BERA
BRITISH EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

BERA Bites

Topical debates from the **BERA Blog**

Issue 5

Research used or produced in schools

Which informs practitioners most?

Edited & introduced by
Ian Potter

February 2020

Selected articles from the BERA Blog on key topics in education.

Featuring an introduction by the editors, and questions for discussion on each article.

A teaching and learning resource for education students and professionals.

The BERA Blog

BERA
BRITISH EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

About BERA

The British Educational Research Association (BERA) is the home of educational research in the United Kingdom. We are a membership association committed to advancing knowledge of education by sustaining a strong and high quality educational research community.

Together with our members, BERA is working to:

- advance research quality
- build research capacity
- foster research engagement.

Since its inception in 1974, BERA has expanded into an internationally renowned association with both UK and non-UK based members. It strives to be inclusive of the diversity of educational research and scholarship, and welcomes members from a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds, theoretical orientations, methodological approaches, sectoral interests and institutional affiliations. It also encourages the development of productive relationships with other associations within and beyond the UK.

Aspiring to be the home of all educational researchers in the UK, BERA provides opportunities for everyone active in this field to contribute through its portfolio of distinguished publications, its world-class conference and other events, and its active peer community organised around 35 special interest groups. We also recognise excellence in educational research through our range of awards. In addition to our member-focussed activity, we aim to inform the development of policy and practice by promoting the best quality evidence produced by educational research.

About the BERA Blog

The BERA Blog was established to provide research-informed content on key educational issues in an accessible manner. Its aim is to produce and promote articles that attract policymakers, parents, teachers, educational leaders, members of school communities, politicians and anyone who is interested in education today. It also welcomes the submission of research-informed articles from across this community.

The blog is edited by a small team comprising academic representatives chosen by BERA's Academic Publications Committee and the BERA office. All content is approved for publication by one or more of this team. However, the views of the authors are their own, and the views expressed on the blog (and in this collection) are not the official views of BERA.

The Blog is currently curated by the editorial team of Gerry Czerniawski, Rachel Lofthouse and Alison Fox.

See bera.ac.uk/blog.

About BERA Bites

The BERA Bites series presents selected articles from the BERA blog on key topics in education, presented in an easily printable and digestible format to serve as teaching and learning resources for students and professionals in education. Each collection features an introduction by editors with expertise in the field, and each article includes questions for discussion, composed by the authors, prompting readers to further explore the ideas and arguments put forward in the original articles.

See bera.ac.uk/bera-bites.

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Editorial

Ian Potter
Gosport & Fareham Multi-Academy Trust

15 January 2020

I am delighted to have been asked to edit this collection of BERA Blog posts, which I have selected on the basis of my interest in promoting research practice *in schools*. These articles are valuable because they illuminate the topic of whether research-in-schools means those schools are research active or research informed. The question of whether a school should be *using* research or *generating its own findings* is probably predicated on a false binary, and it is not necessary to spend too much time debating it. However, knowledge production in the school system is a vital element of school improvement, in my view, so I hope you find this collection of think-pieces helpful as you consider what self-improving, 'research alive' schools might look like.

Ken Jones, in a BERA Blog post published way back in 2015 (and updated in the new version starting on page 8), points out that research-rich schools are not the same as data-rich schools, and offers insights about the need for schools to avoid letting the performance agenda lead them into conflating the two. In the second article in this collection, **Ian Horsewell** points out that educational research relieves the teacher from having to make the mistakes themselves: it enables them to become the best professionals they can be by allowing others to make mistakes (and write about them) and then learning from those mistakes. **Christine Challen** argues that a teacher seeking to consistently improve their teaching *is* learning, and that the best sort of development is multifunctional, requiring self-critical analyses driven by reflection.

An additional perspective is offered by **Iro Konstantinou**, who talks of the 'self-improving' practitioner – a teacher who wants to be informed about research and scholarship in teaching, and to themselves engage in research. Iro recognises that there are still structural barriers to research like this becoming the norm in schools. **Val Poultney** also recognises that encouraging teachers to become 'research literate' is a challenge, and that in most school contexts a near-perfect storm results in research inaction

among teachers. Thus, the key to developing a critical disposition is leadership: school leaders play a vital role in creating and supporting a school climate that is conducive to research and inquiry. **Chris Brown** also discusses how important it is for school leaders to foster a culture of research and research-use in order for collaborative enquiry to take root and flourish.

