

Why practitioner research is important

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Maggie and her colleagues Lawrence and Patricia introduce us to the articles we have selected to appear in this supplement from *Readings for Reflective Teaching in Further, Adult and Vocational Education*

Practitioner research has the potential to help teachers improve outcomes for their learners. Research also keeps your teaching vibrant, engaging and up to date and, by using research and literature to improve teaching, learning and assessment, you can really enhance your work.

Here are four steps to help you get started and see that engaging in practitioner research isn't as difficult as you might have thought.

1. Get together with other teachers

It's hard to do practitioner research on your own. Collaborating with colleagues can make all the difference, provided you go about it in the right way. This means talking honestly about what is actually happening and sharing these experiences in an atmosphere of trust, equality and openness. Trying out new things in the classroom is easier when done together.

2. Agree what to do

Identify and agree an aspect of practice that you both think needs to be improved.

- Ensure the focus of your research is one that you are both interested in.
- Take good ideas from other people – read around the topic. Identify ideas where research has already shown evidence of successful practice. Build on these existing ideas and test them out in the context of your practice.
- Keep the focus for your research tight and manageable. It is best to investigate a small aspect of practice carefully.
- Identify key milestones – what you will do and when will you get back together to discuss what is happening.
- Take small steps to start with to ensure you are on the right lines.
- Ask yourselves:
 - What difference do we think this research will have on learners' progress?
 - How will we know that the research has had an impact?

3. Test out your research idea

- Try out your research idea together with students.
- Collect evidence of the impact of your research idea on students' progress.
- Get together to see how things are going.

Two heads are better than one. As you go along, think about what is working and what you might need to change.

4. Review overall progress together

Make time to evaluate the overall impact of your practitioner research.

Consider the following questions:

- What has worked and why?
- What has not worked and why?
- What has been surprising or troubling in the data?
- Decide together: are you going to continue, adapt, expand, or abandon the ideas or try something else?

In this supplement we have printed two readings from *Readings for Reflective Teaching in Further, Adult and Vocational Education* (pages 5-8) and have published two more readings on the SET website.

You can use these readings, and those in the previous edition of *InTuition* (Issue 22), to help you focus your discussions on key aspects of practice in need of improvement.

Of the readings in this supplement, and on the SET website:

- *Hattie* encourages teachers to use the work he has conducted in relation to visible learning to identify aspects of practice which might be worthy of further research, (pages 5-6).
- *Gregson et al* remind us that you can enhance your professional practice through Joint Practice Development, (pages 7-8).
- *Biesta* asks us to think about the competing purposes of education and the need to strike a good balance between them, (<https://goo.gl/LIOY5T>)
- *Heilbronn* explains the deep roots of 'practical judgement' in Aristotle's philosophy, (<https://goo.gl/LIOY5T>)

The link between research and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is vital. Don't just get by, get better and better through practitioner research.