DEVELOPING RESEARCH CAPACITY

PERSPECTIVES ON RESEARCH CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT - CONTEXT, CHALLENGES & COMPLEXITIES

FEATURING
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NEWS FROM THE BRITISH EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION
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As I approach the end of my term of office, I have been reflecting on the past two years. These have certainly been very interesting times for BERA, for education and for educational research.

As for BERA, we have celebrated our 40th birthday, with a range of very valuable activities, including the ‘40 at 40’ publication, the BERA timeline and the initiation of the John Nisbet award, in memory of our first President. We have also seen the publication of a manifesto for *A Fair and Equal Education*, developed by six of our SIGs and drawing together a wide range of research evidence that can inform improvements in education. And the Inquiry on the relationship between research and teacher education has attracted interest across the globe, as well as having some influence on policy developments in the UK. In June we held an event in the House of Lords, hosted by David Puttnam, to discuss the future of teacher education. And in recent months I have been invited to talk about this work in Russia and in Australia, as well as in several places closer to home.

Education in the UK continues to show signs of both convergence and divergence, as we remain ‘one nation’ in the wake of the Scottish independence referendum, albeit with four education systems. The review of teacher education did indicate that some of the policy directions in England were creating a sense of a reverse trajectory, with the contribution of research and of higher education to Initial Teacher Education (ITE) marginalised in some of the most recent policy moves. The outcome of the recent general election means that there is likely to be a continuing need to argue the case for high quality ITE in England. However, at the same time, the increasing use of the phrase ‘evidence-based teaching’ by the DfE does suggest that the value of research for practitioners is recognised as part of the mix in the policy community. And the Government has set up the Education Endowment Fund as one way of harnessing the research community’s resources. So there are mixed messages about the role of research in and for education, which we will continue to monitor. Other areas of policy change that are a cause of concern in England in the immediate future include assessment and curricular changes in early years settings and in schools, and access to and resourcing for further and higher education.

Whatever the external environment, however, and as I wrote in the previous issue of *RI*, the results of the Research Excellence Framework should give us considerable confidence in the quality of our research and its impact in the wider field. UK educational research can certainly be characterised as world-leading. Our past success means we also now need to look forward to the major challenges involved in building capacity for the future. The report of the ‘Observatory’ that BERA...
commissioned last year demonstrates that research funding sources have been diminishing and that there has been a squeeze on the numbers of doctoral students in education, particularly those funded by the ESRC. BERA will be reviewing our strategic plan over the months ahead so that we can rise to these challenges and strengthen the field still further.

The consolidation of our office in Endsleigh Gardens has been enormously important for BERA to flourish in the way that it has. We have a superb team of professional staff now, to the extent that we will be managing annual Conference ourselves for the first time this year. However, those of you who have visited the office will know that the working conditions are far from ideal and we urgently need to acquire more space.

UK educational research can certainly be characterised as world-leading Conference in Belfast, to meeting with many members and international delegates, as well as to handing over the Presidential baton to Gemma Moss. Gemma and I first knew each other when we were schoolteachers in Bristol [a few years ago!]. We met on the local committee of the National Union of Teachers. It has been very enjoyable working with her again on Council and with her as Vice-President over the past year. I wish her well over the coming years as we continue to make BERA an association that supports its members and helps positively to shape the environment for educational research across the UK and beyond.

My thanks go to all members of Council, other committee members, SIG convenors as well as to all of our staff, for your support over the past two years.

See you in Belfast!

Ian Menter
University of Oxford
Queen’s University of Belfast is delighted to host the annual BERA Conference in 2015, and with almost 700 delegates registered, BERA is looking forward to welcoming delegates to Belfast.

We were last in Belfast in 1998, and a lot has changed in Belfast as well as BERA. This is BERA’s 41st Annual Conference, which has grown from strength to strength. This year’s focus is about stimulating lively discussion and engaging debate. Introducing for the first time ‘Innovation Sessions’, these sessions are designed to engage the audience in a more participatory way in the form of workshops, open sessions and school visits.

Queen’s, which was first chartered in 1810, is one of the oldest universities in the UK. Today, it is an international centre of research and education and a major part of the fabric of Northern Ireland. With more than 23,000 students and 3,700 staff, it is a dynamic and diverse institution. The School of Education at Queen’s continues to play a leading role through its educational research.

2015 marks the beginning of a new presidency for BERA and Professor Gemma Moss will be giving her presidential address. For our other two keynotes we have Professor Paul Connolly from our host institution, Queen’s, Belfast, and Professor Cynthia Coburn from Northwestern University, USA. These keynotes complement each other by all addressing the challenges and possibilities for educational research.

Professor Patrick Johnston, President and Vice-Chancellor of Queen’s, will open the Conference. He will be joined at the opening event by Minister of Education for Northern Ireland, Mr John O’Dowd MLA. Mr O’Dowd became Minister for Education in May 2011.

The Conference dinner will take place in the iconic and most famous attraction in Belfast, The Titanic Belfast. After a private tour of the exhibition, the dinner will take place in the stunning Titanic Suite. With panoramic views over the original slipways, a replica Titanic ‘staircase’ for a great photo opportunity and dining in a true first class experience, we are sure this will be a memorable event in this unique venue.
THE BERA BLOG LAUNCHES

Nick Johnson and Gerry Czerniawski
www.bera.ac.uk/blog

Back in May, BERA launched our brand new blog – Research Matters. This blog has been established to provide research informed content on key educational issues in an accessible manner. The aim is to produce and promote articles that attract policy-makers, parents, teachers, educational leaders, members of school communities, politicians, and anyone who is interested in education today.

The blog is edited by a small team combining academic representatives and the BERA Office. We are always looking for volunteers to join this team – you can play a role in commissioning content, reviewing submissions and deciding upon special themed weeks of posts.

All content is approved for publication by one or more of the editorial team. The blog is open to anyone to make a submission. The aim is to stimulate debate and thus differences of opinion will be aired. However all submissions must have some link to evidence rather than assertion and should be on substantive issues rather than personal criticism.

The editorial team welcome articles of 500-750 words (including any references) that are:
• short reports or summaries of research;
• opinion pieces;
• responses to policies;
• experiences as an educational researcher;
• experiences using research.

If you would like to contribute or possibly even join the editorial team, please get in touch via the BERA Office – Farzana.Rahman@bera.ac.uk.

THE SAD PASSING OF DR ANNE HALSALL

BERA is sad to learn of the passing of Dr Anne Halsall, a long serving member of BERA, Convenor of the Leadership and Management SIG and respected academic from the University of Aberdeen. Anne passed away in the morning of 24th July 2015 and BERA will celebrate her achievements in the next issue of RI looking at Anne’s contributions to the field, and in particular her work on management and leadership issues.

TEACHER EDUCATION – WHAT NEXT?

BERA held a successful event on ‘Teacher Education – what next?’ in June. Hosted and introduced by Lord Puttnam, a packed room heard BERA President Ian Menter introduce the issue and draw from the final report of the BERA-RSA Inquiry into Research and Education. Our panel of speakers then responded and set out how they saw the increasingly divergent situations in the four nations of the United Kingdom. There was a strong consensus in the room about a shared vision of research-rich teaching and teacher education with an acknowledgement that the wider context, particularly in England, is a very challenging one. It was also agreed that further work was needed with a range of partners about what that vision does and might mean in practice. This will be a continuing area of work for BERA in the months ahead.

The panel of speakers were Geoff Whitty, Graham Donaldson, Sir Alasdair Macdonald and Christine Blower.
NEW EDITORS FOR REVIEW OF EDUCATION

Following an open recruitment process, we are delighted to announce the appointment of a new editorial team for our newest Journal, *Review of Education*.

The new team comes from the School of Education and the CEM Centre, Durham University and consists of five editors - Professors Stephen Gorard, Carole Torgerson, Julian Elliott, Carl Bagley and Dr Christine Merrell.

The team has a wealth of editing, reviewing and publishing experience, and includes members of the ESRC Grant Assessment Panel, the British Academy Grants Panel, and the REF2014 panel. Together they have a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds (including teaching, psychology, assessment, social work and sociology), areas of interest, and mix of approaches. Their own research interests include all phases of education and training from early years to later life, and designs and methods suitable for all phases of the full research cycle.

BERA was particularly attracted by the team’s considerable experience of publishing systematic reviews, research syntheses, and reports of very-large complex studies. All of these fit the unique opportunity presented by RoE to allow fuller treatment of complex or long-standing issues where a normal Journal article is just not sufficient.