Louise Jay takes the discourse in the direction of exploring how schools can work with the university sector, and identifies a 'collaborative space' between research and practice. **Claire Tyson** addresses the matter of ethical consideration in research-active schools, and describes a case study of a school that has been systematic about this matter and developed a school-based ethical framework. Another case study of a school is provided by **Megan Dixon**, who describes how one school's journey into being research-articulated enabled a risk-taking disposition towards learning which has had an outstanding impact. **Ruth Dann**'s case study concerns the building of a research culture across several schools. She presents this as a means of addressing the problem of translating research evidence into a real context – one that, she states, is often more problematic than the literature would have us believe.

And finally, **Liz Gregory** takes us into the exciting world of professional doctorates and champions the power of insider research, particularly where the practitioner-researcher is required to look carefully at their own experiences. Her advocacy of reflexivity chimes with my own research interest (Potter, 2017).

I would like to acknowledge the work of BERA colleagues who make the BERA Blog and this BERA Bites series happen – my thanks to them, and to all who write BERA Blogs, which make an important contribution to supporting professional reflection across the field.

Reference

Potter, I. (2017). Developing social justice leadership through reflexivity. In P. Angelle (Ed.), *A global perspective of social justice Leadership for School Principals.* Information Age Publishing.

A note from the BERA Blog editors

While you read these blog posts, you might also think about your own contexts or research. Perhaps you would like to contribute a post to the BERA Blog, or perhaps when you are next at a conference or professional development event you might come across someone who you could encourage to write for us (see bera.ac.uk/submission-policy for details on how to submit). Please consider interesting methodological aspects, issues and approaches that would be worth reporting more widely, as well as the content of studies. As the BERA Blog team and their colleagues develop these resources, we also welcome feedback that can help us improve their quality and accessibility.

1. Teachers, researchers... and teacher researchers

Ken Jones
University of Wales, Trinity Saint David

6 May 2015
Updated January 2020

Call it what you like – practitioner enquiry, classroom-based research, reflective analysis, clinical practice, evidence-informed leadership – the need for teachers and school leaders to look critically at their own work and, through this, to improve teaching and learning in their schools has become a central strand of professional learning.[1] To this end, it is helpful if not essential for teachers to be able to access, interpret, critique and use education research. That point isn't really contested. What is contested, however, is the extent to which teachers should do research, and whether 'practitioner enquiry' is research at all. The BERA and Royal Society of Arts (RSA) report, *Research and the Teaching Profession* (2013), made a strong case for schools and colleges becoming research-rich environments, and for teachers to be research literate. The report called on policymakers to follow the Scottish model, whereby research is embedded within career-long professional learning, and for universities and others to reach out and support those who are engaging in practitioner research to inform strategic improvement.

Although there are many signs of progress and pockets of encouraging practice, there is a long way to go before the practice of enquiry is fully embedded within the profession. The ideologically driven policy momentum in England has produced increasingly performative cultures that potentially inhibit criticality; policy prevarication in Northern Ireland has arguably fragmented and inhibited change. The Professional Update arrangements in Scotland, cleverly built in to new career-long professional learning processes, may well help make it a reality there, but the practice is still geographically patchy. In Wales there is, for the first time, a national impetus to embed practitioner enquiry within a new national approach to professional learning and a reconstituted approach to initial teacher education, but it is still early days.

1 Original blog post: https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/teachers-researchers-and-teacher-researchers

So what can 'the profession' (rather than 'the policymakers') do to make research-rich schools the norm rather than the exception? Research-rich schools are not the same as data-rich schools, and researchers themselves hold different views (Steward, 2015). The BERA–RSA report (2013) acknowledges that currently 'teacher researchers and the wider research community... [inhabit] separate and sometimes competing universes', but there is a clear continuum and we can be confident that, given the right support, institutions and individuals can move up that sliding scale of research engagement. However, some of the hurdles to this movement are as follows.

Language

One of the first things we did with new master's students was to wean them off the language of the classroom and move them into 'academic writing'. This is changing thanks to new, school-focussed master's programmes, but the 'research community' has its own technical language (which in its extreme form can be seen in statistics-based research). Academic journals must, by necessity, make appropriate language a criterion for the acceptance of research-based articles, but this may well restrict their accessibility to teachers. Researchers are becoming more savvy about using social media without 'dumbing down' their findings, and this will need to be a key strategy in future.

Standards

The 'research police' must be more tolerant of emerging teacher researchers, especially those who have invested professional and personal time in formalising their evidence.

Conflict

Leat, Reid and Lofthouse provide an excellent summary of the ways in which 'engaging in research invites complication' (2015, p. 279). To expect teachers to look critically at the learning environments in their schools is a big (but not impossible) ask, unless they have supportive and encouraging middle and senior leaders. If we want to create research-informed cultures we must start with school leadership.

