David Bridges

Appreciating failure
Reflections from AERS

‘What works’ as sublinguistic grunt

No outsiders
Routes to science at GCSE

Lewis Elton: A lifetime of teaching
Members will see from the current issue that the Association remains busy on many fronts; promoting capacity building in educational research, seeking new kinds of publication and developing our website.

**BERA Council**

BERA Council met in Manchester for its annual Awayday in February and progressed work in several areas. The Awayday meeting is an invaluable opportunity for BERA Council to focus on BERA outside our busy working lives and I am pleased that much progress was made to ensure BERA remains focussed on its key aims and priorities including substantial time devoted to new initiatives to meet our members’ needs. Each member of Council has a particular area of responsibility and we are re–evaluating these as our work continues to grow. We had an excellent discussion on the development of membership services, led by Uvanney Maylor, as well as presentations on the RAE outcomes from John Gardner and David Bridges.

As mentioned elsewhere in this issue I would like to welcome Pat Thomson and Sean Hayes as new members of Council with responsibility for capacity building, training and development and local authorities and children’s services respectively.

**Capacity building events**

One of the continuing areas of collaboration between BERA and TLRP is the joint funding of two research capacity building events for research degree students and/or early career researchers focusing on major methodological and strategic issues for educational research. The events will use examples from TLRP projects to illustrate the reality of decision-making about research design, data collection and analysis as well as impact and dissemination issues. The events are planned for October so keep an eye out for further information. I am grateful to Pat Thomson for leading on this important area of work and making progress so soon after coming onto BERA Council. We are familiar with Pat’s efficiency, though, in the extremely successful workshops she coordinated at our annual conference Edinburgh last year, and which will be repeated again in Manchester.

Another aspect of BERA’s inheritance from TLRP is the Meeting of Minds Fellowships which BERA will be funding this year and continue in future. These Fellowships promote research collaboration between experienced and new researchers from different institutions. All the feedback is that these collaborations are hugely productive and useful to participants and BERA is delighted to show its expanding commitment to supporting people through this initiative.

**International**

In another exciting development the establishment of a World Educational Research Association (WERA) is now beginning to be formalised. After some considerable period where careful planning and extensive discussions have taken place, as reported previously in R1, WERA is now beginning to take shape. At its February meeting BERA Council formally agreed that BERA should be a founding member of WERA after being an enthusiastic supporter of this initiative. The establishment of WERA will take place through 2009 and we look forward to the creation of a new global organisation with a voice for educational research. Rest assured WERA has been constructed to add value to what we already do as national bodies and to be lean and mean in its operation. John Gardner will be BERA’s representative on WERA Council. Thanks to Geoff Whitty for his work on
BERA profile

World Educational Research Association

update

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VRE tool we have taken on from TLRP. If you haven’t done so already then I would encourage you to register with the VRE system. Although still in its early stages of adoption by BERA and our SIGs this facility will bring significant benefits to BERA members.

I am also pleased to announce that a new Arts Based Education Research (ABER) SIG has been approved by Council to extend the coverage of our SIGs and respond to a request by members.

Consultations

BERA has provided further input to the ESRC Strategic Review and has recently submitted a response to the Draft Code Of Conduct and Practice For Teaching produced by the General Teaching Council for England. As ever, we continue to monitor and respond to initiatives as they affect BERA members.

Publications and Resources

Building on the new web based facilities BERA has implemented we are working with TLRP, AERS and others to integrate new online research training resources onto the BERA website. This is an evolving project but promises to build into a substantial and valuable resource for all those interested in educational research. This also provides a resource to support our capacity building work.

Elsewhere we continue to refine proposals for a series of new publications with the working title of BERA Insights which will be aimed at a broad audience and deal with key contemporary issues. Becky Francis (BERA Council member with responsibility for Publications) has also put considerable effort into developing new initiatives with publishers which promise to bear fruit later this year.

Manchester beckons

Although it is only Spring it will be no time at all before BERA Conference comes round again. Danny Durant is working diligently with the conference committee to ensure another successful event and I look forward to seeing many of you there. The Victorian gothic splendour of Manchester Town Hall combined with a brand new state of the art conference venue at the University of Manchester offers an exciting mix of old and new.

“I am pleased that much progress was made to ensure BERA remains focussed on its key aims and priorities.”
**BERA Practitioner Research SIG update and online discussions**

**Lori Beckett**, Convenor, BERA Practitioner Research SIG

Taking the position of convenor of the Practitioner Research SIG at 2007 annual conference was a great honour, especially coming from Australia only the year before and being in the UK such a short time. The SIG was well established with a very committed group of active researchers in many different fields, and I am pleased to say there was a healthy climate of discussion and debate. It took a full year to learn of SIG members’ penchant for different approaches to practitioner research, and of an audience both nationally and internationally prepared to support the work in all its manifestations. The launch of the new BERA website with individual SIG web spaces at 2008 annual conference presented a golden opportunity to map the field of practitioner research, introduce a gallery of prominent researchers (not that they needed any introduction because of their prominence through writing for publication), make links to websites of researchers and related organisations around the world, list appropriate journals, and organise some events and initiatives. Retired academic Iain Poole (Leeds Met) has been a significant help in these endeavours, along with Richard Proctor (TLRP) who has provided the technical support.

**Online discussions**

One such initiative is the new series of one-week long online discussions, conducted by prominent researchers, to share intelligence on problems of mutual concern. The request was to focus on an issue/concern identified in the prominent researcher’s experience of practitioner research, and the intention is to support our professional learning and development. It is hoped that by working together collaboratively and respectfully, we might better articulate the nature of practitioner research, different research agendas, epistemological and political issues, contribute to knowledge-building about our respective research practices and so bolster the academic standing of practitioner research, and organise some events and initiatives. Retired academic Iain Poole (Leeds Met) has been a significant help in these endeavours, along with Richard Proctor (TLRP) who has provided the technical support.

We ran an initial trial in February 2009, led by Professor Rob Walker (University of East Anglia). Rob chose to focus on case learning, arising out of his extensive experience of doing case studies. While we had to create a temporary JISCMAIL list because the VRE was not then fully operational, much to the consternation of some members as the emails tumbled into inboxes uninvited, the trial ran reasonably successfully. Rob engaged a number of SIG members in fruitful discussion, which will be reported separately. At issue for the leaders and participants in the e-discussion is an attempt to answer some questions:

- Who are the practitioners?
- What is the research?
- What is its worth?

I am pleased to say the VRE is now operational and a number of prominent researchers are confirmed to follow:

- Jack Whitehead (Bath University)
- Anne Campbell (Leeds Met)
- Jill Blackmore (Deakin University)
- Robin McTaggart (James Cook University)
- Lynne Miller (University of Southern Maine)
- Ann Lieberman (Stanford)
- John Elliott (University of East Anglia)
- Colleen McLaughlin (Cambridge)

This list is not intended to be exclusive, and we welcome any suggestions. We have had agreement from a number of other people who have yet to confirm the dates to lead the e-discussion, which we hope to stage at intervals leading up to 2009 annual conference. The SIG will then review the initiative, along with our other activities, including a proposed invisible college and social function to be held the day before 2009 annual conference.

**Links:**

- SIG webpage: [http://www.bera.ac.uk/practitioner/](http://www.bera.ac.uk/practitioner/)
- VRE information: [http://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/category/networks/vre/](http://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/category/networks/vre/)
- VRE log in/Joining page: [http://groups.tlrp.org/](http://groups.tlrp.org/)
BERA Dissertation Award

The BERA Dissertation Award is made for the best PhD, DPhil or EdD thesis for research in Education awarded by a British university in 2008.

The dissertation or thesis writer must be a member of BERA.

Closing date for applications for this year: 29th April 2009.

Application = nomination form + proposer's statement + abstract

Applications must also name and have approval for the Award Committee to approach one external examiner to obtain their anonymous recommendations.

Applications should be sent by email to Lynne Ridge, BERA Administrator at: admin@bera.ac.uk

Rules
1. The award shall be called the “BERA Dissertation Award” and shall be for a dissertation (or thesis) written at doctoral level (normally a PhD, Dphil or EdD thesis).

2. The BERA Dissertation Award may be made to the individual whose dissertation is deemed to have made the most significant contribution to research in education of those put forward for consideration.

3. The BERA Dissertation Award may be made annually. In each year it relates to a dissertation for which a degree was awarded during the calendar year preceding. (i.e. the award for year 2009, which is presented at the Conference Dinner during year 2009, is for a degree granted during the period 1 January to 31 December of year 2008.)

4. Candidates for the Award must be members of BERA at the time of nomination. They may be proposed by a BERA member or may, without prejudice, propose themselves.

5. The Award shall carry a cash prize, the sum to be determined by BERA Executive Council, and will be announced and presented at the BERA Annual Conference.

6. Nominations for the Award shall consist of
   a. a completed nomination form (available from the BERA Office), including a statement of no more than 1,000 words in support of the nomination (either by the candidate or the supervisor);
   b. a copy of the dissertation abstract; and
   c. an anonymous supporting statement from an external examiner for the dissertation (the BERA Award Committee will contact the proposed external examiner directly).

   After short-listing the BERA Dissertation Award Committee may call for a copy of the dissertation in order to aid deliberations, and in this case will take all reasonable care of the dissertation and return it as soon as possible.

7. The following timetable shall ensue.

   Nomination papers (6a, and 6b above) must reach the BERA Office (envelopes marked ‘BERA Dissertation Award nomination’, address given below) by 1st March (for dissertations awarded a degree in the year of the previous 1 January to 31 December). Receipt of these will be acknowledged.

   The BERA Dissertation Award Committee will consider the nominations and make a recommendation for the Award to the Executive Council. The Executive Council may only accept or reject the recommendation. All nominees will be notified of the outcome. During the BERA Annual Conference (normally at the Conference Dinner) the Award for the year will be announced and presented.

Criteria For Assessment

Nominations must demonstrate a significant contribution to education research in one or more of these criteria:

• Research quality, including rigour, transparency and validity
• New area of research
• Methodological innovation
• Significant conceptual or theoretical contribution to its field
• (Potential) impact for policy-makers, practitioners and other research users

Nomination Form

Nomination Forms are available from the BERA Office or can be downloaded from the BERA website: www.bera.ac.uk (see under development/awards).