This new team takes over from January 2016 but are already planning alongside the current editorial team.

BERA AT AERA

This year’s invited BERA symposium at the annual conference of the American Educational Research Association in Chicago was another great success. The symposium selected by BERA this time grew out of the 40th anniversary project on Respecting Children and Young People, which had also generated the publication of the manifesto, *A Fair and Equal Education*.

Ruth Boyask (University of Plymouth) put together a wonderful team of speakers to present papers under the title: ‘How can education policy respect children and young people? British social justice researchers seek new ways to inform public debate’.

The four papers each took a very different approach to the question – Ruth herself with Katy Vigurs (University of Staffordshire) presented on the development of the ‘Fair and Equal’ manifesto in the run-up to the General Election. Ruth Lupton (University of Manchester) talked about connecting with local and national policy makers through various public events in Manchester. In her paper, Jocey Quinn (University of Plymouth), raised challenging questions about connecting with ‘disengaged’ young people and how researchers can make sense of their experiences. Finally, Liz Todd (University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne) took up the ‘impact’ issue, explained the meaning of that word in the context of the UK’s REF and examined how that agenda may actually enhance a university’s civic mission.

The two eminent discussants, Michael Apple (University of Wisconsin-Madison) and Chris Lubienski (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign), responded very positively, congratulating the presenters on their imaginative and challenging insights.

HOW TO SUBMIT ARTICLES TO BERJ

The *British Educational Research Journal* has gone from strength to strength under the publisher Wiley Blackwell and the current editorial team led by Professor Sally Power and colleagues at Cardiff University.

To submit an article to BERJ, follow the process as set out here: [https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/cber](https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/cber).
Newly Elected Council Members

DR RUTH BOYASK WAS ELECTED TO BERA COUNCIL THIS YEAR. RUTH WILL START HER TERM OF OFFICE FROM SEPTEMBER 2015.

Ruth is an established SIG Convenor, having chaired the BERA Social Justice SIG, and was instrumental in leading the ‘Respecting Children and Young People: Learning from the past, redesigning the future’ project which saw the launch of the ‘Respecting Children’ blog and an evidence-based manifesto: ‘Fair and Equal Education’.

We look forward to welcoming Ruth to BERA Council and to working with her more closely in the development of BERA projects in the forthcoming months.

Dr Ruth Boyask, Professional Masters in Education Programme Lead, Plymouth University

FIRST OF ALL, MANY THANKS TO COLLEAGUES WHO VOTED FOR ME TO BECOME A BERA COUNCIL MEMBER. I CONSIDER THIS AN HONOUR. I SHOULD ALSO LIKE TO INVITE MEMBERS TO CONTACT ME IF I CAN BE OF HELP IN ANY WAY.

Educational research and educational researchers in the UK are at a crossroads. Digital technologies provide opportunities for new research tools, for different ways of gathering data, different ways of publishing data and different forms of collaboration between research users and those who wish to undertake research. I urge all BERA members to be open to these new opportunities and to work to ensure we harness these opportunities to enable educators (practitioners and researchers) as well as policy-makers to access high quality research to underpin policy and practice.

There is considerable will from the non-university education sector to adopt evidence-based practice and members of the SIG I co-convene (Educational Research and Policy Making) are working on strategies to remove barriers to this. You are invited to join the SIG meeting at the Conference to find out more and to put your ideas forward.

I feel it is essential for BERA to be represented strongly in debates about the research and development components of a self-improving education sector and I hope my experience at all levels – schools, local authorities, research organisations, universities, central Government agencies and professional associations - provides a strong foundation for ensuring BERA has a strong voice over the coming years.

Dr Marilyn Leask, Professor of Educational Knowledge Management, University of Bedfordshire

BERA Council are also delighted to confirm that three members were re-elected: Professor Mark Priestley, (University of Stirling), Professor Liz Todd (University of Newcastle), and Professor Gary McCulloch (UCL, IoE). Council and colleagues at the BERA Office look forward to working with the re-elected members.
Developing Research Capacity
By Hilary Burgess, University of Leicester

This issue of RI explores the diverse ways research capacity can be developed in HE institutions and in other contexts. The articles included demonstrate some of the complexities and challenges that emerge. For example, the academic aiming to improve her own career and develop individual research capacity as discussed in the article by Ruggiero. Or the issues faced by project teams working across a range of international institutions to develop lasting research partnerships - see Burgess, Lawson, Wilkins and Forsythe. There are, of course, many questions left unaddressed, such as the way a university as a whole develops a coherent strategy to develop research capacity, but it is hoped the individual perspectives presented might help to inform future research capacity development.

Inter-disciplinarity is perceived as key in many institutions to promoting stronger research teams and wider research impact. This theme is addressed in the article by Scanlon who explores how Technology Enhanced Learning is, by its nature, a multifaceted discipline that can support the professional development of emergent researchers. The article by Alexander focuses upon the role of an International Office and how this can extend beyond issues such as mobility and recruitment to establish an external profile and presence through international partnerships. The remaining articles each present different perspectives which can contribute to capacity development. Golden and Hayes demonstrate the possibilities for teachers and schools to contribute to research despite the increasing fragmentation of the school system. They discuss one project that a local authority undertook with practising teachers with the aim of increasing research capacity. Perselli reports on a research project that explored the importance of being able to theorise to develop a research project - an issue of particular relevance for doctoral students. Pedder’s article examines the way one university department is collaborating to bring together different projects that are based upon international research partnerships to build a common partnership research agenda. The final article by Kambouri reflects on the research she has conducted in the area of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) and how two research projects have had a transformational impact upon her own academic trajectory.

Putting together this issue of RI, the penultimate one that I will edit, has caused me to reflect upon the previous eight issues that I have been Academic Editor for over the past three years. I have found it both an enlightening and highly satisfying experience that I have hugely enjoyed, so it is with some sadness that I leave the BERA RI team. It has been enlightening because of the many distinctive contributions to each of these editions, sharing new perspectives on educational debates. It has been highly satisfying because it has made me increasingly aware of the generosity of the educational community to share creative ideas and offer opinion on a wide range of issues. I have continued to be amazed at the willingness of so many to contribute despite increasingly heavy academic workloads. However, after three years tenure in this role I feel it is time for someone else to pick up the BERA RI editorial baton. If you have not acted as a journal editor before, I think this role is an excellent place to start. If you have ideas that you think are important to share and want to encourage others to talk about specific educational issues then editing RI can provide this platform. Most important of all though, is the fantastic BERA team of Nick, Farzana and Sarah who are absolutely brilliant and always supportive and encouraging to the Editor. I have so enjoyed working with all of them and I know the new Editor of RI will too!
More than 40 years ago, I joined The Open University as an educational technologist and developed an interest in the use of computers in learning. I have since completed a PhD on models of physics problem solving, supervised Doctoral students and employed many postgraduate researchers from diverse disciplinary backgrounds (such as education, psychology and computer science) working on a variety of research topics. This has given me an active interest in interdisciplinary working and in how research capacity can be built.

Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) as a field is inherently applied and multidisciplinary; researchers come from a wide range of disciplines and hence bring with them a rich set of theoretical perspectives and methodologies. Interdisciplinarity provides an approach to addressing cross-discipline research challenges, where researchers from two or more disciplines bring their approaches together to find a solution to a new problem. In TEL, challenges are not just technological but pedagogical and organisational as well. As such, tackling these issues requires a multi-faceted approach and hence, not surprisingly, much research work in this field is interdisciplinary.

Previous work in the Joint Research Council’s programme of research in TEL was concerned to develop an understanding of research capacity development. A £12m programme (2007-2012) jointly supported by the UK Economic and Social Research Council and Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council focussed specifically on TEL. Eight large interdisciplinary projects researched ways in which technological and pedagogical expertise could be combined to improve outcomes for learners.

The Technology Enhanced Research Programme, the last phase of the Teaching and Learning Research Programme, also recognised that one of the defining features of successful bids to the programmes in this area was the requirement for projects to consider interdisciplinary working. They explained the reason for this as follows:

Capacity building: This funding initiative is intended to support UK academic communities and their user partners in building substantial and sustainable capacity for ongoing interdisciplinary research on technology enhanced learning. Proposals should demonstrate how they may contribute to this, for instance, by supporting new researchers in the field, extending forms of interdisciplinary expertise, or strengthening links between researchers, learning, teaching, training and support staff and ICT designers and developers.

