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## 1. Easy access to the results of academic research

*The teachers are rounding up their first inquiry cycle. They have learned a lot from engaging in practitioner inquiry and acting as each other's critical friends in doing so. Reflecting on their experiences, they come back to the point of the relevance of academic research for teachers.*

*Barbara: "When looking at our inquiry projects, I think we did quite well!"*

*Rik: "I agree, but I think it's strange that we came to different conclusions than the scientific studies we read about."*

*Cristina: "Why's that strange? As we talked about when we started, academic research is mostly about means and averages, and we don't deal with average classes and students."*

*Rik: "So what's the use of reading these studies? They can't seem to tell us what works in our practices. Maybe we should stop paying attention to them: we have a hard time finding them, they're clearly not written for us, and it's difficult to figure out how they can help improving your practice!"*

*Marleen: "I understand your question. Maybe we need to view the findings of these studies not as facts that are valid in all situations, but more as general trends that tell us what measures are promising. They also help us find sound terminology."*

*Cristina: "Okay, but the terminology, also makes it very abstract, and hard to read."*

*Marleen: "So maybe we need to find a solution for that."*

*Willem: "Maybe we can invite academic researchers to our PLC to help us with finding and understanding relevant academic studies."*

*Barbara: "I know some researchers from our local university. Maybe we could invite them next time."*

### 1.1 Introduction

As established, evidence-informed teaching could be viewed as a certain stance towards the usefulness of research findings in advancing teaching quality. We assume however, that in a majority of teaching practices, teachers are not automatically inclined towards such a stance, especially when it comes to taking into account the results of *academic* research. Our experiences tell us that most teachers predominantly hold a 'intuitions-based teaching stance'; relying mostly on their personal craft and what they have learned through practical experience.

In order to encourage teachers to reflect upon and improve their practice by taking account of academic research, a number of issues need to be addressed. They are, (a) getting access to academic literature, (b) reading academic literature and (c) relating academic literature to practice. It is also important to consider *why* teachers generally don't routinely make use of academic research.



## 1.2 Why teachers mostly do not work in an evidence-informed manner

It seems that the issue of stimulating teachers to use academic research to enhance their practice hasn't received a lot of attention from educational researchers. Quigley stated almost twenty years ago that "...the majority of teachers, counsellors, and administrators spend their careers at the receiving end of "manufactured" research products produced in remote university "factories" by unseen research experts." (1997, p.3). There are, for instance, hardly any academic publications on how teachers' use of academic research affects teaching quality or, to go one step further, students' learning outcomes: "Although there are very many normative perspectives on what the relationship of research and practice *should* be, there are surprisingly few data about what it actually *is*." (St. Clair, 2004, p. 225). From what *is* written, we can conclude that teachers in general are very reluctant to read academic publications, let alone enhance their daily practice as a result of the information these publication provide. But even if teachers were able to access academic publications, the problem in most cases will be that the information contained will hardly be readable because of the rather hermetic nature of academic language<sup>1</sup>. Research articles are evidently written for the academic community and not for teachers:

"The individual teacher engaging with a research report so that it can be applied 'in practice' must often wrestle alone with challenging levels of abstraction. [...] practitioners need to connect intellectually, practically and emotionally with the knowledge they are offered in the research accounts if they are to take it on board and use this to inform their practice. They are a particular audience and, as with all other audiences, their specific needs and contexts need to be taken into account if the texts are to "speak to" them." (Cordingley, 2008).

Another topic addressed in academic publications is a difference in views of academic researchers and teaching professionals on the usefulness of academic knowledge. Academics usually "want research studies that address global issues in a way that is broadly applicable to understanding", whereas teachers "want studies that will guide them through everyday problems of practice rather than studies that address broad areas of interest" (Fox, 2000, p. 239).

Following this observation, it could be concluded that a possible solution lies in directing academic publications more towards teachers (see e.g. NTRP, 2000; Kerr et al., 1998) That is, however, beyond the scope of this project, but whilst Linpilcare's concern has been to focus on teaching professionals the need for "short, evidence-informed, reflective activities" written by researchers seems compelling (Cordingley, 2008).

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<sup>1</sup> An aspect of this language problem is of course also that most scientific publications are published in English, which gives non-natives English speakers a disadvantage in trying to understand what is written.



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### 1.3 Possible strategies

So far, the partners of project Linpilcare have considered several ideas and strategies in helping teachers bridge the gap between teaching practice and the results of academic research:

- *Making teachers familiar with relevant search engines* – In several countries projects were conducted to develop search engines that are connected to databases of academic research written for teachers. Sometimes these projects emphasize rewriting scientific publications to make them more accessible for teachers; others are more aimed at making available existing archives of professional journals and the like in which academic research is discussed.
- *Training teachers to read academic publications* – As part of working in a PLC teachers could discuss together how to read academic publications: How are journal articles structured? Which parts of it are usually the most relevant to teachers? In project Linpilcare we could develop tools that help teachers to become familiar with academic writings and the way in which to read them.
- *Questioning researchers* – In some cases, instead of (or in addition to) reading publications, teachers could engage in dialogue with the author(s). This could be done by inviting researchers with expertise on the subject at hand from a local university into their professional learning community, or for instance by contacting them by email. Most teachers probably feel hesitant to directly contact a researcher, whereas researchers may be very willing to explain their writings or the key points of their field of interest to teachers.

### 1.4 References

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