

Epistemic Insight Initiative – Primary Schools

Head Teacher Information Sheet

Epistemic Insight Initiative is a two-year project that supports primary teachers to investigate student questions – including Big Questions – from perspectives of different subjects and disciplines. Epistemic insight refers particularly to knowledge about disciplines and how they interact.

The project is part of a research and curriculum innovation initiative, called Epistemic Insight, which is being led by the Learning about Science and Religion (LASAR) team at Canterbury Christ Church University. This information sheet gives some of the context of the Epistemic Insight initiative and explains what its primary project will involve for your school, including information about the research that we will carry out as part of the project.

What is epistemic insight?

Epistemic insight – or ‘knowledge about knowledge’ – refers to students’ capacities to think about how knowledge is formed and tested in different subject areas. Teaching epistemic insight goes hand in hand with teaching a broad and balanced curriculum. It includes building students’ understanding of the ways that different types of disciplinary knowledge can help us address questions that bridge subjects and disciplines.

At LASAR, we are particularly interested in encouraging students to explore Big Questions using more than one disciplinary perspective. One way that we characterise Big Questions is questions about human personhood and the nature of reality. For example, ‘can a robot be a good friend?’ or ‘why does the universe exist?’. These are questions on which science and religion often both have something to say – indeed, another way that we characterise Big Questions is questions that bridge science, religion and the wider humanities. Students typically enjoy thinking about these kinds of questions, but often they are not addressed in schools because they bridge subject boundaries and do not have simple or agreed answers. Please see here the link to BBC’s coverage on the Epistemic Insight Initiative at Canterbury Christ Church: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p07blqmv>

The learning resources we produce as part of the Epistemic Insight initiative are made publicly available on our educational websites, and the findings from the research we carry out is published and informs dialogues with policy makers and curriculum designers, nationally and internationally. For more information about the LASAR research centre, please see: www.canterbury.ac.uk/lasar

LASAR researchers will work with teachers to implement teaching strategies that are designed to help students to frame and investigate questions that bridge two or more subjects. For example, getting students to consider the question ‘why did the Titanic sink?’ from both a scientific and an historical perspective could enable them to better understand how knowledge is formed and tested in each of these subjects.

For each school, 3 teachers teaching at KS1-2 will work together to deliver learning activities aimed at developing students’ epistemic insight and expressed curiosity in Big Questions.

Exactly what these learning activities are and when they are delivered will depend on what works best for individual schools and what teachers decide to take part. Prior to the implementation of these learning activities, during terms one and two, LASAR researchers will work with teachers to plan the delivery of the project, share resources, pilot some activities and carry out some preliminary research. For more information about the kinds of learning activities and examples of resources that have been developed as part of the Epistemic Insight initiative, please see: www.epistemicinsight.com; www.neverofftopic.com

What research will be carried out as part of the project?

The research we carry out will be by a combination of student surveys, interviews with teachers and students and classroom observations. Surveys will be administered to all students who participate before and after the delivery of the learning activities. Interviews and classroom observations will be conducted with a sample of participating teachers and students.

What is the project timeline?

The initiative will take place over two years. To enable us to collect data which compares schools which implement teaching strategies aimed at developing students' epistemic insight with schools that do not, at the start of the project participating schools will be randomly divided equally between two groups. During the first year, one group of schools will implement learning activities with students over five weeks, while the other group of schools will receive professional development on how to implement the epistemic insight framework at KS1-2. During the second year of the project, the latter school will implement learning activities with students, while the other will receive on-going professional development.

Why has your school been invited to take part?

Your school is taking part because a colleague at your school contacted the research team or one of the research team approached one of your colleagues.

Is taking part voluntary?

Yes, taking part in the research is entirely voluntary. If you agree to take part in the research, we ask that you please complete and return the consent form below. We will also seek written consent from each of the teachers who decide to participate.

For the student surveys, an opt-out form will be sent to parents/carers to use if they do not want their child to take part. The form is 'opt-out' rather than 'opt-in' because this educational study is in the public interest, no real names will be used in the reports and because the findings will help teachers to teach more effectively. For the survey to be effective, it is important that we capture a complete picture of the ideas and understanding for all the students in a typical class.

Opting out from the research will not affect whether any students take part in the events that are delivered as part of the project. Students can also opt out of the survey when it is presented to them by choosing to not answer any or all of the questions on the questionnaire or by choosing to not submit their survey. Students and parents/carers will be advised that their decision to submit or not submit their surveys will not affect their school

grades.

For student interviews, an 'opt in' consent form will be provided for both parents/carers and the students who are invited to participate.

Confidentiality

The records of this study will be kept private. Participants' names will not appear in any research, and after completion of the study all personal information attached to responses will be removed. All data and personal information will be stored securely within CCCU premises in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018, in line with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), as well as the University's own data protection requirements. The data before analysis can only be accessed by the LASAR research team.

How will participants' responses be used?

The findings of the research will be used internally within Canterbury Christ Church University to inform and develop this project and related activities. In addition, the data will be analysed and the results will be discussed in the form of papers and presentations which we plan to submit to conferences and to journals. No identifiers linking the participants or the school to the study will be included in any sort of report or academic paper that might be published based on the data.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of taking part?

By participating you will be contributing directly to educational research and helping us to test the hypothesis that epistemic insight improves attitudes to learning. Research that invites personal responses to questions about how humans think and behave is stimulating for participants, teachers and students, and will inform resources for schools. There are no disadvantages to taking part in the study, other than the time commitment required to carry out the stages of the research outlined above. Each participating school will receive a contribution towards survey administration costs and travel for conferences and continuing professional development.

Who has reviewed the study?

This research project has been reviewed following the procedures of the University Research Ethics Committee and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct.

Any questions?

If you would like more information about our research and/or research ethics please contact the Principal Investigator, Professor Berry Billingsley on berry.billingsley@canterbury.ac.uk or the LASAR team at lasar@canterbury.ac.uk, Canterbury Christ Church University, North Holmes Road, Canterbury, CT1 1QU 01227 767700.

Epistemic Insight Initiative – Primary Schools

Head Teacher Consent Form

	Please initial
I have read the Information Sheet relating to this project.	
I have had explained to me the purposes of the project and what will be required of participants, and any questions have been answered to my satisfaction.	
I understand that participation is entirely voluntary and that participants have the right to withdraw from the project at any time, without giving a reason.	
I understand that if I am interviewed as part of the project that the interview will be recorded and transcribed, but that my name will never be used in any reports that draw on this transcription.	
I would like to participate in the Permeable Walls research project.	

Name:	
Position in School:	
School name:	
Signature:	
Date:	