Conference Report

2008 BERA Awards

Ethiopian Deans

EERQI

The work of WERN

Thinking about outputs

Joining the conference community

Research capacity

Grammar schools and social mobility

Peer review
We are now well into a new year for BERA and our activities continue apace.

ESRC Strategic Review
BERA has responded to the ESRC Strategic Review and has been in touch with Harry Torrance (Manchester Metropolitan University and former BERA Council member) who is drafting a paper for ESRC on educational research. This paper will inform the current review and development of the 2010-2015 ESRC Strategic Plan.

SFRE
Our engagement with ESRC is also evident in the Strategic Forum for Research in Education (SFRE). ESRC is a co-funder of SFRE with CfBT, DCSF and BERA and Jeremy Hoad reports on the first Forum event in this issue. Two days of intensive discussion and debate provided valuable input to the first annual report and it was good to see such good representation from across the UK. Further discussions are already taking place as follow-up to the first Forum addressing both the Forum themes of capacity and quality in education and building links and networks between the stakeholders. Andrew Pollard has now taken over as Chair of the SFRE from Geoff Whitty and my thanks to both for their considerable efforts on this initiative.

New BERA publications
This wider engagement is also being developed by a new initiative by BERA to publish research commentaries to address topical issues in educational research. BERA’s Strategic Plan identifies a key aim as maintaining and enhancing a reputation as an association fully engaged with policy developments in education. It also aims to ensure that policymakers are aware of sound professional evidence and opinion from those working in educational research. These new publications are seen as one way of fulfilling these aims and draw on the experience of the Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP) and of the Applied Educational Research Scheme (AERS) of effective dissemination of research evidence.

BERA has previously commissioned research reviews and occasional papers. These new publications are seen as a new vehicle for raising the profile of educational research although note that this idea is still in development and the actual title of the publications may change! The outline for these publications is currently being finalised and a tender will be put out for the first in the series in 2009 so keep an eye on the BERA website.

Capacity building, AERS and TLRP
Mention of AERS and TLRP brings me neatly on to BERA’s collaboration with both these organisations. We are currently exploring ways to integrate capacity building resources and other materials from both...
organisations to ensure that the considerable resource that has been built up over recent years will continue with BERA for the widest possible benefit. BERA is committed to working with other organisations to ensure material is maintained and developed for the benefit of BERA members and all educational researchers.

We are also working with TLRP to hold capacity building events targeted at early career and new/current researchers/research students. These will build on the very successful events BERA has previously run in collaboration with the ESRC and clearly demonstrates our commitment to capacity building for educational research.

International
Elsewhere in this issue there is a report from David Bridges and Jeremy Hoad on BERA’s participation in the EER-QI project (European Education Research Quality Indicators). This project is now well underway and tackling some interesting issues in the use and development of quality indicators, particularly using a broader range of inputs and measures than is necessarily the case elsewhere. It will be interesting to see how this project develops and what possibilities it produces.

As reported in previous issues the development of a World Educational Research Association (WERA) has been ongoing for some time now. This concept has been building momentum, firmly based on the concept of adding value to the work of existing national associations, addressing shared concerns and sharing experience. A meeting at the end of November in Singapore will develop proposals which will then be considered by potential participants, BERA included.

BERA is also pleased to be represented at the 2nd Asia-Pacific Educational Research Conference jointly organised by National Institute for Education, Singapore (NIE), the Asia-Pacific Educational Research Association (APERA) and the Educational Research Association of Singapore (ERAS) in November. And we will also be taking part in the Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) conference in December.

Welcome
Apart from that, as closing comments I would like to welcome new members of BERA following a very successful conference at Heriot-Watt and, indeed, new members of BERA Council. In particular I look forward to the rest of the year working with BERA’s new Vice President, John Gardner (Queen’s University, Belfast) and our new Treasurer, Colin Rogers (Lancaster University).

For both new members and continuing members I would encourage you to check your details on the new BERA website and have a look around. The new site is a big improvement on our previous offering and shows BERA’s commitment to providing new services and facilities to members and for use by others involved in educational research. Any comments or suggestions are welcome to the BERA Office (admin@bera.ac.uk) as the site develops.

Pamela Munn
University of Edinburgh

An Apology
The editors would like to apologise to Gillian Bailey of Edge Hill University, whose article ‘Personalised Learning – Myth or Reality? An investigation into the interpretation of personalised learning initiatives in primary and secondary schools’ appeared without attribution in RI103. This was a printing error, and we would like to assure readers that we have taken significant steps to prevent similar errors in the future.

Ralf St.Clair
Jeremy Hoad

“BERA’s Strategic Plan identifies a key aim as maintaining and enhancing a reputation as an association fully engaged with policy developments in education.”
The 34th BERA Annual Conference took place this year North of the border at Heriot-Watt University where over 900 delegates met together for four days of debate, presentations and keynote addresses. The particularly Scottish flavour to the conference was evident in the opening address by Ms. Maureen Watt, the Scottish Minister for Schools and Skills and continued with contributions from Graham Donaldson (Scotland’s Chief HMI) and Lindsay Paterson, who delighted a number of delegates by ensuring the conference included a flavour of logico-deductive reasoning.

The highlight of Conference however must surely be Gloria Ladson-Billings moving key note address (which literally had delegates in tears at the end). Gloria’s final montage of scenes from New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina reminded us all of how issues of social justice play out in the lives of real people facing adversity. Gloria’s impassioned address set the scene for our Social Justice Panel (Becky Francis, John Elliott, Graham Donaldson and Sally Tomlinson) who reminded us of these issues much closer to home. Our final keynotes speaker, Ken Zeichner challenged us to think about the role of practitioners in research. The Conference Committee are reflecting on Ken’s keynote in planning for the 2009 conference.

Last year BERA engaged the services of David Budge (Press officer) to increase the media coverage of research findings and make sure educational research, over the period of conference, had a higher media profile. David excelled this year with research findings being debated on national radio (Radio 4’s PM and Today programmes, Radio 5 Live, Radio 5 Drivetime, Heart 106 and the BBC’s World Service) as well as local radio (BBC Radio: Birmingham, Leeds, Cambridge, Essex, West Midlands, London, Trent FM). Research debate continued in national press coverage which included extensive articles in The Guardian, The Scotsman, The Independent, Daily Mail, Daily Telegraph, The Times TES and THES. It is very difficult to estimate the entire press coverage of Conference as several ‘stories’ were syndicated by the Press Association for distribution to regional and local newspapers. Articles appeared in the Cambridge Evening News, Loughborough Echo and Birmingham Post but this is far from an exhaustive list. Particularly pleasing has been the coverage on websites and blogs which enable the public to engage in debate about research. These have included the websites of the BBC Newsdesk, London Evening Standard, The Spectator and the NUT. There has also been international media coverage including the South African Broadcasting Corporation, Hong Kong Standard, International Herald Tribune and Education Week (US newspaper). This is an impressive list and BERA is grateful to David for all his hard work. We are fortunate to have the services of someone with both extensive educational knowledge and journalistic insight.
The press coverage highlighted the extent to which research findings engage with the public debate on ‘evidence’ and the use of research evidence to influence policy. Another interesting aspect of the media focus has been the variation in the extent to which members of BERA felt confident in engaging with the media and has led some delegates to question whether they are adequately prepared, by their institutions, to deal with the press.

The evaluations of BERA this year have been very positive (despite the great sausage scandal on Wednesday night – members watch this space for compensation), and both the academic programme and social programme received very good feedback. The Committee acknowledge that a number of things can be improved (long speeches at wine receptions, better signage) and we are already working on these for 2009.

“BERA continues to provide a broad base for educational debate, critique and engagement with the public.”

Finally, many BERA members may have read Dennis Hayes’ comments on the BERA conference in the THE. Feedback from delegates tells a different story to the experience of conference presented in the THE article and I am very happy to report that debate in BERA is not dead, witnessed in a range of symposia sessions where findings were scrutinised and critiqued. This was particularly evident in the Keynote Symposia slots with, for example, ‘Blair’s Legacy’ being hotly debated by delegates over the course of conference.

Conference however, is about more than just presentations – there was no shortage of discussion around the campus, in the bar and at dinner tables and long may this continue. BERA continues to provide a broad base for educational debate, critique and engagement with the public. We welcome this being even more evident when we meet together in 2009 in Manchester.

We look forward to seeing you there!
awards and updates

BERA Award Winners at Conference 2008

BERA congratulates all of the 2008 BERA award winners:

Dissertation Award 2008

The 2008 BERA Dissertation Award is awarded to Dr Giovanna Barzano (Institute of Education, London) for her thesis: 
Headship and Accountability in Three European Countries: England, Italy and Portugal.

Giovanna received her certificate and cheque for £500 at the BERA Conference Dinner.

Student Poster Prize

The BERA 2008 Student Poster Prize, sponsored by the University of Edinburgh, Moray House School of Education, was awarded to Jennifer Hawkins, Manchester Metropolitan University. Jennifer’s poster, titled Emotional Issues in Education: Reframing Learning Theory Through Participatory Research was highly praised by the panel of judges. Jennifer received a cheque for £250, which was presented by Professor Pamela Munn, BERA President during the BERA annual conference.

BERA/SAGE Awards 2008

The BERA SAGE Practitioner Research Awards 2008 built on the success of the 2007 launch of these new awards, which are open to BERA non-members. Awards are made in two categories:

- 16+ setting
- Schools/early years/social care/health setting

This year’s successful submissions were:

16+ category
No Outsiders
Renée DePalma and colleagues (University of Sunderland).

Schools etc. category
I can: demonstrating soft outcomes for homeless and vulnerable adult learners
Harriet Cookson and colleagues (Broadway (London) Homelessness and Support)

The Awards were presented during the BERA Practitioner Day Conference, which took place on Saturday 6 September, following the BERA Annual Conference.

Brian Simon Educational Research Fellowship 2008-09

The 2008/9 Brian Simon Educational Research Fellowship is awarded to Dr Tristan McCowan for his research titled: Developing citizenship in the university

Tristan will receive a grant of £3000 for his year-long project and was presented with a certificate to recognise his achievement in attaining the fellowship at the BERA Conference Dinner.
BERA Website and New Services to Members

Jeremy Hoad, BERA Chief Executive

We are pleased to announce that the new BERA website should be fully active by the time you read this. This follows a useful period of testing and feedback from members following the ‘soft’ launch at BERA conference. The new website has been completely redeveloped on a new software platform which offers additional flexibility and functionality. The site acts as a portal for additional facilities which we hope you will find useful including:

New SIG web pages
Blogging pages for all SIGs to provide a noticeboard of SIG activities.

