The Open University

**EDD Preparing for the Doctorate in Education**

The Open University

# Contents

# Section 1 Introduction

The Open University EdD programme is designed to meet the needs of professionals in education and related areas who are seeking to deepen their knowledge and understanding of contemporary educational issues. It is characterised by a professional orientation and a structured approach. It aims to develop skills in educational research and enquiry, and to use these to carry out research that will contribute to professional knowledge and practice. A growing number of professionals regard this style of EdD programme as being a more appropriate vehicle for their further development than the traditional Doctorate of Philosophy (PhD).

The Centre for Research in Education and Educational Technology (CREET) includes staff from the Institute of Educational Technology and the Faculty of Education and Language Studies. It also has staff from other areas of the University concerned with education and educational technology. CREET is one of the largest educational research units in the UK, with many researchers of international reputation who wish to recruit research students of the highest calibre.

This document is intended to help you with submitting your proposal. The document contains information on:

*   timetable for entry to the EdD
*   writing your proposal
*   areas of study offered in CREET.

You should read this introduction carefully before moving on to the second section of the document, which contains accounts of the CREET clusters and areas of EdD study within each cluster.

## Timetable for registration

| Date | Process | Notes |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Aug–Nov | Application period | 30th November each year is the closing date for applications |
| December | Module results mailed for students on other Open University modules | |
| Dec–Mar | Consideration of proposals by academics | |
| April | Applicants notified of the decision on the proposal | |
| May | EdD course starts | |

## Writing your proposal

**The research proposal is the core of your application to the EdD programme and the nature and quality of the proposal are the most important determining factors for successful entry to the EdD**. It should,

therefore, exhibit a high level of critical analysis and demonstrate your understanding of the relationship between theory and practice in education.

Your EdD proposal should be around **3000 words**. Its purpose is to identify clearly your research question, put it in a theoretical framework, explain how you plan to carry out the work and show how you will analyse your data. You should also show how your proposed study is linked to your professional work. In addition, your research needs to fit in with key CREET cluster areas of research (see Section 2).

The proposal should include:

- a title – this should be clear and succinct with preferably no more than ten words

- a brief explanation of the educational issues that frame your proposed research topic, why you are interested in the topic and the setting in which it will be conducted. You should also locate your research proposal in one of the four clusters and associated areas of study (see Section 2)

- specific research questions, although these may be modified over time, and why you think these are important. Your initial questions should be clear and specific, enabling you to be clear about data collection and evaluation

- a description of the theoretical framework for your research, identifying the important concepts that will underpin your work and how your proposed study relates to research done by others. You will need to clearly identify the key literature relevant to the proposed field of study and show awareness of current literature. You may draw on your own previous work, if appropriate. Will your study fill a gap in knowledge, challenge accepted ideas or add to an existing tradition of research?

- an explanation and justification of the methods you plan to use in the research, both for collecting data, and for its analysis. In this section you should draw on methodological literature and show that you have considered issues of validity and reliability. You should outline your general approach, for example sociolinguistic analysis, ethnography, action research, grounded theory. If you are going to use a combination of approaches then explain how they will complement each other. Then explain the specific methods you plan to use for data collection and data analysis, with as much detail as possible

- an identification of the ethical issues involved in your research and an explanation of how you will address these. The British Educational Research Association provides advice on research ethics on their website; you will need to link particular issues to your own work

- the potential applications of your research to educational policy and practice

- your professional role and expertise, and how you will draw on your professional knowledge in carrying out your research study

- a timetable – you should provide a provisional outline timetable for the work to be covered for each of the three years of EdD study. This is to show that you have made a realistic estimate of the overall workload involved, and have identified a realistic schedule that fits with the scale

and nature of the research activities you are planning. This timetable can later be amended but it must be manageable in terms of the structure of the programme, in particular that Year 1 requires a literature review and initial study and Years 2 and 3 cover the major research and thesis writing.

- the references used in your proposal.

Two examples of research proposals are given in Section 3.

Your proposal will be read by two or more members of the EdD Team, including at least one from the area of study being applied to. These reviewers will assess the extent to which your proposal meets the criteria listed below. The reviewers then make one of the following recommendations:

- accept – the proposal meets all of the criteria well. Written feedback will be provided to help you refine and develop the programme of work

- accept – the proposal just meets the criteria and there is sufficient evidence that the plans can be modified in the time available so as to constitute a viable project. Detailed, directive written feedback is provided and you will need to decide whether the modifications indicated are acceptable and practicable before accepting a place on the programme

- reject – a proposal which meets the criteria but where appropriate supervisors cannot be found will not be accepted. We will, of course, make every effort to identify appropriate supervisors where a proposal meets our criteria for acceptance.

- reject – the proposal does not to meet all of the criteria. Written feedback will indicate how the proposal requires rethinking and/or development if a revised version is to be submitted for admission to the EdD in a subsequent year.

Proposals that are accepted are highly likely to undergo change, particularly in the early months. These changes come about in response to the feedback provided by the EdD Team and to the advice and guidance of the EdD supervisors, especially the concentrated attention paid to individual research plans at the Residential Weekend. In addition, your own thinking will have developed between submitting a proposal in November and starting study in May. Such change and development is an integral part of the research process, but it is as well to be aware of it now because sometimes it is hard to accept that a proposal that is the result of much drafting and redrafting is nonetheless at an early stage of evolution.

If your proposal is not acceptable we will provide you with reasons why in the feedback. We recognise that this will be very unwelcome news. However, it is important to recognise that, unlike other Open University courses, admission to the EdD programme is not by open entry. In the EdD programme there are students whose proposals were not accepted in one year who took note of the feedback and returned a year later with an improved proposal which was accepted.

**Note that admission to the programme is also dependent on the availability of two suitable supervisors.**

## Criteria for assessing your proposal

Your research proposal will be assessed against the following criteria. The proposal should:

- fit in with CREET cluster areas of research
- demonstrate that you can design a coherent and well thought-out research proposal
- relate systematically and clearly to relevant material in the area of study and research methods
- demonstrate the appropriateness of the research methods and methods of data analysis chosen to answer the questions posed
- be of professional and practical educational relevance
- show how your research draws on your own professional expertise and context
- show that the research is feasible within the time and other constraints
- demonstrate the ability to communicate effectively in written English.

In addition, the proposal needs to be of a sufficiently high standard to suggest that you will be able to reach doctorate level within the time available.

## Implications of masters study

For some students, the work undertaken in masters level study has the potential to form the basis for the research proposal. However, it is important to recognise that masters level tutors may not be expert in all subject areas covered in the EdD programme, so feedback may be limited.

Some students choose to develop a research proposal on a different topic from one developed earlier. This may be because their work situation has changed and an earlier proposal is no longer feasible or a new interest has developed while developing their research.

Whatever the reason, there is no requirement that the EdD proposal be linked directly to masters work or focus. What is important is that the research questions you choose to address are located within one of the CREET cluster areas of research and are ones that you genuinely believe will retain your interest for the following three years.

In preparing your proposal for the EdD, it is important that you recognise that it will require additional work to that done for masters level study, both to meet the specific requirements for an EdD application and to provide evidence of being able to apply the research methodological dimensions to a specific set of research questions grounded in your proposed area of research. Therefore, while the initial study and literature review required in Year 1 may build on the work you have previously done, you will need to expand on this. A repetition of your earlier work is unlikely to be sufficient to meet the requirements of the EdD. If your masters study was some time ago, or if you have changed your focus since then, it is particularly important that you demonstrate an awareness of recent literature in relation to your focus of study and methodological considerations.

## Looking ahead

There are two other features of study on the EdD that you should be aware of now. You will need to have:

- use of a computer – this is essential in order to access the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) of the EdD

- access to an academic library.

Most of the communication between students, supervisors and programme team is conducted through the VLE and email.

The computer also provides access to the growing resources of the internet. Students will need to register with an internet service provider (ISP) to gain access to the internet and to the course website. The Open University offers access to excellent online library facilities and alongside this it can be beneficial to have physical access to a good academic library. Your E891 studies may already have involved you in library work and you may wish to develop this over the year with longer-term goals in mind.

Now, if you already know which EdD area of study you wish to pursue, you can go straight to the relevant part of Section 2. If you are unsure whether your plans fit within one particular cluster, you should read through the areas of study for which you are eligible.

# Section 2 CREET clusters and areas of study

## Childhood and Youth Studies Cluster

Members of the interdisciplinary Childhood and Youth Studies Cluster draw on a range of approaches and research methodologies, including developmental psychology, childhood studies, sociology, anthropology, ethnography, cultural studies and cultural geography.

The group encompasses studies of children's and young people's experiences, representations, learning, development, inclusion and social participation. Of concern are the institutions and social practices that shape their lives, and the cultural and personal constructions of childhood and youth that mediate these processes.

Research priorities reflect the diversity of childhoods (for example, related to social, economic and cultural contexts) and the diversity of children's lived experiences (for example, related to age, gender, parenting/family experiences, abilities, disabilities and mental health). Several members are engaged in international research and in studies with a strong policy/applied focus, e.g. early childhood care and education, and child labour.

The group has good contacts with local schools, playgroups, maternity hospitals, youth groups, etc. Research facilities include equipment for eye-tracking and video recording and analysis; these can be used to support data gathering in the group's observation suite and in other settings. A Children's Research Centre has recently been established to support active research by children from local schools and further afield.

## Inclusive education/special education

The inclusive education area is associated with the Pedagogy, Learning and Curriculum Research Group.

Research topics in this area may relate to:

- developing the inclusive curriculum
- learning support and development
- parental participation and decision making
- learner perspectives and participation
- barriers to learning
- policies and systems.

The areas of study outlined below provide a framework to help you choose your research topic, and the examples provide a series of markers about possible content. You might find it useful to think about the detailed content and research methods that might lie behind each title.

Students who choose the inclusive education/special education area are encouraged to use the research methods they have become familiar with through their study of other courses. Research approaches are likely to fall broadly in the traditions of ethnography, action research, case study, grounded theory or oral history. We expect most students will use research methods such as observation (ethnographic or systematic), interviewing and textual and documentary analysis.

**Developing the inclusive curriculum**

This builds particularly on E848 *Researching inclusive education: values into practice.* The focus may be on a curriculum subject, a cross-curricular theme or a specific pedagogical approach (e.g. the use of new technology). Examples might be: exploring group work in science; the contribution of sign language to the whole school primary curriculum; responding to pupils' diverse learning needs.

**Learning support and development**

This is concerned with developing support for diverse learners. The focus might be on changing roles, teaching methods or organisation of provision. Examples might be: developing the work of learning support assistants: issues of practice and policy; educational psychology and inclusive practice; the SENCO and the inclusive learning manager: a comparison of roles.

**Parental participation and decision making**

The area of concern here is the involvement of parents in their children's education, and the understanding that a parental perspective and interest may differ from those of teachers and students. Examples might be: overcoming barriers to learning: comparing the views of parents and teachers; going to appeal: parents and the SEN tribunal; the role of parent governors in special and mainstream schools; the role of the voluntary sector.

**Learner perspectives and participation**

The emphasis here is on student perspectives on education and learning and the extent of student participation. Examples might be: student views on mainstream and special schools; the role of student councils in inclusive schools; hearing diverse voices in further education; the role of learners in collecting data about their own learning.

**Barriers to learning**

This area emphasises the barriers to learning caused by issues such as gender, ethnicity or social class. Research projects might be: evaluation of pastoral support programmes; gender and disaffection; the impact of exclusion; learning relationships: case study of a pupil referral unit; alternative learning settings; the education of traveller children.

**Policies and systems**

This covers policies concerned with difficulties in learning, disaffection or disability in education and their relationship to practice both at local and national level. Examples might include: school SEN policies and the SENCO role; funding arrangements for inclusive provision; changing perspectives in special education and inclusion.

In developing your proposal you should consider the language used; you need to be particularly careful not to accept without question 'labels' that may have been applied to some groups of learners. You should show that you understand that special and inclusive education has been – and still is – an area where definitions are contested and where labels carry value judgements. You may want to consider the competing discourses that surround many topics in this area and show where your study will sit, in terms of a range of different discourses.

Another important area to consider is the role played in shaping your research by the participants in your study. You should think about how they can be included in setting the research agenda. You will also want to consider carefully your own role in the research and how your professional identity may support or impede your role as a researcher.

**Relevant module materials**

Nind, M., Sheehy, K., Rix, J., and Simmons, K. (eds) (2004) *Curriculum and Pedagogy in Inclusive Education: Values into Practice*, London, RoutledgeFalmer.

The Open University (2004) E243 *Inclusive education: learning from each other*, Milton Keynes, The Open University.

The Open University (2006) E848 *Researching inclusive education: values into practice*, Study Guide, Milton Keynes, The Open University.

Rix. J., Simmons, K., Nind, M., and Sheehy, K. (eds) (2004) *Policy and Power in Inclusive Education: Values into Practice*, London, RoutledgeFalmer.

Sheehy, K., Nind, M., Rix, J. and Simmons, K. (eds) (2004) *Ethics and Research in Inclusive Education: Values into Practice*, London, RoutledgeFalmer.

