

Report on Research Projects

June 18

Teacher inquiry, Ermeling (2010) argues, “is about making the study and improvement of teaching more systematic and ‘less happenstance’”; its value lies in collective commitment to solving local pedagogic problems with evidence.

A total of 6 of the 10 research projects funded by Exploring schools funding presented their findings at a meeting in June. The projects are:

- Sacred Heart - Sport and the influence on reading
- MSCP - Higher ability learners and transition
- Trinity – Spirals of enquiry
- Marton Manor - A combined reading approach
- Abingdon – Challenging learning
- Priory Woods- The Equals curriculum

Some of the common themes and learning were:

- A study which focused on disengaged pupils found that the concept of team identity, purpose and competition could be used to ‘turn around’ disengaged pupils if the role of ‘team manager’ was assumed by the teacher, resulting in massive gains in learning, especially reading through the total buy-in of Y6 boys (Sacred Heart)
- Schools questioned the impact of teaching by careful scrutiny of work and particularly by seeking the views of children and young people. This challenged assumptions in some projects e.g. the assumption that the Year 7 curriculum has less challenge than Year 6 for higher ability children was found to be untrue. However the study discovered that foundation subject teaching often under-estimated the level of English skills and didn’t support enhanced learning in writing (Trinity). At Abingdon it was described how the use of classroom talk and debate was at a lower level than assumed before the start of the Challenging Learning project to develop a community of articulate resilient learners.
- Promoting the development of metacognition, including reasoning and conflict resolution was a part of two projects (Abingdon and Trinity - Higher ability and transition). This resulted in children become learning ambassadors (Abingdon) able to identify and evaluate learning skills and at MSCP high level writing skills in History. The use of dilemmas to enhance the formation of justified opinions has become a strength at St Edward’s Primary.
- Whole school approaches to developing an investigative pedagogical culture was demonstrated by the Spirals of Enquiry approach at Trinity. Significant teacher learning was demonstrated but now needs to be evidenced.
- Marton Manor used a tailored approach to select a range of methods in reading, using their own evidence and academic research to progress methods and impact on



reading enjoyment and writing skills. The wealth of creative evidence presented showcasing children's learning was impressive, showing the impact of language development and the diversity of skills developed from carefully selected texts.

- Priory woods acted on their frustration in seeing very low levels of trackable progress for pupils with SEND to develop the EQUALS curriculum, a personalised curriculum delivered at the child's pace around 5 themes, including rehearsing learning and problem solving pedagogies. Parents have valued the information that the new system has provided with regards to the learning of their children. Progress has been evidenced, enabling the project to be disseminated across the school. The impact of this work on curriculum and assessment was recognised in the school's recent Ofsted report.
- All schools are either considering wider roll-out or have already developed a whole school project. All are now engaging with other schools to share this learning. A part of Head teacher conference/meetings could be devoted to learning from these activities in the next academic year. All projects will be showcased on Learning Middlesbrough.

Some research issues/considerations-

- Conflict of promoting interactive learning skills but using the KS outcomes as a tool for evaluation
- Sustainability of projects requiring additional staff supported by research funding
- Showing outcomes within the year - planning for evaluating impact from the beginning of the project, identifying a range of qualitative and/or quantitative evidence is important
- Complexity of assessing impact for children of different backgrounds and home support
- Case study approach can be significant for developing larger projects

Summary

This was highly positive exchange of ideas demonstrating a climate of systematic thinking, investigation and evaluation and representing a healthy pedagogic culture in the presenting schools.

Reference

Ermeling, B. A. (2010) "Tracing the Effects of Teacher Inquiry on Classroom Practice." *Teaching and Teacher Education* 26 (3): 377–388