




Who we are

The Forum for Learning and Research Enquiry (FLARE) has been established to help foster a culture of research practice in Essex. The Forum is mainly made up of practising teachers and headteachers. It wishes to encourage people who work in schools, and in the educational community at large, to both use and engage in research activity. The Forum sees this as making a significant contribution to improved teaching and learning. Engagement with research also encourages practitioners to question, explore and develop their practice and is an integral element of continuing professional development.



The teacher as enquirer

Many teachers may be reluctant to recognise themselves as 'teacher researchers' because they are not conscious of formally engaging in activity that is labelled research. Some teachers do undertake specific research activity, often leading to accreditation, and the Essex Forum for Learning and Research Enquiry is interested in hearing of your research work.



However, for the majority of teachers the notion of being a teacher researcher is unhelpful and may be off-putting. A more useful term, which describes the skills that are part of good teaching, is the teacher as enquirer. By this we mean teachers who are keen to reflect upon and critique their practice. They make good use of research and evidence to stimulate new ways of thinking and to try out new ideas, and then systematically to evaluate the impact of any subsequent change they have brought about. We want to encourage such teacher enquirer activity and to help network research approaches and outcomes.



Essex is establishing a new website community for the exchange of research and enquiry activity. This website will be available for all in the Essex educational community to disseminate recent and current research activity and projects, or simply to exchange and debate research interests and ideas. It will also provide links with other organisations to enable Essex colleagues to become part of a national community of educational enquiry and research.

If you are interested in knowing more about this development or are currently engaged in a project or have a research interest, and would like to log this on the forthcoming website, please email Graham Handscomb on: graham.handscomb@essexcc.gov.uk.

