

update



Leading Learning through
Action-led Research and Innovation

THE LATEST NEWS FROM THE LAUREL TRUST

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SPRING IS HERE!

Spring is a time of promise, plans and projects and The Laurel Trust is delighted to introduce our latest projects to our ever-growing family of research schools. The latest projects are based in Devon, Stafford and Sunderland. Our congratulations to the Lead Schools and all their partners and we look forward to forming new and fruitful strategic partnerships with them. Further information giving a brief details about each project appears on page eight.

Maggie Roger, Consultant Director, The Laurel Trust

IN THIS ISSUE: **2** Answering the Big Ask | **4** Top Tips | **6** Teacher Researchers | **8** Latest Projects

Answering the big **ASK...**



By Rose Durban, Trustee.

Last summer the National Children's Commissioner sent out a voluntary survey to children across England. Over half a million children, including from the schools we support, responded to 'The Big Ask' to share their hopes, fears, dreams, lockdown stories and their future plans. And what was their big ask?

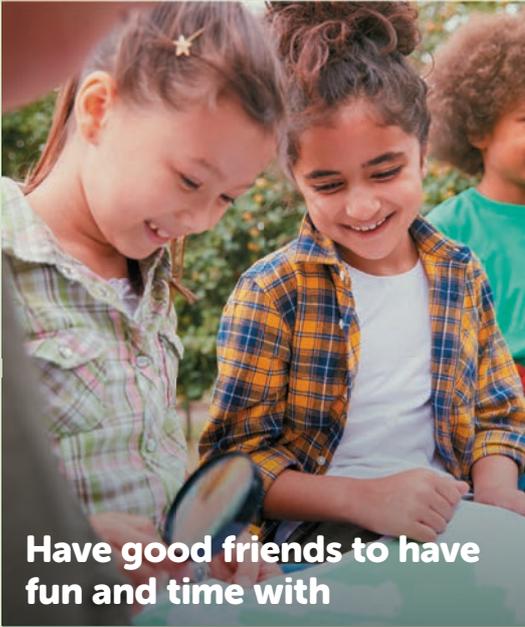
Children care about and want to act to look after their communities and the environment now and in the future too. They worry about the challenges they'll inherit: climate crisis, Covid debt and disadvantage. They want to contribute to and be part of a harmonious and just society, a fair world for everyone.

Schools can't fix all of this for every single child but it seems to me that each of our Laurel Trust beneficiary schools can and does play a huge part in making sure that children have the very best chances to be safe, happy, active and learning, positive about their now and confident about their future, ready to contribute to their local communities as active citizens.

So as trustees and as school partners, let's make sure that whenever possible we listen, learn and follow up on what we hear from children and schools so we know we are actively supporting and championing children's Big Ask with a Laurel Trust contribution to a Big Answer.

The Children's Big Asks are shown on the following page.

Their big ask? Simply and powerfully to...



Have good friends to have fun and time with



Live in happy homes – families come in all shapes and sizes, but no matter their what your family looks like, you want a happy home life



Feel well, fit and healthy – mentally, physically and emotionally



Get away from their screens, play outside and be active



Get on and do well in life



Be back at school! It's mostly a good place to be



Make their community better, safer and fairer

TEN TOP TIPS

for conducting effective Educational Research

By Bill Goddard, Chair of Trustees



Place-based research in schools is one of the most effective ways of improving the quality of teaching and learning. Conducted with care and integrity it is a powerful improvement strategy. Bill Goddard, our Chair of Trustees, has spent many years many years working with university/ school partnerships both in England and internationally. In the following article he provides some useful advice on creating the conditions for effective research.



What do you want to do to make a difference? What do you want to do to improve practice and learning? Your research project is about practical issues and change. It will involve a cyclical process which involves a feedback loop and clearly involves the participation of many people. At the beginning decide who they are. There will be teachers, school leaders, pupils or students, parents, governors, and maybe others. You should be a bias-free factfinder and an objective discoverer of truth.



Plan a timeline with key milestones in your process. Even though you might have slippage due to events it will help you to keep on track. What actions do you need to take and what activities are required? How are tasks going to be accomplished and who is responsible for them?



