the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). Therefore, publications represent an example of

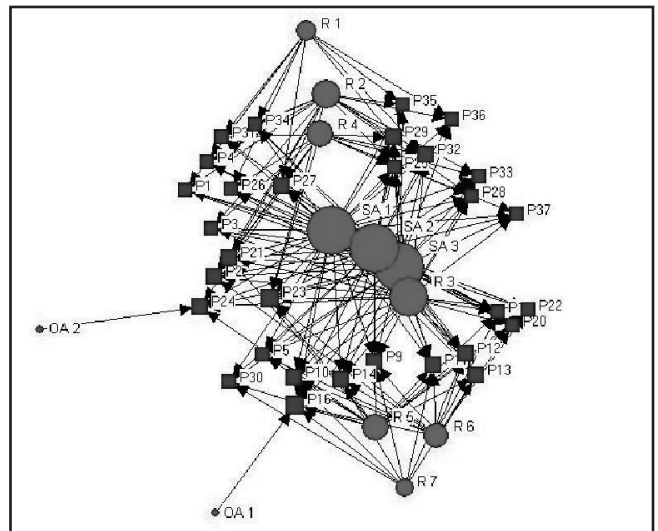


Figure 8: Co-authorship network diagram for project with restrictive publications policy

practical capacity building, in relation to the project's collaborative working practices, and symbolic capacity building, in terms of building a publications 'capital' which would have value in relation to future employment opportunities. Some researchers also wanted to specialise within an area related to the project and to develop their own papers in relation to this, but recognised that this might be beyond the focus of the research project.

Symbolically, some interviewees commented that a publications strategy which put all researchers' names onto the papers emerging from the project was seen as a means of visibly demonstrating the value of "doing

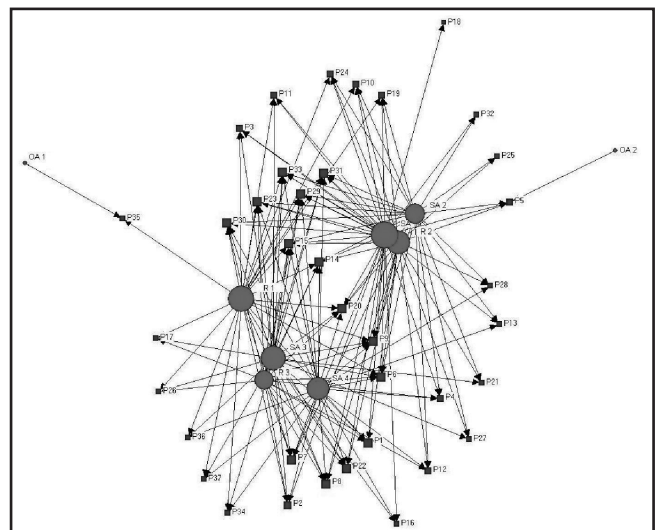


Figure 9: Co-authorship network diagram for project with expansive publications policy

the research” as well as writing the outputs. This was particularly pertinent in relation to two respondents who had taken, or were about to take, periods of maternity leave from a project at the time that outputs were being written. One respondent benefitted from her project’s publication strategy: although she was on leave, her name was included on all publications. The other respondent expressed frustration and concern that her involvement in the research was about to be rendered invisible as she would be absent from the project at the point of writing up findings.

One interviewee concentrated upon her frustrations with her project’s publications strategy. This had been agreed at the start of the project by the project directors, but this researcher felt that the decision to involve all team members’ names on all project outputs prevented her from developing her own visibility and reduced her chance of future employment. This researcher was keen to develop expertise on a certain area linked to the project findings, and she wanted the opportunity to sole author papers linking to this: while she wanted to draw on project data, she was willing to write these papers within her own time. She felt that the rigid publications strategy prevented her from doing this. She had had discussions with the project director and felt that she had been forbidden from developing her own research identity alongside the project. Figure 8 shows the co-authorship networking of this project and the diagram is suggestive of a very constrained publications policy. Symbolically, the listing of all authors on all publications meant that all team members became identical in relation to project outputs: no space is available for individual researchers or smaller subgroups of colleagues to visibly develop their own expertise or specialism. We have described this adherence to a publications policy as ‘restrictive’ as it seems to restrict all researchers to the shared outputs of the project and does not allow them the freedom to publish beyond this. A further possible consequence of this type of publications strategy is the assumption that all researchers’ contributions are equivalent, several researchers were critical of the lack of meritocracy in naming all contributors as authors on a paper when the level of contribution could vary significantly.

