

Teachers engaging in and with research: bonding, bridging and linking

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Countries across the world are reforming their systems of teacher education. Although often in different forms, one common theme appears to be an increased focus on enquiry, evidence based teaching and teacher research (Kennedy, 2015), and Scotland is no exception. In 2011, the report 'Teaching Scotland's Future' (TSF; Donaldson, 2011) was published. This policy proposed a radical redesign of teacher education provision in Scotland, at the centre of which was the ambition for teachers to become "reflective, accomplished and enquiring professionals" (Donaldson, 2011, p. 14). Central to this vision was the claim that teachers should be 'agents of change' and this increasing focus on 'teacher agency' also appears in recent curriculum policy in Scotland and internationally (Biesta, Priestley and Robinson, 2015; Priestley, 2011).

Over the last five years, the vision of the teacher promoted by TSF has come to be associated with the idea of teachers becoming more actively engaged in and with educational research, which has been supported and strengthened by a number of key organisations in Scottish education. For example, shortly after the publication of TSF, the General Teaching Council of Scotland (GTCS) introduced its new standard for career-long professional learning (CLPL) and a programme of Professional Update (PU), both of which require teachers to engage in and with research. Although this can take different forms, this may include reading academic literature, conducting independent research projects, and, participating in research events and conferences. In this paper, the researchers make a distinction between engaging in and engaging with research, but understand the two to be linked. The former refers to teachers contributing to research or designing their own research projects, while the latter refers to teachers reading and sharing research or drawing on evidence to inform their practice.

One example of where this has been put into practice is the development of Scotland's first school-based research centre, Hutcheson's Centre for Research (HCR). This centre was established to provide support for teachers and pupils to conduct their own independent research. The HCR supports teachers to develop the skills they need to become researchers and to put this research knowledge into practice, and thus provides an excellent site in which to explore issues around teacher engagement with research.

Understanding social capital as a multi-dimensional construct (Putnam, 2000), this paper utilises the concepts of 'bonding', 'bridging' (Terrion, 2006) and 'linking' (Woolcock, 2001) to explore the extent to which engagement in and with research appears to be facilitated or restricted by social ties, connections and networks within and outwith the school context. We also draw on the work of Emirbayer and Mische (1998) and their conceptualisation of agency as a configuration of forces from the past, future orientations and present engagement.

This paper summarises the findings from the second phase of a research project carried out within the HCR, in partnership with the University of Strathclyde, which explores the development of teachers as researchers. The first phase, identified a number of perceived barriers to teacher engagement and highlighted a tension between the conceptualisation of teacher research promoted by current policy and the conceptualisation of teacher research by teachers themselves. The second phase of this project explores these issues in more depth by asking the following questions:

- 1) What do teachers understand by engaging in research and with research?
- 2) What structures or support can be put in place to facilitate teachers who do not engage in and with research?
- 3) Does the practice of engaging in and with research appear to be related to bonding, bridging or linking social capital?

Method

The majority of data from the second phase of the research project has been gathered through semi-structured interviews with teachers who work in the school where the HCR is based. The teacher participant group includes individuals who are considered as 'research active', individuals who might be at the early stages of becoming 'research active' and individuals who do not engage in or with research. It is expected that ten to fifteen teachers will be interviewed in total. This paper also draws on data from the first phase of the research, which consisted of an online pilot questionnaire, completed by thirty-five teachers based within this specific school.

Expected Outcomes

This research is ongoing, but it is expected that outcomes will provide more detailed information about teacher perceptions of barriers and facilitators to engagement in and with research in this particular school setting. Based on interview data collected thus far, we hypothesise that teachers who are 'research active' may also have capital in the form of social ties, connections and networks out with the immediate context of the school (bridging), when compared to those who are less 'research active'. We are now six years on from the publication of TSF, yet the vision of teachers as 'reflective' and 'enquiring professionals' continues to gain traction in national reform. Given that this is a common theme throughout teacher education reform across the globe, we hope that the findings from our study can be used to further develop school-based research in Scotland and beyond.

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