## Child and youth studies

This area focuses on the social processes of development. It provides an opportunity for you to research the contribution of social relationships to the education of children and young people. It takes as its starting point child development in families, schools and society. The core theme is that child development is a social process, embedded in cultural contexts (family, day care, school, etc.), constructed in social relationships (between children and parents or other care givers, between siblings, with teachers and amongst peers, etc.), mediated by cultural tools that enhance possibilities for communication, thinking and personal expression (notably speech, literacy and numeracy) and shaped by cultural practices (styles of relationship, expectations of behaviour, etc.).

This perspective contrasts with views on child development as a process of slowly emerging individual competence, which is seen as failing to acknowledge the respects in which children's knowledge and skills, their beliefs and understanding are constructed through and with others, through diverse processes of imitation, instruction, guided participation, and co-operative construction.

In this perspective, the social dimension of child development becomes an important area of study for education professionals, since it is the means through which skills, values and meanings are constructed and reconstructed, and transmitted between generations, in both formal school contexts and informal family and other contexts.

Your doctoral research topic will be located in the general area of the social processes underlying the development of children and young people. This broad area permits numerous types of study, in terms of questions asked, context(s) of research and participants studied. Your research design will be informed by social constructivist/socio-cultural theoretical frameworks on child development. Your research methodology will include systematic observations using qualitative and simple quantitative methods. These observation methods may be supplemented by other research techniques depending on the nature of your project.

**Research topics**

Your EdD research may be located in one of the areas below or may span two (or more):

- social development in the pre-school years
- the social processes of learning in family contexts
- the social processes of learning in schools
- peer social relations in the school years.

**Social development in the pre-school years**

Your research will concentrate on the processes by which children acquire social understanding through their relationships with parents, siblings, peers, etc. These early relationships are central to children's developing identities and social competence and influence their ability to transfer successfully from the family to the school setting. Your research may be located in the family or in some other educational provision for preschool aged children or span both types of settings.

**The social processes of learning in family contexts**

Research in this area will focus on the way children acquire skills and understanding through interaction with an adult or another child in their own families. The starting point will be situations in which learning is taking place, or is intended to take place. You may focus on children of pre-school age or school age.

**The social processes of learning in schools**

The setting for this area of study, in contrast to the first two areas, is the school classroom. It covers research into the social processes of teaching and learning in classrooms; the focus may be on children working together, or on the contribution of teachers and other adults in the classroom.

**Peer social relations in the school years**

This focuses on how children's social relationships and social understanding change as they progress through school and how these influence their understanding of their own identity. The emphasis is on their social relationships with their peers.

In each of these areas, numerous research questions are opened up for study, and your choice of a research topic will depend on your professional concerns and interests as well as your reading of the literature. For example, how useful are concepts like 'scaffolding', 'contingency' or 'guided participation' as analytic devices? How well do they apply in different contexts? Other questions may emerge from thinking about your own practical experiences and professional responsibilities. For example, you might be interested in how parents adapt the way they support their children's development depending on the children's age and ability, or how different strategies modify children's contributions in different situations. Alternatively, you might be interested in the strategies employed by a group of children as they work together to solve a problem or complete a task.

However, all studies in this area will have as their primary focus an examination of the social processes underlying development. Below we offer

a two-dimensional framework, which we hope will help you locate your ideas. One dimension in the framework is the formality of the context in which child development is taking place. At one end of this dimension are formal settings such as school classrooms. At the other end are less formal settings such as the home or the school playground. The other dimension is the symmetry of the relationship between the participants involved. For example, the relationship might be symmetrical, as when two children of similar age and ability are together; alternatively the relationship might be asymmetrical, for example if two children of different ages or abilities are engaged on a task, or if a child is with an adult, perhaps playing or involved in a more structured activity. Figure 1 illustrates these two dimensions and identifies some of the most obvious settings.

**Formal setting**

children of similar age and ability in classroom

child and adult in classroom

children of different ability in classroom

children of different gender in classroom

**Symmetrical relationship** — **Asymmetrical relationship**

same aged/ability children at home

same aged/ability children in playground

siblings at home

adult and child at home

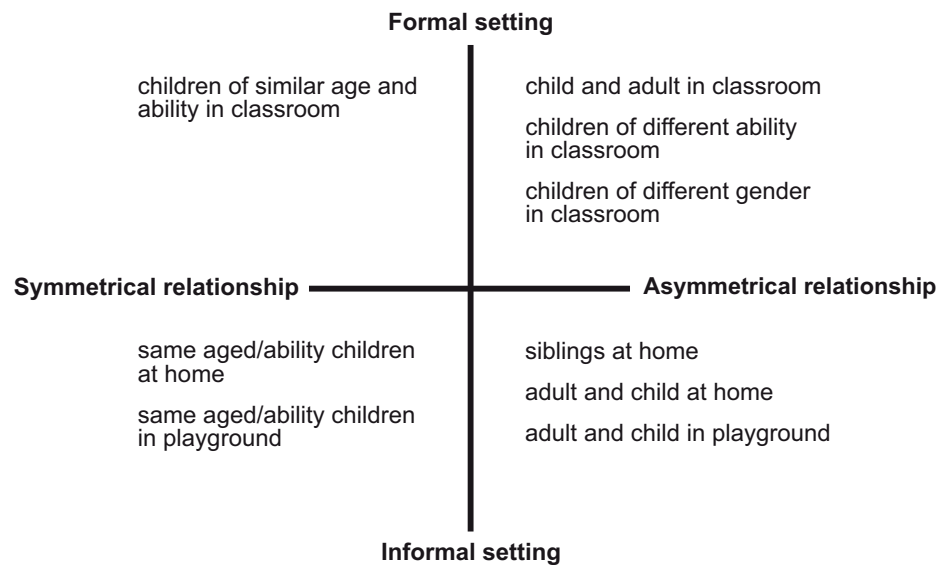adult and child in playground

**Informal setting**

Figure 1   Two-dimensional framework combining formality of context and symmetry of the relationship

If you consider the four areas of study in relation to this two-dimensional framework you will see that they can all be located in two or more of the quadrants: social development in the pre-school years could be located in any of the quadrants but most probably in the bottom two; the social processes of learning in family contexts is located in the bottom two quadrants; the social processes of learning in schools is located in the top two quadrants; and peer social relations in the school years is located in the two left quadrants. This framework may help you refine your research questions.

Your research will involve you in observing children in a classroom or at home, or both, as they are engaged in some kind of social or cognitive activity. This activity could range from children playing or talking with each other or with an adult, to teachers instructing an area of the curriculum. The selection of the activity and the nature of the data you collect in any particular setting will be strongly influenced by the questions you are seeking to answer in your research project. Whatever the design and setting for your research, the emphasis will be on observing the verbal and/or non-verbal behaviours of the participants involved. Given the emphasis on process, the data you collect are likely to be in the form of audio and/or

video recordings supplemented by written observations made at the time of the recording. The nature of your research questions will determine how you analyse your data. It will also determine what setting(s) you decide to observe and whether you give the participants particular instructions about what to do or provide particular materials. In order to answer some questions it will be appropriate to look at the outcome of the process; in others, it will be sufficient to focus on the process itself.

**Relevant module materials**

Faulkner, D., Littleton, K. and Woodhead, M. (eds) (1998) *Learning Relationships in the Classroom*, London, Routledge.

Mercer, N. (1995) *The Guided Construction of Knowledge: Talk Amongst Teachers and Learners*, Clevedon, Multilingual Matters.

The Open University (2011) ED841 *Understanding children's development and learning*, Study Guide, Milton Keynes, The Open University.

Schaffer, H. R. (1996) *Social Development*, Oxford, Blackwell.

Woodhead, M., Faulkner, D. and Littleton, K. (eds) (1998) *Cultural Worlds of Early Childhood*, London, Routledge.

Woodhead, M., Faulkner, D. and Littleton, K. (eds) (1999) *Making Sense of Social Development*, London, Routledge.

# Educational Studies Cluster

United by a common interest in pedagogy, professionalism and policy, researchers in this cluster employ qualitative methodologies to explore teaching and learning in formal and informal contexts in homes, schools, higher education and work-based settings. The cluster is well known for its research into several inter-related educational themes, including pedagogy and the curriculum, teacher education, professional development and leadership. In addition, the work of colleagues studying qualitative methodology and ethnography is widely cited. Cluster research is undertaken at a local, national and international level. It seeks to contribute to knowledge expansion and make an impact upon the unfolding educational agenda.

## Teacher development and professional learning

This area is linked to the Research Group in International Developments in Teacher Education across Societies and Cultures (RITES).

Research in this area covers studies of student teachers, and those more experienced, in primary and secondary schools. It is concerned with the professional development of teachers at all levels and in all contexts. However, despite the strong teacher focus studies have also been undertaken, for example, in the professional development of social workers, in prison education, nurse education, and further and higher education.

**Research topics and examples**

Research topics in this area may be related to:

- teachers' professional development
- mentor–mentee interaction
- assessment of teaching
- learning institutions (the 'mentoring institution')
- interpersonal skills and team understanding
- educational development and the change process
- interpreting and using evidence
- policy and practice in teacher education in a variety of cultures and contexts
- ICT-enhanced models of teacher education
- the development of teacher knowledge, including the impact of ICT on professional knowledge
- the policy contexts of teacher education and teacher workforce reform.

You may find that your research topic seems to straddle two aspects of study. This may be unavoidable given the many interconnected factors that contribute to successful professional development. However, you should make every effort to identify the one area in which your proposed topic is principally located. Indeed, many excellent research topics may be located in just one area, and you should avoid developing a topic that is so broad it seems to encompass most of the areas.

The following are some suggestions which should provide you with an idea of what is acceptable. However, these examples should not be regarded as a prescriptive list: it is vital that your chosen topic is one that is interesting and significant for you.

**Teachers' professional development**

This relates to models of professional development. Most education and training programmes take a developmental approach; novices work alongside more expert colleagues as they move from observation to collaborative work, through to solo teaching. For example, the Open University PGCE requires the mentors to plan lessons and co-teach with their mentee, so that the mentee appreciates the need for planning but also recognises when it is appropriate to deviate from the plan. By getting fully involved, the mentee develops not only an understanding of teaching strategies but also a language of description and analysis with which to critique the teaching process. Sample topics include:

> How do student teachers in different subjects develop their questioning strategies during initial teacher education (ITE)?

> 'Learning to survive': What teaching strategies do teachers in further education bring with them to the classroom from commerce or industry?

### Mentor–mentee interaction

This is linked to 'mentoring strategies' and the interpersonal factors that impact on teacher development. Such interactions can be considered in a wide sense and embrace studies related to work culture and professional ethos. This area would be particularly interesting to students who wish to consider the psychological aspects of teacher–teacher interaction. For example, even experts get nervous and may not perform at their best when placed in a situation in which their work is open to criticism. Sample topics include:

> What is the role of counselling in the professional education of nurses?
>
> Successful mentoring: Successful managing. What are the personal qualities of a good mentor?

### Assessment of teaching

Here we take the term 'teaching' to be wider than just the assessment of teaching competence for work in schools and colleges. The use of competences in teacher assessment has been a source of debate in ITE circles. The debate continues as techniques to assess competences are applied to newly qualified teachers, expert teachers, subject leaders and head teachers. Some argue that professions and HE in general should not be part of this trend (Barnett, 1994), as it does not capture properly the nature of the teaching task. This area gives an opportunity for you to consider thoroughly the use of competences as a means of assessment, and their use in examination, appraisal and professional development. Sample topics include:

> Assessing teaching using teacher competences. What is a meaningful model?
>
> Self assessment, peer assessment, external assessment: Who are the best critics of teaching performance?

### Learning institutions

It is perhaps too easy to emphasise the distinctiveness of the teaching process and the peculiarity of educational (and similar) institutions. This potentially cuts education off from the rich lines of enquiry in the sociology of organisations, industrial sociology and organisation theory. Much of the literature in educational management is inspired by ideas from the industrial and commercial sector, and it is appropriate to consider insightful research in non-education contexts, as this could inform your thinking here. This would be true of all the areas mentioned above, but is particularly so when the notion of mentoring is applied to the development of institutions and whole-school planning.

It is likely that a consideration of 'learning institutions' will overlap with other areas of study, but you should try to keep the institutional focus clear if you wish to develop a proposal in this area. Some sample topics are set out below:

> What are the critical quality assurance issues when mentoring student teachers?

What factors contribute to successful peer mentoring?

**Interpersonal skills and team understanding**

Research in this area could focus on working in teams, on formal or informal mentoring or coaching programmes, or on collaborative or collegial models of professional learning such as the use of Journal Clubs. Contexts could include work with student teachers, newly qualified teachers, and curriculum, tutorial or senior management teams with a focus on skills development. Studies of an analysis of professional changes and evaluation of effective strategies would all be appropriate. Some examples of research topics are:

> Supporting peers towards further professional development.
>
> A case study of a collaborative model of professional development.

