

Contract researchers, career development, and capacity building

Zoe Fowler

Fixed-term employment in social science research:
new directions in the research economy,
Wednesday 13th May, 2009

Structure of the presentation

- Brief overview of the TLRP
- The context of Education and its relevance to other social sciences
- Overview of structures which benefit researchers' career development
- How do research project characteristics affect researcher experience and career development?
 - Expansive workplaces
 - Social capital theory
- Conclusions
- Key strategic considerations

Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP)

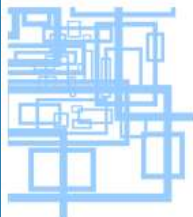
Teaching and Learning Research Programme

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Welcome to TLRP - supporting and developing UK educational research to improve outcomes for learners of all ages.

 Miriam David HE & LLL	 Alan Brown FE & Workplace	 Richard Noss TEL Phase	 Andrew Pollard Fellowship
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Who are you?

Student Practitioner Journalist Policy Maker Researcher

Top Story
Pastures new for Director
From 1st May Andrew Pollard will step down as Director of TLRP...



Feature

Mary James on tour 

Dissemination trip to Hong Kong and New Zealand...

TLRP News

New roles for Directors
From 1st May Andrew Pollard will step down as Director of TLRP...

TLRP Fellow gets PHD
Mark Goodrham doctorate from University of Leeds...

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AERA 2009
TLRP represented at US gathering...

Capacity building in California
AERA conference report...

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Mapping the Ripples: data collection

Data Sources	Details
Documentary Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• TLRP project annual reports and end of award reports;• D space analysis of project outputs and co-authorship networks.
Survey Evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Three on-line surveys:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• researchers who had worked or were working on TLRP projects;• researchers in Education with no experience of working on TLRP projects;• senior academics with experience of directing or managing TLRP projects.
Researcher Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 12 TLRP researchers from a range of research projects and a diversity of institutions across the UK.

Educational research in the UK

- Second largest of the social science disciplines.
- Much current research is piecemeal and practice-based (Mills et al., 2006)
- Ageing demographic with majority of staff aged over 50.
- Diversity of research community: range of qualifications, expertise, and career backgrounds.

The research workforce in Education: who does the research?

Age	From 22 to 68
Qualifications	Ranging from no level 4 qualification to PhD and post-doctoral researchers
Employment	Ranging from full-time and part-time contracts, to hourly paid work
Professional background	Including academic doctoral career paths and/or previous careers in Education practice or work in policy settings.
Gender	67% of survey respondents (62% of database researchers) were female.

Summary of characteristics of TLRP population of researchers

Educational research in the UK

- Second largest of the social science disciplines.
- Much current research is piecemeal and practice-based (Mills et al., 2006)
- Ageing demographic with majority of staff aged over 50.
- Diversity of research community: range of qualifications, expertise, and career backgrounds.
- Institutional polarisation between research-intensive and other institutions (Munn, 2007; Pollard, 2006)
- Increasing number of fixed term contracts.

The working conditions of the contract researcher

“I enjoy conducting educational research as I think it is very rewarding knowing that what you do for a living could impact and benefit young people’s lives. However, the current state of contract research posts means no financial security whatsoever and no real prospects for a better job and with three young children I may have sooner or later to stop being idealistic and get a stable job with a future.”

The working conditions of the contract researcher

- Difficulties of developing a coherent body of expertise
- Limited opportunities to develop wider networks
- Reduced “*sense of allegiance*” with research project
- Preoccupation with finding next project

The research workforce in Education: where are they going?

- Lectureship routes:
 - consequences for one's research profile and research work;
 - consequences for the research field
- Lack of visibility of professional research career paths
- Not all contract researchers are early career researchers

TLRP's Capacity Building Structures

Structures:

- Long term funding
- RCBN - formal learning opportunities
- Conferences
- On-line resources
- Meeting of Minds Research Fellowships



Wider benefits:

- Networking
- Community building
- Identity formation
- Access to range of resources
- Confidence-building

Workplace learning

PREMISE: Work organisations differ in the ways that they create and manage themselves as learning environments.

