

t h i r d e d i t i o n

# A Teacher's Guide to Classroom Research



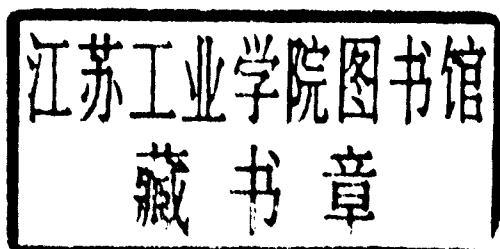
David Hopkins

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# **A teacher's guide to classroom research**

THIRD EDITION

**David Hopkins**



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For  
Jeroen, Jessica and Dylan  
with love

In short the outstanding characteristic of the extended professional (teacher) is a capacity for autonomous professional self-development through systematic self-study, through the study of the work of other teachers and through the testing of ideas by classroom research procedures.

Lawrence Stenhouse

*An Introduction to Curriculum Research and Development*

Learning experiences are composed of content, process and social climate. As teachers we create for and with our children opportunities to explore and build important areas of knowledge, develop powerful tools for learning, and live in humanising social conditions.

Bruce Joyce, Emily Calhoun and David Hopkins

*Models of Learning – Tools for Teaching*

Appreciating a phenomenon is a fateful decision, for it eventually entails a commitment – to the phenomenon and to those exemplifying it – to render it with fidelity and without violating its integrity. Entering the world of the phenomenon is a radical and drastic method of appreciation.

David Matza

*Becoming Deviant*

And what is good, Phaedrus,  
And what is not good –  
Need we ask anyone to tell us these things?

Robert Pirsig

*Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*

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## Preface to the third edition

The educational landscape in Britain and most other Western countries has changed dramatically since this book was originally published in 1985. The increase in centralized policy-making, however, far from undermining the role of 'teacher researcher', has in my opinion made such a professional ethic all the more necessary. It is becoming increasingly obvious that 'top-down' change does not 'mandate what matters', and that it is local implementation, the work of teachers, that is most influential in determining the achievements of students. If we are serious about enhancing the quality of education in our schools, teachers need to be more, not less, involved in curriculum development, school improvement and pedagogy.

It seems to me that the major differences between now and the mid-1980s is that teacher researchers have increasingly to take a whole school perspective. They now have to interpret and adapt policy to their own teaching situation, to link their classroom research work to that of other colleagues and whole school priorities, as well as to the process of teaching and learning.

In the second edition of *A Teacher's Guide to Classroom Research*, I tried to take this new perspective into account while retaining the structure and simplicity of the original book. In particular, I emphasized the crucial role of classroom observation in supporting teacher and school development, added a new chapter on linking classroom research to other whole school initiatives, updated the text and took the opportunity to rewrite where I had originally been too bland, confused or just got it wrong.

It is a great privilege to have the opportunity to update a book at regular intervals, for it allows one to keep pace with what has proven to be a rapidly changing educational scene. In the second edition I placed more emphasis on the importance of viewing teacher research within a whole

school context. In this third edition I argue that not only should teacher research be a whole school activity, but that it should also focus unrelentingly on the teaching and learning process. It has become increasingly apparent to me that if teaching and learning is not the centre-point of our classroom research efforts then the achievement of the young people in our schools will continue to lag behind the aspirations we have for them. And more importantly we will have failed them during the most crucial learning opportunity of their lives. As we pursue an increasingly ambitious educational reform agenda it is vital that we take the opportunity to create a discourse around teaching and learning in our schools and communities.

In the preface for the second edition, I mentioned that since the initial publication of the book I had become the proud father of Jeroen, Jessica and Dylan. Their mother tells me that my writing and practice has become much more learning and classroom focused since they have become part of our lives. Whatever the truth in that, it is certainly the case that as they have developed their own individual learning histories they have consistently challenged my own ideas on education and forced me to rethink and rewrite. As I have written elsewhere, in a profound way, I am continually trying to adjust my educational thinking to keep pace with their development.

