

## Meeting in the OTLA (NE&C) Marketplace....



The tranquil charm of the stately Ramside Hall Ballroom rapidly descended into an exhilarating (if exhausting) clamour of excitement as ninety learning support staff, teachers, teacher-educators and managers traded project adventures and set fresh course for completing their research voyages. Practitioner-researchers from training providers, offender learning institutions, local authorities and FE colleges shared excitement and nervousness about getting started on research, wondering “Will I do it right?”, together with delight in sharing “What worked better...” from their first attempts at research.

There was lots of forgiving laughter as teachers swapped familiar stories of well-meaning research plans being frustrated by timetabling clashes, student absences, resource problems and last-minute rooming changes. The dynamics of the marketplace seemed driven by a fresh self-belief as teaching staff had found time and space – and purpose and permission – to rediscover their missions to “make a difference”.



Marketplace artist Graham Ogilvie produced bold sketches highlighting the real challenges driving teachers’ research. His hand-crafted pictures seem at first whimsical, yet within



each project illustration, “the learner” is always the strong central image, demonstrating how all the different project themes – assessment, Maths, English, Student Support, Offender Learning, Diversity, teacher development, Mindfulness, etc – are basically driven by teachers’ commitment to students. And amidst the bustling busyness of the marketplace activity, the coherence and

integrity of the afternoon – and our OTLA programme – has been delightfully captured in the picture of Graham cementing the final “brick in the wall” whilst our visiting partners from the policy and academic worlds – Paul and Jean – study the key messages from the creative world of practice that should complement and transform academics’ and policy-makers’ limited understandings and assumptions.



## Reflections – What did practitioner-researchers take home from the market?

It was great to see teaching staff taking the opportunity to share experiences between providers, especially when those ideas from visiting speakers and project practitioners have a resonance for teachers, and are judged worthy of being adopted into their teaching and research<sup>i</sup>.

One striking example of the practical research value of the marketplace features a teacher researching Diversity approaches who became intrigued by another project's focus on exploring the potential of 'Mindfulness' for inspiring hard-to-reach learners, and she saw opportunities for employing some Mindfulness strategies in her one-to-one tutoring with a very challenging learner. <sup>ii</sup> She has since designed an individual plan of Mindfulness interventions, and by keeping notes about these interventions, the teacher will contribute unique, single-site case-study insights for herself, her colleagues across projects and for the wider research community by addressing the question, "To what extent have these approaches helped with this learner in this situation..."

We believe that the significant feature of this new individual study is not that the teacher is just trading information from the Mindfulness project, but that she is demonstrating how her newfound practitioner research approach empowers her to test innovative approaches

in her practice. This teacher has not just come back from the market with new knowledge, but also with the confident capacity, as a research-active practitioner, to test this knowledge in her practice to generate – and share – her own new working theory of Mindfulness.

---

<sup>i</sup> *(Essentially, the value of any research “findings” and proposals – whether from novice practitioners or from established academic research communities – can be measured by whether they are considered worthwhile enough to be translated into effective practice by practitioners.)*

<sup>ii</sup> *Mindfulness promises tantalising potential, although a recent review of all school-based applications of Mindfulness interventions indicates that the promise has not been vindicated as yet by existing research ([Campbell, 2017](#)).*