Models

In the 1990s it was felt that teacher education departments were out of touch with classrooms. Recent and relevant school experience was prioritised over research experience in making new appointments. So where are the credible professionals who are able to mentor teacher-researchers? Pools of mentors with a wide variety of educational experience were developing

partnerships with new teachers in the master's in teaching and learning in England and the master's in educational practice in Wales, before both programmes were cut short.

Sponsorship

We know that governments use research selectively. Teachers must look critically at the funding source of the research on which they base their practice to ensure it is truly objective rather than politically expedient.

Faddism

Research findings are, and should be, contested – but tell this to a teacher who has built a pedagogy based on learning styles, and who now finds their research-based practice questioned.

Ethics

In this post-Saville society we must not downplay the need for our work to conform explicitly to professional ethical criteria. Initially it was sufficient for teachers to acknowledge the BERA *Ethical Guidelines* (2018) when engaging in classroom enquiry; now there are university committees scrutinising every proposal from professionals working in their own classrooms. Is the tail beginning to wag the dog?

Embedding

The 'C' in 'CPD' is 'continuing'. Research-based practice is more than the gathering of evidence to inform one-off school development priorities.

Space, time and interaction

Teachers need space and time to be creative practitioners. A flame needs air if it is to burn brightly. They also need to engage with other professionals from their own and other schools. Research-focussed policy must honour these professional commitments.

This blog was originally published on 6 May 2015. Small updates have been made to certain sections of this new version.

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Questions for discussion

1. In the five years since the initial publication of this blog, to what extent has practitioner enquiry become embedded in professional practice in education?
2. How realistic is it to expect teachers to pursue continuing engagement in practitioner enquiry, and can this be classed as 'research'?
3. Is the linguistic gap between academic research publications and the literature of practice significant?
4. What is required of school leaders (at all levels) if they are to create cultures of professional learning and enquiry that allow (and encourage) critical perspectives?

2. Learning from experience

Ian Horsewell 15 Aug 2016

How can we become the best professionals we can be without *personally* making all the mistakes along the way?[2] It's true that we can learn from our own mistakes. We have to recognise them, to reflect on our actions and plan for 'the next time', and to change our behaviour based on that insight.

Of course, as we tell our students, it's often better to learn from someone *else's* mistakes.

As classroom science teachers, we ourselves learn a lot from screwing up – from not labelling the beakers or letting year 7 use powerpacks with 1A bulbs, to mixing up the two Rebeccas in the class during parents' evening. We learn – particularly, perhaps, early in our careers – from watching our colleagues, deliberately or in passing. It's sad that for many established teachers, the only reason to watch another's lesson is as part of the performance management process.

Science teachers in particular can find it hard to reconcile their experience of replicable laboratory research with studies into educational interventions. Perhaps what is needed is to put published educational research into the context of 'experience with students' that we're used to relying on. You could argue that research, at its least abstract, is simply the sum of many classroom experiences.

In an online conversation on this topic, my colleague used – as a riposte to my above line of thinking – the phrase 'people are not electrons'. This is true. But isn't the whole point of science to use models which, while simpler than reality, give us an indication of how reality works? We can model people as particles making up a fluid when we design corridors and stairwells, and that gives us useful information. Nobody seriously suggests that those people travelling on the London Underground, for instance, are actually faceless, indistinguishable drones. However, with enough data and enough people we can make good predictions about what will *usually* happen *most* of the time.

We need to leave room for

2 Original blog post: https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/learning-from-experience

professional judgement while sharing how the patterns in data might imply how one approach, on average, works better than another. My argument wasn't about the bad research that's out there. Rather, it was about the very idea that educational research should or could guide our practice at all. Teachers must feel supported to be both critical and receptive, which means sharing the caveats.

'Teachers must feel supported in being both critical and receptive, which means sharing the caveats.'

As teachers of exam groups know, averages using large numbers aren't specific to a small subset, even a homogenous one. We don't, and can't, know all of the confounding variables for our students: the kids are all different, and there's a fine line between describing and defining them. We tend to find and remember the results that confirm our expectations, and personal anecdotes feel more powerful than data.

However, educational research, imperfect and incomplete as it is, must still be better than nothing. Teachers need to realise that while we can be critical about individual papers, it isn't sensible to ignore it all. Yes, we need to be able to ask good questions about sample sizes, about the methodology, about sources of potential bias. But then we also need to take on board the advice on offer and try applying it to our own classes.

A difference between two interventions might be large or small. The bigger the numbers, the more we should pay attention to that difference since noise in the data becomes less likely. Why would you ignore that hint when planning your own lessons, regardless of the subtleties of different statistical thresholds? Any two classes might be compared without spotting this pattern: only wider research, beyond what most classroom teachers are able to take part in, lets us see what's going on. The difference, or the cost in terms of money or time, might be so small for the cost that we decide it doesn't matter, but if we don't ask we'll never know.