Contact
BERA Administrator: Lynne Ridge
Address: BERA, Association House, South Park Road, Macclesfield, Cheshire, SK11 6SH
Tel: 01625 504062
Email: admin@bera.ac.uk

BERA/SAGE Publications Awards 2009

BERA is pleased to confirm submissions for the prestigious BERA/SAGE Practitioner Awards awards will soon be open for 2009. The aims of the award are:

• To support and encourage excellence in the application of research in practice;
• To disseminate the results of practitioner research and practice;
• To help practitioners to improve the quality of their work by example.

Full details will be available in the next issue of Research Intelligence but please also keep an eye on the BERA website for further information: www.bera.ac.uk
The focus of the symposium was on research capacity building and what educational research associations might do to promote this. Pamela Munn looked at capacity building at a systemic level and highlighted the work of the Strategic Forum for Educational Research, which BERA helps to fund. Anne Campbell focussed on the development of the Teacher Education Resource which provides a free and searchable database of articles on various aspects of teacher education. She highlighted the particular issues around developing research capacity among teacher educators. Olwen McNamara discussed the ESRC funded Teacher Education Research Network, a collaborative approach to capacity building being piloted by Northwest Teacher Education Institutions. Bob Lingard, University of Queensland and the only symposium contributor not to be member of BERA Executive Council, described the collaborative approach embodied by Applied Educational Research Scheme in Scotland and reported findings from a project funded by that Scheme on social capital and independent schools.

The symposium was well attended and there was lively discussion and debate. It was clear that Australian colleagues share many of the capacity building issues faced by educational researchers in the UK. Capacity building will also be a priority for the nascent World Educational Research Association which is reported elsewhere in this issue.

Pamela Munn
February 2009

BERA Doctoral student workshop

Using meta-analysis and other forms of systematic review in your PhD literature review.

This session will consider the contribution that quantitative synthesis or meta-analysis can offer to the literature review section of a doctoral thesis in Education. The key issues are about summarising important literature in the field of study. The session will provide an overview of the concepts and techniques used in quantitative synthesis. These approaches to meta-analysis will be compared with other approaches to systematic (and non-systematic) reviews of educational literature. The session is offered as part of the ESRC-funded Researcher Development Initiative in Meta-analysis in Education Research based at Durham University. More information can be found at: www.dur.ac.uk/education/meta-ed

Date: Wednesday 2nd September 2009

Venue: British Educational Research Association (BERA) Annual Conference Manchester University

Workshop leader: Professor Steve Higgins, Durham University

Steve Higgins’ research interests lie mainly within the areas of effective use of information and communications technology (ICT) in schools, understanding how children’s thinking and reasoning develops, and how teachers can be supported in developing teaching and learning in their classrooms. He has a particular interest in the educational philosophy of Pragmatism and the work of John Dewey and C.S. Peirce.

His teaching areas include primary mathematics, ICT and supporting effective professional development of teachers, particularly using approaches which focus on the development of children’s thinking, reasoning and understanding. He supervises doctoral students in these fields. Steve teaches across a number of undergraduate and post-graduate programmes including PGCE, Masters and taught doctorate programmes.

Booking: Attendance at this workshop is free, but all delegates must be registered for the main Conference. Places are limited and will be allocated on a ‘first come, first served’ basis.

Register at www.beraconference.co.uk

Links:
BERA website: www.bera.ac.uk
BERA Annual Conference: www.beraconference.co.uk

Programme:
13.30-15.00: Workshop session
15.00-16.30: Main Conference Parallel Session 1
BERA writing workshop

Turning a conference paper into a journal article: a hands-on workshop for early career researchers.

The workshop will assist those relatively new to scholarly publishing to turn their BERA conference paper into a journal article. The workshop uses a conceptual framework for academic writing and publishing which looks at academic writing as textwork/identity work and as a discursive social practice (Kamler and Thomson, 2006). The workshop will focus on authoring a tiny text to become the basis for the article, and it will explore strategies to make the ‘so what’ and the argument of the conference paper stronger and sharper.

You will need to bring your conference paper and the abstract you submitted to get it accepted into the conference. Please bring four copies of your BERA abstract with you as we will actually workshop your text. You will also need to have a target journal in mind, so please check the word length and any other requirements the journal makes for papers and abstracts. Don’t be nervous – if this is your first time in a workshop setting. I promise you will find it productive.

The workshop caters for 20 people only. Please do not commit yourself to the workshop if you are not sure you can attend.

Date: Wednesday 2nd September 2009

Venue: British Educational Research Association (BERA) Annual Conference Manchester University

Workshop leader: Professor Pat Thomson, Nottingham University

Pat Thomson is Professor of Education and Director of Research in the School of Education, The University of Nottingham. She is an Editor of the journal Educational Action Research. Together with Barbara Kamler she has published Helping doctoral students write: pedagogies for supervision (Routledge 2006) and several articles and book chapters on doctoral and early career writing and publishing. She is currently editing with Melanie Walker The Routledge doctoral student’s companion: getting to grips with research in education and the social sciences and a companion volume for supervisors (to be published in April 2010).

Booking: Attendance at this workshop is free, but all delegates must be registered for the main Conference. Places are limited and will be allocated on a ‘first come, first served’ basis.

Register at www.beraconference.co.uk

Programme:

09.30-10.30 Session 1: Understanding academic journals and doing locational work: finding the contribution and the appropriate journal

10.30-11.30 Session 2: Working with tiny texts: Hands on editing

11.30-12.30: Session 3: Mapping the paper. Working with your abstract to develop the sections and word weightings.

13.30-14.30: Session 4: Understanding the game of journal publication. An interactive conversation, managed by Professor Becky Francis, past Editor of Gender and Education, with three journal editors:
• Professor Helen Gunter (Journal of Educational Administration and History)
• Professor John Holford (Editor: International Journal of Lifelong Education)
• Professor Meg Maguire (Journal of Education Policy)

15.00-16.30: Main Conference Parallel Session 1

Academy of Social Sciences (ACSS)

BERA is pleased to announce that both our nominations to membership of the Academy of Social Science (ACSS) have been accepted:

Dr Gemma Moss
Institute of Education, London

Prof Ian Menter
University of Glasgow

Congratulations to both!

A full list of the 49 new Academicians is available from the ACSS website at: www.acss.org.uk
A short online survey was held in January to provide members with the opportunity to help direct the future shape and format of our annual conference. Thank you to the 481 members who took the trouble to complete the survey. The findings along with comments from the BERA 2008 evaluations will be considered as we plan our future conferences.

The purpose of this article is to share my own thinking about the findings and issues. At the time of writing (27/2/2009) I haven’t had the chance to fully discuss the survey findings with my colleagues on the Conference Committee, but I wanted to provide you with the summary as soon as possible. I am, therefore, writing in a personal capacity.

One of BERA’s strengths is our diversity. We are a broad church with a wide range of disciplines and interests, but does conference provide for all? I suppose a subsidiary question is should conference provide for all? As regards the purpose of Conference, can I suggest as a starter for ten, something like ‘an annual coming together to celebrate all that is good in educational research’. However we could all come together on the Underground and not achieve much, so it is more than simply gathering together. Networking and socialising is an important aspect of conference, but something has to happen. There are other activities woven into the conference and these have different levels of importance for individuals. Delegates are different and attend conference for a variety of reasons:

- Some are experienced researchers (with national and international reputations), some are new researchers.
- Some have attended conference annually for many years, others are ‘conference virgins’.
- Some delegates go to all the sessions, others are more selective.
- Some follow a particular theme or area of interest through the programme; others take a broader approach to their choice of sessions.
- Some attend purely, or mainly, for the academic programme, others mainly for the social and networking aspects.
- Some go with a close group of colleagues (often, but not exclusively, from the same Institution), others go alone.

The diversity was reflected in the fairly even spread of responses to the question about whether BERA should have a conference theme. Some respondents thought a theme would be beneficial, others were less enthusiastic. In other words, let us have a theme, as long as it was my theme e.g. ‘A theme would definitely draw me to conferences, where the theme was of interest’ (!!).

Given this diversity of needs and expectations, I am clear that I will not be able to please all of the delegates all of the time. There have been many examples of evaluation comments that were diametrically opposed; some are of the “I love” version and others of the “I hate” version. Similarly, when it comes to the conference date, it is not possible to reconcile the suggestions which included “Not being held in September”, “Hold it later in September”, “Bring the date forward by one week”, “In July”…Satisfying a diverse audience is not confined to our Conference. A similar issue was discussed in the editorial in BERJ (Vol 35, Number 1, 2009, p1-3).

“One of BERA’s strengths is our diversity. We are a broad church with a wide range of disciplines and interests, but does conference provide for all?”

Danny Durant, Conference Committee Chair
Planning our Conference is like building a house of cards. Moving something here or changing something there will have an impact and every choice is associated with a range of issues, pros and cons. It is an apparently simple change, but, as an example, if the number of papers per parallel session were to be reduced from four to three, the implications could include:

- having more parallel sessions causing individual sessions to have smaller audiences
- having fewer papers causing less opportunity for delegates to present their work.

I’d like to illustrate the range of issues associated with any particular aspect of conference by listing some of the factors associated with the dissemination and publication of conference abstracts and papers. They include;

- At conferences where full papers are refereed before the conference and there is access to the accepted papers before the conference, it is possible to read the proceedings and decide which sessions to attend and with which authors to seek to have conversations.
- Having access to papers before the conference may help the Chair or Discussant manage the session especially if it a session of mixed papers.
- Being obliged to put papers online may limit future publishing of the work and could decrease contributions to the conference unless conference publishing carried the same status as being in a journal such as BERJ.
- Are we simply serving the RAE/REF rather than furthering open professional debate and discussion?
- There should be a full review of papers rather than abstracts. If this was the case, papers would have to be completed and submitted nine months ahead of the Conference.
- Abstracts don’t always develop into papers that have substance and people’s thinking might have moved on from the abstract that they wrote a long time ago.
- In the survey, over 80% said that they would appreciate access to all the conference papers. However, a similar percentage hadn’t submitted their papers to British Education Index, although they may be published elsewhere. As most delegates are also presenters, there is a clear implication that to have access to full papers online prior to the conference, you will also have to submit your paper in good time.
- Carrying 20+ hard copies of my paper increases my luggage and isn’t very green.
- I expect to be given a copy of each paper in a session. Just bringing a copy of Powerpoint slides or asking delegates to email authors to send copies of papers is not acceptable.

