

RESEARCH AND TEACHER EDUCATION: THE BERA-RSA INQUIRY
TEACHERS' VIEWS: PERSPECTIVES
ON RESEARCH ENGAGEMENT

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INTRODUCTION

The focus of this paper -- teachers' points of view in relation to engagement in and with research -- is somewhat elusive. Selected teachers' voices can be found in peer-reviewed literature; and while it is probable that these voices are an incomplete representation they often demonstrate teachers' positive attitude towards their research engagement. This is particularly so when teachers' engagement is as practitioners undertaking research into their practice. McLaughlin *et al* (2004, p.7) suggest that three purposes can be discerned in the teacher research tradition:

research and enquiry undertaken for primarily personal purposes; research and enquiry undertaken for primarily political purposes; and research and enquiry undertaken for primarily school improvement purposes. Often these are interwoven, not simple and distinguishable or as neat as here presented.

Teachers' research as practitioners can share many of the characteristics of powerful continuing professional development (CPD), as for example in some forms of Joint Practice Development (Sebba *et al*, 2012). Some CPD courses, especially those that are award bearing, require participants to carry out a reflective project,

which may replicate most or all of the characteristics of engaging in research. We have drawn on this tradition and concentrated on evidence where the authors have presented their work as focusing on teacher research or inquiry or where the direct quotes from teachers have made it clear that they are engaged in such processes.

However in research partnerships between HE (higher education) researchers and teachers, teacher involvement is often not the focus of the resultant writing. Where teacher engagement is the focus and academics take responsibility for writing, they may summarise teachers' perspectives or quote teachers selectively (as we will). Where teachers write it is unusual for them to write reflectively about their engagement with research; they focus on their selected topic, which is usually associated with some aspect of student learning or experience. In some cases, researchers gather and report on the views of school leaders rather than of teacher researchers themselves. As such, gaining a true picture of teachers' views of research engagement from existing literature is not straightforward.

Educational research in broad terms is a problematic concept (Stenhouse, 1981), drawing upon multiple

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theoretical frameworks (Bryman, 2008; Cohen *et al*, 2007), and throwing up contrasting interpretations of the extent to which teachers should be involved, indeed to what end (Carr, 2007; Elliot, 2001). Whether explicitly for purposes of CPD or for research per se, much of teachers' engagement can broadly be conceptualised as action research, which perhaps combines more than one of the purposes suggested by McLaughlin *et al* (*ibid.*). Lewin (1946, p.34) first used the term 'action research' to describe 'research that will help the practitioner' by providing clarity about how to make improvements to complex situations. This tradition has been extremely influential in the intervening period. However, based on their extensive experience of conducting action research in a number of different educational settings, Baumfield *et al* (2013) prefer to describe the process of teachers investigating questions which arise directly from their classroom experiences as 'practitioner enquiry', which occupies middle ground between reflection and action research. In their view, this encourages a shift towards the co-creation of knowledge, where teachers and researchers work in collaboration with each other to investigate issues and report their findings together, thus affording them a considerable voice because the research process takes account of teachers' opinions.

From the vantage point of four decades of involvement, Elliott (2012) has critiqued the evolution of teacher research in England, arguing that it has become detached from the curriculum development theory advanced by Stenhouse (1981), in which the 'teacher as researcher' is at the centre of curriculum development and nothing is taken for granted. From this theoretical perspective the focus of teachers' research should be on how to effect worthwhile curriculum change in their classrooms and schools, through systematic inquiry. Elliott argues that teacher research has predominantly become a captive of outcomes-based education, finding ways of being more effective in delivering predetermined knowledge outcomes, which Stenhouse saw as a distortion of education. For Stenhouse the nature of knowledge was a matter of speculative understanding, always open to question, which prised open serious ontological and epistemological issues. Elliott is critical of educational academics for colonising teachers' action research by 'methodologising' it, which has the effect of shaping it into small-scale qualitative enquiries with little to say about wider educational theory. However Somekh (1995) takes a different view in arguing that if action research is not recognised as a methodology, with recognised methods, then it is not taken seriously.

In this paper we explore what is known about teachers' engagement in and with educational research, with a focus on teachers doing research in the context of their own practice. Our sources were derived from three processes; the first of which was a literature review (involving keyword searches of the ProQuest database).