Figure 8 presents a project within which the publications strategy appears to restrict the potential for individual researchers to develop their own autonomy. Figure 7 presents a project which suggests a polarisation across

the research team, and a lack of networking between senior academics, with consequences for the capacity building of individual researchers. Neither project seems to be ideal, although both might be seen to also have good points. Figure 7 enables researchers to develop their own publications profiles, Figure 8 suggests that the research team worked collaboratively and shared expertise. Figure 9 can be seen, perhaps, to merge the best qualities of both of these. In this project, certain central project outputs were written collaboratively across the whole research team and were published using all team members’ names. Alongside this, opportunities were provided for researchers to develop their own specialisms and to publish papers relating to these in their own names. In her interview, one researcher from this project spoke very positively about the capacity building opportunities this approach provided her. We refer to this policy as an ‘expansive’ publications strategy, as it acknowledges the contribution of all team members on central outputs, but also enables researchers to expand beyond this central dissemination to develop their own publications profile in relation to the project’s outputs.

Access and encouragement to attend off-the-job training

The TLRP provided off-the-job training through the RCBN. Across the TLRP researcher sample, some researchers also had opportunities to attend training within their institutions, through the ESRC, and through bespoke courses bought by their projects. One of the key factors in researchers’ engagement with these opportunities was the promotion of these opportunities to the researcher by more senior team members. While some project directors supported capacity building of their research staff through the use of both on-the-job and off-the-job training, this was not always the case. One experienced researcher began her interview conversation by reflecting that she felt quite happy about the level of professional development she had accessed through her TLRP project, but as she scrutinised this more closely she realised that this had actually been quite constrained, both through the project demands upon her time and by the lack of prioritisation of her training by other team members. She felt that a more junior researcher’s professional development was prioritised over her own opportunities: *“I wanted [the other researcher] to have all the professional development opportunities but, if I am being honest, I would have liked some too.”* Although she heard about available opportunities, these were never encouraged by the senior members of her project

team due to concerns over funding and workload: *"I did feel slightly negative about that."* She perceived wider consequences in not attending courses within her host institution: she did not have the opportunity to become part of these networks, and this disadvantaged her when it came to her looking for a new job. Because she had not attended many courses, she was not able to increase her visibility in the field. *"I could possibly have been more assertive about getting myself onto staff development."* She thinks that maybe there should have been a greater allowance of staff development time for her in the project.

Our survey evidence shows that researchers placed a similar level of satisfaction with the different working practices of their project. There were moderate correlations between all the variables and exploratory factor analysis revealed no distinct underlying explanatory dimensions. Researchers were broadly satisfied with their opportunities to engage with academic activities beyond the immediate needs of their project and researchers identified RCBN and other training courses as key factors which had impacted upon their perceived improvements in research skills. Project directors were asked to grade a similar range of working practices in relation to their importance to a 'well-managed research project'. Their responses showed that opportunities to engage with academic activities beyond the immediate needs of the project were the least valued: this was the only statement considered to be "unimportant". These senior academics saw the support and development of researchers through the use of on-the-job training or situated learning thus,

"most important way is by doing the research work – well and efficiently. Supporting the staff to do this (dealing with social and emotional as well as cognitive issues) is essential. Other wider opportunities relate to this only secondarily".

For other senior academics the wider opportunities were to be used in conjunction with "Situated learning within the team. Formal learning opportunities offered by RCBN, host Institutions, and other specialist centres". The project directors appear to be tending towards a social practices model of capacity building where it is assumed that the individuals' capacity can best be developed through being involved in the day-to-day practices of research rather than through off-the-job training. The researcher sample, in contrast, see similar worth in opportunities to engage with learning activities beyond the confines of their project.

Evans et al (2006) identify value in workers having access to 'off the job' training and stress the importance of the combined value of learning informally through workplace practices and experiencing more formal learning through external training opportunities. Evans et al (2006: 30) acknowledge the value of recognising the workplace as an important site of learning, but stress; ... if conceiving all learning as situated has the effect of confining workers to a particular workplace, on the grounds that (all) learning is highly context-dependent, their opportunity to gain new perspectives, to cross boundaries, and to participate in other communities of practice will be denied.

It is important that opportunities for learning off-the-job are available alongside project working practices as a means of building researcher capacity. Off-the-job training provides access to skills and opportunities that might be useful to one's professional and career development beyond the confines of the immediate project, facilitates networking with other people within the field, and enhances confidence in one's own ability, as was demonstrated in the case study in section 5.

Ongoing commitment to researchers' futures beyond the completion of the project

Evans et al (2006) identify the importance of a gradual induction to working practices as a key component of the expansive workplace. This did not emerge as a valuable factor to researchers when interviewed about their research projects. In contrast, the processes through which the researchers' work on the project was concluded were included in many evaluations.