**Educational development and the change process**

This focuses on managing change and educational development in the context of change. Studies in this area may explore learning and achievement as a process of change. Leaders of professional development activities need to have an understanding of the dynamics and logistics of the change process, and these issues may form the basis for a research study. Topics could be 'micro', such as a study of the organisation of an individual classroom, or 'macro', such as an analysis of the introduction of the mathematics strategy in primary schools in the late 1990s. Other areas may include the implementation of policy decisions, the impact of government intervention on teaching and learning, how teachers and practitioners in other professions cope with externally imposed change, how leaders plan for change and the influence of internal and external constraints, and the relevance of shared understandings in the development of knowledge and skills. Examples of research topics include:

> The impact of change on learning: a case study.
>
> Strategies for effective leadership in educational change.

**Interpreting and using evidence**

This explores the forms of evidence that teachers and other educational professionals should draw on in developing their practice. Teaching as a research-based profession and studies that explore this theme would also be appropriate. Examples of research studies include:

> The knowledge-creating institution: an example of practice.
>
> Accessing the evidence through new technologies.

It is likely that the research methods you will use for this area will include small-scale questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and document analysis. You may also wish to use quantitative methods, perhaps to find out about the assessment of teaching in a range of schools across a local authority. If you decide that your topic will indeed require the use of more complex statistical methods, you should indicate in your research proposal what these will be, together with an estimation of your competence in using them.

**Relevant module materials**

Ashton-Warner, S. (1980) *Teacher*, London, Virago Press (first published 1963, Secker and Warburg).

Barnett, R. (1994) *The Limits of Competence*, Buckingham, Open University Press.

Berliner, D. (1993) 'Teacher expertise' in Moon, B. and Shelton Mayes, A. (eds) *Teaching and Learning in the Secondary School*, London, Routledge.

Craft, A. (2000) *Continuing Professional Development: A Practical Guide for Teachers and Schools* (2nd edn), London, Routledge.

Fullan, M. (1991) *The New Meaning of Educational Change*, London, Cassells.

Furlong, J. and Maynard, T. (1995) *Mentoring Student Teachers*, London, Routledge.

Kerry, T. L. and Shelton-Mayes, A. (eds) (1995) *Issues in Mentoring*, London, Routledge.

Leach, J. and Moon, R .E. (eds) (1999) *Learners and Pedagogy*, London, Paul Chapman.

Moon, B., Butcher, J. and Bird, E. (eds) (2000) *Leading Professional Development in Education*, London, Routledge.

The Open University (1995) E830 *Mentoring*, Study Guide, Milton Keynes, The Open University.

The Open University (2000) E843 *Leading professional development in education*, Study Guide, Milton Keynes, The Open University.

Shulman, L. (1986) 'Those who understand: knowledge growth in teaching', *Educational Researcher*, vol. 15, no. 2, pp. 4–14.

Soler, J., Craft, A. and Burgess, H. (eds) (2001) *Teacher Development: Exploring our own Practice*, London, Paul Chapman.

## Curriculum, equity and assessment

This area is linked to the Pedagogy, Learning and Curriculum Research Group within the Education Cluster.

In this area, it is likely that you will be researching issues related to one or more of these inter-related areas of study:

- learning and the curriculum
- assessment and the curriculum
- knowledge and skills and the curriculum
- pedagogy and practitioner identities
- identities and gender differentiation in education.

The context for your research proposal may be a sector (e.g. early years practitioners and learners), a subject area or a particular group (e.g. primary teachers, learning support assistants, children with learning difficulties) and the focus may be on one or more of a number of factors. For example, factors affecting identity and performance may include age, class, race, gender and disability. What we mean by a 'curriculum and assessment issue' is something that gives insight into the 'why', 'what' and 'how' of teaching and learning.

Just as a number of MA modules involve reviewing and developing practice to enable you to plan and implement change in your curriculum area, so your work should focus on researching the understandings necessary to carry out such a review or development. For example, you will not be doing research on mathematics (if this is your chosen subject area) *per se*, but on the curriculum and learning issues that relate to the mathematics education context based on your understanding of one or a combination of learning, assessment, knowledge and skills, and pedagogy.

Even when considering the area of 'knowledge and skills and the curriculum', for example, your concern should not just be about a particular domain such as literacy, but instead, about how understanding the nature of knowledge leads to particular curriculum choices – such as what or how to teach literacy for example. This will require consideration of what you and others understand about literacy and what it is to be literate, which in turn relates to the reasons for and ways of teaching literacy. Any answer to the question of what literacy should be taught will have elements that are particular to literacy and those that are general to all domains. Both types of elements – subject-specific and general – are of interest in this EdD.

In each area of study of learning, knowledge and assessment, there may be equity issues. Thus, there may be a concern for the achievement of boys and girls or with the fact that girls do not study science in equal numbers to boys. This area of study covers the role of education and schooling in shaping individual gender identities; the ways in which particular aspects of educational institutions and educational practices reinforce or question gender identities; how people experience education differently and the implications of this for educational institutions and educational practices; and the ways in which educational experiences are also located in wider familial, cultural, social and political contexts.

It is important to bear in mind that your study must be research-based – a curriculum development programme on its own will not be sufficient.

### Examples of research topics

Examples of the types of study you might choose are:

- evaluating the effectiveness of a curriculum development programme in terms of, for example, student learning (curriculum evaluation)
- investigating the way change affects an educational institution or its teachers (a curriculum change study)
- investigating a pedagogical issue associated with an existing or new programme – for example, how to provide effective support for collaborative learning
- investigating particular teaching and assessment practices in specific domains such as literacy, music, science
- exploring relationships between gender, disability, race or other factors, and considering associated issues of practice concerned with curriculum, teaching and learning
- investigating how primary-age children develop different ways of knowing and the implications of this for teaching
- investigating issues in the professional development of practitioners in a particular educational setting
- exploring issues in the early years curriculum in relation to policy and practice.

### Learning and the curriculum

Topics could bear on a particular aspect of learning – for example, metacognition, procedural versus conceptual learning, problem solving, collaborative learning, cultural bridging. Possible research topics include:

> Exploring connections or disjunctures between learning at home and in school in the early or later years.

> Collaborative learning at Key Stage 3: Institutional, assessment and learning barriers and opportunities.

> Encouraging students to think strategically in technician education.

### Assessment and the curriculum

There are two basic types of study relating to the area of assessment and the curriculum:

- a critique of an existing assessment system or assessment technique
- a development and trial of an assessment instrument, procedure or system.

If your chosen topic is concerned with purposes and methods of assessment, then you will need to ask questions of why, what and how to assess. In any discussion of assessment, whether a critique or a development, there will be underlying issues that fundamentally affect the way assessment processes are viewed and developed, and who is involved in these processes. The most basic of these will be the view of learning and knowledge that is taken,

which raises a number of issues: standards and the relationship to criterion-referencing; views of achievement (for example, fixed, universal stages); levels of performance (progression); role of assessor and assessed; and the purpose of assessment. Possible research topics include:

> Assessing creativity in children's writing at Key Stage 2 in an inner city school.

> The role and design of process folios for mature students in higher education.

> The impact of grouping structures on students' access to the mathematics curriculum in secondary schools.

### Knowledge, skills and the curriculum

This section considers the nature of knowledge in education, including:

- the selection of knowledge
- the relationship of learning and knowledge
- types of knowledge – for example, procedural and conceptual knowledge.

The theoretical approaches to research topics in this area could be the same as those in the 'learning and the curriculum' area of study. Alternatively, some elements of the study could relate to broader sociological issues of the nature and social construction of knowledge, including the specifics for a particular subject – for example, the Popperian view of the processes of science, or the development of a school subject. However, this type of approach should always be used to focus on the curriculum issues, rather than to consider the nature of, for example, science *per se*. Possible research topics include:

> Models of knowledge and creative development in the early years.

> The status of knowledge: A comparative study of an academic and a vocational mathematics course.

> The curriculum inter-relationship of procedural and conceptual knowledge in the problem solving carried out by nurses.

### Pedagogy and the curriculum

This covers the ways that teachers construct a pedagogical setting to support the learning process for students, irrespective of the teaching and learning context in which they work. The concept of learning will be fundamental to this type of study.

There are numerous aspects of pedagogy that you could investigate. You may choose teaching strategies as your focus – for example, the use of discussion and practical investigations; or you may choose to consider the relationship between the teacher and the learner – including the roles of teacher and learner, the types of interactions between teacher and learner, the types of interactions between learners, and the nature of learning tasks. Whichever approach you choose, you will need to place your research into the wider context of the teaching and learning situation. Possible topics include:

> Creative teaching and learning in Key Stage 2.

Organising resource-based learning (RBL) for machine-operative training and development.

Higher level teaching assistants (HLTAs): the nature of their pedagogy, knowledge and identity.

The role of bilingual adults in multilingual early years settings.

Here, we have put together studies that overlap with the other four areas and pick up the fifth area that focuses on identity:

Masculinities in the playground: a study of boys' behaviour outside lessons.

Single sex teaching groups in English.

Teachers' literature identities and the impact on their pedagogy.

The initial set of ideas that you present in your research proposal will represent your personal outlook at an early stage of your thinking, with your plans stemming from a set of interests and values. You can consider your topic as being made of several dimensions:

- the aspect of study (learning, assessment, knowledge and pedagogy)
- curriculum, equity and assessment issues
- the type of study
- the sector or context for education.

In approaching these dimensions, your research proposal will need to include an indication of your 'location'. By this we mean your professional position or involvement in the area of study you have chosen, and also the perception of the nature and scope of this study.

**Relevant module materials**

**Learning, curriculum and assessment**

Leach, J. and Moon, B. (eds) (1999) *Learners and Pedagogy*, London, Paul Chapman / Milton Keynes, The Open University.

McCormick, R. and Paechter, C. (eds) (1999) *Learning and Knowledge*, London, Paul Chapman / Milton Keynes, The Open University.

Moon, B. and Murphy, P. (eds) (1999) *Curriculum in Context*, London, Paul Chapman / Milton Keynes, The Open University.

Murphy, P. (ed.) (1999) *Learners, Learning and Assessment*, London, Paul Chapman / Milton Keynes, The Open University.

The Open University (1999) E836 *Learning, curriculum and assessment*, Study Guide, Milton Keynes, The Open University.

**Gender issues in education**

Adler, S., Laney, J. and Packer, M. (1993) *Managing Women: Feminism and Power in Educational Management*, Buckingham, Open University Press.

Arnot, M. and Weiller, K. (eds) (1993) *Feminism and Social Justice in Education: International Perspectives*, London, Falmer Press.

Blair, M. and Holland, J. with Sheldon, S. (eds) (1994) *Identity and Diversity: Gender and the Experience of Education*, Clevedon, Multilingual Matters / Milton Keynes, The Open University.

Browne, N. (2004) *Gender Equity in the Early Years*, Maidenhead, Open University Press.

Davies, B. (2003) *Shards of Glass: Children Reading and Writing Beyond Gendered Identities*, Cresskill, NJ, Hampton Press.

Dawtrey, L., Holland, J. and Hammer, M. with Sheldon, S. (eds) (1994) *Equality and Inequality in Education Policy*, Clevedon, Multilingual Matters / Milton Keynes, The Open University.

Holland, J. and Blair, M. with Sheldon, S. (eds) (1995) *Debates and Issues in Feminist Research and Pedagogy*, Clevedon, Multilingual Matters / Milton Keynes, The Open University.

Murphy, P. and Gipps, C. (eds) (1996) *Equity in the Classroom: Towards Effective Pedagogy for Girls and Boys*, London, Falmer Press.

The Open University (1995) E826 *Gender issues in education: equality and difference*, Study Guide, Milton Keynes, The Open University.

Rowan, L. Knobel, M., Bigum, C. and Lankshear, C. (2002) *Boys, Literacies and Schooling: The Dangerous Territories of Gender-based Literacy Reform*, Buckingham, Open University Press.

Skelton, C. (2001) *Schooling the Boys: Masculinities and Primary Education*, Buckingham, Open University Press.

Weiner, G. (1994) *Feminisms in Education: An Introduction*, Buckingham, Open University Press.

**Primary education**

Alexander, R. (1995) *Versions of Primary Education*, London, Routledge.

Bourne, J. (1994) *Thinking Through Primary Practice*, London, Routledge.

Collins, J. and Cook, D. (eds) (2000) *Understanding Learning: Influences and Outcomes*, London, Paul Chapman.

Collins, J., Insley, K. and Soler, J. (eds) (2000) *Developing Pedagogy: Researching Practice*, London, Paul Chapman.

Craft, A. (1996) *Primary Education: Assessing and Planning Learning*, London, Routledge.

Murphy, P., Selinger, M., Bourne, J. and Briggs, M. (eds) (1995) *Subject Learning in the Primary Curriculum*, London, Routledge.

The Open University (1995) E832 *Primary education: the basic curriculum*, Study Guide, Milton Keynes, The Open University.

The Open University (1996) E833 *Primary education: assessing and planning learning*, Study Guide, Milton Keynes, The Open University.

Soler, J., Craft, A. and Burgess, H. (eds) (2001) *Teacher Development: Exploring our own Practice*, London, Paul Chapman.

## Developing lifelong learning

This area is associated with the Policy, Professionalism, Leadership and Lifelong Learning Research Group, which investigates the interlinked areas of policy-making and implementation, leadership in formal and informal settings, the nature and importance of professionalism in relation to policy and practice, the nature of adult learning and learning in the workplace – lifelong learning.