Often, although papers (written by researchers in North America, Australia and New Zealand, Europe and the UK) have a specific focus within the field of educational research, they do not include evidence or examples of teachers' experiences of educational research itself. As such the content of papers resulting from the database search did not always correspond to the specific needs of this review. Thus we have also drawn on papers based on recommendations from key informants and our own experience to include sources from a wider range of empirical literature. Such evidence as we have has to be interpreted within a wider frame of knowledge about professional learning and school change/improvement.

The core questions underpinning this paper are:

- What are teachers' reported experiences and perceptions of engagement in and with teacher research?
- What do teachers indicate as conditions which support or constrain this engagement?
- How do these voices and views contribute to an understanding of the wider culture of schools and teacher professionalism?

TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF ENGAGEMENT IN TEACHER RESEARCH

A recurring theme in the literature is that engagement in teacher research results in both professional learning outcomes (including changes in practice and knowledge) and an affective response. In other words it can affect their identity. Although there is the caveat of how representative the literature is in this respect, the available evidence of teachers' experience of research is overwhelmingly positive, providing an acceleration of professional understanding and new perspectives which re-invigorate those teachers who do engage. These effects can result from different elements of engagement in research processes; for example from reading, planning research around practice, taking action, seeking evidence, solving problems, and reflecting on and sharing outcomes. This is illustrated in the views of teachers awarded Best Practice Research Scholarships (BPRS) (Furlong *et al*, 2003, pp. 13 & 19) and the Learning to Learn (L2L) project (Hall, 2009, p. 674):

[...]I just feel it [reading] makes your more PROFESSIONAL because you've had to go and examine something instead of just thinking of lesson plans and little Freddie in the front row [...]
(Teacher, focusing on SEN, BPRS)

I'd not done this kind of research before and I think I'd underestimated the power it had for helping me learn about teaching and being able to identify things that work. (Secondary Science Teacher, BPRS)

Looking at the whole research process for me personally has been you know ... has certainly been the most learning I've ever had to do ... and it's been a real learning curve ... how you go about a research project. The whole thinking of your hypothesis and then data collection, planning it out, it's been one of the more interesting parts of it. (Primary teacher, L2L)

Engagement in and with educational research can provide a model for professional change and learning, in that the engagement can encourage teacher action and reflection (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Timperley & Parr, 2007). In these cases learning is seen as active (Stephenson & Ennion, 2012). Teachers decide the focus of their learning, move beyond the role of classroom 'technician' (Carr, 1995) and become 'facilitators' of their own learning and that of others (Day, 1999). Again such outcomes were voiced by teachers in both the BPRS (Furlong *et al.*, 2003, p.21), and the L2L projects (Hall, 2009, p.676):

[We were doing] an oral feedback and I was just struck, it was really sort of a moment for me, I was struck by the quality of the discussions of the teaching and learning and the feeling that the teachers have got really underneath what was happening. That was a wow moment for me. (L2L Primary teacher, Year 2 interview)

We learned a lot but we also learned that we need to learn a whole lot more. (Primary Headteacher co-ordinating a BPRS research team)

For those who commit to research engagement there is evidence of the benefits which accrue. Kershner *et al.* (2013), drawing on interviews with 15 primary and secondary English teachers over the course of a two-year, schools' university partnership Masters' programme, identify six aspects of personal and professional learning: being a learner; learning as part of professional practice; widening repertoire; changing as a learner; personal growth and critically adaptive practice. There is a degree to which the categories are overlapping, but in this quote there is a strong sense of learning and satisfaction (Kershner *et al.*, p.44):

(I am) far more reflective as a senior leader.... As a deputy head teacher I was able to use my research findings to change policy and practice of self-evaluation...Reflection and a constant awareness of the need to question my own thinking, connected my learning and practice. It was a very inductive exercise all in all.

Such satisfaction may precipitate a change in identity for some teachers, such as this teacher in the L2L project (Leat, 2006):

... that's gradual, rather than a big moment, in that you see yourself as not the didactic person in front talking at the pupils ... but you see yourself who's at the front, who's motivating, taking the lead so that pupils are understanding their own learning.

In the US Richert (1996), reported in McLaughlin *et al.* (*ibid.*), summarises the effects of engaging in research in the Bay Region IV Professional Development Consortium:

- It resulted in a renewed feeling of pride and excitement about teaching and in a revitalised sense of oneself as a teacher.
- It reminded teachers of their intellectual capability and the importance of that capability to their professional lives.
- It allowed teachers to see that the work that they do in school matters.
- It reconnected many of the teachers to their colleagues and to their initial commitments to teach.
- It encouraged teachers to develop an expanded sense of what teachers can and ought to do.
- It restored in teachers a sense of professionalism and power in the sense of having a voice.