VRE worksites
The new Virtual Research Environment (VRE) tool is made up of ‘worksites’, each one of which contains a combination of online tools. New features are being developed all the time but the current features include:
• Wiki – for drafting and collaborative writing
• Resources – for file storage
• Discussion Tools
• Chat
• News Reader
• Blog

The VRE facility was established by the ESRC Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP) to support projects, seminar series and other collaborative working between education researchers. It is used to support a wide range of collaboration and communication activities and also provides secure personal online resource storage and access to information for individuals in the form of a private online ‘workspace’. BERA is grateful to both TLRP and CARET at Cambridge University for developing this facility.

Online member management
We have also developed online access to your BERA membership record so that you can update your personal information directly without having to go via the BERA office. This will improve the management of member records and put you in control of your own information. The access is password protected and information is secure.

Over to you...
The new website was designed to offer much better facilities to members and is part of BERA’s work to improve membership services. This entails a change of focus so the website provides useful functions for you and becomes more interactive. Gone are the days when websites were static providers of information and we hope you will use the new facilities and find them useful in your work and your BERA activities.

BERA Dissertation Award 2009

The 2009 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. The closing date for applications for this year is 1 April 2009. To apply, a completed nomination, proposer’s statement and thesis abstract is required. Applicants must also name one external examiner whose views will be sought as part of the judging process.

The application forms and more information can be found on the Awards section of the BERA website, www.bera.ac.uk

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

Note: The term ‘dissertation’ is taken to include ‘thesis’.
The College of Education, Addis Ababa University, cordially invites interested researchers, educators, practitioners and others from the international community to contribute to the First International Conference on Educational Research for Development to be held from 13-15 May 2009 in Ethiopia.

The Conference aims to create a global discussion forum on the roles of research for policy and improving practice. The Conference also serves as a point of departure for the College of Education and Faculties of Education from across the burgeoning higher education sector in Ethiopia as well as in other countries to build new networks and research consortia.

The Conference will consist of keynote addresses, parallel workshops, and a mix of plenary and parallel sessions, paper presentations, and poster presentation sessions. The keynote speeches will be made by distinguished scholars (among them one sponsored by the British Educational Research Association and another by the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain). The speeches are expected to primarily address the following areas:

• 21st century methodological paradigms in educational research
• Postgraduate research, teaching and learning links
• Educational research for development in the 21st century

Call for papers
This International Conference on Educational Research for Development invites university leaders, academics, researchers, students, policymakers, practitioners and all interested educationalists and business people from around the world to submit or contribute research articles or proposals of articles along the thematic lines indicated in this announcement.

The Organizing Committee invites the submission of abstracts of papers, papers or posters. The abstracts/papers will be evaluated by the ‘Evaluation Committee’ to be appointed for this purpose by the Organizing Committee on the basis of set criteria. A message of confirmation of receipt of articles will be sent to authors well in advance of the date of the Conference.

Key Dates
31 December 2008: Abstract submission deadline
1 October 2008: Opening of the Registration for the Conference
30 January 2009: Notification of feedback on abstracts by email
28 February 2009: Submission of full paper for selected abstracts
31 March 2009: Deadline for registration for the Conference
13-15 May 2009: Conference Date

Addis Ababa University, College of Education
Addis Ababa University (AAU) is the oldest and the leading university in Ethiopia. Ethiopia is one of the world’s great crossroads, where the peoples and cultures of Africa, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean have been interacting for thousands of years. The resulting ethnic and cultural diversity has given rise to many unique and dynamic visual traditions. The cumulative of which resulted in considering the country as a cultural mosaic with 80 different languages and dialects spoken.

The College of Education of AAU is the oldest of all the education faculties in the country. It is located at the Main Campus of the University. The overall mission of the College of Education is to foster teaching, research, testing, training and consultancy services in education and related fields.

Join us at the conference, share with us contemporary issues of educational research, and thereby experience the unique culture of Ethiopia in Africa! Once more, miss it not!

Contact address
All contacts including submission of articles, proposals, accommodation, information, etc may be made to:
International Conference on Educational Research for Development Organizing Committee
P.O. Box 1176 College of Education, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Website: www.aau.edu.et
Email: organizingcommittee@edu.aau.edu.et or ebalfi@yahoo.com or mekasha_kassaye@yahoo.com
Visit of Ethiopian Deans of Education

Among the substantial international contingent at BERA conference this year were Professor Tirussew Teferra, Dean of Addis Ababa University College of Education, which has over 11,000 students preparing to be teachers, and the deans of the Faculties of Education of six regional universities in Ethiopia.

...Their visit was part of a DfID/British Council DelPHE programme aimed at building capacity in applied research in education in Ethiopia directed by Professor Tirussew Teferra, Professor David Bridges and Dr Barbara Ridley. The three year programme is supporting the development of the first doctoral programme in Education in Ethiopia as well as locally applied research in the regions.

Addis Ababa University is hosting its first International Conference on Educational Research for Development to be held in Addis next 13-15 May (see call for papers in this issue of RI and also at www.ethiopia-ed.net) and BERA will be sponsoring one of the keynote lectures. The Deans greatly appreciated the welcome they received in BERA and hope to build research collaborations with colleagues in the UK Education research community. As well as conference papers and contacts the were delighted to take home with them some new found skills in Scottish country dancing honed at the splendid conference ceilidh. BERA members attending the Addis conference should expect a similar apprenticeship in the remarkable shoulder shaking dances of Ethiopia!

David Bridges

European Educational Research Quality Indicators

Just a brief up-date on this Framework 7 supported European project directed by EERA Chair Ingrid Gogolin and of which BERA is one of the partners.

At a further workshop held in conjunction with the EERA conference at Gothenburg we heard of progress in enlisting the support of a significant number of publishers in providing publications (books as well as journals) in electronic form so as to permit the development of a major set of metadata for analysis. This will allow further work to be done testing different approaches to citation as well as semantic analysis of text in terms of indicators of research quality.

We were able to do some more work in clarifying criteria of quality (we are currently working with five high level criteria (rigour, originality, significance, integrity and style). We shall by-pass the issue of how such criteria are applied to very different kinds of research in Education and simply collect in relation to each the sort of questions which people might ask of text (in different research traditions) as part of the assessment of its quality against these criteria. We shall then be asking to what extent semantic analysis can identify the features of the text which would provide an answer to any of these questions. (Your correspondents remain curious but highly sceptical).

In parallel with this computer based work the project will be undertaking some traditional peer review of quality of material based on an old fashioned reading of the text, so that we shall have a basis for comparing the results of this against any other model proposed. (We hear members of the UK RAE Panel screaming as they flee the field!).

David Bridges
BERA Annual Conference
The University of Manchester, 2-5 September 2006

Danny Durant, Conference Chair, danny@handwlea.demon.co.uk

I have pleasure in inviting you to attend the 2009 Annual Conference to be held from 2-5 September 2009, at Manchester University and submit a paper for our Conference.

The venue is situated in the centre of Manchester and is located about 10 miles from Manchester Airport which is served by both national and international flights. If travelling by train, the University is only a short walk from both Piccadilly and Oxford Road stations.

The Conference will be held at the new ‘University Place’ which opened in May 2008. The new development, with its ultramodern eight-story building, distinctive rotunda and 1,000 seat lecture theatre is at the heart of the University of Manchester on Oxford Road. ‘University Place’ offers spacious exhibition areas, seminar rooms and a 400-seat capacity restaurant as well as state of the art technology. Its publicity boasts ‘exceptional facilities and a first class service’.

The key dates are:
• Keynote symposia submission deadline 9 January 2009
• Main and Student Conference submissions deadline 23 January 2009
• Authors notified of acceptance 13 April 2009
• Authors notified of time and date of presentation 1 June 2009

Guidelines for abstracts
Abstracts submitted for the main conference for individual papers or for papers in symposia and the Keynote Symposia Competition should not exceed 1,000 words (which must include all references, titles, authors and affiliations) and should address the following:
• Background to the topic;
• Research questions and/or focus of enquiry;
• Research methods and/or mapping of literature;
• Analytical and/or theoretical frame;
• Research findings and/or contribution to knowledge.

Symposia
In addition to the above, papers entered for symposia should be accompanied by a 400-word overview/rationale which should address the:
• Overall coherence of the papers.
• A total score will be given and symposia scores will be aggregated. Convenors of symposia need to be aware that symposia will be accepted/rejected based on the average scores awarded to each paper therefore a weak paper could result in the symposium being rejected.

Keynote Symposia Competition
(offered through open competition)
The well-attended Keynote Symposia have been successful feature of Conference that helps to highlight the ‘best of BERA’. A highly competitive competition for is now a permanent feature of the Conference. In addition to the criteria for all conference abstracts, the Keynotes are assessed against the following additional criteria:
• High quality of the research and overall coherence of the papers
• Timeliness of the research in the current educational context
• National/international significance of the research
• Demonstrable impact of the research upon practice, policy

Reviewing
The conference in 2009 will be our fourth refereed conference. Each year we strive to improve our online systems to ensure that both submitting proposals and registering are as straightforward and ‘user friendly’ as possible. This year we will move to an online submission system for the popular Keynote Symposia Competition as well as a group booking system (piloted successfully in 2008). Both are designed to improve services to delegates, while assuring the quality of the conference.

Refereeing of papers is now an established part of conference. Papers will be graded by two reviewers, identified wherever possible by SIG Convenors, against five criteria:
• Relevance of topic to BERA members;
• Clarity of research question(s) and/or focus of enquiry;
• Appropriateness of research method(s) and/or literature;
• Robustness of analytical and/or theoretical frame;
• Significance for educational practice, policy or theory.

If you are planning to submit an abstract you are advised to be alert to these criteria and to ensure that you address them explicitly in your submission.

Assessment will be against each criterion using a 6-point scale ranging from 6 (Very good) to 1 (Very weak). Papers will be accepted/rejected on the basis of the average total score awarded in the review process.

27-30 Definitely accept
23-26 Accept
19-22 Accept if possible
15-18 Probably reject
10-14 Reject
5-9 Definitely reject
Keynote speakers for 2009 include:

Incoming BERA President Professor John Gardner

John is Professor of Education in the School of Education at Queen’s University, Belfast. He has been engaged in educational research and teacher education at Queen’s for over 20 years, having begun his career as a teacher in a Belfast grammar school. He has been a head of the Graduate School of Education (1993-02) and Dean of the faculty of Legal, Social and Educational Sciences (2002-06). Since 1990, he has been principal investigator in over 20 large and small-scale projects including the Nuffield-funded project: Analysis and Review of Innovations in Assessment (ARIA). As a member of the Council of the British Educational Research Association, he chaired the development of the Association’s Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2004). He has been a member of the Assessment Reform Group since 1994 and is an elected academician of the Academy of Learned Societies for the Social Sciences, a fellow of the British Computer Society, a member of the ESRC Teaching and Learning Research Programme Steering Committee, a member of the Research Assessment Exercise panel for Education and now BERA President elect.