**Research topics and examples**

There are three major areas associated with developing lifelong learning that are supported within this line:

- perspectives on learning through the life course
- educational policies for lifelong learning
- information and formal learning in the workplace, the community and educational institutions.

These areas are broadly defined, and indeed, they may overlap with each other. They are intended to offer you broad guidance only, and may accommodate different shifts of emphasis that arise out of your own research interests, professional experiences and the context in which you work.

These three areas are concerned with young people (aged 13–19) and adults of different ages (but all post-16) who have a wide range of different experiences, expectations and learning needs. They also address issues in social and cultural environments in which learning or training occurs, including social exclusion and the removal of barriers to learning.

All three areas can be located in various cultural communities, in the UK or elsewhere, depending on the interest, expertise, knowledge and experience of the researcher.

**Definitions of lifelong learning**

Lifelong learning includes: perspectives on adult learning; the nature of change; the social context of learning; the role of experience and critical reflection; formal and informal learning; and the impact of technology on learning and learning organisations.

The term 'lifelong learning' is not easy to define, which makes it a particularly challenging and exciting area for research at EdD level. You will be familiar with many, often conflicting uses of the term 'lifelong learning'. This is partly because the term is applied in many different contexts and for a variety of different purposes.

In a political context, the term 'lifelong learning' is often used as a means to promote the flexibilisation of the workforce. Hence, the promotion of employability, improved knowledge, skills and competencies, which sit alongside a perceived need for global competitiveness.

Lifelong learning can also refer to the desire to promote active citizenship and to combat social exclusion. Or, indeed, to embrace all learning activities that take place across a person's lifespan from 'the cradle to the grave'. It can include all types of formal and informal learning.

Embedded in the notion of lifelong learning, however, is an understanding that a shift has taken place in recent years away from the front-end model of education – that is, institution-led or teacher-led initial education and training – to the individual and his/her responsibility for continuing lifelong learning.

Despite difficulties of definition, lifelong learning has emerged as a powerful policy notion in recent years, not just in the UK but in many countries around the world. There are at least three major themes that are supported through the lifelong learning line, which are outlined below.

**Perspectives on learning**

This theme addresses the 'learning' aspect of lifelong learning, which has received surprisingly little attention in discussions of how to promote more effective and inclusive approaches to learning. The theme will appeal particularly to those who are involved in supporting learners in the workplace, the classroom or the community. Examples of research in the 'learning' aspect of lifelong learning include:

> Formal and informal learning in the workplace
>
> Learning needs and opportunities for the elderly in the context of a local community
>
> The multi-skilling of staff: An examination of changing staff roles and expectations

As a practitioner you will be familiar with at least some of the issues relating to lifelong learning. You will also have gained considerable professional experience working with adults who come from a wide range of social and professional backgrounds. You may want to explore:

- aspects of learning with reference to, for example, motivation, critical reflection, experiential learning, the social context of learning, communities of practice and learning networks
- groups of learners, such as women, young people, the elderly, and ethnic minorities, with reference to access, institutional and social barriers, and exclusion
- notions of change and changing boundaries, formal and informal learning, learning in the workplace, learning through special interest groups, and the impact of technology on learning.

**Educational policy and the area of work**

Here you may consider: the role of governments and agencies; policy strategies and responses, and the 'machinery' put into place for the implementation of policy – statutory, regulatory, advisory; the changing nature of work, whether in terms of job function, skills or hours of work; and how different kinds of employer organisations implement change. This strand also addresses issues in relation to vocational education and training. It can accommodate both the knowledge dimensions of the changes – curricula, pedagogy and assessment – and also the institutions that provide organisational support, such as colleges, HE institutions and private training centres.

Many organisations and commentators attempt to describe the processes and trends of change currently being experienced around the world. Since the 1990s the need to create learning societies has been widely referred to by supra-national organisations, such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). Reference has been made to the need to create learning societies (particularly in the context of increasing globalisation), and to respond to economic demands and advances in information technology. At national level, many governments – including the UK, Australia, the USA, Canada and countries in the European Union – have introduced major changes in the restructuring of educational provision. These changes require 'flexible' labour markets and new forms of training and lifelong learning to support the emerging 'knowledge-based' service industries of the future.

Research in this area is critical to understanding the influences that have led to the construction of public policies in vocational education and training and lifelong learning. Governments in the UK have raised issues such as 'the skills gap', the 'learning divide' and 'widening participation'. The need to give better support to learners has dominated discourses in post-compulsory education. Other policy areas are concerned with workplace learning and other changes that have broadened conventional institutional boundaries. Many of these policies are closely connected with access, participation and equity. There are a number of aspects to this topic area, but perhaps the most significant are:

- the knowledge base of policy development – agendas, strategies and discourses, the assumptions and objectives that feed into the formulation of the content of policy and the emerging critiques of policy

- the agencies involved in the development of policy – state departments, regional offices, executive agencies, consultative groups and interest groups

- the machinery put in place for the implementation of policy – statutory, regulatory, advisory.

Studies in this area could investigate almost any aspect of the policy process – depending, of course, on access and the requirements of confidentiality. In many cases these will have an institutional focus – for example, a government department (or one of its regional offices), a training and enterprise council, an employer's organisation, a trade union, a task group or a qualifications award body.

**Vocational education and training – policy and practice**

This area encompasses the various reforms to employment-related education and training that are currently being implemented. Again, it can accommodate both the knowledge dimensions of the changes – curricula, pedagogy and assessment – and also the institutions that provide the organisational support: schools, colleges, HE institutions and private training centres. One of the central issues here is the degree to which public expectations in the establishment of vocational qualifications have been met by the experiences of individuals taking them. Possible studies include:

- an assessment of a company's policy towards supporting learning

- an investigation of the market responses to, and the use of, vocational qualifications
- a study of perceptions of work experience
- a study of local provision of careers advice
- a study of workplace, work-based or work-related learning.

**Relevant texts**

**Lifelong learning**

Coffield, F, Edward, S. Finlay, I., Hodgson, A., Spours, K. and Steer, R. (2008) *Improving Learning, Skills and Inclusion: The Impact of Policy on Post-compulsory Education*, Abingdon, Routledge.

Edwards, R., Miller, N., Small, N., and Tait, A. (eds) (2002) *Making Policy Work, Supporting Lifelong Learning*, Volume 3, London, RoutledgeFalmer.

Evans, K., Hodkinson, P., Rainbird, H. and Unwin, L. (2006) *Improving Workplace Learning*, Abingdon, Routledge.

Field, J., Gallacher, J. and Ingram, R. (2009) *Researching Transitions in Lifelong Learning*, London, Routledge.

Harrison, R., Reeve, F., Hanson, A. and Clarke, J. (eds) (2001) *Perspectives on Learning, Supporting Lifelong Learning*, Volume 1, London, RoutledgeFalmer.

Mallcoh, M, Cairns, L. Evans, K and Connor, B (2011) *The Sage Handbook of Workplace Learning*. London, Sage.

Reeve, F., Cartwright, M. and Edwards, R. (eds) (2002) *Organizing Learning, Supporting Lifelong Learning*, Volume 2, London, RoutledgeFalmer.

Tett, L. and Fyfe, I. (2010) *Community Education, Learning and Development*, Edinburgh, Dunedin.

**Educational policy and the area of work**

Warhurst, C., Grugulis, I. and Keep, E. (2004) *The Skills that Matter*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.

## Educational leadership and management

This area is associated with the Policy, Professionalism, Leadership and Lifelong Learning Research Group, which investigates areas of work related to educational leadership and leadership development, particularly formal and informal learning, and work-based learning and issues in partnership in educational governance.

**Research topics and examples**

Research proposals in the educational leadership and management area should focus initially on one of the following areas:

- leadership and management in relation to the students' experience
- leading and managing people

- resource management
- shaping and responding to the environment
- strategic leadership and managing change.

All of these areas are conceived broadly, and once you have started on the research you may find that the focus will shift from one area to another. You may also find, as you plan your project proposal, that it draws on more than one of these areas. This is particularly likely in the earlier stages of your research as you engage with the literature in order to deepen your perception of the topic. Changes of emphasis may also result from your analysis of your own findings as you go along.

Possible topics that might be explored in each of these areas are discussed below. Please note that these are examples only; many other potential topics exist in these areas.

**Managing the students' experience**

Research studies in this area focus on the primary task of educational organisations: ensuring that the students achieve worthwhile learning outcomes from their time in schools and colleges, which marry up to their personal and other expectations. It is concerned, therefore, with providing leadership in the fields of the curriculum and pastoral care, with arrangements for monitoring, review and evaluation of practice, and with promoting and sustaining change. For those intending to research in this area in compulsory rather than post-compulsory education, there is a substantial opportunity to draw on concepts and ideas developed in school improvement and school effectiveness research, and room for projects to bring together the school effectiveness and school improvement fields. The focus of such studies, however, must be on the processes involved in generating and sustaining worthwhile experiences rather than on the experiences themselves. Studies might focus on such issues as: the arrangements for curriculum planning, construction and delivery; roles, responsibilities and structures related to the curriculum and pastoral care; the change and implementation processes relating to new or existing programmes for students; or the processes of measuring and assessing unit and sub-unit performance. Each of these is likely to have overlaps with other areas – the last, for example, may spread into questions of added value, which have implications for resource management. However, an initial decision on the primary focus of the study will help you to organise much of your early work. Two recently completed research projects in this area were as follows:

> **The construction of a model of qualitative evaluation to support the development of the policy and practice of measuring student satisfaction in a higher education (HE) institution**
>
> This was an analysis of the methods used for the measurement of student satisfaction in HE in the United Kingdom, and drew on evidence from Europe, Australia and the USA.

### So you think you are a good school! An evaluation of one school's strategies for raising the achievement of those pupils identified as underachieving

This investigated the way in which a school responded to the pressure of school 'league tables', which focused attention in particular on improving the performance of children who were on the 'D/C' borderline, or who had the potential to obtain five or more GCSEs at grade C or above but were not realising their potential.

### Leading and managing people

Studies in this area are concerned with the processes involved in ensuring that staff of the organisation are able to deliver the most effective service to the students that can be achieved. They are likely to focus mainly, but not exclusively, on the internal management of educational organisations. There is a wide range of potential topics in this area. Studies might focus, for example, on staffing policy in an organisation, selection and recruitment policies, on roles and relationships between staff members, on organisational cultures and effectiveness, or on appraisal and staff development. It is an area that can engage with important questions of gender, 'race', and wider equal opportunities issues. It is also likely to involve studies of organisational and professional cultures and sub-cultures. Recent projects in this area include the following:

### Promotion in Irish post-primary schools: precluding factors for women teachers

This was set in the broad context of a society in which women are under-represented in management and leadership positions throughout organisations and business. It examined why women form the majority of teachers in Ireland, even though the decision making in areas of management, curriculum and examination structure continues to be male dominated.

### Appraisal in an FE college: a case study

Appraisal of teaching staff is mandatory in all colleges and, in recent years, there has been a progressive movement towards an emphasis on accountability rather than simply on the development of individual staff. This study by an insider researcher aimed to examine a college's internal processes of policy-making, interpretation, implementation and review.

### Leadership and management of resources

Studies in this area will be concerned with aspects of the acquisition, deployment and evaluation of the use of financial and other resources. It might appear that it is the exclusive preserve of quantitative approaches to research, but this is not necessarily so. The processes of financial planning

and decision making provide as much scope for qualitative research into how people act and respond to situations as an examination of the operation of teams or groups in departments. The belief that research into financial management equals quantitative research rests on assumptions of rational management in rationally functioning organisations, which can be questioned through well-designed qualitative research. Projects in this area could be both internally and externally focused. Possible projects in this area might include:

A study of the resource and quality assurance implications of increasing the autonomy of individual subject areas in a school.

An evaluation of the budgetary process in a college of further education.

**The leadership and management roles in shaping and responding to environmental pressures and opportunities**

This area of work could include all aspects of external–internal intercommunication between the organisation and those outside it. It draws us towards concepts such as stakeholder theory, and into questions of accountability, and would include studies exploring the workings of educational markets or quasi-markets, and relations between schools/colleges and their funding agencies (although these might be incorporated into the previous section). In its focus on the boundary between the organisation and its environment, it leans towards the strategic management focus of the last area rather than towards the internal management processes that have been highlighted in the two previous areas. This area, even more than those already outlined, requires a careful and critical examination of national policy developments and the direction in which educational organisations are being moved. An example of a recent project in this area is as follows:

> **Linked independent junior schools: an investigation into what head teachers perceive to be the influence of autonomy on school effectiveness in terms of shared leadership and management**
>
> A major growth area in independent education has been the provision of organisations catering for the 0–11 age range. Some of these are junior schools that are 'linked' to secondary schools. The cost of providing education in such schools is often greater than in 'free-standing' junior schools, which indicates that secondary schools have created and financed such schools in order to maintain their own student intakes. The question explored in this study was the extent to which the degree of autonomy available to the head teacher was affected by the creation of the 'linked' relationship, especially as the two head teachers worked on different judgements of effectiveness and different understandings of autonomy.

