Research events, autumn term

Our Thursday afternoon seminar series welcomed a range of external and internal speakers to discuss their research with us as part of our Thursday afternoon seminar series, as follows: Rhona Stainthorp, Jessie Ricketts and Daisy Powell spoke about three related projects looking at the development of reading and spelling, and all carried out with support from UROP (Undergraduate Research Opportunities Programme). From the University of Warwick, Dr. Pontso Moorosi led a seminar on Female schools leaders in South Africa. Postgraduate students Rosemary Reynolds and Onye Abiodan-Ekus both led seminars on their work. Sessions such as using referencing tools also provided research training for both staff and students alike. Most IoE seminars can be viewed at Media Site: mediasite.reading.ac.uk
Research funding

IoE funding opportunity

The final deadline for the internal funding competition for this year is as follows:

7 May 2014

For details of how to apply, please see the IoE Staff Blackboard site, in the ‘Research’ folder.

Please note that all funds need to be spent by the end of the financial year (end of July) in which they are awarded, and projects need to be planned with that factor in mind. We will also make only one award a year to any one individual member of staff as Principal Investigator.

We have also added a new criterion for assessing applications, the ‘newness’ of the applicant, i.e. the extent to which they are new to research and funded projects. This is to encourage and support less experienced colleagues.

In last term’s competition, projects funded were:

Kempe, A.
What value do teachers, parents and theatres perceive ‘relaxed performances’ to have for children with special educational needs?

Wilson, T.
Perceptions of partnership with parents in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

External funding won:

Billingsley, B. Research to explore and evaluate the ways in which Exploring Science supports formative assessment. Funded by Pearson Education Limited.

Edwards, V. & Rassool, N. In collaboration with the Institute of Community Education and Society, University of Edinburgh: Policy, pedagogy and pupil perceptions: EAL in England and Scotland. Funded by the Bell Foundation.

External Research proposals submitted:

Billingsley, B. with Sharon Fraser (University of Tasmania), Paul Davies (Institute of Education, London), Keith Chappell, (University of Reading). Being human: Discovering and advancing school students’ perceptions of the relationships between science and Religion. Submitted to TWCF.


Harris, R., & Fuller, C. An investigation into the role of choice of curriculum topics in promoting a sense of identity and community cohesion amongst young people. Submitted to the ESRC.

Williams, T. The reading skills of people with autism and learning difficulties who use a word only version of PECS. Submitted to the British Academy.

Research project profile

Jessie Ricketts Learning to read and reading to learn.

Dr Jessie Ricketts’ ESRC-funded Future Research Leaders project officially started at the beginning of December. The Vocabulary and Reading in Secondary School (VaRiSS) project is a three year project that will track reading and vocabulary development in secondary school pupils from Year 7 to Year 9. Learning to read and acquiring a rich and varied vocabulary are among the most important skills that a child will develop. Furthermore, there are well-established links between the two areas: good vocabulary knowledge supports reading comprehension, while the process of reading provides opportunities for acquiring new vocabulary. This relationship does not become any less important as a child gets older; if anything, it becomes more central to a pupil’s learning. It is surprising, therefore, that up until now, research (and educational policy) has tended to focus on the relationship between oral vocabulary and reading comprehension in primary school children, neglecting its importance for pupils at secondary school level. Nicky Dawson has started work on this project as a research assistant and has successfully recruited some schools, with data collection beginning in January, gathering information from over 200 Year 7 pupils across three secondary schools in and around Berkshire. Lucy Taylor, a recent graduate, will also be joining the team to get some research experience.

In the first instance, the project will look at how the pupils’ oral vocabulary and reading comprehension abilities develop across three years, and how these skills interact.

A smaller group of pupils will also take part in a number of experimental tasks, which will investigate how reading plays a part in learning new words. In these tasks, pupils will be provided with certain types of information about a new word – for example, how it sounds, what it means, and what it looks like written down. The team will then evaluate whether this information helps the pupils to learn the new words through reading.

The findings from the study will not only contribute to existing theories of reading and language, but will have implications for the ways in which new words are taught in schools. It is hoped that the research will highlight the continuing importance of reading comprehension and vocabulary skills for adolescents as they become increasingly independent in their learning.

The advisory group for this project includes Rhona Stainthorp and Eileen Hyder as well as representatives with knowledge of reading policy, speech and language therapy, educational publishing and schools in and around the university. The advisory group met for the first time in December and will meet annually.
Conference news

Presentations


Stainton, R. (2013, November). Phonology and orthography in learning to read Chinese. Recent Developments in the Computational Modelling of Reading in Chinese workshop, Maynooth Campus, University of Ireland.


