

Evaluating amalgamation and organisational change – a collaborative action research project with the staff of a West Midlands primary school

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Synopsis

A collaborative action research project is reported, in which a trainee educational psychologist worked with the staff of two recently amalgamated West Midlands schools. The purpose of the project was to evaluate the amalgamation process and to gather formative feedback from the staff about a proposed change to the school's management structure. A questionnaire was used as the principal information-gathering instrument; responses were received from two thirds of the staff. The poor quality of communication in the school was found to be the most significant issue for those respondents, who suggested that it was adversely affecting their professional and personal effectiveness. Attempts to turn this feedback into action points for future planning within the school are discussed.

The action research paradigm is identified as belonging to a firmly anti-positivist strand of social science research. Historically, psychology has shared the aspirations and methods of positivist science. The corollaries of this approach are discussed, and arguments are advanced which suggest that educational psychologists seeking to work with organisations such as schools must abandon positivist methods if they are to be professionally effective and useful.

Anti-positivist philosophy and methods are discussed, and the present author's work is indicated as being firmly located within this paradigm.