**Strategic leadership and managing change**

Strategic leadership refers to the task of establishing a whole-organisation or whole-unit view of current practice, planning the direction of overall future developments, and setting them in motion. It is essentially concerned with synthesis of the disparate elements which have been outlined in the previous four sections. It is not undertaken only at senior management level: anyone

with managerial responsibility should have some sense of strategic direction for their work, but it is less likely to be constrained by hierarchical requirements when undertaken at senior staff level. Projects proposed in this area are likely to be concerned with integrating the functional areas of leadership and management through effective development planning, and in transforming the plan into practice. They will need to be concerned with both the collection and transformation of data into plans, and the tasks involved in making the plan operational. This is an area on which much has been written, but little empirical research has been done. An example of a recent study in this area follows:

> **Managing universities in transition: moving from traditional classroom-based delivery to blended and distance learning approaches**
>
> This thesis reported on a research study undertaken to develop an understanding of the extent to which universities in the UK were embracing the ideas of distance and blended learning, and how they were changing their management and planning processes to facilitate this. The contribution of this thesis was to develop a framework for UK universities wanting to embrace blended learning to anticipate and manage strategic stumbling blocks.

What will be important will be to identify and address a topic or question in leadership and management practice that will benefit from an extended and in-depth study that can generate practical conclusions. It should also be both relevant to your professional development and to the development of the organisation where you undertake it.

**Relevant module materials**

Bottery, M. (2004) *The Challenges of Educational Leadership*, London, Sage.

Bush, T. (2003) *Theories of Educational Leadership and Management* (3rd edn), London, Sage.

Coleman, M. and Earley, P. (eds) (2005) *Leadership and Management in Education: Cultures, Change and Context*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Crawford, M. (2009) *Getting to the Heart of Leadership*, London, Sage.

Gronn, P. (1999) *The Making of Educational Leaders*, London, Cassells and Continuum.

Gunter, H. M. (2006) *Leaders and Leadership in Education*, London, Paul Chapman.

Harris, A. (2008) *Distributed Leadership in Schools: Developing the Leaders of Tomorrow*, London, Routledge and Falmer Press.

Hoyle, E. and Wallace, M. (2005) *Educational Leadership: Ambiguity, Professionals and Managerialism*, London, Sage.

Kydd, L., Anderson, L. and Newton, W. (eds) (2003) *Leading People and Teams in Education*, London, Paul Chapman. (E849 Reader)

The Open University (2005) *Researching Educational Leadership and Management*, Milton Keynes, The Open University. (E859 Reader)

Preedy, M., Glatter, R. and Wise, C. (eds) (2003) *Strategic Leadership and Educational Improvement*, London, Paul Chapman. (E849 Reader)

Woods, P. A. (2005) *Democratic Leadership in Education*, London, Paul Chapman.

# Language and Literacies Cluster

## Language and literacy

This Cluster brings together researchers in the areas of language and literacy as well as language learning and teaching.

We are interested in any project that investigates texts, discourses or practices in relation to children's or adults' learning and teaching, whether in formal or informal contexts, and in any global location. We particularly welcome projects that employ a socio-cultural research approach (including linguistic methods of analysis) to investigating the contribution of spoken, written and computer-mediated dialogues to teaching and learning in home, school, HE and workplace settings. Language and literacy also covers areas overlapping with research in Language Learning and Teaching (see below).

### Research topics

We welcome proposals related to language and literacy in any of the following contexts in any global location:

- education at school level
- higher education
- educational, professional and workplace settings
- learning in everyday informal settings
- online learning.

We expect that proposals may overlap a number of areas.

### Talk and the processes of teaching and learning

The nature of talk in educational settings; socio-cultural approaches to analysing language and education; uses of English for education in multilingual contexts; supporting bilingual learners in multilingual contexts; issues in the assessment of oral language; gender and language in educational settings; accent and dialect.

### Discourse and genre

Discourse and identity in educational contexts; genres in different disciplinary areas; discourses underpinning teaching approaches and teaching materials; competing discourses in educational contexts; discourses about standard and non-standard language.

### Nature and purposes of texts

The analysis of texts, including oral texts, learning materials, texts produced by students, online and multimodal texts; issues in the production, circulation and interpretation of educational texts; assessment of student writing.

### Language and literacy practices

The uses and meanings of spoken language and literacy in educational institutions, homes and communities, and the implications of these for students and teachers; contrasts between students' language and literacy practices in and outside school; students' multilingual language and literacy practices and their implications for education; online literacy practices and the use of mobile phones.

### Multimodal communication

The ways different semiotic modes – words, images, sound effects, moving images, colour – combine to create meanings in texts. The study of multimodality involves looking at these elements both separately and in combination, for instance in relation to a specific area of communication such as film, the internet and magazines.

### Language and literacy policies

Issues connected with language and literacy policies at school, local, regional, national and international levels.


**Examples of research topics**

Previous studies have focused on a wide variety of topics, for instance:

- young children's acquisition of biliteracy in multilingual homes
- students' negotiation of the discourse of Law School
- the role of classroom assistants in supporting children's literacy development
- the experience of non-traditional teacher-training students required to teach Standard English
- discourses of learning, knowledge and identity in business studies
- email literacy practices in an HE college
- talk and learning in Kenyan primary school classrooms

- boys and literacy in the early years classrooms
- a comparison of literacy practices across the primary–secondary school transfer
- the development in five to seven year olds of an individual writing voice in the context of the National Literacy Strategy in the UK
- the role of critical literacy in work with 'hard-to-reach' adult learners.

In order to give you an idea of how research topics are linked with initial specific research questions (which may then be further developed and refined in the course of the research), a number of other potential examples are briefly described below.

### A study of students' use of computer-mediated communication inside and outside the curriculum, and the implications of this for pedagogic practice

This study could focus on the communicative practices of a particular group of students. It would aim to document and explore their use of computer-mediated communication (CMC) both in and outside the curriculum, and to draw out the implications of any differences between these for the teacher's design of learning tasks.

### A study of the inter-textual elements of 12-year-old boys' and girls' narrative writing in school

The study could focus on the narrative writing of a small group of 12-year-old boys and girls over an extended period of time, with a view to tracing the inter-textual elements in, and influences on, their writing.

### A study of a small group of young children in their transition from home to school, with special reference to the continuities and discontinuities between the literacy practices of the home and the literacy practices in the school

This research would be based on an extended ethnographic study, for instance a modified and more modest version of Shirley Brice Heath's seminal study reported in *Ways with Words* (1983), but in a very different time and place. You would need to gain access to the homes of the families being studied, and also to the children's school, in order to carry out a systematic study of literacy practices.

### A study of the effects of students' structured experience of oral argument on their development of written argument

This study would need to start with an exploration of the relevant features of argumentative writing, and their possible relation to oral argument, in the research context. The study could then focus on two similar classes of students who are both given the same argumentative

writing task. One class would be asked simply to do the task, but the other would be first given structured small group activities to provide them with practice in oral argument. The sets of writing from the two classes would then be analysed and compared in terms of the students' effective use of different features of written argument, and connections examined between the features of oral argument in the transcribed recordings, and the same students' use of written argument. Conclusions would be drawn about the effects, if any, of the experience of oral argument on the students' writing, and about the relationship between spoken and written genres.

**Relevant module materials**

Burns, A. and Coffin, C. (eds) (2001) *Analysing English in a Global Context*, London, Routledge.

Butt, D., Fahey, R., Feez, S., Spinks, S. and Yallop, C. (2000) *Using Functional Grammar: An Explorer's Guide* (2nd edn), Sydney, NCELTR, Macquarie University.

Candlin, C. N. and Mercer, N. (eds) (2001) *English Language Teaching in its Social Context*, London, Routledge.

Coffin, C., Lillis, T. and O'Halloran, K. (eds) (2009) *Applied Linguistics Methods: A Reader*, London, Routledge.

Cook, G. and North, S. P. (eds) (2009) *Applied Linguistics in Action: A Reader*, London, Routledge.

Goodman, S., Lillis, T., Maybin, J., Mercer, N. (eds) (2002) *Language, Literacy and Education: A Reader*, Stoke-on-Trent, Trentham.

Hall, D. R. and Hewings, A. (eds) (2001) *Innovation in English Language Teaching*, London, Routledge.

Hall, J.K. (2012) *Teaching and Researching Language and Culture* (2nd edn), Harlow, Pearson Longman.

Heath, S. B. (1983) *Ways with Words: Language, Life and Work in Communities and Classrooms*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Lillis, T. and McKinney, C. (2002) *Analyzing Language in Context: A Student Workbook*, Stoke-on-Trent, Trentham.

Mercer, N. M. (2000) *Words and Minds*, London, Routledge.

The Open University (2001) E841 *Teaching English to speakers of other languages world wide*, Study Guide, Milton Keynes, The Open University.

The Open University (2002) E844 *Language and literacy in a changing world*, Study Guide, Milton Keynes, The Open University.

The Open University (2009) E854 *Investigating language in action*, Study Guide, Milton Keynes, The Open University.

The Open University (2012) E852 *Language, Literacy and Learning in the Contemporary World*, Study Guide (online), Milton Keynes, The Open University.

## Language learning and teaching

Researchers in our area apply a range of innovative methods to advance our knowledge of the learning and teaching of languages, both online and offline.

### Research topics

We welcome research proposals related to language learning and teaching in the following contexts:

schools, colleges or higher education

professional and workplace settings

virtual learning environments

informal and independent learning settings.

We are keen to support research related to the topics listed below, and accept that proposals may link more than one topic.

### Potential research topics

- application of learning theories to language learning
- second language acquisition (SLA): context; methodological, ethical and epistemological concerns; cognitive, social, affective, linguistic, cultural and critical dimensions
- contexts of learning (e.g. classroom, distance, online, independent, telecollaborative, mobile, residence abroad, tandem)
- learner autonomy, collaborative learning, independent language learning
- individual variation (e.g. affective, cognitive and biographical factors)
- applications of technology
- e-literacies and usability of online resources for language learning
- learner strategies, styles and beliefs, and their modification (strategy training)
- task design
- online interaction
- multi-modality
- learner beliefs and online language tuition
- language teacher development
- history of second language teaching
- intercultural communication in classroom, online, distance and other settings
- language learning or teaching and identity.

Your initial research proposal should address one or more issues related to these topics and will probably be related to your professional concerns. You should consider the particular characteristics of the learner group you hope to study, the target language(s) involved, the specific issue(s) that interest(s) you, the theoretical framework in which the study could be undertaken, and the most appropriate and practical research design.

**Examples of research topics**

**Language learning in multimodal online environments**

In recent years, online media have started to offer us new tools for interaction between learners and between learners and teachers. These tools range from asynchronous applications such as email to real-time audiographic or video conferencing. Although many virtual learning environments now offer modes that are similar to those used in the conventional face-to-face classroom (writing, speaking and images), we cannot assume that they work in the same way. Speaking to other students via an internet conference is, for example, a very different experience from talking to someone face-to-face. How should this be reflected in the training of tutors or in the design of tasks for online environments? What kind of strategies do learners and teachers develop in order to cope with the affordances of the environment?

**Language learning strategies**

There has been plenty of interest in the area of language learning strategies over recent years. Research studies have produced conflicting results about the effectiveness of strategy development or 'training' and are often based on experimental programmes with full-time students in schools or universities. As yet there is no agreement on a variety of issues such as which strategies are most useful at which level, or whether strategy use increases or decreases with knowledge of the language or experience of language learning. Is it more effective to develop learners' capacity to manage their own learning and choose appropriate strategies to suit their purposes rather than train them in the use of specific reading or vocabulary recall strategies, for example?

**Language learning strategies during residence abroad**

Institutions sending students for a compulsory period of residence abroad think they know what the students should get out of it, and there is extensive research on the likely outcomes – although it is hard to synthesise and generalise, since individual differences are significant, many studies are flawed, and comparisons are difficult when the age, proficiency level and immersion context of learners vary widely. But what do students actually think they should gain from the experience, and how does their behaviour reflect their aims and their beliefs?

**Distance and blended language learning and teaching**

An increasing number of institutions across educational sectors are turning to distance and blended forms of learning and teaching to increase participation, enhance access or for other reasons. What impact does this have on teachers or on learner motivation? How are the different components integrated in blended programmes? What kinds of 'blend' work best in different contexts? How do learners respond? Sound and detailed studies of the experience of teachers and learners are needed for the future development of these programmes and in order to provide appropriate support for the learners and teachers who participate in them.

**Researching tandem learning**

Tandem learning is an approach to language learning which draws on theories of learner autonomy and is based on cross-cultural collaborative partnerships. It is popular among students – who undertake it on a voluntary basis – and seems highly effective in helping them to develop both second language proficiency and intercultural awareness. Research into tandem learning might usefully explore such dimensions as: the provision and nature of scaffolding; the roles of positive and negative evidence in second language acquisition; the negotiation of meaning in cross-linguistic encounters, strategies for error correction, the relationship between input and intake, the role of collaboration in developing intercultural competence.

**Language and intercultural competence**

In an increasingly globalised world and in societies that are multi-cultural, the ability to communicate across cultures has gained significant importance over the last two decades, thus highlighting the need for intercultural competence among a wide range of people. Intercultural communication is not confined to one particular academic subject area but draws on a number of disciplines, among them language learning and teaching. Different frameworks and models have been developed, for example Bennett (1986) and most influential in a European context, Byram (1997), alongside various competence standards and criteria.

