

Research to raise achievement

Welcome to the second edition of "Teaching and Learning", the Newsletter of the ESRC Teaching and Learning Research Programme.

This Newsletter is to bring you up to date with our research work on raising attainment. All of our research is being undertaken by partnerships of researchers, practitioners and policy advisers, and we are working with them to make sure it has positive impacts on practice.

The core of this bulletin consists of updates on the Projects and Networks within the Programme which are most relevant to your sector. The teams concerned would all welcome your comments on their particular research and would be happy to add you to their mailing lists. Each report has a contact address at the end, and in many cases a website URL where you can find more information.

Since our first edition last September, there has also been progress on a number of our Programme-wide activities.

- We held our first Programme Conference in November at the University of Leicester. We are planning a further major conference in 2002, when many of our projects will be well placed to report on early findings and their implications.
- We have published a report on the implications of recent developments in neuroscience for research on teaching and learning (see page 7).
- A three-year Research Capacity Network to support development of researchers' skills has started work (see page 7).
- The Programme has been allocated a further £10.5 m. to undertake a third phase of research focused on post-compulsory education and lifelong learning, including teacher and trainer education (see page 8).

It is important that we receive advice from as many of you as possible before deciding what the research agenda for Phase III should be. Please take a few minutes to complete the questionnaire enclosed with this Newsletter and return it to us in the reply paid envelope. Let us know if you would like further copies of this; you can also complete it on-line on our Website.

We would be grateful if you could pass this Newsletter on to relevant colleagues after you have read it. Let us know if further copies should be sent to people we have missed in our distribution.

More details about the Programme, as well as the versions of this bulletin for the other sectors of teaching and learning, are on our website at www.ex.ac.uk/ESRC-TLRP/. We will be developing this over the coming months to include more progress reports from projects as they begin to generate research findings, and more contributions from teachers, trainers and policy makers.

We would be very happy to receive suggestions from you on the sort of content you would like to see on the website and in future editions of this Newsletter, or on the Programme generally and how we can engage effectively with the teaching and learning community. You can do this by e-mailing us: J.W.Kanefsky@exeter.ac.uk or writing to the address on the rear cover.

Project Reports

Improving incentives to learning at work

This Network (Helen Rainbird, Karen Evans, Phil Hodkinson, Anne Munro, Peter Senker, and Lorna Unwin) is working with practitioners and others to establish a better understanding of learning practice at, for and through the workplace. By enabling the development of the concept of apprenticeship as a model of workplace teaching and learning it aims to contribute to improving the achievement of learners in this field.

The five projects which make up the Network are united by two themes: (a) the significance of communities of practice and (b) the role of the wider regulatory framework of the employment relationship (for example, wages and conditions of employment, levels of unionisation, legal requirements to training) to workplace learning. The projects are:

- The regulatory framework of the employment relationship
- The role of tacit skills in workforce re-entry programmes
- Key skills in older and younger workers
- Apprenticeship models in contemporary industrial society
- The school as a site of work-based learning for teachers.

Considerable work has been put into developing mechanisms for co-ordinating the five projects to ensure that the research themes are fully integrated; that research tools are shared and that potential synergies between the projects are fully developed. A website (www.northampton.ac.uk/ncr/esrc-resnet) and a database have been established for publicising the Network and disseminating findings. In the early stages of the research, the projects have focussed on the development of research design, developing contacts with practitioners, negotiating access, researching contextual issues and starting fieldwork.

Links with practitioners are crucial to the success of the Network as a whole and to individual projects. The Network has a strong advisory group on which a range of practitioner interest groups are represented. Their support for the Network reflects the centrality of workplace learning to contemporary issues of workplace change and the value of research which can enhance the attainment of learners. The research is also timely in relation to policy developments, in particular the new Learning and Skills Councils in England and Wales and the growing emphasis on workforce development at different levels (national, local and sectoral). It is moreover relevant to the review of Modern Apprenticeship, performance management in schools, and the potential future role of union learning representatives in influencing training provision. It coincides with the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development's interest in mechanisms for strengthening workplace learning and trade union campaigning for a right to paid educational leave.

