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ABOUT TLRI

The Teaching & Learning Research Initiative (TLRI) is a Government programme which aims to:

- build knowledge, through partnership research, about teaching and learning
- use this knowledge to create improved outcomes for learners
- create partnerships between practitioners and researchers to maximise the value and usefulness of research.

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First contracts completed

The first Teaching & Learning Research Initiative (TLRI) projects, which were granted one-year funding in late 2003 for research in 2004, have been completed. One, "The Relationship Between English Language and Mathematics Learning for Non-native Speakers" by Pip Neville-Barton of Unitec, appears as a supplement to this newsletter, while a summary of "The Connect.ed Action Research Project" by Louise Starkey of The Correspondence School and Jedd Bartlett appears on page 3.

The other two one-year projects from the 2003 funding round are also due to be published. These are "Who, What, How and Why? Profiles, Practices, Pedagogies, and Self-Perception of Adult Literacy Practitioners" led Dr Robyn Chandler, Canterbury Adult Basic Education Research Network (CABERN), Christchurch, and "Narrative of Beginning Māori Teachers: Identifying Forces that Shape the First Year of Teaching" by Paora Stucki, School of Education, Te Wānanga o Aotearoa.

2005 funding round underway

The call is out for Expressions of Interests (EOI) for the 2005 TLRI funding round. Interested parties will have a little over two months to complete and submit their EOIs, with 14 June 2005 being the deadline for submissions. The fund is open to proposals from all sectors of education and training including early childhood, school, and the post-school sector.

The funding round has a two-stage process. Stage one is the lodging of an EOI, which allows a short list to be made for stage two, which requires a full proposal. The selection panel for the EOI stage comprises members of the TLRI Co-ordination Team and people from the TLRI National Register, although they can only undertake this role if they are not involved in submitting a bid themselves. The panel assessing full proposals consists of appointees with specific research and sectorial experience. The New Zealand Council for Educational Research co-ordinates the fund

Summaries of all projects and the full research reports will be placed on the TLRI website www.tlri.org.nz as soon as they are ready for publication. All website publications will be uploaded in PDF format and will be available free-of-charge.

The TLRI was established by the Government in 2002 and now has annual funding of \$2 million. There are currently 27 projects in progress.

NEW MINISTER FOR TLRI

Hon. David Benson-Pope is now the Minister in charge of the TLRI, having assumed the role after the Cabinet reshuffle in December. He takes over from Hon. Trevor Mallard who instigated the programme in the 2002 Budget.

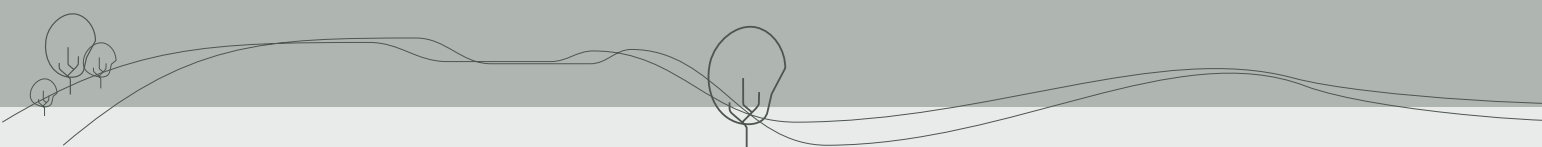
Mr Benson-Pope is Associate Minister of Education with responsibility for the Education Review Office, the compulsory sector, and special education.

and its associated research programme, including the selection process.

The TLRI seeks to support research that will lead to an improvement in outcomes for learners, with partnerships between researchers and teachers being central to the research undertaken. When assessing EOIs the selection panel will consider how the EOI might contribute to the aims, principles, and priorities of the TLRI using the following criteria:

- strategic relevance
- research relevance
- practice relevance
- researcher and practitioner partnerships
- project team capability.

Teams who receive funding are required to submit quarterly progress and financial reports throughout their research project.





Teaching Toddlers: New Zealand Kindergarten Teachers and Two-Year-Olds

Dr Judith Duncan of the University of Otago (right), and Dr Carmen Dalli of Victoria University are working with New Zealand kindergarten



teachers' to investigate perspectives and reflections on working with two-year-olds. The following is a précis of a paper outlining the findings of the first year of research given by Judith Duncan to the Australian Research in Early Childhood Education Conference in Melbourne, January 2005.

New challenges

This research study investigates both the immediate and wider context of the kindergarten experiences for under three-year-olds who are attending the kindergarten service.