Investigations of intercultural competence among language learners could focus on any particular group of language learners in any learning setting, aiming to answer questions in relation to the acquisition and measurement of intercultural competence and how the various frameworks and theories of intercultural competence are put into practice by teachers, in textbooks or in other materials.

**Relevant preparatory reading**

Alred, G, Byram, M. and Fleming, M. (eds) (2003) *Intercultural Experience and Education*, Clevedon, Multilingual Matters.

Arnold, J. (1999) *Affect in Language Learning*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Beatty, K. (2003) *Teaching and Researching Computer-Assisted Language Learning*, Harlow, Longman.

Benson, P. (2001) *Teaching and Researching Autonomy in Language Learning*, Harlow, Longman.

Benson, P. and Reinders, H. (eds) (2011) *Beyond the language classroom*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.

Block, D. (2003) *The Social Turn in Second Language Acquisition*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press.

Brown, J. D. and Rodgers, T. (2002) *Doing Second Language Research*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Byram, M. (2008) *From foreign language education to education for intercultural citizenship*, Clevedon, Multilingual Matters.

Cook, V. (2001) *Second Language Learning and Language Teaching* (3rd edn), London, Arnold.

Deardoff, D. K. (ed) (2009) *The SAGE handbook of intercultural competence*, Thousand Oaks, CA, SAGE publications.

Dörnyei, Z. (2001) *Teaching and Researching Motivation*, Harlow, Longman.

Dörnyei, Z. and Ushioda, E. (eds) (2009) *Motivation, Language Identity and the L2 Self*, Bristol, Multilingual Matters.

Ellis, R. (1994) *The Study of Second Language Acquisition*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Ellis, R. (2003) *Task-based Language Learning and Teaching*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Felix, U. (2003) *Language Learning Online: Towards Best Practice*, Lisse, Swets and Zeitlinger.

Feng, A., Byram, M. and Fleming, M. (eds) (2009) *Becoming interculturally competent through education and training*, Bristol, Multilingual Matters.

Holmberg, B., Shelley, M. and White, C. (2005) *Distance education and languages: evolution and change*, Clevedon, Multilingual Matters.

Hurd, S. and Lewis, T. (eds) (2008) *Language Learning Strategies in Independent Settings*, Clevedon, Multilingual Matters.

Kramsch, C. (1998) *Language and culture*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Kramsch, C. (ed.) (2004) *Language Acquisition and Language Socialization: Ecological Perspectives*, London, Continuum.

Lamy, M. N. and Hampel, R. (2007) *Online Communication in Language Learning and Teaching*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.

Lantolf, J. P. and Thorne, S. L. (2006) *Sociocultural Theory and the Genesis of Second Language Development*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Levy, M. and Stockwell, G. (2006) *CALL Dimensions: Options and Issues in Computer-Assisted Language Learning*, Mahwah, NJ, Lawrence Erlbaum.

Lewis, T. and Walker, L. (2003) *Autonomous Language Learning in Tandem*, Sheffield, Academy Electronic.

Lo Bianco, J., Liddicoat, A. and Crozet, C. (1999) *Striving for the Third Place: Intercultural Competence through Language Education*, Melbourne, Language Australia.

Mitchell, R. and Myles, F. (2004) *Second Language Learning Theories* (2nd edn), London, Arnold.

Norton, B. (2000) *Identity and Language Learning: Gender, Ethnicity and Educational Change*, London, Longman.

O'Dowd, R. (ed.) (2007) *Online Intercultural Exchange: An Introduction for Foreign Language Teachers*, Clevedon, Multilingual Matters.

Oxford, R. (1989) *Language Learning Strategies: What Every Teacher Should Know*, New York, HarperCollins.

Parret, H. (1976) *History of Linguistic Thought and Contemporary Linguistics*, New York, Walter de Gruyter.

Richards, K. (2003) *Qualitative Inquiry in TESOL*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.

Samuda, V. and Bygate, M. (2008) *Tasks in Second Language Learning,* Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan

Scovel, T. (2001) *Learning New Languages: A Guide to Second Language Acquisition*. Boston, Mass., Heinle and Heinle.

Skehan, P. (1998) *A Cognitive Approach to Language Learning*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Thomas, M., Reinders, H. and Warschauer, M. (eds) (2013) *Contemporary Computer-Assisted Language Learning*, Bloomsbury.

White, C. (2004) *Language Learning in Distance Education*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

# Technology Enhanced Learning Cluster

## Technology enhanced learning

This area expands on the topics explored in the MA in Online and Distance Learning in the Institute of Educational Technology. The focus for the MA is in what has become commonly known as online, networked and e-learning. The concern with the digital networked environment is combined with an interest in new technologies and developments in education, as they happen, which combines our interest in technologies with experience of the new technologies at first hand.

The programme focuses on a variety of post-compulsory educational contexts, including lecturers, teachers, trainers, support staff, educational technologists, media specialists, learning systems managers, librarians, learning centre advisory staff, etc., from a range of knowledge domains such as education, health care, voluntary organisations and the public and private sector.

**Research topics**

Students who have studied modules in the MA in Open and Distance Education are encouraged to build on projects they have completed in their prior study. Students who enter from another MA degree in Education will need to ensure that their research topic builds on their own prior experience and relates to the following core themes:

- design and delivery of online and distance education
- evaluation of online and distance education
- theoretical approaches to online and distance education
- technologies for online and distance education.

**Examples of research topics**

It will be important for you to keep in mind that your study must be research based and an evaluation or design will not necessarily be sufficient on its own. In the sections below we relate possible research interests with particular modules from the MA in Open and Distance Education, but we would encourage applicants to link across different topic areas and most importantly to develop a research area that has a strong interest for you. Below we give one example of a study that **does not** clearly fit into the themes we have provided.

### An investigation of the emotions and the use of technologies in teaching and learning

The study will situate itself in a particular context but this could be at any level of education. It will explore the roles that emotions, including motivation, play in the ways in which students use and adapt technologies to meet their own educational or social goals, and the ways in which they integrate their use of technologies in their everyday life with their use for formal education. The study is also interested in how technology can mediate the boundaries between formal and informal learning.

### Design and delivery of online and distance education

This area will cover the design and implementation of open and online distance learning. It builds on the experience that applicants from the MA in Open and Distance Education have gained of a number of newer, innovative technologies, including wikis, blogs and social bookmarking. Research in this theme would concentrate on implications for module design that arise from exploration of the students' experience of these newer technologies. Possible research topics might include:

- the kinds of learner support appropriate in online and distance learning
- the kinds of media a designer might choose to meet their objectives and how might this relate to their module design
- creating and testing an application or some module materials. The key to this work would be to inform the design and testing with strong theoretical and methodological underpinnings
- exploring the implications for module designs that arise from the deployment of particular new technologies, for example, wikis, blogs, learning objects, social bookmarking and e-portfolios.

### Evaluation of online and distance education

This section focuses on the evaluation of online and distance learning. Evaluation, would include evaluation of specific technologies for learning or larger-scale policy evaluation and evaluation of the student's and tutor's experience of online and distance education. Possible research topics might include:

- an evaluation of a particular application or technological tool such as blogging, podcasting or e-portfolios

- an evaluation of a policy initiative, for example in a school, university or training organisation introducing new technologies
- taking a particular approach to evaluation, either related to technology, for example HCI, or related to use, for example in relation to accessibility.

**Theoretical approaches to online and distance education**

This would cover background theoretical approaches and assumptions that inform the design and practice of online and distance education. The theme relates to all the modules in the MA in Online and Distance Education and draws out the theoretical standpoints that inform various technological and organisational developments, including changes in the practice of online and distance education. It relates most strongly to distance and flexible learning and socio-cultural and social practice theories of learning and change. Possible research topics would include:

- building on work on academic literacies and online learning, examining the ways electronic texts are used to construct the experience of university study in the absence of physical buildings and face-to-face interaction. This would also link to studies examining:
  - multi-modality in relation to online learning
  - examining socio-cultural and social practice approaches to online learning
  - exploring the development and use of theoretical paradigms such as computer supported collaborative learning (CSCL), activity theory or communities of practice in online and distance education.

**Technologies for online and distance education**

The area covered under this heading is the range of technologies that can be applied to online and distance education. Some of the modules in the MA in Online and Distance Education are constructed from learning objects. These are stand-alone, independent activities and they can have a number of benefits in module production including flexibility, reuse and ease of updating. It is less clear how they impact on learners. The MA in Open and Distance Education also employs a number of newer, innovative technologies, including wikis, blogs and social bookmarking. Research could explore the students' experience of these technologies including e-portfolios and mobile technologies. Possible research topics include:

- a study of e-learning innovators and innovations in an organisation, for example the use of learning objects
- an examination of the emergent study patterns that arise with the use of learning objects
- the role of emergent technologies in the development of virtual communities
- developing profiles of mobile learners to inform educators or technologists
- an investigation of e-portfolio technologies and how they may provide links from the world of education with the world of work.

**Contexts for online and distance education**

This theme covers the wider landscape in which online and distance education is developed. It covers the relationship between online and distance education and policy, either institutional or governmental policy or policy at the level of multinational and international agencies. This theme also relates to corporate online and distance education and the place of online and distance education in the knowledge-based economy. At a social level, this theme would encompass research into the nature of networked society and online and distance education. Possible research topics include:

- networked learning in a particular formal or informal learning context, for example in nurse education or the development of school leaders

- exploring the demands for an educated workforce in the knowledge-based economy and the ways in which new digital technologies can be applied to meet those demands

- the creation, distribution and exchange of learning and new technologies. You may wish to explore the use of standards, metadata, XML or Open Source, or you may wish to explore issues such as the re-use or storage in repositories of learning objects.

**Relevant materials**

Bates, A. W. (2005) *Technology, E-Learning and Distance Education* (2nd edn), London, Routledge.

Britain, S. (2004) *A Review of Learning Design: Concept, Specification and Tools*, JISC E-Learning Pedagogy Programme. Available online at http://www.jisc.ac.uk/uploaded_documents/ACF1ABB.doc (accessed 31 July 2007).

Castells, M. (2001) *The Internet Galaxy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Conole, G. and Dyke, M. (2004) 'What are the affordances of information and communication technologies?', *ALT-J*, vol. 12, no. 2, pp. 113–24.

Disability Rights Commission (2004) *The Web: Access and Inclusion for Disabled People: A Formal Investigation Conducted by the Disability Rights Commission*, London, The Stationery Office. Available online at http://www.drc-gb.org/PDF/2.pdf (accessed 31 July 2007).

Godwin-Jones, R. (2005) 'Skype and podcasting: disruptive technologies for language learning', *Language Learning and Technology*, vol. 9, no. 3, pp. 9–12. Available online at http://llt.msu.edu/vol9num3/pdf/vol9num3.pdf (accessed 31 July 2007).

Goodfellow, R. and Lea, M. (2005) 'Supporting writing for assessment in a global online environment', *Journal of Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, vol. 30, no. 3, pp. 261–71.

Goodfellow, R. (2004) 'Online literacies and learning – operational, cultural and critical dimensions', *Language and Education*, vol. 18, no. 5, pp. 379–99.

Joinson, A. N. (2003) *Understanding the Psychology of Internet Behaviour: Virtual Worlds*, Real Lives, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.

Kukulska-Hulme, A. and Traxler, J. (2005) *Mobile Learning: A Handbook for Educators and Trainers*, London, Routledge.

Laurillard, D. (2002) *Rethinking University Teaching. A Conversational Framework for the Effective Use of Learning Technologies* (2nd edn), RoutledgeFalmer, London.

Lea, M. and Nicoll, K. (eds) (2001) *Distributed Learning: Social and Cultural Approaches to Practice*, London, Routledge. (H805 Reader)

Lea, M. (2004) 'The new literacy studies, ICTs and learning in higher education' in Snyder, I. and Beavis, C. (eds) *Doing Literacy Online: Teaching, Learning and Playing in an Electronic World*, New Jersey, Hampton Press.

Mason, R. (1998) *Globalising Education: Trends and Applications*, London, Routledge.

McConnell, D. (2000) *Implementing Computer-Supported Cooperative Learning* (2nd edn), London, Kogan Page.

Paton, R. and Taylor. S. (2002) 'Corporate universities: between higher education and the workplace' in Williams, G. (ed.) *The Enterprising University*, Buckingham, Society for Research into Higher Education / Open University Press.

Richardson, J. T. E. (2000) *Researching Student Learning: Approaches to Studying in Campus-based and Distance Education*, Buckingham, Society for Research into Higher Education / Open University Press.

Rumble, G. (2001) 'The costs and costing of networked learning', *JALN*, vol. 5, no. 2, September.

Simpson, O. (2002) *Supporting Students in Online, Open and Distance Learning* (2nd edn), London, Kogan Page.

Steeples, C. and Jones, C. (2002) *Networked Learning: Perspectives and Issues*, London, Springer-Verlag.

Weller, M. (2002) *Delivering Learning on the Net*, Maidstone, Kogan Page.

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

# Section 3 Example research proposals
## Example project 1

### Project title

An investigation into the factors that attract and retain young students at The Open University.