Some early highlights are:

- Literature analysis and early findings have resulted in a tentative classification into learning something known by others, and learning something unknown, or assumed to be unknown. As the research develops, the value of this classification will be explored as a means of understanding and theorising learning, and as a potential basis for raising attainment.
- There are indicators that awareness of 'hidden abilities' or tacit forms of key competences is strongly associated with positive or negative socio-biographical experiences. Since positive experiences often have reinforcement effects, learning experiences which positively reinforce awareness of hidden and tacit forms can be identified. The converse also appears to hold. The effects on learning success and learning outcomes will be investigated and modelled as the research progresses.
- Early evidence suggests that the teaching and learning relationship between older and younger workers is being reappraised as apprentices' skills gained prior to work entry are given greater recognition in the workplace. Where young people are entering employment with developed communication and IT skills, they are being seen as important catalysts for change in the steel industry.
- Interviews with representatives of organisations which have sectoral level responsibilities for training have confirmed the significance of the regulatory framework of the employment relationship to formal and informal learning at work.

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Teaching and Learning

Project on The Effectiveness of Problem Based Learning (PEPBL)

PEPBL is investigating whether Problem Based Learning (PBL) will assist students in learning specific professional competencies and should be the preferred approach for a wide range of learning contexts. It builds on the growing interest in using PBL in the healthcare field and aims to generate evidence about its effectiveness through a randomised control trial comparing PBL with traditional teaching and learning methods in nurses' professional development.

The project will assess changes in learning styles, assessment outcomes and practice. It will also report on learner and teacher views of the two delivery methods.

The project started with 31 Students from 5 London NHS Trusts who enrolled as students on the first year of the programme in October. The development of the methodology for the empirical study has been documented in the production of 5 methodology working papers. These can be downloaded from the project website (details at the end of this piece).

A UK e-mail discussion list for problem based learning is now up and running and we are also discussing plans for a Problem Based Learning Research network with The Generic Teaching and Learning Centre. Plans are well advanced for the first of our user engagement events which this year will take the form of an 'expert symposium' in Research and Development in Problem Based Learning. This will take place on 27th June in London.

The project has been successful in securing strong participation for our planned systematic review of the effectiveness of Problem Based Learning. The proposal has been shared with academics and practitioners from all over the world, and firm intentions of joining the review team have come from colleagues in Australia and Canada as well as the UK. We would be pleased to hear from anyone else who would like to get involved.

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Project on the Effectiveness of Problem Based Learning (PEPBL)

'Expert Symposium' on Research & Development in Problem-based Learning

Date: 27 June 2001, 9.30 – 4.00

Venue: Middlesex University, Archway Campus, Highgate Hill, London N19 3UA

Who should attend?

This event is targeted at researchers, academics and practitioners who are already working with Problem-based Learning or other similar teaching and learning strategies. A working event is planned to allow participants to spend as much time as possible discussing methodical issues in research in this field.

Speakers:

Dr Charles Engel (Insitute of Education) will deliver the opening plenary address on 'Issue in Research and Development in PBL'.

Dr Maggie Savin-Baden (University of Coventry) will deliver the closing plenary address on 'The future of research on Problem-based Learning'.

Participation:

This event is funded by the ESRC TLRP and is free. The number of participants is limited but some places may still be available on a first come first served basis.

Further details are on the PEPBL website at www.hebes.mdx.ac.uk/teaching/Research/PEPBL/index.html or from Tess Elsey at the TLRP Programme Office.
Contact: T.J.Elsey@ex.ac.uk Tel: 01392 264845.

Transforming Learning Cultures in Further Education

The Transforming Learning Cultures Project aims to identify learning cultures in FE that are amenable to intervention and change; and to determine which types of intervention contribute to the improvement of learning under what conditions.