A key aspect of feeling part of the TLRP seemed to relate to the welcome that researchers received when they joined the programme and, similarly, one researcher who felt valued and recognised by the TLRP related this also to the sense that her affiliation with the Programme would continue beyond the end of her research project: *"it was made very clear at the last TLRP conference that anyone who has been involved with the TLRP is welcome to come back: it doesn't close its doors. I liked that and I liked hearing that"*. However, this ongoing commitment wasn't one which all researchers felt; the practitioner researcher who comments in the next section on the TLRP conference felt that both her project and the TLRP had ceased to have an interest in him/her when the project came to an end: *"I don't see it as TLRP's responsibility to make sure that I have been looked after post-project [...] I'm a grown-up, I should be able to not feel hurt that I'm not being valued more*

or being used more etc.” In this instance, this researcher no longer felt part of any research networks and had, therefore, ceased doing any further research alongside her practice. Another researcher did not experience the TLRP’s ‘open door’ policy: when, due to problems, she left the project before its completion and did not hear from the TLRP again. She observed that she would have liked to have heard from the Programme or for the TLRP to have shown an interest in her reasons for leaving.

Researchers who felt undervalued in their work on the project team often felt a lack of ownership and influence. In many cases this linked to a sense of expendability to the project, these researchers saw themselves to be *“hired guns”, “interchangeable economic units”, “replaceable at the end of contract”* [open-ended survey responses]. In one interview, a researcher spoke with real emotion about how her involvement with the project abruptly ceased at the end of her project and, although she had offered to continue contributing to the development and dissemination of findings in her own time, the project team ceased communicating with her and no longer had any interest in her observations. This had badly affected her confidence in applying for new research positions.

This researcher was not alone in realising that her research project/research team had no ongoing interest in her career, that she had had a primarily instrumental role within the project. Another researcher experienced a period of unemployment at the end of her TLRP project and related this, in interview, to the lack of support received from the project directors: *“I regret – maybe I should have started sooner to look for work, but I didn’t feel very supported at the end”*. This contrasts with the feeling that some researchers had of an ongoing association with TLRP beyond their terms of contract, and the ongoing relationship that many researchers had with key people and mentors. In relation to these evaluations, there might be benefits to research projects having explicit guidance on how to seek to facilitate opportunities or to engage with researchers towards the end of their contracts. Given that 67% of the TLRP researcher sample were working on fixed term contracts, this seems particularly pertinent to the capacity building of the field of Educational research.

Many researchers commented on their desire to, or their experience of, having an ongoing association with the project beyond the end of their contract. Frequently,

researchers wanted to have an ongoing interest in a project to which they had invested considerable energy and commitment over a long period of time. Some researchers felt that this was, or would be, possible. Other researchers experienced a clear cut-off from the research project when their contracts came to an end. Another interviewed researcher spoke about much more explicit tensions where she had sought to publish papers based on project data following her reemployment elsewhere and was told, explicitly, that she did not have permission to do this. This researcher spoke about her aim to carry out separate research in this area to elicit similar data so that this can inform the paper that the researcher has already written.

References

Becher, T. and Trowler, P. (2001) *Academic Tribes and Territories. Intellectual enquiry and the culture of disciplines.* (2nd ed.) OUP: Buckingham CVCP (1996)

A Concordat to provide a framework for the career management of contract research staff in universities and colleges. London: Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals of the Universities of the United Kingdom and the Office of Science and Technology. Accessed 05 June 2008 at www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/activities/RCI/downloads/rciconcordat.pdf

Evans, K., Hodkinson, P., Rainbird, H. and Unwin, L. (2006) *Improving Workplace Learning.* London: Routledge

Freedman, E., Patrick, H., Somekh, B., McIntyre, D. and Wikeley, F. (2001) *The BERA Charter for Good Practice in the Employment of Contract Researchers.* Southwell: BERA

Fuller, A. and Unwin, L. (2004) 'Expansive learning environments. Integrating organisational and personal development' in *Workplace Learning in Context.* Rainbird, H., Fuller, A. and Munro, A. (Eds) pp. 126-144
Routledge: London

Reay, D. (2000) "'Dim dross" Marginalised women both inside and outside the academy', *Women's Studies International Forum.* 23/1. pp. 13-21

Rees, G., Baron, S., Boyask, R. and Taylor, C. (2007) 'Research-capacity building, professional learning and the social practices of educational research' in *British Educational Research Journal.* Vol. 33, No. 5, pp. 761-779

To read the full report, please go to: <http://www.tlrp.org/mappingtheripples/>

Project contact:

Dr Zoe Fowler

Email: zfowler.ed@gmail.com

TLRP

Institute of Education

University of London

20 Bedford Way

London WC1H 0AL

Tel: +44 (0)20 7911 5577

www.tlrp.org

Mapping the Ripples

The full research report on capacity
building through TLRP is at:

www.tlrp.org/mappingtheripples

