

Session 3

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“Encouraging discerning research involvement by schools and developing the role of CPD co-ordinators – the contribution of the National Teacher Research Panel”

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Encouraging discerning research involvement by schools and developing the role of CPD co-ordinators -the contribution of the National Teacher Research Panel.

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Introduction

The National Teacher Research Panel has recently produced an Open Letter for Consultation setting out questions for schools to think about when considering whether to host academic research (attached as Appendix a). They have also produced, in draft form, guidelines for CPD co-ordinators. These publications seek to improve the connections between research and practice; a core goal of the Panel.

This paper explores the research implications of the Questions for schools and introduces the guidelines for CPD co-ordinators.

Context

The initiative was sparked by:

- Anecdotal but increasing reports from research teams about school being reluctant to participate in large scale research projects and/or dropping out of participation;
- the self evident ethical and practical difficulties involved in studies that seek to compare effective, less effective and/or ineffective teaching practice;
- concerns about research proposals and reports that continue to view teachers as only the 'subject' of the research and fail to explore or acknowledge a more proactive role for teachers in the knowledge creation process (see, for example, the Panel's paper to last year's conference, Cordingley et al (2001));
- a belief that closer and more open dialogue between teachers and academic researchers during the research process has the potential to increase the extent to which outputs meet teachers' needs.

Whilst these concerns raise many technical issues for researchers they also flow from, and raise significant practical issues for schools and teachers. The Panel feels that increasing debate about these issues is an important aspect of its work in promoting teaching as a research informed profession.

To set its concerns in the context of current research literature, the Panel conducted searches via BIDS [BEI and ERIC]. Despite the wide-ranging discussion about the nature and quality of education research sparked initially by David Hargreaves' annual lecture for the TTA (Hargreaves, D 1996). The issues of access to schools and classrooms as research sites does not appear to be extensively discussed in the literature.

The Journal of Philosophy Education, August 2001 comprised a special issue on the Ethics of Education Research. Our reading of that Journal highlighted very similar concerns to our own including:

1. It's important that consent is not just from the head teacher accompanied by assumptions about the amount of information given to subjects of the research and their willingness to participate. (Homan, 2001)

2. Care is needed over tangential investigations which may arise during research since these may breach initial confidentiality assurances (Homan, 2001)
3. Reciprocated generosity is needed between researched and researcher (Bridges, 2001)
4. Research should “promote the capabilities of those whom you research in terms of those things necessary for the quality of life” (Pendlebury, & Enslin, 2001)
5. The research participants must be respected as autonomous agents (Smith R)
6. Codes of practice are ‘only ever relatively finished products’ in complex research situations. (Small, 2001)
7. Basic requirements from ‘moral law’ are that research should be ‘just, beneficial non-maleficent and improving’ (Ross, 1939)
8. The subject object view of research promotes a distance, which inhibits true understanding about the researched. (Standish, 2001) The closer the researcher is to the researched, the more likely it is that truths will emerge when looking at the complexity of school life.

We have also noted the discussion of the difficulties in securing samples capable of supporting the identification of effective (as opposed to less effective) practice in the Effective Teachers of Literacy and Numeracy studies funded by TTA (Medwell, Wray, Poulson and Fox, 1998) and (Askew, Brown, Rhodes, Johnson, Wiliam, 1997) and in an article by Qualter (1999). Here academic researchers report significant difficulties in identifying a sample of teachers containing a range of effectiveness and securing and retaining the participation of their schools.

Aims of this paper

Whilst making explicit the challenges faced by schools through the questions, the panel also recognises the challenges faced by researchers. In this context the panel’s first goal is to increase the likelihood of schools participating in research on a sustained basis by helping them raise their expectations of what is possible. We also seek to help them understand what is involved so that they can plan for effective participation. We believe that it is possible to carry out research so that the process benefits the school, the teachers and/or the pupils involved as well as the researchers and the potential future readers of the research.