Professor Ben Levin

Professor Levin is Canada Research Chair in the Department of Theory and Policy Studies at the Ontario Institute of Studies in Education (OISE), University of Toronto. Ben’s career has been in academia and in government. He is a native of Winnipeg who holds a B.A. (Honours) from the University of Manitoba, an Ed.M from Harvard University and a Ph.D from OISE/UT. He has worked with private research organisations, school divisions, provincial governments, and national and international agencies, as well as building an academic and research career in education. From late 2004 until early 2007 he was Deputy Minister of Education for the Province of Ontario. From 1999 through 2002, he was Deputy Minister of Advanced Education and Deputy Minister of Education, Training and Youth for Manitoba. He is widely known for his work in educational reform, educational change, educational policy and politics. His work has been international in scope, including projects in a dozen countries and with several international agencies.

Professor Anne Lieberman

Professor Lieberman is an emeritus Professor from Teachers College, Columbia University and Senior Scholar at The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. She is a past president of the American Educational Research Association. She is widely known for her work in the areas of teacher leadership and development, collaborative research, networks and school-university partnerships, and the problems and prospects for understanding educational change. Her many books and articles have been used by schools and universities alike. She has worked with teacher unions, state and federal departments, reform groups and at all levels of schooling. In addition she has run two school university partnerships and created the National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools and Teaching (NCREST) with Linda Darling-Hammond at Teachers College. She is able to embrace the dualities of theory/practice process/content; intellectual/social-emotional learning; policy/practice to deepening the work of teachers and schools. To do this she has fashioned a way to be both a scholar and an activist, a practitioner and a theoretician.

Other items from the Programme

There was good feedback from both the 2008 Student Conference Doctoral Workshop and Writing Training Workshops. I am pleased to report that a similar programme is planned for 2009. Again delegates wishing to attend these sessions will need to pre-book. The Routledge symposium on publishing in academic journals led by Graham Hobbs was similarly well received and I am pleased to say that this symposium is to be repeated.

The Panel discussion was a successful new feature at BERA 2008. This year we shall have a Philosophy Panel discussing ‘The voice(s) of philosophy in the conversation of the Educational community’. The Panel comprises:

David Bridges

Professorial Fellow at the University of East Anglia, where he was previously Pro Vice Chancellor, and Chair of the Von Hugo Institute and Fellow at St Edmund’s College, Cambridge. He is Honorary Vice President of the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain)

Morwenna Griffiths

Professor of Classroom Learning at Moray House, Edinburgh University. Morwenna taught in primary schools in Bristol before working in a number of Universities. Her research includes philosophical theorising and empirical investigation related to epistemology of auto/biography, social justice, public spaces, the nature of practice, feminisation and creativity.

Janet Orchard

Janet worked as a teacher in London before accepting a Teacher Education Research Fellowship in the Department of Education, University of Oxford. Her philosophical interests within Teacher Education include the value of conceptual clarity to professional practice and the ability of early career teachers to identify and articulate their educational values.

Alis Oancea

Research Fellow at the University of Oxford. Her recent work includes: a study of quality in applied and practice-based educational research; a review of UK education research expertise post; a critical assessment of the ‘what works’ discourse in research policy; and a scrutiny of the UK research assessment reform, based on the analysis of peer review, bibliometrics, and econometrics in an international context).

For those interested or curious about the title, refer to Oakshott’s famous essay or ask David!

Awards

A number of awards were made at BERA 2008. The Brian Simon Fellowship 2008/9 was awarded to Dr Tristan McCowan from Roehampton for a research project titled ‘Developing citizenship in the university’. The Dissertation Award 2008 was awarded to Dr Giovanna Barzano, now based in Rome, but who studied at the IOE for her thesis: ‘Headship and Accountability in Three European Countries: England, Italy and Portugal.’ The BERA SAGE Award for 2008 in the Schools/early years/social care/health category was awarded to Renée DePalma and colleagues at the University of Sunderland for their ‘No Outsiders’ project. In the 16+ setting category, the award was made to Harriet Cokson and colleagues for ‘Broadway (London) Homelessness and Support: “I can: demonstrating soft outcomes for homeless and vulnerable adult learners”’. These awards are being repeated in 2009 as is the Student Poster competition sponsored by Moray House School of Education, which was another successful initiative in 2008. Thanks to all the sponsors for their support.
A Pre-Conference Workshop: getting authoritative about academic writing and writing pedagogies

Pete Boyd, University of Cumbria

The timing of this workshop certainly worked for me, it was bolted on to the beginning of the 2008 Edinburgh BERA conference. This saved the extra travelling that a stand-alone day would have required and it provided a nice warm up to the main conference.

Pat Thomson and Barbara Kamler very kindly entitled their first section of the workshop ‘helping doctoral students write with authority’, which provided the audience with a clear and respectable reason for attending. I suspect however that I was not alone among the workshop participants in feeling that the practical tasks in the workshop were of value to my own development as a writer, as well as to the students I am supervising. The activities were enjoyable and thought provoking and modelled strategies we might use as part of supervision. They included reconstructing a chopped up abstract and applying the metaphor ‘hosting a dinner party’ to the writing of a literature review. Certainly from my perspective as an early career researcher and being new to doctoral supervision, a much longer practical session would have been useful. We had a taster of what a really effective writing workshop might be and were left wanting more.

In the second shorter workshop session Stephen Ball had kindly agreed to be interviewed by Maggie MacLure about his experiences and approaches to writing. This worked extremely well, it would have made a great video, and it highlighted the importance of considering the audience for our academic writing. This emphasis on audience was then continued in the final session in which editors Marianne Legrange (Sage) and Philip Mudd (Routledge) offered their perspectives on the range of book proposals that they receive. This informed a lively discussion which hinged on the purpose of writing a book and gave some insight into the market for academic texts.

I noticed during the main conference that a considerable number of presenters did not bring papers with them and simply offered copies of presentation slides. This suggests a need for more focus within the educational research community on academic writing as a crucial part of building research capacity. As a starter BERA might consider a pre-conference one-week writing retreat for those apparently reluctant writers who managed to submit an abstract for peer review in January but did not manage to produce even a draft paper by September. More seriously however, I certainly would welcome research skills workshops as a preamble to next year’s conference. They should perhaps involve really hands-on practical activity in order to contrast with the main conference; academic writing and data analysis might be areas that many would find useful.

I will end by passing on the thanks of the workshop participants to the organisers – Pat Thomson and Maggie MacLure in particular – and presenters for an excellent pre-conference workshop event.
The event went extremely well and met its aims of bringing together invited participants from different groups – policymakers, practitioners and academics – to begin to address a series of key questions on the generation and use of education research. The intention of SFRE is to explore a series of questions modelled on the OECD country study approach of education systems over a three-year period with the final event scheduled for March 2010.

The first event focussed on issues of quality and capacity in educational research, its use and application across the UK. Discussions were organised around thematic issues of quality and capacity and discussed in smaller groups organised by these themes and also by country groups (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales). Further country-based work is planned between now and summer 2009 to continue discussion and build links in preparation for the next SFRE event.

The Forum received presentations from Matthis Behrens (Swiss Society for Research in Education – IRDP) and Rob Gilbert (University of Queensland, Australia), who acted as critical friends for the event. These speakers provided international comparisons drawing on their experience in Switzerland and Australia respectively. Further critical analysis throughout the event was provided by Alis Oancea (University of Oxford) and Zoe Fowler (freelance education consultant) who worked with teams to collate and distill discussion. Richard Bartholomew (DCSF) and John Ireland (Scottish Government) admirably closed the event with some pertinent analysis of the event and a positive view to future work.

The first SFRE event was intended to provide active input to the project and be integral to the process. Andrew Pollard (SFRE Chair) is now working with Sarah Tough (SFRE Research Support), Alis Oancea and Zoe Fowler to draft the first annual report.

Thanks in particular to ESRC, DCSF and CfBT who, along with BERA, have provided the funding for SFRE.

Further information, including the supporting research reports commissioned for the project, can be found on the SFRE website at: www.sfre.ac.uk

“The event went extremely well and met its aims of bringing together invited participants from different groups…”

BERA Ethical Guidelines

The BERA Ethical Guidelines were last updated and published in revised form in 2004. BERA Council considers it a matter of good practice to review the guidelines periodically. Therefore BERA members are encouraged to let us know if you feel there are any particular areas where the guidelines need updating. We will then consider whether further amendment is required to reflect current views and practice.

If you wish to provide input to this process please contact Jeremy Hoad, BERA CEO (jeremy.hoad@bera.ac.uk) or the BERA office (admin@bera.ac.uk or 01625 504062).
We are currently evaluating a ‘before and after’ survey of Bristol Brunel Academy, one of the first new children’s services research. It is also a registered charity. Our purpose is straightforward: to undertake research which will make a difference to learners of all ages, especially to the lives of children and young people. Our research is focused on providing the evidence of what works in education (and what doesn’t) so that informed decisions can be made about policy and practical developments.

With few exceptions, our work is won through competitive tender. In doing so we often compete with university departments, and with other social research organisations and consultancies – both private and not for profit; large and small. So can we be pigeon-holed as a contract research organisation or a not-quite-university? My answer is – absolutely not.

At the heart of NFER is a passion for making a difference, for making a strategic, evidence-based, contribution to education in the UK and beyond, and for providing help today for those who are making decisions today – whether those decisions are about national policy and its local implementation or the next steps for an individual learner.

As a result, our activities are wide-ranging, and are driven by the information and evidence needs of those working to improve outcomes for learners. Through our networks, our clients and our external Advisory Group we aim to understand and anticipate these needs. We focus on winning the work we want to win in order to enhance our strategic contribution and on careful planning of projects and outputs to try to maximise their practical value to the intended audiences. We try to influence the research agendas and on the evidence needs of others and we use our own centrally funded resources to support our strategic approach – exploring new methodologies and subject areas, developing new research-related products and services, and growing our expertise in important new areas.

To achieve all this we know that we must continue to attract, motivate, develop and retain highly skilled staff. Indeed, one of our key goals is to be acknowledged by our 260 staff as a great place to work. Through our investment in staff training and development (since January 2008 we have taken on 34 new researchers) we believe we make a significant contribution to capacity building in educational and children’s services research.

