



The Graham Nuthall Classroom Research Trust

NEWSLETTER

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International classroom research group convenes

The Trust-supported Book and Symposium Project on Classroom Research, led by Dr Baljit Kaur of the University of Canterbury held its first meeting of contributing authors on 8 December 2009. Twenty researchers from New Zealand and other countries gathered in the Virtual Europe Room at the University of Canterbury in person or via video link.

Dr. Jane McChesney, the Deputy Chair of the Graham Nuthall Classroom Trust, welcomed the participants. In the morning session, the participants debated questions such as what constitutes classroom research, how knowledge about classrooms is constructed and what touchstones or criteria do they use for deciding what is "good" classroom research. In the afternoon, they used group action methods to identify the influential researchers in their own work and place themselves as researchers on the map of classroom research.

Technical and administrative assistance was provided by Kirsty Fraser (GNCRT), Nathan Gardiner (AVCC), Guy Cottrell and Andrew Fletcher (AV Services at UC). DVDs of the day's proceedings are available for the contributing authors' further discussions and deliberations. A website to create a forum for ongoing interaction is being set up with help from Kathleen Ell (UC).

More than 20 researchers from New Zealand, Australia, Finland, USA, and

Canada, representing a wide range of approaches to classroom research are contributing sixteen chapters. The authors include those who have been heavily influenced by Professor Nuthall's research, for instance four recipients of the Graham Nuthall Trust Research Award, as well as those who take different theoretical and methodological approaches to classroom inquiry.

The book will also include two of Professor Nuthall's unpublished manuscripts, an introduction and a concluding section comprising of comments on future research directions by leading classroom researchers. Some who have accepted our invitation to contribute a comment include Professor Judith Green (University of California, Santa Barbara, USA), Professor Neil Mercer (University of Cambridge, UK), Professor Greta Morine-Dersheimer (Formerly at University of Virginia, USA), Professor Kristiina Kumpulainen (University of Helsinki, Finland) and Associate Professor Alison Gilmore (University of Canterbury, NZ).

Professor Annemarie Palincsar from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, USA, an eminent classroom researcher, has agreed to write the foreword. The first drafts of the chapters, due at the end of February, will be peer reviewed before the second one-day meeting of the authors

slated for May 5, 2010. An appropriate international publisher is currently being sought for the book.

As a part of the project, an International Symposium on Classroom Research to be held at the University of Canterbury from 16th to 18th August 2010 is being planned under the leadership of Trustee Peter Allen. The contributing authors will be invited to present their research in Round Table Workshops along with researchers from anywhere else in the world whose papers are accepted through a peer review process. August 17 will specifically focus on pedagogical implications and issues in classroom research and will be oriented to serve as a Teachers' Day with a keynote speaker and two round table workshop sessions, followed by the Graham Nuthall Annual Lecture in the evening. The concluding session on August 18 will feature a panel discussion based on the comments of the leading researchers on future research directions, mentioned above.

This project is bringing researchers together around a common broad vision of classroom research. The Trust anticipates the resulting edited volume will serve as an effective resource for researchers, educators and practitioners. ●



Alison Gilmore, Sally Peters, Jane Abbiss, Jae Major, Baljit Kaur, Kathleen Quinlivan, Cathy Solomon, Michelle Clarke, Jane McChesney and Christine Rietveld by Kahikatea tree planted in Graham Nuthall's memory.

Classroom Research Symposium

University of Canterbury
16 -18 August 2010

Keynote Speakers,
Research presentations
in Round Table Workshops

17 August Teachers' Day,
Annual Graham Nuthall Lecture

See www.nuthalltrust.org.nz
for further information

We are all teachers

This is the third issue of The Graham Nuthall Classroom Research Trust's newsletter. Our thanks to those who sent donations following our May 2009 newsletter. These are especially welcome as we no longer conduct regular fundraising auctions. Do let us know of anyone else who would like to receive this regular update.

Many of you will have attended the Annual Lecture so will have your own version of Mary Chamberlain's inspiring address. I was delighted when a longtime friend of our daughter's, an early childhood teacher said she looked forward to the annual lecture all year. For many busy practitioners it is a time to catch up with the thinking of one of the leaders in education and their take on what the latest research is telling us. We are grateful to our donors for helping make this such a success.

The board was especially pleased to bestow the 2009 Graham Nuthall Research Award to a practising teacher, Joanne Aitken. To date applicants have

been in the midst of their academic studies or taking time out from teaching to do research this is a first. We look forward to seeing the eventual insights gained from her study described in this publication.

Another first is the awarding of a Nuthall Doctoral Scholarship in association with the University of Canterbury's PhD Scholarship programme. Early childhood educator Sandy Radford's study is here outlined.

