Feature article

Research@Work
This paper has been developed to support Departmental staff whose role involves undertaking or commissioning research as a means of informing and guiding policy. It is also relevant to the work of education researchers and classroom practitioners undertaking action research to improve teaching and learning.

Office of Learning and Teaching, Department of Education and Training

Related Research

Schools (primary and secondary)

Does educational research matter?
Peter Mortimore reflects on the place of British educational research in an ever-changing social, economic and political landscape. The scope is broad, covering different methodologies and both formal and informal aspects of the educative process. Four main tasks emerge: to observe and record systematically; to analyse and draw out implications; to publish findings; and, crucially, to attempt to improve educational processes and outcomes. Mortimore argues that educational research is essential for independent questioning and impartial evaluations of policy and practice. He gives examples of successful studies but also focuses on shortcomings in the research community and speaks of the need for researchers to develop repertoires of research techniques, guard against bias and relate positively to the elected government of the day.

www.bera.ac.uk/addressdownloads/Mortimore,%201999.pdf

Data-informed research and practice: Evaluating student achievement in secondary schools
While data-driven research is popular amongst researchers, it is often far removed from the work of students and teachers in schools. A more appropriate approach to research for teachers uses data-informed evaluation of student achievement and school performance. Such analyses have the capacity to provide fairer assessments of schools and student achievement than reliance on raw scores alone. This paper sets out the process of conducting genuinely data-informed analyses and will serve as a valuable guide for policy makers and educational practitioners alike.

Carmel Richardson, paper presented at the ACER Conference 2005, Melbourne
http://www.acer.edu.au/workshops/conferences.html

Closing the circle: action research partnerships towards better learning and teaching in schools
Teachers’ voices are rarely heard amongst the educationalists proclaiming about what needs to change in schools. Small-scale action research studies do not claim to be ‘generalisable’ but rely on the transfer of knowledge to new settings. The authors argue that the educational research establishment should encourage greater school involvement in school-university partnerships. Teachers from Denbigh school in the UK decide their research topics by sharing stories about professional concerns. Self-identified
professional development was the focus rather than training to resolve needs identified externally. What resulted was an educational community where people were treated equally and authority was shared. In their action research groups, students focused on how motivation was affected by the quality of their learning and how they could be involved in changing their own practice.

Moyra Evans, Pam Lomax and Helen Morgan, ‘Closing the Circle: action research partnerships towards better learning and teaching in schools’, Cambridge Journal of Education, vol.30, no.3, 2000. For further information contact the Office of Learning and Teaching at the following email address <research@edumail.vic.gov.au>

The role of action research in learning support; a case study

‘Adam’ had a long history of disruptive and aggressive behaviour, but the implementation of an action research strategy improved his learning outcomes. It also provided a clear process, objective evidence and professional support to enable two teachers to improve their management skills in tandem. The framework incorporated the elements of reconnaissance, planning, acting, collecting evidence and reflecting in a cyclic process. When collaborative consultation is viewed as a problem-solving process as well as a service delivery model, strategies can emerge to maintain students with special educational needs in the regular classroom. The action research approach promotes a collaborative process among teachers that is professionally transparent because of its reliance on agreed strategies and empirical measures of outcomes rather than personal attitudes.

Heather J Jenkins and Shirley B Dix, ‘The role of action research in learning support: a case study’, Special Education Perspectives, vol. 13, no. 2, 2004 pp. 47-68. For further information contact the Office of Learning and Teaching at the following email address <research@edumail.vic.gov.au>

Researching with children – children’s perspectives of their place(s) in primary schools

Within the newly emerging international focus on children’s competence are calls for children to become active participants in the operations and governance of their primary schools. Johnson’s research is based on a commitment to enabling children to articulate their views and undertake strategic action in their schools, together with the conviction that adults who inhabit the world of schools need to listen to and enter into dialogue with children. The children became co-researchers who ‘made’ photographs and selected those for conversation. This promoted collaboration between the researcher and the participants, thus reducing the unequal power relationship between them. The visual texts took Johnson to the children’s places in the school and challenged her to look at the school, its operations and its relationships through the children’s eyes.


