

# Initial Teacher Education – How to ensure it is research intensive

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*Research Tutoed: Implementing and then critiquing research on the use of children's literature in primary education helping students to develop their cognitive and intellectual skills.*

In my role as a lecturer in primary and early years initial teacher education, I have to ensure that students engage with research at 'M' level at the same time as meeting a set of professional standards by the end of the course. As the PGCE/PGDip Ed courses are only one academic year long, there is a temptation to adopt a technician approach to teaching (Liston and Zeichner, 2013)<sup>27</sup>, by 'training' students to copy strategies modelled by lecturers and by experienced teachers in placement schools. However, thinking critically about research into teaching is an important part of developing thinking at 'M' level (Lakin and Mason, 2008<sup>28</sup>) and a way of developing teachers who are likely to remain in the profession. Early years and primary students need a strong sense of why they are doing what they are doing, based on the available research evidence. This supports them to develop as effective and resilient professionals who can successfully negotiate the educational, research and policy developments that will inevitably arise throughout their careers.

The approach shared in this case study is 'research tutoed', in that I am not encouraging students to enact research findings in the classroom but to critique the research in relation to its practical application. I support primary and early years ITE students to engage with research in the collaborative creation of a primary teaching resource based on their subject knowledge of children's literature. Research by Cremin et al (2009<sup>29</sup>) demonstrates that strong knowledge of children's literature is important if teachers are to be effective in teaching early years and primary English. Students are introduced to this research in a university-based teaching session. I share key findings from the research and link it to other research into how children learn to read, that we have examined in previous sessions. Students are given time to explore the Cremin research on its associated website (Open University, 2014<sup>30</sup>), before small group discussions to consider the possible challenges when putting the findings into practice. Then, they are set the task of using children's literature in their English teaching when on school placement. So that students can share their ideas with one another when they are out on placement, each student contributes teaching ideas based on one children's text per teaching placement to a Canvas discussion board. This allows them to build their collective knowledge of children's literature at the same time as exploring ideas from research in the practical context of the classroom. At the end of the training year, a university-based seminar is dedicated to discussion and critique of the research in relation to its practical enactment in the classroom. I create a .pdf document from the discussion board contributions, which is then a searchable resource of between 50 and 100 texts that students can make use of in their classrooms as qualified teachers. By creating a resource, students have a concrete representation of their understanding of the research findings, which can support them in their first year of teaching and beyond.

27 Liston, R and Zeichner, K. (2013) *Reflective Teaching. An Introduction*. London: Routledge.

28 Lakin, L. and Mason, D. (2008) 'What can I expect my PGCE look like at subject level?' in Sewell, K. ed *Doing a PGCE at 'M' Level: A Guide for Students*. London: Sage, pp.19-33.

29 Cremin, T., Mottram, M., Collins, FF., Powell, S. and Safford, K. (2009) 'Teachers as readers: building communities of readers'. *Literacy*, 43(1), pp. 11–19.

30 Open University (2014) *Research Rich Pedagogies* Available at [researchrichpedagogies.org/research/theme/reading-teachers-teachers-who-read-and-readers-who-teach](https://researchrichpedagogies.org/research/theme/reading-teachers-teachers-who-read-and-readers-who-teach) (Accessed 12/06/2020)