

The Teachers' Research Exchange (T-REX)

Transitioning into phase 3 of the project

About T-REX

The Teachers' Research Exchange (T-REX) is a non-profit online community that was established to facilitate and support interdisciplinary collaboration on evidence-based practice and education research across numerous professional boundaries in Ireland. The project, led by Mary Immaculate College, is a strategic partnership with Dublin City University, Marino Institute of Education, University of Limerick, University of Galway, the Education Support Centres of Ireland, and Oide. Along with financial support from the participating higher education institutes (HEIs), funding is from a consortium of the Department of Education, the Teaching Council, and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.

T-REX is an open-membership network for those studying or working in the early years, primary, post-primary, further education, higher education, and educational support services. Members of the platform can avail of a myriad of learning material and support, collaborate on projects, engage in professional dialogue on topics of interest, and multiply the value of their research activity by sharing outcomes in accessible and practical formats. Members vary in their experience of educational research: some are research-curious, while others are actively engaged in or leading on research projects. All are welcome!

2024 was a significant year for T-REX, which transitioned into phase 3 and saw two major developments during this time. First and foremost, the consortium was strengthened by the addition of a new HEI partner in the Dublin City University Institute of Education, and by the significant support of Education Support Centres in Ireland and Oide, both of which have a clear remit in supporting the professional learning of teachers and school leaders.



Ms Barbara Mulvihill
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The Teachers' Research Exchange (T-REX) is a non-profit online community that was established to facilitate and support interdisciplinary collaboration on evidence-based practice and education research across numerous professional boundaries in Ireland. This article outlines the key features of T-REX and discusses the significant developments that occurred in 2024 during phase 3 of the project.

Secondly, the appointment of Barbara Mulvihill as national coordinator marks the first full-time employee on the project. Barbara's work primarily entails liaising with the professional learning community from early years to further education, raising the platform's profile, encouraging its adoption, and facilitating its use by new users. The role involves advocating for teacher research and, in collaboration with other members of the project team, establishing and strengthening networks with research-active teachers.

Educational research: value and challenges

In 2024, students, teachers, and educational professionals have been engaging in different ways with new curricula. This has required critical engagement with educational research to determine how best to implement effective and relevant programmes in the classroom. Teachers' research engagement typically consists of two main activities: they engage with research when they read, listen to, and discuss published research; and they engage in research when they plan, undertake, and reflect on research projects (Xerri, 2021). Such activities can support deep, reflective learning, enhance collaboration, and lead to greater job satisfaction (Sharp, 2007).

Engaging in and with educational research while teaching full-time is challenging. It is vital, however, that teachers' voices be at the forefront of conversations about teaching and learning. Ensuring that teachers' professional learning is 'evidenced-based and adapted to the identified needs of the school' (Department of Education, 2024, p.35) requires time. Given the constraints of the working day, research engagement often takes place individually, after school, which can become an isolating experience.

Accessing appropriate research material can also be difficult, as it is often presented in academic journal articles whose language may differ from the professional language used by practising teachers. The perceived 'research-practice gap' (McGann et al., 2020) adds another layer of complexity. This term is used to describe the fact that no clear framework exists by which research findings become integrated systematically into educational practice, nor is educational practice integrated systematically into developing and answering research questions.

Benefits of joining T-REX

Becoming a T-REX member is free of charge and easy to do via an online registration form at www.t-rex.ie. Membership enables teachers to:

- » link with other educational researchers across the continuum of teacher education

Members of the platform can avail of a myriad of learning material and support, collaborate on projects, and multiply the value of their research activity by sharing outcomes in accessible and practical formats.

- » avail of supports on a spectrum of learning and engagement activities
- » share their research outcomes in accessible and practical formats, and learn from others' research findings.

T-REX hosts brief, asynchronous courses. Getting into Research is designed for anyone at the early stages of research engagement. Critically Reviewing Research Literature provides practical resources, and questions to keep in mind when reading a research article, which helps teachers build expertise to make informed decisions on how best to use and engage with research. Some courses are designed to support engagement in research. Classroom-Based Research and Professional Enquiry helps members find strategies to formulate the right research question and progress that into an actionable research plan. For teachers engaged in or starting formal postgraduate studies, resources can be downloaded and printed (e.g., Guidance on Identifying an area of Focus, Research Question Examples, Ethics Reflection Tool, Interview Schedule Templates).

T-REX also provides a place for teachers to share their research findings on their own terms. Templates and step-by-step guidelines can be used for research dissemination. Research material can be accessed in various formats, including posters, audio recordings, videos, magazine articles, book chapters, and journal articles. Schools and organisations can create their own group on T-REX, where discussions can take place privately or publicly. There are many special-interest groups open to new members, including the recently formed Research in Coaching and Mentoring group.

We invite new members to join our community by registering at www.t-rex.ie. Should any reader wish to discuss how T-REX could support them as an individual teacher or school community, or if they are looking for specific supports that are not currently available, please email barbara.mulvihill@mic.ul.ie. The T-REX project team congratulates teachers on their engagement in and with educational research in 2024 and seeks to support and celebrate teachers' research endeavours in 2025.

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