In RI 94 (p4-5) Robert Adams wrote about our 1978 and 2005 Conferences. There have been initiatives and changes (especially size) since the 1978 conference, but I suspect that a delegate from 1978 attending BERA 2008 would have recognised much of the basic structure. Conference structure is not set in stone. Neither is changing something for the sake of change necessarily a good thing, but I think conference ought to evolve to reflect the world and our organisation.

You may not be aware that the planning cycle for our conference is a long one; venues have to be booked several years ahead and by the close of one conference, many of the decisions about the next one will already have been taken. Although the majority of respondents favoured a Tuesday/Friday conference rather than Wednesday/Saturday, it will be 2011 before this could be implemented. Change, therefore, happens slowly.

If we consider a single slot in the programme, the de facto standard is for the session to last for 90 minutes and contain four papers. Some of these sessions are put together from individual papers and some are organised by the SIGs who play a major part in Conference organisation. (A thank you here to SIG convenors and their colleagues for the work they do associated with conference planning). For many years SIGs have organised 90 minute symposia of several papers around a specific topic. If this does the job, then fine. However it doesn’t have to be so. A SIG could, for example, take the 90 minute slot and have a single speaker followed by, say, an hour’s debate on a particular theme or the slot could take the form of a workshop with something being produced as the outcome. The overriding consideration is that the quality of the session must be maintained, but Conference Committee is open to proposals.

It may be possible to weave a number of threads and different types of sessions through the conference; some SIG-related, some cross-SIG, some completed work, some emergent thinking, some posters, some blue sky sessions etc. I suspect there may be different authors and audiences for these different sessions and some may be more popular than others. However if this sort of structure was to be adopted, then decisions must be made early and communicated to members so that authors could submit their abstract, proposal or paper for a particular session or type of session.

A further thought – our Conference aims to achieve many things for many people. Does it all have to happen at Conference? BERA as an organisation or individual SIGs could explore holding other events during the year. I know some already do and some don’t, and that there are areas where we don’t have a SIG. Those are other matters …that do impact on Conference planning.

I appreciate that BERA 2009 is still on the horizon, but I am writing this now so that members can start thinking about their contributions for our 2010 Conference and beyond. In order that Conference Committee can respond in good time, please take us along with you as your thinking develops.

There isn’t a single answer. In RI 105 (p10-12) I introduced the survey by stating that I had a number of questions, I didn’t have all the answers, but that I would welcome your views. I now have some answers, but I’m happy to continue to receive your thoughts and suggestions.

Hope to see you in Manchester.
From Fairies to Philosophy: A Profile of David Bridges

David Bridges missed his vocation to be a theatre impresario when his rock opera ‘Rock Bottom and the Midsummer Night Blues’, featuring a Do wah diddy diddy chorus of fairies, was subordinated to the more austere demands of analytic philosophy at the London Institute of Education. With wholly inadequate preparation he was precipitated (in those heady days of the late sixties) to a post at Homerton College Cambridge teaching philosophy of education on the new BEd course and escorting a large cohort of young women into Cambridgeshire primary schools for their ‘school experience’.

Somehow he survived all this and went on to initiate both a new role for the College in in-service teacher education and then establish with Dave Ebbutt the first research centre in the College, of which, by the late eighties, he had become Deputy Principal.

Throughout this period David had close association with John Elliott, Jean Rudduck, Barry MacDonald and other colleagues in the Centre for Applied Research in Education at UEA with whom he collaborated on a long series of projects. In 1990 he was elected to a Chair at UEA. Here he developed an extensive portfolio of research projects as well as continuing his writing in philosophy of education even as he was drawn into management roles including that of Pro Vice Chancellor.

He planned to return quietly as Professor of Education following a Visiting Fellowship at St Edmund’s College, Cambridge, but was persuaded to take on a new role as Director of the recently established Association of Universities in the East of England, a membership body of all twelve higher education institutions in the region, with an office based in the Regional Development Agency. In this capacity until 2006 he represented higher education on all the major policy bodies in the region and established an extensive network of collaboration but also directed a major regionally focussed research programme.

In 2004 he was invited to become Chair of the Von Hügel Institute, an interdisciplinary research institute based at St Edmund’s College Cambridge, and was elected a Fellow of the College.

In parallel David continued to write in philosophy of education – and was especially engaged in trying to bridge the gap between philosophy of education and the mainstream educational research community. He co-founded the Philosophy of Education network of the European Education Research Association and the BERA Philosophy of Education SIG; he became Chair of the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain; and he wrote and edited a number of key texts on philosophy and educational research.

In 2006 David was co-opted to BERA Council as BERA representative to EERA. He was a member of both the 2001 and 2008 RAE Education panels and is currently contributing to the Framework 7 European Education Research Quality Indicators Project and completing a DeLPHE supported Research Capacity Building Project in Ethiopia – the most recent phase in a 23 year commitment to educational development in the country.

BERJ Editorial Board seeks new members

Editorial Board Membership

BERJ is seeking to recruit six members to its Editorial Board with a start date of 1st January 2010. Membership is for a period of 3 years in the first instance. Existing Board members who are due to retire in 2009 may apply for re-election. We have an active Board, meeting 3 times per year as necessary, discussing and shaping policy as well as playing a major role in refereeing processes. To be on the Editorial Board you do need to be a member of BERJ. If you are interested in applying, please send an expression of interest together with a brief outline of your major substantive and methodological interests and a CV to the BERJ editors c/o berj@contacts.bham.ac.uk by 23rd April 2009.
As reported in RI previously BERA has been actively engaged in exploring the potential of establishing a new World Education Research Association (WERA). Following a series of development meetings over the past 18 months a final meeting was held in Singapore in November 2008. Jeremy Hoad, BERA CEO, represented the interests of BERA at this meeting and Geoff Whitty and Pamela Munn have both participated in earlier development meetings with the CEO.

The meeting agreed:

• a structure and draft constitution;
• a three-year programme plan;
• a financial model and indicative budget; and
• a transition plan to enable consultation and establishment of WERA.

The agreed proposals are currently being considered by potential founding member organisations of WERA. BERA Executive Council received a summary report at its meeting in December 2008 and considered the proposals in detail at its meeting in February 2009. The next meeting of WERA will take place in San Diego immediately following the AERA Annual Meeting in April. BERA will be represented by Pamela Munn and Jeremy Hoad.

Key elements of the three-year plan

1. WERA Web-Site as Interactive, Dynamic, World-Wide Home and Node for Information and Communication
2. WERA Substantive Research Sessions Aligned Especially with Member Association Meetings
3. Capacity Building Research Workshops for Advanced Graduate Students and Emerging Scholars
4. Education Research Indicators Project
5. Establish a Set of Research Topics for Research Working Groups with World-Wide Perspective

Participation, membership and funding principles

Because WERA would be dedicated to advancing education research worldwide, the principles emphasise the importance of affordability for all associations otherwise interested in and eligible to be full members of WERA. Each member organisation would have one vote on the Council of WERA, regardless of size, membership or resources. The agreed principles are:

1. Larger associations will contribute more money than smaller ones.
2. Membership fees will be related to GDP of countries/regions (Member associations would be classified as High income, Middle Income, Lower Middle Income, and Low Income according to the World Bank Classification of National Economies).
3. A lack of money should not become a threshold for active membership by any association.
4. In order to reduce costs, WERA meetings will piggy-back on the larger existing conferences; this also opens the possibility to subsidise participation, by WERA and/or by the conference organisers (see WERA Symposia below).

Implementation

All participating organisations are now in the process of considering membership of WERA. The April meeting will identify an Interim President and Interim Secretary General to work through to May 2010 and commence the implementation of the three-year plan and necessary support to enable work to progress.

The inaugural meeting of the new WERA Council will take place in Vienna in September 2009 (coincidental with ECER 2009, the conference of the European Educational Research Association).

By the end of 2009 an election of the first full WERA Board and Officer roles will have taken place with the first meeting of the Board and second meeting of the Council scheduled for 5-6th May 2010.

WERA Symposia

The first of several presentations and discussions on WERA took place at the Asia-Pacific Educational Research Association (APERA) Conference in Singapore in November 2008. In this symposium scholars with strong commitments to international research examined challenges to conducting education research and building research capacity worldwide. The session, “What Counts as Quality Research and Building Research Capacity for Education Research Worldwide” was chaired by Jeremy Hoad, and included presentations from Therese Mungah Shalo Tchombe (President of ERNWACA Scientific Committee; Education Research Network for West and Central Africa); Ingrid Gogolin (President of EERA); Petronilha Beatriz Gonçalves e Silva (Representative of Associação Nacional de Pesquisa e Pós-Graduação em Educação); (National Association of Research and Graduate Studies on Education) and Associação Brasileira de Pesquisadores Negros (Brazilian Black Researchers Association); and Alan Pittman (Representative of World Council of Comparative Education Societies).

A second symposium, “The Genesis of World Education Research Association”, was held at the Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) conference, also in November 2008. This was chaired by Jan Wright (AARE Past President) with presentations from Jan, Felice Levine (AERA Executive Director) and Jeremy Hoad. Pamela Munn and Jo-Anne Reid (AARE President) joined presenters for a discussion panel during a lively question and answer session which was enthusiastic about the opportunities and benefits offered by the WERA initiative.

It is very positive that the WERA initiative has built momentum during its conception and development with a total of 31 education research associations/organisations involved to date.
The ‘I Can’ Project:
2008 Winners of the BERA-Sage Research into Practice Award for 16+ Learners

Harriet Cookson, Social Inclusion Manager at Look Ahead
(formerly Work and Learning Manager at Broadway)

Introduction
Broadway was delighted to be awarded the 2008 research award from BERA (British Educational Research Association) and Sage in the ‘research into practice category for 16+ learners’, for the practitioner-led research project I Can.

Broadway is a charity working with homeless and vulnerable people, and I Can aimed to demonstrate soft outcomes for homeless and vulnerable adult learners. The project was developed under Round Two of the National Research and Development Centre’s Practitioner-Led Research Initiative (PLRI) delivered by Lancaster University. Practitioner researchers, supported by Broadway’s internal dedicated research team, identified the key soft outcomes of learning for homeless and vulnerable adults, and developed a measurement tool for these. The project also looked at links between these outcomes and the national curricula for literacy, numeracy and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and determined how the outcomes monitoring could be integrated into individual learning plans. The project was Broadway’s response to increasing recognition in the field of the wider benefits of learning (including soft outcomes), but a lack of measurement tools or guidance for this work.

