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ABOUT TLRI

The Teaching & Learning Research Initiative (TLRI) is a government programme that aims to:

- build a cumulative body of knowledge linking teaching and learning
- enhance the links between educational research and teaching practices—and researchers and teachers—across early childhood, school, and tertiary sectors
- grow research capability and capacity in the areas of teaching and learning.

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Fresh look to the future

As the Teaching and Learning Research Initiative (TLRI) enters the second phase of its development, we have engaged in reviews and conversations to help us ensure that we are building important knowledge for New Zealanders and for educators around the world in the field of teaching and learning. This newsletter highlights some of the changes we have made to the grant and the rationale behind those changes. For more information please see our website. You will also find full details of the process for expressions of interest.

What has changed and why

The original aims of the TLRI remain unchanged: to build a cumulative body of knowledge linking teaching and learning; to enhance the links between educational research and teaching practices—and researchers and teachers—across the early childhood, school, and tertiary sectors; and to grow research capability and capacity in the areas of teaching and learning. To help in meeting those aims into the future, TLRI management have made some key changes:

- We have put a higher premium on research design and the thoughtful description of that design in the proposal. If we are to both build new knowledge and build capacity, we have to support very well designed studies where experienced and emerging researchers learn together.
- We have clarified that by “building research capacity” we mean primarily growing the research knowledge and experience of professional researchers rather than teaching research skills and practices to practitioners. While practitioners may learn quite a lot about research, we have made it clear that it is a key priority that researchers learn quite a lot about research as well. In this way, it is our hope that practitioners will learn about systematic enquiry in their classrooms as researchers advance their own research skills and capabilities.
- Because we are asking for projects to be built on previous New Zealand research and current priorities, we have made it easier to link to those. We have gathered together all the previous and current TLRI projects along with information about what a senior educational scholar in each sector

sees as the current research priorities. This information is available on our website.

Building on these strategic changes, we have defined two different types of grant opportunities that make use of the partnerships and methodologies in different ways:

- **Type I: large and medium-scale studies** (\$100–150K/year for two to three years—no more than \$450K in total). These are large-scale, researcher-led (or supported) projects which will build on previous TLRI projects and other national initiatives. The partnerships with practitioners will require the researchers to build relationships of respect and to include the views of the practitioners, but will not expect that the practitioners will necessarily have key data collection or analysis roles in the project. The most important characteristic of the partnerships is that each party should learn from the experience: both the researchers and the practitioners.
- **Type II: exploratory studies** (Up to \$65K/year for up to two years—no more than \$130K in total). These studies are to be smaller in scale and more innovative than Type I studies. A key feature is that both practice and research are valued together. The projects need to be constructed in a way that explicitly draws on the questions and knowledge of all the project team (and are linked to the literature). The focus should be on questions where both researchers and teachers are exploring new ideas together; examining uncharted territory and so possibly contributing to a transformative agenda.



Inside the TLRI review

In 2007 a steering committee set up to take a strategic look at the future direction of the TLRI commissioned Canterbury University Associate Professor of Education Alison Gilmore to carry out a review. Here is a summary of her report, which helped inform the changes that have been made to the TLRI, detailed on the front of this newsletter.

Dr Gilmore said it was a good time to conduct a review, as TLRI was entering the second phase of its development.

“The beginning of this next phase of the TLRI is an ideal opportunity to signal explicitly how the TLRI intent can now best be achieved given what has been learned during the first phase,” her report said.

The report described the TLRI framework as complex, with multiple aims, values, and principles. It said the original intent of the TLRI and its essential elements had shifted, which was another reason for a review.

The review praised the management of the TLRI by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research. Dr Gilmore said the management team had gone well beyond its contractual obligations to co-ordinate and promote the TLRI and had provided intellectual leadership.

The review contained some criticism of the reporting requirements under TLRI, particularly the final report from projects. Dr Gilmore said these tended to provide a relatively superficial account of the research itself. “Large proportions of the report are given over to a discussion of the insights into how the principles and priorities of the TLRI were realised through the research project.”

Dr Gilmore said that given the complexity of the TLRI framework, the only way to examine whether it was fulfilling its intent was to analyse the balance achieved across all projects. Her analysis noted a decrease in the number of expressions of interest being received, and a decline in the number of grants made since 2004, although a greater number of large grants (Category A) had been made. In terms of research design and focus, she found a large majority of projects were substantially qualitative, a third were substantially quantitative, and a fifth



Associate Professor Alison Gilmore

used measures of student outcomes.