This list suggests that there are some restrictive and negative aspects to their working environment that the teachers were encountering, and for which research engagement offered an antidote. This is also illustrated in the words of a student teacher engaged in a research project during their training in England (Medwell & Wray, 2014, p.72):

I have really contributed to new knowledge. It's made me think about that. How you do that all the time, I suppose, but having this as outside my teaching lessons it has made me think a lot more than I do when I am on planning and evaluating treadmill.

Teachers' views on research engagement frequently relate specifically to the theme or problem that is being researched, and appropriately these are often related to pedagogies and curriculum. Here the focus for research has authenticity and immediacy; it allows teachers to experiment with alternative models of teaching and learning, to explore relationships between teachers, learners and a wider community. It is highly likely that there is a productive relationship which should not be ignored. The value of this resonates in teachers' responses to research engagement, although this can make it difficult to judge from the literature whether it is research engagement per se or the opportunities for practice development it offers. This is exemplified in this teacher's response to being part of CapeUK's Creative Action Research Award Scheme (Comerford-Boyes *et al.*, 2005, p.34):

The project has been one of our highlights this year ... it being a longer project was great, all the strands, doing something real ... it's been remarkably special.

It is also of relevance that some teachers contextualise specific themes and outcomes of research engagement in the wider development of personal or school practices; it is not isolated, but becomes integrated. Teachers' views on research cannot be isolated either – they overlap with their experiences and views of other CPD and school improvement (Hall, 2009, p.676):

For at least those of us who are involved with learning to learn and other projects, some of the Heads of Dept who are certainly Advanced Skills Teachers, is that we ... it's a bit like a Venn diagram because you have so many initiatives going on that overlap. This afternoon I'm going to a University of the First Age meeting, it's ... what I'm going to be hearing there it's going to be close to what we're saying together and sometimes you're thinking ... was it Investors in Excellence I did this, you know or somewhere else ... and I think that's a good thing. (Secondary teacher, Year 2 interview)

TEACHER RESEARCHERS' VIEWS ON THE AFFORDANCES FOR, AND CONSTRAINTS ON, TEACHER RESEARCH

Partnerships, infrastructure, relationships and permission
Teachers' experiences of research engagement depend on a wide interplay of environmental factors, time and teachers' personal capabilities within a context of change. Relationships and trust provide a foundation for teacher research, and active support is highly significant from sources such as headteachers, local authorities (far weaker in England now) and higher education researchers (Timperley & Parr, 2007). At one extreme, a single teacher may be pursuing a personal inquiry with virtually no support, interest or expectation from others, whilst at the other there might be an array of research support, ranging from stimulating ideas and help in research design, data collection and analysis and assistance in writing a research report.

The literature suggests that teachers recognise certain conditions which support and foster their research engagement. In particular they value opportunities for collaboration and the building of productive relationships, and both of these relate to trust. Trust is increasingly seen as an important determinant of human interaction, not least in professional contexts (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011; Cox, 2012). Where accountability is intense and surveillance a constant threat then trust is at a premium. In some cases, even for the most willing participants, research is experienced as a burden, a conflicting agenda or a contradiction, or

at the very least an addition to overcrowded workloads. Given this, teachers need some surety in the quality of relationship with the research promoters or partners, whether they are internal or external to the school. A starting point for many seems to be permission to experiment with practice, as indicated by a teacher in the L2L project (Higgins *et al*, 2007, p.57):

...motivation and permission to look closely at previous methods used and trial new methods. Findings at the end of the year have not only justified doing this but have prompted more changes to occur.

The influence of the relationships between researchers and teachers highlights a dynamic of power and control, which is reported in terms of alleviating fear (Hedges, 2010), sharing professional expertise and equality (Newman & Mowbray, 2012). The evidence indicated by Newman and Mowbray challenges the assumption by Gore and Gitlin (2004) that neither academic research nor academics themselves are highly valued by teachers. Clearly there are contexts in which they are applauded, if they are prepared to engage with teachers' perspectives. Rathgen (2006, p. 584), for example, recounts the confidence that Nuttall in New Zealand gave teachers in his projects through suggesting that it was a privilege to be in their classrooms. She quotes one of them as follows:

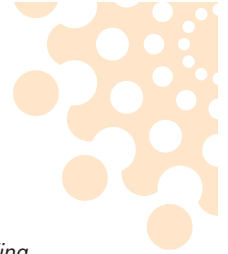
So that the issue of having to trust the people themselves was a critical part ... The research team worked very hard to assist me to be part of the research project.