Kindergartens have historically provided for three and four-year-olds. With the introduction of two-year-olds, teachers are now faced with new challenges and rewards in their practices, programming and curriculum goals.

Why is this an issue?

There is an impact on all children attending the centre, particularly very young children in an environment that has traditionally been structured for older-age children and large group settings. Large numbers of two-year-olds in a session introduces new complexities and issues, for example staffing ratios, and concerns about physical safety.

What do we know?

- Aspects such as staffing levels and teacher qualifications allow one-to-one interaction to occur, and joint attention between adults and children.
- Adult/child interaction where there is engagement, "tuning-in", and a sense of "being present", is critical to children's emotional well-being.

- Concerns that some key structural aspects associated with good practice for under three-year-olds (ie: operation of a primary caregiver system, a 1:3 staff/child ratio) are missing from normal kindergarten provision.

What don't we know?

- The effect and experience of the having two-year-olds in kindergarten, and what the outcomes are for these children.
- Enough about two-year-olds in education – there is little literature or research on the developmental time between the infant and toddler years (0-2) and young child or preschooler years (3-5).
- What does becoming a "kindy kid" at two-years old mean?

Four levels of learning

Our research uses a socio-cultural approach to answer these questions, in keeping with four levels of early childhood learning.

1/ The learner engaged with the learning environment

Q: What are the experiences of under-three-year-olds in the kindergarten setting?

We have focused on a small number of children in three case study kindergartens, and taken observational data of three children in each setting to identify and describe their learning experiences. This is compared with teachers' documentation and the parents' perspectives of their children's experiences at kindergarten.

2/ The immediate learning environments and the relationships between them

Q: What factors within the kindergarten support positive experiences for under three-year-olds?

We have observed the experiences of the children in the setting, between the teachers and the children, the children

with each other, and the impact the physical environment has on the under-threes. We have also worked with teachers to reflect on their practices – planning, assessment, interactions, and relationships with the children.

3/ The adults' environment as it influences their capacity to care and educate

Q: What factors impact on teachers for positive environments and practices when working with the under three-year-olds?

We are involving all the teachers in the Dunedin and Wellington Free Kindergarten Associations who are working with under-threes.

4/ The nation's beliefs and values about children and early childhood care and education

Q: What macro factors impact on the kindergarten experiences of the under three-year-olds?

We have examined the cultural and societal discourses which shape the policies and practices of kindergartens.

What have teachers told us?

Despite some reluctance when large numbers of two-year-olds began to participate in the kindergarten sessions, the teachers all readily completed lists of the joys of working with two-year-olds. This did not remove the concerns they also held for the children and the realities of having two-year-olds in the kindergarten environment, but the teachers involved in this study were also quick to identify numerous great things about working with two-year-olds.

The good things

- Rapidity of growth observed.
- Really nice to be part of their life for that long.
- Seeing them achieve - the cheeky look "I told you I could do it!"
- Spontaneity.

(continued on pg 4)



Connect.ed Action Research Project

This project was a partnership between Louise Starkey, Faculty Leader at The Correspondence School, and Educational Consultant Jedd Bartlett. Below is a précis of their research – on completion, the full research paper will be lodged on the TLRI website.

Project aims

The Connect.ed Action Research Project sought to improve:

- teachers' educational practice
- student participation in learning outcomes, and
- understanding by both students and teachers of Connect.ed.

Background

The Connect.ed programme, in its second year in 2004, was an online distance-learning programme designed to enable year 9 and 10 students enrolled at The Correspondence School to "learn how to learn"; how to investigate, create, discuss, and work collaboratively. Five specialist teachers worked as a team on this integrated curriculum project, helping students develop the confidence and skills to achieve educational goals.

The teachers communicated with their students using a wide range of tools including email, phone, MSN, iChat, virtual classroom, threaded discussion forums, and face-to-face home visits. This helped them gain information about attitudes to learning, learning behaviours, and individual curriculum preferences.

Developing the research

Teachers developed their own research questions on how teaching practice and student learning could be improved, and which were designed to:

- increase the engagement and participation of students
- increase the rate of task completion
- support students in their development of effective Internet search strategies
- improve student understanding of online learning resources

- improve learning through the use of technology, and
- effectively meet the needs of the upper and lower levels of student ability in an online learning programme.

The project also sought to allow a better understanding of the processes of teaching and learning in an online environment, provide evaluation of the Connect.ed programme, and develop knowledge that could be used by The Correspondence School in other e-learning situations.

