



The Graham Nuthall Classroom Research Trust

NEWSLETTER

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Research shows way to educational achievement

Dr Rod Carr, Vice Chancellor of the University of Canterbury opened the Trust's International Symposium on Classroom Research in August and The Graham Nuthall Classroom Research Trust Chair Peter Allen welcomed the participants to the three day programme.

The constant message from the keynote speakers and the symposium as a whole was that New Zealand already has the necessary skills and frameworks to make a difference in classrooms. We just need to base our programmes on what the best research tells us and work smarter, in co-operation with each other and our communities.

Professor Wally Penetito, Maori Education, Victoria University of Wellington* argued that by the time teachers graduate they must already be well versed in Maori culture and practices and these need to underscore every component of teacher education. He described how Te Kotahitanga (Unity of Purpose) improves Maori achievement and teacher development.

For Maori students the relationship with their teachers and their school matters more than the information and these relationships persist after classroom interactions. He explained that Maori talk differently about themselves than others do for instance pakeha talk about the mountain, Maori talk to the mountain. Place based education matters, and this means multidisciplinary, experiential education. It is participatory, something you do. "We need a more sociological approach, to see students in context. To succeed in school Maori students need their identity enhanced, if not the school has failed." The school must be connected

to its community. Educators need to talk to the collective early in any process, to negotiate and keep going back.

Associate Professor Alison Gilmore, Educational Assessment Research Unit University of Otago talked of the threats from the current tug of war between politics and education. "There is always a tension between policy, research and practice but they must work together. Politics is spitting them apart."

Advances in understanding of how children learn are always tempered when juxtaposed by politics but National Standards could lead to three threats. First, accountability may be exchanged for improvement. Secondly they may lead to national testing and then thirdly to league tables and unfair competition.

She said the National Education Monitoring project was working well using light sampling but this finishes in 2010 and National Monitoring begins in 2011. Any successful assessment project places teachers at the heart, "Teacher judgement has to be the basis of assessment. Moderation is harder than assessment; it is not a precise science and if too much 'reliability' and 'consistency' is required there is a danger schools will revert to teaching only the basics. Blaming teachers does not lead to better learning."

Underlining that educational research and scholarship contribute to our understanding, Alison Gilmore recommended three Rs of classroom research - respect, rigour and a realistic approach.

Dr Adrienne Alton Lee Chief Education Advisor, Strategy and Performance Ministry of Education described a series of cases of quality teaching that accelerated student learning. Results of research show

poor achievement is not only the result of poverty, socio economic status; ethnic differences are an additional factor. Within schools of all deciles we can trace social differences and show that some teachers can overcome them to produce good learning results. Now it is time to apply the lessons from these studies.

One major concern is that New Zealand second to bottom in the 2006 international study on bullying. Dr Alton Lee advocated that education return to the first professional principle, Do No Harm. It is worrying for example that many mistakenly believe 'learning styles' is backed by evidence and so use that approach. Other studies show negative results from parents helping with homework both in reading and in maths. Too often the parent or caregiver contradicts the teacher and confuses the child.

Surveys show principals are spending too much time on administration property and less on learning and this needs to change. "Professor John Hattie has shown us what works, we do not need to keep reinventing the wheel."

*The link to Penetito's speech is on the Trust website or CORE Education EDtalks at www.edtalks.org. Other keynote addresses will follow. ●



Professor Wally Penetito

Symposium safe place to question, test ideas

The International Symposium* provided participants with ample time to listen, digest, question and contribute, making this one of the most worthwhile conferences for classroom researchers according to many of the 76 who attended. They liked the format and professional support provided, the different types of presentation of the 39 papers and the nature of the round-table sessions.

This symposium was an integral part of the Trust's project to help build classroom research capacity and to increase understanding of teaching and learning as revealed in classroom research. Participants gained insights into its application to improving learning and contributors to the book being edited by Dr Baljit Kaur used the opportunity to refine their ideas and learn from others.

Many of Professor Nuthall's conceptual and methodological ideas came into focus in round table discussions. Leaders supported discussion of the keynotes and all presentations. Doctoral students and emerging researchers shared the stage with veteran and renowned researchers from New Zealand and overseas.

There was enthusiasm for creating opportunities for on-going exchange of ideas and several suggestions were made for the GNCR Trust, the University of Canterbury as well as for the individual or collective initiatives by the researchers.

The second day was a Teachers' Day that culminated with the Trust's Annual Lecture by Professor Judith Green.