Other PGR news

Tomasz John gave a presentation, A ‘roller coaster’ experience? An exploration of postgraduate international students’ perceptions of teaching, learning and assessment, integration with home students and building a campus community, at the Conference on Internationalization and the Student Experience, Plymouth University, 19 December.

Research Groups

Research Group Convenors are as follows:

Equity, Inclusion and Improvement
Alan Floyd
alan.floyd@reading.ac.uk

First Language
Jessie Ricketts
j.ricketts@reading.ac.uk

Second Language
Jeanine Treffers-Daller
j.c.treffers-daller@reading.ac.uk

Values in Practice
Berry Billingsley
b.billingsley@reading.ac.uk

Last term’s research group activities: The Equity, Inclusion and Improvement Group held three well attended meetings last term, each centred on different themes. First, a lively discussion about reviewing the literature, based around a published paper chosen by one of the group members. Next, a staff member gave a presentation on a large scale external research bid they were developing, which allowed group members to discuss the process and offer some feedback.

Finally, two PhD students talked about their on-going projects which exemplified some of the excellent doctoral being undertaken in the group.

The First Language group held a series of focus groups on literacy and transition from primary to secondary school. They were well attended with a number of representatives from local primary and secondary schools getting together to have a lively discussion about the issues surrounding transition. In the Second Language Research Group, Barbara King gave a presentation entitled ‘To CLIL or not to CLIL: evidence-based approaches to teaching MFL’, which was attended by IoE colleagues and those from DELAL. The two groups also held a joint reading meeting to discuss the following paper: Geva, E., & Farnia, F. (2012).

The VIP group used one of its meetings to consider questionnaire design.
Impact of research

Launch of Bilingualism Matters

On 10th December the Centre for Literacy and Multilingualism (CeLM) launched a new Branch of Bilingualism Matters. This organisation was founded by Professor Antonella Sorace at the University of Edinburgh, and it aims at bridging the gap between researchers and the community (bilingual families, educators, and policy makers) in order to enable more and more children to benefit from bilingualism.

There are branches of this organisation in Tromsø, Thessaloniki, Trento and Sardinia and now also in Reading, where 28% of pupils in schools are bilingual and the number of bilingual pupils has more than doubled in the past 10 years.

Apart from Professor Sorace the following speakers contributed to the launch at London Road campus: Dr Beverley Costa from Mothertongue www.mothertongue.org.uk in Reading who provides multi-ethnic counselling services to multilinguals in Reading; Sunita Chah, a speech and Language Therapist and Professor Viv Edwards from NCLL at the University of Reading.

The researchers in CeLM set up a new branch of Bilingualism Matters@Reading because they are keen to ensure their research is focused on issues that are relevant for bilingual families, as well as teachers and practitioners in clinical practices. Many parents and educators do not know that bilingualism is beneficial for children’s development and their future, so research centres such as CeLM have an important role to play in communicating this to the wider public. Among the advantages of bilingualism the following listed on the Bilingualism Matters website are the most important ones: Children exposed to different languages become more aware of different cultures, other people and other points of view. But they also tend to be better than monolinguals at ‘multitasking’ and focusing attention, they often are more precocious readers, and generally find it easier to learn other languages.

The researchers in CeLM think it is important to listen to the questions that come from the wider community and to share their expertise with parents, educators and policy makers, so that their research can make a difference to the lives of the many bilinguals and multilinguals in Reading and its surroundings. In practical terms this means the researchers in CeLM will visit schools to give talks to parents of bilingual families and hold a surgery at Whiteknights where parents of bilingual families can come for advice.

For further questions about CeLM, see www.reading.ac.uk/celm and for Bilingualism Matters@Reading see: www.bilingualism-matters-reading.com or email j.c.treffers-daller@reading.ac.uk

Rhona Staintorp is one of a team of academics and practitioners who have been acting as an ‘Expert Group’ providing advice in relation to the new National Curriculum for English. An outcome of the group’s meetings has been the publication of an ‘English Curriculum Planning Tool’ for curriculum leads in school and ITT providers. This can be accessed via the National Literacy Trust website at: www.literacytrust.org.uk/schools_teaching/curriculum

Rhona was keynote speaker at the Independent Schools Special Educational Needs conference held in Victoria, London in November. She talked about the importance of handwriting in developing children’s writing skills. She was also invited to give an INSET session for the Reading Schools Special Educational Needs series of lectures. She talked about the importance of words in developing writing skills. As a result of her UROP student placement study on ‘Word characteristics and their impact on individual differences in spelling in Key Stage 2’, Rhona was asked to return to the school in Colchester where data were collected to provide INSET on their teaching of spelling throughout Key Stage 2.