The Project offers four principal benefits for those outside the research community:

- opportunities for practitioners (and managers) to deepen understanding of educational practice;
- opportunities for the development of strategies for the enhancement of learning cultures and for improvements in learning;
- from these developments, insights which may have importance for national policy development;
- the enhancement of practitioner-based research capabilities within communities of practice in FE.

The Project involves a partnership between ten staff at four universities (Exeter, Warwick, Leeds and West of England, led by Martin Bloomer, Denis Gleeson, Phil Hodkinson, David James and Keith Postlethwaite) and twenty teaching staff from four FE colleges (St. Austell, Cornwall; Park Lane, Leeds; City of Bristol; Tile Hill, Coventry). At each college four learning sites will be selected, providing the focus for an intensive four-year longitudinal study of educational practice and learning cultures, using qualitative and quantitative approaches.

The team are working with existing communities of FE practice, with direct participation of college tutors and managers, and consultation with the wider sector. It is backed by a wide communication network supported by LSDA. Regular reporting of project activities and outcomes to practitioners, managers and policy-makers within and beyond the Colleges will be backed up with opportunities for participation by an expanded network of practitioners, managers and policy makers. Local and regional workshops, national conferences and 'Digests' of work in progress, articles, and web-site postings are all planned.

Four types of outcome will be developed:

- a new theoretical and conceptual understanding of the cultural influences on learning in FE, including a much-needed clarification and elaboration of the meaning and utility of the term 'learning cultures';
- the development of principles of procedure for the transformation of learning cultures in FE and elsewhere;
- an enhanced FE sector knowledge base in the case study colleges, in the regions within which they are located and nationally;
- the expansion of research capacity in the FE sector and, where possible, beyond.

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Enhancing teaching-learning environments in undergraduate courses

This project has been designed to explore ways of strengthening the teaching-learning environments experienced by undergraduates, so as to enhance their achievement. It will build on existing research into teaching and learning in higher education, by extending the range of disciplinary perspectives

being used and relating them more directly to the professional knowledge of academic staff in contrasting subject areas - cellular biology, business economics, electrical engineering, history, and media and communication studies. By working collaboratively with departmental partners, ways of enhancing the system-wide capacity for research-based practice will be explored and disseminated.

We have made a preliminary analysis of QTA/QAA reports on teaching of nearly forty departments, from our five subject areas, which had very high ratings. It appears that the reviewers based their judgements on four main aspects of the departmental 'cultures' they encountered, namely administrative, research and professional, teaching and student support. The comments tended to be judgmental, with little explanation of what counted as excellence within teaching. This analysis helped to provide a useful back-cloth against which to consider the teaching-learning environments on which our project will concentrate. Twenty of these departments have been approached to take part in telephone interviews, through which we shall seek to identify more specific aspects of high quality learning environments, within the differing areas of study.

A preliminary review of the literature on teaching-learning environments in higher education has led to a concept map, showing the wide range of concepts used to describe them. This review will enable us to locate our research in the broadest possible idea of environment, as we concentrate on the much narrower aspects over which teachers have control, namely, designing their curricula and teaching.

The Project is based at the University of Edinburgh collaborating with the Universities of Coventry and Durham and Napier University. Professor John Biggs and Professor David Perkins have been appointed as International consultants, and senior colleagues have been identified who are prepared to act as subject advisers to the project. We now have agreement from colleagues in all five areas to act as subject advisers.

The project's web site (see below) gives fuller descriptions of progress, and team members' developed working papers.

Teaching and Learning

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Learning During the First Three Years of Postgraduate Employment

Our project aims to develop evidence for best practice in the support and training of recent graduates. It will follow three groups of 30 young professionals (trainee accountants and engineers, and newly qualified nurses) in a longitudinal study not previously attempted.

As we intend to track their learning in a series of four, two-day, visits to their workplace over three years, we need effective long term partnerships with them, and with the organisations in which they work. Partnership is, therefore, a crucial aspect of the project. Collaborating organisations include 10-12 employers, two professional organisations and four universities, led by the Universities of Sussex and Brighton.