Dr Gilmore looked closely at the TLRI’s aim of growing research capability and capacity.

“Each TLRI project I have examined has

approached the requirement to build capability and capacity of researchers and practitioners in quite different ways. While different approaches are to be valued, there is a danger that the aims of the TLRI will not be met or will be compromised if the specifications around capability and capacity building are not more clearly articulated.”

She also found the respective roles of researchers and practitioners in the partnerships of completed TLRI projects varied widely.

The review made a number of suggestions which it said would optimise what had been learned so far from the TLRI. These included:

- Allocate a proportion of annual funding to projects which synthesise the key findings across projects, and provide pointers for future research.
- Identify what commissioned or strategic developmental work is required. This should be done by the TLRI advisory committee through recommendations from the management team.
- Broaden the responsibilities of the TLRI management team to reflect the intellectual leadership they provide, and increase its budget.

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Wishlist to help guide applicants

In a new move, each year several leading educationalists will be asked to come up with a research wishlist—their views on what the crucial research questions are in their particular area and where the gaps are. These will be available on the TLRI website as short background papers and are intended to help potential TLRI applicants come up with relevant research proposals.

The first round of these interviews are now up. They are with Dr Anne Meade, who led the Centres of Innovation project and who looks at research needs in the early childhood sector; Dr Adrienne Alton-Lee, the chief education adviser on the Ministry of Education’s Iterative Best Evidence Synthesis programme, who looks at the schools sector; and Dr Peter Coolbear, director of Ako Aotearoa, the National Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence, on research priorities in the tertiary sector.



Dr Anne Meade: “What is going on in early childhood centres to really pull together the teaching team to be the very best that they can be?”



Dr Adrienne Alton-Lee: “Researchers need to read and build on the BES, which is a body of knowledge that the New Zealand educational and research community has worked on together.”



Dr Peter Coolbear: “I think there are huge gaps in the body of knowledge on approaches to vocational education in New Zealand, not least around the nature and validity of vocational qualifications.”

Funding for new projects

Two-year projects

Sustainability of effective teaching and school practices: developing a model for sustaining and extending literacy achievement

Project leader: Dr Mei Kuin Lai

Partnerships: University of Auckland and 13 schools from Mangere AUSAD Cluster and Otara.

The focus of this project is on sustaining gains in reading comprehension made during two TLRI-funded research development projects in low-decile South Auckland schools. Researchers aim to come up with a model for sustaining effective teaching and school practices once the intervention ends.

This involves identifying and explaining the conditions that enable schools to continue improving achievement (e.g., increased teachers' pedagogical content knowledge, use of inquiry); explaining how the conditions interrelate, and how these relationships result in differing patterns of achievement after the intervention.

Titiro Whakamuri, Hoki

Whakamua: we are the future, the present, and the past: caring for self, others, and the environment in early years' teaching and learning

Project leader: Associate Professor Jenny Ritchie

Partnerships: Unitec and kuia, kaumātua, research facilitator and teacher from Dunedin Kindergarten Association, together with nine kindergartens from throughout New Zealand.

This research will explore approaches to early childhood teaching that reflect and enact an ethic of care for self, others, and the environment. The project draws from both kaupapa Māori and Western perspectives.

Learning wisdom

Project leader: Professor Margaret Carr

Partnerships: University researchers and 13 early childhood teacher-researchers.

In this project, 'learning wisdom' is defined as knowing why, when, and how to engage with learning opportunities. Early childhood teachers will research their own practice as they revisit children's learning stories with them. The strategies and insights from this phase will contribute to longitudinal studies of changes in case study children's learning dispositions—their wise engagement—as evidenced from conversations when their learning is revisited over time, and in the stories themselves.

Learning environments and student engagement with their learning in tertiary settings

Project leaders: Associate Professor Nick Zepke and Dr Linda Leach

Partnerships: Nine partners including one wananga, two universities, four polytechnics, one PTE, and one large community provider.

This project investigates student engagement with their learning process across the range of providers in tertiary settings and gauges the importance and nature of environmental influences on that engagement. The project has four phases: the first completes a literature review to inform the process; the second adapts international survey instruments on learning climate and student engagement to the New Zealand tertiary environment; the third surveys tertiary teachers to identify their approaches to achieving student engagement; and the fourth interviews selected students in order to follow up key findings identified in the student survey. The findings will provide insight into ways to create learning environments that engage learners.