Examples of our recent work
Some examples may help to illustrate the breadth of our work and our approach.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples of our recent work</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children’s Services – broadening our focus</td>
<td>The Local Authority Research Consortium (LARC) is a collaborative venture aiming to help local authorities identify how they can make faster progress on improving outcomes for children and young people, in response to Every Child Matters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major evaluations</td>
<td>We are currently evaluating The Implementation and Impact of Diplomas, a major development in the 14-19 sector. The research will review the delivery of the Diplomas and assess their impact on young people’s participation, attainment and progression. The results of the evaluation will be a central part of the evidence to be considered when all 14-19 qualifications are reviewed in 2013.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smaller scale studies</td>
<td>A ‘before and after’ survey of Bristol Brunel Academy, one of the first new schools to open under the Building Schools for the Future initiative, shows that students feel safer and enjoy going to school more because of their new surroundings. They describe the new school as inspirational, colourful, motivational, stimulating and comfortable, and think that vandalism, graffiti, littering, and bullying are much less of a problem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment – staying at the leading edge</td>
<td>Our extensive experience in test development was key to our securing a contract to develop the new single-level tests in reading and writing being piloted for primary aged children. Following our submission to the Select Committee on Testing and Assessment, we will now offer assistance in the deliberations around new approaches to KS3 assessment. The combination of our assessment expertise with the power of ICT resulted in the launch of new e-assessment products, i-nfer plan, early in 2008. The comprehensive range of e-assessments allows primary teachers to assess, monitor and respond to children’s understanding of progress in mathematics, reading and science.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investing in other new areas</td>
<td>Recent use of our own research funds includes small scale research projects such as Social Care Professionals in Schools and The Impact of 14-16 year olds on FE Colleges through to development work on a regular omnibus survey of teachers – now successfully launched as Teacher Voice.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
With a permanent staff of 260, NFER has the capability and capacity to work on a wide range of projects, from small-scale surveys to major evaluations and assessment activities. Typically we will be working on around 200 projects in a year.

Although much of our work is UK-based, NFER has a strong international reputation. We work with a range of international associations and educational research organisations to develop major comparative surveys, including the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), the Progress in International Reading Study (PIRLS), and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). These studies increase our understanding of national education systems; being able to make comparisons between different countries helps to identify national strengths and celebrate them, as well as areas of concern and those requiring action.

In addition, our International Information Unit manages contributions to two international information networks. Eurydice at NFER is the national Eurydice Unit for England, Wales and Northern Ireland and provides comparative information on education in Europe, to support and enhance the policymaking process. INCA, the International Review of Curriculum and Assessment Frameworks Internet Archive, provides descriptions of the curriculum, assessment and initial teacher training frameworks for education in 20 countries.

NFER’s role in C4EO is to lead on knowledge management, including the production of 18 knowledge reviews over the next two years. The reviews will bring together a unique blend of qualitative evidence, quantitative data, expert views and local practice. Work on the early years theme is underway and is already opening up new opportunities for collaboration.

Communicating our work

We communicate the results of our research in a variety of ways: printed, on the web and through presentations and articles by our researchers. Our work is showcased on our website (www.nfer.ac.uk) and on clients’ sites. We produce regular research updates, and manage the CERUK plus database of current and recently completed UK research in education and children’s services.

As well as publishing our research, we produce a range of publications for various audiences, including Practical research for education, which encourages practitioners to use research, and NFER News, aimed primarily at teachers. We also edit the Educational Research journal.

A great place to work – and looking to the future

NFER is strongly committed to the development of all staff and aims to provide them with the support they need to reach their full potential. We are a thriving research community, with a strong emphasis on collegiate and team working. Research seminars, good resources, and highly skilled colleagues all combine to make NFER a stimulating and rewarding environment in which to work.

As we review our current strategy and direction we will be placing renewed emphasis on the quality of our relationships with schools and will continue to track and inform developments in integrated children’s services, to play a major role in the next phase of assessment in England and to identify the lessons from comparative UK and international data. And we will continue to do all we can to maximise the likelihood of our work improving policies and practices which, in turn, contribute to individuals’ achievements and life chances.

Notes

For the ECM outcomes see www.everychildmatters.gov.uk

The five outcomes are: be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution, and have economic wellbeing.

All the projects and activities mentioned can be found on the NFER website www.nfer.ac.uk by using the search facility. See also www.nfer.ac.uk/emie for local authority information.

“Working in partnership

We actively seek partnerships with others where our strengths can be valued and complemented. Many competitors are also partners on individual projects and we have developed new partnerships with areas outside education for our work in children’s services. Our statisticians also work with university, public and private sector clients to provide sampling designs, data analysis and modelling, including support for Randomised Controlled Trials (RCTs).

An important collaboration for NFER is the new Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People’s Services (C4EO) in England. We’re proud to be a core partner in C4EO, working alongside other leading organisations in the field of children’s services. The aim of the Centre is to help to transform outcomes for children, young people and their families, by identifying and co-ordinating local, regional and national evidence, to create a comprehensive picture of effective practice.
Collaboration Builds Capacity In Wales

Susan M.B. Davies, Trinity College, Carmarthen

The Welsh Education Research Network (WERN), funded by ESRC and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), has had a successful first year and can now look forward to funding for at least another year.

In 2007 all the Welsh HEIs with education and education-related departments formed a collaborative partnership to share research skills and expertise. Education research capacity in Welsh universities, with the exception of Cardiff University, has been in steady decline since the beginning of the 1990s. Many departments have very few research active staff and so researchers are isolated and lack opportunities to ‘learn alongside’ more experienced peers.

Following a social practices model of learning (see Davies and Salisbury, 2008, for more information on this rationale) WERN used the funding it received to build collaboration between researchers from different institutions—joint training events, a research colloquium and, the main focus, the Group Bursary Scheme. The Bursary Scheme provided funding to groups of colleagues to work together to prepare a proposal to submit to a research funding organisation. An essential criterion for WERN funding was that there needed to be a sufficient mix of expertise and experience within the group to have the potential to build the capacity of group members. Each group had also to find a mentor—a skilled and respected researcher in the appropriate field—who would meet with the group on an occasional basis to offer advice and support.

WERN’s funding for this pilot phase was only nine months and therefore time frames were of necessity very short, nevertheless 24 applications for bursaries were received, most with high levels of inter-institutional collaboration. Although only eight could be funded the successful groups included members from nine institutions, had varied levels of experience and had a range of focus that extended from the new Welsh Foundation Phase to recording the working lives of staff in post 16 education.

Both the internal (Davies, 2008) and external evaluation (Gardner, 2008) of WERN found that the group members perceived the informal learning opportunities presented by the Bursary Scheme to be an effective way to develop new research skills:

Working in this way has also been successful in increasing the confidence of group members about their abilities and the overwhelming majority have reported their research skills have improved (see Davies and Salisbury (in press) for a full account of this evaluation). The opportunity to work alongside more experienced colleagues was perceived as a valuable and supportive environment in which to undertake a new, and sometimes daunting, role. It created space for reflection and intellectual challenge and began to build new collaborative alliances that have potential for the future. Frustrations did arise from different levels of experience, communication across institutions and sometimes just geographical distance.
Although the bursaries had been created to buy time for research activity this did not always reduce the competing demands made by everyday responsibilities. Nevertheless participants still valued the opportunities the bursary group presented:

Training usually carries with it some time for the activity whereas ‘learning on the job’ can put great constraints on the time available as workload does not decrease to allow for the learning… However the learning advantages of working on a ‘real’ research bid with experienced colleagues and an inspiring mentor cannot be replicated by a training environment. In the model adopted new learning was used and put into practice immediately rather than, as can be the case with new training, new skills are not practiced and have to wait until an opportunity for use presents itself. [Second career researcher]

For the most part there was willingness in the institutions to make this time available. Nevertheless, sometimes the practicalities, for example a lack of ease of access to available cover staff, resulted in difficulties. This was most generally the case in institutions which are not research focused, and it highlighted the need for cultural and infrastructural change in some institutions. It can be said that for growth in capacity to be sustained, institutional development must go hand in hand with the upskilling that is occurring for growth in capacity to be sustained, institutional development and infrastructural change in some institutions. It can be said that the Scottish and Welsh experiences of capacity building.

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“The majority of delegates rated the event very positively; they commented on the lively atmosphere and the feeling of a research community that was growing as a result of WERN activity. One delegate commented:

Today has been really important and has made visible some powerful projects and highlighted huge potential for more joined up working across Wales… the buzz and excitement in the first coffee break and at lunch was tangible. The less experienced researchers have had a great apprenticeship experience here today and there has been nothing peripheral about their participation they quite rightly have been centre stage! [Experienced researcher]

It has not been possible to describe fully the range of WERN activities (refer to Davies and Salisbury (in press)) or discuss its inter-institutional impact (see Davies and Salisbury, 2008). However the report of the external evaluator concluded:

WERN was never formulated as a transforming ‘silver bullet’ initiative [but]… ‘in terms of its primary intention ‘to trial a funding and support structure for education researchers in Wales that harnesses collaboration between institutions to build research capacity’… the WERN initiative has been highly successful [Gardner, 2008: 4-5]

The pilot year has created some excitement around research in new places, and has produced a momentum for change that uses fresh-collaborative- ways of working. After suffering a long period of decline WERN’s short period of funding can only be a small start to rebuilding capacity. Extension funding from HEFCW and ESRC has now been made available until July 2009 and so WERN will be able, as well as continuing with the Group Bursary Scheme, to introduce additional collaborative funding opportunities for this period. However, although further incremental progress is expected over the coming year, it will require a coherent long term strategy, with the commitment of all relevant stakeholders, coupled with further investment to embed a sustainable community of collaborative research in Wales.

References
The RAE has been and gone and there will, no doubt, be inquests both in individual institutions who feel hard done by and in the academic community generally about the picture emerging of education research. I have a different question – what sort of outputs should educational researchers generate in the future? I will take as a given that peer-reviewed journal articles will continue to be hard currency in whatever ‘metrics system’ emerges.

However, given the stated concern for impact in the RAE and the Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP) there is a case to be made for rethinking both research products and more broadly how research might inform teachers’ practice. We certainly need to move on from the somewhat sterile notion of helping teachers to interpret research findings. If one believes in social constructivism (or even just constructivism) then it is important to stimulate a readiness in teachers that allows them to connect with more traditional research outputs, and this readiness can be created by research products that have a catalytic effect on their thinking. In simple terms if teachers are thinking deeply about their classrooms and questioning their assumptions then they are likely to be more receptive to a research informed stance.

Thinking differently about research outputs

David Leat, Research Centre for Learning and Teaching, Newcastle University.