Contact

Graham Handscomb

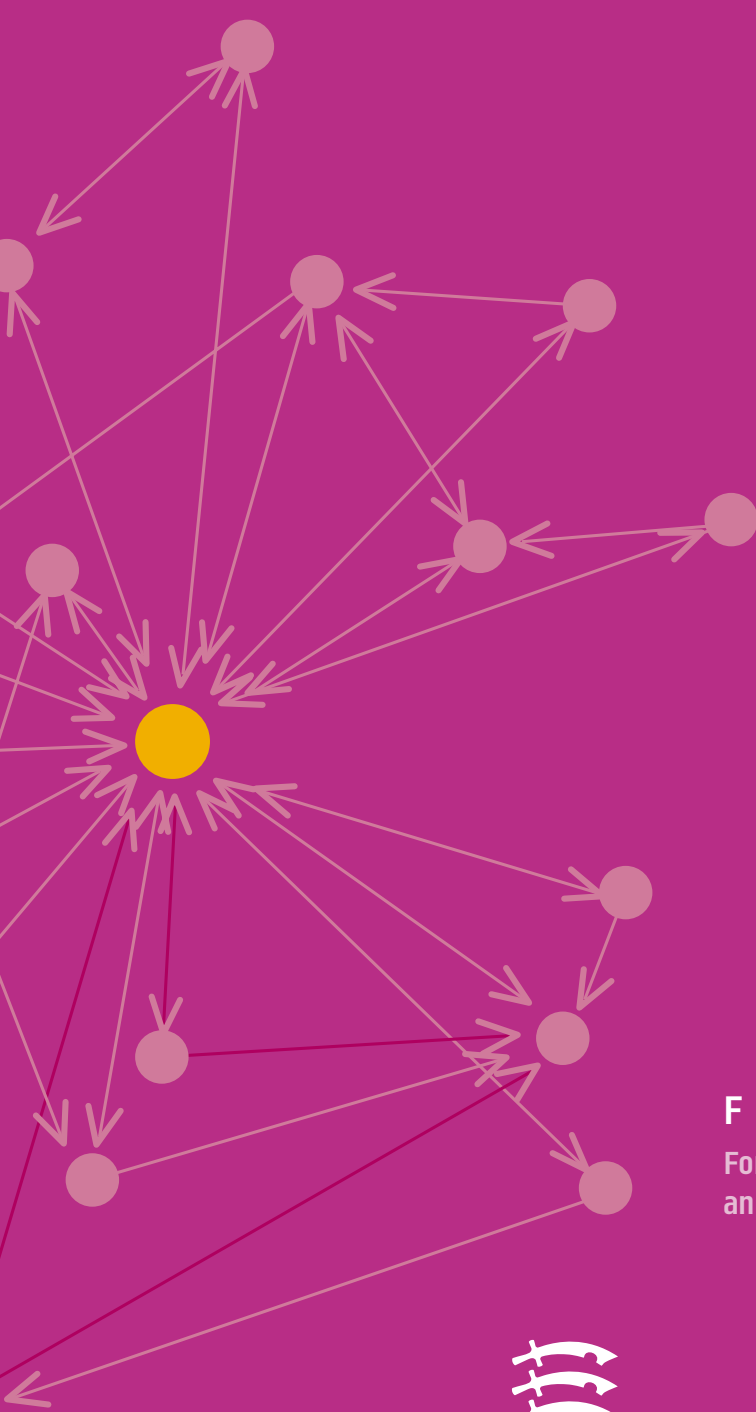
graham.handscomb@essexcc.gov.uk

On behalf of the **Forum for Learning and Research Enquiry (FLARE)**



Essex County Council

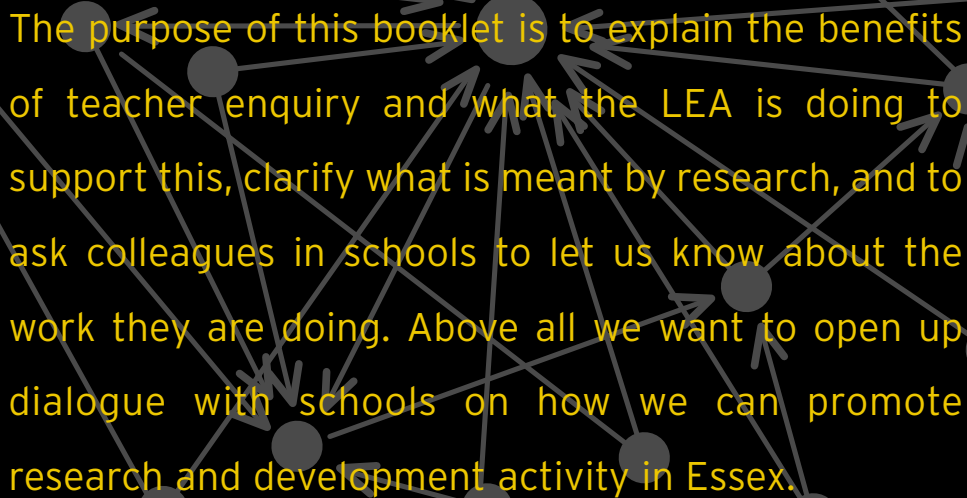




FLARE
Forum for Learning
and Research Enquiry



Essex County Council



The purpose of this booklet is to explain the benefits of teacher enquiry and what the LEA is doing to support this, clarify what is meant by research, and to ask colleagues in schools to let us know about the work they are doing. Above all we want to open up dialogue with schools on how we can promote research and development activity in Essex.



Enquiry and research: what's in it for me?

Many teachers are keen to reflect upon their work, explore different approaches and try out new things in the classroom. Research activity provides the opportunity to support teacher enquiry by making it more systematic. If you are an Essex teacher, teaching assistant, school manager, or someone who supports the work of schools, we want to encourage your work of professional enquiry. We want to help colleagues link up and communicate with each other, share their questions and exchange their research practice. We want the outcomes of research to be understood and the benefits to be implemented in the classrooms of others. To support this, our newly established research forum will regularly communicate with schools, sharing case studies and publicising the research from Essex schools and beyond.



Building a body of research knowledge in Essex

One aspect of FLARE's work is to build a body of knowledge about effective teaching and learning in Essex. So we are keen that the research outcomes of enquiring teachers are identified and contribute to this shared knowledge base. Not all research work carried out within one school or classroom will be directly transferable or generalisable to other settings. However, a common feature of all such enquiry is that it should pose problems and ask questions for other colleagues, and challenge them to re-examine their own practice in the light of work done.



Research audit: putting research to work

The Forum will periodically audit research activity taking place in the Essex educational community in order to establish and maintain a directory of research and enquiry.

This is intended to be a resource index for all colleagues in Essex and to facilitate networking and sharing of good practice. It will also help the Forum to identify where there are current 'gaps' in research activity and inform what research needs to be encouraged and commissioned.

We intend to establish a FLARE on-line community which will help stimulate dialogue and networking.



What is research?

We think it would be helpful to open up a discussion on what we mean by research in relation to the work of teachers and others in schools.

The image of educational research is for many teachers something done by others in academic institutions – complex, difficult to access, and of limited relevance. Unfortunately some developments in educational research have suffered from these features. However, this is changing. Increasingly, classroom practitioners have discovered the merits of investigating an aspect of their work which directly contributes to improved practice and benefits the children they teach.



Evidence-informed practice

Teachers have long been involved in examining their practice in order to make further improvements. When does such an activity 'count' as research? What is the relationship between large-scale research conducted by a university department and a piece of evidence-informed practice carried out by a teacher within her classroom? And how is such evidence-informed practice any different from what good teachers do anyway in refining and honing their craft in day to day lesson preparation and evaluation?

One view is that evidence-informed practice typically involves the individual teacher, reflecting on her own classroom practice and sharing this with colleagues; whilst in contrast 'research' is seen as involving a larger scale, more systematic enquiry. Another view is that these two characterisations are not different in kind but rather two ends of a continuum of practice in which 'evidence-informed practice' merges into 'research'.

Systematic enquiry, made public

Many have found this a difficult debate and are uncomfortable about making too sharp a distinction between evidenced-informed practice and research. Perhaps the most useful understanding of what constitutes research is 'systematic enquiry, made public'. This can encompass both the individual teacher focusing on one feature of her craft, as well as large scale projects involving many schools. The important common elements are that the research is undertaken with rigour and communicated to others.

What are the main features of research and enquiry?

FLARE is keen to hear about research/systematic enquiry carried out in educational settings.

We will be working with schools on identifying the characteristic features of such activity. Typically they will include being clear about what you are trying to do, and ensuring that intended outcomes sensibly link with stated aims. Enquiry which has firm foundations takes account of what is already known and previous work in the area that has taken place. The value and rigour of research is very much dependent on the clarity of research approach and methodology used. This simply means being clear about the best methods for gathering the information you need relevant to the issue being explored.





Devoting attention to evaluative reflection on the research process is often time well spent. So for instance it is helpful to ask, did the research measure what you set out to measure, and would the outcomes be the same in similar and other circumstances? This proves particularly useful when considering how the outcomes of school colleagues' research may be accessed and used by others.

Let us know about your research.

So this is the activity we wish to encourage and support in Essex. We want to hear of all research, recent and current, no matter how small scale. The common feature will be that they are examples of systematic enquiry made public.