The second purpose of this paper, therefore, is to encourage the academic research community to reflect more fully and openly upon the difficulties they face in working with schools and to consider whether the current guidance and frameworks can be enhanced to create a culture in which schools and teachers become thirsty not only to access and interpret research findings but to act as hosts to the research process.

The remainder of this paper seeks to fulfil these aims by highlighting and exploring an example of a question for each of the 5 sub sections of questions regarding:

- research aims;
- research conduct;
- school practicalities;
- funding; and
- outputs.

Research Aims

In the section of our leaflet for schools that considers research aims we encourage schools to satisfy themselves not only that the aims of the research are clear, but also about its potential benefits. We recognise that researchers are often anxious that teachers only have immediate, narrow and practical concerns an issue that has arisen in our discussions for example with ESRC. We don't believe this is true and have tried to emphasise the importance of broader and longer term thinking to schools, by indicating that benefits many perfectly properly accrue to future teachers, parents or pupils to the profession as a whole or to the wider community as well as to those directly involved.

Notwithstanding an interest in "the big picture", for many schools there is still much effort and risk involved in participating in a research project and signing up to a project's broader or longer term aims. A bridge is needed between a passion for the future of education and educational values and the relentless demands of the day-to-day classroom. One way of building such a bridge is to involve teachers in the schools more actively in the process of defining project aims and questions. So far, despite the best efforts of programmes such as the ESRC Teaching and Learning Programme (TLRP) or the TTA funded School Based Research Consortia, progress in this area is very slow. The Panel recorded, in its paper for BERA last year, its concern that most of the activity to involve teachers in TLRP would take place only once the design and contract had been finalised. The evaluation of the School Based Research Consortia, the final reports of the individual Consortia and the overview all note that although funding experiments in involving teachers in research design was an explicit aim of the initiative, progress in this respect was patchy. The Manchester and Salford Consortium used seminars designed both to take forward teachers' thinking about target setting or numeracy, and to refine academic researchers' thinking about project design as part of the process of preparing proposals for the ESRC that were ultimately successful. The Norwich Consortium built directly upon a teacher research case study to prepare a proposal to ESRC for a small research project that was eventually carried out by an academic researcher with support from the original teachers. But other, broad sweeping efforts to involve teachers in design were less successful – and more depressing. For example, the North East Consortium involved its School Research Co-ordinators very actively in every stage of preparing a bid for TLRP – but the bid was unsuccessful partly, the Consortium felt, because of the resulting, more complex and diffuse design.

The obstacles to be overcome in involving teachers appropriately in identifying research questions or refining designs research are challenging. Teachers who are pressed for time are understandably reluctant to put effort into speculative activities. Researchers who are preparing research bids to Funders' timetables find it hard to make space for additional consultation. Yet good research, like good lessons, depends upon clear aims and questions. The aims and questions in their turn have an enormous impact upon how easy it is for the student or research user to access the learning being offered. And users of research, like students in classrooms, have to start from what they know and can do already.

In this context, and in the light of its experience of reviewing research proposals, participating in research steering groups and reviewing research reports, the Panel has asked itself whether part of the problem is the enormity of the difficulties. Perhaps researchers hold back from consulting teachers in the design stage because they don't yet feel their questions and aims are sufficiently clear – because they expect to refine them as

the work proceeds, and in light of the feedback from the funders? Perhaps researchers' concern about teachers' workload prevents them from offering teachers the chance to get involved? If this is the case, the Panel believes first that it can provide a service to the research community in providing an informed (and funded) teacher comment on proposals. It also identifies in the questions an additional, if partial, solution to build in a commitment to consulting users about aims very early in the research process and providing time for doing this. It would be important that the parameters for negotiation were reasonable and made clear to users, if such consultation was to prove meaningful.