Methodology
The project team used an action research approach, which ensured that learners’ experiences of the tool, and its integration into service delivery, were central to the research. There were three reflective stages in the project cycle:

1. Developing a package enabling us to measure soft outcomes, through consultation with clients and staff and analysis of existing materials.

2. Fieldwork using the soft outcomes package: tutors undertook initial interviews and two reviews with 15 recruited learners using the new materials; learners were asked to reflect by undertaking diaries and photo projects and taking part in in-depth interviews at the end of the project; and reflective notes from tutors and key workers were collected.

3. Analysis: a collaborative method of qualitative data analysis was used, creating a large analysis grid in a group session, coding and theming data.

Key findings
We reported findings in two sections: outcomes of learning; and appraisal of the toolkit that we developed. The most striking finding was that improved communication and reducing isolation were key outcomes for all the learners. By the end of the project, all learners felt better about communicating, and social integration had increased both within and outside the learning context. For example, one young female learner dramatically commented that group work ‘feels like putting your hand into a pool of dark water and the thought there might be a snake there’. At the end of the project, she said: ‘I can’t believe I now take part in small group sessions’.

“feels like putting your hand into a pool of dark water and the thought there might be a snake there”
Yet as Bryant (1996, in Scott et al, p 107) states, ‘the key to any successful action research lies in the quality and strength of (the) commitment’. The team’s commitment was crucial in carrying out what was not only an inherently difficult task in terms of measuring soft outcomes, but also in terms of a complex, multi-layered study. As a project team, it was also very important and motivating for us to be part of independent critical communities of practice and enquiry: it was attending a RaPAL conference (research and practice in adult literacy) that demystified research enough for me to consider the PLRI opportunity when it arose and offer it to the team. The RaPAL network is alive and vibrant and its un-hierarchical approach enables people to create and hold a critical space, and to develop living educational theories with a sense of value and critical thinking independent of the whims of current policy. It was also important in getting feedback on our initial findings. The NRDC also provided ongoing support in sustaining and developing the project, linking us in with other networks and providing opportunities for us to present our findings at conferences. This research project has left a legacy at Broadway, and I have brought this experience to my new role. So the learning goes on.

References

“The style made a difference”

There also seemed to be what we termed a ping-pong effect between learning and skills outcomes and quality of life outcomes. This is shown by the case of a woman who could barely read the top 200 sight words on entry to the service. After 3 months, she had just finished reading her first adult library book. She wrote in her diary:

‘Now I’m taking responsibility for letters coming through my door… I read to my son. He said “Well done.”’

A male learner said:

‘I write down words I find and read everywhere I go. I was in a café wondering what could be in a “bacon” sandwich. I worked it out in the end.’

In terms of the toolkit, all clients were motivated by the self-assessment aspect of the I Can tool and the visual display of confidence changes, and tutors found it a useful diagnostic tool as it breaks down confidence into clear indicators and identifies areas of need not picked up in initial interviews. I Can also acted as a bridge in the tutor-client relationship, increasing awareness of issues that could then be tackled. Overall, the toolkit was successful in capturing evidence of change. It encouraged a cycle of reflection and learning for client and tutor, reinforcing confidence and success as well as recording challenges and areas for further work.

Reflections
The value of the project has been immense on several levels. Broadway’s clients and the organisation have benefited from the development of the approach and the further adaptation: the resulting toolkit has now been integrated into Broadway’s key working model for working with all clients, enabling us to move beyond needs-based assessment to a fuller view of clients’ confidence, motivation and self-esteem relating to themselves, their life and their relationships. Several other organisations are now using the toolkit.

For the project team, it was invaluable continuing professional development. As one of the practitioner researchers said:

‘Allowing my values and “wrong-headed” assumptions to be challenged and changed has been difficult at times, yet overwhelmingly positive.’

Another said:

‘I’m even more aware of the vulnerability of clients than before.’

The project also enabled us to be constructively critical of the increasing emphasis, in education for people who are socially excluded, on value for money (or task/target driven professionalism) rather than tangible impact on learners’ lives (or responsive professionalism based on social justice) (Appleby, 2008). It gave the team the confidence not to apply for further Skills for Life funding as it did not enable us to provide a service for people in priority need.

The project was small scale and has some obvious limitations. It also raised many questions for further investigation. And while action research is ‘a flexible, situationally responsive methodology that offers rigour, authenticity and voice’ (Cohen et al, 2000 p 241), it is also fraught with complexity, as it involves action and reaction, and observation is by practitioners who are also participants.
Appreciating failure, depreciating success: an antidote to the eulogies of departure

Ian Stronach, Liverpool John Moores University

This account summarises some ‘leaving’ and ‘arriving’ thoughts on moving from MMU to LJMU, 1st December 2008. It condenses a farewell speech in which I broke with the conventions of the ‘departure eulogy’ and offered instead of such ‘victory narratives’ a more challenging notion of the ‘failure narrative’, and some thoughts in the light of that about how research development takes place.

My departure at the age of 63 was occasioned by MMU’s refusal to let anyone stay after 65: I decided it was better to cash myself in while I still had a market value. Many staff wrote to the VC and Dean paying generous tribute to my contributions, and asking for an exception to be made. The answer was ‘no’, but such tributes triggered for me a ‘Tom Sawyer’ moment.

Tom, as I first recalled it, attended his own funeral and was moved to tears by the tributes. This seemed to sum up the ‘departure eulogy’ ritual as a funeral oration that conveniently preceded death.

The congregation became more and more moved as the pathetic tale went on, till at last the whole company broke down and joined weeping mourners in a chorus of anguished sobs, the preacher himself giving way to his feelings, and crying in the pulpit.

(Twain 1876/1951: 118)

It’s germane to this farewell that when I went back to the original, I was reminded how chancy memory is. NOT Tom himself, NOT his tears but his triumph. (I blame my 8 year-old self, the original reader, for working up a self-serving “you’ll be sorry one day” displacement. Though perhaps I should blame, as well, a much older self…).

…the three boys came marching up the aisle, Tom in the lead, Joe next, and Huck, a ruin in drooping rags, sneaking foolishly in the rear. They had been hid in the unused gallery, listening to their own funeral sermon.

(ibid.)

Twain is an apposite departure point for another reason. I start out on this reflection from two different starting points. The first is a colleague’s recent departure and the eulogy rendered by Maggie MacLure and responded to in like measure by Bridget Somekh. Both were ‘deserved’, of course, but they were also culturally inevitable victory narratives, true to the rituals of departure. It is the cultural and not the personal that I intend to subvert. I wish, that is, to dismember that kind of remembering.

The second is certainly a bit weird, yet empirical. I experienced a strange recollection as I cleared out my room, filtering the detritus of 13 years’ research activity at MMU. It provoked the memory of an earlier clearing-out. My mother had Alzheimer’s and when she died we found a letter in her belongings. It was a blank sheet of writing paper, mostly. But in the bottom right hand corner, a page within a page, in absolutely tiny writing she had started a letter to her already dead sister. It began: ‘Dear Meg, I haven’t heard from you for a while so…’ and then the rest was hieroglyphics. Her mind for the rest of the letter was only able to do bits of letters… a loop, a vertical, a dash… a kind of litter of letters. But more like ‘litter’ in the older sense of what remains for us to lie on, a bedding of sorts, those broken letters as remainders of sense. This was a performative paradoxically unable to say anything yet enacting all that could be said about a mind and the nature of its atrophy.

It was such a performative thing in relation to her disease, the mind representing its own destruction in the blank spaces of the paper, a mind going blank, and also – in an additional confession, breaking up in the course of its own writing in that tiny bottom right-hand corner of the paper. Together, a double inability that was so able in expressing its deficit. It was a mind picturing its own disappearance.
That was 17 years ago. I’ve not thought about it since. Why did it come to mind as I cleared out my room?

Well, who’s to say… But the analogy that came to mind was this. You apply for a new job because MMU won’t keep staff after 65. You write for your (working) life. It’s a last letter of application. CV, RAE record, publications, funding, editorships, blah, blah. And it struck me, as I filled up the black bags with stuff to throw out, that all that ‘black letter’ achievement (written, recorded, official, evidential, undeniable) was also bottom right-hand corner stuff.

(We say: “It’s there in black-and-white”, but we read the black rather than the white. And, as we’ll see, I was filling the black bags with the ‘white’. I thought there were significant blanks surrounding such ‘black letter’ accounts couched in the genre of the CV and the like. They covered most of the ‘page’, if a working life can metaphorically be rendered as such, and they subvert the telling of victory narratives that obscure and displace a much more interesting and extensive hinterland of failure, deficit and ignorance. (I will argue that these three are virtues, the hidden building blocks of ‘success’. Think of the ‘Three Graces’ as the ‘Three Disgraces’.)

So perhaps my mother’s last letter did not come to mind because of associated metaphors of death (whether professional or institutional) but because of associations of remembering and forgetting, awakened by rifling through old folders, chucking out notes, failed bids, rejected articles, feedback to half-forgotten students, research development workshops and seminars, drafts, and so on. I had found the ‘blank’ – a ‘white-out’ world of forgotten initiatives, past students, failed projects, draft articles, job applications, incomplete papers, unused notes. A blizzard of failures. Far larger than the bottom right-hand corner of the page, the so-called ‘CV etc, this was the unconsidered job. Like my mother’s last letter, truths congregated in these blanks and breakdowns, in what lay behind the black letters of the CV/RAE/departure eulogy. I realised that most of that work-life was lived through, and in, and with failure. It took the physical act of throwing stuff out to unearth the metaphysical business of remembering and forgetting – to invert their customary priorities and begin to deconstruct the genre of the ‘victory narrative’ on which CV, RAE, and departure eulogies all insist.

Lesson 1: Failure is the rule not the exception. Success is its occasional mistake, not its opposite.
In the spoken version of this account, I illustrated this thesis by looking at the careers of those who came to MMU as Professors, including myself. All had failed in some way or another [I omit the detail of the others’ failures here out of respect for the dead. But, by way of illustration against only myself, Sally Brown certainly painted me as a disastrous appointment at Stirling.] And all these failures were typically hidden away, denied, repressed. In the actual talk, indeed, one of the profs interrupted in order to deny her failure story, neatly illustrating the corollary of an active and interested forgetting.