Viv Edwards has undertaken consultancy for the Welsh Government for a Review of Research Evidence on the Effectiveness of Different Approaches to Promoting Early Speech and Language Development.

Berry Billingsley has been an Expert Panel member for National Curriculum developments in RE. Suzanne Graham has been part of the Expert Panel for Modern Foreign Languages, and in September helped launch a cluster for teachers in Sussex as part of her ESRC Professional Development Consortium work, helping teachers to implement research-based principles into the classroom. She also spoke about this work at a practitioner conference for primary MFL teachers (see Conference News). Andy Goodwyn is Chair of the Pearson Expert English group, advising on their development of the new GCSEs and A levels in English. Richard Harris has been asked to contribute to the setting up of a new NGO to support teacher education across Europe.

Tim Williams has been invited to provide a module for educating educators in the UK about OCD as part of the Charlie Waller Memorial Trust.
Bolashak Programme

October – December 2013 saw the very successful delivery of our first Bolashak Programme. This exciting and engaging professional development course was for leading academics from Kazakhstan. 48 participants won places in a highly competitive field to join the programme: ‘Improving University leadership, management and teaching’.

Through a combination of presentations, workshops, hands on learning and site and cultural visits, the Bolashak scholars had a stimulating and developmental opportunity to deepen their understanding of leadership and management in HE and how to improve the quality of teaching and learning in universities and educational organisations. Modules included ‘University Organisation and Governance’, ‘Curriculum reform and development’, ‘Improving assessment for all students’ and ‘Research in higher education and university teacher development’. Both Andy (as Head of the IoE) and Tony (as Director of Enterprise) would like to publicly thank all those academic and administrative staff involved – this was a real team effort that achieved excellent feedback from participants and praise from across the UoR. We hope a second course will run in 2015 and plans for this are underway. Dr Cathy Tissot is representing us in Kazakhstan next month to meet up with some of our new alumni, market the course, see potential applicants and visit important representatives from the British Council, Bolashak and ORLEU.

Other Enterprise News

On top of the Bolashak scholars we also hosted a two week visit in December from ORLEU participants (mainly teachers) which centred on Technology Enhanced Learning. This was the first in what we expect to be a series of CPD courses (worth an expected £75,000 this year) from this educational organisation in Kazakhstan. There is little doubt our success with Bolashak provided a basis for winning this contract; along with the IoE, London, we are the only two Universities (from 23 international bidders) to be awarded this partnership.

Looking ahead internationally we have a CPD course arranged for Beacon House Schools system for the Spring and we are waiting on the results of Expressions of Interest from a number of educational improvement projects including Mongolia, Belize and Ghana where we are working with international partners. Unfortunately, we came second in a tender for educational improvement in Georgia recently which was won by a German company. We also expect to start work on a pilot project with the BEIT charity in East Africa this Spring.

Closer to home many thanks and congratulations are due to all those involved in the recent NQT conference which this year included secondary participants as well as the more established Primary focus: lead lectures, seminars and subject specific surgeries proved an excellent combination; Deidre Burrell and Helen Bilton deserve a special mention here.

Karen Goulding and NCLL recently hosted a successful visit from Katesgrove Primary School; for more details of the visit see www.katesgrove.reading.sch.uk/news_detail.asp?Section=8&Ref=249

Doctoral Researchers

Three doctoral researchers graduated in December: Emre Debreli, supervised by Suzanne Graham and Elizabeth McCrum (EFL teachers’ changing beliefs about learning and teaching English: a model for the nature of belief change and factors influencing change), Alice Sheridan, supervised by Paul Croll, (The reflective practices of new lecturers within PGCTHE courses) and Xiaorong Zhang, supervised by Viv Edwards and Daguo Li (Impact of residential courses in the UK on the continuing professional development of Chinese teachers of English and educational change in Western provinces in China).
5 minute interview
Doctoral students in Education

The Institute of Education has a vibrant and diverse range of doctoral students in both its PhD and EdD programmes. These short interviews give you a snapshot of some of our dynamic students.

Shahla Yassaei

Tell us a bit about yourself (who you are and where you are from)

I am Shahla Yassaei. I am originally Persian and I left my homeland about 6 years ago to do an MA in TESOL at the American University of Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates. Upon receiving my MA degree I left the UAE for England in 2011 and four months after that I started my PhD at Reading.

What inspired you to do doctoral work?

As a requirement of my MA degree, I had to write a dissertation, and to be honest, I enjoyed every minute of writing it. I also got it published in a well-known peer reviewed journal and the feedback I got from my MA programme professors, particularly my supervisor, made me consider doing doctoral work. In addition, the topic I was working on for my MA, reflective practice, was so interesting to me that it inspired me to think about doing a PhD.

