

THE BERA CLOSE-TO-PRACTICE RESEARCH PROJECT

RESEARCH REPORT SUMMARY

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Full report: <https://www.bera.ac.uk/researchers-resources/publications/bera-statement-on-close-to-practice-research>

This BERA Close-to-Practice research project addressed the overarching research question, ‘How can high quality close-to-practice research be characterised and enhanced for education in the UK?’

The project had two phases.

1. A rapid evidence assessment of published research papers that focussed on close-to-practice (CtP) research. These papers were of two main types:
 - a. those that focussed on the methodology of CtP research
 - b. findings from research that was close to practice.
2. Interviews with people who had relevant knowledge and experience in relation to CtP research and its qualities. The interviewees included both people who held very senior leadership roles in education and education research, and those whose work meant that they were close to practice on a day-to-day basis – those involved in teacher education, for example.

The rapid evidence assessment looked at traditions of CtP research in order to arrive at a working definition, and also examined research quality in a selection of CtP research papers. This phase of work resulted in the following new definition of CtP research.

Close-to-practice research is research that focusses on aspects defined by practitioners as relevant to their practice, and often involves collaborative work between practitioners and researchers.¹

¹ BERA elaborated on this definition in its [statement about CtP research](#) (BERA, 2018); the text is not intended to be identical in both documents.

One of the striking findings of the rapid evidence assessment was the wide range of methodological traditions of CtP research – among them action research, participatory research, practitioner research/enquiry, design-based research, lesson study, knowledge exchange/transfer/mobilisation/K*, and research learning communities. Furthermore, there were broader trends such as evidence-informed policy and evidence-informed practice. Some of these traditions, such as action research, were more well established than others, such as research learning communities. However, irrespective of their histories, there was scope for research conducted in any of the traditions to be either higher or lower quality, depending on the rigour of the research conducted within each particular methodology.

Our review of 1,343 potentially relevant titles and abstracts found that the most frequent traditions were practitioner research (252 titles/abstracts) and action research (204). Findings that emerged from the interviewing process revealed that the action research subset typified how CtP research is generally perceived in the UK; time constraints also militated in favour of focussing specifically on the subset of research papers in the action research tradition (as opposed to the other 16 traditions we identified) for our analysis of education studies. Of 47 potentially relevant titles/abstracts in the action research tradition we found that 19, upon examining the full texts, were not CtP research. The remaining 28 were judged in terms of their originality, significance and rigour. We judged six studies (only one of which was UK-based) to be high in quality, 11 to be medium in quality and 11 low in quality.

Only 17 of the 47 potentially relevant papers presented UK-based CtP research. They addressed teaching in maths (5 studies), science (6), English (5) and maths and science (1).

In the second phase of the research, the interview phase, some of our interviewees noted the potential of CtP research to connect and contextualise theory and policy as a result of mutual recognition – by practitioners, researchers and policymakers – of problems in education that could be seen as problems of mutual interest to all three groups.

The research team concluded that the best CtP research gave a full and rigorous account of whichever methodology had been selected. Fundamental aspects of chosen research designs were in place – for example, a minimum of two cycles of action and research in action research designs. In weaker CtP research, methodology was not explained in sufficient depth. The lack of a sufficiently rigorous account of data analysis was the methodological aspect that was frequently neglected, particularly in qualitative research.

As a result of the analysis of quality in the selection of CtP studies, the definition of CtP research given above was augmented by the following supplementary definition of high quality in CtP research.

High quality in close-to-practice research requires the robust use of research design, theory and methods to address clearly defined research questions, through an iterative process of research and application that includes reflections on practice, research and context.²

This research report also includes some recommendations for BERA: for example, the need to provide guidance to the field on quality in CtP research; the need to engage with the field, including some of the newer sites for CtP research, in order to support the application of a wider range of methods to CtP problems; and engagement with universities to raise awareness and promote the career development of those who carry out CtP research, in recognition of their importance to education as a discipline.

² BERA elaborated on this definition in its [statement about CtP research](#); the text is not intended to be identical in both documents.

The study summarised in this document was commissioned by BERA to examine dimensions of quality in close-to-practice educational research, in recognition of the fact that capacity-building in education research is necessary in relation to the REF 2021, and with the objective of considering how BERA could best advance the quality of CtP research in the academic discipline of education. Please refer to the BERA statement on close-to-practice educational research (details below), which was informed by this research.

Full report

Wyse, D., Brown, C., Oliver, S. & Poblete, X. (2018). *The BERA Close-to-Practice Research Project: Research Report*. London: British Educational Research Association. <https://www.bera.ac.uk/researchers-resources/publications/bera-statement-on-close-to-practice-research>

BERA statement

British Educational Research Association [BERA] (2018). *Close-to-Practice Educational Research: A BERA statement*. London. <https://www.bera.ac.uk/researchers-resources/publications/bera-statement-on-close-to-practice-research>

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