### Focus of the research

As part of my MA, I investigated the factors affecting the participation and retention of first-year university students. Most studies about higher education (HE) participation and retention focus on young applicants to full time study but there is little information about the motivations of young

students participating in part time distance learning modules. Over the last ten years, the proportion of 18–20 year olds studying at the Open University has risen from 3.6% to 5%. This led me to question what motivates this particular group of students to choose the OU and what influences their decision to complete or withdraw from the module. Are their experiences and motivations substantially different from students at full time institutions?

A strong feature of recent research in higher education has been the concept of barriers to participation. Reay et al. (2001) claim that social class and race inequalities persist despite Government efforts to widen access while Hodgson and Spours attribute the 'lack of participation of young people from working class backgrounds' to 'a marketized and class-based approach to higher education during the 1990s.' (Hayton and Paczuska, 2002, p. ix). A recent survey found that cost and fear of debt are now the major deterrents for people who apply to but do not enter higher education (Futuretrack, IER, 2009) – findings which have implications for the funding of student financial support and the planned review of student fees.

Gorard et al. (2006) point out that the concept of barriers is an attractive one to policy makers as it implies that action can be taken to remove the barriers and solve the problem of non participation; although, as Field notes, learners are now 'largely responsible for directing their learning themselves' (Dohmen, quoted in Field, 2000, p. 256). Moreover, McGivney et al. state that 'reluctance to engage in education may have more to do with attitudes, perceptions and expectations than with any practical barriers.' (McGivney et al., 1993, p. 21).

Gorard et al. develop this idea, stating that 'the key social determinants predicting lifelong participation in learning' are long term and 'involve time, place, gender, family and initial schooling.' (Gorard et al., 2006, p. 5). Such findings, they claim, 'emphasise the importance of reviewing evidence on participation through the "lifecourse" of each individual, and compromises the analytic utility of the "barriers" metaphor.' (Gorard et al., 2006, p. 5). Similarly, Fuller et al. reject the notion of 'readily identifiable barriers' and claim instead that 'patterns of participation and non participation in HE are strongly embedded in and explained by people's interwoven social, historical and biographical circumstances and experience.' (Fuller et al., 2008, p. 6).

In investigating student motivations for participation in higher education, Connor concludes that the main motivations for recent entrants to HE were 'their interest in studying a particular subject and their desire to acquire a higher qualification for a specific job or career.' (Connor, 2001, p. 211). These findings will be compared to those of OU students in the proposed study.

Access to clear, detailed and accurate information is seen as important for students faced with HE choices, particularly when Moogan et al. report that 72% of the main sample were 'afraid of making the wrong decision'. (Moogan et al., 1999, p. 222). The research study will investigate whether OU students have the same perception of risk in choosing to take an open entry module and whether this relates to their study aim in committing to a qualification or a single module. Both studies highlight the importance of teachers and parents in the decision making process and the influence of family and friends will also be examined as part of the proposed study.

Cook and Leckey (1999) highlight the problems some students face in the transition from school to university, stating that 'many entrants to higher education will not have been adequately prepared for the types of learning and studying they will encounter' (Cook and Leckey, 1999, p. 169). They investigate student study methods, preferred learning styles and student expectations of university life compared to their actual experience and conclude that students find it difficult to adapt to being autonomous learners and will need additional learning support in their first year. (See also Fazey and Fazey, 2001). This may or may not be a problem that is exacerbated for part time distance learners but it will be investigated as part of the research study.

Many studies on the issue of student retention have been published in the UK in recent years but 'little consensus exists in the literature (…) regarding which combination of elements is paramount' (Bennett, 2003, p. 128). The research on retention has largely focussed on three areas: student characteristics, institutional characteristics, and experiential factors. Harrison claims, for example, that student withdrawal is linked to 'poor preparation, poor or passive decision-making and difficulties with socialisation or adapting to the student lifestyle.' (Harrison, 2006, p. 388) while Thomas (2002) believes that it is universities that have a responsibility to foster an environment which supports students and consequently aids retention. One of the few conclusions shared by the majority of the studies is that students are most in danger of withdrawing in the first year of study (Yorke, 2000; Rickinson and Rutherford, 1995) and 'the reasons for student drop out are complex and multidimensional' (Bennett, 2003, p. 128).

Recognising this, Assiter and Gibbs take a different approach in their study. Rather than investigating reasons for student withdrawal, they focus instead on the 'the experience and biography of those experiencing problems' (Assiter and Gibbs, 2007, p. 82). They conclude that issues like debt, illness, wrong choice of module or lack of social support networks may all be factors in student withdrawal but 'it is the way that these factors interact in a complex fashion with the student's biography (..) and their identity that matters' (Assiter and Gibbs, 2007, p. 90). In this, they adopt a similar approach to Fuller et al. (2008) and Johnston and Heath (2007) and it is one I also plan to use in the proposed study.

## Research questions

Why do young students choose to study at the Open University?

- What are the key factors that influenced their decision?
- Were these mainly external factors (e.g. Government policy on student fees, open entry policy) or internal (e.g. personal motivation)?
- What role did their 'networks of intimacy' have in the decision making process?
- To what extent did their decision to come to the OU relate to their personal and educational biography to date?
- What is their main study aim in coming to the OU? (Qualification? One-off module?)

What factors influence whether or not a young student completes their OU module?

- Did the experience of studying at the OU match their expectations?

- Did they experience any problems with their studies? If so, how did they tackle these?

- What were their main sources of support when they were studying?

- What factors influenced their decision to complete or not complete their module?

- What are their plans for education/employment after the end of their module?

- Are there differences in the motivations and retention of students studying Arts modules compared to Science modules?

## Research strategy

Since the main focus of the research is student motivation, I intend to undertake a qualitative study of 20 students across the life of their module. This will be supplemented by quantitative information from existing OU surveys/databases and a questionnaire.

The model for the qualitative study is the interpretivist approach used by Fuller et al. (2008) and Assiter and Gibbs (2007) which seeks to explore people's behaviour, attitudes and experiences, although as Denscombe points out, it is important that the data collected should be 'structured as little as possible by the researcher's own prior assumptions'. (E891 Study Guide, p. 84)

**Year 1** will focus on the literature review and a pilot study in one OU region with 4–6 registered students in the target age group (undergraduate 18–20yr) who are new to higher education and are studying a 60 credit point Level 1 module in the Arts or Science Faculty – either AA100 (The Arts Past and Present) or S104 (Exploring Science).

Part 1 of the pilot study will be individual semi-structured interviews prior to module start. (By interviewing the students before module start, I hope to avoid the dangers of post hoc rationalisation (Assiter and Gibbs, 2007). The interviews would focus on the students' motivations in choosing the Open University, their decision-making process and influences on their choice from among their 'networks of intimacy' (Heath and Cleaver, 2003). Open comments and quantitative information from the Modules Survey, Withdrawal Survey and CIRCE will be used to help structure the questions. The use of a semi-structured interview allows the inclusion of specific questions arising from the research focus and provides a clearer framework for analysing the data afterwards. It also gives the students the opportunity to talk more freely about their own personal and educational history.

Interviews will be audio recorded and supplemented by field notes to document non-verbal communication. The notes and recordings will be analysed, sub-divided into categories and arranged thematically for potential inclusion in the questionnaire.

Part 2 of the pilot study will be a questionnaire in December to all students from the target group in two OU regions who are studying either AA100 or S104. This will focus on students' personal and educational histories, covering independent variables such as academic qualifications, school experience and support networks. The results of the questionnaire will be compared to student performance, assessed through Tutor Marked Assignment (TMA) scores. This will give an indication of how well students from different backgrounds perform on OU modules.

In January, follow-up interviews will take place with the 4–6 students interviewed in September/October to discuss their learning experiences to date. Responses will be analysed, categorised and compared to the original interviews to identify themes for follow up in Year 2/3.

**Year 2** will study 20 students for the whole length of their module from two contrasting (demographically) OU regions. It could be argued that the self-selected sample group might be biased in favour of more motivated students so the results of the questionnaire sent to all students studying AA100 and S104 will act as a form of 'control' group.

Semi-structured interviews will take place in September/October 2011 with follow up interviews in March and after the end of the module in July/ August (or earlier for any students who withdraw). Students will also have access to a designated mailbox or Facebook area for posting comments related to the study.

In December, questionnaires will go out to all students in the target group in the ten English OU regions.[1] These will be analysed between January and May and compared later with the results of the OU Modules Survey published in December 2012. The inclusion of all students studying AA100 and S104 in the questionnaire will enable me to analyse the data by module, age, socio-economic grouping, gender and ethnicity and make comparisons with the main research group. I will also be able to identify students with 2+ 'A' levels who would more closely parallel school leavers entering traditional higher education institutions and compare their responses to those in the studies from the literature review. During August, I will analyse the results of any withdrawal surveys returned by those in the larger study group.

**Year 3** will involve detailed data analysis from the questionnaire, interviews, survey information and CIRCE. I would use an ANOVA test to assess the significance of the effect of students' backgrounds (assessed by the questionnaire) and performance (assessed by TMA scores) on their satisfaction with the module (assessed by the Modules Survey). A separate analysis will be undertaken for students who withdraw from the module to assess whether there is a significant difference in the profiles of students who complete and those who withdraw.

## Anticipated problems

[1]  Nation regions are excluded from the study because there are a number of differences in student support arrangements, including financial support, which may impact on the validity of the findings.

- There is a lower than average response rate from younger students to institutional surveys and the potential small sample size may have an impact on the validity of the finding.

- Young students may be reluctant to participate in a study lasting almost a year. I may need to reduce the amount of contact time with the interview group.

- Some students may not want to meet before module start, particularly if it requires additional expense in travelling for a face-to-face meeting.

- Face-to-face interviews may be difficult to arrange, particularly if students live a long way from the regional centre. Interviews after tutorials may be possible. Phone interviews would be an alternative.

- There is a pilot project taking place with AA100 students in the East Midlands region, as part of the Student Support Review, where students will be receiving enhanced learning support. I will need to exclude these students from the main study as their experiences are likely to be substantially different from AA100 students in other regions and this would have an impact on the validity of the findings.

- I will need to be aware of other retention activities being undertaken within Student Services as this may impact on the behaviour of students in the research study.

- The total number of students aged 18–20 is still relatively small and it may be difficult to recruit sufficient volunteers for the research, particularly if the study is restricted to two modules.

## Ethical issues

As the research involves the collection of information from students, I will need to:

- apply to the Student Research Project Panel at the OU for authorisation to contact students

- apply for authorisation from the Human Participants and Materials Ethics Committee

- inform the OU Data Protection Officer about the research and comply with data protection guidance

- establish a research ethics protocol, e.g. how to gain informed consent, how the data will be collected and stored, how to debrief participants

- use pseudonyms to protect the identity of the students and anonymise the data

- obtain agreement from the participants to record and use their personal details for the purposes of the research and sign an Agreement to Participate form

- obtain agreement from the tutors and director of any OU regional centres I visit

- obtain permission to reproduce sensitive IET data for an external audience

- decide how to respond to any negative comments from students about OU staff.

## Application to educational policy and practice

This is an area of research that relates to the widening access agenda, the changes to the funding of higher education in the UK in 1998 and the growing interest from the UK Government in student retention (National Audit Office, 2002; HEFCE, 2003; DfES, 2003). It is an important topic because it concerns 'differential access to education, wastage of potential, social justice and value for money for taxpayers' (Harrison, 2006, p. 377).

The research is important for a number of reasons. First, there is very little research into what motivates young students to study part-time, distance-learning modules or the factors that affect their retention. The outcomes of the study could have significance to the growing number of higher education institutions offering modules by distance learning and the nature of the support they offer to their students. A better understanding of the factors affecting student motivation in the 18–20 age group will enable the University to attract and retain more young (and mainly non-ELQ)[2] students, fulfilling its mission of widening access and improving its financial security through increased government funding and fee income. The conclusions of the study could inform the future focus of student support, particularly in the context of the Student Support Review that is currently taking place at the Open University.

## Development of professional knowledge

My teaching experience in secondary schools and my posts in student recruitment and retention at the OU should provide a useful background for this research study. Through my work in Student Services, I also have good working relationships with the OU regional directors and would have their support for carrying out research interviews within their regions.

My current post in the Arts Faculty led me to nominate AA100 as one of the modules in my research study. What I learn from my research may enable me to influence module design and student support policy in Arts Faculty and may have a positive impact on student completion and retention rates.