“\textit{It is the cultural and not the personal that I intend to subvert…}”

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Lesson 2: Learn how to fail, not how to succeed. Not to be ‘a failure’, but how to be in failure (not avoid, not cope with, not overcome, but through)
If you don’t, fantasies of efficacy and control ensue. You construct yourself as a victory narrative, then swallow that myth. The myth ingested then asserts a core identity. You become precisely who you aren’t. There are, for example, a growing number of people anxious to claim ‘educational research at MMU’ as their achievement. Each is a fantasist because the achievement was collective, not individual. Least of all was it a managerial triumph, ‘headed’ by anyone. Think hydra, not head – and hydras can’t have victory narratives: their muddy and plural stories can’t be personified and claimed in that way; they are not ‘led’ in any conventional sense, though certainly orchestrated. It’s not very insightful to say that such claimants are dishonest, and much more important to realise that these claims are almost always a matter of the most sincere self-deceit, as in all Walter Mitty scenarios. So here’s a tough question for each of us, and especially the growing band of managerialist claimants: where is my most sincere self-deceit?

Lesson 3: Success doesn’t need much understanding. Failure does. Aim to get better at failing.
Victory narratives are designed to confuse sequence with cause. They lay a false trail, and offer an impossible exemplar to those who follow. They are a bad example masquerading as a ‘good example’ to us all. That’s where the ‘departure eulogies’ offer a pedagogic dead-end for those who remain. There’s a literature on this theme – from Hayek’s notion of ‘catallaxy’ (life as part-skill, part-chance; 1976: 71), through to Shermansky’s entertaining and statistically irrefutable hierarchy of football managerial excellence (Kenny Dalglish came top, but, 10 years on, the only one to remain in the top 20 is Ferguson. The key managerial skill is, Shermansky concluded, ‘luck’, personal communication). Or there’s Mladinov’s more recent offering, The drunkard’s walk: how randomness rules our lives. In particular he criticises the ‘hot-hand fallacy’ that success now predicts success later (a point I currently take very seriously). But I do want to offer a saving limitation to the rule of Lady Luck: don’t think serendipity is just a matter of luck. Make your own by failing often and failing well.

Lesson 4: Know what you don’t know. Knowledge is more useful than ignorance, of course. But knowledge of ignorance is even more useful. An ignorance deficit (you don’t know what you don’t know) is the biggest failure of all.
When I was appointed Research Professor at MMU in 1995, I was charged with leading research development. No-one knew what a ‘Research Professor’ was, including me. So the role emerged from an extensive series of preliminary interviews with research-active or research-interested people, from managers to students. It turned out that people by and large wanted:
\begin{itemize}
  \item dialogue over draft articles
  \item help with writing research proposals
  \item seminars and workshops to help ‘research-ladder’ step-changes
  \item critique of research activities
  \item develop theory and methodology expertise
  \item tighten support and supervision structure to PhD/MPhil
  \item integrate teaching, learning and research
  \item initiate new projects (notes, December 1995)
\end{itemize}
And invariably, people would add at the end of the interview, ‘… and do your own research as well, of course.’

In the bottom right-hand corner of the page on which I wrote these notes – shades of my mother’s last letter – also bracketed off from the rest of the page, and also in tiny writing, I’ve added ‘[OK, that’s Monday, what do you want me to do on Tuesdays]’. Where’s the substantive failure here? No doubt about that: ‘integrate teaching, learning and research’. The structural one? I didn’t know how to be a Research Professor, let alone a ‘good’ one. But I knew enough to make that initial failure and ignorance public, and open to negotiated remedy.

Finally, there’s another failure, more generically associated with the role of Research Professor. Such a role was divorced from line management. I reported to two faculty Deans, both of whom were persuaded that the role ought to separate management and development roles to an unusual degree. It suited my temperament and postmodernist bent to work ‘sideways-in’; leading by not-leading, motivating rather than controlling, making rather than taking initiatives, creating spaces rather than filling them, mentoring rather than directing, developing a collaborative and relatively democratic ethos – and no doubt I stray towards a utopian rendering hereabouts. Perhaps it was a crazy way to work, but only the crazy would say that it didn’t work. Still, it was an approach that a few top-down managerialist individuals failed to understand, or chose not to recognise. And when a spirited attempt to abolish the role was made last year (it lasted a week, and ended both with a denial that the attempt had ever been made and an offer to put my name forward for a OBE ‘in recognition not in compensation’ – a superb misreading of everything and everyone… [email from Institute Director, 23.2.07]), I decided it was time to look around. Such a proposed disappearance, in role terms, has after all to be regarded in itself as a kind of failure. Age, then, is only part of my alibi for this story about moving on.

**Lesson 5: Theorise in-the-way as well as out-the-way**

A last point concerns a peculiarity I noted when I worked in the Centre for Applied Research in Education (which in many ways MMU has succeeded). The dominant creeds in CARE were ‘democratic evaluation’ and ‘action research’. Neither practice was the explicit, black letters of CV, RAE, or valedictory rhetorics. As in my mother’s last letter, you must read between the lines. So a last spectral paradox appears: I’ll only be real when I’m gone.

**References:**


Some reflections from the Applied Educational Research Scheme (AERS): a Scottish Model of Research Capacity Building

**Adela Baird**, Senior Research and Knowledge Transfer Fellow, Applied Educational Research Scheme (AERS), University of Edinburgh

**Stephen Baron**, Professor of Education and Co-ordinator of AERS, University of Strathclyde

AERS was a five-year programme jointly funded from 2004 by the Scottish Funding Council and the Scottish Government. It was established to build research capacity across the seven universities in Scotland which provide initial teacher education and to conduct high quality research in support of the National Priorities in Education. The need to build capacity across Scotland is important, as a generation of researchers is about to retire. Replacing those researchers has been recognised as a challenge for some time. In particular, the situation in educational research is acute. Munn, in her presidential address at the annual British Education Research Conference in 2007, focused on the challenges of research capacity building for the future. She has strongly suggested that a collaborative approach would be necessary, as part of an overall strategy, to increase the number of people engaged in educational research and the quality of the work they do.

AERS was organised into three substantive networks to provide an appropriate research focus for the planned capacity building: Learners, Learning and Teaching; Schools and Social Capital; and School Management and Governance. Each network supported a range of research projects and provided the main locus of the ‘on the job’ training, where provision emerged out of the needs of the project rather than any individual’s preferred or chosen need. AERS also supported a Research Capacity Building Network that had a generic responsibility for capacity building, both by developing a formal masters’ training resources and by responding to the on-going needs for training across the substantive networks, thereby providing both ‘on’ and ‘off’ the job training.

Evidence from questionnaire and interview data has been collected to identify if AERS has been successful in promoting research capacity building among its participants. These data tracked the research activity which had taken place in each of the three substantive networks within AERS. This paper focuses on a small selection of the results from questionnaires distributed to the AERS participants active in a research project and focus group interviews with our AERS Fellows (those whose institutions had signed a formal agreement to support their involvement in AERS).

**Results**

The surveys indicated that the AERS participants, although coming mainly from the academic community, also included substantial numbers from both the policy and practice communities. ‘Time to do the AERS research’ was identified as a common problem across all the communities, but particularly from those coming from the academic community. Those whose employers operated outside academia appeared to make better efforts to arrange dedicated time for research. This was particularly the case where formal agreements had been signed within the AERS Fellowship scheme, planned to provide ‘training’ for the next generation of principal investigators.

I’ve signed a contract, in terms of meant to be normal hours but, I mean, the time that’s needed for it is much more. So, I mean, it’s just been added on to your workload, a small amount… And, it seems to me, it’s like generally, time’s elastic. It doesn’t seem to mean anything! A certain amount of work’s to get done, and it’s to get done, and that’s it. So you can put down any number of hours you like.

(Academic Fellow)

“The need to build capacity across Scotland is important as a generation of researchers is about to retire.”
It was typical for the Fellows from higher education institutions (HEIs) to find that the original agreements had not been honoured and that most of the AERS work had to be completed in the Fellow’s own ‘elastic’ time. There were some exceptions, but this was unusual. One of the Fellows from an HEI had signed an agreement but had not had time allocated at all and was struggling to maintain the Fellowship alongside a full teaching and administrative workload. In contrast, the Fellows from the practice and policy communities indicated that their ‘home’ work places had recognised and formally endorsed the time needed for the work of being a Fellow though they reported that some juggling of time and priorities were inevitably necessary:

…and I have had the time and I have had the support within the organisation, and also of kind of my mentor and the institute, as such. But I think, we’re nearing completion, we’re at reporting stage almost, and I feel as though I would quite like to say “Right, okay, this is what we set out to do”. And I think, also, for the local authority, to acknowledge that, you know ‘Oh right, okay ‘M’ has been busy for the last two years. Now she’s back! This is what she achieved’ you know? Now go back to doing your job.” (Practitioner/Policy Fellow)

Although being involved in AERS appeared not to have had a direct impact on most of the participants’ careers, a number of them identified what one called ‘a ripple effect’. One of the focus group members said:

I feel as though it’s not only improved my personal capacity for research, I feel as though the local authority, as a whole, has benefited from me participating in this research too. I feel as though the young people that we’ve been working with, they’ve benefited out of it, you know; the volunteers we’ve worked with. I think the spin-offs from just one person doing one particular research, one piece of work, has been…you know; the ripples from it, I would say, have been quite far reaching. (Practitioner Fellow)

The network model adopted by AERS has meant that many of its participants have been closely attached to a particular project within a network. The questionnaire results confirmed that for most of the active participants in a project, their main affinity was with the project rather than with the network or AERS as a whole. This suggests that for those participants involved in one project over the time of AERS, there has been some ‘freezing’ of widening involvement opportunities, possibly limiting the range of research skills to which they had access. Although one network operated an approach which enabled many its participants to be involved in more than one project over time, their main affinity still tended to be with what they considered their main project.