Think about how you are going to gather your data. What are the potential problems and what are the opportunities? Are you going to observe, interview, or use questionnaires, or an amalgam of these? Consider the pros and cons of these techniques.





Make sure that you conduct your research ethically. In terms of educational research you ought to refer to the BERA guidelines. Participants who take part in your research should take part without pressure, with anonymity guaranteed, and with the possibility of withdrawal without sanction.



Recognise the limitations of your research. Your research is in a specific context but doesn't mean that others cannot learn from it. However, be clear about your context.



Make sure that you clearly attribute any contributions used in the research report. Initially your research ought to be informed by previous work done in the subject area – this might be other research projects, or publications, or government reports. You can use all sorts of information but you must keep clear records of attribution and make sure that you acknowledge your sources.



Think about how you are going to analyse your research before you begin. This may be qualitative or quantitative or a mixture of both. Just be clear about what you are doing in telling your story.



In the overall evaluation be clear about the extent to which your desired outcomes have been attained. Also, importantly, be clear in stating what the effects of the research have been on the participants. Has the project made an impact on the priorities in your school development plan?



Have a clear plan for writing your research report. You will need to report on the work done, the results or findings, your discussion and analysis and conclusions. Have you met your initial goal? What are your recommendations? Is your report a Case Study, Action Research, a Narrative, a Qualitative or Quantitative report, or something else?



Make sure that you enjoy finding out. Your project should be interesting and have an ongoing impact. You can also say something about the effect that it has had on you and your colleagues and also how your research will be embedded in everyday practice.





Let's make 'Teachers Researchers' obsolete!

By Professor Philip Garner



Philip Garner has held several Chairs of Education and is currently the Chair of Education at Brunel University in London and Emeritus Professor at Northampton University. Philip has had a distinguished career in both mainstream and specialist schools. He now works nationally in the field of research – and internationally in over a dozen countries. His particular interest is in Special Educational Needs and Disability. Philip has published widely on topics relating to his research including leadership and change, teacher education and development, and alternative provision for excluded children and young people. Philip is a strong supporter of The Laurel Trust and despite the provocative title of his article he is passionate about the efficacy of teacher enquiry and its power to transform!

The rapid and fairly recent emphasis on measuring the impact of educational research has meant that school communities have now become an essential component of effective research. And about time too!

I'm in a fortunate position to be able to visit many schools as part of my role as a university researcher. It is an immense privilege, and reminds me of 17 massively stimulating years in the classroom. But it also raises some questions as to whether teachers fully recognise the opportunities they now have to be in the vanguard of a novel research culture. Whilst it is fascinating to hear about 'research schools' and 'communities of professional practice', my concern is that the teacher's role in all this won't flourish because many regard 'research' as something to be undertaken by more 'qualified' others.

I recall visiting a primary school prior to the Covid-19 outbreak. In conversation with a class teacher and some teaching assistants I suggested that they write an account of how their work with children and families was maximising the effect of the school's Pupil Premium. I felt that readers of the journal I edit, *Support for Learning*, would benefit from their wisdom and insight. To my mind this was 'research in action'.

I was quickly disabused! One of the group said that "There is nothing new about this at all. I can't think of anything less I'd rather do", adding that 'I have nothing worth saying... and, besides, I'm not a researcher'.

Though this response was disappointing, in the end I felt it could be easily explained: for too long schools and settings have been peripheral to research, acting as

sources of data rather than actively engaged in enquiry that results in outputs which benefits everyone in their community. Now, however, there has been a shift in emphasis. There is gathering momentum and an appetite in many schools to participate in all aspects of research.

What can be done to support this vital reorientation and extend the notion that schools are the pre-eminent venues for undertaking relevant, high-class and transferable enquiry? More particularly, how can teachers and teaching assistants adopt the mind-set of crucial activists, in what Colin Robson has long referred to as 'real world research'?

My view is straightforward. Teachers are researchers. They collect vast amounts of data, both formal and informal, every single day. They have to analyse and then make use

of the evidence they gather, with subsequent decisions based on credible information. Part of the task of teaching is to promote new ideas which lead to better teaching and thus better learning for all children and young people: ground-level research supports this.