Book contributors met to discuss the progress of the book, to generate ideas for promoting the book at national and international research forums and to

sustain on-going interactions amongst the contributors. Dr Fleur Harris, Dr Kathleen Quinlivan and Keryn Davis volunteered to prepare symposium proposals for conferences in 2011 and 2012.

*The Trust acknowledges the support of the College of Education University of Canterbury, Core Education and the Educational Assessment Research Unit University of Otago. ●

It was heartening to see how various presenters had taken some of the broader principles of Graham's research and adapted them to investigate assessment and learning in different socio-cultural contexts (e.g. with different ages, ethnicities etc). The way the papers were organised (10 mins. presentation followed by discussion) meant that ALL presenters received some critical feedback, which in my case, can be utilised in the book chapter and/or other work.

Dr Christine Reitveld, UC Book contributor

I felt energized by the symposium, by the ideas and enthusiasm of both the presenters and those attending. Even though I had been present at Graham Nuthall's 2001 Jean Herbison lecture, Judith Green's conversation with Graham put his words into a completely different context and illustrated how they reverberated through another's perspectives on classroom research. Ideas were exchanged, experimented with, challenged in a nurturing environment, where all felt welcome, and there seemed no great divide between 'the gods' and 'the mere mortals'.

Cathy Solomon, UC Ph.D. student (Book contributor)

...best remembered for the networking opportunities and people's openness to conversations, to sharing their work and their expertise. The diversity of presenters, and the lengths that some went to making themselves available and encouraging others, was something I had not experienced in larger events. After the symposium I felt encouraged in my own work.

Kaye Kara, UC Ph.D. student

....certainly the most ambitious undertaking of the Nuthall Trust to date. The organisers need to be congratulated for both the academic research of the symposium, and the opportunity for a wide range of experienced and beginning researchers to contribute and participate.

Kathleen Quinlivan, Senior Lecturer UC

Part of my role is to provide professional development to our staff. The symposium gave me valuable insights into research that has occurred throughout New Zealand with our children. Every person who spoke and shared their research from achievement for gifted and talented students, to developing self-regulated learning skills in young students, inspired me to take back to my team the understandings gained and to put it into a practical context with them. The unpacking of the symposium research will provide my team with another level of professional development that will enable them to see and understand the work being done and the level of passion that everyone has, from practitioners to researchers to policy makers for the children that we teach right here in New Zealand.

Caro Searell, Senior Manager Elmwood Normal School

Annual Lecture Judith Green in dialogue with Graham Nuthall

This year's Annual Lecture*, embedded in the International Symposium, was given by Judith Green, Professor of Education and Director of the Center of Literacy and Inquiry in Networking Communities at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Her ethnographic focus came through in *Creating a language for exploring learning in classrooms*.

*Judith Green explores ideas. (third from right)
Photo by Varpu Tissari, Finland*



Continued on page 3..

Professor Green met Graham Nuthall in the sixties. "We always argued, always learned from our discussions. He was more about cognition and I was more about language." They agreed that culture forms and informs learning (Nuthall) and culture is invisible except when something goes wrong (Green). Her work is built on Nuthall methods and theories.

She put his research into context saying that when he and Philip Lawrence wrote *Thinking in the Classroom* in 1965, they were some of the few researchers talking about thinking. Also Graham helped reframe US educational research as one of only two international scholars on a 1974 US taskforce in Washington.

"Judith's notion of engaging in conversation with Graham Nuthall's research speaks to the longstanding and ongoing commitment that she has shown over the course of her career in understanding teaching and learning relationships within the classroom," says Dr Kathleen Quinlivan of the College Of Education, University of Canterbury.

"My interest in working as a classroom researcher was sparked by her eclectic approach in bringing together a range of diverse theoretical approaches to understand the complex worlds of the classroom, and her emphasis on the intertwined nature of theories and methodologies."

Kathleen said that the opportunity to engage with the scholarship of Judith Green was one of the highlights of the 2010 International Symposium. She is hoping that her visit, and the impressive range of papers that were presented at the symposium, has the effect of revitalising classroom research studies within the College of Education at the University of Canterbury.

**The Trust acknowledges the support of the University of Canterbury, Core Education, South Pacific Press and Lift Education. ●*

2010 Nuthall Research Award

Ferguson tackles boys' achievement

Graeme W. Ferguson the 2010 Nuthall Research Awardee, is examining the influence of peer cultures on the learning dispositions of a group of primary school boys. He is doing this PhD project, unique in New Zealand, while teaching part time at UC.

Graeme's twenty years' experience as a primary school teacher and sixteen years in teacher education have informed several publications including "You'll be a boy if you play rugby: Sport and the Construction of Gender" (Dunmore 2004). Boys' education and the status of boys in schools has recently been the focus of public attention, in particular the achievement of boys relative to the achievement of girls. He spells out his approach here.