I don’t think I ever became sufficiently involved to really develop any of that (contact with the wider Network and AERS in general). And, yeah, that’s nobody’s fault but my own. Well, it’s not my fault, but I didn’t have the time and place to become involved in all of that. (Academic Fellow)

For the majority of active participants much value was reported in terms of working collaboratively with others on a project over a period of time and some linked this to a development in their own personal research capacity:

For me, the capacity that I see as, perhaps, being most valuable personally, is the capacity to network and to work collaboratively. So part of it is about meeting other people and considering future collaborators, but also about developing skills in collaborating and going through some of the difficult parts of working as a team, and still speaking to them all, which I think is incredible! (Academic Fellow)

And I think there’s also a wider thing in terms of research capacity building. I suppose it’s what A calls academic assertiveness. Finding your voice and being able to hold your own and not feel intimidated… And I think that’s down to the fact that the AERS Group, the AERS Network - the group that I belong to – are very supportive. You can say anything without fear of being slapped down from that little group, without feeling uncomfortable about it. (Academic Fellow)

Wilson, Christie and Rippilainen (2008) have reported that for many of the research teams within AERS, the virtual research environment (VRE) was an important focus for the research though its uptake and use varied between and across teams. As researchers became more familiar with the virtual environment and its potential uses a small number of HE research teams made use of the VRE as a means of engaging research participants, generating new opportunities for data collection and analysis in the process. They suggest that of particular value was a small number of communities of enquiry in which ‘other’ groups were given a voice and an active role as research participants. The virtual environment has the potential to offset some of the issues of time in that one can log on at will and become part of a community or network without taking travelling time out from a busy routine. One AERS participant, originally negative about the VRE has said:

Well, I like the fact that somebody set it up for us and, all we have to do, is learn how to access it… It didn’t take very much investment of time and energy to do the things that we wanted to use it for… I think, that way of managing data, it’s actually converted me a bit, to seeing that there is some use of the VREs and VLEs. (Academic Fellow)

Another AERS participant noted that the VRE has:

…developed networking links, fostered research capacity, increased confidence and provided a supportive environment for collaborative research.

While another has suggested:

…the use of the VRE has changed my daily research practices.

This suggests that being part of AERS involved its participants in a research capacity building experience which went beyond the bounds of just being part of a research project team. This might be called being within a new learning territory. Overwhelmingly the AERS participants reported a gradual accumulation of skills when they compared their levels of expertise before and after AERS. This was common across the three communities and across a wide range of research type skills.
However, there were a number of areas where no progress was reported. These areas tended to fall within the quantitative spectrum of skills, probably reflecting the fact that most of the AERS projects focused on qualitative research methods rather than on quantitative. Indeed it proved difficult to recruit team members for quantitative projects from higher education (in comparison with a great interest from local authority personnel).

The specification for the funding for AERS from the Scottish Government and from the Scottish Funding Council properly represented their priorities in 2002, namely research in support of the National Priorities in Education and strengthening the HE research base (both in terms of the national profile of excellence and in terms of numbers of staff involved). Less than two thirds of participants in AERS were from the targeted academic community with practitioner and policy communities constituting the remainder. One of the major outcomes of this unexpected (and strictly ultra vires) development has been the co-production of knowledge within the project teams. This has usefully expanded the operational definition of ‘capacity building’ with AERS from the ‘technicist’ (provision of decontextualised research skills training) to the ‘social practices’ and now to a ‘community of practice’ model. Emergent dimensions of the latter can be sketched: the co-working of member of different practice models; the co-production of knowledge; enhanced engagement between different frameworks of relevance. However, this enhanced engagement and understanding between the different communities has to be balanced against the additional time required to enable such joint insights and trust to develop.

Conclusion
From this initial analysis of data evaluating the progress (and lack thereof) of AERS we suggest that AERS has created a viable social practice model of capacity building which has been influential outside Scotland and has begun to chart a ‘of communities of practice’ model. It has strengthened Scottish educational research and engendered the co-production of knowledge across traditional boundaries which has the potential for enhancing the integration of research, policy and practice communities (as well as tentative steps towards integrating the perspectives of pupils, their families and their communities). These conclusions are triangulated by the RAE 2008 Subject Overview Report for Education. This notes a ‘significant expansion’ of submitted activity in Scotland (in comparison with little change in Northern Ireland and a decrease in Wales; interestingly the situation in England is not stated and can not be inferred from data given). The Panel concludes that the expansion in Scotland has been ‘strongly supported’ by AERS with its ‘ethos of collaborative cross-disciplinary working and user engagement’. The Report from User Members notes that only a small proportion of the submitted outputs were of the type supported and funded by TLRP and AERS, apparently due to risk aversive institutions being wary of submitting ‘research-for-use’ to the RAE (implying significant impacts in terms of ‘Environment’ and/or ‘Esteem’). To this must be added the long cycle of capacity building whereby research outputs from AERS were only beginning to appear at RAE deadline. Such conclusions about the impact of AERS are supported by institutional feedback given by the Education Panel.

“The progress of AERS has been inhibited by a dearth of institutional strategies to manage the dual labour market in Education in HEIs resulting in an ongoing tension between the demands of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) provision and research, a false dualism which can only serve to question the place of ITE in Higher Education. The current culture and organisation of some ITE provision in inhibits research development, individually and institutionally. Programmes such as AERS have not fully balanced the zero sum elements in capacity building, whereby the opportunity costs of devoting the time of experienced researchers to capacity building have to be set against the high quality research foregone.

Munn (2008) is correct to think of strategies as being required at different ‘levels’ of the higher education, policy and practice systems. At the level of the individual, research capacity building challenges long run identities and necessitates transformation, with all the uncertainties entailed. At the level of institutions, be they Universities, local authorities, non-governmental bodies, there is a challenge to realise in staff the critical, enquiry-based perspectives which are increasingly being demanded of the learners. Crucially, at a system level, initiatives are required to establish mechanisms to address the issues of the dual-labour market so that integrating professional experience and research perspectives is not privatised as matter of foregoing leisure time and personal life.

References


‘What Works’ as a Sublinguistic Grunt, with Lessons from Catachresis, Asymptote, Football and Pharma

Gary Thomas, School of Education, University of Birmingham. g.thomas.3@bham.ac.uk

This July morning I look out of my window and it is cloudy from horizon to horizon. It’s relentlessly grey, with drizzle in the air. The weather forecast yesterday said it would be sunny. In fact they said it would be the hottest day of the year – and this morning they admit that they had been wrong. No sizzle; just drizzle.

How can this happen? We know that there is a 70 per cent likelihood of the weather today being the same as it was yesterday (and it is today), so meteorology has to do better than this to be taken seriously as a predictive science. Admittedly, it does do a bit better, but not much. Despite a payroll of thousands, satellites and computers the size of Wales, weather forecasters can’t do much better than I can by looking out of the window and using the simple heuristic of saying ‘Tomorrow it’ll be like today’.

Why do I feel so cheated by this? I think it is to do with the idea of science – in this case meteorology – being able to provide exact answers; being able to do better than my own guess. But of course there are differences in the ways that different sciences work, and some – if the truth be told – aren’t really predictive sciences at all, even if they can, with their toolkits and their methods, be entitled to the epistemological garland ‘science’. Which leads me to social science. Should we expect social science to be able to predict? Should we expect it to be able to tell us ‘what works’ better than we already know on the basis of our own experience of the world? In his classic After Virtue Alasdair MacIntyre suggests that ‘the record of social scientists as predictors is very bad indeed, insofar as the record can be pieced together … the salient fact about those [social] sciences is the absence of the discovery of any law-like generalisations whatsoever’ (1985: 88). More recently, Susan Haack (2003: 27) also suggests gently that social scientific discoveries are hard to think of. And Butz and Torrey (2006: 1898), 25 years on from MacIntyre in their review of social science talk about ‘the fundamental challenge’ of moving to useful prediction.

Don’t forget that the challenge is to come up with useful prediction. The challenge is to do better than a simple heuristic based on our own experience and everyday generalisation. In other words, of doing better than the 70% of looking out of the window. My guess is that we don’t do any better than this in educational research that purports to know ‘what works’.

Catachresis and sublinguistic grunts

I think that the problem is that we are living with the ‘science’ bit of ‘social science’ as a metaphor. This is unproblematic up to a point, but the problem is that the metaphor gets extended and we start believing all sorts of silly things. One of those silly things is in ‘what works’.

‘Catachresis’ means an outlandish comparison or an ingeniously mixed metaphor, and in literature it can work well, as for example in Philotus’s line in Timon of Athens: ‘I fear ‘tis deepest winter in Lord Timon’s…

“…Should we expect social science to be able to predict? Should we expect it to be able to tell us ‘what works’ better than we already know on the basis of our own experience of the world?”
for the

Asymptote
Having talked about the distortions that can come from metaphor, I am now going to use a metaphor myself (but, I hope, avoid an inappropriate use). Asymptote is a mathematical term meaning a straight line to which a curved line gets closer and closer but never meets. More loosely, and as it has been expropriated by learning theorists, it means the plateau of a curve that rises at a decelerating rate. With its move from learning theory to the vernacular, most people are now familiar with the term ‘learning curve’, though many may not appreciate that the characteristic shape of this curve is of a steep rise, when one is learning a lot in the early stages of skill mastery, falling off to a slower rise, and eventually levelling off to the asymptote, in the shape of the left-hand side of an upturned letter ‘U’.

Extending the metaphor from its use in learning theory, one can see evidence of asymptote – of progress starting powerfully, and then tailing off to nothing – also in programmes of social innovation. Looking at evaluations of almost any programme of social or educational innovation one can see asymptote arising. In other words, when the innovation is introduced, it meets with success, sometimes spectacular, that is kept afloat on a combination of adrenalin, enthusiasm and publicity.

What usually seems to happen is that remarkable successes are maintained for a while, until trials are conducted outside the original sites and without the pioneer theoreticians, researchers or practitioners. Even without the pioneers, though, the buzz is still there and results are still good – but not quite as good as early results promised. Then, on the back of early promise, larger scale policy initiatives and evaluations are introduced but even weaker positive findings are made, or perhaps no positive findings at all. The consequence may not only be asymptote, but asymptote with attitude, as the asymptote drops off so that one completes the upturned ‘U’ with its right-hand side now intact: ‘fl’. Pawson (2006) describes this well in relation to the evaluation of social programmes but it is undoubtedly true also in education. One could, if one were heretical, even perhaps give as a recent example reports on the use of ‘synthetic phonics’ (e.g. Johnston and Watson, 2003) with the Rose Committee (2006: 4) even suggesting that ‘‘synthetic’ phonics, offers the vast majority of young children the best and most direct route to becoming skilled readers and writers’. But see Wyse and Goswami (2008) for a discussion, perhaps, of the beginnings of the asymptote.