Opportunities are becoming increasingly widespread for teachers to participate in a reorientation, so that the traditional notion of 'teacher-researcher' will gradually be replaced: the term 'teacher' will eventually become synonymous with 'researcher'. My advice to those who feel unsure about taking the first step in this exciting direction can be reduced to 5 suggestions.



Use authentic voices.

Evidence gathered directly from children & young people, teachers, parents or other key stakeholders gives authenticity and meaning to research accounts.

Look for collaborators - they are all around you.

Co-researching, group writing and other shared approaches are excellent ways of problem-solving and stimulating ideas.

Identify a priority interest.

Small-scale research is often triggered by a concern or existing gap in provision; it often relates to an issue which several colleagues encounter in their daily teaching or which are highlighted by children or parents.

Don't let the word 'research' put you off.

You're already gathering systematic data and analysing the results...'enquiry' is a much more user-friendly expression.

Think about your audience(s).

Who is going to benefit from your enquiry? Make sure you can define concrete outputs from your research in order to demonstrate its widespread value.

Become a Trustee

The Laurel Trust will shortly be recruiting some new Trustees. If you are interesting in becoming a Trustee, in the first instance, please email our Chair of Trustees: Bill Goddard at bill.goddard11@gmail.com

There will be a formal recruitment and selection process in the near future.



Latest research projects

By Maggie Roger, Consultant Director, The Laurel Trust.

The following articles which briefly describe our new research projects will, I believe, be of interest to a range of our partner schools especially those facing disadvantage and challenge as well as to schools more widely.



HETTON LYONS NURSERY SCHOOL COLLABORATION, SUNDERLAND

The Hetton Lyons project involves the seven maintained Nursery Schools in Sunderland and is led by Hetton Lyons with its headteacher, Ailsa Higgins, acting a Lead Headteacher/ Researcher to the project.

Their focus is undertaking observations and enquiry to determine the impact of the Covid restrictions on young children's early experiences and to ascertain whether they demonstrate a delay in social and emotional development through the lack of interactions and social opportunities, resulting in children struggling to adapt to the social nursery environment.

All the nursery schools taking part are within communities with high levels of deprivation. Covid and prolonged periods of lockdown have hit these families extremely hard.

The schools will focus on interaction, self-regulation and will use therapeutic approaches. Parents/carers and external professional agencies will be key to the research project. These will include a Play Professional/Clinical Supervisor. A central thread will be developing children's play skills so that this will allow them to engage in deeper learning.



ROWLEY PARK PRIMARY ACADEMY, STAFFORD

Rowley Park Primary Academy and its partner schools will focus their research upon improving attendance in an area of challenge and disadvantage. Rowley Park is part of the Victoria Academy's Trust and nine of its primary schools are taking part. The project extends over five local authorities. The headteacher of Rowley Park, Annika Beaumont will lead the project in partnership with the Lead Researcher, Lisa Wogan, the Head of Curriculum for Victoria Academies Trust.

All the schools are highly committed to exploring a wide range of strategies to improve attendance and to working with parents/carers and a variety of specialist agencies to achieve this. These will include mental health teams and charities who will support children that are facing anxieties and barriers to attending school. The project also includes significant professional development centring on training on Adverse Childhood Experiences and Poverty Proofing.



OKEHAMPTON PRIMARY SCHOOL, DEVON

Okehampton Primary School is part of the Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust of seventeen schools across the phases. Four of their primary schools will pilot the research led by Martin Evely, the headteacher of Okehampton Primary School in partnership with Suzie Stevens, the headteacher of St James CE School. The project will then be extended across the MAT.

Their research is essentially an enquiry which poses two questions:

- does having specialist Speech and Language Therapist interventions make a difference to the outcomes of children by the end of the Early Years' Foundation Stage?
- does the timing of that intervention (Nursery or Reception) have an impact on children's progress?

This project will be of particularly interest to those Nursery/Reception Teachers in Early Years Schools and settings who are developing approaches to communication.

If other Laurel Trust partner schools working on similar themes wish to contact these schools please email me at: maggie.roger@outlook.com