Our employer partners are being asked to:

- comment on the project plans;
- agree our research procedures and an appropriate ethical code for the project;
- develop a sampling process for their group of trainees;
- facilitate our access to trainees who have voluntarily agreed to join the project, and to significant others in the trainee's immediate work environment.

The project will give employers detailed feedback on the research findings after the first cohort of trainees have completed a year and been visited twice (the project's Interim Report). This feedback will cover (a) their own group of trainees (b) all trainees in their occupational sector visited by the research team (c) the complete research sample.

Because we want to improve learning provision, we are also asking our employer partners to commit to some action research, based on the interim findings. This will involve:

- discussing all relevant aspects of the Interim Report, and
- if they feel it would benefit the learning of their trainees, agreeing to make changes to their policy and practice to affect the last cohort we will study.

Through their active involvement, our partners will themselves benefit directly from the research. We are also confident that our collaboration will produce a much better understanding of how to improve learning at work that will be useful in sectors beyond the original three. We will be exploring the best routes to involving other sectors and sharing our findings as widely as possible as the project develops.

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Interactive Education: Teaching and Learning in the Information Age

The overall aim of this project is to examine the ways in which ICT can be used in educational settings to enhance learning, working with a LEA and a number of schools and colleges. It will provide evidence on the best ways of using ICT in teaching different subjects.

The project centres around 'subject design initiatives' in which teachers from participating schools work alongside researchers and teacher educators to draw on research evidence and practical expertise to develop innovative and appropriate uses of ICT in the classroom. Work so far has focused on building the project teams, developing theory and methodology and reviewing relevant literature in the field.

Teachers will start trying out activities in the classroom in the Summer Term, and this will involve an iterative phase of design and evaluation together with the use of video data in order to focus on classroom practice. Subject design teams are reviewing the range of ways in which ICT can be incorporated into the teaching and learning of particular aspects of a subject, with a focus both on the ways in which ICT might be used by professionals in the area (for example for composing in music) and on the use of ICT for specific learning aims.

The research activity throughout the project will focus on the following 5 themes:

- Educational policy and management of ICT in schools
- Teaching and learning
- The role of subject cultures in mediating ICT use
- Teachers and professional development
- Learners' out-of-school uses of computers

Research on learners' out-of-school uses of computers will report early in the project in order to inform the work of the subject design teams. Students' use of computers in the home is increasing and this presents teachers with the challenge of assessing computer-produced work, negotiating students' growing expertise in the use of new technologies and confronting inequalities in differential access to computers in the home.

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Other projects

Mel Ainscow (Manchester), Tony Booth (Canterbury Christ Church College) and Alan Dyson (Newcastle Upon Tyne), *Understanding and Developing Inclusive Practices in Schools*; Prof. Mel Ainscow, School of Education, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL.
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Peter Blatchford (IoE, London), Maurice Galton (Homerton College, Cambridge) and Peter Kutnick (Brighton), *Improving Effectiveness of Pupil Groups in Classrooms*; Prof. Peter Blatchford, Psychology and Special Needs Group, Institute of Education, 25 Woburn Square, London WC1H 0AA.
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Martin Hughes (Bristol), Andrew Pollard (Cambridge - co-director), Guy Claxton, David Johnson and Jan Winter (all Bristol), *Home-School Knowledge Exchange and Transformation in Primary Education*; Prof. Martin Hughes, Graduate School of Education, University of Bristol, 35 Berkeley Square, Bristol BS8 1JA.
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Mary James (Cambridge), Dylan William (King's, London) and Geoff Southworth (Reading), *Learning How to Learn - in Classrooms, Schools and Networks*; Dr. Mary James, School of Education, University of Cambridge, Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 2BX.
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Carol McGuinness and Noel Sheehy (both Queen's, Belfast), *Sustainable Thinking Classroom*; Dr. Carol McGuinness, School of Psychology, The Queen's University, Belfast, Northern Ireland BT7 1NN. Tel: 028 90274373 E-Mail: c.mcguinness@qub.ac.uk