Research seldom gives a recipe. It won't turn us into robots or allow our jobs to be done by computer. What it can do is inform and guide: it can suggest good starting points, or approaches that, more often than not, will be the best way to teach a given concept. Often the evidence used to design effective classroom strategies is 'below the surface' – teachers who claim never to use

educational research to improve their practice just don't realise what the foundations are.

It's interesting that many choose to describe teaching as an art rather than a science. I can see why. However, I'd suggest that there's a middle ground. That is, is it better to think of teaching as a *craft*? It might be 'in person' rather than strictly 'hands-on', but the word 'craft' hints more at the professional judgment and individual style involved than the common perception of a science. Crafts traditionally guarded their secrets from outsiders, but shared them openly within the group or guild. We should certainly do the latter. Let's think of research as just a conversation within a larger staffroom, and maybe we can avoid making all the mistakes ourselves.

Questions for discussion

1. Consider an example in which you have learned from a mistake in your own practice. What changes did you make – perhaps to resources or classroom routines – to improve student outcomes?
2. How could you better learn from the practice of other colleagues in your setting?
3. How could you translate from other curriculum areas to your own? What might they learn from you?

3. Training and/or learning and development

Which is key for quality in teaching?

Christine Challen
South Tyneside College

2 Mar 2016

The drive to measure teaching performance through observations and assessment in schools and the introduction of teaching excellence framework (TEF) at higher education institutions (HEI) has led educators to ask, Where do we go from here?[3] How do we consistently improve our teaching? Is it through continuing professional development (CPD) training, or learning and development?

While training implies a 'one dimensional' approach sometimes referred to as 'production centred', learning and development is multifaceted and requires self-critical analysis driven by reflection. The word 'training' might imply repetition, as in many sport activities. However, even when the same teaching session is being delivered several times daily, subtle changes occur at every point as amendments are made on reflection in order to enhance learning. If we consider teaching to be like a scientific experiment that has failed, the difference between the great and the average scientist is the ability to ask, Why or how am I going to make this work? The same approach should be taken to teaching the ability to reflect. To my mind, reflection is the key to learning and development, and is completely different to training.

In addition to reflection, real education always involves risk. In *The Beautiful Risk of Education*, Gert Biesta (2013) discusses the importance of risk-taking and its centrality to 'educational endeavours' and position at 'the forefront of critical pedagogical practice'. His strong argument for this is based on the principle that education is not 'an interaction between machines, but an encounter between human beings' (Biesta, 2013, p. 1). The key starting places for the risk-taking strategy are a combination of subject knowledge and research into current subject delivery techniques as well as, most importantly, reflection.

3 Original blog post: https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/training-andor-learning-and-development-which-is-key-for-quality-in-teaching

So the big question is, How do we encourage and ensure that all educational practitioners reflect in learning? This is a tough call, and certainly not a process that can be achieved by training. One way to tackle this may be to develop a strategy called 'peer reflect'. This would involve staff working with a peer/mentor and over time, through reflection, using student assessment and retention, for example, as evidence to support consistent self-critical analysis in teaching. It would also realise the benefits of coaching and mentoring in the practitioner/student learning experience. Furthermore, it could also include any new risks taken after this process, relating it to critical pedagogical progression, thereby embedding Biesta's theories and practices.

This is not an overnight fix. However, given persistence the benefits may over time prove rewarding not only for the students' teaching and learning experience, but professionally for staff and their institution. The ever-increasing policy focus on measures of teaching performance in schools, colleges and HEIs means that there is a demand to demonstrate consistent improvements in teaching. There is also pressure to encourage and develop pupil/student autonomy and critical-thinking skills from early on. The implementation of reflection and 'risk taking' will not only develop excellence in teaching and the student learning experience: it may also enhance and build on the reputations of educational institutions through pupil/student achievement.

However, there is more to reflection than this: if we as practitioners are showing critical thinking and responsibility for our teaching, this sets an example of autonomy in learning to our pupils and students.

As W. B. Yeats is believed to have put it, 'Education is not about filling a bucket but about lighting a fire'. As educators we always want to see our students not as 'objects to be moulded and disciplined but as subjects of action and responsibility' (Biesta, 2013, p. 1). Autonomy as a key to successful lifelong learning is a well-known concept, and doing this by example is an ideal way to encourage our students, particularly if they see a positive outcome in their learning journey. Even better, why not involve them in this process through their feedback and ideas so that they can learn how to be self-critical? In the apt phrase ascribed to Benjamin Franklin, 'Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn'.

As practitioners and educators we should remember that reflection is

our own professional autonomy, the ability to think critically in learning is the key to pedagogical development, and professional satisfaction something that cannot be trained for!