What I wish for Jeroen, Jessica and Dylan, is that they not only meet and if possible surpass existing educational standards, but that they also find learning exciting, compelling and intrinsically worthwhile. I wish them to become competent and social beings who have sound, secure and healthy self-concepts to help them face the challenges that await them in their lives. It is here where the personal and the professional converge. What I want for my children is I believe the same as what most teachers wish for their students. There is a striking quality about fine teachers – they care deeply about the young people in their school. Most teachers came into teaching because they wanted to make a difference. Classroom research by teachers is one way of focusing educational efforts to ensure that this difference is being made.

In preparing the third edition of this book, I have taken the opportunity to generally revise and update the text. I have also added some additional examples and cameos that reflect the increased focus on teaching and learning and in a few places I have rearranged certain sections in order to accommodate other necessary revisions. In addition I have completely rewritten the last three chapters. This is to emphasize the contribution classroom research can make to creating a discourse around teaching and learning, to whole school development, and to the creation of increasingly powerful learning communities in our schools.

The book continues to have a modest aim: it is to provide teachers and students with a practical guide to doing research in their own classrooms and to linking these research efforts to the extension of their teaching and

learning repertoires and to whole school developments. Despite the proliferation of texts on action research in recent years, I believe that there is still a place for a practical and straightforward introduction to teacher-based classroom research; particularly one that is committed to teacher and school development. In this way, the book complements the existing literature rather than competes with it.

In rereading the book again I was struck once more by how far the original text was influenced by the work of Lawrence Stenhouse and how relevant his ideas still are for us today. Given the great educational challenges that we continue to face, more people of his stature are needed who have a vision of education and can translate it into a coherent philosophy and a pragmatic course of action. On my office wall there is still the quotation from Stenhouse that is on his memorial plaque in the grounds of the University of East Anglia:

It is teachers who, in the end, will change the world of the school by understanding it.

I hope that in some small way this book continues to contribute to that aspiration.

*David Hopkins*  
*Argentiere Mont-Blanc*  
*30th January 2001*



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# Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the late Mike Bruce, Don Cochrane, Peter Norman, Jean Rudduck and especially Ann Kilcher for the care with which they reviewed the original manuscript; and for conversations that clarified my thinking on this and other matters. Their friendship and professional collaboration has meant a great deal to me. Suzzane de Castell, Gill Harper-Jones, Pat Holborn, my sister Mary Schofield, Louise Pelletier and David Pritchard also provided material and intellectual support at critical and opportune times: my thanks to them too. A number of colleagues and students graciously allowed me to use some of their material as illustrations and examples in the first edition. In this regard, I remain indebted to Stan Auerbach, Judy Byer, Heather Lockhard, Sandra Meister, Marianne Schmidt, Ann Waldo and Harvey Walker. The three anonymous reviewers of the original book proposal made comments that encouraged me to revise and improve that manuscript. I anticipate that at least two of them were satisfied with the outcome.

In preparing the second edition of this book, my colleagues at Cambridge were characteristically generous in taking time to review and help me with the manuscript. I am particularly grateful to Mel Ainscow for his thoughtful and creative comments, and more generally for exploring with me the boundaries of professional partnership. Colin Conner, Dave Ebbutt and Julie Howard also reviewed parts of the manuscript and made helpful comments. I am grateful to the Bedfordshire LEA/University of Cambridge Institute of Education 'Developing Successful Learning Project', Howard Bradley and Rob Bollington, Jere Brophy and Tom Good, Walter Doyle, Rex Gibson, David Hargreaves, Pamela Hughes, David Jeffries, Denis Lawton, James McKernan and The Sanders Draper School for letting me use some of their material in this new edition. John Skelton, my publisher at Open University Press, has been most supportive throughout.

The task of preparing the third edition was greatly eased by the

assistance of Julie Temperley and John Beresford. They both made numerous and helpful suggestions for updating the text and through our discussions shared with me their own experience of facilitating teacher research. Once again my colleagues have been more than generous in allowing me to include in this new edition work that we have published elsewhere. In this respect I am grateful to Mel Ainscow, John Beresford, David Fulton Publishers, David H. Hargreaves, Alma Harris, David Jackson, Barbara MacGilchrist, Collette Singleton and Ruth Watts. Thanks also to Shona Mullen of the Open University Press who is one of the best, and most supportively critical, editors with whom I have had the pleasure to work.