Robin Millar (York), John Leach (Leeds), Jonathan Osborne (Kings College London) and Mary Ratcliffe (Southampton), *Towards Evidence based Practice in Science Education*; Prof. Robin Millar, Department of Educational Studies, University of York, Heslington, York YO10 5DD. Tel: 01904 433469 E-Mail: rhm1@york.ac.uk

Terezinha Nunes (Oxford Brookes), Peter Bryant (Oxford) and Jane Hurry (IoE, London), *The Role of Awareness in the Teaching and Learning of Literacy and Numeracy in Key Stage 2*; Prof. Terezinha Nunes, Department of Psychology, Oxford Brookes University, Gipsy Lane campus, Headington, Oxford OX3 0BP.
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Jean Rudduck (Homerton College, Cambridge), Madeleine Arnot (Cambridge), Michael Fielding (Sussex), John MacBeath (Cambridge), Donald McIntyre (Cambridge), Kate Myers (Homerton College), Diane Reay (King's College London) and Julia Flutter (Homerton College - linked Career Development Associate), *Consulting Students about Teaching and Learning*; Professor Jean Rudduck, Research Unit, Homerton College, Cambridge CB2 2PH.
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Or see the Programme Website at www.ex.ac.uk/ESRC-TLRP/

First Programme Conference

Leicester, 9 & 10 November 2000

The first Programme Conference was held on Thursday 9th and Friday 10th November 2000 at the University of Leicester. The conference was affected by transport problems associated with flooding and railway repair work, but over 170 people nevertheless participated on one or both days. This is a tribute to the perseverance of all those concerned, and in some cases involved very complicated and lengthy journeys.

The first session of the Conference featured short presentations from several of the research projects which had recently been announced under Phase II of the Programme.

Highlight of the Conference was the keynote presentation by Professor Lauren Resnick of the University of Pittsburgh, who gave an inspiring account of recent work in primary education in the USA. Professor Erik de Corte of the Catholic University of Leuven gave a European perspective full of insight and hope. David Hargreaves, Chief Executive of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, addressed some of the challenges faced by the teaching and research communities in the UK. Dr David Gough spoke about the work of the EPPI-Centre in developing systematic reviews of research evidence, and Professor John Gray examined the challenges for the development of research capacity.

There were also a wide range of parallel papers in four sessions covering some of the main themes of the Programme: raising attainment, knowledge transformation, user engagement and impact, and developing research capacity. Most of these are available on our website under the "Conference 2000" button. Our thanks to all those who gave papers or led discussion sessions.

The next major Programme Conference will be held in 2002, when many of the Programme's projects will report on their findings.

Teaching and Learning

The implications of recent developments in neuroscience for research on teaching and learning

A review of recent developments in neuroscience by Sarah-Jane Blakemore and Uta Frith of the Institute of Cognitive Neuroscience, London, has recently been published on the Programme's website, with a request for comments from others with an interest in the field.

The report explains that recent advances in technology have enabled neuroscientists to discover more about how the brain develops and how the adult brain learns. Techniques such as functional neuroimaging, which measures activity in the brain as humans perform a certain task, have significantly pushed forward our knowledge of the brain, with important conclusions which are relevant to research on teaching and learning.

The authors highlight two examples of how brain science challenges "common sense" views about teaching and learning. They report that research on implicit learning has shown that the brain tends to extract information without us noticing that this is taking place, a finding which might have repercussions on theories of teaching. Neuroscience research has also demonstrated that the adult brain is 'plastic' - capable of a remarkable amount of change and relocation of function, depending on how it is used. This research has implications for policy and practice in life-long learning, but also suggests that there is no biological necessity to start teaching earlier and earlier.

The full report is on the Programme website under "Consultation Papers", or contact Tess Elsey in the Programme Office (T.J.Elsey@ex.ac.uk, 01392 264845).