Other teachers in the project reported the importance of the classroom teaching experience of the research team that allowed them to provide ideas for teaching, discuss teaching sessions and develop rapport with the children. This extended to the researcher talking to the children about the project with 'no power or hierarchy' intervening. In the L2L Project the quality of personal relationships and respect was also evident (Leat, 2006):

A great deal of support has come from Newcastle University. Very, very helpful. I mean Steve in particular ... his talks are always very inspiring and very, very useful.

Newman and Mowbray (2012, p. 464) found comparable admiration amongst teachers for their university lead partner:

I think the support of the leader of the group ... her expertise, research skills as a practitioner and as an academic was absolutely invaluable. Having it facilitated by an academic was particularly invaluable given her experience in the field and her academic knowledge.



The subtle practices required of, and offer made by, external partners were recognised by two teachers who were part of Creative Action Research Award Scheme, firstly speaking of the research mentors, and secondly of school-linked creative practitioners (Comerford-Boyes *et al*, 2005, pp. 35 & 34):

Our research mentor was absolutely excellent. [...] they were able to be helpful and directive without assuming control. Everything was a suggestion, all valuable, and this helped us to focus our enquiry [...]. They were really supportive and informative and did genuine mentor stuff, that is, working alongside us. (p.35)

the action research aspect has been the whole thing, we have used our creative practitioner as a fieldworker who has a creative background, one with insight and tacit knowledge.. (p.34)

Going beyond the lone practitioner - developing agency and making time and space

Teachers engaging in and with research do not just draw on support, but can become part a community of support. In this context the opportunity for talk is critical – talking with, being heard, and engaging with others' perspectives. At one level, through collaboration or cooperation as teacher researchers within school, they talk and listen (both formally and informally) through interest in others' parallel experiences. This is evident in the words of this teacher from the L2L project (Leat, 2006):

... it then developed on to talking to other colleagues about what they felt was central to developing learning for themselves and for the children ... it was just really fascinating to be able to have that professional conversation and really unpick what people feel are important for them and what they feel is important to school and children.

This sense of the value of engaging in dialogue as part of a wider research community is also found in the words of teachers, as illustrated first by a teacher involved in research practice related to environmental education (Rickinson *et al*, 2004), and by a participant in the North East School-based Research Consortium (NESBRC) which was funded by the Teacher Training Agency and focused on teaching thinking skills (Leat *et al*, 2006, p.655), the main focus of which was to investigate the effective implementation of thinking skills.

My perception of where I am with Thinking Skills seems to have changed considerably since my last entry. This has been influenced mainly by finding out what other schools in the consortium have been doing. I just haven't realized how far we've progressed since last year. Talking with people makes it clear that I am much more

familiar with Thinking Skills jargon e.g. debriefing, metacognition ... (Secondary History Teacher, NESBRC)

This quote came from a teacher diary – analysed as part of set written over the three-year duration of the project. This analysis demonstrated the transition experienced by teachers participating in the NESBRC research project. Three stages of development were identified (Leat *et al*, 2006) and can be summarised as follows:

Stage 1: the personal. Teachers focused on their own understanding rooted in developing classroom practice and analysing data which emerged. They arrived at generalizations, and perceived its relevance to their teaching situations.

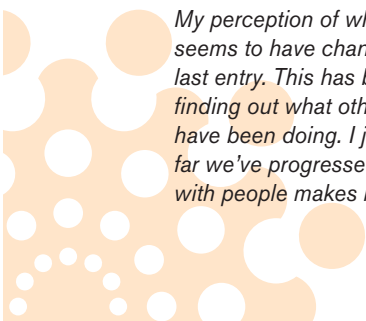
Stage 2: the collegial. The group setting (typically at a school level) became significant as a community in which research was designed, conducted and analysed, in an environment characterised by professional intimacy.

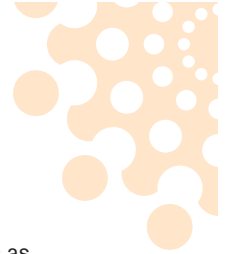
Stage 3: the collective. The collegial group had developed sufficient confidence to work with others across the consortium (schools, LA and university), allowing the research evidence to be more commonly recognised, and collectively explored across a wider range of settings.