The front page report on the Book and Symposium project tells of the great progress being made on this our most substantial work to date. Dr Baljit Kaur's high standing in the international educational community is reflected in the co-operation she has been receiving from researchers all over the world as well as from our country. The first audiovisual meeting has taken place and writing is well advanced for the first draft of the book.

An item on changes to the Board of Trustees shows how fortunate we are in attracting people of such calibre to plan and make decisions on the Trust's activities, present and future. Since the establishment of the Charities Commission we have to send them each year information on changes to our office bearers for them to check alongside the annual reports. The board and people we call on to organise and assist with events give freely of their time and many organisations donate in kind. We have one part-time administrator. You can be sure we are held to high ethical standards and that the money you donate all goes to classroom research.

Hidden Lives of Learners is still selling well and each year a proportion of the profits come back to this Trust. We are delighted that Professor Graham Nuthall's book is of use to so many parents and grandparents as well as to educators. As Chamberlain said *We are all teachers.* ●

Jill Nuthall, Editor, Secretary Graham Nuthall Classroom Research Trust

Joanne Aitken wins research grant

At the Annual Lecture the Trust announced that the 2009 Graham Nuthall Research Award has been given to Joanne Aitken, Assistant Principal at Northcote Primary School. She has worked there for three years teaching new entrants and loves educating young children.

During this time I have introduced learning stories to the school as a major method of assessment. We have implemented them throughout the school and they have been used as a tool with which to motivate our learners and create closer community links. It is with this thought in mind that I applied for the Graham Nuthall Research Award. I am aware of impact that learning stories have made and would like to investigate this further. I was honoured and delighted to be offered the Award and was thrilled to accept it.

Learning Stories document what and how a student is learning. The teacher looks at what a child is doing and explains what they have observed. They then analyse

this and write it up along with suggestions for steps that the child can take to further their learning or extend their interest. The learning story is then shared with the child so that they understand and become aware of their learning. The story is then sent home



to the child's family or whānau and often the parents or caregivers will add comments on their experience or ask what they may do to help. Aitken says that when they read learning stories, parents understand more about what their child is learning day by day. They appreciate that the teacher knows what interests their child and how they learn.

She believes the results of her research will have an impact on a number of levels, at the study school, at a general primary school level and lastly it will inform the wider school community. It is hoped that it will provide insights into students' motivation and the effects on their learning. The research may also allow the impact of the key competencies to be explored and how these have influenced students' learning. She is now working on her methodology and expects to interview students and staff and record interactions between students who are reading learning stories together. ●

Trust seeks new administrator

The Graham Nuthall Classroom Research Trust is seeking a new administrator. This is a part-time role with an average of five hours a week though this might be greater or less in some weeks. Skills and attributes the Trust are looking for include a good knowledge of university systems; intermediate to high level of computer skills and familiarity with Microsoft packages; experience with Mac computers; expertise in MYOB and Dreamweaver. Please email nuthall-trust@canterbury.ac.nz, to obtain a job description.

Putting students at the centre

Mary Chamberlain gives 2009 Lecture



The Annual Graham Nuthall Lecture offered an opportunity to engage with one of New Zealand's notable educationalists, Mary Chamberlain. As Group Manager, Curriculum Teaching and Learning-Design for the Ministry of Education, Chamberlain has participated in the development of new national curricula and related assessment policies at both primary and secondary levels. Chamberlain involved the audience of 300 people from early childhood, primary and secondary education as well as university lecturers and friends of the Trust, working on the principle that everyone is a learner, all of us.

She said *We are finally catching up with Graham and putting students at the centre.* Students learn best when their teachers

understand how they feel, what they think, what they know and don't know and build up from there. The relationship between the teacher and the learner is fundamental to success. An example she gave was of a student who was asked how he got on with his teachers, he responded *I look behind their eyes to see if they are mean or if they care and then I know how to be with them.* This response illustrates the learner's need to connect with their teacher and the damage to the learning environment that can be done if there is no real relationship or rapport.

For many reasons students often feel vulnerable as learners. Chamberlain encouraged teachers to put themselves in a vulnerable learning position at least once a year challenging them to put on your own oxygen masks before (you) attempt to help others. This helps us as teachers, parents or relatives to empathise better with learners.

Chamberlain said there are four big ideas that underpin best practice and hone the teacher's ability to engage students: flexibility, pedagogy, student voice, and learning environment. The teacher's job is to develop inventiveness, curiosity as well as delivering 'the daily bread' of curriculum.

Chamberlain advocated for learning environments that offer learners appealing and challenging activities that stretch their capacity to learn while at the same time offer new content. She challenged

teachers to look for and recognise what learners bring to the classroom and design curricula around that. It is important not only that the student should be at the heart of learning but should also be able to lead their own learning. But they do need to develop realistic goals and need to be told how long it might take to learn a particular thing. Beginners can be disappointed when they haven't learned to read after their first week at school.