In the interval between the second and third editions I have had the privilege of working with networks of schools in Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Bedfordshire, South Wales, Leicester and Walsall on our 'Improving the Quality of Education For All' school improvement project. This work has focused more than ever before on strategies for teaching and learning and the facilitation of action enquiry and classroom-based research. As always, I have learned a great deal from the commitment, enthusiasm and sheer professionalism of colleagues involved in those networks. It is here that the energy for the transformation of our school system lies. My thanks and admiration to them.

The argument of the book was developed from ideas originally published in the *CARN Bulletin*, the DES booklet *Planning for School Development*, the *Empowered School*, *Managing Schools Today*, *Phi Delta Kappan*, *School Organization* and *The Times Educational Supplement*. Finally, I must also acknowledge the Deakin University Press, the Ford Teaching Project and Universitetsforlaget AS for allowing me to reproduce copyright material.

As always it was Marloes Hopkins de Groot who provided the shelter conditions under which the work could take place: thanks to her for this and many other things.

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# CHAPTER 1

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## A teacher's guide to classroom research

This is a practical guide for teachers who wish to undertake research in their classrooms and schools for the purpose of improving practice. Classroom research, in the sense that I refer to it here, is an act undertaken by teachers, to enhance their own or a colleague's teaching, to test the assumptions of educational theory in practice, or as a means of evaluating and implementing whole school priorities. So when I write of classroom research or of the teacher as researcher, I am not envisioning scores of teachers assuming a research role and carrying out research projects to the exclusion of their teaching. My vision is of teachers who have extended their role to include critical reflection upon their craft with the aim of improving it.

Although lip service is often paid to this idea, we live in an educational system that tends to limit individual initiative by encouraging conformity and control. Teachers and pupils (and society too) deserve better than that. Undertaking research in their own and colleagues' classrooms is one way in which teachers can take increased responsibility for their actions and create a more energetic and dynamic environment in which teaching and learning can occur.

The origins of teacher research as a movement can be traced back to the Schools Council's Humanities Curriculum Project (HCP) (1967–72) with its emphasis on an experimental curriculum and the reconceptualization of curriculum development as curriculum research. HCP, in its attempt to encourage a non-partisan and critically reflective attitude to teaching on the part of teachers, had a radical and controversial influence on teaching in British schools during the 1970s.

Following HCP, the concept of teacher research was nurtured by John Elliott and Clem Adelman in the Ford Teaching Project (1972–75). The project involved 40 primary and secondary school teachers in examining their classroom practice through action research. These teachers developed

hypotheses about their teaching which could be shared with other teachers and used to enhance their own teaching.

At about the same time, Lawrence Stenhouse, who directed the Humanities Curriculum Project, further popularized the concept of 'the teacher as researcher' by utilizing it as the major theme in his influential book, *An Introduction to Curriculum Research and Development* (Stenhouse 1975). Encouraged by the considerable impact that Stenhouse had on the theory and practice of curriculum and teaching, and the popularity and publicity enjoyed by the Ford Teaching Project, the teacher research movement mushroomed. As well as burgeoning teacher research groups in the UK, Australia, the USA and Canada, there are pockets of teacher-researchers in Scandinavia, France, Chile and many other countries. Although teacher research was not an entirely new concept in the late 1960s, it is from this period that it became an identifiable movement.

Much, however, has changed in the context of education in most Western countries since the concept of the teacher as researcher became popular. The main difference between the 1970s and the first decade of the 21st century is that classroom research has increasingly to be seen within a whole school context. It is no longer sufficient for teachers to do research in their own classrooms, without relating their enquiries to the work of their colleagues and the aims and direction of the school as a whole. We need to strive consciously for a synthesis between teacher research and school development. That is why this book is not just a primer on classroom research techniques, it also attempts to relate teacher research to whole school development.