“There are policymakers and school leaders who see teachers as technicians and seek answers to the question: ‘What works?’ This is an important question but inherently problematic. Far greater in number, though perhaps not in influence, are teachers with a disposition to improving their practice, whether we characterise this as action research, professional enquiry or tinkering. The majority of these teachers, in my experience, have a natural bent towards a social constructivist stance on teaching (although that may not be how they would describe it), in which sense making and pupils’ engagement are paramount. Many, though not all, are drawn towards a transformation of education and the life chances of their pupils. Because they are interested in individual and collective meaning making they tune into classroom talk, between pupils and in whole class episodes, as a marker of progress on this front. I would also characterise them as having robust self-theories and being willing to experiment. This sketch accords with a notion of ethical practice, or praxis, in which teachers are stirred by an inner force to do well by their pupils, which they see in much larger terms than examination success. However for most there is a practice-values gap. It is here that an important capacity for research-informed practice resides but it needs to be nurtured.

Although it is open to some justifiable critiques and qualifications, the distinction between Mode 1 and Mode 2 knowledge (Gibbons 1994) is worth some examination. Mode 1 knowledge is characterised as being generated in academic communities by research processes – it is generalised and abstract. Mode 2 knowledge is that generated in and through practice in industry and public services and it is more contextualised and applied. If teachers and schools function in the realm of Mode 2 knowledge, how might they draw from the work of academic researchers.

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It is unwise to think, therefore, in terms of linear causality in the relationship between research and practice, it is multi-layered and unpredictable. If teachers try new strategies or materials it is more pragmatic to see this as a process in which the classroom ecology is upset as pupils respond (positively, negatively or just bemused) and routine is lost. If the school culture is supportive and certain conditions pertain, then this is fertile ground for teachers to engage in and draw upon research to develop practice, perhaps in a slightly jerky fashion. This complexity is reflected in an apposite passage from Connolly and Wagner (1989):

"...effective teachers cumulatively seek out and recognise innovations that give them more, new and better feedback."

A key to understanding this complexity is the concept of epistemic objects (Knorr-Cetina, 2001) which provides an important bearing on the generation of practice knowledge. Epistemic objects according to Knorr-Cetina have the capacity to unfold indefinitely, rather than being taken-for-granted tools which perform a known function. They are characteristically open, question generating and complex. Their force resides in ‘the pointers they provide to possible further explorations’ (p.183) and thus are potentially critical in unlocking the ambition for change exhibited by creative practitioners. Consequently they may be important tools in creative communities of teachers who are seeking to break the stranglehold of habit in educational practice.

It is appropriate to ponder here what might qualify as epistemic objects. Strong candidates for inclusion would be Philosophy for Children, ground rules for talk, concept mapping, some drama conventions and many individual strategies used in teaching thinking (such as mysteries).

There is an interesting parallel in research into teachers’ use of ICT in which the notion of Learning Objects (LOs) has emerged. Although there is much criticism of the rhetoric advanced on behalf of LOs, evidence does show teachers using generic pieces of software in ways which provide structure for open tasks (Ilomaki et al, 2006). The software and associated tasks provide cognitive and social affordances that encourage the construction of joint understanding. Affordances refer to the properties of things that suggest action. Of course some practitioners are able to exploit the affordances better than others. Ilomaki et al (2003) propose that in the design of LOs it is possible to create ‘advanced’ affordances, for example to activate prior knowledge, to give multiple representations, to support conceptual change, to visualise thinking, to generate complexity and to support collaboration. Such affordances will of course disturb classroom ecology. There is an echo too of Perrenoud’s (1998, p.88) distinction between traditional sequences of activities with a narrow focus and tasks which are not ‘imposed on pupils but (adjusted) once they have been initiated’. In short, some task structures are better then others!

John Hattie, who has accumulated a prodigious database of effect sizes, has made the point that effective teachers cumulatively seek out and recognise innovations that give them more, new and better feedback. This may be necessary because some ideas lose their potency over time, but it also may be because one innovation (in the form of an epistemic object) causes practice to unfold and raise questions which invites the adoption of further innovations. There is a sense here of an innovation trajectory. We have noted in work at Newcastle University in research partnerships with schools and practitioners how often work on teaching thinking, classroom talk/cooperative group work and formative assessment are linked together over time.

Formative assessment, in isolation, provides an interesting case. Inside the Black Box (Black and Wiliam, 1998) had a very powerful effect on professional consciousness. The evidence related to raised attainment put formative assessment in the spotlight for policymakers and senior leaders. In translation by policymakers formative assessment became Assessment for Learning and some of the key messages became distorted. Teacher groups working in the Kings Meadway Oxford Formative Assessment Project have generated some of the practical ideas for enacting the key messages in classrooms.

There is, of course, a micro-political dimension, as the acceptability of new practice may depend on who introduces it – therefore research outcomes need to make connections with school agendas in order that school leaders with power may sanction the process.

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“...I am putting some energy into publications for teachers and school students which offer a substantial innovation...”

Understanding practice is the key to rethinking research products. As a consequence I have changed my publication strategy. I am scaling back my journal writing (until the metrics systems bleeps at me) and instead I am putting some energy into publications for teachers and school students which offer a substantial innovation, and which through their use challenge existing classroom ecologies. The most recent publication in this mode, Thinking Through School (de Aʼechevarria and Leat, 2006) is a class text with a narrative structure which invites pupils to report, en masse, their experiences of school and home and sets the scene for open classroom discussion. It is densely packed with epistemic objects. It comes with lengthy advice to school leaders about how its use both connects with pressing school agendas, enquiry processes and significant messages from research. The evidence we have thus far, from pilot schools and from a masters dissertation, is that its use does indeed cause profound disturbance, some of which has been positively channelled to constructive ends. In this process other research has been interrogated. We are also aware that the experience has been extremely unnerving for a few teachers. The experience has confirmed our initial assumption, that a certain infrastructure and culture are required to harvest the full benefit for professional learning.

References


RESEARCH CENTRE FOR LEARNING AND TEACHING (www.ncl.ac.uk/cflat/)
Many of the projects run in CfLaT are in partnership with practitioners, charities and local authorities (LAs) in which tools are a critical part of translating and creating knowledge. These tools may initially be focused on either teaching or research but commonly they evolve to inform both activities. Three of our flagship projects at present are Learning2Learn (L2L), a Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) and the Improving Coaching Project. L2L is a partnership with the Campaign for Learning and 40+ schools in four LAs, during which teachers have produced over 100 research reports since 2005 (www.campaign-for-learning.org.uk/cfl/learninginschools/index.asp). The KTP is with Bedlingtonshire High School in Northumberland, whereby a KTP associate works in the school with teacher and student researchers to develop an assessment framework for enquiry. The Improving Coaching Project (funded by CBfT and NCfSL) works with 25 teachers in 10 schools to develop dimensions for analysing coaching practice. In all three cases tools have performed a variety of functions – disturbing thought, supporting pedagogic action and feedback, and helping sense making which are highly productive in generating new practice and knowledge. The big challenge is how that new practice fares at the cultural/institutional level.
Joining the community

Sue Bridges, University of Canterbury, New Zealand

Towards the end of Day One of each Annual BERA conference, a welcome and drinks reception is held for delegates of the Student Conference and for international delegates of the Main Conference. I am fortunate to have been invited as part of the latter group twice now – at Warwick in 2006 and Heriot-Watt this year.

So what is it that draws someone like me from the other side of the globe, on what can be a gruelling and challenging journey? How do distant academics and educators learn of the opportunities and benefits of joining the BERA community, and what hooks and reels them in?

Without presuming to answer these questions for others, I can offer some insights from the perspective of a teacher educator from New Zealand, bolstered by that of my colleagues who attended BERA for the first time this year.

As a member of a newly-merged teacher education community, with many years of practice and some experience of research behind me, I found ourselves in a university environment where Research (with a capital R) took on a larger presence. While the concept of informing practice through theory was no stranger to us (we have been fortunate in New Zealand to have the work of such intellectual and academic giants as the late Professor Graeme Nuthall, Dr Adrienne Alton-Lee, Professor Warwick Elley, Dr Stuart McNaughton, Dr John Hattie etc), we were required to become active participants in the academic dialogues of our field. Along with the new environment came the expectation of significant research activity leading to outputs to satisfy PBRF (performance-based research funding, similar to RAE) criteria.

The peer-review process has developed a little each year…

The big-picture conversation about education is ongoing and vibrant in our country, but how was one to engage in and contribute to debate in the international context? The internet seemed to be an obvious starting point, but the reality remains that personal discourse and the establishment of face-to-face professional relationships provide the truly effective facilitation of useful interaction and collaboration. It was imperative to identify a community of academics, educators and others from related professions from a range of institutions and agencies who could inform, challenge, mentor, critique and extend our ideas and understandings, yet whose experience would connect with relevance to the New Zealand context. I believe that BERA has provided exactly that.

As an international author in the language and literacy field, this placed me in a somewhat precarious position, particularly with the extended period between submitting the abstract and receiving confirmation of acceptance/rejection, which was considerably longer in 2008 than it had been in 2006. An issue of concern for those of us in far-flung places such as New Zealand includes the difference in academic years (ours runs with the calendar year), and therefore in the timing of research plans and applications that our universities require us to submit. We also need to have an indication as early as possible in order to access airfares within our budget, and even to secure places on flights during the northern hemisphere summer can be fraught with difficulty, particularly with a world event such as the Olympics taking place around the same time! If there were some way that international delegates’ submissions could be peer-reviewed first, and then perhaps moderated against the first group of local submissions for early release of accept/reject outcomes, this would be hugely appreciated.

In 2008 at Edinburgh, I found that many aspects of the conference offerings resonated strongly, and provided me with increased depth and further questions to pursue on my return to New Zealand. The supportive feedback of SIG members, the relevant keynote addresses for teacher education, the friendly interactions of members who I was re-establishing contact with or meeting for the first time, and the genuine feeling of comradeship and evident common purpose, all combined to confirm my place as a member of this community and to affirm my decision to join it.
Building research capacity with research staff: what works

Zoe Fowler, Independent researcher, zfowler.ed@gmail.com

Evidence from the recent evaluation of TLRP’s capacity building activities provides interesting insights into the aspects of professional development which are valued by research staff.

It is timely to focus on this issue: there are widespread fears that there will be insufficient people able to lead the delivery of quality research in education in the near future (Mills et al, 2006), and the launch of the new revised Concordat to support the career development of research staff has provided an imperative to review and improve professional development support for research staff.

Mapping the Ripples (MTR)’s evaluation of the TLRP brought together a range of evidence including: existing TLRP databases and archived project reports; on-line surveys distributed to educational researchers (working on TLRP and non-TLRP projects) and award holders of TLRP projects; and interviews with a range of research staff.

