

Research Review

British Educational Research Association 2012

It turns out my copies of the British Educational Research Journal (BERJ) were being sent to the wrong address. Last week, the nice people at the IoE sent over the whole set of last year's journals so I thought I'd go through and provide a summary of the highlights from these latest bits of peer reviewed research.

Topics include:

1. Self-regulation/motivation , learning experiences, and achievement
2. The experiences of disengaged pupils in education
3. Learning Citizenship through social participation outside and inside school
4. Behaviour in early years: becoming a problem
5. Unions and worker learning
6. Regulation and standards in Initial Teacher Training for the FE sector
7. Withdrawal from Initial Teacher Training Courses
8. Assessment for Learning around the world

The effect of self-regulation and motivation on how learning experiences impact on students' academic performance

Who? Hoi Kwan Ning and Kevin Downing (City University of Hong Kong)

What? Analysis of how self-regulation (the ability to select important ideas, concentrate, manage time etc.) and motivation interact with learning experiences to affect academic attainment. Based on quantitative analysis of 384 under-graduate students on one degree program.

And...?

- Having bad learning experiences had a much bigger effect on students who had low motivation and/or self-regulation and much less effect on those with above average motivation/self-regulation.
- This matters because: a) it shows just how important good learning experiences are for students with low motivation/self-regulation, and, b) research has shown that motivation/self-regulation can be taught (in fact it is the second most effective strategy in the Sutton Trust's Pupil Premium Toolkit <http://www.suttontrust.com/research/toolkit-of-strategies-to-improve-learning/>).

Find Out more... in BERJ Volume 38, Number 2 (Apr 2012). The Pupil Premium Toolkit
<http://www.suttontrust.com/research/toolkit-of-strategies-to-improve-learning/>

Disengaged and disaffected young people: surviving the system

Who? Jacky Lumby

What? Analysis of how young people perceive the difficulties they experience and the extent to which they see them as the consequence of their own behaviour and as the product of the system. Based on a subset from a QCA dataset, looking at 65 young people considered disaffected or disengaged by their school or college.

And...?

- Some students saw their failure as a consequence of their personal attributes (being moody or lazy)

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"Society should ensure that all young people receive the support they need in order to make a fulfilling transition to adulthood"

- Many were able to distinguish times when they were learning and times when they were not learning and to link these to different teacher practices. These included: clear instruction, active learning, working with others and clear feedback on how to improve.
- Relationships with teachers and whether pupils perceived their teachers to believe in them, or like them were very important.
- Lumby characterises these young people as “enduring education”
- Most efforts go into helping these pupils adjust or cope with the education they are squeezed into rather than adapting their education to them even though the pupils themselves believe they know what is obstructing them and what would help them do better.

Find Out more... in BERJ Volume 38, Number 2 (Apr 2012)

Learning Citizenship through Social Participation Outside and Inside School

Who? Bryony Hoskins and Jan Germen Janmaat (Institute of Education) and Ernesto Villalba (Institute for Future Studies, Austria)

What? The researchers measured pupils understanding of democracy (“cognition about democratic institutions” – i.e. knowledge of content, skills in interpretation and attitudes towards democracy) and their attitudes towards participating in democracy (“participatory attitudes”).

They explored how these linked to three forms of social participation (“meaning making”- such as talking about political issues, “practice”- such as volunteering, and “school instruction” – such as history lessons).

Their work was based on an analysis of data from the 1999 International Civic Education study which used a random stratified cluster sample of 3000 14 year olds in 150 schools across 28 countries. This study used data from five of these countries (Finland, England, Germany, Italy and Poland). It is worth noting that the data precedes the introduction of Citizenship in the National Curriculum.

And...?

- “Meaning making” variables such as classroom climate, media and talking with parents and friends about politics have a large and significant effect on cognition about democracy and participatory attitudes.
- Talking with teachers seems to have a negative effect on cognition about democracy in several countries including England. This is odd.
- “Practice” i.e. volunteering and collecting money for charities does not seem to correlate with higher levels of cognition about democracy (indeed, in many cases they link to lower levels). These practices are linked to more participatory attitudes but this is not the case across the board and the link is weaker than with “meaning making” variables.
- There is some link between participating in school councils and democratic cognition in England, Germany and Poland. Participating in school councils also correlates significantly with participatory attitudes.
- Hours of instruction in History, Citizenship and Social studies seems to have little or no link to democratic cognition or participatory attitudes.

What I don't quite understand about this paper is how/if it shows causality.

Find Out more... in BERJ Volume 38, Number 3 (Jun 2012)

Becoming a Problem: Behaviour and reputation in the early years classroom

Who? Maggie MacLure, Liz Jones, Rachel Holmes, Christina MacRae

What? A qualitative study of how reception age children gained a reputation and what made it hard for some of them to be seen as good. The researchers visited reception age children in four contrasting Greater Manchester schools once a week for over a year to carry out observations, interviews and workshops.

And...?