The potential effect of such transition is illustrated from the following teacher diary extract (Leat *et al*, 2006, p.688):

It's really impacted on my career, at first I was just an ordinary classroom teacher not knowing much about the wider world of education and suddenly we are getting offers to go and disseminate thinking skills in LEAs and at TTA conferences and so on, and that's opened my eyes to see who else is involved in education ... what is going on. (Secondary Teacher, SBRC)

It is likely that teachers engaging in research as part of a collective have an advantage to those engaging as individuals within the school setting. In the context of teachers undertaking Scottish Qualification for Headship (SQH), an example of a hybrid between CPD and teacher inquiry, Reeves and Forde (2004) conceptualise the members of the course encountering three 'spaces': firstly that generated by the workplace that has norms and expectations resulting in a work identity, secondly that generated by the course, and the third space is a space in the workplace 'conceived as a set of permissions to enact the values and knowledge acquired in the course/project environment'. An individual member of the course had to struggle to persuade others in their school of the worth of their SQH activity and to





make 'space' for it. They make the point that winning a space to be different can be hard and risky work. Of the 40 SQH candidates whose work was examined, 29 made reference to micro-political dilemmas. Space is a recurring metaphor for those who are going against the grain or under external pressure (Edwards & Fowler, 2007) and is very powerful for understanding the transitions/adjustments a teacher has to make in moving between professional contexts.

Similar perceptions have been voiced by several teachers engaging in our own Masters' programmes which promote developing innovation in teaching through action research. This can set them apart; they become lone practitioners, and they are often critical of the models for 'sharing practice' in their schools. One stated her frustration as follows in an interview conducted for our ongoing research:

[Teachers'] research and innovation is futile if kept in the isolated environment of the single classroom [...] There seems to be little opportunity to share individual innovation in my school, or for my colleagues to pose the question "why are you doing that?" (Secondary teacher, and M.Ed / Ed.D student)

RESEARCH ENGAGEMENT, CULTURE OF SCHOOLS AND TEACHER PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

It is important to recognise that teachers' engagement in and with research is a minority activity in most national contexts, even where there is a relatively strong tradition. This reflects, for example, intensification of workload, traditions in teacher education, scepticism towards the value of research, the changing nature of teacher professionalism and national educational policy contexts. Research is never neutral, it reflects values and views about knowledge, and research in schools is often interpreted within the dominant culture within schools (Kincheloe, 2003). To simplify we can represent this theme as a dimension with two poles – school control at one end and teacher control at the other, but this is further complicated if there is another entity involved such as HE researchers, a course, or peer group or network. In addition, school control could be seen as a proxy for state influence through centralised policy. Evidence suggests that the number of secondary schools in the UK or England where senior leaders have relinquished control of teachers' professional development remains very low (Opfer & Pedder, 2011). There few empirical examples of 'bottom-up' innovations led by classroom practitioners (Fullan, 2003); where the focus of development is driven by teachers' questions, doubts, problems and uncertainties. Elliott would argue that there has been a shift away from teachers' control.

Teachers' experiences of research have been variously defined in the literature according to the nature of

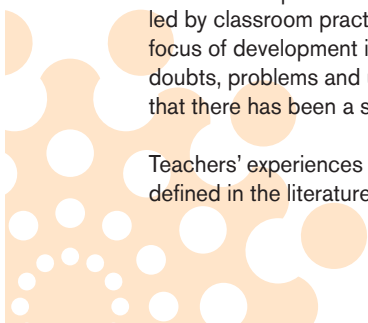
that engagement. Hall (2009) describes teachers as engaging 'in' and engaging 'with' research. Cordingley's (2013) review of the contribution of research to teachers' professional learning and development highlights the concept of leadership within the research process in three distinct forms (Bell *et al*, 2010); researcher-led, larger studies (academic studies); teacher-initiated small scale studies; Masters-based teacher enquiry (Masters-based studies). It is also possible to consider this in relation to knowledge; in some cases teachers are participants in research projects which are researcher-led with the aim of synthesising findings for a wider professional, policy and academic audience (for example Vrijnsen-de Corte *et al*, 2013; Murray *et al*, 2009). Alternatively researchers and practitioners draw on their knowledge and understanding of their contexts in order to collaborate and create opportunities for personal and professional change (for example Zeichner, 2008; Schnellert *et al*, 2008; Miretzky, 2007; Alton-Lee, 2011; Timperley & Parr, 2007, Wall *et al*, 2010). Across the range, however, only a small number of the studies included in our sample focus on teachers' actual experiences and views of educational research (including Vrijnsen-de Corte *et al*, 2013; Beycioglu *et al*, 2010; Wall *et al*, 2010; Hemsley-Brown & Sharp, 2003).

