

# WHAT WORKS? *YOU tell us!*

A research-into-practice series produced by a partnership between the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat and the Ontario Association of Deans of Education

What makes a great submission to *What Works*

**To make research findings stick, strive for the following characteristics ...**

- **Simple** – Avoid excessive detail.
- **Unexpected** – Appeal to your reader's sense of curiosity.
- **Concrete** – Hold attention by being real.
- **Credible** – Present a balance of professional and practitioner sources.
- **Emotional** – Frame the research in day-to-day experiences.
- **Narrative** – Tell a story or anecdote.

**MICHELANN PARR, PHD**, and **TERRY CAMPBELL, PHD**, are professors at the Schulich School of Education at Nipissing University in North Bay, Ontario.

## Mobilizing Research into Practice in Meaningful Ways

By Dr. Michelann Parr and Dr. Terry Campbell  
Co-editors, *What Works? Research into Practice*

In our term as editors, we have been asked many questions: What makes a great submission to the *What Works?: Research into Practice* collection? How do I get published? What type of topic should I consider? How should I write? Should I write? What can I include? What should I not include? Can I report on a single research study? Are monographs based on original research? What is the purpose of the series? How are monographs used in the field?

This editorial attempts to answer these questions. We offer a research-based rationale for the series. We share what we know about what works for school communities and the importance of translating research into practice and conclude with a set of implications for potential authors.

### What We Know

The field of education is rich with research: practical and theoretical, qualitative and quantitative, formal and informal, teacher-driven and researcher-driven. Most school communities, given the day-to-day busyness of schooling, have little time to sit down and distill best practices from the many research publications and studies available; when they have a concern, they turn to efficient resources that offer practical, evidence-based information. Educational researchers, appreciating fully the complexities of the classroom and the time demands on educators, wonder whether their research will find its way into school communities in a way that impacts daily practice.<sup>1</sup> “They also know that the types of articles published in refereed journals, while vital, aren’t always accessible”<sup>2</sup> (p. 36).

The Student Achievement Division is committed to providing teachers with current research on instruction and learning. The opinions and conclusions contained in these monographs are, however, those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the policies, views, or directions of the Ontario Ministry of Education or the Student Achievement Division.

## An invitation ...

“We are always available and ready to answer any questions you might have with regard to style, topic, format, etc. You can send us your query or draft and we will review it and get back to you with comments and feedback. We look forward to working with you to put the hands of educational research into school communities.”

– The Editors  
michelap@nipissingu.ca &  
terryc@nipissingu.ca

Increasingly, researchers are exploring multiple methods of knowledge mobilization in order to reach more diverse audiences and have greater impact in the field.<sup>3</sup> In fact, many granting agencies are calling for new ways of knowledge mobilization, recognizing that many research monographs and educational books are not only inaccessible from a time and opportunity perspective, but also not fully current with new technologies and open-access initiatives. Further, those interested in knowledge mobilization and educational change recognize that research has the greatest impact when it is used in meaningful and authentic ways, as part of social processes that include professional development, collaborative inquiry, and systemic initiatives.

In order to make messages and research findings stick, authors should write with the following six characteristics in mind:<sup>4,5</sup>

- **Simple**  
Ensure that the message is simple and not bogged down by excessive details.
- **Unexpected**  
Capture attention by offering something unusual or memorable. Surprise the reader and appeal to their sense of curiosity.
- **Concrete**  
Present information in a way that holds readers’ attention and excites their imaginations.
- **Credible**  
Ensure that references are trustworthy and credible. Have a balance of professional and practitioner sources.
- **Emotional**  
Facilitate connections with readers; frame the research within the day-to-day context of schools.
- **Narrative**  
Tell a story or an anecdote that illustrates the content and main points.

Using these principles, *What Works?*<sup>2</sup> is designed to translate cutting-edge research into action-based practice that informs teachers and school communities as they seek to enhance student achievement and well-being. The goal of each monograph is to leave readers with at least one new piece of theory or strategy that they can easily transfer into their practice; monographs may also help them to understand their practice on a deeper level.<sup>6</sup> As a resource that responds to the complexities of schooling, *What Works?*<sup>2</sup> moves new ideas and shared understandings into the hands of school communities, at the point of action where day-to-day decisions are being made.<sup>7</sup>

**Q What purpose does the series serve?**

**A** *What Works?* was launched in the early days of the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat (LNS) as a way to share evidence-based best practice in elementary education. It has since evolved to a K to 12 outlook, though its ultimate purpose remains to support school communities in the areas of student achievement and well-being. The monographs provide an expert voice, and are often used to spark discussion in professional learning communities, collaborative inquiries, pre-service teacher development, and Ministry symposia. The series is a vehicle for Ontario Faculty of Education researchers to disseminate research widely to Ontario educational communities, including the Ministry of Education, school districts (schools, teachers, families), and faculties of education (faculty, students). In fact, some monographs are being used as best practice in other countries. (For example, *Storytelling* and *Story Writing: Using a Different Kind of Pencil* – available at [http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/inspire/research/ww\\_storytelling.pdf](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/inspire/research/ww_storytelling.pdf) – was re-published, with permission, by the Australian Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat.)

**Q What can we write about?**

**A** Potential topics for the series are often negotiated between the editors and the Ministry's K to 12 Student Achievement Division. As editors, we also conduct periodic reviews of what has been previously published, the most frequently downloaded topics, and issues identified in the field (pre-service and in-service). In the past year, working with our ministry colleagues, we have responded to identified needs (including mathematics and student well-being) to facilitate professional development and use in classrooms. Upcoming themes will include, but not be limited to, early literacy and early numeracy, language and mathematics across the curriculum, and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning.