## Timetable

| Year 1 | Activity |
|---|---|
| May | Revise proposal. Apply to SRPP |
| May–July | Literature review |
| | Residential weekend |
| August | Analyse CIRCE information, Modules Survey 2009 and Withdrawal Survey |
| | Prepare interview questions |
| September | Initiate pilot study |
| October | Semi-structured interviews with pilot group |
| | Analyse information from interviews |
| November | Construct questionnaire |
| December | Send out questionnaire |
| January | Analyse results of questionnaire. Compare with TMA scores |
| | Email contact with 4–6 students |

[2] Non-ELQ students are students who do not have an equivalent or lower (ELQ) qualification to the qualification they want to register for.

| February | Final analysis of interviews and questionnaire |
| March–April | Write up results and Stage 1 report |
| May–June | Review interview questions and questionnaire |
| | Amend timetable for Year 2/3 |
| **Year 2** | **Longitudinal study** |
| September | Identify 20 students for research study |
| | Set up face to face/phone interviews |
| October | Attend day school in early October |
| | Interviews with research group |
| | Agree contact dates with research group |
| | Set up mailbox/Facebook area |
| November | Analyse information from interviews |
| December | Questionnaire to all AA100 and S104 students from English OU regions |
| January–June | Analyse results of questionnaire |
| March | Mid-module interviews with sample group |
| April–June | Analyse mid module interviews |
| July/August | Face-to-face/telephone interviews with completers and withdrawers |
| August | Analyse withdrawal surveys of those in main target group who withdrew from module |
| **Year 3** | |
| September/October | Check completion and progression data |
| November–January | Analysis of data |
| | Construct list of possible indicators for successful/unsuccessful completion |
| February | Attend residential weekend |
| March–July | Write up research |
| August to October | Revisions and preparation for viva |

**(2981 words)**

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# Example project 2

## Project title

The significance of cultural and social capital in university choice.

## Focus of the research

**Rationale:** My research concerns the extent to which sixth-form students from different socio-economic backgrounds utilise cultural and social capital to inform the process of applying to university through the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service. I wish to examine this process in terms of the university and module choices made and the social advantage and prestige that can be linked to the offer of a place.

Notions of different kinds of capital and the impact on educational outcomes stem from the work of Bourdieu (1998; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1998), who addresses the tripartite relationship between economic, social and cultural capital. Much has been written to establish that those who lack economic capital are disadvantaged in terms of educational achievement (Halsey, Heath and Ridge, 1980; Douglas, 1964). However, I wish to examine the often less tangible notions of cultural and social capital to examine the extent to which these influence choice. This derives from a concern, identified through supporting students, that many students are not making the most of opportunities available to them, although often they have the economic capacity to do so.

My interest in this area links to my professional practice and issues raised during E845 *Supporting lifelong learning* and E891 *Educational enquiry*, and links to a desire to enable people to participate in education to reduce social exclusion (E845, Study Guide). In Britain lifelong learning is prioritised as a means to widening participation in post compulsory education and training. Whilst limited in terms of implementation, Field (2002, p. 204) suggests that policies and practices have developed to reform initial education. This initial education is the focus of my research.

Whilst studying E845 I examined the extent to which adult students on Access programmes access social capital to empower them to gain maximum benefit from educational provision. I wish to apply similar concepts to sixth form students to assess the benefit gained from social capital, cultural capital and subsequent impact on choice.

Putnam (1995) suggests that social capital can be structural in that opportunities and networks within a community can be significant, hence

'social capital refers to … social organisation such as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination, and cooperation for mutual benefit (Putnam, 1995, p. 67), and can be encouraged through community collaboration. Putnam suggests social capital is being eroded through a decline in civic engagement and participation – and in turn educational activities decline. Schuller and Field (2002) suggest that high social capital results in high academic achievement. Mayo suggests that social capital is crucial as a means of reducing or removing social exclusion. Coleman (1988) and Bourdieu (1998) suggest that social capital is centred on resources within the family and this can affect both educational achievement and employment. Coleman relates this to human capital (Coleman, 1988, p. 101) that is productive for employers. In addition, Lin (1988) demonstrates a link between social capital and occupational mobility. Coleman further links social capital to community trust and obligation.

Social capital, it seems, has the capacity to empower individuals through civic engagement (Putnam, 1995) or resources within the family (Coleman, 1988; Bourdieu, 1998) although it can empower people in an unequal way. This remains one of the key questions in assessing the benefits of social capital as a means to empowerment and the reduction of social exclusion. Recent studies concerning the use of social capital by adult students (Preston, 2003; Jackson, 2006), examined during E891, highlighted the extent to which social capital can be both beneficial and exclusionary. Both studies identified social class as a significant criteria and identified different patterns of the development of social capital in relation to this. They demonstrated links to both empowerment and unfair advantage and could not separate social capital from cultural capital. Social capital can be beneficial and may encourage particular outcomes in terms of university choice, although such support might be variable and can be exclusionary.

In assessing 'cultural capital' I wish to examine the information and knowledge that circulates within and around families which might enable students to gain advantage in education and positively influence university choice. This follows Bourdieu's (1998) formulation of cultural capital, but broadens the concept, as Vryonides (2007) suggests, by looking at 'students, their cultural practices, skills, attitudes, knowledge in relation to their schooling experience or outcomes, or by looking at parents education, cultural practices and skills and ability to engage successfully in processes and institutions influencing children's education' (Vryonides, 2007, p. 869). Through utilising cultural capital one can see a link to social advantage, and this relates to the 'cultural resources' that students bring to making choices (Collier and Morgan, 2007). The development of cultural capital can be linked to the family and correlations to social class have been established (Dumais, 2002). Cultural capital is passed from one generation to another and through this process individuals gain social advantage (Swartz, 1997). Wildhagen (2009) suggests cultural capital is also 'institutionalized and … is used to maintain group advantage' (Wildhagen, 2009, p. 175). This echoes Bourdieu, and in developing this it is proposed that cultural capital is further employed to gain academic reward. Such reward has been linked to improved academic performance in a range of research (DiMaggio, 1982; Dumais, 2002), but also impacts on 'whether students make certain

educational transitions' (Wildhagen, 2009, p. 175), such as the transition to university.

## Research questions

1. To what extent do students have access to social and cultural capital ?
    (a) Which social networks, aspects of the community and familial associations do students have access to?
    (b) What kinds of knowledge impact on student aspirations ?
    (c) How are students exposed to this knowledge?

2. How do students employ social and cultural capital when choosing where and what to study?
    (a) How do social networks, aspects of the community and familial associations impact on university and module choice?
    (b) Are these inclusive/exclusive?
    (c) What kinds of knowledge impact on university and module choice?
    (d) Which factors directly link to high status/prestigious choices?
    (e) What cultural practices/resources promote particular choices.

3. To what extent do college practices and policies support informed choices when undertaking UCAS applications?
    (a) What knowledge circulating throughout the college assists students with choice?
    (b) Do students have equal access to this knowledge?
    (c) What networks and resources support student choices?
    (d) Do students have equal access to these networks and resources?
    (e) Does the college reinforce existing hierarchies?

## Research strategy

I intend to utilise semi-structured interviews and will focus on a target population based on my own college. In theoretical terms two significant problems arise: the choice of methodology and the operationalisation of research concepts.

In considering operationalisation, I note that many studies (Wells, 2008; Croninger and Lee, 2001; Perna, 2000) point to the close relationship between social and cultural capital and the difficulty of operationalising individually. I do not wish to narrow concepts in an over prescriptive way, as a key part of the research will involve participants contributing to an overview of how different kinds of capital are utilised. In accepting a broad definition of social capital I accept that it may be both familial (Coleman, 1988; Bourdieu, 1998) and based on community networks (Putnam, 1995). Portes (1998) indicates that social capital has been linked to educational attainment, school retention and subsequent employment (Portes, 1998, p. 9), whilst Wong (1998) utilises a notion of social capital external to the family and linked to other social networks (Wong, 1998, p.5). Gewirtz et al. (1995) are interested in linking the use of social capital to school choice and to the

family. In this sense social capital represents the extent to which families have the opportunity to utilise information concerning factors related to schools and teachers. This links to cultural capital through examining the way knowledge within a family is used to facilitate educational advantage. In terms of cultural capital Bourdieu's definition is relatively narrow (Sullivan, 2001), but the concept has been utilised in research in a number of ways. Vryonides (2007) suggests that cultural capital can encompass the behaviour of 'students, their cultural practices, skills, attitudes, knowledge in relation to schooling experience or outcomes, or by looking at parents' education, cultural practices and skills and ability to engage successfully in processes and institutions influencing children's education' (Vryonides, 2007, p. 869). In examining cultural capital and advantage Vryonides identifies a number of quantitative studies that try and establish various correlations, but notes that they do not 'reach to conclusive results' (Vryonides, 2007, p. 869). In contrast, qualitative research such as Gewirtz et al. (1995) identify the use that parents made of cultural capital in relation to educational choices and the ways that parents gained social advantage through social capital.

Through revealing the interconnections between different kinds of capital and the way that parents use non-economic capital, qualitative methodologies give a rich insight into the dynamics of social and cultural capital that might not be revealed through quantitative methodology. Where Vryonides (2007) found little to link cultural capital to educational advantage through the use of quantitative methods, further examination using interviews revealed a great deal more that linked to social advantage. This relates to my aims where I wish to examine the students' perspectives in relation to university choice, rather than examining statistical correlations. Ball (2003) discovered that middle class families utilised different kinds of capital in a complex way to gain an educational advantage for their children. It is difficult to differentiate between the ways that they use different kinds of capital and hence examining both together seems to make operational sense. Ball also deployed qualitative methods that seem particularly suitable for examining a range of complex factors and give 'insight' into familial choices, outcomes and educational practices.

My approach is a broadly interpretivist, although critical, perspective that seeks to examine the outlook of the students being investigated. This is to gain a broader understanding of their motivations and the meanings and reality of their behaviour (E891 Study Guide). I have chosen a qualitative methodology in the form of semi-structured interviews; these should enable me to gain 'access to people's knowledge about both the contexts in which they act and the other people involved in them' (E891 Study Guide). It also relates to practical concerns relating to operationalisation.

I am seeking to utilise a method that will both enable me to standardise themes under discussion, but will also allow me the opportunity to probe issues further to add to the depth of responses (*Research Methods in Education*, p. 184) thereby increasing validity. Through the use of open-ended questions, and with the scope to encourage students to elaborate on answers, this will also allow for 'unanticipated responses' (Cohen *et al*., 2008, p. 357). Nevertheless, through standardised themes I will be able to make some comparisons, although this is not my primary objective. The

target population will be based on my own college, with a sampling frame drawn from 16–19 year old sixth-form students undertaking Level Three qualifications. It will be difficult to utilise large numbers of participants, which will hamper generalisations, but I wish to achieve a degree of representativeness to address my research questions. Consequently I will ensure that a degree of stratified sampling is employed to obtain an equal gender distribution and a range of students from local council wards that represent the socio-economic diversity within the college. Once such sub-groups have been established I will utilise random sampling, whilst also employing a reserve list to allow for problems caused by those who are not willing to participate (Bell, 2005, p. 146). I anticipate undertaking approximately thirty interviews.

Data analysis will utilise 'theme analysis' (E891 Study Guide, p. 125) to reveal the significant features of the way respondents used non-economic capital and arrived at their module choices. Themes will be grouped around non-economic capital and will be organised in relation to each research question to 'preserve coherence' (Cohen *et al*., 2008, p. 468). Through utilising a methodology that allows for unanticipated responses, I am aware that different themes and subsequent theoretical considerations may well emerge suggesting a 'grounded theory' approach. Themes will be summarised and interpretations of data illustrated by reference to examples (*Research Methods in Education*, p. 218).

## Ethical issues

I will seek permission from the college principal prior to undertaking research and keep him informed regarding progress. I will maintain confidentiality and anonymity in relation to college and students, who will not be named. I will also use a consent form and emphasise voluntary participation. It will be emphasised that respondents can leave the research at any point, and if desired their responses will not be used in the research findings. If responses are used, respondents will be able to see transcripts. This information will also be provided, in the form of documents sent beforehand. I will need to be aware that I may need to terminate an interview if the respondent seems uncomfortable.

## Application to educational policy and practice

Social and cultural capital can have a positive or negative interpretation and form a useful conceptual basis for investigating the extent to which students use the local community and educational providers, as well as assessing the advantages than can be gained through the family. If educational providers are to reach their goals they need to understand which types of knowledge and networks support students from more marginalised or disadvantaged groups. It would be ironic if widening participation initiatives simply reinforced the benefits of powerful groups. Findings ought to influence the way that students are supported, in terms of the college and the wider community of Hampshire colleges; the findings could influence arrangements for student support and targeting of extra resources and minimise boundaries between the community and the college.

## Own professional context and development of professional knowledge

My interest in this area emerges from experience of working in an open entry co-educational sixth form college (see Appendix). Previously I undertook a role that enabled me to examine the extent to which adult students on Access programmes access social capital to empower them to gain maximum benefit from educational provision and contributed to my assignments for E845. In my current post part of my role involves advising sixth form students with UCAS applications both as tutor and as a pastoral adviser (senior tutor) where I am also responsible for managing UCAS applications for a team of tutors. I have been able to observe the choices that students make and this initially informs the research area under consideration. If sixth form students who make an informed choice have a specific use of non-economic capital it may be appropriate to assess if similar types of capital can be further facilitated through the college. It may also suggest which aspects of the community are beneficial to students and again may have implications for the college.

## Timetable

| | |
|---|---|
| **Year 1** | |
| May | Plan strategy for literature review |
| June–May (the following year) | Literature review |
| June–August | Plan methodology – operationalise concepts, preliminary planning |
| **Year 2** | |
| September–October | Pilot interview schedule and assess applicability |
| November–March | Conduct interviews (ongoing transcripts, initial data analysis) |
| April–October | Data analysis (identify themes, analyse, evaluate) |
| **Year 3** | |
| November–February | Re-visit literature review |
| March–October | Write-up research |

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