Kay Munyard and Everarda Cunningham - *Laying the Groundwork for Applied Research in Schools*

**Abstract**

Conducting research in applied settings is potentially fraught with many difficulties. A key element in implementing research in a practical arena is that the problems or goals of the research are regarded as a matter of concern by the organization in which the research is carried out. A further critical factor for researchers is knowledge of the context in which they are working. This study reports processes that were followed in establishing positive links within a secondary school setting in order to promote willing participation in the progressively in-depth data collection phases of the research. In response to a request from a school for assistance in addressing the needs of students with learning disabilities, a whole-school professional development session was initially conducted. This presentation offered a range of options that the school might consider in managing their specific concern. Subsequently, the school agreed to collaborate in a research proposal that would monitor uptake of the ideas presented and simultaneously support teachers in the implementation of new knowledge and skills.

The researchers, who were teachers themselves and hence familiar with the school environment, visited the school on a regular basis for over a year and engaged in informal discussions, classroom observations and the monitoring of data at the request of school personnel. In particular, the researchers were a resource for teachers to draw upon as required. The effectiveness of laying the groundwork is evidenced in a 75 percent response rate to an open-ended questionnaire and the depth of information given by many respondents. Future studies in applied settings may be more efficient if more time were devoted to developing the research partnerships in the first instance.