- Pupils are judged on how they perform certain “category-bound activities” like “joining in” and “sitting properly”
- Discipline was very public and this had implications for status and reputation
- Reputation for naughtiness did not come from particular actions but from being fixed into certain “discursive frames” in which actions are treated as “signs” of “dispositions.” This could happen by “explaining” children as products of their family and community or through “medicalisation”.
- Teachers often reinforce some pupils’ good behaviour by contrasting it to other pupils’ and presenting them as more sensible/good or further down the developmental process
- Being good is treated as making the teacher happy and is important in gaining the approval that pupils compete for
- Pupils get mixed messages about whether they should be involved in collective policing of behaviour or if this “telling tales”. Similarly, it is not always clear whether having something interesting to say is a good thing or is less important than knowing when to keep quiet and listen carefully. Knowing what to do when and interpreting these rules correctly affects pupils’ reputation.
- Being taught to “say nice things” or “act nicely” even if this does not fit with actual feelings can be seen as “sly civility” or “learned insincerity” and learning the performance needed to pass as a proper or ideal child
- The risk with early intervention approaches is that they exacerbate and fix children’s reputation.

This article is useful in encouraging teachers to put their behaviour under the microscope. The risk though is that it assumes that teachers having power and imposing order is a bad thing...

Find Out more... in BERJ Volume 38, Number 3 (Jun 2012)

Employee demand for learning

Who? Jeanette Findlay (University of Glasgow), Patricia Findlay & Chris Warhurst (University of Strathclyde)

What? Analysis of demand for learning amongst workers and the role of Union Learning Funds (ULFs) and Union Learning Reps (ULR). The researchers used telephone surveys of 750 workers in unionised Scottish workplaces.

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And...?

- Union based learning reaches otherwise “hard to reach” workers.
- Union Learning Reps (ULRs) play a crucial role in stimulating interest in learning
- ULRs believe that workers’ demand for learning is increasing
- The most highly educated and paid workers were the most likely to intend to learn
- The highest demand was for IT skills and very few were interested in basic skills.
- Workers’ demand for learning was often linked to a desire to progress in their current job
- Being able to learn in the workplace, through a union and the availability of encouragement or advice in the workplace would increase workers’ likelihood of learning.

Find Out more... in BERJ Volume 38, Number 3 (Jun 2012)

I have also written more about this research in my forthcoming article “Union Power! Unions and professional development” in the next issue of Professional Development Today.

From Fragmentation to Chaos? The Regulation of Initial Teacher Training (ITT) in Further Education (FE)

Who? Norman Lucas, Tony Nasta and Lynne Rogers (Institute of Education, London)

What? The research explored the impact of the significant increases in the regulation of ITT for FE teachers (including the PTLLS, CTLLS and DTLLS, QTLS qualifications). It questioned to what extent codified standards actually link to what teachers do. Researchers studied one-third of universities providing FE ITT by reviewing documentation, holding workshops and focus groups and carrying out interviews.

And...?

- One of the aims of the framework was to standardise Initial Teacher Training for Further Education (FE ITT) but substantial variation (in terms of credit systems for example) remains.
- The variety of qualification titles caused confusion
- The quality of work based subject mentoring was very variable and mentors often lacked the time needed to do the job effectively.
- ‘Theory about learning is not useful’ is a tautology: where trainees saw “theory” about learning as useful they automatically saw it as practical rather than theory.
- The research findings corroborate reports by Ofsted (2010) and the Skills Commission (2009) which have also criticised teacher training in the vocational and skills sectors. Codified standards have not addressed these problems.
- The need to comply with standards and regulation has distracted ITT providers from fundamental weaknesses in mentoring and developing “synergy between the taught and practice elements of courses”.

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Find Out more... in BERJ Volume 38, Number 4 (Aug 2012)

Withdrawal and Persistence in Initial Teacher Training

Who? Deborah Roberts (Lancaster University)

What? Exploration of why trainee teachers leave their courses or remain on them based on interviews with and questionnaires of trainees on a HEI-based primary ITT program.

And...?

- Personal, inter-personal, academic, professional, institutional and external factors affected trainees.
- Professional concerns to do with placements and “how I feel within the school” were more important in causing withdrawal than social or academic factors to do with the course
- School based support was frequently instrumental in trainees’ persistence
- Several trainees left due to their own perfectionism- they were doing well enough in terms of school-based mentors and the university’s expectations, but not in terms of their own self expectations

Find out more... in BERJ vol 38, Number 6 Dec 2012

Assessment for learning around the world

Who? The Assessment for Learning in International Contexts (ALIC Research Project. Stuart Shaw (CIE research), Martin Johnson (Cambridge Assessment) Paul Warwick (University of Cambridge)

What? An international study of attitudes and practices relating to Assessment for Learning based on 242 responses to an online survey across 5 countries.

And...?

- Teachers do not particularly value giving pupils marks but do it a lot. There is a mismatch between the value teachers see in it and their practice of it.
- Teachers value assessment that empowers students to assess own work, think critically about their learning etc. but do not feel comfortable and confident doing so.
- Teachers do not particularly value giving students more control over assessment practices.
- Teachers are more interested in approaches to assessment that gave them greater understanding of students’ learning

Find out more... In the British Educational Research Association’s “Research Intelligence” magazine Autumn/Winter 2012