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Contents

Editorial	
Research Capacity in Education in Wales – Terminal Decline or Regeneration? HOWARD TANNER	1
Capacity and Quality in Education Research in Wales RICHARD DAUGHERTY AND SUSAN M. B. DAVIES	4
The Twist or the Tango? Strictly . . . Comparing Two Approaches to Educational Research Capacity Building which Have Been Funded by the Welsh Education Research Network SUSAN M. B. DAVIES	24
What’s Occurring? The What, Why, When and How of Research Capacity Building in a Modest Pilot Project with EAL Learners and Science JANE SALISBURY, CHERYL ELLIS, GARY BEAUCHAMP AND CHANTELE HAUGHTON	46
Metacognition in the Foundation Phase: Using VSRD to Help Young Children Talk about their Thinking HOWARD TANNER, SONIA JONES AND HELEN LEWIS	66
The Challenges and Benefits Presented by Partnerships within Rural Education in Wales ROSEMARY CANN, MALCOLM THOMAS AND MARTIN JEPHCOTE	80
Datblygu a Gwerthuso Dulliau Dysgu Cyfunol a Thrawsieithu mewn Sefyllfa Ddysgu Dwyieithog ENLLI MÓN THOMAS	91

Levels of Behavioural Difficulties among Young Welsh Schoolchildren	103
JUDY HUTCHINGS, MARGIAD ELEN WILLIAMS, PAM MARTIN AND R. ORINA PRITCHARD	
The National Behaviour and Attendance Review (NBAR): Summary and Prospective Outlook	116
KEN REID	
<i>Book Review</i>	
Peter Grimes on Andy Howes, Susan M. B. Davies and Sam Fox, <i>Improving the Context for Inclusion: Personalising Development through Collaborative Action Research</i>	139
Notes for Contributors	143

Editorial
*Research Capacity in Education in Wales –
Terminal Decline or Regeneration?*

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The previous edition of *The Welsh Journal of Education* reported on attempts to rebuild capacity in educational research in Wales, following an extended period of decline (Furlong and White, 2001; Rees and Power, 2007). The journal included papers based on research from the four projects funded under the Welsh extension to the Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP). The Welsh extension projects were linked to existing TLRP projects with the aims of increasing impact and enhancing education research capacity in institutions in Wales (Davidson, 2004).

Following on from the TLRP Welsh extension, the Welsh Education Research Network (WERN) was funded by the Economic and Social-Science Research Council (ESRC) and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) for a pilot in 2007/2008. The previous edition of the journal included papers from projects that had been funded under Phase One of WERN. Phase One of the project was evaluated externally (Gardner, 2008) and funding was extended for a second year. Three of the projects which received small amounts of pump priming funding in Phase Two of WERN report on their research in this edition.

This edition has as its theme Research Building Capacity in Education: Practical Approaches and Outcomes. It begins with a report commissioned by the Strategic Forum for Research in Education (SFRE) as one of four similar reports reviewing capacity in each country of the United Kingdom and relates to the situation in mid-2008, towards the end of Phase One of WERN. The next paper compares two approaches to research capacity building that were used in Phase Two of WERN.

Howard Tanner 1

The next three papers report research that was funded under Phase Two of WERN. The last three papers report on issues that are of particular concern for the education system in Wales.

My last editorial reported uncertainty about whether there would be any continuing capacity building activity in Wales to nurture and develop the emerging green shoots of recovery. Sadly, at the time of going to press, the future of capacity building activity still remains uncertain, a year after the end of Phase Two of WERN, in spite of a supportive external evaluation report (Gardner, 2009).

One of the successes of WERN was the involvement of academics from Initial Teacher Education and Training (ITET) dominated institutions in the research process. Many of these staff had prior experience in the classroom and were experienced teachers in higher education, whilst also being early career researchers. WERN's social practices approach to capacity building allowed them to add quality by contributing practitioner knowledge and insights to the research process whilst being inducted into the research community.

Does it matter whether teacher educators are involved in research or not? Yes it does! Teaching well is an extremely complex task, involving decisions made 'in the moment' rather than following or applying rules. Professionals are not only able to act in situations, they are able to reflect and critically analyse to explain why an action is appropriate (Schulman, 1987: 13). Part of the rationale for involving higher education in teacher education and training is to ensure that pedagogy is developed that is based on critical analysis of evidence rather than anecdote. In higher education courses students should develop the knowledge and skills necessary to reflect on and critically analyse their own practice. This requires interaction with tutors who themselves have deep pedagogical knowledge and the researcher's ability to critically analyse practice (Tanner and Davies, 2009: 373–4). Research capacity is part of the 'unique selling point' that higher education offers ITET.

The 2008 RAE result can be viewed as a further confirmation of the decline in research capacity in education in Wales and the 'low average quality' in Wales was commented on by the subpanel (RAE, 2008). However, some institutions that had not received funding in 2001, received limited funding in 2008, raising the profile of research and scholarly activity and with support the decline might be reversed (Tanner and Davies, 2009: 387).

Engagement with research is a powerful tool for the professional development of teacher educators (Tanner and Davies, 2009: 387) and WERN

helped to facilitate that. It is a matter of great regret that WERN was not continued beyond 2009. It is difficult to argue for funding for research in education at a time of financial stringency and competing claims for limited resources. However, research must be embedded in the culture of higher education institutions and in particular teacher educators must be a part of that culture to be able to critically engage with research to deepen their own pedagogical subject knowledge, to enable them to analyse practice effectively and educate their students to do the same.

Research capacity in education in Wales is at a critical point. If the present decline is not to be terminal, support for capacity development must be a priority. At the time of going to press, it is not clear whether such support will be forthcoming.

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