**Q Who is involved in the production of the series?**

**A** Written by scholars at Ontario universities who are experts in the field of education, *What Works?* is produced by the Student Achievement Division in partnership with the Ontario Deans of Education. Monographs are procured both by invitation and open submission to the co-editors (Michelann Parr – [michelap@nipissingu.ca](mailto:michelap@nipissingu.ca); Terry Campbell – [terryc@nipissingu.ca](mailto:terryc@nipissingu.ca)). While monographs may

be co-authored with those in the field, the corresponding author must be employed in an Ontario Faculty of Education. Monographs proceed through multiple levels of review, including an editorial review where the editors consider format and purpose. University scholars blind-review monographs to assess the relevance of the topic to student achievement and the currency of the research; monographs may be accepted as submitted or refused, or authors may be offered the opportunity to revise and resubmit. Accepted monographs are copy edited and then forwarded to the Student Achievement Division, where they are reviewed by Ministry representatives and prepared for publication.

**Q How many monographs are produced each year?**

**A** Six monographs are grouped into two mailings to educational communities (schools, boards, faculties of education) in September and February. The monographs are distributed across Ontario and are simultaneously posted to the Ministry Website (in English – <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/inspire/research/whatworks.html> – and in French – <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/fre/literacynumeracy/inspire/research/whatWorks.html>). Additional paper copies can be requested through Service Ontario. During the period of April 2013 to April 2014 alone, over 60,000 monographs were requested through Service Ontario with close to 5,600 hits on the website.

**Q How is the success of the series monitored?**

**A** “Having thoughtful teachers who question their own practice”<sup>2</sup> (p. 36) is one way to measure success. Request for individual monographs is also a strong measure. Hot topics include literacy, numeracy, parent engagement, early learning, Aboriginal education, and diversity. Monographs are highly popular documents in the field, written in reader-friendly language with concrete strategies to follow.<sup>2</sup> They are used as part of the Ontario Focused Intervention Partnership program, at Parent Involvement Committee symposia, as starting points for teacher research and board-level literature reviews, as a stimulus for discussion for professional learning and collaborative inquiry, as a tool for sharing contemporary information quickly and efficiently, and as research summaries for pre-service candidates.

## Author Guidelines for Writing

- **Clearly state the issue/question/problem.**

Make sure that your topic is relevant to improving student achievement and well-being in Ontario schools (see *Achieving Excellence*<sup>8</sup>). Review curriculum and policy documents and media releases, and listen to conversations in the field; consider issues or problems presented in the media that require unpacking or reconsideration. Choose a topic that is focused on student achievement and well-being.

- **Familiarize yourself with the style and tone of previously published monographs.**

Attend to the different ways that information is presented and the equal weight assigned to such things as research summaries and implications for practice. Be positive, respectful, and professional when offering research and evidence-based strategies. See *Supporting Families as Collaborators in Children's Literacy Development* for an example that offers a respectful tone, at [http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/inspire/research/WW\\_Families\\_Literacy.pdf](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/inspire/research/WW_Families_Literacy.pdf)

- **Describe the research in a clear and readable fashion.**

Compile and summarize the most salient and trustworthy resources and studies that report on this particular topic, which busy teachers can consult if they want to find out more about the topic. Emphasize how these research findings can help teachers to solve the issue/question/problem identified. In terms of number of references to be cited, aim for 12 to 15.

- **Provide implications for practice for the classroom, school, or district level.**

Implications are the crux of linking research and practice. Identify creative, innovative, and cutting-edge ways to address the issue/question/problem identified at the outset. Ensure that there are practical strategies that can be easily implemented by teachers into day-to-day practice. Provide links to texts or other resources, including websites, YouTube, or podcasts, that allow teachers to access the information in a different and more in-depth ways.

- **Write with purpose and in a reader-friendly style.**

Avoid including excessive tables, figures, and transcripts in favour of short anecdotes that illustrate the points. Ensure that language use is straightforward. A maximum of 1800 words (including references) requires a writing style that is clear and concise. Use a system of numbered citations and references as demonstrated in this monograph so that the reader may move through the monograph in an uninterrupted way.

- **Be willing to engage with teachers and those who disseminate research to school communities.**

Make yourself available for professional development, collaborative inquiry research team meetings, Ministry podcasts and luncheons, and so forth. Involve teachers in applying the research in the context of their day-to-day practice.

## REFERENCES

1. Chavkin, N. F., & Chavkin, A. (2008). Promising website practices for disseminating research on family-school partnerships to the community, *The School Community Journal*, 18(1), 79–92.
2. Foxman, S. (2010, June). Making research come alive. *Professionally Speaking*, 35–40.
3. Institute for Knowledge Mobilization. (2013). *Canadian knowledge mobilization forum 2013*. Ottawa, ON: Author. Retrieved from [http://www.knowledgemobilization.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/2013-Report\\_Canadian-Knowledge-Mobilization-Forum.pdf](http://www.knowledgemobilization.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/2013-Report_Canadian-Knowledge-Mobilization-Forum.pdf)
4. Cook, B. G., Cook, L., & Landrum, T. G. (2013). Moving research into practice: Can we make dissemination stick? *Exceptional Children*, 79, 163–180.
5. Heath, C., & Heath, D. (2008). *Made to stick: Why some ideas survive and others die*. New York, NY: Random House.
6. Randi, J., & Corno, L. (2007). Theory into practice: A matter of transfer. *Theory into Practice*, 46, 334–342.
7. Bennet, A., & Bennet, D. (2007). *Knowledge mobilization in the social sciences and humanities: Moving from research to action*. Frost, WV: MQI Press.
8. Ontario Ministry of Education. (2014). *Achieving excellence: A renewed vision for education in Ontario*. Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario. Retrieved from <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/about/renewedvision.pdf>