Given the complexity of research in education settings, the Panel recognises that there will be strong pressure against opening up the design to further variables or competing demands. Nonetheless, real dialogue about such aims – in particular dialogue about how broad aims and eventual outputs will connect with more medium or even short term concerns has, we believe, the power to increase the rigour of the research as well as its authenticity from a practitioner perspective. At the very least, it would make it easier to present the research to the teachers and students involved because the process of dialogue will help to build shared meanings and a common vocabulary with practitioners so that research outputs can be developed in terms that are close to the grain of practice.

Research Conduct

Many of the questions about research conduct that we suggest schools explore with researchers will be familiar to academic researchers. They relate closely, for example, to BERA's code of conduct. One set of questions, in particular, is of obvious and intense significance for practitioners and probably accounts for a significant element of the impatience that scientific or positivist researchers sometimes express about education research. We refer here to the difficulty of identifying effective practice and, specifically, the problems in securing teachers' agreement to participate in research projects where they are or may be identified as a less effective or ineffective teacher as part of a control or comparison group. As the introduction to this paper noted, there are examples in the literature of research projects that have wrestled hard with this problem. The TTA funded Effective Teachers of Numeracy project structured its sample around a number of schools whose staff were likely to include a range of effectiveness and used pre and post tests to assess the range of effectiveness within the sample. The Effective Teachers of Literacy project targeted ordinarily effective and very effective teachers and used pupil assessments and observations to triangulate the range of effectiveness in their sample. Perhaps other projects balance the complex resource and timescale demands that constructing a comparative sample brings against the difficulties of securing willing school and teacher participation in different ways. Others duck the issue by looking at issues beyond pedagogic processes, presumably because of the ethical and practical problems involved. A solution to the problem that the Panel noted as helpful in the review of research outputs that led to its paper to BERA in 2000 was that adopted by the Newcastle University "Ways Forward with ICT" project. Here, the sample was structured using data from the University of Durham database about value added pupil progress. The sample of teachers were observed 'blind' by the research team to triangulate the pupil data and teachers were offered the opportunity to participate actively in the final case study phase of the project that set out explicitly to explore the process of improving effectiveness (in the context of using ICT). Thus, from the school and teachers' point of view the sample was rigorously structured and based on data that had been collected anyway for the schools' own benefit. The design included activities expressly designed to support improvement of the practice

on whose weakness it depended – and in so doing produced materials expressly developed to make connections between the researchers’ larger, longer term and more generic questions – and the immediate practical concerns of the teachers involved – and of their colleagues in schools across the project and in schools who had no other involvement.

Practicalities

The panel has given extensive thought to some of the difficulties and challenges facing both schools and academic researchers at operational level. Some schools will see engaging with researchers as part of a wider commitment to becoming an evidence-informed profession engendered or supported for example by involvement in BPRS, Improving the Quality of Education for All, or a School Based Research Consortium. But there are many teachers and schools for whom research activity (which demands additional teacher time and may hence be perceived to threaten target-setting and other accountability issues) is viewed warily, even negatively. Even if the Headteacher has signed up to it the staff may remain unconvinced.

The “emotional” climate of the research planning and timetabling can be enormously helpful in allaying teacher anxieties. For example, if it is clear and focused where the research is coming from and going to (e.g. what the outputs will be) teachers will be able to know how much is being asked of them and to feel in control of their decisions and agenda? Knowing that classroom observations will be negotiated and timetabled with their agreement well in advance enables teachers to ensure that their planning and their priorities for their students’ learning can still be taken in to account. Above all, knowing what the criteria for judgements about the effectiveness of practices are, understanding that such judgements will contribute to a generic picture and are not personal or linked to accountability structures is vital. Such reassurances will help ensure that the judgements are seen to be credible and objective and, to promote and establish the climate of trust between researchers and practitioners that is essential if schools are to welcome researchers into their midst.

