

# Research to Raise Achievement

Professor Charles Desforges,  
Programme Director of the Teaching  
and Learning Research Programme,  
explains how this initiative is  
breaking new ground.

Welcome to the ESRC Teaching and Learning Research Programme.

Our objective is to support the teaching and learning community in improving the achievement of learners, across a wide range of contexts, by providing evidence from high quality research and ensuring it has impact on practice.

The Programme is the most co-ordinated investment made to date in studying effective learning and teaching in the UK. We are funding more than a dozen large-scale research projects and other related activities across a range of sectors and subjects in pursuit of our aims.

This is the first of a series of newsletters designed to keep you informed about the progress of our research.

## Research which has Impact

Our work is based on the following principles and practices:

- building on the achievements of the teaching and research communities;
- recognising the complexities of teaching and learning and the pressures on teachers and trainers;
- collaborating between researchers and practitioners to generate excellent research;
- transforming research findings into practical action which has wide impact.

All our projects involve partnerships of researchers with teachers, trainers, managers, policy makers and others. These practitioner partners are playing active roles in the Programme's research, from design to analysis and transformation of research findings.

We are also building alliances with the wider teaching and learning community (through both existing networks and individual teachers and trainers) to take forward this collaborative approach.

## How you can Participate

This Newsletter includes a series of short reports about the projects within the Programme which are most relevant to your sector, together with brief details on other research we are funding.

Please read this bulletin and, if appropriate, make it available to colleagues with an interest in our objectives. Let us know if you would like further copies sent to you.

On the inside you will find a freepost card. Please complete this and return it, so that we can keep you informed of progress with the Programme.

The Programme also wants to stimulate debate, with the objective of improving how we will deliver on our objectives. We would like to hear your views on this, both through your organisations and individually. You can write to, or e-mail, us at the address on the back.

Please contact individual projects at the addresses given inside this newsletter if you wish to engage more directly with them.

More details about the Programme are on our website at <http://www.ex.ac.uk/ESRC-TLRP/>

## A Long Term Strategy

This ambitious Programme will take time, of course. Reliable results require careful examination of evidence across several sets of learners. We will, however, be reporting in future Newsletters on evidence as it emerges and on how our research is informing and supporting advances in practice.

## Understanding and Developing Inclusive Practices in Schools

This Network of researchers from three universities and 24 schools in three LEAs is working to define, evaluate and disseminate practices that can increase the participation and achievement of learners who have hitherto been marginalised. This includes a range of groups whose difficulties within the education system are usually treated separately in respect of both policy and research.

The Network is embracing a wide concept of inclusion to address a range of issues of concern to particular schools, around these questions:

- what barriers to participation and learning are experienced by pupils?
- what can be changed to help overcome these barriers?
- do improved practices facilitate improved learning outcomes?
- how can such practices be encouraged and sustained in LEAs and schools?

The Network is undertaking three interrelated studies with different Local Education Authorities which have made a commitment to address issues of inclusion and exclusion in their improvement plans. The research focuses on classroom practice, the effective use of support, and the creation of organisational conditions and cultures which can lead to more inclusive policy and practice and therefore to higher attainment.

As well as specific research findings, the three studies will map out a research agenda for further improvement.

The Network features strong involvement of the schools invited to participate. Staff are being supported in collecting, analysing and using evidence within the Network. The research team is working with them to develop case studies of how the schools work to improve their ability to foster the learning of all the pupils in their communities.

Mel Ainscow (Manchester), Tony Booth (Canterbury Christ Church College), and Alan Dyson (Newcastle).

**Contact:** Prof. Mel Ainscow, School of Education, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL. Tel: 0161 275 3498, E-mail: [mel.ainscow@man.ac.uk](mailto:mel.ainscow@man.ac.uk)

## Improving Effectiveness of Pupil Groups in Classrooms

This project will develop and evaluate effective group-work at the primary and early secondary school level. The project aims to enhance the learning/achievement potential of pupils (at Key Stages 1-3) working in classroom groups, by actively involving teachers in three geographical areas in a programme designed to raise levels of group-work during typical classroom learning activities. The research will first evaluate the effect of training pupils in group-work skills, and the effect of different group sizes and different task demands on the quality of group-work.

On the basis of these results it will then design a group-work programme which will aim to enhance pupil attainment, motivation and attitudes, and which will be systematically evaluated in relation to two control groups. By taking a 'what works and why' approach, the project will contribute to practice, policy, and theory and will promote a more considered approach to the use of groupings within classes.

The results should therefore allow teachers not only to adopt new approaches based on sound evidence of their effectiveness, but also allow them to consolidate and improve current uses of grouping. The findings will have an important contribution to make in the bid to raise standards and to reduce pupil disengagement. By working closely

# Research Primary

with practitioners to identify the conditions in which such effects can be maximised, the findings should have an impact on future government policy.

Peter Blatchford (IoE), Maurice Galton (Homerton College, Cambridge) and Peter Kutnick (Brighton).