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Questions for discussion

1. What do you believe professional development should really achieve?
2. How can we support more focus on pedagogy research and reflection to encourage 'risk taking' towards citizenship in education?
3. What can we do to ensure that education results in a non-linear movement outward from childhood to adulthood, from being to becoming, leading to autonomy and lifelong learning?

4. The teacher-as-researcher

Making the case for research in schools

Iro Konstantinou
Tony Little Centre for Innovation & Research in Learning, Eton College

26 Feb 2018

I was once told that professionals reach their peak after seven years in their profession.[4] Fine, I thought, if you are an accountant: numbers don't really change. It's okay if you are a lawyer: laws are hard to shift. It could be manageable even if you are a doctor: your practice will ask you to retrain; you will learn about new treatments, new medicine and perhaps cures for diseases that have been found within your years of practice.

But what if you are a teacher? With ever-changing demands, both from stakeholders and a changing economy, teachers need to ensure that they do not plateau. This article will argue that one of the most efficient ways to achieve this is by becoming an almost self-improving practitioner: by being informed about research and scholarship in teaching, engaging in and with research, being a consumer of research and equipping yourself to conduct your own research (see BERA & RSA, 2013). With the government showing a real interest in this agenda (Coldwell et al, 2017), it is time for more collaboration across schools, universities and other national organisations in terms of conducting research, engaging with findings and opening up the dialogue among universities, schools and other stakeholders.

I draw on the findings from the BERA–RSA report (2013) to argue that the best way to achieve this is by embedding collaborative inquiry in the school culture, rather than it being treated as an optional continuing professional development session. Teachers need to be equipped with the motivation, capacity, confidence and opportunity to do so. Meeting these objectives will create new avenues and greater potential for schools to achieve high academic results, and ostensibly reduce the workload of teachers. However, there are still some structural barriers that must be overcome before research becomes the norm in schools.

4 Original blog post: https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/the-teacher-as-researcher-making-the-case-for-research-in-schools

Despite the long tradition of action research – which gained traction in the 1930s and 1940s and was consolidated in classrooms with the work of Lawrence Stenhouse in the 1970s – the model of the teacher-as-researcher (Hammersley, 1993) remains underdeveloped, and the potential of this position is yet to be fully realised in schools. There is also the 'there is no time' narrative, often heard in school corridors and staffrooms, which will need to shift. If attention is given to the nature of the reflection required by teachers (Leitch & Day, 2000), and if action research is seen as having a relationship to processes, outcomes and purposes that are vital in the classroom (such as academic achievement and behavioural management), perhaps there will be a more widespread shift in perception.

'Research is becoming central to what schools strive to do: an increasing number are appointing research leads in senior roles, training teachers to become researchers and building centres to foster research initiatives.'

However, we have fortunately been seeing a shift in the cultural practices in schools, educational organisations and other organisations. For example, there is now the Research Schools Network,[5] the Institute for Research in Schools[6] and the Institute for Effective Education,[7] to name a few. Research is becoming central to what schools strive to do. Increasingly, schools appoint research leads in senior roles, train teachers to become researchers and build centres to foster research initiatives. Researchers in schools network, collaborate, try to bring down barriers and 'convince' those who are not entirely persuaded that research has its place in a busy school schedule.

As the newly appointed researcher-in-residence at the Tony Little Centre for Innovation and Research in Learning at Eton College, I was myself sceptical about the role that research had in schools. I come from an academic background where academics complained that the teaching excellence framework meant that they would be 'judged' on their teaching. Was it now that schools would be 'judged 'on their research outputs?

However, after only a few months in post, I have come to see that there is a real drive to engage teachers in schools, as this practice can be valuable even in and of itself. This is true not only

5 https://researchschool.org.uk/

6 http://www.researchinschools.org

7 https://the-iee.org.uk

in a well-resourced school such as Eton College, but across the country, both at independent and state schools. By engaging with research and conducting their own research, teachers have the ability to 'retrain' and schools can become self-improving. It allows practice to become informed by developments in the educational profession. By trialling ideas – some of which might not work at times – there may be opportunities to engage disengaged students, to make teaching more effective and efficient, to achieve better exam results and perhaps to contribute to the wellbeing of pupils.

There is a real need, and a rightful place, for research in schools. While this need is being met in some schools, there is potential for it to become the norm across all schools. While schools may struggle to balance the twin priorities of producing their own research data and using research findings in the classroom in order to enhance pedagogical practices, I believe this need not be a conundrum. Any engagement with evidence-based pedagogy has the potential to result in more efficient practice. Auspiciously, teachers seem keen to engage with the process: speaking from my own professional experience, there are several projects which are in progress in my school. Most of them are not looking to utilise the most innovative methods, but simply to make teaching more efficient and effective, and to ensure that pedagogies have the scope to develop academic excellence and contribute to skills, both of which are vital for 21st-century students.