Theoretically, the evaluation is informed by research analysing how work organisations differ in the ways that they create and manage learning environments (Fuller et al, 2007; Evans et al, 2006; Fuller and Unwin, 2004). These writers have developed the conceptual framework of an expansive-restrictive continuum of workplace factors which provides a useful vehicle for bringing together the pedagogical, organisational and cultural factors that contribute to workplace learning. Their continuum of factors is recontextualised in the diagram below, identifying those experiences and activities which researchers have found most valuable in relation to their own professional development and their research careers.

The SIGs rejecting the highest proportion of abstracts in 2007, for example, were science education, language and literacy, physical education and sports pedagogy and practitioner research. Rather worryingly, the most disadvantaged constituency across the board appears to be international authors. (p17)

Interpersonal support

Educational research is the second largest of the Social Sciences (Mills et al, 2006) with a broad diversity of methodological approaches, epistemological claims, and theoretical stances. Researchers valued interpersonal support from more senior colleagues which provided direction and guidance within this field. For example, one interviewee described how her PhD supervisor had been a key influence upon her research career through providing direction and pushing her beyond the limits of what she thought she could achieve:

“She got me thinking about what I should be publishing, what I should be reading – really directed me in terms of career development and pushed me – there were times when [she] was asking me to do things that I thought I couldn’t possibly do, but I knew why she was asking me to do them.”

Researchers recognised that they had only partial understandings of the field, both in terms of their knowledge and in relation to their awareness of what was going on. Research staff attached importance to a key person(s) encouraging researchers to engage with literature, theory, or wider communities. In this way, interpersonal support provides the researcher with both motivation and guidance.

Supported engagement with multiple communities of practice

One particular strength of the TLRP has been “the success of bringing together a large number of researchers from different disciplinary and methodological backgrounds to engage in conversation and to exchange ideas” (Rickinson et al, 2005:32); research staff particularly valued the opportunities that they had had to participate in these multiple communities of practice. One researcher summarised a view held by many:

“I have had great fortune of working with some of the leading researchers in the field, have made new contacts and carried out some inter project work. So I have learnt from more experienced colleagues on other TLRP projects.”

(Survey response B2)
In some cases, participation in these communities has been transformative in terms of individuals’ research aspirations. One practitioner researcher, interviewed for this project, eulogised about her experiences at the TLRP conference:

That was fantastic! I really, really enjoyed that… I was in with, how shall I word this? People that I wanted to be my peers, in a way. It was – everybody was singing from the same songsheet, although we were all doing different projects… I just felt that there was so much knowledge and potential just in that conference that it really did buoy me up and make me think “this is what I want to be doing”.

This interviewee is now studying for an EdD, motivated to a large part by her involvement with the TLRP.

Within their evaluation of the RCBN provision, Rees et al (2007:765) similarly identify opportunities to interact “with professional colleagues both within and outside of the workplace” as one of the most important aspects of capacity building. While it is vital that researchers have opportunities to learn within their research team, it is similarly important that they can access off-the-job learning. As Evans et al (2006: 30) explain: “If conceiving all learning as situated has the effect of confining workers to a particular workplace, on the grounds that (all) learning is highly context specific, learning as situated has the effect of confining workers to a particular workplace, on the grounds that (all) learning is highly context dependent, their opportunity to gain new perspectives, to cross boundaries, and to participate in other communities of practice will be denied.”

Multidimensional models of expertise

Some TLRP research projects successfully operated a flattened inclusive management structure, which generated a perceived equity of value across the team, creating the sense that each person’s contribution to the research process was valued. Within these projects, researchers valued the collaboration and cooperation existing across their research teams, and linked this to their own professional development. In contrast, researchers who had worked within more rigidly hierarchical teams often considered themselves to have been poorly managed: doing the ‘donkey work’, feeling marginalised, and being at the ‘bottom of the work hierarchy’. One researcher linked the lack of value afforded to her by her project director as a direct cause of her decision to leave educational research. The revised Concordat (RCUK, 2008) emphasises the need for more effective management of research staff. Managing a research team so that all members feel valued is an important aspect of research capacity building.

Access and encouragement to attend off-the-job training

A range of off-the-job training was made available through the TLRP, including a Research Capacity Building Network (RCBN) which delivered training courses, and substantial on-line and text-based resources (see www.tlrp.org). In some instances, off-the-job training had direct relevance to researchers’ ability to do their current research, although this was not always expressed by researchers in terms of learning new competences: researchers also explored how the courses validated their existing practices through providing them with confidence in what they were already doing. Off-the-job training also provided access to skills and opportunities that benefitted researchers’ professional and career development beyond the confines of their immediate project, and provided opportunities to network with other people within the field.

Ongoing commitment to researchers’ futures

While some training focused on researchers’ abilities to meet the needs of their research project, many researchers also took opportunities to develop their expertise in relation to their longer term futures as Educational researchers. The need for a balance between the outputs from the research project and the individual’s longer term professional development was returned to repeatedly across the researcher dataset.

This reflects the values written into the BERA Charter for research staff (BERA, 2008), which strongly emphasises the responsibilities of research institutions to go beyond the immediate concerns of high-quality research to consider also the long-term capacity of the field. This means fostering the development of transferable research and dissemination skills.

Summary

This summary of some of the findings from the Mapping the Ripples evaluation of the TLRP’s research capacity building activities provides some insights into how research capacity might be usefully and effectively built in future research projects. A major strength of the TLRP has been the generation of opportunities for multiple communities of practice to develop across the field of educational research, and researchers have benefitted from engaging in these communities through events including conferences and off-the-job training opportunities. Investment in these activities has enabled both the building of individuals’ research capacity, and the building of research capacity across the field. Interpersonal support from more senior colleagues was valued by many researchers, particularly in providing guidance and direction in their professional lives and learning: there might be benefits for strategising for these constructive relationships being formally built in future research projects. Finally, as recognised by the RCUK in their recent Concordat, greater attention might usefully be given to the management of research projects so that the professional development of their research staff is awarded the prioritisation that it needs. For more information on the mapping the ripples project, see www.tlrp.org/capacity/mappingtheripples/

References


In early summer 2007 the then Opposition Shadow Secretary of State for Education (David Willetts) suggested his party give up its long-standing ‘obsession’ with ‘selective education’ and address more compelling issues of social justice and equal opportunity. One of his most telling points was that, far from Grammar schools being ‘ladders of opportunity for the poor’, as claimed by their supporters, they had actually become ‘ghettos of the privileged’ – doing little or nothing for the poorest members of society.

The issues of Grammar schools’ social composition and their contribution to ‘upward mobility’ are clearly of substantial importance. This paper provides data which helps clarify the current situation.

Two national sources of data are available which allow exploration of:

- Comparison of Grammar and ‘other schools’ recruitment of ‘disadvantaged’ pupils; and,
- Extent of Grammar schools’ recruitment of pupils from private, fee-paying schools

The 164 Grammar schools are located in 36 local authority areas, however the great majority of these schools are found in just 15 LAs. We characterise LAs as follows:

- **Fully Selective**
  - 15 LAs comprising 108 Grammars out of a total of 358 schools
- **Partially Selective**
  - 21 LAs comprising 56 Grammars out of 657 schools
- **Non-Selective**
  - 114 LAs comprising 2103 schools with non-selective intakes

Grammar and other schools compared using conventional measure of ‘disadvantage’

Table 1 uses this classification of LAs to compare the proportions of pupils ‘eligible for free school meals’ in schools of selective and non-selective entry within each LA type.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local Authority type</th>
<th>Percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Selective</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar Schools</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Schools</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partially Selective</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fully Selective</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All LA</td>
<td>13%</td>
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</table>

Table 1 shows clearly the ‘polarisation’ between Grammar schools and all others in terms of the recruitment of disadvantaged pupils. Wherever Grammar schools were located they comprised very small proportions of ‘disadvantaged’ pupils in distinct contrast to the ‘other’ schools in their areas and also in comparison with all schools nationally. In fact, out of an annual national cohort of 22,000 pupils entering Grammar schools, well under 500 of these are from ‘disadvantaged’ backgrounds. If these schools did offer ‘a ladder of opportunity’ to pupils in their areas we might have expected well over 2500 in this category.

A clear inference from Table 1 is that entry to Grammar schools is NOT offered in any significant manner to pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Where do Grammar schools’ pupils come from?

Each year around 22,000 pupils enter Grammar schools at age 11. Competitive entry tests are held each year to identify those qualifying – these tests are open to all pupils including those who are educated in private, fee paying schools. Around 15% of the places in Grammar schools are allocated to pupils from private schools – suggesting that ‘advantaged’ families can ‘purchase’ entry to Grammar schools, which ‘disadvantaged’ families are unlikely to be able to take advantage of. Private schools are not required to follow the national curriculum and are therefore free to coach for Grammar school entry tests. (One reason why parents may choose these schools in the first place)
The contrast with pupils in state primary schools could hardly be sharper – these pupils have to follow the national curriculum, and any coaching has to take place outside of school and at substantial additional expense.

This provides further evidence on the nature of Grammar schools’ entry characteristics.

Table 2 shows the number of schools with each proportion of entrants from private schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% Entry from private schools</th>
<th>Number of Grammar schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Over 25%</td>
<td>20 schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15% to 25%</td>
<td>50 schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10% to 15%</td>
<td>33 schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5% to 10%</td>
<td>46 schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 5%</td>
<td>15 schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall 15%</td>
<td>164 schools</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are 70 Grammar schools which recruit more than one sixth of their entrants from fee-paying private schools – and, where these private school pupils have taken Key Stage 2 tests they often have LOWER Ks2 scores than entrants from state primaries.

Table 3 shows this further feature of Grammar schools’ entry. For the great majority of Grammar schools the Key Stage 2 points scores of pupils from private schools was substantially lower than those from state primaries. It is surely very surprising to find that with such competition for entry, ‘able’ pupils from the state sector appear to be ‘discriminated’ against in favour of less able pupils from the private sector. This may well be a further indication of ‘bias’ against disadvantaged pupils which we have identified above.

Table 3: Characteristics of Grammar school entrants in schools classified as in Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% Entry from private schools</th>
<th>Number of Grammars where Ks2 points from state school entrants was higher than those from private schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Over 25%</td>
<td>18 out of 20 schools (90%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15% to 25%</td>
<td>46 out of 50 schools (92%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10% to 15%</td>
<td>31 out of 33 schools (94%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5% to 10%</td>
<td>39 out of 46 schools (85%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ks2 Points for Pupils</td>
<td>134 out of 149 schools (90%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From state primary 31.8 From private schools 31.3

Conclusion
Taken together these analyses provide no evidence whatsoever that Grammar schools provide a ‘ladder of opportunity’ for poor and disadvantaged pupils. The clear picture that emerges is of a system of schooling that systematically discriminates against pupils of this type and is also highly exclusive in its social composition.