**Contact:** Prof. Peter Blatchford, Psychology and Special Needs Group, Institute of Education, 25 Woburn Square, London WC1H 0AA. Tel: 0207 612 6268, E-Mail: [p.blatchford@ioe.ac.uk](mailto:p.blatchford@ioe.ac.uk)

## Home-School Knowledge Exchange and Transformation in Primary Education

This project aims to develop and test ways of improving pupil attainment by enhancing collaboration between parents and teachers.

More specifically, the project is based on the assumption that the knowledge and skills of teachers and parents are both valuable for children's learning. Can we raise standards and pupil attitudes further through the development of new forms of school-home collaboration? If so, by how much, and which approaches are likely to work best?

Working with schools and families in urban working and middle class communities, these issues will be investigated through action research projects focused on literacy, numeracy and primary/secondary transfer.

The project will be based in Bristol and Cardiff and has been developed with the close cooperation of teachers and LEA officers. Twelve primary and four secondary schools will be involved in detailed development work focused on literacy at Key Stage 1, numeracy at Key Stage 2 and transfer between Key Stages 2 and 3. Teachers, parents and researchers will work closely together to develop activities in which different kinds of knowledge about children and their learning are shared. Monitoring methods will include large-scale statistical comparisons with pupils in non-participating schools, detailed pupil case-studies and analytic accounts of each action research theme.

The main outcomes will be the generation and systematic evaluation of new forms of home-school collaboration to enhance pupil attainment. The project will thus be of direct relevance to parents, teachers and educational policy-makers.

Martin Hughes (Bristol), Andrew Pollard (Cambridge), Guy Claxton, David Johnson and Jan Winter (all Bristol).

**Contact:** Prof. Martin Hughes, Graduate School of Education, University of Bristol, 35 Berkeley Square, Bristol BS8 1JA. Tel: 0117 928 7007, E-Mail: [Martin.Hughes@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:Martin.Hughes@bristol.ac.uk)

# ch in the y Sector

## Learning How to Learn - in Classrooms, Schools and Networks

This project will advance both understanding and practice of learning how to learn in classrooms, schools and networks. It will develop recent work on formative assessment into practical advice for both teachers and pupils.

Raising educational standards means that pupils need not only to learn but also to learn how to learn as an essential preparation for lifelong learning. The focus of the project is to explore what teachers can do in their classroom practice to help pupils acquire the knowledge and skills of learning how to learn. At the same time it is necessary to clarify the conditions under which teachers engage in the creation of knowledge about learning, including its routine application in classrooms.

New professional knowledge relevant to lifelong learning also needs to be communicated more rapidly through the school system than traditional methods of dissemination have achieved. The development of an evidence-based model of knowledge creation and effective transfer among teachers and between networked schools to maximise impact is therefore an important part of this project.

The project will provide knowledge about 'what works' in primary and secondary schools and classrooms, which will be useful to classroom teachers, school managers and policy-makers. Findings are also likely to have implications for initial teacher training and continuing professional development. A further aim is to develop instruments for research for use by schools evaluating the extent to which learning how to learn is part of their culture and practice.

Mary James (Cambridge), Dylan Wiliam (King's College London) and Geoff Southworth (Reading).

**Contact:** Dr. Mary James, School of Education, University of Cambridge, Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 2BX. Tel: 01223 369631, E-Mail: [mej1002@cam.ac.uk](mailto:mej1002@cam.ac.uk)

## Sustainable Thinking Classrooms

The project will create and evaluate practical teaching strategies to improve classroom learning in primary schools, through enhancing pupils' thinking skills across the curriculum.

The research examines the role of metacognition in teaching thinking skills at Key Stage 2. "Metacognition" refers to people's knowledge about thinking which helps them to manage effectively their thought processes in learning and problem solving. Classroom dialogue is thought to play a key role in teaching this form of intellectual management. This project will focus on assessing and promoting appropriate dialogue, analysing the critical features of this approach in terms of improving learning outcomes for both

pupils and teachers, and models of teacher support which can sustain innovation in this regard.

Three interrelated studies will be conducted. The first will develop and evaluate a framework for analysing metacognitive features of teachers' and pupils' classroom dialogue. The second will evaluate an intervention process involving the promotion of appropriate teaching; the effects on both teachers' and pupils' learning will be appraised. The third study will develop long term strategies for sustaining thinking classrooms with a focus on metacognitive activity.

The research builds on the achievements of the ACTS (Activating Children's Thinking Skills) project in Northern Ireland. The project involves a wide range of collaborations, working with teachers, curriculum advisers and officers from the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) in Northern Ireland to develop evidence-based teaching strategies.

The project will generate training materials in a variety of forms for teaching thinking skills, which teachers can apply to their own practice. These will also be valuable for teacher trainers, education authorities and curriculum support units.

Carol McGuinness and Noel Sheehy (both Queen's).

**Contact:** 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](mailto:c.mcguinness@qub.ac.uk)

## The Role of Awareness in the Teaching and Learning of Literacy and Numeracy in Key Stage 2

Learning involves a mix of conscious and subconscious processes; people handle language and calculation without always being able to explain how. This project aims to improve the learning of literacy and numeracy in primary schools through understanding how implicit and explicit knowledge is used by pupils and teachers. It will provide important evidence for raising attainment through national literacy and numeracy strategies.