Project findings

Meeting the student needs

Undertaking studies online is a largely an independent learning activity, so having an understanding of each student's existing learning behaviour and level of achievement was critical in accurately meeting their needs. To design a programme that met individual needs, the teachers also had to understand each student's attitude towards online activities and specific curriculum areas.

For example, the maths specialist provided students with a choice of activities at any one time, including skills practice, practical activities, high-interest contexts, and the use of interactive activities already available on the Internet. The range of activities were designed to meet a variety of student ability levels and learning preferences, and resulted in a greater student participation, engagement and achievement over the life of the project.

Engagement and task completion

One teacher was concerned with the poor engagement of students in her form class, and the low level of completed work. Her action research project involved a series of interventions focused on developing relationships between student, teacher and learning supervisor, as well as developing an understanding of the specific learning needs and habits of each student. It became apparent that developing partnerships between

students, teachers and supervisors was critical to successful teaching and learning outcomes.

Effective Internet searching

As Connect.ed students spent a lot of time on the Internet, and were expected to regularly use web-based resources, their ability to effectively search for information as part of their online learning was crucial. Early in the project, teachers carried out student visits to get a snapshot of each student's Internet search skills taking into account completed work, and discussions with students. Students' success in finding and using appropriate web-based information was then assessed including skills such as comprehension, levels of literacy, learning styles, motivation, past successes and failures, and the students' ability to function as independent learners. A key outcome of this action research project was the development of an online research help website.

Understanding online learning resources

Support for students who had difficulty reading or understanding text based instructions was addressed by ensuring clarity in the production of online resources. This included developing a set of conventions for resource production and providing students with advice on file management, navigation of the online learning environment, and the use of colour and other visual clues in document location.

Impact on practice and relevance to practitioners

The project enabled the teachers to develop an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the pedagogical practice underpinning the programme. The findings have resulted in the development of guidelines and conventions that will be used in the implementation of the Connect.ed programme in the future. With the growth in e-learning options, the findings of the project can be used to inform teaching practice and the design of online learning programmes.



TLRI NUMBERS

After two rounds of funding, 31 TLRI projects have been undertaken.

Research projects being completed at end of:

(funding round in brackets)

2004 4 x 1-year (2003) *

2005 9 x 2-year (2003)
7 x 1-year (2004)

2006 8 x 2-year (2004)
Any 1-year contracts awarded in October 2005

2007 3 x 3-year (2004)
Any 2-year contracts awarded in October 2005

2008 Any 3-year contracts awarded in October 2005

No 3-year contracts were awarded in the 2003 funding round.

Recipients of funding in the 2005 round will be announced in October – see key dates (right).

* Summaries of these reports will be placed on the TLRI website shortly.

National Register assists research projects

The National Register is made up of educators who have agreed to provide research support and mentoring.

These researchers may be asked to offer their expertise through activities such as assisting with workshops that focus on research methodology, or by mentoring or supervising less experienced researchers and practitioners who are interested in undertaking a TLRI project. People on the National Register may also be asked to be a member of the team that assesses the short-listed proposals, although they can only undertake this role if they are

not involved in submitting a bid themselves.

If you would like to be included on the National Register, or would like to be put in touch with a researcher from the National Register to assist your proposal, please contact Christina Smits on (04) 802 1461 or e-mail tli@nzcer.org.nz. You will need to include brief details of your expertise, in particular your understanding of research methodology and any particular strengths you have in relation to teaching and learning.

KEY DATES FOR 2005

1 April	2005 Expressions of Interest (EOI) documents published and available on TLRI website
14 June	EOI applications close
Week of 20 June *	Selection panel meets
29 June *	TLRI Board approve shortlist
11 July	All EOI applicants notified of short-listing
31 August	Full proposals from short-listed projects close
Week of 12 Sept *	Selection panel meets
22 September *	TLRI Board meeting to approve funded projects
5 October	All short-listed applications notified of funding decision and receive feedback
25 October *	Announcement of successful 2005 funding round projects
January 2006	Funding commences for 2005 funding recipients
January 2006	Completion of one-year projects from 2005 and two-year projects from 2004

* Dates to be confirmed

(Teaching toddlers: New Zealand kindergarten teachers and two-year-olds – from pg 2)

The not-so-good things

- Time, time, time!
- Maintaining programmes that meet the needs of a wider age range of children.

Where to from here?

In the study's second year, we anticipate teachers will feel more confident in their practices with the under-threes, and this should lead to differences in their discourses and teaching practices. We believe, and hope, researchers will have a LESSER, and teachers a GREATER, role to play in the cluster groups and kindergarten discussions.