Funded by the TEL programme, I worked with colleagues on a study of the working practices of academics in TEL (Conole et al, 2010). An interview study of 18 participants, conducted as part of the project, revealed interesting perspectives on working within such projects. TEL researchers are drawn from across a broad range of disciplines and bring with them a rich variety of theoretical perspectives and methodologies. These have the potential to be harnessed to provide insight into some of the challenging research questions which are contemporary in TEL. This investigation concluded that capacity building is likely to be important, both in terms of helping individuals to develop the skills and competences they need to adopt interdisciplinary approaches and to use new technologies as effective research tools.

In an action research investigation of research capacity in TEL, Carmichael (2011) describes the dilemma for early career researchers as follows: ‘As a researcher
developing a profile in TEL, they are faced with demands to work across disciplinary boundaries and have to adapt to different working practices, research relationships, publication practices and career trajectories.

He goes on to describe how some TEL researchers identify themselves with one of the main disciplines which contribute to TEL but some are ‘discipline hoppers’. However, others identify their mode of working as interdisciplinary. These identifications have consequences for career advancement and professional development. Other commentators point to some difficulties with this: ‘Researchers who identify themselves professionally with cross-disciplinary categories face the entire panoply of gatekeeping mechanisms, which by and large favor existing disciplinary categories’ (Klein, 1993, p. 193; quoted in Nissani, 1997).

There are also particular skills which researchers need to develop. In multidisciplinary teams these include the need for fusion or T skills – the combination of deep skills within specialisms with broad understanding at a more holistic level (Creative Skillset, 2013).

At the Open University a strategic research initiative in TEL is underway to build on our strengths in the Centre for Research in Education and Educational Technology. Three themes bring together a cross-University community of researchers: shaping the future of education, technological innovation and learning, and learning in an open, connected world.

Research focussed on how learning and technology are shaped by each other will drive innovations in teaching, learning and assessment.

Innovative technologies can allow people to learn in different places – using their smartphones or through technology embedded in the environment – and we need to understand how these technologies enhance learning and empower learners. Research on openness in Education examines the way the transition to digital content and the impact of a pervasive network has the potential to bring about real changes in the ways we share knowledge and interact. Across these themes we will be considering some of the embedded practices that were identified by researchers in interdisciplinarity as supporting the professional development of researchers in emergent fields such as TEL.

REFERENCES

Beyond Mobility and Recruitment:

HOW A UNIVERSITY’S INTERNATIONAL OFFICE CAN SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF RESEARCH CAPACITY

By Suzanne Alexander,
University of Leicester

In common with most other UK universities, the work of the University of Leicester’s International Office has traditionally focussed on student mobility and recruitment, principally for undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes. As the international agenda has expanded to embrace internationalisation across all aspects of the University’s activities, both internally and externally, so too has the scope and perspective of the International Office broadened and developed.

Internationalisation and the transformative impact of partnerships

Central to the achievement of our vision as an international university are the benefits derived from working collaboratively. Our international partnerships facilitate and support not only staff and student mobility and student recruitment, but also developments in teaching and learning, collaborative research and capacity-building.

Universities are seeking to position themselves globally and to gain an international reputation. There is growing recognition that internationalisation has both internal and external dimensions, that is, an institution has to set up appropriate organisational structures and mechanisms to support its internationalisation strategy, and also needs to establish an external profile and presence. Partnerships can be a highly effective way of achieving this.

There is an increasing belief too that international collaboration - with carefully selected and ‘strategic’ partners - can be an important element of institutions’ development and growth. What happens outside institutions can change what happens inside them. Resources may be shared or created. Joint projects can take institutions in directions they would not have taken alone or may never have thought of.

Responding to opportunities

The Millennium Development Goals have focussed on the importance of establishing robust basic education systems and providing universal access. However, many less-developed countries also place high priority on the development of higher education systems which can realise other important strategic ambitions, providing opportunities for local universities to develop not only their teaching curriculum but also their own research capacity, therefore mitigating the risks of ‘brain-drain’ and playing a major role in national capacity-building.

A number of countries are making a significant investment in academic staff development through scholarships for PhD study. Many, however, have been disappointed by slow progress and difficulties encountered in using these resources effectively. In some cases allocated budgets have remained unspent, as matching candidates to appropriate overseas study opportunities has proved extremely challenging.

Obstacles exist both in the home country and for the receiving country, in this case the UK. It is not always straightforward to understand eligibility criteria or the bureaucratic...
processes that enable candidates to access scholarship funding. Timescales and deadlines for scholarship applications and visas may be unrealistic; scholarship terms may exclude funding for pre-sessional English courses; offer letters may be required with specific wording or clauses which are non-standard or not even articulated.

Recruitment of research students can pose a range of challenges due to academic cultural differences, such as limited exposure to a research community and culture, so that it is important for potential research admissions tutors and supervisors not to confuse unfamiliarity with lack of potential or ability. Defining the scope and nature of the research proposal may therefore be a longer and more iterative process.

In Iraq, for example, two decades of wars and lack of strategic planning badly affected universities and restricted access to the broader research community, so that realistically prospective students may not be able to access resources or facilities that might typically be expected of PhD candidates.

Encouraged by closer government-to-government relationships, together with the Indonesian government’s investment in higher education staff development, Leicester staff have taken the opportunity to develop new and mutually beneficial partnerships with Indonesian universities in Kalimantan. These links also offer opportunities for visiting scholars, job-shadowing, language training and professional development courses.

The International Office at the University of Leicester has taken a proactive approach to supporting both prospective research students and academic departments. We have worked to establish direct communication channels with sponsors; to build relationships and enter into formal agreements with selected universities; and to act as academic cultural interpreters, providing detailed guidance and advice (sometimes in the native language) to candidates in regard to our requirements and processes, and to admissions tutors on education systems and qualifications.

**From recruiting research students to developing research capacity**

Governments supporting overseas research studentships often impose a bond, requiring a period of service from a returning PhD graduate. In most cases this is not regarded as a sacrifice of a promising academic career: the majority of new PhDs are keen to put to work their skills and expertise and proud to contribute to the development of their country’s higher education system. This includes the development of a research culture, and there are significant opportunities for UK universities to continue their relationship both with the returning graduates, and the institutions they work in.

Funding is often available for post-doctoral study and visiting scholars and sometimes to host UK academic research visitors. Institutions with prior experience and established links are often the preferred choice for other government research needs, and may lead to opportunities for consultancy, research projects and research centres. As well as subject-specific links, this may also include work relating to the higher education system itself, such as support for pedagogical and curriculum development or for governance and management structures.

Partnerships also position us to apply for external funding, for example from the Newton Fund, which is intended to strengthen research and innovation partnerships between the UK and emerging knowledge economies.

All successful partnerships are the result of shared commitment to, and mutual benefit from, the relationship. Many of the most productive partnerships result from individual links between academic staff, whilst others have been formalised as relationships with our research centres, departments and Colleges.

Fundamental to the concept of partnership is acknowledgement that there is something to be gained from working together that cannot be accomplished alone. Whatever model or form they take, partnerships are essentially about the power of collaboration and an ethos of mutuality, although the benefits that each party seeks and gains from the relationship may not be the same.

**Suzanne Alexander is Director of the International Office, University of Leicester**
When I say that I research games I often get a blank look followed closely by someone asking me what I mean. After I expound on it and tell them that I research how video games affect learning about social issues they are less baffled but still dubious. Really, I should have seen these clues for what they are, a hard road to getting funding for what I love to do.

Like other new PhDs seeking the academic life, when I graduated I assumed I would take a job where I would need to apply for grants as a key component of success. What I did not assume was that doing this would be so impossible, hence the famous statement about what assumptions make out of you and me. As an early career researcher in learning design and technology, whose work falls in the cracks between ESRC and AHRC, I am constantly trying to find a good fit for my work. I know that I am not alone; there are many of us that occupy ‘The Crack’, as I like to call it. In an academic world where we are told to innovate not imitate, it is hard to walk the line between staying true to your research and working to develop capacity in an area that has actual funding streams. There are positives to being in The Crack though; I have been able to work with a lot of great people who have tried their best to help me angle my research in a way that will draw funding, and we have failed time and time again.