Rossi (1987) describes the ‘stainless steel law of evaluation’, namely that ‘the better designed the impact assessment of a social programme, the more likely is the resulting estimated net impact to be zero’. In particular, special education is replete with examples of what might be called ‘programmatic asymptote’, as I have tried to show elsewhere (Thomas and Loxley, 2007).

Football and pharma
And how shall we know what works? Randomised controlled trials (RCTs) of course! There’s no doubt that RCTs are wonderful. They are, as Slavin (2002) helpfully reminds us, the basis of remarkable advances in medicine. In fact he goes further: ‘In particular, it is the randomized clinical trial – more than any single medical breakthrough – that has transformed medicine.’ (2002: 16)

Actually, that’s such a huge assertion that I need to digress for a moment to attend to it. Surely, imagination, insight and ingenuity are responsible for the advances. If we want to understand the guts of advance we are unlikely to be rewarded by an analysis of the role of RCTs. Rather, we would do better to focus on the ways that tacit knowledge is used by practitioners and by the ways that ‘intelligent noticing’ emerges within and outside local intellectual infrastructures. If one looks at well documented advances in any science or technology (not just medicine) – in the understanding of superconductivity, the discovery of penicillin, the vulcanisation of rubber, the discovery of heliocobacter pylori (the bacteria that cause ulcers), the invention of nylon or even progress in artificial insemination – it becomes clear that it is inspiration, creativity and imagination coalescing in extraordinary ways that

purse’. Fine in the dramatic arts, then, but in education, and indeed all social science, caution is needed when the potential for catachresis arises. In his paper Scaling up as catachresis Joe Tobin (2005) asks if the notion of scaling up in ‘what works’ paints an attractive picture – that we can take lessons from here and use them there – but a picture that is in fact misleading. Does it, by using the word ‘works’, invoke the idea of successful processes from another field of endeavour (for example, an engineering technique, a chemical process or a drug treatment), offering a notion of ‘works’ which implies ‘working’ irrespective of social or cultural circumstances?

The issue is about the use of language and thinking, and the responsibility that we as professional researchers have to think beyond slogans and popularised jargon. Becker (1993: 218) makes the point about language when he regrets the use of ‘science talk’ in the study of social phenomena. In a similar vein, Fish (1989: 14–15) notes disapprovingly the over-use of what he calls ‘theory-talk’ in the humanities, with the invocation of the word ‘theory’ simply to add cachet to an argument. Likewise, Illich and Sanders discuss the misleading elision of technical and non-technical language, though they invent a term more prosaic than catachresis for such misuse: ‘sublinguistic grunt’ (Illich and Sanders, 1988: 106). I’d venture that ‘what works’ is ‘catachresis’ for such misuse: ‘sublinguistic grunt’ (Illich
enable ‘advance’ (see T hagard, 1998, for an interesting discussion). ‘Advances’ happen from able people working with their personal knowledge, the tools of their trade and their immersion in the ideas of their intellectual communities. The bigging up of RCTs’ role in the ‘remarkable advances’ Slavin admires in medicine seems to me to be misplaced. RCTs of course play a vital role in validating effectiveness, but it is a mundane and rather dull one and one that is peculiar and necessary to enquire only in certain fields. The reason for the need for RCTs in pharmacology and medicine, and not in, say, aeronautical engineering is that medical interventions exist in a strange epistemic netherworld where people often get better anyway. When jets crash they rarely get better. How do you know that people have got better because of your drug? Answer: RCT. Excellent answer to difficult problem in pharma.

Human learning is a bit strange epistemically as well. Humans seem to learn in almost any circumstance, and sometimes (though I’ll say it quietly) we even seem to learn better when we are not being deliberately taught. So, given children’s inuiritiating habit of learning in spite of everything that education systems throw at them, an RCT, or something like it, is necessary to separate the programmatic wheat from the programmatic chaff. How do we know that this kind of teaching is better than that kind of teaching?

But teaching, and in fact any intervention in a social world, is more like football than pharma, and the success of RCTs in pharma may give us a false sense of security in education if this is not understood. A method can be developed for playing football – say, the 4-3-3 system – but it won’t always be successful or the best method. In medicine tetracycline (or something like it) will almost always be the best method for treating tuberculosis. For Manchester United 4-3-3 may work much of the time, but when Rooney and Ronaldo are both available it may be better to play 4-4-1-1. Or when playing at home to Arsenal, to play 4-4-2 and get the ground staff to soak the field beforehand so the Arsenal players’ superior footballing skills cannot make themselves evident. For the pub team and the primary school team similar considerations will obtain. In fact, 4-3-3 will rarely be best for the primary school team. All of which is why RCTs aren’t well known for their role in evaluating the effectiveness of football systems.

Teaching is more like football than pharma. As I have noted elsewhere (Thomas, 2007) in practising teaching – or indeed in practising most things – local considerations will always obtain and these will be based on what E.D. Hirsch (1976: 18) calls ‘… making calculations of probability based on an insider’s knowledge’. Or, in Stanley Fish’s terms by ‘… extending a practice, employing a set of heuristic questions’ always ‘… tethered to the contextual setting’ (1989: 322-3). Teachers are reflective practitioners, developing and using what Hirsch calls ‘local hermeneutics’ in the rule of thumb and the knack. Talking of the rule of thumb and distinguishing it from the rule, pure-and-simple, Fish (1989: 317) suggests that these rules of thumb ‘vary with the contextual circumstances of an ongoing practice; as those circumstances change, the very meaning of the rule (the instructions it is understood to give) changes too’.

To paraphrase Condoleezza Rice, there are no silver bullets (a nice metaphor, and not a catchphrase). Teachers are thinking, independently-reasoning professionals and professional development surely depends more on engagement in a community that shares... and argues about ideas than it does on being spoon-fed tips, bullet points and too-easy answers about ‘what works’.

References


The No Outsiders participatory action research project, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council from September 2006 through December 2008, has been exploring ways in which proactive approaches to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) equality can be implemented within primary classrooms. A team of 26 primary practitioner-researchers across England have been supported by academic researchers based at the University of Sunderland, the University of Exeter and the Institute of Education, University of London in investigating heteronormative processes and designing approaches to LGBT equality grounded in their own particular contexts.

We adopted a participatory action research approach because of the emphasis on social action as an immediate goal (rather than theory building without praxis) and the potential for analysis of ongoing practice (rather than the investigation of generalised phenomena that may or may not later be applied to a specific situation).

Practitioner-researchers have generated the goals and objectives of their action research projects based on their classroom experience and concerns, while their research assistants and other team members have taken on the role of critical friends (Campbell, McNamara, & Gilroy, 2004, p. 106). This ongoing collaborative interrogation has taken us beyond the doing/thinking binary sometimes implied by ‘reflective practice.’

Project members have been examining heteronormativity embedded in everyday classroom practice with a critical eye, that is, the ways in which what is unthinkingly said and done, or not said and not done, reinforce stereotypes and assumptions about sexual orientation and gender identity. Our investigations have included a wide range of issues, such as:

- How can parents’ concerns be addressed, both proactively and as they arise?
- How can coalition-building be developed between marginalised groups who may not have previously seen each other as allies?
- How can teachers’ own sexual identities and gender expression support or constrain sexualities equality work in the classroom?
- How can sexualities equality be incorporated into the values and ethos of a Church school, and into the inclusive tenets of Islam?

A password-protected web site formed our virtual research space, where team members’ contributions to a discussion forum comprised both data and data analysis. Regular face-to-face research discussions between university researchers and practitioner-researchers were also transcribed and uploaded as data, along with fieldnotes, journal reflections, lesson plans and classroom work. All team members were invited to participate in data analysis as an ongoing part of the research process.

Aside from academic conference presentations and publications, project dissemination in the form of professional development events for educational practitioners and policy makers has been ongoing, with requests already coming in for dissemination/professional development events in 2009. These events have transformed the notion of dissemination from information-giving to knowledge-building through professional development, and have led to the growth of widening circles of communities of practice, in line with our project objectives. On 31 October the National Union of Teachers (NUT) hosted the official No Outsiders publicity launch at their London headquarters, where invited educational leaders spoke alongside project teachers.

In collaboration with professional film makers, we have produced a series of documentary films capturing the work of all the practitioner-researchers, which will be used for professional development and dissemination. The project is also producing two books, both to be published by Trentham books. A book entitled Interrogating heteronormativity in primary schools: the work of the No Outsiders project (expected Spring 2009) will collect analyses by university researchers and will be targeted toward an academic audience, while teachers’ ideas and reflections will be collected in a book entitled No Outsiders: Undoing homophobia in primary schools (expected Autumn 2009).

For further information on the No Outsiders project, visit the public website at www.nooutsiders.sunderland.ac.uk or contact Renée DePalma at renee@uvigo.es.
Recent changes to the reporting of GCSE results (in 2006, emphasising the role of passes in English & Maths) and now this change to include pupils’ awareness of science, appear in response to criticisms about the ‘multiplication of routes to GCSE success’ which have not emphasised the importance of basic skills. In the case of science this was long overdue – given the historic importance to this country of its scientific contributions to the world economy. The introduction of this measure coincides with concerns about low and declining take-up of science subjects at A-level and beyond, and also the well-publicised closure of some University science departments.

Basics
This paper is concerned with the take-up of science courses for the ‘more able’ 40% of the population (considered as those with KS2 points >28.5). Whilst it might be assumed that the choice of separate GCSE science courses as an alternative to ‘Double Science’ would be reasonable for many of these pupils, in reality only a small minority appear to be offered that choice. In fact well over two thirds of non-selective schools did not offer this choice at all in 2007, and almost half of grammar schools offered it only to a small minority or none at all.

In 2007 there were around 230,000 pupils classified as ‘more able’ – of these well over three quarters took Double Science. In grammar schools where (almost by definition) most pupils are technically ‘more able’, over two thirds took Double Science.

One of the purposes of this paper is to encourage schools to review the choices they offer in science. This could be assisted by two highly significant findings reported here:

• First, that pupils who take ‘Separate Sciences’ get better GCSE results than similar pupils who take Double Science; and,

• Separate science GCSE choice appears to offer both a better catalyst for studying science subjects at A-level and also, better chances of obtaining ‘A’ grades in those examinations compared to similarly well-qualified entrants who took Double Science.