When yes means sometimes

The use of qualitative or quantitative data poses dilemmas for decision makers. Quantitative data is perceived as providing precise information with qualitative data providing richness and depth. With quantitative data objectivity is an issue, because information needs to be processed subjectively through the senses, thought processes and past experience of the people gathering it. With qualitative data, the more interactive the process, the greater the possibility that dialogue can assist with clarification of meaning. However, the way the questions are asked, when, where and how they are asked will all shape the response. The authors conclude that new directions are needed to find ways to work through the dilemmas. The question remains, ‘How are we to come to know anything useful from research?’
Professional learning communities: connecting teachers’ practices and student outcomes through the arts

In the Northern Territory, many students are at risk after disengaging from mainstream education. This project trialed and evaluated an arts-infused curriculum which had the potential to improve students’ proficiencies in literacy and numeracy. The results suggest that a strategic, sustained and flexible learning communities approach to professional development may transform teachers’ practices, improve teacher-student relationships and have a positive impact on student outcomes. The implications for professional learning are relevant for school change as well as the wider system’s need to facilitate such change. Shared understandings of purpose, together with the building of trust, also emerge as important factors in a sustainable intervention.

Anja Tait and Ian Falk, paper presented at AARE Conference 2004, Melbourne

Early Childhood

Frameworks for collaboration in early childhood research

In a slowly changing research culture, collaboration helps educators to develop a voice to be heard by policy makers. This project sought to link home and school cultures in designing a responsive literacy curriculum. The researchers were committed to breaking out of traditional relationships where university researchers are seen as the knowledge generators and teachers as translators. Collaborative research enables teachers to assume leadership roles and legitimizes their professional knowledge. University collaborators gain because findings are based on the additional perspective of the practitioner. Dr Potter describes how collaborative research leads to critical reflection and professional development and facilitates the development of new perspectives and understanding through the exchange of knowledge about theory and practice.

Dr Gillian Potter, paper presented at the AARE Conference 2004, Melbourne

VET and ACE

Crossing the great divide

Now here’s an interesting question: guess how often VET policy makers and practitioners make use of research material? If you said, hardly at all, you would be right, according to the results from this intriguing study undertaken in regional areas of NSW and the ACT. It seems that once an individual completes teacher education, the use of research drops off dramatically. But what can be done to address this situation? The authors recommend various strategies designed to bridge this gap between research and practice.

Helen Corben, TAFE NSW, North Coast Institute and Sarah Sutcliffe, Canberra Institute of Technology, Connecting Teachers with Research

Learning naturally at work

The workplace has long been recognised as a critical learning environment. But what conditions or settings make for a workplace where learning can occur naturally? This is the key research question being
investigated by Clive Chappell and Geoff Hawke in their paper ‘Investigating Learning and Work’. Their ‘work in progress’ report identifies four areas that ‘influence the extent to which the work undertaken in Registered Training Organisations encourages learning to take place’.

Clive Chappell and Geoff Hawke, Investigating Learning and Work, August 2005, ANTA and NCVER

Further Reading

Research Articles

The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) is an international leading research centre. Current research reports and conference proceedings can be found on the ACER website. Selected papers from the 2005 ACER Research Conference, Using Data to Support Learning, are summarised here.

What is the nature of evidence that makes a difference to learning?

Although volumes of data continue to be collected about and from schools, teaching continues without the benefits of such data. In this context Hattie argues that because the major influence on student learning is the teacher, education data should focus on supporting teachers to enhance teaching and learning.