METHODOLOGY: Identify the relevant dimensions of the working environment using the expansive-restrictive continuum. Each dimension can be mapped between high restrictiveness and high expansiveness.

PRINCIPLE: An expansive environment produces the widest opportunities for learning.

Karen Evans, Phil Hodgkinson, Helen Rainbird and Lorna Unwin
(2006) *Improving Workplace Learning*
London: Routledge

Workplace learning: the expansive-restrictive continuum

Research project context	
← EXPANSIVE	RESTRICTIVE →
Interpersonal support from more senior project team members/members of institution	Limited interpersonal support
Supported engagement with multiple communities of practice	Limited exposure to multiple communities of practice
Multi-dimensional model of expertise with diverse skills of entire research team valued	Hierarchical valuing of skills with privileging of some team members
Balance between project outputs and researchers' own professional development	Prioritisation of project outputs over professional development needs of individuals
Access and encouragement to attend off-the-job training	Limited access to off-the-job training
Ongoing commitment to researchers' futures beyond the completion of the project	Abrupt ending to the project with no further investment in research staff

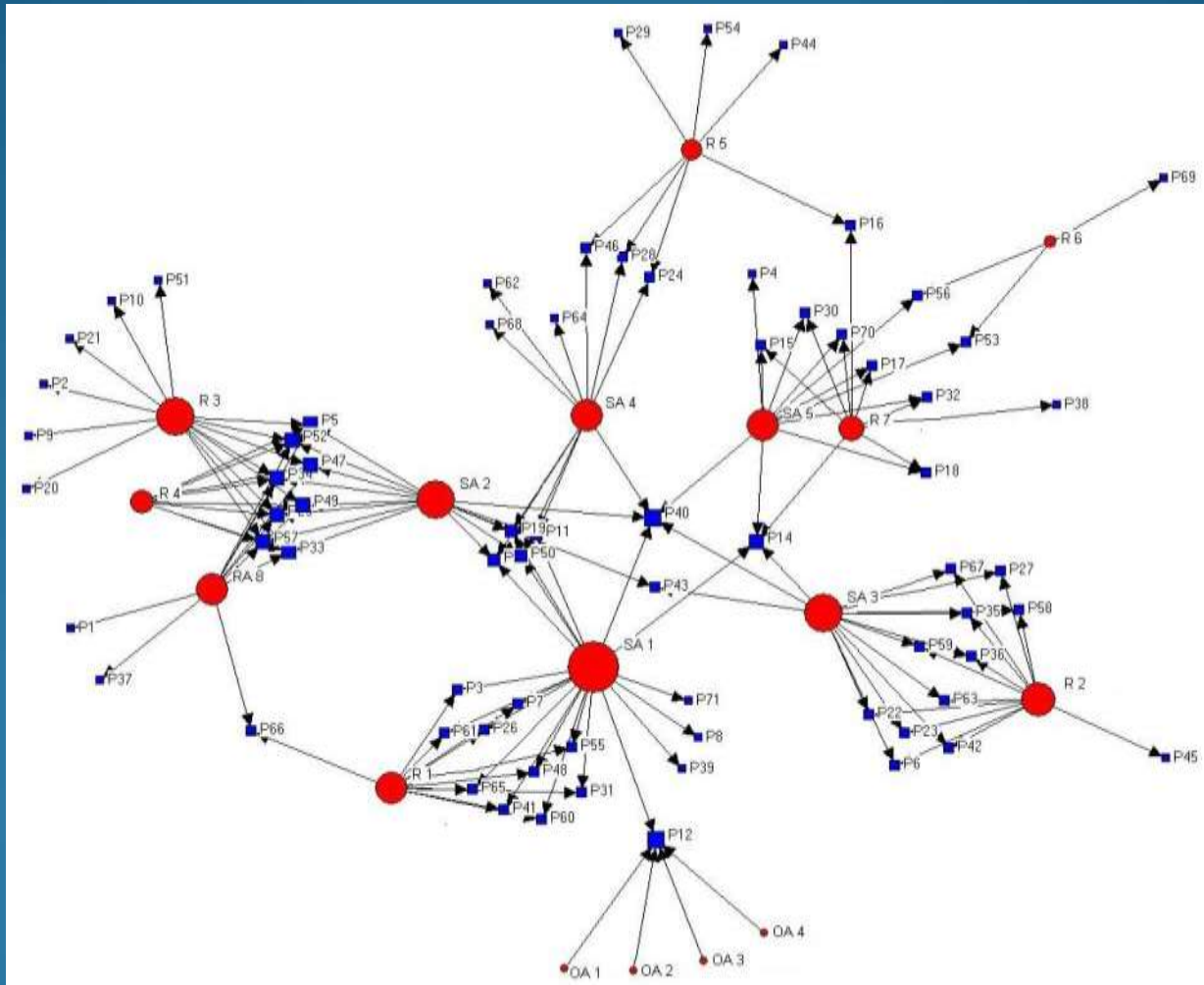
Social capital theory: making sense of the interpersonal