All books emerge out of a specific set of individual circumstances that have influenced the author, and this book is no exception. The journey that preceded this book is still continuing, and so the story remains unfinished. But two influences in particular have been crucial in developing the ideas presented here and provide a context in which to consider the book. The first is the work of Lawrence Stenhouse. In the Humanities Curriculum Project and his other work, Stenhouse was primarily concerned with the concept of emancipation. He wrote (1983: 163):

My theme is an old-fashioned one – emancipation . . . The essence of emancipation as I conceive it is the intellectual, moral and spiritual autonomy which we recognise when we eschew paternalism and the role of authority and hold ourselves obliged to appeal to judgement.

There are three levels at which this concept of emancipation can operate – at the level of the student, the teacher and the school.

At the level of the student, emancipation refers to the ability to stand outside the teacher's authority on forms of knowledge, and to discover and

own it for oneself. It was in the Humanities Curriculum Project that Stenhouse most notoriously signalled his commitment to this theme. In that project he was principally concerned with the emancipation of pupils through a particular teaching strategy. There were three elements to this aspect of the project: the use of discussion, the use of documents as evidence to inform discussion, and the assumption by the teacher of the role of neutral chairperson. By adopting this approach, Stenhouse was moving away from a teacher-dominated classroom to a setting where pupils, unconstrained by the authority of the teacher, could create meaning for themselves on the basis of evidence and discussion.

If HCP was in part a curriculum designed to emancipate pupils, the phrase 'teacher as researcher' was intended to do the same for teachers. Teachers are too often the servants of heads, advisers, researchers, textbooks, curriculum developers, examination boards or the Department for Education and Skills, among others. By adopting a research stance, teachers are liberating themselves from the control and command situation they often find themselves in. Stenhouse encouraged teachers to follow the specification of a curriculum or teaching strategy, but at the same time to assess it critically. Such curriculum proposals and teaching specifications are probably intelligent but are not necessarily correct. Their effectiveness should therefore be monitored by teachers in the classroom. By adopting this critical approach, by taking a research stance, the teacher is engaged not only in a meaningful professional development activity, but also engaged in a process of refining, and becoming more autonomous in, professional judgement. This applies as much to the National Curriculum as it did to the HCP.

The third level at which emancipation can operate is that of the school. Here it is a question of the school liberating itself from a bureaucratic educational system. The image of the 'ideal' type of emancipated school is represented by the words 'autonomous', 'creative', 'moving' or 'problem-solving'. These successful schools take the opportunity of the recent changes and use them to support developments already underway or planned for in the school. They adapt external change for internal purposes. In the most successful or emancipated schools, there is also a realization that successful change involves learning on the part of teachers. This implies that successful change strategies involve a seamless web of activities that focus on, are integrated with and enhance the daily work of teachers. This can result in quite profound alterations to the culture of the school and the ways in which teachers, heads and governors work together towards the goal of student achievement.

The second influence on this book is more personal. During the 1970s, I trained as a teacher and taught, worked as an Outward Bound instructor and mountain guide, and read for postgraduate degrees in education. Although somewhat different activities, they were all characterized

by a desire, often hesitant and naive, to create ways in which people could take more control of their own lives. Irrespective of the context – practice teaching, an ‘O’ level history class, counselling a ‘delinquent’ pupil, assisting in a youth club, on the rock face, out in the wilderness, or discussing ideas in a seminar – there were similarities in overall aim and pedagogic structure.

Later, as a teacher in a Canadian university, I taught courses in curriculum development, analysis of teaching, classroom research, and found in Stenhouse's work a theoretical framework within which I could put my ideas into action. The book emerged from that experience, more specifically from a course I taught in classroom research and some papers I wrote on the topic (Hopkins 1982, 1984a,b). Thus, the book is based on a set of ideas that have the enhancement of teacher judgement and autonomy as a specific goal, and is grounded within the practical realities of teachers and students.