To begin any research grant at the university where I work, you first have a meeting with our research office where you propose your idea in simple terms. They then help you to find your best fit, your niche in a world of tiny niches overflowing with qualified projects. This part is great and they are very knowledgeable about the processes of applying for grants. The first project I worked on after arriving was a bid to research how persuasive games affected kids in school. This was my area; I had written my dissertation on this topic and had three articles in press on the same topic. After four months of work on the proposal, with vast amounts of help from our research office, I was faced with puzzlement from the funding body: why was I applying to their fund, my work was not a good fit. I was puzzled and the research office explained that this fund was the best fit for my work but I fell between many of the funding bodies; we would just have to try again. Three months later, I won a best paper award for the same research. The second project I proposed was met with approval from the university, help from the research office, and a similar response from another funding body - not a good fit after getting through the first three rounds. Two months later, two articles on this very topic were published by

In the current post-REF culture where only funded research is considered worthwhile research, how does an early career researcher learn to innovate and not imitate?
good journals with a book contract signed for the very same research.

As much as this sounds like every other early career researcher’s journey, and it is, I have now applied to over a dozen calls in two years with no success, not as a partner, co-I, or PI. On the other hand, I have published research in top journals, presented as a feature speaker in amazing conferences, and have three books either published or in press. Not long ago, I had coffee with a colleague who had faced the same situation and he recommended that I stop applying for grants and instead focused on growing my research through publication alone. Now I know that is not a smart long-term strategy but it is at least under my control. Here in The Crack I can control what work I do, as long as it is small-scale and I do it in my own time, and I can control to whom I submit it. Best of all, when I submit to a journal or conference and get rejected I get three pages of quality feedback on how to make my work stronger, something that I never received with a research funding body.

This is the end of my third year in academia and I have to say that as an early career researcher my priorities have shifted. I still apply for grants but I no longer rely on them to develop research capacity. Instead I work with small groups of other researchers to develop work that we can collaborate on long distance, publish in groups, and use to apply for future funding. Basically I am failing up; in the nearly three years that I have been in this job I have managed to publish and present, form good contacts, consult on exciting projects and write books. What I have failed at is getting funding for any of my ideas, either within cohorts or by myself. The feedback I have received when I have asked other researchers about their grant seeking has been enlightening and somewhat disheartening: Are you writing your proposal to the Call? Are you using the keywords and concepts they are looking for? For some of the proposals I can say yes to this and for some I have to say no. If research is about the pursuit of knowledge to inform thought and future practices (my own definition) then why should I answer a call for proposals that reads like an order for pizza? If a research funding body wants pizza they should order it, not ask potential chefs to create a dish that looks like pizza and tastes like pizza but is not in essence pizza.

So here I am; I still research games, and I still get a blank look from most people about my research. I have found a niche but it is a moneyless one. In the current post-REF culture where only funded research is considered worthwhile research, how does an early career researcher learn to innovate and not imitate? At this point I am lucky to have a job where I can research, write and publish what I am interested in rather than what makes money, but I can’t promise it will always be like that. For me and all other early career researchers who fall in The Crack there needs to be a better system for growing our capacity other than the amount of money we bring in. Otherwise I can foresee a time when the pressure to produce money becomes more important than the pursuit of knowledge and I will become a pizza delivery person.

The views expressed in this article are my own and do not represent anyone else.
This three-year (2012-15) project has brought together 14 universities and educational institutions from Europe and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region: nine from Egypt, Lebanon and Palestine and five from England, Malta and Sweden. CDFEIATE has involved a wide range of activities, including study exchange visits between European and MENA institutions and between the MENA partners. The 14 partners have collaborated to produce reports, that analyse practices focused on three central aspects in the formation of teachers; the practicum in initial teacher education, continuing professional development, and action research; a centrepiece of the project was a Transformations Conference in Cairo (September 2014). CDFEIATE has illuminated the possibilities and the potential for partnership between faculties of education and schools to drive reforms designed to improve teacher effectiveness. In doing so it has highlighted the importance of international partnerships being informed by research and evaluation, and so enhancing collaborative research capacity.

This project proposal was being developed during the ‘Arab Spring’ uprising in Egypt which ousted President Hosni Mubarak, but the euphoria of Egyptian partners during that period has evaporated as the subsequent political climate destabilized. The challenge of undertaking the project in this volatile political situation was recognised by all partners, yet it continued to flourish, largely due to tacit understanding that education could be a stabilizing force in civil society, and this in turn required effective, high quality teacher education.

The involvement of three English universities in CDFEIATE reflects the international recognition of innovative, high quality teacher education practices in England, notably for the way in which it embeds theory and practice in the training of teachers. The irony of the fact that the project took place against a backdrop of the Coalition Government’s attempts to dilute universities’ contribution to teacher education was not lost on the Leicester team. A number of our papers written during this period consider how innovative and creative solutions might be drawn from current practice, therefore contributing to knowledge transfer and capacity building across the national teacher education systems of the partners engaged in the project. The significance of CDFEIATE in developing and sustaining genuinely collaborative partnerships between schools and universities is an important theme, but we have also reflected on the challenges and risks inherent where partnerships are driven by ‘top-down’, market-led policy rather than built through collegial networks of shared interests and values.
As a ‘South-North’ collaboration, project partners learned to work with each other in ways that take into account their different needs and circumstances. Underpinning our work has been the acknowledgement of the inherent risk of falling into neocolonial assumptions, of learning flows based on Northern partners ‘teaching’ those from the South about ‘best practice’. All participants, therefore, were determined to avoid a uni-dimensional flow of expertise, but instead to learn from each other as genuinely equal partners with distinctive perspectives rather than as ‘experts’ and ‘novices’. However, we also acknowledge that this aim was not always possible to fulfil, so we increasingly found ourselves exploring and reflecting upon the theoretical and practical challenges of North-South collaborations.

The starting-point for much of our deliberations was the work of the CDFEIATE project lead, Malak Zaalouk (American University of Cairo). Zaalouk (2013) conceptualises relationships between the North and South as part of the dependency approach to development which sees periphery elites locked into metropolitan interests in an unequal economic and political relationship. This reflects the notion of globalised education as being characterised by neo-liberalism, in which cutting public expenditure combines with the privatisation and decentralisation of educational systems which are at arms-length to a regulatory state (Ball, 2012).

However, the dominance of neoliberal ideology is never unopposed and the specific manifestation of a globalised education system depends upon the historical and traditional formations of education within a particular society. Where rights-based empowerment ideologies prevail, teachers are more likely to be envisaged as upholders of professional values, not just as mere technicians at the service of corporate interests’ needs for skilled and unskilled workers. The relationships between teacher educators represented in the TEMPUS project can be seen as part of this complex and often contradictory setting, in which all the actors, whether from the North or the South, are embodiments in different ways and to varying degrees of these global ideological and material forces.

The TEMPUS project can be seen as part of what O’Donahue (1994) conceptualised as a transnational knowledge transfer, but with the danger that this transfer would result in MENA partners being at the receiving end of Northern ideas and practices that did not reflect the local circumstances of those recipients (and, indeed, took no account of the distinctive differences within the MENA region). The practice of ‘policy borrowing’ (Phillips & Ochs, 2004) is widespread in international exchanges in Higher Education, with the adoption of ‘best practice’ policies (in ways that may potentially be “impositional, exploitative and neo-colonial” (Bridges, 2014, 92)). However, the key difficulty in taking the local into account is how to determine which aspects of culture and practices are central to a deep understanding of the contextual circumstances of the recipient institutions.

The extent to which CDFEIATE outcomes can be made relevant in wider European/international contexts is a wider aim of our work. We anticipate that it will stimulate sustainable partnerships within and beyond the project, and contribute valuable comparative analysis about the impact of teacher education reforms, particularly with regard to the relationship between universities and schools. As Suzanne Alexander notes in this issue of RI, p. 12: “partnerships are essentially about the power of collaboration and an ethos of mutuality” - although what each partner gains may not be the same.

REFERENCES
Despite living in austere times and against a backdrop of the increasing fragmentation of the school system, local authority Children’s Services departments still strive to maintain and develop their research capacity and involve practitioners from schools in the process.

Here in Hounslow Council we try to work with and support what McIntyre and McIntyre (1999) referred to as the fourth sub-dimension of educational research: ‘practitioner research, and especially schools as research and learning institutions.’ We are committed to research which sees ‘schools and other educational settings as research and learning institutions through established models of practitioner research.’