Social capital theory

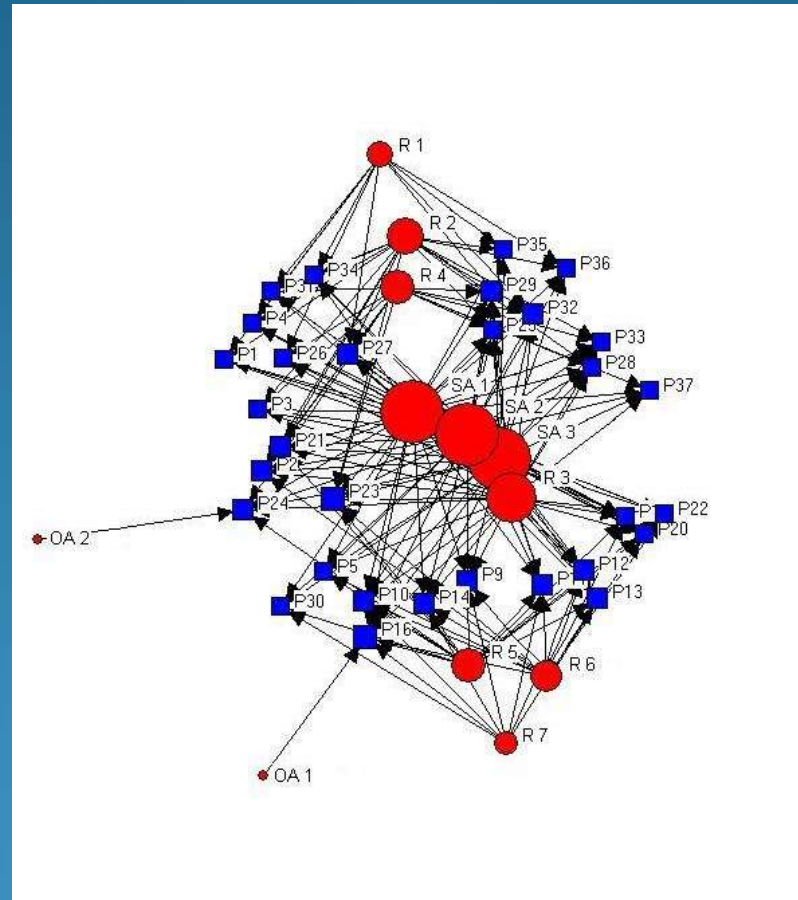
“ ... The sum of the actual and potential resources embedded within, available through, and derived from the network of relationships possessed by an individual or social unit. Social capital thus comprises both the network and the assets that may be mobilised through that network.

Nahapiet, J. And Ghoshal, S. (1998)
'Social Capital, Intellectual Capital, and the Organisational Advantage'
In Academy of Management. 23/2. pp.242 - 266