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Questions for discussion

1. How has engagement with or in research been implemented at your school?
2. What have some of the benefits of this engagement been?
3. How have you managed to overcome some of the barriers identified in the article, such as finding time, or scepticism?

5. Different schools, same problem
What value teacher research and inquiry?

Val Poultney
University of Derby

11 Feb 2019

Robust school leadership is seen as the most effective route by which outcomes for students and schools can be achieved (Greany, 2015).[8] But how does the headteacher of a school graded 'outstanding' by the inspectorate maintain the motivation of its teachers to work consistently at this highest level?

I am a university academic, and recently I was in conversation with the head of an outstanding secondary school about this issue. He explained that most of his staff are graded as 'very good' or 'outstanding', and that student outcomes are consistently above the national norm. The school is not aligned with a teaching school alliance, nor is it part of a multi-academy trust. Networking with other teacher professionals is limited because of a restricted budget for cover teachers and for fear of compromising standards in the long term. We talked about teacher research to encourage staff to engage with wider external networks in order to keep them motivated about practice. This might open opportunities for dissemination to enable the staff to adopt a more critical perspective on their work. He seemed interested.

Encouraging teachers to become 'research literate' is a challenge. Busy school lives are consumed with delivering 'good' lessons, keeping up with the latest trends and looking towards the next inspection. It could be argued that most school contexts provide a near-perfect storm for research *inaction* among teachers. As graduates, teachers have research experience, yet many are not encouraged to research practice. This prevents schools from building and mobilising their collective knowledge (Philpott & Poultney, 2018). At a systems level, changes to the inspection regime give rise to uncertainties about what type of evidence, beyond statistical data, constitutes school improvement. This is exacerbated by the fact that is no agreed body of knowledge that teachers might draw upon in their defence – the so-called 'knowledge-doing gap' (Sheard & Sharples, 2016).

8 Original blog post: https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/different-schools-same-problem-what-value-teacher-research-and-inquiry

In contrast, at a primary school, working within the same constraints and pressures, I worked with a headteacher who was willing to invest time to support teacher inquiry. The school was under Ofsted-imposed special measures, and the head was keen to evaluate his newly introduced initiatives. He saw value in teachers researching and using evidence from their own practice to enable them to improve their pedagogy. Like the secondary head he wanted an approach that created greater capacity for everyone to be a learner in school (BERA & RSA, 2013). He understood his leadership role in providing a supportive school climate for research and inquiry. He had to build and maintain trust with staff and live with the outcomes long after I left. My role was to galvanise teachers to engage with ways of collecting and evaluating their practice data. I needed to steer them towards adopting an analytical approach to their practice.

'By engaging in research these teachers focussed on evidence they had collected, moving them from congenial (sharing) conversations to collegial or dialogic ones.'

Key to this was developing a critical disposition to the way teachers talked about their work. They used sharing conversations about their classroom practice, as can be heard in any staffroom, but these discussions rarely critically analysed their practice. By engaging in research these teachers focussed on evidence they had collected, moving them from congenial (sharing) conversations to collegial or dialogic ones (Nelson, Deuel, Slavit, & Kennedy, 2010). This focus generated probing questions about practice, resulting in a deeper understanding of teaching and learning.

After a successful pilot, the primary head decided to invest in teacher inquiry and, with his senior leadership team, generated many studies that are still in use today. Many of his staff have moved to promoted posts, and some have taken the opportunity to engage with external networks to disseminate their work. The school is now graded 'good' by Ofsted. They contributed to a book about their research. This is a model of how partnership between a school and a university can help embed systematic teacher inquiry into a school and provide opportunities for everyone to improve their learning and future prospects. In the case of the secondary head – well, he is still considering this approach. He has my card…

For more information about this work see Poultney, V. (Ed.) (2017). Evidence-Based Teaching in Primary Education. *St Albans: Critical Publishing.*

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Questions for discussion

1. Why is research, and building an evidence-informed approach to practice, so undervalued in our school system?
2. How might school leadership encourage teachers to adopt a more critical disposition towards their practice?
3. What body of knowledge would teachers have to acquire in order to become properly research literate?

6. The self-improving school system from the classroom out

Chris Brown
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12 Oct 2017

When thought about at the level of the school or classroom, the self-improving school system involves teachers collaboratively engaging in evidence-informed practice to improve teaching and learning.[9] In this blog I briefly explore what evidence-informed practice (EIP) is and the different ways in which teachers engage with EIP. I then illustrate the role of school leaders in fostering the collaborative use of research evidence by teachers in their schools.