McIntyre and McIntyre (1999) took the view that capacity for research by teachers and by schools was increasingly being recognised as important, but they also saw it as being the most difficult sub-field to conceptualise. In the local authority context we have found that teachers can sometimes lack the opportunity and/or the training to engage with or carry out research, although their schools contribute an enormous amount of data to the Department for Education on their students’ achievements and characteristics. There has been a great deal of enthusiasm and support for collaborations between schools and university education departments, but the task of analysing all of the collected data with the kinds of insight that can support the schools and their communities is often left to the local authority.

Conducting education research in a local authority

In Hounslow, Sean Hayes as the Research and Statistics team leader takes a proactive approach to developing research capacity. I am the equivalent of an early career researcher in his team and our work is an example of how we continue to build research capacity in the local authority context. This article describes a research project carried out in Hounslow by our team along with our School Effectiveness colleagues.

The research theme emerged because we were struggling to reconcile our schools’ high performance at GCSE with our underperformance at A Level. Hounslow ranked as high as 13 out of 151 other local authorities in England for GCSE performance but was ranked 112 for A Level performance. This pattern has persisted for at least three years. Something appeared to be causing the A Level performance to fall short of what we were anticipating and we decided to investigate.

Our first theory was that there might be a ‘brain drain’ where students would perform very well at GCSE and then decide to continue their A Level studies at good schools and colleges elsewhere. To test this hypothesis we collected each pupil’s GCSE and A Level performance data, the pupils’ characteristics from the relevant school censuses and the destinations data from our Connexions team. We collated this data and conducted an analysis which tracked two cohorts of students, covering what they achieved at GCSE and at A Level two years later, including where they completed Key Stage 5.
Interestingly we did discover a relationship between GCSE performance and progression to an out-of-borough destination: students who achieved ten or more A* grades were disproportionately more likely to leave. However this was a small proportion of the total GCSE cohort. The estimated effect on our borough’s results by a handful of high-achieving students leaving was not sufficient to explain the observed drop in our A Level performance.

We went on to study the attainment and characteristics of the incoming pupils, including gender, ethnicity and home language, and compared them to the original cohort. We systematically developed a profile of the groups of students who were likely to leave, stay or join. An unexpected observation that emerged out of this analysis was the achievement of students who had a language other than English as their first language. In Hounslow these pupils, as a whole, performed better in their GCSEs than the indigenous English-speaking students. At A Level the performance gap reversed and the English-speaking students achieved higher than the others. It may be the case that the technical English language requirements at A Level are substantially more difficult than at GCSE, including for STEM subjects.

We concluded there was little difference between the profile of students completing GCSE and the cohort who went on to study A Levels in Hounslow schools. Therefore, ceteris paribus, we would have expected them to achieve a higher average level of performance at A Level than they actually achieved. At this point we wondered whether we could even justify an expectation of high A Level results from high GCSE results. To unpick this we did a value added analysis of student level performance at A Level, taking GCSE as the measure of prior attainment. We found that the best predictor of A Level performance was the average GCSE points score, which gave an R² of 0.35, suggesting that GCSE performance explained only one third of the variation in A Level outcomes.

We then looked at other boroughs’ results and their circumstances. The variation between GCSEs and A Levels is not unique to Hounslow; Hayes and Cassen (2014) have shown that students in London have performed better than national at GCSE for the past ten years but this has not been mirrored in London’s A Level performance. We found that Hounslow students were taking fewer entries on average than students nationally but were taking a number consistent with students across London, and that despite the reported A Level underperformance, London local authorities (including Hounslow) had higher rates of progression to universities than elsewhere. Hodgson and Spours (2013) suggest that London schools may have a lower GCSE threshold for entry to post-16 study and correspondingly have a higher A Level participation rate among pupils who achieved a C/D average grade at GCSE.

Dissemination and the involvement of schools
At each stage of the investigation, the summaries of our findings and the analytical reports were shared and discussed in meetings with our schools’ headteachers, deputy heads and heads of sixth form, who fully interacted with the study as it was progressing. As the discussion moved towards the average number of A Level entries per student, there were obvious protests that students might be better prepared for university progression with three A grades rather than four Bs, even if the latter provided more A Level points for the student. This investigation has provided an effective forum for dialogue and research that gave schools the opportunity to engage with research that they may not have been able to do in isolation. We have found that this is a successful model for how research in local authorities can be conducted in a way that involves practitioners.

REFERENCES

The views expressed are those of the authors and not Hounslow Council.
Developing Theoretical Capacity Through Educational Research: NINE NARRATIVES OF PRACTICE AND THEIR POSSIBLE (GLOBAL) SIGNIFICANCE

By Victoria Perselli, Kingston University

This article reports on a research project which evolved from the view that finding time to think theoretically is becoming increasingly difficult for practitioner researchers. An overbearing emphasis on ‘what works’ may be jeopardising teachers’ (in statutory schooling) and lecturers’ (in tertiary settings) chances of locating our work within extant theoretical frameworks and of developing new theories in and from practice. This is particularly significant in doctoral education where engagement with theory, whether articulated through the literatures or expressed empirically, requires considerable time and effort alongside, if not instead of, the day job, where more pressing issues of professional and personal survival are often at stake. How do practitioners find time and space for thinking, reading, discussing and developing researchable topics at doctoral level? What is their experience in terms of continuing engagement with theory and theorising in and beyond the doctoral project – and how does this contribute to the development of new pedagogic knowledge and praxis?

I asked nine pre- to post-doctoral scholars at different stages of their careers and in various parts of the world to consider the question: Where does theory come from in your educational research? I invited them to respond in the form of narrative accounts of their doctoral/post-doctoral experience, focussing particularly on its theoretical element. Participants were encouraged to interpret this (deliberately minimal) brief in terms of their own understandings of theory, my aspiration being that open-endedness regarding its interpretation would foster a richly diverse range of issues arising; whether concerning theory as extant and/or as generated from these practitioners’ work, which similarly represented a broad range of disciplinary areas and professional fields.

By extension, reflexive questions arose for me regarding how to ‘curate’ the doctoral story when viewed in this way; that is, as a multifaceted cultural artefact that might, interpreted individually and collectively, speak back to the dilemma of researching practice in times of potential ‘theory austerity’. Additionally, I was curious about what happens to doctoral research/researchers following completion of this high-stakes endeavour; specifically, is there currently a lacuna between completion and dissemination that could be addressed by a project such as this, thereby sustaining or even extending the reach of the work?

Suffice to say that over time some simple protocols were developed which enabled me to be in educative relations (Lomax, 1998) with contributors; that is, in dialogue about the focus of their individual projects, the overall direction of the narratives and how these might be rendered visible in ways that were explicitly educative as well as informative for the reader. For my part, this would enable me to compare and contrast them in relational terms, that is, without any pretence to theoretical ‘authority’ or ‘comprehensivity’, which was not an intention of the study. I also sought opportunities for contributors to present aspects of the research in local, national and international contexts, using networks and organisations such as BERA. In these ways a research outreach community has developed, notwithstanding the fact that, given our various geographical locations, some of us have not yet met in person nor read each other’s work in its final form.
The data
Each of the studies involved transmigrations (my term) across intellectual, if not geopolitical, space and time; that is to say, contributors described how they aligned distinct theoretical positions from the literature with their pedagogic or disciplinary concern – the ‘research problematic’ – in order to rethink and remake practice: Irigary and mothering in a faculty of education in Malta, Rogoff, *Te Whariki* and early childhood education in England, traditional beliefs and practices and Freirian critical pedagogy in relation to the ‘post-80’ generation of Chinese graduate students in Canada, Foucault in a Foundations of Education summer school in the USA. Some explicitly featured inter- or trans-disciplinary foci: education creatively conjoined – and in tension with – engineering, policy sociology, physiotherapy, visual arts, business studies. Many familiar tropes of the doctorate: journey, transition, transformation, gateway, threshold, were also prominent, but highly differentiated and problematized, with the doctorate as an artistic endeavour – most noticeably the aspiration to ‘do it better’ or ‘get it right’ next time – featuring in the work of the newer researchers, especially. Not all the studies were presented as straightforward narratives: practice-as-research, writers’ theatre, a two-act play and my own preface to the project engaged diverse methodological and/or representational forms.

