



Creating Hospitable Spaces for Research Engagement

An Executive Summary by Dr Kathryn Wright, CEO, Culham St Gabriel's Trust

Teachers as Researchers: RE teachers' engagement with research (TasR project)

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Overview

This Culham St Gabriel's grant-funded project aimed to understand how teachers engage with research and how best to promote a 'bi-directional relationship' that draws upon the expertise of researchers *and* teachers. The project leaders aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the types of research, both subject specific or general educational research, that are used and the ways in which this is accessed, interpreted, and mediated by teachers of religious education (RE). Developing such understanding in the context of RE also makes a significant contribution to educational research and, crucially, will be of lasting value to the professional knowledge, confidence and autonomy of present and future teachers.

To achieve the necessary breadth and depth of understanding the TasR project had three phases: a mapping review of research literature to identify factors in teacher engagement with research; interviews with teachers of RE to ascertain if and how research featured in their classroom practice; comparison of the factors identified in the literature with themes from the interviews to understand what is most effective in promoting engagement with research in RE.

The full report can be downloaded here: https://www.cstg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2021/09/TasR-project-Report-30_4_21.pdf

Key Findings

- **Community and Hospitality:** Hospitable places need to be created in which dialogue between teachers and researchers can be fostered and relationships of trust developed. Teachers value professional learning communities where there is a strong sense of belonging, such as a community of practice.
- **Agency and Relevance:** Research needs to be related to real world teaching/learning and curriculum development. The research needs to be meaningful to the teacher and

their school/context. Teachers are interested in what difference research will make to pupil outcomes. Researchers should facilitate research with teachers – translation, rather than application is most appropriate. Research engagement promotes reflexivity and builds self-confidence of teachers. Research approaches which promote a participatory design are most successful e.g. action research, lesson study.

- **Access:** Teachers are willing and able to engage with research, but improvements need to be made in terms of access. Teachers need to know what is out there, how to access it, and be given the time and the tools to engage with it. It is important for teachers to be research informed, as well as undertaking research through classroom practice. There is a need for increased research literacy.
- **Institutional Support:** Research engagement needs to be more closely aligned with leadership development. A school's culture is pivotal in terms of engagement. It is important for senior leaders to understand how research can lead to school improvement.

Priorities for the RE/Religion and Worldviews Community

Based on the outcomes of this project more research is needed into:

- Best processes for developing sustainable partnerships between teachers and research-focused institutions to provide 'hospitable spaces' for dialogue about research aims, methods and outcomes in RE
- Identifying conditions in different national contexts shown to be conducive to supporting teachers' engagement with research and investigating how these impact on the situation of teachers of RE in greater depth.
- How to improve access to and relevance of research for practitioners through cross-professional analysis and collaboration; the Health Service have developed approaches that could be adapted to the context of teachers and would facilitate RE taking a leading role in future developments
- How to work with school leaders and policy makers on linking evidence of professional learning through engagement with research to school improvement

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