EIP is the process of teachers accessing, evaluating and applying the findings of academic research in order to improve their teaching practice (Walker, 2017). Considered to be the hallmark of high performing education systems (BERA & RSA, 2013), EIP is regarded by many as a prerequisite for effective teaching and learning. Research has also identified substantial benefits from EIP for both teaching practice and pupil outcomes (Brown & Zhang, 2016).

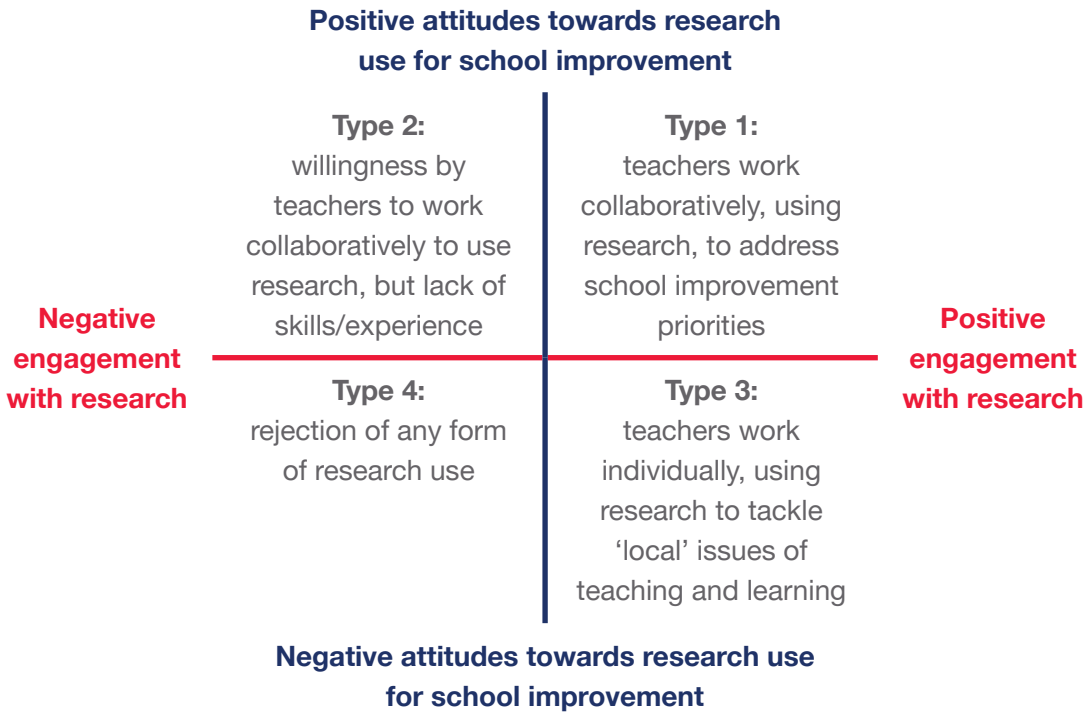
Recent studies examining the use of research evidence by teachers (such as Brown & Zhang, 2016) suggest that it is possible to characterise teachers' EIP behaviours according to a combination of their attitudes towards using research for school improvement *and* teachers' actual engagement with research. Positing teachers' research-use attitudes and engagement as the axes of a two-by-two matrix, these studies point towards four evidence-use 'types':

- type-1 use represents teachers working collaboratively, using research to address school improvement priorities
- type-2-use teachers are those willing to work collaboratively to engage with research, but who lack the skills and/or experience required
- type-3 teachers are those who work individually, using research to tackle 'local' issues of teaching and learning
- type-4 teachers reject any form of research use.

These types are shown illustrated in figure 6.1, below.

9 Original blog post: https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/the-self-improving-school-system-from-the-classroom-out

Figure 6.1
A matrix illustrating the characteristics of the four 'types' of evidence-use among teachers



In terms of school and school-system improvement, it would seem preferable for schools to have a high number of teachers who are type-1 evidence users. Given the vital role of school leadership to improving school outcomes, school leaders have three key roles to play to develop type-1 behaviours among their teachers.

Role 1: Give teachers hands-on experience of EIP in a safe environment

First-hand experience is vital if individuals are to buy in to new ways of working, such as using research evidence. Teachers also need to feel *able to experiment* if they are to fully engage in EIP-type activity. Key to increasing EIP, therefore, is for school leaders to ensure teachers are able to access, engage with and apply research when attempting to improve their practice, *and* that they can recognise the impact of doing so.