Interpretation and potential implications
Cumulatively these very personal and practical responses to the task reinforced for me the importance of theory as a dynamic, interactive element of praxis; a lived reality wherein practitioners cope with, respond to, and seek to bring about change through intervention; frequently expressed as counteractions to undesirable totalising movements in social life, but also as explicit ontological and methodological choices: having relinquished claims to anonymity and objectivity in this instance, greater emotional and intellectual energy could be directed towards the identification and naming of experiences and affections that go awry in environments where the mission has become – or so it seems – to control and to normalise human endeavour.

None of this was particularly unexpected, given the communities of practitioners accessible to me at the time and their probable political orientations. Likewise it was relatively unsurprising that friendship, love and the I-Thou relationship emerged as emphatic ingredients in these studies. But for folk schooled in typically Western academic conventions and operating in what might be described as a risk-averse era, at least in the UK, all this is nevertheless hard to put into words, hence the range of *chiarosuro* effects brought into play to represent what practice is like against what is frequently – and possibly sloppily – termed ‘neoliberalisation’ in education. That this has become code for a recognisable problem across broad geopolitical areas reinforces the sense that many highly talented folk may be slipping away into alternative and even clandestine communities in order to defend and develop more robust ideals in education. If so, both those who go and those who choose to remain should be better valorised, and the doctorate is as good a place as any to begin afresh.

REFERENCES
LETRIP is a newly developed research grouping and stands for Researching International Partnerships of the University of Leicester School of Education. Here I want to summarise LETRIP and link our work to broader possibilities for building research capacity in a department.

LETRIP brings together different projects that develop as international partnerships involving Leicester School of Education and universities overseas. The purposes of these international partnerships range across:

- an international teacher education partnership involving collaboration with two UK universities (UCL and OU) and universities in Malta, Sweden, Egypt, Lebanon and Palestine;
- a research capacity-building partnership with four universities in Pakistan with a focus on ‘Mapping Women Academics’ Careers in Pakistan’;
- a teacher education partnership with colleagues at four teacher training colleges and universities in Pakistan;
- a leadership development partnership with Nanjing University, China;
- a partnership with Stavanger University, Norway focused on Lesson Study approaches to ITE and CPD;
- and collaboration with several European universities to develop inquiry-based approaches to mathematics and science education.

Most of the funding for these partnerships has come from the EU, British Council and British Academy.

It is easy for such partnerships to proceed and develop as separate entities even when located in the same department. How ‘partnership’ is understood, valued and realised in different contexts can vary enormously from project to project. But there are important benefits, summarised at the end of this piece, when colleagues come together in a cross-project research grouping like this. So it has been important at Leicester to identify and establish a basis for coming together as a group to develop synergies across our different partnerships without losing what is distinctive to each. Building a common research agenda is one step towards establishing such synergies.

Building a common partnership research agenda

Ideas following discussion at LETRIP’s first meeting in May helped us develop a provisional common research agenda focused on, first, the particularities of different partnerships and second, cross-partnership synergies. The LETRIP group will be meeting to further develop this research agenda at our second meeting in July.

We want to understand each of our respective international partnerships in terms of their origins and starting points, scope and core purposes and
the thinking behind the identification of these, and the key initial relationships that lead to their formation. We are also concerned with processes of collaboration in terms of the division of labour across different spheres of partnership activity and the enactment of leadership, especially how empowering or exploitative leadership is construed in different partnership contexts. And we are interested in the kinds of impact and achievements that can be attributed to each of our partnerships, how these relate to their core processes and purposes, and what constraints and opportunities have influenced the processes and outcomes of each partnership.

Going beyond a focus on the particular, we want to develop more explicit insights into cross-partnership synergies in terms of theoretical and practical understandings. We aim to understand more about processes through which our international partnerships come to contribute to improvements (or otherwise) in policy and/or practice related to their core purposes, and whether such processes and achievements are (i) common across partnerships, (ii) different but complementary, or (iii) peculiar and distinct. In any case we are interested in what constraints and opportunities influence partnership processes and achievements and whether these influences and the ways they take effect are similar or different across our partnerships.

Standing back a little from such important questions of partnership process and achievement, we are concerned with questions about whether or not our various partnerships represent in common distinctive innovations and strategies for promoting their core purpose - in relation to other international partnerships with similar purposes, and to other ‘non-partnership’ approaches. We also want to clarify rationales that might underpin claims to the common distinctiveness of our partnerships. In sum, we want to be clearer than we are now whether or not we have important ideas about how Leicester University’s involvement in international partnerships can contribute in future to improvements in policy and practice related to their core purposes.

Implementing this common research agenda will involve each of our partnerships building explicit methods for reflexive enquiry into ‘partnership’ as the object of enquiry. These reflexive enquiries can become particularly powerful when they adopt culturally appropriate story-telling approaches that support representation of genuinely multi-voiced perspectives of different partners, stakeholders and colleagues in Leicester and overseas. The scope then for story-telling and autobiography, together with the potential within and between each of our partnership stories for (apparent) inconsistency and paradox can provide the LETRIP group, and others like it, with richly contextualised starting points for theorizing partnerships, practical development, well-evidenced impact case studies and multiple opportunities for writing for publication – a rich prospectus for research capacity building for all members of the group irrespective of research and partnership experience.

Prospects for building research capacity in the department

Committing to such a common research agenda, and climbing out of our different partnership teams to work together in this enlarged grouping may prove helpful in wider aspects of our approach to building research capacity in the department; for example by providing an expanded cross-project context in which:

• colleagues, already committed to partnership work perhaps as teacher educators, can enhance their own and one another’s research skills, and strengthen or encourage development of research identities in a sphere of activity closely related to current professional strengths and commitments;
• the roots of the department’s goals and purposes as they relate, for example, to international research capacity-building partnerships and inquiry-oriented teacher development can be nourished for further growth;
• we can move away from small units of research activity that fragment the department’s research vision;
• colleagues at all stages of their research careers can develop clarity and confidence in their personal research vision of the kind of researcher and research leader they are and/or want to become.
Reseaching in the area of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) has recently brought me to reflect on the quality and impact of my own professional development. Being part of one such research and development project, and then directing a second one during the same period, increased my self-awareness, especially of my own improvement as both projects focused on CPD for teachers (new and experienced) aiming at capacity building for faculties of education. What I didn’t appreciate enough initially was how convergent the two projects were, and how experience and knowledge from one flowed into the other and eventually transformed the way I was thinking about my own academic trajectory/enquiry.

The first project, for which I was one of the co-PIs, was a three year TEMPUS-funded project focusing on ‘Capacity development of faculties of education in International approaches to teacher education’. The project was conceived by Professor Malak Zaalouk of the American University in Cairo (AUC), as a collaboration between partner universities in the EU and those in the Middle East/North Africa (MENA) region. Through a series of visits between EU and MENA countries, a successful practice was seen, experienced and exchanged in order to reflect about and instigate change back home. At the heart of the debates were partnerships: school and university faculty share the responsibility for student teachers’ learning. In partnership, they share and integrate resources and expertise to create roles and structures that support and create opportunities for student teachers to learn. They also prepare members of staff to supervise and mentor student teachers. Teachers are expected to apply the skills, knowledge and professional dispositions they are exposed to during coursework in its conceptual framework, including a capacity to have a positive effect on student learning. They need to demonstrate skills for working with colleagues, parents, families and communities. The cycle is indeed a transformational one for all those involved. As McNiff and Whitehead (2005:4) put it, “Practice (what you do) informs theory (what you think about what you do), and theory (what you think) informs practice (what you are doing). Theory and practice transform continuously into each other in a seamless flow.” This was one of the principles that colleagues from Helwan University in Cairo were most inspired by in developing new ways of initial teacher education.

The belief that the divide between research and teaching...
is blurred, if not completely removed, through teachers engaging in research as practitioners was also debated. Faculty members who conducted the research became aware of the reverse side of this argument. This should overcome some of the issues discussed in the project; namely the danger of research being an activity that is done on teachers rather than by them and with them, and which is in the domain of either academics or the educational system as a whole. Through becoming participants in action research, driven by their own or institutional needs, it was suggested that teachers and teacher educators can become agents of transformations.