John Hattie, paper presented at the ACER Conference 2005, Melbourne
http://www.acer.edu.au/workshops/conferences.html

From accounting to accountability: Harnessing data for school improvement

Data only becomes knowledge when it is shaped, organised and embedded in a context that gives it meaning and connectedness. Through the metaphor of an artist who continually gathers data, observes, investigates and responds to different issues, Earl is able to provide a simple framework for ‘taking charge of change’, creating reform and using data as a policy lever.

Lorna Earl, paper presented at the ACER Conference 2005, Melbourne
http://www.acer.edu.au/workshops/conferences.html

Learning about teaching and teaching about learning: Using video data for research and professional development

Does video data ‘offer tremendous opportunity for authentic learning about teaching and teaching about learning’? This is what education consultant, Hillary Hollingsworth, set out to explore in her recent paper delivered at the 2005 ACER Conference in Melbourne. The paper outlines the ‘nature and virtues’ of classroom video data use in research and professional development projects. It identifies possible future directions in the use of video data as a ‘rich resource’ to support and improve learning and teaching.

Hillary Hollingsworth, paper presented at the ACER Conference 2005, Melbourne
http://www.acer.edu.au/workshops/conferences.html

The Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) facilitates the development and dissemination of a wide range of educational research in Australia. AARE provides a forum, through its journal and conferences, for national and international educational researchers. The article summarised here was presented at the 2004 AARE Conference, Doing the Public Good.
Using an action research model to bring about school improvement through PE and school sport

An action research model used to investigate the impact of PE and sport on young people and whole-school improvement causes schools to become more reflective practitioners and to use the model to bring about improvements they recognise as important.

Crichton Casbon and Lucy Walters, paper presented at the AARE Conference 2004, Melbourne
www.aare.edu.au/04pap/cas04215.pdf

Research Publications

Program evaluation: forms and approaches

More so than ever, researchers are being called to plan carefully, reflect more critically and justify reasons for selected courses of actions. This thoughtful guide to program evaluation provides a rich conceptual framework for anchoring researchers existing evaluation knowledge and practice. Owen describes evaluation as the process of negotiating an evaluation plan, collecting and analysing evidence to produce findings, and disseminating the findings to identified audiences. This useful resource provides a useful overview of the evaluation process appropriate for both beginners and experienced research practitioners.

John M. Owen
Copies can be purchased through leading educational bookstores

Doing qualitative research: a practical handbook

Although the practical skills needed to conduct qualitative research are vital, so too are the theoretical underpinnings of this research technique. Keeping this in mind, Silverman introduces the concept of qualitative research by delivering an easy to follow handbook full of useful examples, case studies and a glossary of terms. More experienced researchers will find interest in the chapters dedicated to originality in research and the contested character of qualitative research as well as the extensive reference list provided. Derived from Silverman’s 15 years of experience teaching introductory workshops for research students, this resource will be of particular benefit for beginners to qualitative research.

David Silverman
Copies can be purchased through leading educational bookstores

Research Websites

Association for Qualitative Research (AQR), Australia
http://www.latrobe.edu.au/aqr/

Association for the Supervision and Development of Curriculum (ASCD), USA
http://www.ascd.org/portal/site/ascd/index.jsp/

Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE)

Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER)
http://www.acer.edu.au/

Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI), OECD
http://www.oecd.org/document/27/0,2340,en_2649_33723_2516571_1_1_1_1,00.html
Further Reading

Education Resource Information Centre (ERIC), USA
http://www.eric.ed.gov/

NCVER Useful Websites for VET Information, Australia

National Education Research Forum (NERF), UK
http://www.nerf-uk.org/

National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), UK
http://www.nfer.ac.uk/index.cfm

New Zealand Council for Education Research (NZCER)
http://nzcer.org.nz/

Research of the Month (ROM), UK
http://www.gtce.org.uk/PolicyAndResearch/research/ROMtopics/childrens_schooling/

Scottish Council for Research in Education (SCRE)
University of Glasgow
http://www.scre.ac.uk/

The Research Informed Practice Site (TRIPS), UK
http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/research/

US Department of Education Research and Statistics (including Institute of Education Sciences)