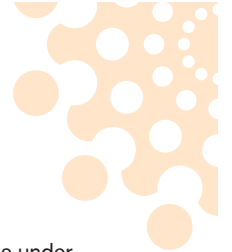
Contradiction and conflict

Teacher engagement in research can produce contradiction and conflict. We use the term contradiction as used in socio-cultural theory to denote the fact that research can often provide tools which set in train processes which begin to challenge or contradict the motivation or object of school activity (Engeström, 1987), where it is strongly focused on meeting external assessment targets. One of the potential consequences of research which provokes contradictions and causes dissatisfaction is that teachers may choose to leave the classroom as they find it increasingly difficult to live with those contradictions. They may not be lost to teaching, as consultancy, working for local authorities, teacher training and working for charities may keep them in education, but away from the sharpest edge of the contradiction. The tensions that surface are brought to a fine point by McLaughlin *et al* (2004, p.4) commenting on school-university research networks:

progress in terms of practical usefulness of such networks is probably being slowed down by ... diversity of ideas and by the possible impracticality of much of the rhetoric.

Engaging in research invites complication. It is very common for teachers engaging in research to experiment or to take action. If emerging research agendas and outcomes are unconnected to school improvement priorities there may be a schism between teacher researchers and school leaders or their peers. Ebbutt *et al* (2000) reporting on the SUPER schools judged that only





two of six had developed an established research culture and even in those two there were trenchant issues. One was the existence of a substantial minority of staff who did not want to engage in research and they could be antipathetic. There was a second related challenge in that when the headteacher retired the governors did not give high priority to the research-informed culture of the school in selecting a replacement, which led to continuity issues. In one school the hostility of the anti-research camp amongst the teachers precipitated the retirement of the deputy headteacher who had led the research for ten years.

In Scotland the advent of Chartered Teachers status has generated contradictions in some schools. Undermining the status quo can put teacher researchers at odds with senior leaders who are dominated by the need to achieve certain targets. In the context of Chartered Teachers in Scotland, Reeves and Drew (2013) suggest that this created problems in the relationships with school managers. They report that many managers found this 'activism' inappropriate and their suspicion led them to try to control the incursion. Reeves and Drew (*ibid.*) attribute this to the friction between school improvement as a short-term, closed process and action research as a more open discursive process:

There is a difference between our understanding of collaboration and the SMT's definition of collaboration. The SMT find it quite scary that teachers will come up with the content of the project and they are nervous about the whole thing because they don't feel they have control.

Leeman and Wardekker (2014, p.55), in the Netherlands, report substantial difficulty in provoking teachers, through engaging in research focusing on the aims of their teaching, to consider the goals of education. They conclude that teachers avoid challenging the status quo in their schools:

Moreover research is only valued as long as it contributes to the efficient teaching of take-for-granted aims: 'Doubts about our teaching principles are not valued much in our school'.

It is important to remember that teaching remains the 'day job' for most and it is tough to maintain a full-time job and commit to research. Many of the teachers who are quoted in the literature seem to be revisiting values which have been compromised or lost sight of due to contextual constraints. The concept of 'performativity' (Ball, 2000) is a condition of teachers' lives and heavily influences their thinking through the language and other tools which primes their consciousness and orientates their thinking. Although not pertaining directly to research experience, one primary teacher interviewee in Webb *et al* (2009, p.417) captured the something of the essence

of the impact of a performative culture: "The head is under pressure to perform, she puts pressure on us, we put pressure on the children and then everyone is just under immense pressure and stress."

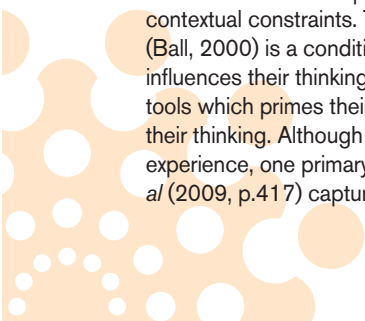
DISCUSSION

Recurring themes emerging above relate to the purpose and support for research activities. We see an important distinction between research as a body of knowledge, research as a professional learning process and research as a social practice. The distinction is informed by Leeman and Wardekker's (2013) differentiation between various forms of research-mindedness which they typified as research awareness, research competence and research inquisitiveness. This distinction brings some order to the range of evidence of teachers' relationship with research. For example it reflects, to a degree, the distinction between engagement in and with research (Cordingley, 2013).