The second project, for which I received an IOE HEIF (Higher Education Innovation/Next Generation Fund) award last year, was inspired by previous work in the field of adult education: focusing on CPD in special schools through innovative use of ICTs (information and communication technologies). The project’s aims are to help teachers identify and develop examples of effective pedagogic practice in using ICTs which may facilitate learning and aid teaching of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). In doing so they would develop their pedagogic skills through a reflective use of ICTs in their classes. Classroom action research, or pedagogical action research was used (Norton, 2009) in which teachers carried out reflective enquiry to improve their practice and, by extension, the performance of their students. The final aim is to produce a consultancy model for school-based CPD. The revised OFSTED framework stipulates that ‘teachers should make judgements through discussion with other staff and children, analysis of assessment records and observations of children’s dispositions to learning (characteristics of effective learning) so that they can establish best what children know, understand and can do’. In addition, the Children and Families Act 2014 places greater emphasis on schools implementing personalised approaches to working with children with SEND.

In the first phase of the project we aimed to create a safe, inspiring environment so that teachers are encouraged to learn with the Skills for Life needed in the 21st Century.

This project also involved significant knowledge transfer utilising relevant expertise across three IOE departments; it will lead to piloting the development of a consultation model and associated materials for CPD of teachers who work within SEND as a second phase. Further capacity building possibilities will be created via dissemination seminars, at conferences/SEND school network events and also through ERASMUS plus projects with other European countries.

We aimed to create a safe, inspiring environment so that teachers are encouraged.

Both projects are coming to an end soon. Learning for me was as indirect as it was unexpected: although I was aware of my skills being transferred, working in different practices across countries and systems, I was unaware of any fundamental personal development and certainly of any ‘transformation’ until I was asked to reflect on this piece. The model I look for needs to incorporate a stronger, effective component of university-schools partnership with Masters students both as researchers and as practitioners in the school. There would need to be a re-thinking of the methods and processes we use to do this more efficiently and so the transformation needs to start at home (Kambouri & Wall, 2014).

REFERENCES
The field of Education in UK universities is at a critical juncture. Despite a seemingly impressive performance in the 2014 REF, the field faces a period of insecurity, uncertainty and restructuring. In this article we offer a snapshot of current data on educational research funding, postgraduates and staffing, based on our analysis for the BERA Observatory, an initiative to monitor the general state of education research in the UK.

The project, which reported in December 2014, drew evidence from HESA data, the RCUK and from the websites of HEIs and non-HEI research organisations.

**Research capacity**

Academic staffing in Education cost-centres in the UK has declined since 2008, from a peak of about 7000 in 2008-09, to about 6500 in 2011-12. This trend includes a 29% drop from 2004 to 2012 in academic staff employed on research-only contracts, and a 52% increase in teaching-only contracts over the same period (see Figure 1). A clear drop in FTE staff on fixed-term contracts (particularly marked in Russell Group universities) also occurred over this period. This trend may connect with the decline in research-only contracts, the decreasing proportion of staff aged under 56, and universities’ commitment to reducing the use of fixed-term contracts; but may obscure a possible rise in the use of open variable-hours contracts, although data on this is difficult to collect. The total academic staff in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland amounts to less than one-sixth of those employed in England, and research staff numbers here too are in decline.

By comparison, the total numbers of academic staff in Business and in Psychology have remained steady or continued to rise gently; while there is a rise in teaching-only contracts in these disciplines, there is no comparable drop in research staff. These differences suggests that, in addition to general changes in the funding arrangements for the social sciences, specific factors may also be at play in Education, such as the decreasing availability of direct Government research funding (for example Department of Education funding) and the diverse institutional responses to changes in the provision of teacher education nationally.

**Research students**

Higher Degree (Research) student FTE numbers in Education have increased slightly since 2009, from 4413 to 4854 in 2012-13 (HESA data). This figure includes those pursuing ‘new-route’ or professional PhDs, but does not include taught Masters. Part-time research student FTEs have remained stable since 2009. A few universities have very large numbers...
of research students, but in 2013 more than 40 hosted less than 20 PGR students (FTE). Almost 80% of these research students are aged over 30, compared to only 40% of Psychology students. Across the sector, part-time students (including, for example, teachers and HEI employees pursuing research degrees) make up two-thirds of the total FTE student numbers.

One third of all PGR students (excluding taught Masters) have some level of studentship funding, but the percentage of ESRC studentship awards made to Education has dropped (from 8% of total ESRC awards to around 4% in 2013) since the introduction of open competitions held by Doctoral Training Centres. Increasing fluctuation in ESRC studentship numbers is likely, as disciplinary allocations and benchmarks are removed, and the majority of studentships are awarded through open competition.

**Research income**

Educational research in the UK is increasingly commissioned and carried out in a dynamic and diverse set of sites, collaborations and organisations. UK universities are only involved in a subset of these networks. Partly as a result of this opening-up of the research economy, HEIs have experienced a reduction in their overall research income since 2009, down by at least 23% overall between 2009 and 2013 (but a change in reporting arrangements means that the income in 2012–13 is not directly comparable with previous years, and may suggest a smaller real drop). The reduction affects different types of institutions in different ways, but is visible across the traditional sources of funding for HEI-based education research. The drastic reduction in funding from the UK Government, for example, (down by 42%) is not offset by the small increase (in absolute figures) of funding from outside the UK (see Figure 2) and by the additional income from less traditional sources secured through the creative efforts of various types of institutions, including post-1992 and post-2000.

**CONCLUDING COMMENTS**

Departments and Schools of Education in HEIs across the UK face complex challenges. The field has to maintain its sense of academic independence, to respond to expectations around social accountability, and to compete for funding in order to remain financially viable. Distinctive institutional responses to these pressures range from organisational restructuring, to the diversification of teaching and research portfolios, and the redefinition of academic practice. Institutions are actively positioning themselves within a constantly expanding research ecosystem. These developments are key to sustaining Education as an intellectual and professional project within higher education.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This research was carried out with assistance from Dr Teresa Florez-Petour and Jennifer Allen. A forthcoming article will discuss it more fully.
On 8th May 2015 Colin McCaig and Pete Boyd, co-convenors of the BERA Higher Education SIG, organised a symposium on Innovative Research Methods at the Institute of Education, London University. Six papers encompassing a broad range of topics were presented, with a particular emphasis on emerging methods of self-definition and self-actualisation, as follows.

Reflecting the increase in online interviews with hard-to-reach research participants, and using examples from a project concerning the realities of career building after graduation, Tony Leach (York St. John's University) demonstrated how asynchronous email interviews conducted over several weeks became a joint venture: shared conversations wherein both researcher and participants gain time and space to reflect on the emerging focus of the conversation and to draft and redraft what they want to ask and say. This led to a debate on the practicalities, benefits and challenges of asynchronous email as a research methodology.

Sarah Dyer (University of Exeter) described a project investigating gendered engagement with learning in STEM subjects. Using an appreciative inquiry framework in which 20 student ‘peer researchers’ collected and analysed data via peer-interviews and q methodology, Sarah demonstrated the power and potential of academic-student co-inquiry. However she also articulated the need for greater attention to ethics and positionality in staff-student partnerships, making the case that this is primarily a pedagogic relationship. The subsequent discussion illuminated the tensions inherent in this methodology, which needs further development.

Drawing from the African notion of Ubuntu, Marie Huxtable (University of Cumbria) introduced living educational theory research, which engages relationally-dynamic, life-enhancing, multimedia research methods stemming from researchers’ values-based explanations of their educational influence on their own learning, through questions of the kind ‘how do I improve what I am doing?’ Marie illustrated her presentation via HE researchers’ embodiment of this premise in the legitimation of their doctoral theses, wherein relational values, explanatory principles and living standards are clarified as they emerge, thus contributing to a living logic epistemology of educational research.

Joan Smith (University of Leicester) presented an HEA funded action research project which trialled peer-assessment as a strategy for developing EdD students’ criticality skills, via an intensive critical writing weekend that culminated in the establishment of a student-led, peer reviewed journal. Students were interviewed before and after the intervention; they reported shifts in their understanding of criticality, peer review and critical writing, with noticeable changes in their perceptions of themselves as capable of and confident in their criticality, not least as members of a research community in which they were playing a meaningful and enduring role.

Clare Kell (Cardiff University) introduced a paper + pencil/tablet + pen notation system for capturing real-time interaction kinesics and proxemics. Building on spatial choreography (Laban) and kinesics (Birdwhistell; Heath), Clare developed this method for an ethnographic study of physiotherapy students’ learning in hospital-based settings. Recording eye-contact, movement, spatial and touch-based practices, it makes visible for discussion and reflection the nonverbal elements of learning interactions. The method, which can be learnt by educators, peer observers and students, has relevance across learning contexts including those where there is postural use/risk in skill performance.