The research will compare the effectiveness of implicit and explicit teaching for developing literacy and numeracy skills in an experimental situation. It will test whether the children can use these skills to handle problems and assess their awareness of their knowledge. It will then examine whether the best teaching methods remain effective when children work in groups. Finally, teachers will transform these methods into classroom activities and assess their efficacy.

The project will also investigate with teachers whether they are more effective if their own knowledge is explicit rather than implicit. First, it will evaluate the connection between teachers' explicit knowledge, their teaching methods and pupils' performance. Secondly, teachers will be supported in developing their explicit knowledge and any consequent changes in their teaching monitored. The project will then examine different models of teacher training and their impact on children's learning.

There will be an on-line INSET programme about results of the study. Teachers will play a strong role in communicating results through a website, seminars and the creation of a virtual learning community.

Terezinha Nunes (Oxford Brookes), Peter Bryant (Oxford) and Jane Hurry (IoE, London).

**Contact:** Prof. Terezinha Nunes, Department of Psychology, Oxford Brookes University, Gipsy Lane Campus, Headington, Oxford, OX3 0BP. Tel: 01865 483770, E-Mail: [tnunes@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:tnunes@brookes.ac.uk)

# Research as a Partnership

By Philippa Cordingley

Partnerships are fashionable in research - as in most areas of public expenditure. Proposals to ESRC for funding under the Teaching and Learning Research Programme are moving in the same direction. Is the idea of research as a partnership anything more than a fad? I believe it is, and can give clear benefits to both sides of the partnership.

Current attempts at research partnerships between schools and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) with whom I am involved, however, suggest specific incentives and preconditions for meaningful and effective partnerships. Here are one or two reflections on the challenges and benefits that participants or users of ESRC funded partnerships are likely to encounter.

## A Precondition

It is a truism worth emphasising that partnerships without genuinely shared goals are condemned to a cosmetic effect only. Schools focus on improving teaching and learning processes. HEIs focus on improving research, continuing or Initial Teacher Training. Where both pursue these activities as a means of enhancing pupils' attainment, partnerships can help them jointly to pursue their separate but overlapping goals.

This sounds easy. It is a matter of common sense. TTA Research Consortia tackled this in different ways, e.g. through the choice of theme, methodology or through both. Turning collaboration into a continuing reality capable of sustaining genuine involvement for all partners is more complicated. Changing, often increasing, external pressures abound and pull in many directions. Carrying out already complex processes such as teaching or doing research in new ways and working through new relationships have to compete with such pressures for attention and for resources. When push comes to shove teachers and researchers have had to weigh decisions to depart from traditional divisions of labour extremely carefully against the need to make efficient use of every teacher second. Is this worthwhile?

## Making a Difference

It is worthwhile, in the eyes of the teachers, if the research focuses on improving teaching and learning and outcomes become more credible, accessible and useful to them. But outcomes take time. Teachers are becoming confident that benefits will outweigh costs where data collection contributes directly to their development at the point of collection, for example when video recordings of teaching and learning can be used to review the development of specific aspects of pedagogy for individuals as well as to contribute to a larger evidence base.

It is worthwhile to the HEIs in perhaps more diffuse or longer term ways. The credibility of research in the eyes of teachers seems to increase exponentially when the involvement of serving teachers in collecting, interpreting or using data shines through research reports (something identified by the National Teacher Research Panel after sustained scrutiny of a range of research outcomes). As the credibility of research in the eyes of teachers increases so will their tolerance for longer timescales and their willingness to open up their practice to research processes.

Increasing teacher involvement, interest and use of research should also increase public funders' appetite for complex, long term research designs and for wrestling with complexity (accessibly reported) in research outcomes.

But research partnerships are neither romantic nor magical. Without recognition within funding and accountability regimes in both sectors they depend upon talented individuals, inspired relationships and a great deal of faith and determination. Funding opportunities are growing. TTA consortia funding, LEA programmes such as Essex's Early Reading Partnership and the ESRC Teaching and Learning Programme have created a substantial opening. Schools and research teams can push the door further ajar by considering how such a partnership could strengthen and enhance each major new programme or initiative they undertake and by taking an interest in the outcomes of the early adopters. By their very nature research partnerships should also, in time, produce a range of quantitative and qualitative evidence to persuade those who manage quality and accountability regimes to recognise and give status to this important work.

Philippa Cordingley is Director of the Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence (CUREE) and Chief Professional Adviser for Research to the TTA

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 Website for a full list of members.



Dr. John Kanefsky, ESRC Teaching and Learning Research Programme, University of Exeter, School of Education, Heavitree Road, Exeter EX1 2LU.  
Tel: 01392 264845 Fax: 01392 264945  
Email: J.W.Kanefsky@ex.ac.uk  
Website: <http://www.ex.ac.uk/ESRC-TLRP/home.htm>

Mr Gary Grubb, Programme Manager, Economic and Social Research Council, Polaris House, North Star Avenue, Swindon SN2 1UJ.  
Tel: 01793 413086 Fax: 01793 413010  
Email: Gary.Grubb@esrc.ac.uk  
Website: <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/prog/tlguide.htm>