Teaching and Learning Research Capability Building Network

The Programme has recently appointed a multidisciplinary team from Cardiff University School of Social Sciences to form the basis of a Teaching and Learning Research Capability Building Network. It is led by Stephen Gorard (co-ordinator), Laurence Moore, Gareth Rees, Ken Prandy, John Furlong and Ray Crozier.

This is a three year initiative. The key objective is to co-ordinate and support the research capacity building activities of the Teaching and Learning Research Programme, and thereby produce a significant enhancement in the methodological skills and social scientific approaches of a substantial body of UK educational researchers and practitioner-researchers, both within the Programme and in the UK educational research community more widely.

Our particular focus is a substantial group of early to mid-career researchers, who will eventually move to future research projects with a wider range of high level research skills than at present. In particular, we expect to provide or broker high level skills training in design, analysis and interpretation of quasi-experimental and experimental research designs, advanced analytic techniques, complex project management, the combination of different forms of evidence, and theory-building in teaching and learning. We will also provide more general training in the appreciation of research results utilising high level techniques (appropriately packaged), for the benefit of practitioners, practitioners, and policy-makers. As a by-product we also expect to provide some assistance for researchers in their current projects and so strengthen the work of the Programme.

The activities undertaken in pursuit of this objective include a consultation exercise (within the first six months) concerning the skills and needs of UK educational research; the subsequent evaluation, brokering and provision of

relevant training materials; and the recommendations for further capacity building exercises based on our terminal evaluation.

Our work with the researchers will be designed to maximise their motivation to engage with the Network, and subsequently to promote long-term interaction, learning and resource-sharing between individuals within this community. Learning sets, secondments and 'buddies' are particular mechanisms by which this might be achieved.

The Network will be starting its work soon. In the meantime any thoughts, comments, useful contacts, details of existing capacity-building activities etc. would be very welcome (in the first instance to Stephen Gorard at the address below).

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Phase III three

for the Teaching and Learning and Research Programme

We now have funding of £10.5 m. from the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE) for a third phase the Programme. Phase III will focus on post-compulsory education and lifelong learning, including training in the commercial, voluntary and public sectors of employment and learning in the third age. It will also include training and continuing professional development of teachers and lecturers, and research which addresses transitions between compulsory and post-compulsory education and training.

As with earlier stages of the Programme the core objective will be to support research which focuses on raising attainment. This will be pursued through partnerships between practitioners and policy makers with researchers in all stages of developing research projects, so these generate outcomes which address the needs of policy and practice.

There will be an extensive and proactive period of consultation on what the research priorities and research specification for Phase III should be. We will therefore be holding a number of invitation-based consultation seminars in different locations and also arranging a number of focus group discussions with hard-to-reach groups.

Since the issue of insufficient capacity of the research community to undertake high quality studies in the post-compulsory field was a feature of earlier stages of the Programme, we will also be making a significant commitment developing research capacity and the formation of research partnerships in the fields included within Phase III. We will be working closely with the research, policy and practice communities in post-compulsory education and training on this.

A questionnaire seeking views on research priorities, questions and the issues which would most benefit from research has been sent to a wide range of interested parties and is enclosed with this Newsletter. We would be grateful if you would complete it and send it to us in the reply-paid envelope, or complete it on line via the Programme website. We apologise if you have already received this through another route. For additional copies, please contact Tess Elsey at the Programme Office (T.J.Elsey@ex.ac.uk, 01392 264845).

the programme

The ESRC Teaching and Learning Research Programme's prime objective is to support research which will lead to improvements in the achievement of learners of all ages, in all sectors and contexts of education, training and lifelong learning throughout the UK. The Programme comprises a number of large-scale research projects and other related activities designed to achieve that aim, co-ordinated by the Programme Office in Exeter. It has total funding of £23 million from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Scottish Executive, the Welsh Assembly and the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) and is managed by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

Strategic management of the Programme rests with a Steering Committee of practitioners, academics and other users chaired by Professor Sir David Watson, Director of the University of Brighton. See the Programme Website for a full list of members. Key contacts are:

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Teaching & Learning
Research Programme

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