

T·L·R·P

Teaching & Learning  
Research Programme

# Teaching and Learning

No 1 September 2000

## 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.

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ECONOMIC  
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RESEARCH  
COUNCIL

An ESRC Programme of Research into Teaching & Learning

## 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).

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## 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 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 attainments, 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

# Research Secondary

improve current uses of grouping. The findings will have an important contribution to make in a country-wide bid to raise standards and to reduce pupil disengagement. By working closely 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).

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## 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 real 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 second 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).

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## Evidence-based Practice in Science Education (EPSE)

The aim of the EPSE Research Network is to explore ways in which teachers, and others involved in science education (e.g. textbook writers and examiners), can be encouraged to make greater use of research to enhance pupils' learning in science. In three inter-related projects, we are working with groups of teachers to develop new materials and approaches and to evaluate these in the classroom.

One project is developing diagnostic test materials that teachers can use quickly to obtain good evidence of their pupils' current understanding and then to modify their teaching. Another group of teachers and researchers is developing teaching materials, based on research findings, for some of the key ideas in science. These will be evaluated in practice and compared with the 'traditional' approach.

A third project examines whether other teachers not involved in the development process can use the materials equally effectively. Having asked a panel of 'experts' about the most important things people need to know 'about science', the Network is working with teachers to develop materials for probing and enhancing pupils' understanding of these key ideas-about-science.

To tie these projects together, a sample of teachers and others involved in science education directly are being asked about their knowledge of research and their views on its relevance to their work. This survey will improve understanding of the research-practice interface and identify factors which facilitate or inhibit the application of research to enhance pupil learning.

Robin Millar (York), John Leach (Leeds), Jonathan Osborne (King's College London) and Mary Ratcliffe (Southampton).

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## Consulting Pupils about Teaching and Learning

From an early age young people are capable of insightful and constructive analysis of their experiences of learning in school and they have a contribution to make to the development of strategies for improving learning and raising achievement.

The Network is seeking to open up, with teachers, new dimensions of classroom practice where they think pupil perspectives can make a difference, and to disseminate good practice. A Network membership of interested teachers and researchers is being built up.

There are five core research initiatives:

- identifying manageable strategies for consulting pupils and evaluating the outcomes.

- understanding how teachers respond to and use pupil perspectives to improve teaching and learning in different subjects.
- involving pupils as researchers in ways that help them to manage learning more effectively.
- exploring with different groups of pupils how the social conditions of the classroom affect their participation and identities as learners.
- building a commitment to pupil perspectives and participation into the organisation of the school.

A sixth initiative is supporting schools directly, through small grants, in developing innovative ways of using pupil perspectives to enhance engagement and progress.

A linked Career Development Associate, Julia Flutter, is analysing the growth of interest in pupil voice and examining the different constructions of childhood and youth it represents. This study is integrated with the Network but is also building a coherent analysis of the growth of interest in 'pupil voice' by charting and explaining its development in recent years in the UK and elsewhere.

Jean Rudduck (Homerton College, Cambridge), Madeleine Arnot (Cambridge), Michael Fielding (Sussex), John MacBeath (Cambridge), Donald McIntyre (Cambridge), Kate Myers (Keele), Diane Ray (King's College London) and Julia Flutter (Homerton College - linked Career Development Associate).

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## InterActive Education: Teaching and Learning in the Information Age

The project will examine the ways in which new technologies can be used in educational settings to enhance learning. The research centres on the design and evaluation of longitudinal teaching and learning initiatives using new technologies such as computers within the areas of English, mathematics, science, humanities, modern foreign languages and music. It is also concerned with learning which cuts across traditional subject disciplines and with the contexts and conditions that best support these initiatives. It will investigate the relationship between home and school use of new technologies such as computers by learners and teachers.

The research team involves a partnership between teachers, researchers, teacher educators and managers, working across the primary, secondary and FE sectors. The first phase will focus on the collaborative design and refinement of teaching and learning initiatives and the development of research instruments. Rigorous research and evaluation of learning which emanates from the designed initiatives will follow, taking into account the wider influences on the learning and organisational context. The project will analyse similarities and differences between subjects in both teaching practices and students' approaches to learning through new technologies.

A major outcome will be to identify the ways in which research and the systematic use of evidence can be transformed and developed to be of value to teachers and learners. The findings will be communicated by researchers and teachers to a wide range of people who can use them to enhance practice in teaching and learning through ICT.

Ros Sutherland, Susan Robertson and Terry Atkinson (all Bristol).

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# 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.



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