A sensitivity to and awareness of these issues needs therefore to be clearly demonstrated in building relationships with partnership schools. The Panel recognises that achieving a balance between encouraging some teacher ownership, for example, during classroom observations i.e. at the point of data collection and the need for rigorous research design is not easy. But there are examples of studies where data collection has been designed to be useful both in answering research questions and in enhancing practice. For example, in the North East and Manchester and Salford School Based Consortia, a commitment to opening up classrooms for regular and research based observations was built slowly, through supporting small scale and short term observations or video recordings by individual teachers, initially for their own development purposes. Other factors that helped in this process seems to have included:

- developing a focus on a highly specific aspect of teaching and learning and pursuing this in depth rather than focusing on overall performance or effectiveness; and
- involving teachers collaboratively within and between schools so that they can support each other and develop a sense of professional engagement in and control over the process.

Guidelines for CPD Co-ordinators

Alongside the questions the panel has been working on a practical document for CPD Co-ordinators. Its aim is to provide CPD Coordinators with a range of resources to help them harness research processes and/or findings as a means of improving the effectiveness of CPD.

When completed it is anticipated that the guidelines, in the form of a pack, will encourage CPD coordinators in research-active schools to make extensive use of research findings as well as enquiry processes as part of wider professional development and to help coordinators in less research - active schools start to identify how to draw on research findings and processes which can contribute to CPD.

The pack has been constructed through the lenses we would use to plan a lesson. We have done this because we believe harnessing research findings and/or processes on questions of teaching and learning is pedagogic process rather than a single matter of transmission. The pack therefore includes:

- an introduction – i.e. a lesson starter with an attention grabbing analogy and a mini activity;
- an introduction to evidence about what works where – somewhat similar to a plenary presentation;
- some frequently asked questions – analogous to the debate that comes from of plenary questioning session – and the teachers' pedagogic knowledge of common ideas and misconceptions;
- a research activity to support detailed analysis of teacher CPD needs similar to the main interactive learning activity with a class; and
- an evaluation activity similar to the debriefing that takes place in effective final plenary sessions.

We hope that academic researchers will see the guidelines as a useful insight into the teacher mindset and challenges faced by CPD co-ordinators and that they will help to build a climate within schools where exploration of our questions will be pursued enthusiastically and will foster a positive interest in contributing to research by opening school and classroom doors.

Funding

Schools need to be assured that funding will be sufficient for staff to fulfil their role both in school and in the research. If teachers are to become co-researchers then sufficient funds need to be applied for in order to 'buy' their time. At the very least funding for cover should be provided to release the teacher for research purposes. Teachers may effectively be acting in a consultancy role with an amount of time spent 'outside school' helping with the research funding should be allocated to provide remuneration which reflects this.

The amount of teacher participation in the research may well vary. In the ESRC funded 'Interactive Education' teachers and researchers worked in collaboration to combine their

expertise. Design for action followed appraisal of the project and was through joint iteration. Later teaching was filmed and reflected upon. One of the five main research themes was 'Teachers and professional development' indicating the importance of the teacher role. Seven of the teachers involved had applied for, or received BPRS from the DfES. It will be interesting to see how far teachers have become researchers and how funding was managed in this innovative research.

Outputs

The panel's paper to BERA 2000 'Teacher Perspectives on the Accessibility and Usability of Research Outputs' focused on the research outputs that help teachers to access and make use of research findings. The panel believes that research outputs must attract interest, be credible, relevant, accessible and support teachers in interpreting research implications for their own context. Teachers require research that enables them to be more effective and addresses the teaching and learning problems that are persistent features of classroom life. Research that gives evidence of clear learning gains and gives rise to strategies that can be applied across a range of subjects is of particular importance. 'Inside the Black Box' by Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam (1998) has encouraged teachers of all phases and subjects to reassess their assessment strategies and has indeed inspired many to be involved in their own action research.

Teachers also welcome research that evolves into practical usefulness by providing teaching materials and schemes of work. For example, SPACE research led to the development of an approach to teaching primary science, which in turn led to Nuffield Science and its curriculum support materials.