Julia Fotheringham outlined a longitudinal research project on college to university transition. Initial focus groups failed to effectively engage university entrants in meaningful discussion about their experiences and expectations. To disrupt the tension and formality of traditional data-gathering methods, various toy-based artefacts and accessories, including Mr Potato Head construction sets, Fuzzy pipe-cleaners and Plasticine were deployed to the participants, who were tasked with using these materials to create models of themselves as university students. Julia then revealed how photographs of the artefacts and recordings of their group discussions and presentations provided subsequent data analysis.
In April 2015 the Youth Studies and Informal Education SIG co-hosted an agenda-setting event, bringing together researchers and practitioners working across youth work and arts settings. The day was organised in collaboration with the Centre for Research in Arts, Creativity and Literacies at The University of Nottingham and Tate Research Centre: Learning. The event came about following conversations at the 2014 BERA Conference, around the lack of arts-focused events in youth work contexts, and the need to identify common issues at a time of enormous change for the youth sector.

What was intended to be a modest seminar quickly turned into a mini conference. The call for submissions produced a wide range of interdisciplinary contributions from academics, youth and cultural workers, and young researchers. Travelling from Edinburgh, Brighton and many places in between, over 50 delegates assembled at the university for a busy day of presentations, shaped around four themes: Pedagogies, Youth Voice, Evidencing Impact and Cross-sector Partnerships.

In his introduction, Ian McGimpsey (University of Birmingham) - who stood in for SIG co-Convenor Janet Batsleer on the day - spoke about the long-term crisis being experienced by the youth sector. He raised questions about how this work is valued, and endorsed opportunities presented by alliances with cultural organisations and practitioners. The opening provocations gave some insight into the historically uneasy relationship between youth work and arts practice. Steph Brocken (University of Chester) discussed conflicts over professional identity and working traditions, as experienced by drama practitioners and youth workers collaborating in voluntary, open-access environments. Brian Belton (YMCA George Williams College), focused on the tendency to position the arts as a practical tool in youth work training, and to undervalue the discursive, critical potential of interaction with art, as a means to reflect on youth work practice. And Richie Cumming (National Galleries of Scotland) gave a paper prepared by colleague Robin Baillie, which raised concerns about the pressure on arts-based youth programmes to demonstrate positive messages and role-modelling, at the possible expense of young people’s creative risk-taking, authenticity and autonomy.

The ‘Pedagogies’ session looked in greater depth at the pedagogical compatibility of arts and youth work practices, drawing upon learning from theatre, music and multi-art form initiatives. The session on ‘Youth Voice’ explored the politics and processes involved in representing and supporting the voices of young people in and through arts-based youth programmes. ‘Evidencing Impact’ concentrated upon the ongoing challenges facing practitioners across informal education around how to effectively and sensitively capture and communicate the value of this work. And finally, the ‘Cross-sector Partnerships’ session looked at research developed from three large-scale projects, each of which highlighted the merits and trials of working across disciplinary boundaries with researchers and practitioners.

At the end of the day, Helen Manchester (University of Bristol) and Pat Thomson (The University of Nottingham) were tasked with drawing conclusions and mapping the agenda for future work. Manchester spoke about the recurring themes of regulation, ethics and collective youth voice in the presentations, and noted the minimal presence of discussion on digital and everyday cultural engagements. Thomson urged us to take confidence in our fairly robust knowledge about what this work with young people looks like, and to concentrate more on thinking about how to codify and theorise our practice.

This event drew our attention to the strong level of interest for discussion that explores the intersections between arts practice and youth work, and for opportunities to meet with different peers and communities. While the event did reach out to an academic audience, most of the delegates came from outside of BERA’s membership. This suggests there is room for national educational research bodies to expand their activity and networks in relation to informal education and the arts.
JULIA EVERITT

I am in the fourth year of my part-time Doctorate at Staffordshire University. I have worked as an FE lecturer and as an education commissioner (with schools) and have owned my own learning and research social enterprise. During the past 18 months I have undertaken six short-term research contracts with Warwick and Staffordshire Universities as I develop my skills and experience.

I have purposely worked part-time as I believe the doctoral journey also includes the development of a research identity. This is important if one works outside of academia or aims to move into academia or educational research. I have also undertaken opportunities such as presenting at conferences, chairing (sessions), mentoring and reviewing abstracts to build my skills and confidence. From these I gained from sharing my ideas, discussing my research and utilising my skills such as critical analysis.

My aim for the Postgraduate Forum is to create a space where members can gain support and information, but also share and reflect on the false starts, dead ends or unplanned events that happen in research. I would encourage new members to both BERA and the Postgraduate Forum, by discussing the benefits of a community of practice such as sharing information between practitioners.

GEORGINA SHAW

I am a Chartered Psychologist and have been a lecturer and researcher in Further and Higher educational environments for more than 15 years. My research background includes early years pedagogy, university student experience of VLE and military children in education. My current PhD research study is a cross disciplinary theme exploring the effects of mobility on military children’s psychological wellbeing and educational outcomes, spanning the fields of psychology, sociology and anthropology.

I bring extensive knowledge and experience to the PGF. I have been involved in conference organisation for postgraduate conferences within HE institutions and development of conference themes and content. I also bring experiences of conference attendance where I have been a keynote speaker and presented my own research internationally over the past five years.

I aspire to use my knowledge and experience to support the Forum in developing innovative and motivational opportunities for all postgraduates to engage in and disseminate their own research through this medium. I am particularly keen to encourage postgraduates to ‘cross boundaries’ and engage in multi-disciplinary research, which is now actively supported in universities who recognise its value in enriching diversity of knowledge and understanding.

YUWEI XU

I am a PhD student in gender and early childhood studies at the University of Glasgow’s School of Education. Prior to this I worked as a university teacher in a Chinese university. I gained a Master of Arts in Child Studies from King’s College London, and was awarded a Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood Education by Shanxi University in China. I am dedicated to gender balance and equity in early childhood education workforce and my current research looks at gender and teacher-child interactions in early childhood settings in Scotland, Hong Kong and Mainland China.

My research capacity has been significantly developed throughout my PhD study, particularly during my fieldwork period in the three totally different cultures of Edinburgh, Hong Kong, and Tianjin City, China. I regard ‘independence’ as the key to developing research capacity, as you learn and get stronger while you are practicing research on your own.

I wish to bring my abilities of networking and organization to the PG Forum, to make it a more dynamic platform for postgraduate students and early career researchers in the UK. The PG Forum of BERA can provide a venue for enlarging the research impact of the work of young educational researchers, as well as ‘advisers’ and helpers for their academic career.
**CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS**

The next issue of *RI* (*RI* 128, Winter 2015) will focus on Framing Excellence in Teaching and Research.

Each issue of *RI* aims to capture a range of perspectives on a topic of current relevance to the wide range of sites for the generation and mobilisation of education research. If you have some recently completed research that you feel is relevant to the theme and likely to be of interest to BERA members, please summarise it in 1000 words and send it to the Editor.

We are keen to hear from researchers at different stages of their career, including student and early career researchers. We welcome contributions from different education sectors and interest groups and from different sites for the generation and use of education research.

**If you would like to contribute please contact Farzana Rahman at farzana.rahman@bera.ac.uk with the subject line "RI 128". The deadline for papers will be 25th September, 2015.**

**OPINION AND GENERAL CONTRIBUTIONS**

Brief opinion pieces addressing other current critical issues affecting education research and its stakeholders are also welcome. We also encourage members to submit contributions discussing initiatives of strategic importance to education research from any sector of activity. Members wishing to respond to an existing piece or to suggest topics for future issues of *RI* should contact the Editor. We would like to receive brief pieces relevant to agencies or individuals who use educational research. We would particularly welcome contributions sharing news in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. SIG convenors can use the medium of *RI* to update all BERA members of their activities or open up a particular issue for debate. Accounts of events supported by BERA are also very welcome. In all types of submissions please avoid the use of footnotes and keep the number of references to a minimum. Please refer to articles in recent issues for examples of acceptable formats. Material should not exceed 600 words unless specifically agreed in advance and should be sent to the Editor, Hilary Burgess, care of farzana.rahman@bera.ac.uk.

**NOTES FOR CONTRIBUTORS**

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BERA champions the best quality evidence produced by educational research, and provides opportunities for members to contribute through its portfolio of distinguished publications, its world-class conference and other events, and its active peer community, organised around 30 Special Interest Groups.

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DEADLINE: 25TH SEPTEMBER, 2015

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