Sometimes the person who is closest to another's experience is the best teacher. A Wellington school used the six year olds to orientate beginners to school. Contrast their advice to that of an adult, *Don't eat all of your lunch at playtime. Keep some till later and You have to stay all day, you can't go home even if you want to.*

Chamberlain said the current challenge is for teachers to design learning experiences that not only engage but also empower learners. She believes that the 'new' New Zealand Curriculum has the potential to free teachers and allow them to create meaningful learning experiences that are contextual and relevant to the learner.

The annual Nuthall lecture has once again provided professional educators and lay people in Canterbury the opportunity to learn about current education theory from an educationalist who understands where classroom research is leading. ●

First Nuthall Doctoral Scholarship awarded

Sandy Radford, a teacher and teacher educator in early childhood education has been awarded the first Graham Nuthall PhD Scholarship. Her career has roused her curiosity about the effect organisational culture has on teachers and how they teach, and how this affects children's learning and experiences. This is what she is studying in an early childhood setting.

This topic was cemented in her mind by the time she had completed her M.Ed in 2001 but had to keep working during those intervening years.

Winning a University of Canterbury PhD scholarship allowed me at last to realise my dream and winning the Graham Nuthall scholarship at this stage of the research process has provided practical support to allow me to gather and analyse the data.

I feel privileged to be able to take the time to gather and document children's stories in an early childhood centre, and to talk with children, their parents, teachers and employers about the subtle nuances that are often overlooked, yet impact in fundamental ways on the children's learning and wellbeing.

In addition to the interviews, she has gathered material for analysis such as parent newsletters, programme plans and self-review documents and is now observing children directly as they go about their activities in the centre, gathering their stories.

This is (of course) proving to be the most insightful part of the data gathering process. I am seeing that indeed organisational culture does indeed affect what happens, and, just as Graham found, what the adults think the children are experiencing is not necessarily reflecting the children's reality. ●

Thank you

Melanie Mackenzie

Melanie Mackenzie resigns from the role of Administrator to the Graham Nuthall Classroom Research Trust from April. Ms Mackenzie has been with the Trust for just over two years taking over from Michelle Clark. During her time, she has supported the Trust on its many different activities from the audit to the Annual Lecture and Bids for Kids Auction. Melanie leaves with the aim of achieving more work/life balance in her life as she also works full-time for UC Education Plus. Nick Major, Chair of the Trust said "We will miss her willingness to go the extra mile in her enthusiasm for the work. Melanie is ever dependable, a person of integrity so essential in this independent role. We wish her well."

Trustees change roles

In 2009 some changes in the governance board of The Graham Nuthall Classroom Research Trust.

Nick Major, Principal of Beckenham School succeeded Associate Professor **Alison Gilmore** as the Chair of The Graham Nuthall Classroom Research Trust. Major has been on the Trust since its inception representing the Canterbury Primary Principals' Association. He has personal experience of the benefits and complexities of classroom research as some years ago Beckenham hosted one of Nuthall's research projects. Major believes that *the high attendance by teachers, school leaders and academics at the Trust's annual lectures and seminars reflect the importance to educators of the Trust's activities and the high regard with which the Trust is held within the education community.*

Nick Major BSc; Dip Tchg; M.Ed (Distinction) is a Fellow of The Institute of Education, University of London. In 2009 he received the Canterbury Primary Principals Fellowship Award to travel to the UK and University of Bristol exploring challenges related to the implementation of the revised New Zealand Curriculum.

Associate Professor Alison Gilmore, the inaugural Chair says she has seen

the organisation establish itself as a credible voice in classroom research through its activities which support researchers and help spread results of studies on learning. Gilmore currently chairs the New Zealand Assessment Academy which seeks to advance the debate and quality of assessment in NZ and abroad. A collaborative research programme of building teachers' assessment capability involves an international team from New Zealand, Canada, Scotland and Australia. She is also involved with the National Education Monitoring Project and is deputy chair of the NZ Council for Educational Research Board.

Farewelling Associate Professor Gilmore, Major said *the Trust owes her a huge debt of gratitude for her passionate advocacy of the ideals of the Trust since its inception, and her tireless contribution to Trust activities in the intervening years.*

At the 2009 AGM In July The Board welcomed **Peter Allen** BA; MPhil; Dip ED; DipTChg as a new Trustee. Allen was Director of UC Education Plus until May 2009, and is currently working part time as Coordinator of the Experienced Principals' Development Project. Prior to his time as Director of UC Education Plus, he was Principal of Rangiora High School for thirteen years. He is chair of the NZ Council for Educational Research.

Allen says *In my role as a Professional Development Advisor and Facilitator and previously as a Secondary School Principal, I am very aware of the significance of classroom research as a way of informing teacher practice and assisting with the learning of practising teachers.* ●



The information in this publication was correct as at the time of printing.

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