The panel is not suggesting that teachers want over simplified cause and effect propositions but that they want research outputs that are crisp, clear and provide convincing evidence of being well-grounded in the realities of classroom practice. Research such as 'Ways Forward with ICT' and 'Effective Teachers of Numeracy' that enables teachers to make sense of national initiatives engages teachers' attention and engages their sustained interest in the improvement of classroom practice. Teachers also welcome research that provides the tools to assess their own skills and practice. Indeed, the compelling evidence from departmental effectiveness research (Harris and Sammons et al) has provided self-review materials for CPD for many schools.

The panel highlights the value of evidence that provides illustrations of classroom practice whether it be in the form of case studies, video clips of teaching and learning, or other visual representations. However, it should not be assumed from the above that teachers want to remain in the comfort zone with 'anaesthetised' research; many teachers welcome challenge and blue skies. Evidence that challenges policy and practice is rejuvenating and exciting as the extensive work on the student voice has demonstrated.

Conclusion

In this paper we have tried to provide some of the background thinking that led to the particular questions that we suggest schools should explore with researchers. The questions are being published for consultation and all comments, suggestions or queries will be warmly welcomed. They should be addressed in the first instance to Jenny Buckland - jenny.buckland@dfes.gsi.gov.uk

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Appendix A

Dear

Open Letter of Consultation (to targeted audience including, teacher associations, subject associations, BERA, UCET, NERF, ESRC)

The National Teacher research Panel wishes to support improvement in the arrangement for schools hosting large scale research projects.

The Panel believes that research outputs are most accessible and useful to teachers when the research has been conducted in partnership with them rather than on them.

The Panel is also concerned about schools' reluctance to take part in research carried out by outsiders and the problems that arise when schools feel it necessary to pull out if research projects once they have started. It believes that whilst knowledgeable and discerning hosting by schools may pose initial challenges to research teams, it will also provide the most fruitful context for improving the quality and accessibility of research outputs. For example, attention early on to the sensitivities around sampling for a range teacher effectiveness through a supportive partnership between the school and the research team might ensure that teachers early on in their career or less effective in a particular aspect of their practice, not only help elucidate problems but obtain evidence and feedback in forms that help them subsequently to improve their practice.

The Panel has therefore drawn up a list of questions to help schools to think through the issues involved and to help them to negotiate confidently with research teams. It would welcome views from teacher and subject organisations about how useful they feel these questions could be and , of course , any suggested amendments.

In making explicit the challenges to schools the Panel also recognises the challenges faced by researchers. The Panel's goal is to increase the long term likelihood of schools being open to research on a sustained basis by raising school expectations about what's possible, helping them to understand what's involved and so enabling them to plan their involvement effectively and avoid confusion and misunderstandings.

The Panel would therefore also welcome comments from research stakeholders about the questions. In particular the Panel would welcome views of what a mirror image of these questions for schools might look like for researchers.

Hosting research in school: securing benefits for schools, teachers and researchers

A consultation Document from the National Teacher Research Panel

Introduction

Is it possible to carry out research so that the process benefits the school, the teachers and/or the pupils involved as well as potential future readers of research? Yes - for example, the "Ways Forward with ICT" research project Higgins *et al* 1999 proved to be of real benefit to case study teachers and their schools. But this isn't always the case. Not all researchers know what issues help or hinder schools and not all schools know what to expect or what to ask for. The questions contained in this paper aim to help close these gaps.

Benefits

If schools, teachers and researchers explore the nature of research plans and questions fully:

- plans and communicates about the research project from researchers have more choice of fitting in smoothly with the grain and pressures of school life;
- teachers, schools and researchers are likely to learn from the process as well as the outcomes of research projects; and
- teachers, schools and researchers will be able to consider the implications of research for practice over a larger period and so help to ensure that potential implications for such schools reading research outputs are effectively highlighted.