My research engages in the debates about the perceived differences in schooling outcomes for boys and girls by exploring the idea that some boys constitute themselves in such a way that their understanding of themselves as boys may conflict with the more scholarly requirements of being a school boy. Approaching the topic in this way seeks to move beyond the backlash¹ and the recuperative masculinity politics² that posit boys and men as victims of feminism, damaged and in some way in need of rehabilitation, and as the newly disadvantaged in society and in our schools. I also wanted to avoid the tendency of popular psychology to essentialize the binary categories of boys and girls whereby each is fundamentally



Photo by University of Canterbury

different from the other but within each gender, basically the same.

The methodology employed, which draws on that developed by Graham and Adrienne Alto-Lee, is qualitative involving classroom-based case studies in two Christchurch primary schools. I observed and gathered data in one junior class in each school. I used focus group interviews with the children and from these I identified seven boys, four in the first school and three in the second, for closer observation. These observations involved audio and video-recordings, as well as my own direct observations, of their participation in their classroom literacy and physical education programmes for a period of one week.

I also observed, during this same week, the boys in their interactions with other children during their playground activities at playtimes and lunchtimes. These observations of the children at play were supplemented by conversations with the children about their own drawings of their playground activities. Interviews were also conducted with the two classroom teachers.

I am currently engaged in data analysis and writing up my work. Receiving the prestigious Nuthall Award, which I regard as a considerable honour, will enable me to take leave from my teaching commitments to focus on completing this task. I hope my work will contribute useful knowledge to the New Zealand debates about the achievement of boys in schools, raise teachers' awareness of gender issues in education and, in particular, challenge us to reflect on the dominant ideas about masculinity which may not be particularly helpful in enabling boys and young men to adapt to the changing social and economic circumstances of a globalised 21st century New Zealand. ●

- 1 Sommers, Christina Hoff. (2000). *The war against boys: How misguided feminism is harming our young men*. New York: Simon & Shuster.
- 2 Lingard, Bob & Douglas, Peter. (1999). *Men engaging feminisms: Pro-feminism, backlashes and schooling*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Inaugural trustees retire, principals introduced

After being with the Trust from its inception, **Nick Major** Chair and **Dr John Vargo** Treasurer both retired from the board at this year's AGM. In his final report Nick said "It has been a stimulating and engaging experience – both personally and professionally. The opportunity to work alongside so many dedicated and highly competent people who have all shared an unwavering belief in and commitment to Graham's research legacy has been and remains inspiring."

Peter Allen was elected the new Chair. He thanked both Nick and John for their "phenomenal contributions to the Trust". He highlighted Nick's calm good humoured chairing and the skills with which he guided the board through complex issues and John's excellent reports and understanding of academic systems and management. Both men had had warm personal relationships with Graham Nuthall, Nick having hosted his research teams at Beckenham School and John having played basketball with him in the Very Old Maroons.



Dr Lyn Bird Dip Tch, BA, MEd (Hons), PhD replaced Nick as the Primary Principals' Association representative.

Lyn is the Principal of Ilam School. Her research interests are self-regulated learning in young students and Teaching as Inquiry. Over the past 15 years she has headed a variety of primary schools and lectured at Otago University. Lyn is a member of the Christchurch Primary Principals' Association Executive, the UC College of Education Advisory Board and is the Regional Director of the Ministry of Education and New Zealand Principals' Federation Ariki Project.

The Trust also welcomed our new Secondary Principals' Association representative, **Richard Edmundson** MA (Hons), DipEdMan, DipTchg. Trained as an English teacher, he is now principal at Hornby High School. His career took him to Feilding Agricultural



College, Christ's Hospital (an amazing charity school in England), Naenae College, Linwood College, Aranui High School and the NZ Graduate School of Education. Richard is keenly interested in the realisation of the power of student voice and co-construction of the curriculum; and trying to understand why our school system leads to so many students who lack the self-efficacy to engage and therefore discount themselves from the learning process.

The Trust has a new part-time Administrator, **Karen Bell**. She works concurrently as e-asTTle, a package that enables teachers to create and analyse literacy and numeracy tests for Years 5 -10 and curriculum levels 2 – 6, and Assistant Administrator at UC Education Plus. In the past Karen has worked for Canterbury Netball and has been a personal secretary in a law firm, a local body council and in private enterprise. Karen brings relevant perspectives from being involved with her own children's schools (currently President of Riccarton High School PTA) and their various sporting activities. ●

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

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