Research as a body of knowledge sets research as a noun, representing the accumulated public knowledge generated largely by academic researchers and available in journals. The relationship that teachers have with the body of knowledge is predominantly passive. Research as a professional learning process is manifest when teachers engage in research and inquiry processes. Purposes and conditions can vary which will have an effect on the whether the process is school improvement or effectiveness, or whether it challenges existing tenets of the institution. Furthermore purpose and conditions can change over time or vary across an institution or network. What is important is that data is being gathered and discussion generated which can provide alternative perspectives on the daily activity of teaching. Given sufficient support and time some teachers begin to think differently and may adopt an altogether more critical stance with repercussions for their identity and some difficulty in working within the parameters of the institution. This marks progression into research as a social practice, which is consonant with the model created by Stenhouse.

Research engagement can enable teachers to become more dialogic, creating a contrast with the monologic voice of policy that insists that 'thou shalt'. The longer that an individual or group engages with research and associated action then the more likely they are to become more critical and find greater barriers with their peers who are not thus engaged. However time alone is not a guarantee. The nature of teachers' engagement and the support they receive will also have a bearing. This teacher is clear about the importance of long-term critical engagement by teachers in research (Higgins *et al*, 2007, p.63):

Me taking on research projects in the school has made my colleagues really reflect on why they are doing what they are doing and why we're doing



what we are doing as a school. I did a thing about the research, a whole staff inset evening about 3 months ago. I got some tremendous feedback from that on, that made me understand what an impact it had. In my jaundiced moments I think why am I doing this ... but actually the feedback was fantastic and a lot of people saw the research project if nothing else acting as a "conscience for the school". It is a phrase that I coined but other people bought into it, this idea that we otherwise bundle along doing stuff and not reflecting on why we are doing it.... So I think that is the least tangible thing but the thing that I notice most. That is a strange thing to say isn't it. I don't necessarily see it everyday but I know that it has an effect.

But just as dialogue can be encouraged it can also be stamped on, as experienced by another L2L teacher (Higgins *et al*, 2007, p.61):

... we are not as enthusiastic as we were... The things that haven't helped are when you are discouraged from the point of view that you feel not valued, that your work isn't valued... The other thing that hasn't helped is that we are not allowed to disseminate as such to other people. We did have one opportunity to give one session feedback but the Head looked disinterested and the rest of the staff felt that it wasn't particularly important.

Through research engagement teachers may exercise more or less agency at various times and in different settings because neither their personal experiences nor their individual contexts remain fixed. However even where conditions may appear to be superficially conducive to research engagement, it is possible that agency may not develop as expected, either because sufficient permission and trust has not generated or because there is a lack of skill in leading meetings so that helpful conversational routines are absent (Horn & Little, 2010).

There is sufficient evidence to suggest that engagement in and with research can be a very positive experience for teachers. Broadly speaking it improves their working lives, gives them new perspectives and makes them more sensitive to students' experiences of classrooms. However there is a conditioning effect on working and thinking where the pressure to meet exam targets is intense. It is difficult to overestimate this factor. We have been struck by the relatively recent appearance of papers detailing this phenomenon and its implications are profound. It is increasingly difficult for teachers to create space for research activity, both in terms of time and finding synergy with school policies and curriculum development.

A question for everyone reading this paper is: Do current educational climates support or undermine research inclinations? When conditions are good, teachers get

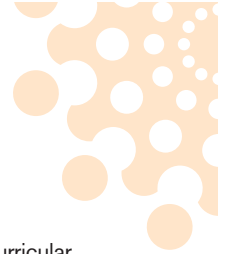
more exposure to external stimuli through conferences, academic researchers and reading, and more exposure to school voices from teachers and pupils. There is therefore more interaction between teachers' own reflections in and on practice and external sources that offer different voices and create greater opportunity for personal and professional development.