Questions to tease out potential benefits

The questions address 6 specific issues:

- aims and research questions
- conduct of the research
- practicalities
- funding
- design; and
- dissemination

The research aims and/or hypotheses

1. Are the aims and research questions clear and comprehensible?
2. Are there potential benefits to:
 - your pupils, now or in the future;
 - other pupils now or in the future;
 - existing or future teachers;
 - existing or future parents;
 - the school now or in the future;
 - the profession as a whole; or

- the wider community;
in having these research questions answered, and/or in the process of answering them?
3. Have other teachers or schools had an active role in identifying these questions? If not is there scope for you to help refine them?

Conduct of the research

4. Is there a code of practice for the ethical conduct of the research? Are there assurances about:
 - whether the school and/or teachers will remain anonymous;
 - whether the contribution of the school and the teachers is to be acknowledged and how;
 - how the data collected about teachers, teaching and learning or other aspects of school organisation are to be checked with those involved in generating them. For example, will teachers who are interviewed have access to records of the interview? Will the teachers or the school have chance to comment on profiles?
 - Whether the sample will target a range of teacher effectiveness and how is this to be defined? If so what will teachers need and want to know about how their work is being evaluated?
 - will the teachers and/or the school have chance to comment on written outputs?
 - how will disagreements about data or reports be negotiated and reconciled?
 - are there proper arrangements for observing pupils and for parental permission?

Practicalities

5. Are you clear where the research is coming from and going to?
6. Does the timescale allow you and the team to prepare to ground, comment on interview and observation schedules and comment on draft outcomes?
7. Can this be managed so that it fits as well as possible into school routines?
8. If classroom observation is needed, how will it be negotiated with teachers?
9. If judgements are to be made about teacher effectiveness, is the evidence to be used sound? How is such information to be handled ethically to help those involved? Will there be feedback capable of informing the practice as those involved, contributions to school improvement or to the evaluation of specific programmes or activities?
10. Are there clear plans for collecting data? Are these practical? Is it clear when and how activities are to be conducted? If teachers are to be involved will released how will their classes be covered?
11. If teachers are to be consulted or interviewed are there plans for making sure there is good notice, an appropriate location for meeting and a streamlined approach to paperwork?
12. What thought has the team given to keeping bureaucracy to a minimum?

Funding

13. Are you satisfied that the research funding is sufficient to allow:
- the research to be completed effectively;
 - the team to resource all teacher time involved including out of hours interviews when teachers may in effect be acting as consultants;
 - teachers who are contributing from across several schools to meet each other at appropriate times and to network so that they can learn from the experience;
 - your school to have access to an appropriate number of copies of draft profiles, reports and final outputs?
 - your school to be involved in testing, replicating or interpreting outcomes if you want to (assuming the study reaches useful conclusion)?
14. Are you satisfied funding comes from a reputable source?

You may also wish to consider the following questions or you may know/trust the researchers well enough to accept that all is well in this area.

Is this a well designed study?

15. Are the questions clear – how will the data being collected help to answer them?
16. Does the study build effectively on previous research? Can the team provide a user friendly summary of existing research that might be useful in school?
17. Has thought been given to collecting sufficient, rather than too much evidence?
18. Will the study look for evidence that contradicts as well as evidence that confirms a hypothesis?
19. Is it clear how the study team will identify criteria for the analysis?
20. Is there enough time planned to analyse data?
21. If the project design looks good – what arrangements exist to keep it on track?

Dissemination

22. Will there be time to test interim and preliminary findings with teachers and with other academic researchers?
23. Are the team effective communicators with the audience they seek to inform? Will there be teacher-friendly outputs such as classroom materials or vivid case studies as well as academic papers? If schools and/or teachers haven't been identified as a target audience should they be?

24. Has enough time been planned for dissemination and for considering the implications of the research on practice?

25. Are there particular and additional arrangements for dissemination to your school?