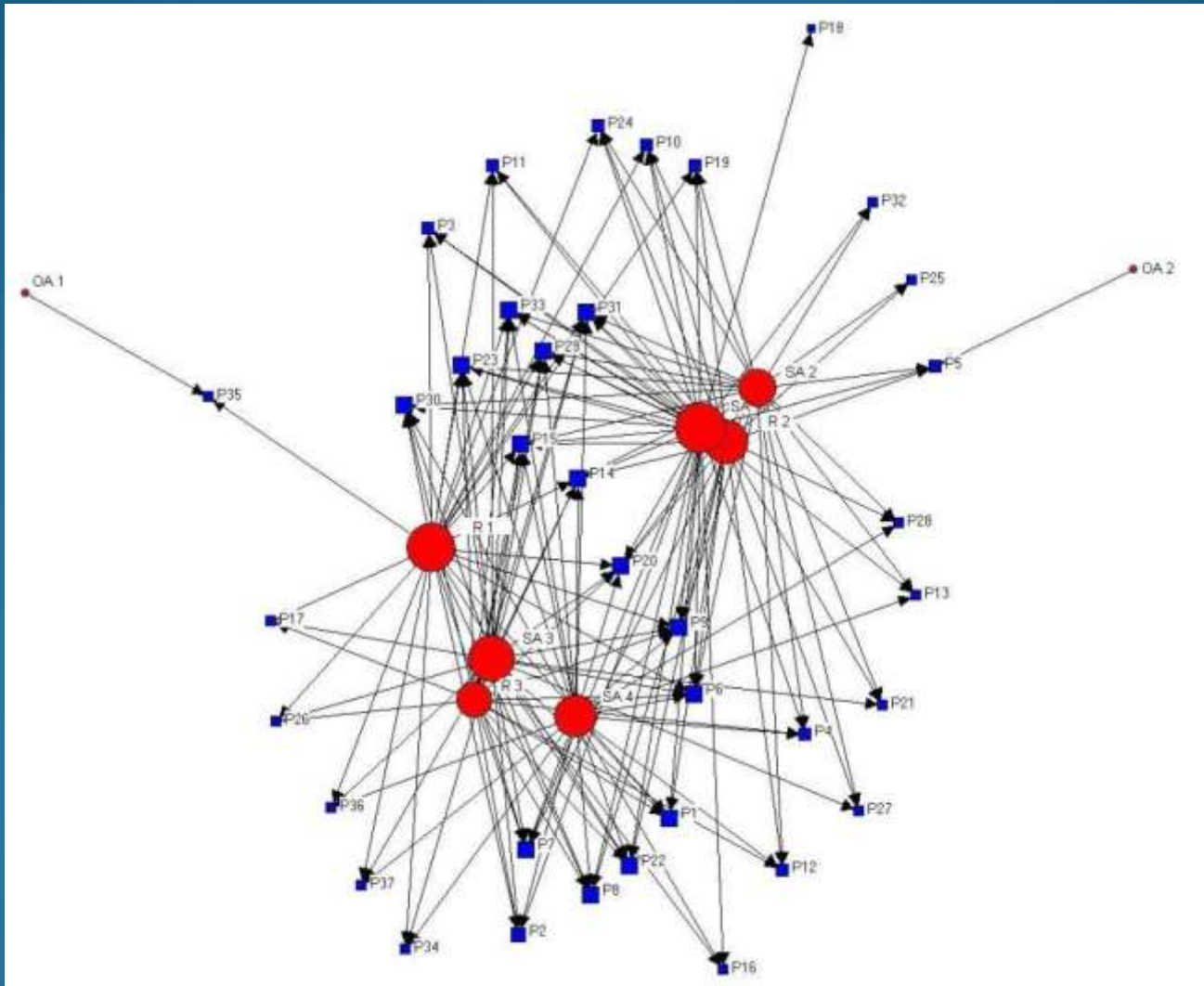
Co-authorship network diagram for project with atomised publications policy



Co-authorship network diagram for project with restrictive publications policy



Co-authorship network diagram for project with expansive publications policy



Conclusions

Diversity of population



Diversity of provision

Longer term funding



Greater opportunities for growth

Piecemeal nature of field



Navigational difficulties in
developing coherent body of
expertise

Key strategic considerations

- Supported development of expansive research workplaces:
 - Explicit objectives for capacity building within research proposal and as criteria of successful bid;
 - Research management training and support for project directors;
 - Communication of good practice and standardisation of practice across institutions and departments.
- Ongoing funding and support for inter-institutional collaboration.
- Development of information management systems to support navigation of existing resources and expertise;
- Promotion of visible, sustainable professional research career routes.

More information....

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www.tlrp.org/mappingtheripples