There are however significant issues. Whilst engagement with and in research in a context of school improvement can proceed smoothly and successfully, once teachers, for whatever reason, adopt a more critical stance they are likely to find themselves at odds with their colleagues and their school leaders, unless the school itself has decided to adopt a more radical approach to the curriculum. Creating and sustaining the conditions that enable teachers' engagement with research may be difficult in current political climates. As far back as 2003, Hemsley-Brown and Sharp suggested that barriers to the use of research knowledge generally in the public sector were less to do with individual resistance and much more to do with institutional cultures which are anti-pathetic and do not promote learning.

When viewed alongside research as a body of knowledge (which teachers may engage with) and research as knowledge creation (which can position teachers as subjects within academic-led research projects), teachers' engagement in research as a social practice is often not only the most insightful but also the most problematic, both for the individuals involved and the institutions they work in. This can be seen as a result of the changes that teachers experience through engagement in this form of social practice. Our review illustrates a number of these:

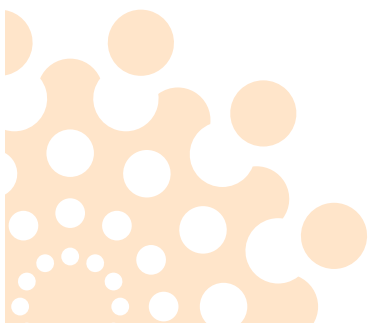
- Research can focus teachers' thinking beyond the accountability culture of a performative system, towards a more sophisticated working understanding of an ecology of learning.
- Research can support the development of cultures which permit risk-taking which accompanies the eschewing of the normal routines.
- Research can enable teachers to be more accepting of challenge and difficulty, allowing them to step out of their comfort zone.
- Research as a social practice provides the company of others who can facilitate such changes.
- The importance of dialogic approaches and ecological agency, which relate to teachers' multi-dimensional perceptions of and participation in research.

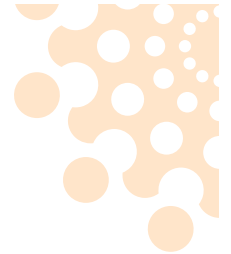
It seems that teacher research is currently frequently positioned within the school effectiveness tradition, in which challenging questions, such as 'what is the curriculum for?' and 'how should we teach it?' are generally off limits. We believe that the most likely catalyst for significant engagement with and in research is a return to treating the curriculum as a matter of debate and



which requires an ongoing research stance to continually question and revisit answers to substantive curriculum questions. The fact that when teachers voice opinions about research engagement it is not just about the

process but about the substantive pedagogic or curricular theme is telling. This would mark a return to Stenhouse's stance on teacher research.

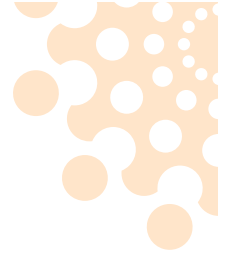




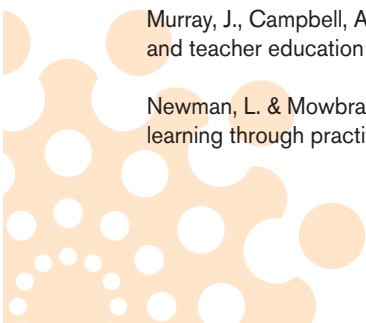
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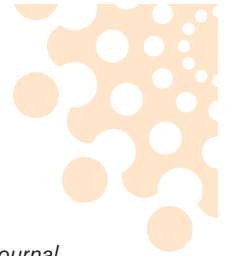
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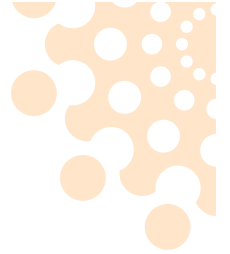
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This paper has been commissioned as part of a major Inquiry undertaken by BERA and the RSA on the role of research and teacher education. The Inquiry aims to shape debate, inform policy and influence practice by investigating the contribution of research in teacher education and examining the potential benefits of research-based skills and knowledge for improving school performance and student outcomes.

To investigate the contribution that research can make to teacher education, seven academic papers have been commissioned from experts in the relevant fields: international and UK policy and practice on teacher education; philosophical reflections on the nature of teachers' professional learning; innovative programmes of initial teacher education based on the model of research-informed 'clinical practice'; the role of research in effective continuing professional development (CPD); the impact of research-based teaching on school improvement and student outcomes; and research engagement from the teacher's perspective.

Further information on the Inquiry and its other outputs can be found via the BERA website: www.bera.ac.uk