Brian Simon Educational Research Fellowship 2009-10
BERA invites applications from BERA members for the Brian Simon Educational Research Fellowship 2009-10. The award is made possible by a gift from the Simon family which is held in trust by the Association.

Purpose
The purpose of the Fellowship is to encourage research which is independent, imaginative, scholarly and dedicated to educational advance.

Funding
The Fellowship is to be supported by a sum of up to £3,000 for a period of up to twelve months.

Areas of work
Fellowships are awarded to support research which reflects the approach taken by Brian Simon in his work – that research should be useful, radical and interdisciplinary and should inform society about core educational issues:

- The importance of common schooling
- The significance of pedagogy
- The study of intelligence and education
- The exploration of histories of education
- The internationalising of education
- The struggle for democracy through education

Applications
Applications for the 2009–10 Award should arrive by 30 April 2009 and should be sent to:

The Brian Simon Fellowship Committee,
BERA Office, Association House, South Park Road, Macclesfield, Cheshire, SK11 6SH

Reporting and Publication
As a condition of the award the Fellow must provide BERA with a brief report at the end of the Fellowship period. It is expected that work undertaken in connection with the Fellowship will lead to publication.

Result
It is expected that the award will be announced to those submitting applications by 1 August 2009.

Winners will be invited to receive their award at a dinner at the 2009 BERA Annual Conference.

Further information
Further information is available on the BERA website www.bera.ac.uk or by contacting the BERA Office:

Dan Hollingshurst, BERA Administrator
BERA, Association House, South Park Road, Macclesfield, Cheshire, SK11 6SH

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Politics and ‘peer’ review

Chris Holligan, University of the West of Scotland

In the *Investigations*, one of the great philosophical texts of the 20th century, Wittgenstein stated dogmatically that there is no point in endeavouring to verify the truth of a newspaper story by purchasing another copy of that same newspaper. Consider now the landscape of government funded research which escapes every attempt to evaluate adequately the fruits of the labours of those in the research community who furnish the government with knowledge in the form of ‘research reports’, quite unlike an academic paper accepted by a reputable peer reviewed journal.

The peer review process has been developed to protect the academic community, the integrity of the knowledge within fields and the public. The protection is aimed at preventing the exploitation of knowledge by narrowly partisan interests of a political or economic nature. Societies are characterised by those very types of interests, so it follows not only that such protection is essential, but also that achieving the objective, necessarily external verification of research quality will be problematic and challenging.

In the case of educational research anxieties arise in connection with the evidence base made available and developed by those working with the public sector, including those professional councils which are rapidly expressing interest in funding and contracting out their research needs. Public bodies in Scotland concerned with schooling and the teaching profession routinely conduct business in this way, through contracts with a thoughtfully selected putative elite of academics.

The fact that national and local government policies are to varying extents based upon researcher reports only, reports that have never been submitted for peer review before the funder feed the findings into the policy-making process, is a serious issue which ought to be debated more widely, especially at a time when organisations such as BERA have created charters for research staff designed to support quality research. That charter which was disseminated with the recent edition of *Research Intelligence* (Issue 104) neglects the issues examined in this article, yet researchers should be alerted to these issues, which are a subject for legitimate debate.

At a time when income generation through research contracts forms a major foundation for the focus of academic audit it is tempting to conclude that some academics and their employers whose infrastructures depend upon this income stream, might never wish to raise this concern either with funders or their peers, particularly in view of the competitive and commercialised nexus of contemporary ‘collegiality’.

Writing in the most recent edition of the *Psychologist*, Akira O’Connor (2008), a postdoctoral fellow at Washington University in St. Louis, describes how opinion can be manipulated when results which have yet to be submitted for the scientifically rigorous and objective appraisal of peer review are provided by academics as reports to the national media, who then misrepresent the results. He argues this approach can lead to human suffering. Such an outcome is more likely if the media seek brand consistency and the editorial ‘review’ policy aims not only to relay news, but also to create it.

Governments are inevitably political and in this way are not unlike major news organisations which also deal in knowledge, and which then exploit it, in education’s case, to influence professional practice and legitimise its decision-making. O’Connor, in a statement about the supposed effects on public opinion of research findings by neuroscientists, argues the media were the initial relay of their alleged results concerning political loyalty and its neural basis.

The issue here lay in the fact that the concentration of media ownership entailed that “those holding the purse strings are increasingly dictating the overall stance that the news media should take on the stories they cover” (p754). Such ‘results’ may not have been scientifically replicable, but they nevertheless shape public perception illustrating the power of the media mogul pulling the strings. The public communication of science was in fact an exercise in corporate power, which despite misrepresenting the truth still transformed layperson’s understanding of how human beings function.

Recently I was asked by a national human rights organisation if an article in the press reporting my research into sectarianism in Scotland could be used to inform policy intervention. I pointed out the work was still under peer review and that until it had run its course the best plan was not to make any policy decisions. The subtlety of verified truth was lost on this organisation, illuminating ignorance about the practice of good science among these well-meaning persons.

“Treating knowledge as a commodity carries a great many risks…”

The historic practice of not submitting completed studies for peer review until after a report is submitted to the funder and then only after having received permission on what can be submitted to journals, is ethically questionable and scientifically worrying. Treating knowledge as a commodity carries a great many risks involving what the peer review process is aimed at helping to prevent.
This instance suggested to me that even professional groups perceive media reports of research investigations as tantamount to having the status of verified fact. Newsworthy studies are more prone to being subjected to distortion in the dissemination process and falling foul of the power and self-interests of brand consistency. Substitute the word ‘brand’ here for the word ‘values’ in the case of policymakers within education and the relevance is highlighted.

Because government and its agencies have vested interest in the ‘brand’ of knowledge they promote it follows that they would have difficulty in any public display of criticality of findings arising from studies that they have themselves funded and upon which their adumbrations of new policies arise. This cannot be a circuit which enhances either research excellence or robustly transparent policy-making. They are behaving like Wittgenstein’s newspaper reader. Studies by sociologists of science conclude that Mode-2 knowledge is becoming more prevalent and replacing the historical dominance of the traditional Mode-1 knowledge production and the privileged status of universities as the main sites for knowledge production. Gibbons et al (1994, pp1-3) claim that alongside the continuation of Mode-1 enquiry we also have the supposedly novel Mode-2 type. These authors argue that:

"…Mode-1 is generated within a disciplinary, primarily cognitive context, Mode-2 is created in a broader, trans-disciplinary social and economic context… in Mode-1 problems are set and solved in a context governed by the largely academic interests of a specific community. By contrast, Mode-2 knowledge is carried out in a context of application… It involves a wider, more temporary and heterogeneous set of practitioners, collaborating on a problem defined in a specific and localised context…”

Their Mode-2 resonates well with the emerging market-driven university where academic labour is devoted to income generation and knowledge transfer links with commerce, not contributing to disciplinary knowledge. As suggested above the reliance on any department upon peer review and RAE constructs of activity would seem to position them within Mode-1, but future national audit may give more weight to Mode-2. In terms of the former “…individual creativity is emphasised as the driving force of development and quality control operating through disciplinary structures…” (Gibbons et al, 1994, p9).

The extent to which departments can continue to locate their trajectories within Mode-1 is at risk today given the demise of donnish dominion (Halsey, 1992). Academics are being coerced into forging different relationships with knowledge and society, ones based on forms of commoditisation which operate within shorter periods of impact projection and gain credibility from constituencies which fall outside the limited circle of the peer review university based academic community (Nowotny, et al, 2004). The thesis advanced by Nowotny et al (2004, viii) concludes:

"…that the closer interaction of science and society signals the emergence of a new kind of science: contextualised, or context-sensitive, science…”

In Mode-2 science no longer occupies an autonomous space, one which is hermetically sealed from the demands of culture and economy. And they claim that universities are becoming Mode-2 institutions ‘captured’ by a managerialist and scientific establishment which impedes independence of thought (Nowotny et al, 2004, p80):

They portray Mode-2 knowledge work as causing a weakening of the historically given cognitive and moral hegemony of the university. These sociological commentators do not however adequately trace the implications of a reliance upon Mode-2 standards and trajectories of research with the possibility that vested interests seek to spin plausible meanings for the results of research documented in official reports of it to help project political interests. This form of knowledge, Mode-2, will not be submitted for the purposes of quality control verification to peer reviewed academic journals makes this option available to policymakers.

In conclusion we have in this country a curious situation where research contracts are put out to competitive tender by various public bodies with stakeholder interests in education, making it virtually impossible for the academic-research community to have these reports, produced by those winning the bids and the resulting knowledge reported, subjected to rigorous and independent peer review prior to them being accepted as fact by the funding organisation and others. The obvious corollary of this unsatisfactory state of affairs is not only that public monies may be being wasted, but also that it is ironic since this is occurring in times of a rhetoric of evidence-based policy management that such research intelligence could be woefully inadequate, by scientific criteria, and yet it shapes the practice of professionalism in our schools. The creation of a cumulative body of evidence to inform the incrementalist approach to policy–making common in the UK is as a consequence undermined because as governments change the spin they put upon reports varies.

A unique system of peer review, one which is opaque and institutionalised outside of universities, is the contemporary norm. In this system the funder is happy to adopt a strategy of judging the researcher’s expertise to deliver quality research, not on the grounds of their known excellence as defined by peer review, but instead on their subjective view of that individual’s charismatic authority.

We ought to be wary of regressing to systems for assessing scientific merit that belong with pre-scientific times where magical beliefs prevailed. In those historical periods power was concentrated in a small minority of persons whose patronage enabled a corrupt form of meritocracy to emerge. As Michael Young stated fifty years ago in The Rise of the Meritocracy, even an oligarchy based on genuine merit does not necessarily support the wider good of society.

If you have comments or questions, please contact the author at: chris.holligan@uws.ac.uk

References


An Epistemological Transformation in what counts as Educational Knowledge: Responses to Laidlaw and Adler-Collins

Jack Whitehead, University of Bath

Pip Bruce Ferguson (2008) began this open dialogue with a suggestion that changes in how research is carried out, funded, presented and assessed are indicative of an epistemological transformation in what counts as educational knowledge. These changes involve the inclusion of diverse perspectives and presentation styles in research.