Analysing the transition from secondary to tertiary education in mathematics

Project leaders: Associate Professor Mike Thomas and Associate Professor Sergiy Klymchul

Partnerships: Auckland University and Auckland University of Technology, Mt Albert Grammar and Epsom Girls Grammar schools.

This project will investigate secondary and tertiary mathematics education and provide evidence of whether key differences exist. Any differences that are discovered will be described qualitatively. The project aims to examine the influence of a number of key factors in the transition from secondary to tertiary mathematics education, and consider how to smooth this transition. It will identify and analyse the reasons for any differences at the two levels and explore ways to enrich mathematics teaching and learning, employing ideas from both secondary and tertiary educators.

One-year projects

An exploration of the pedagogies employed to integrate knowledge in work-integrated learning in New Zealand tertiary educational institutions

Project leader: Dr Richard Coll

Partnerships: AUT, Massey University, Unitec, NZ Association of Cooperative Education, and Waikato University.

This project explores the teaching theories involved in work-integrated learning programs (WIL) in the context of full-time undergraduate students undertaking WIL as part of their programme of study in New Zealand tertiary institutions.



Helping to link experienced researchers with practitioners and novice researchers

In the past a number of teams have been unsuccessful in gaining TLRI funding because, although they have identified a potentially interesting and researchable educational problem to investigate, they have not been able to convince the review panel that they have the research knowledge and experience to successfully carry out their projects. Similarly, the TLRI receives applications from researchers who have not yet identified a practitioner team to work with, and these are also unsuccessful in gaining funding.

We intend to strengthen the process of linking practitioners and novice researchers with experienced researchers who are interested in providing research guidance and mentoring.

Experienced researchers who are interested in providing research support to teams will be invited to submit details of their research interests and skills, publications, and recent research projects for inclusion on a TLRI Research Expertise Register.

This will expand our current list of researchers who have indicated an interest, and we will get more information about researchers' interests and experience.

Less experienced teams may apply to TLRI for a research partner (someone to work as a full team member throughout the whole research process from design to dissemination of results) or a research mentor (someone to support the research at key points, perhaps in helping the team to design the project, and assisting with data analysis).

Applications should be sent some time before any expressions of interest for TLRI funding are submitted.

A member of the TLRI management team will broker initial contacts between likely partners.

KEY DATES FOR 2008

Call for Expressions of Interest	Monday, 3 March
Closing date for Expressions of Interest	Tuesday, 13 May
Notification of shortlisting and invitation to submit Full Proposals	Friday, 27 June
Closing date for Full Proposals	Friday, 29 August
Notification of decisions: successful and unsuccessful proposals	Wednesday, 1 October
Feedback on unsuccessful Full Proposals	Wednesday, 1 October
TLRI funding commences for 2008 funding recipients	January 2009, or as in contract

Inside the TLRI review

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The review also made suggestions about the framework and intent of the TLRI, including:

- Clarify the intent as it is currently expressed, compared with the original intent proposed in 2002.
- Make clear that the TLRI provides opportunities for 'blue skies' research and sits alongside a suite of R & D opportunities in New Zealand.
- Review the aims, principles, values, and priorities and establish whether some are of greater importance than others.
- Clarify what is meant by 'growing research capability' and 'capacity building'. The primary focus for this should be researchers in tertiary institutions. Building research capability and capacity among practitioners should be a secondary focus.
- Examine the TLRI expectations about researcher-practitioner partnerships. The principle should be one of collaboration between researchers and practitioners, so that researchers conduct research with practitioners, rather than on practitioners.

The review concluded with a substantial section of suggestions for adding

further value to the TLRI. Among almost 20 suggestions were:

- Review the documentation and assessment criteria to ensure research designs are detailed and well justified.
- Ensure the final report contains a rigorous account of the research itself. It could be in two parts: the most important being the research itself, and the second an account of how the principles and priorities of the TLRI were realised.
- Give more attention to projects with an explicit focus on the links between teaching and learning. Research designs which gather evidence of student outcomes, particularly of a quantitative nature, should be encouraged.
- Gain a good understanding of the big lessons that have come from the collective projects to date and where the gaps are.
- Identify projects with the potential to progress a line of research and invite researchers to continue their research.

To read the full review, go to www.tlri.org.nz