What is your research about?

My research is about secondary teachers’ reflective practice in England. In my project, I looked at how secondary teachers conceptualised reflective teaching; the content of their reflections, i.e., the issues that they tended to reflect on; the types of critical incidents they chose to reflect on and the reasons why the incidents were significant to them; and finally the factors that affected the focus of their reflections.

Why did you choose Reading University?

I had heard about Reading University when I was an MA student. I had offers from two other very good universities as well but after considering and researching all my options I decided to go for Reading. I am now confident that I made a very good decision because I received high quality support and supervision during my PhD years in Reading and this is what any PhD researcher would want to get during his/her doctoral journey.

What aspect of your doctoral studies (so far) are you most proud of accomplishing?

I think the fact that I have won a lectureship before completing my PhD makes me very proud of myself and my work. I am now a full-time lecturer in Education Studies at Anglia Ruskin University.

What tips would you give to other students?

Two things are important: first, excellent time-management skills and second, the ability to prioritise. I think every PhD student needs to work on these two aspects of the doctoral journey in order to be successful.

On a scale of 1 to 10 (best) how would you rate your student experience at the IoE?

It would definitely be 10 since I enjoyed every minute of it. I am now a very confident, autonomous, and independent researcher and I owe it all to the quality instruction I received at Reading.
Tim Clark

Tell us a bit about yourself (who you are and where you are from)

My name is Tim Clark; I’m a student on the Ed.D programme. I live in Bristol with my partner and three children and I work full time as the Head of Family Services for an organisation called the Southville Community Development Association. We are a charity and social enterprise, working to develop and facilitate projects and services to improve quality of life and wellbeing of people across the local community. My work involves co-ordinating and developing a range of services from early years provision through to projects to address loneliness and isolation for older people.

What inspired you to do doctoral work?

I’ve always been quite ambitious and, if I’m honest, I think embarking on the Ed.D was really about wanting to challenge myself. I hadn’t previously completed a Masters Degree, but given the flexibility with the entry requirements, I decided that I’d apply and let the university be the ones to decide whether I was up to it! I was a little surprised when I was offered a place, but it also provided a great source of motivation for me.

What is your research about?

My research is about the methodological assumptions and journeys of researchers themselves. I am interested in the idea of the researcher as philosopher and exploring perceptions of how individual ontological, epistemological and subsequent methodological assumptions may be socially constructed. I intend to use collective biography and life history approaches and have an interest in the role of reflexivity in research.

Why did you choose Reading University?

I was first involved with the University of Reading in 2010 when I did some work as an Assessor for the Early Years Professional Status programme. In 2011 when I started to look at the opportunities available for further study, I contacted Geoff Taggart who suggested I consider the Ed.D programme. The varying entry requirements of the universities I was considering effectively left me with the option of either studying for a Masters Degree locally, or travelling to Reading for the Ed.D. My enthusiasm for the challenge and my existing positive impressions of the university meant that this wasn’t a very difficult decision to make!

What aspect of your doctoral studies (so far) are you most proud of accomplishing?

Studying alongside a demanding professional role, whilst having three young children has been quite tough at times, so firstly I’m proud just to have passed Part A! I’m also pleased with the standard of work I’ve produced, and I think that both in terms of confidence and ability the journey I’ve been on over the past two years has placed me in a really strong position for my thesis.

What tips would you give to other students?

1. For part time students in particular; make time to talk with others about your work, especially if you reach a difficult point or decision. Often I found that explaining an issue to someone, or better still trying to verbalise the potential justification for a decision, methodology, argument or approach, would progress my own thinking, even if the other person didn’t actually have any suggestions or ideas. I often find opportunities for discussions with contacts through my professional role, but also with other students or teaching staff involved with the programme.

2. If you’re struggling with writing, then stop and do more reading. The worst moments for me over the past 2 years were when I sat down to write and 2 hours later had fewer words than when I started! I found that if having made these attempts, I then returned to more reading I’d usually find a way forward quite quickly.

On a scale of 1 to 10 (best) how would you rate your student experience at the IoE?

I think this programme has been a great fit for me. I’ve really enjoyed the taught sessions, it’s (just about!) manageable alongside my other commitments, I’ve found it really useful to be part of a consistent cohort for the first two years, and I’ve really enjoyed coming to Reading for the study weekends. For those reasons I’d give it a 9 without hesitation!
Staff publications


Leyman, T., & Harris, R. (2013). Connecting the dots: Helping Year 9 to debate the purposes of Holocaust and genocide education. *Teaching History*, 154, 4-10.