I responded (Whitehead, 2008) by agreeing with Bruce Ferguson about the epistemological transformation in what counts as educational knowledge and explained the significance of inclusionality (Rayner, 2004) in this epistemological transformation:

For me, inclusionality in educational research is distinguished by flows of life-affirming energy and a gaze of recognition of the other. These are omitted from representations of educational phenomena on pages of written text, such as I am producing here. These are the usual forms of representation in the established and renowned international refereed journals of education. The radical suggestion I am making here is that the usual forms of representation in such journals are masking or omitting the life-affirming energy that distinguish what should count as educational knowledge, educational theory and educational research.

Laidlaw’s (2008) response to Bruce Ferguson and me included the sentence below, which I think has profound implications for extending the forms of representation that are presently used in the British Educational Research Journal. I believe that Laidlaw’s (2008) and Adler-Collins’ (2008) contributions to Issue 104 of Research Intelligence are leading the way in evolving the forms of representation that can communicate the epistemological transformation in what counts as educational knowledge. The key to communicating this epistemological transformation is the live url in Laidlaw’s sentence:

Additionally, I believe there may be some elaboration of multimedia forms of representation and connections to developing new epistemologies in the work of EJOLTS (Educational Journal of Living Theories) at www.ejolts.net.

Because Research Intelligence is now available in an e-format it can contain the live urls that take readers to multi-media representations of educational research. For example, readers of the e-version of RI can now click on www.ejolts.net and go into the contents of the current issue that supports Adler-Collins’ point (2008) about visual data that emphasises the importance of flows of life-affirming energy with values in creating safe spaces for relating, enquiring, learning and researching in educational relationships.

As a reader of RI you can now see if multi-media representations of educational theories are bringing about an epistemological transformation in what counts as educational knowledge. Through the live urls below you can access the evidence to evaluate the validity of Laidlaw’s (2008, p17) and my own claims about this epistemological transformation. Through the urls you can access the following multi-media accounts, in the current issue of the Educational Journal of Living Theories to see if they stretch and transform your understandings of the nature of educational knowledge through different forms of representation. You can judge this evidence to see if it also fulfils what Bruce Ferguson asks for at the end of her article in RI to:

Here is the evidence:

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<tr>
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<th>Jean McNiff</th>
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“…validate forms of research that can convey knowledge not easily encapsulated just within pages of written text and work to overcome those whose knowledge and skills have been, in the past, inappropriately excluded”. (Bruce Ferguson, 2008, p25)
My hope is that after seeing, hearing and reading the multimedia representations of educational knowledge above, together with Jean McNeill’s foreword, you will want to sustain this particular thread in the open dialogue in RI and perhaps campaign for an e-version of BERJ. I am thinking particularly of sustaining a dialogue on the proposition that the forms of representations used in BERJ are too limited to communicate the energy flowing, explanatory principles that can explain educational influences in learning. I am suggesting that the e-version of RI is open to different forms of representation as demonstrated through the live urls above and that these can communicate the epistemological transformation in what counts as educational knowledge.

There may be readers of RI who believe that it is important to distinguish education research from educational research. Those who make this distinction may believe, like Geoff Whitty (2006) in his 2005 Presidential Address to BERA, that ‘education research’, should characterise the whole field while educational research should refer to the narrower field of work specifically geared to the improvement of policy and practice. I do agree with Geoff Whitty that it is important to distinguish education research from educational research. I also believe that it is important to distinguish education theories generated by researchers in the philosophy, psychology, sociology, history, economics, leadership, administration, politics and theology of education, from educational theories generated to explain the educational influences of individuals in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of social formations.

As readers can see in my paper in EJOLTS I stress the importance of generating educational knowledge in living educational theories from educational research. For me, educational research draws insights from educational theories generated to explain the educational influences in learning. I am suggesting that educational research refers to educational research."RII is open to different forms of representation and perhaps campaign for an e-version of BERJ. I am thinking particularly of sustaining a dialogue on the proposition that the forms of representations used in BERJ are too limited to communicate the energy flowing, explanatory principles that can explain educational influences in learning. I am suggesting that the e-version of RI is open to different forms of representation as demonstrated through the live urls above and that these can communicate the epistemological transformation in what counts as educational knowledge.

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References
ESRC Strategic Review

The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) is currently undertaking a review of its 2005-2010 Strategic Plan. Professor Harry Torrance (Manchester Metropolitan University and former BERA Council member) has been asked to prepare a paper for the ESRC as input to the review process. The following response was developed by BERA after consultation with BERA Executive Council and SIG Convenors.

The ESRC Review is not focussed solely on education but runs across the social sciences and the input being prepared by Harry Torrance is to respond to the ESRC ‘Research Challenge for Education’. This is included in the ESRC Strategic Plan but specifically identifies the following points:

“By 2010 we will have …developed the capacity to address research questions such as:

• How are key decisions on education taken and what are the effects of these decisions on long term well-being?
• How can initial education and new e-learning technologies sustain a commitment to lifelong learning?
• What changes would be needed for education to be the main intervention to overcome social exclusion?”

The following response was drafted to inform the current ESRC Strategic Plan Review. Attention was also drawn to the recently published “2008 BERA Charter for Research Staff: promoting quality conditions for conducting quality research” and the contribution ESRC could make to supporting contract research staff/those on fixed term contracts.

BERA response to help inform ESRC strategic review

How are key decisions on education taken and what are the effects of these decisions on long-term well-being?

Significant progress has been made in understanding the relationship between central government policy-making and educational research. The more we understand about the complexity of this relationship, the more we need to continue to explore ways of improving communication between policymakers and researchers and in understanding the distinctive contributions that each constituency can make. We need to develop research capacity at systemic level so that knowledge management within and among different stakeholder groups is improved. The Strategic Forum in Research on Education is an attempt to create a space for different constituencies. This is supported by ESRC, BERA, DCFS and CfBT and is a good example of the potential of small investments potentially yielding important returns.

Central government policy-making is clearly a crucial area in terms of decision-making. So also is the day-to-day decision-making by teachers and other education professionals that can directly affect long-term well-being. Decisions, for example, to exclude pupils from schools, to set or stream pupils by ability and how feedback on pupil or student performance is given can have significant effects on life chances. We need more research on teachers’ decision-making to improve our understanding of curriculum innovation, (we know we cannot design a teacher-proof curriculum), of assessment practices and if we want to encourage more and better use of e-learning technologies.

How can initial education and new e-learning technologies sustain a commitment to lifelong learning?

Much funding is directed towards new technology but in order for this to be effective more sophisticated theoretical tools are required that engage with subjectivity, identity, and in general an understanding of the cultural contexts in which new technologies are used. Technological solutions, call for sociological understanding that recognises the reflexivity of technology, how it shapes subjectivities and social worlds. With the exception of groups working within multimodal theories, multiple literacies and discourse theories, technological innovation is often not well-theorised, too short term, and focused on narrow, technical aspects. Research is frequently called upon to play an overt promotional role (e.g. BECTA). This fails to address the interpenetration of market and educational processes, or wider implications of regulatory regimes instituted through database technologies. Well-theorised research suggests implications for curriculum and assessment (new literacies); requires a dynamic interrogation of curriculum, rather than current static model. Thus in HE, developments since the Dearing Report of PDP/portfolios/ transcripts linked to elearning tend to be too strongly focused on ‘technical’ aspects of such developments. That these innovations will ‘support’ learning, rather than inscribing differences between citizens and acting as technology of control is unquestioned. Longitudinal, qualitative research is needed to address these questions.
Lifelong learning as a contentious and shifting concept and should be interrogated more deeply.

**What changes would be needed for education to be the main intervention to overcome social exclusion?**
At classroom level we need better understanding of teachers’ classroom decision making and at school level we need better understanding of school cultures that promote inclusion. This suggests the need for more inter-disciplinary research, for example in the area of behavioural difficulties and learning difficulties, and for better understanding of inter-agency working. A study of successful interventions in different sectors, pre-school, school, FE, higher education and community education to uncover explanations and conditions for success would be an important source of evidence for policymakers.

At macro level we have considerable evidence through ESRC funded studies and studies funded by the Sutton Trust and the JRF that processes of differentiation such as selection, league tables based on attainment performance criteria, setting and streaming exacerbate social inequality. The development of accountability systems that promote inclusion thus seems to be a priority. International comparative research with the Nordic countries, for example, could help us understand the conditions to promote inclusion in various sectors.

**What gaps remain?**
ESRC should continue to fund ‘blue skies’ research on enduring educational issues through its responsive mode. Such research on, for example, learning, inequalities in education, social cohesion and education can be drawn on to inform policymakers’ thinking and bring new ideas into the arena.

Support for interdisciplinary research needs strengthening and further collaboration amongst research councils will encourage this. Recent calls to develop interdisciplinary networks to address specific issues are welcome and we would encourage continuation of this approach. More could also be done within the social sciences too.

**New Priorities**
The new Research Excellence Framework will have a profound impact on social science research and this will need to feature in ESRC’s decision-making.

Key issues will continue to feature over the next five years include:

- **Climate change.** The social sciences will have a role to play in assessing the social and economic impact of environmental developments and policy.
- **Health.** Health inequalities will continue and new challenges will face the nation in terms of access to care, and to specialist medicines, as well as enduring issues such as teenage pregnancies, drug addiction and the like. The relationship between education and health is under-researched.
- **Social cohesion** and the role of education for citizenship in this will continue to be important. Much of the research on citizenship to date has concerned models of curriculum provision, pupil voice and teacher education. As education for citizenship beds down in schools, there are larger questions about the rights of young people, the development of political literacy and the ways in which educational institutions tackle cultural differences within society.

We would wish to see the continuation of some large scale funding as with TLRP in order to tackle complex and enduring problems and improve outcomes for learners. To that end we would also wish to encourage greater engagement of education with social theory.

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**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](http://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
ESREA Life History and Biographical Research Network
12-15 March 2009
Società Umanitaria, Milan
www.esrea.org

Gender and Education Association
7th International Conference
Gender: Regulation and Resistance in Education
25-27 March 2009
Institute of Education, University of London
www.ioe.ac.uk/fps/genderconference09

American Educational Research Association
Annual Meeting
13-17 April 2009
San Diego, California
www.aera.net

Adult Education Research Conference
28-30 May 2009
National Louis University, Chicago
www.adulterc.org/

ESREA Network: Between Global and Local: Adult Learning and Development
May 28-30 2009
Magedeburg University
www.esrea.org

Standing Committee on University Teaching and Research in the Education of Adults
7-9 July 2009
Institute of Continuing Education and Downing College, Cambridge
www.scutrea.ac.uk

British Educational Research Association
2-5 September 2009
University of Manchester
www.bera.ac.uk