This interest in classroom-based work, although always in my mind linked to school improvement, has assumed a broader perspective whilst at Cambridge and Nottingham. Much of this work has been concerned with assisting teachers, schools and local education authorities (LEAs) to handle and reflect on the change process. I have learned an enormous amount from them, as I did from my involvement in the evaluation of TVEI, the DES projects on Teacher Appraisal and School Development Plans, and in particular our school improvement project ‘Improving the Quality of Education for All’. I have also been fortunate to have worked over a slightly longer period with the OECD's Centre for Educational Research and Innovation on a number of school improvement-related projects. This work has helped me to see the teacher's role in the wider context of the school as an organization and workplace. In particular, it has impressed on me the crucial importance of the culture of the school in sustaining teacher development.

It is this commitment to a practical philosophy of emancipation and empowerment as well as a particular set of individual circumstances that underpin the argument in this book. After this introduction, a few case studies of teacher-based research are given to provide a context for what follows. In Chapter 3, two arguments are considered for teacher-based research – the need for professionalism in teaching, and the inadequacy of the traditional research approach in helping teachers improve their classroom practice. In Chapter 4, action research, which has become the main vehicle for teacher research, is discussed and critiqued; from that discussion, six criteria for teacher-based research are suggested. Chapter 5 discusses the ways in which teacher research problems are formulated and initiated. Chapters 6 and 7 describe the principles and practice of classroom observation, and in Chapter 8 various other ways of gathering information on classroom behaviour are described. Chapter 9 outlines a method for analysing these data. These five chapters constitute the heart of the teacher research process. In Chapter 10 there is an elaboration of the explicit focus of the third edition on teaching and learning. In arguing that pedagogy

should become the heartland of classroom research, I review the research on effective teaching and models of teaching and provide practical examples of three common models of learning and teaching. The discussion in Chapter 11 highlights the role of development planning as a vehicle for linking classroom research activities to school improvement strategies in the pursuit of enhanced learning outcomes for students. In the final chapter, I stand back a little and attempt briefly to connect the discussion in previous chapters to the themes of teacher and school development, in particular the creation of a culture that promotes networks and professional learning communities within and outside the school.

A continuing emphasis throughout the book is the importance of establishing a professional ethic for teaching. Implicit in this idea is the concept of teacher as researcher. The teacher-researcher image is a powerful one. It embodies a number of characteristics that reflect on the individual teacher's capacity to be in Stenhouse's phrase 'autonomous in professional judgement'. A major factor in this is the teacher's ability to think systematically and critically about what he or she is doing and to collaborate with other teachers. Central to this activity is the systematic reflection on one's classroom experience, to understand it and to create meaning out of that understanding. By becoming self-conscious, collaborative and critical about their teaching, teachers develop more power over their professional lives, extend their teaching repertoires, and are better able to create classrooms and schools that are responsive to the vision they and we have for our children's future.

## FURTHER READING

The key source for any teacher-researcher is the work of Lawrence Stenhouse, in particular his *An Introduction to Curriculum Research and Development* (1975). Although he died before making his own comprehensive statement on classroom research by teachers, Jean Rudduck and I (Rudduck and Hopkins 1985) edited his published and unpublished writing to make such an argument in *Research as a Basis for Teaching*. Until the mid-1980s most of the work on teacher research was either philosophical discussion (Kemmis 1983, 1988), reports by researchers (Elliot and Adelman 1976) or teachers' own accounts of their research (Nixon 1981). Since that time, however, there has been a dramatic growth in the number of books on the topic. Pride of place must go to John Elliott's (1991) *Action Research for Educational Change*, which traces the development of the teacher research movement, describes its methodology and explores how it can be 'a form of creative resistance' to centralized policy-making. Other books that attempt in different ways to link the ethic of teacher research to school development and educational change are Helen Simons' (1987) *Getting to*



*Know Schools in Democracy*, Rob Halsall's (1998) collections on *Teacher Research and School Improvement*, our own *The Empowered School* (Hargreaves and Hopkins 1991) and *The New Structure of School Improvement* (Joyce et al. 1999). Much else of relevance to the theme of 'classroom research by teachers' has been published recently, and I have referred to them in the 'Further Reading' section at the end of the most appropriate chapter.