Table 1: GCSE results for Double Science and Separate Science entries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ks2 Grp</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ks2 Pts</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td>31.1</td>
<td>32.2</td>
<td>33.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCSE Sc</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dbl Sc</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>182597</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separate</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>31635</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No’s</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Performance of ‘more able’ pupils taking Double Science and Separate Sciences
For this analysis we have grouped ‘more able’ pupils into five equally sized groups based on their Key Stage 2 average points score. The outcome measure we have used is the ‘high stakes’ achievement of A or A* grades in Double Science or in at least two ‘Separate Sciences’ (Physics, Chemistry and Biology). The table below shows these groupings and the outcomes achieved by the two separate ‘routes.’
For each group of matched pupils the outcomes for ‘Separate Science’ GCSEs are substantially higher than those for Double Science. This occurs for each ‘more able’ pupil group. Overall, just over a quarter of ‘more able’ pupils achieved A*/A passes in Double Science compared with over one third for those taking ‘Separate Sciences’.

This evidence should go some way to contesting the often expressed view that ‘Separate Science’ GCSE exams are ‘harder’ than other routes to qualification. Table 1 shows clearly that this is NOT the case for ‘more able’ pupils – they stood a greater chance of achieving A*/A grades if they took Separate Sciences than Double Science. We do not have evidence here to explore why this should be the case – but the inference from Table 1 is pretty clear-cut.

Post-16 qualifications in Science subjects

In choosing subjects to study at A-level both students and their institutions are guided by performance at GCSE. Although not a pre-requisite, evidence of previous success in cognate subjects is often a useful guide.

For main-stream A-level Science subjects (Physics, Chemistry and Biology) we have investigated the role of GCSE Science outcomes in relation to the achievement of A grades in these areas. The information emerging from this should be of very real value both to students and their advisers – but also pose questions about the availability of ‘differentiated’ science course options pre-GCSE for ‘more able’ pupils.

Using the 2007 A-level results matched to their pupils GCSE courses and outcomes taken in 2005 we have reviewed the GCSE background and detailed outcomes of ‘more able’ students who achieved A-grades in Physics, Chemistry and Biology.

Table 2: A-level grade achievement by GCSE route

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GCSE Route</th>
<th>GCSE Double Science</th>
<th>GCSE Separate Science</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A grade in A lev</td>
<td>A*C Double Sc</td>
<td>A*/A Double Sc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physics 31%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemistry 32%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biology 26%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A-Grade A-level Outcomes for students following different GCSE Routes

For each student who achieved an A-grade in each subject we calculated the overall proportion of A grades; then the percentage of those who took Double Science who achieved an A grade and percentage of those with A*/A grades in Double Science who achieved an A grade. We repeated these calculations for those who took Separate Sciences at GCSE.

Three things stand out from Table 2:

- Achieving two A*/A grades at GCSE boosts the chances of obtaining an A grade at A-level; and,
- Those who took ‘Separate Sciences’ at GCSE had substantially greater chances of gaining an A grade at A-level; and,
- Achieving two A*/A grades in ‘Separate Sciences’ at GCSE substantially increased the proportion of those gaining an A grade at A level.

In fact those who did achieve two A*/A grades in ‘Separate Sciences’ were more likely to gain an A at A-level in a Science subject than any other grade. This is a remarkable finding and one which needs wide dissemination. The issue remains, however, of ensuring that the decline in take-up of A-level Sciences is not merely halted but reversed.

Conclusion

These findings reported in this paper vindicate the role of ‘Separate Science’ courses at GCSE. For far too long it has appeared that ‘Double Science’ has been the fallback choice for the great majority of schools – with the attendant marginalization of other routes. We have shown not only that ‘Separate Sciences’ are ‘good’ vehicles for more able pupils’ outcomes – but also that they provide firms (and encouraging) evidence of their role in outcomes of post-GCSE study.

One consequence of wide dissemination of these results could be to encourage more ‘more able’ students to go on to study ‘hard’ sciences at A-level, and possibly beyond.

“In choosing subjects to study at A-level both students and their institutions are guided by performance at GCSE.”
There was a break at about 16, when I came to Britain and had my work cut out learning, which included – frustratingly – Latin unseens, where the problem was that I knew the German, but not the English for instance for ‘castra ponere’. But I was back at it in my first vacation in Cambridge, when I had a summer job as an English(!) teacher. We did the Dragon Book of English verse.

When I had finished my war time degree at Cambridge, I got my first post in a ‘reserved occupation’, teaching mathematics and physics in a public school. I soon learned from my pupils that they did not want any practical work, as it was not examined and they had enough difficulty passing the theory. So I stopped teaching practical work (always listen to your students!) and they all passed School Certificate.

I also did a correspondence course for a BSc in Maths, as my war time Cambridge degree was not likely to count for much later. The correspondence course was a revelation educationally; one studied in one’s own time, at one’s own pace and not the teacher’s, from competent notes and not one’s own inadequate lecture notes taken from lectures by not always adequate lecturers. I was awarded a research studentship on my BSc and went on to take a PhD at UCL. It was then that I learned that in mathematics one hits one’s ceiling wholly unprepared for it, some sail through O-level but cannot cope with A-level; some with A-level and cannot cope with degree work; I in due course was out of my depth in the advanced maths that my best friend and fellow student had no problems with.

I also began to realise that there were problems not only in mathematics itself, but in the teaching of mathematics, and when for the next twenty years I taught physics, for ten of them as a Head of Department, I became very conscious of teaching and learning problems. Then, in a summer at MIT, I met the Keller Plan which confines lecturing to special lectures. I thus discovered that different purposes lead to different forms of lecturing – knowledge that escaped Lawrence Bragg, when he wrote his booklet on ‘Lecturing’.

By now I was middle aged and it was time for a career change, circumscribed by four children at school, which made a location move difficult. So I resigned from my Headship and began a new career. I became a professor of what I called ‘Educational Technology’, but really only because that enabled me to get a small grant ‘for the improvement of teaching and learning in universities’. When a former colleague of mine in physics also got a grant, of the same size, for the improvement of the trombone, I must say that I began to wonder whether teaching was not inadequately appreciated in universities. There were five of us in this game for the improvement of teaching and learning – five in the whole world including myself, but they included Ruth Beard in England, Bill McKeachie in the USA, Barbara Falk in Australia, and John Clift in New Zealand.

Interest in teaching and learning is still a minority sport, but it is the research interest of probably about 5% of academic staff and we now have a scholarship of teaching and learning – SoTL in HE – which has long outgrown its roots in the Carnegie Foundation. I no longer teach undergraduates, but I have had numerous research students in my chosen field, from all of whom I learned a great deal and many of whom are now my colleagues; indeed for many years now I have ceased to distinguish between students, colleagues and friends. I pioneered a full Master’s course in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education and subsequently became the external Examiner in several others. I have by now retired four times, but – if I can help it – I am not going to do it again. I am attached to two universities – UCL, my alma mater of a life time, and the University of Gloucestershire, whose Vice Chancellor declared that ‘our students are not customers, they are junior members of the academy’. I liked that. And my former students – all professors themselves now – have given me a Festschrift, which I accepted on the condition that it would not end my work.

So here I am at 85, I have had a good life and it is not over yet. Anyone wanting to employ an active octogenarian in the research and scholarship of teaching and learning?
Power and the Academy
6 – 8 April 2009
Manchester Metropolitan University, UK

This conference takes place in a climate of convulsive change. The new political administration in the USA is getting underway, with millions hoping for the first time in decades that world politics will really change. At the same time the global economy is sliding into major recession with consequences no-one can predict. This is the turbulent context for a conference on power and the academy.

The conference brings together researchers, teachers and learners from within and beyond educational institutions to debate the issues of power and the academy in a changing world and to see what needs doing to make a difference.

There is no deadline for abstracts which will continue to be considered until the conference limit is reached. Please submit to:
http://www.esri.mmu.ac.uk/dpr

Notes for contributors

Disclaimer
In the interests of professional and academic dialogue, RI will occasionally publish articles that deal with controversial topics. Publication of any article by RI should not be seen as an endorsement by BERA of the views expressed, but as an attempt to promote academic freedom.

Current findings
We would like to receive one or two brief articles under the heading of ‘Current findings’ in each issue of RI. If you have some recently completed research that you feel is important and likely to be of interest to BERA members, please summarise it in approximately 1000 words and send it to the Editor.

Article/s
Material should not exceed 2000 words.

Opinion
There will only be one ‘opinion’ piece per issue. Material should not exceed 2000 words.

From the SIGs
SIG convenors can use this part of RI to update all members of their activities or open up a particular issue for debate. Contributions to ‘From the SIGs’ should not exceed 1000 words and be sent to the Editor.

Open dialogue
The intention is for RI to publish continuing discussion of issues of interest to members. The process will be:
– Initial paper (not to exceed 2000 words)
– Response/s to initial paper
– Author’s reply.
Members wishing to respond to an existing piece or to suggest future topics for the ‘Open dialogue’ should contact the Editor.

Profiles
In this section we plan that in each issue one or two of the BERA Executive Council members will talk about their Council portfolio. Readers are encouraged to send comments or suggestions on any of the portfolios featured. See www.bera.ac.uk/welcome/portfolios.php for details of how to contact Council members.

Using research
In this part of RI (see RI 90 for an example) we would like to receive brief pieces relevant to agencies or individuals who use educational research. We would particularly welcome contributions sharing teacher education news in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Material should not exceed 1000 words and be sent to the Editor.

Editor
The Editor encourages electronic submission of articles etc. Please send your contributions to Ralf St.Clair: rstclair@educ.gla.ac.uk
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<td>Adult Education Research Conference</td>
<td>28-30 May 2009</td>
<td>National Louis University, Chicago</td>
<td><a href="http://www.adulterc.org/">www.adulterc.org/</a></td>
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<td>ESREA Network: Between Global and Local: Adult Learning and Development</td>
<td>May 28-30 2009</td>
<td>Magedeburg University</td>
<td><a href="http://www.esrea.org">www.esrea.org</a></td>
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<td>Standing Committee on University Teaching and Research in the Education of Adults</td>
<td>7-9 July 2009</td>
<td>Institute of Continuing Education and Downing College, Cambridge</td>
<td><a href="http://www.scutrea.ac.uk">www.scutrea.ac.uk</a></td>
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<td>British Educational Research Association</td>
<td>2-5 September 2009</td>
<td>University of Manchester</td>
<td><a href="http://www.bera.ac.uk">www.bera.ac.uk</a></td>
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