Role 2: Developing a school culture that encourages research use

Support from school leaders is also key to fostering a culture of research-use. As Earl and Katz (2006, p. 20) argue,

> *'Leaders have the challenge of convincing everyone who works in a school of the merits of using [evidence] for productive change and creating the conditions in which [evidence]*

can become an integral part of school decision making'.

As well as establishing a vision for EIP, therefore, school leaders should be fostering conditions that include co-ordinated and protected time and space, as well as access to relevant research resources.

Role 3: Ensuring networked collaboration within and then across schools

Senior leadership support is also essential for collaborative activity to take root and flourish. It is particularly important that senior leaders promote the idea of 'community' while also ensuring that staff are both encouraged and supported to engage in EIP in a networked way. All staff must move beyond the superficial exchange of practices and resource, and towards meaningful research-related collaboration that has demonstrable benefits for both individual teachers and the school. Indeed, it is the use of networks in ways that produce a multitude of benefits at a variety of levels that is likely to be key to unlocking the potential that EIP has for classrooms and schools. Once we have embedded such working and benefits at these levels, the next step will then be to engage in networked collaboration *across* schools.

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Questions for discussion

1. How can we convince doubters to engage with educational research?
2. What can school leaders do to prioritise teachers' engagement with research within their schools?
3. To what extent can distributed-leadership-type approaches help ensure that new research practices are developed and mobilised effectively within and across schools?

7. Synergising research in early childhood education

Creating a collaborative space between close-to-practice research and academia

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23 September 2019

Since the turn of the 21st century there has been a push for teaching to become a research-based profession in a way that is practically relevant to the classroom.[10] The recent research report arising from the BERA Close-to-Practice Research project (Wyse, Brown, Oliver, & Poblete, 2018) examined 'dimensions of quality in close-to-practice educational research' (p. 4) and identified a need to 'explicitly promote partnerships that connect universities and practitioners' in order to help support the conduct of trustworthy and credible research (p. 33).

A systematic review of close-to-practice methodology and education studies undertaken as part of that research project highlights the fact that, of the final 12 studies selected, none focussed on the early years.

The aim of this blog, therefore, is to briefly explore the potential for establishing a collaborative space between practitioner and academic research as a way of supporting rigorous and trustworthy methodological decisions and output, with a focus on early childhood education.

'Establishing a community of research practice between practitioners and researchers has the potential to be a mutually beneficial partnership.'

Drawing on work by Wenger (1998), I argue that establishing a community of research practice between practitioners and researchers has the potential to create a mutually beneficial partnership. It is acknowledged that researchers and practitioners are 'differently qualified and differently positioned' (Christianakis, 2010, p. 120) within this process, and that both parties bring valuable skills and knowledge to the collaboration.

10 Original blog post: https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/synergising-research-in-early-childhood-education-creating-a-collaborative-space-between-close-to-practice-research-and-academia

Firstly, practitioners who wish to design and undertake a close-to-practice research project could benefit from the support of university research expertise. Secondly, close liaison with practitioners through these processes would help to keep the researchers' knowledge and understanding of the challenges of classroom teaching current and grounded in practice.

A key aim of this relationship would be to produce robust scholarship on learning and teaching that reflects a wider range of ideas, beliefs and perspectives. The co-operative nature of a community of practice increases the commitment, motivation and interest of the members, making their knowledge available to others while becoming aware of their capacity to access other individuals' knowledge (Bratianu, 2015). This sharing of knowledge between people with a common set of values and interests within the community of research practice may lead to increasing innovation, both pedagogically and methodologically. Further to this, rather than simply being the 'recipients of research', practitioners would become 'interpreters or producers of actionable knowledge' (Ozga, 2004).

Taking inspiration from the BERA report on close-to-practice research (Wyse, Brown, Oliver, & Poblete, 2018), and considering my own interests in establishing a collaborative relationship with early years practitioners, the following questions have been devised as a starting point to further explore the potential of this initiative.

1. What close-to-practice research is already happening across the diverse range of early years educational contexts?
2. How can academics work with teachers to identify what their specific needs are when undertaking a close-to-practice research project?
3. What would be an effective way of establishing a mutually beneficial working collaboration within the community of research practice?
4. How could a meaningful knowledge-sharing partnership within the community of research practice be established?
5. What is the potential for incorporating research strands into initial teacher education programmes?

It is envisaged that this (very) early thinking will be formulated into a comprehensive research proposal as a way of moving forward and building on some of the key recommendations of BERA's Close-to-Practice Research project.

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Questions for discussion

1. Why is close-to-practice research important?
2. What challenges might be faced by teachers/academics undertaking close-to-practice research?
3. What benefits would a teacher–academic collaboration bring to close-to-practice research?

8. Developing an ethics framework for school-based research in the context of a large academy secondary school

Claire Tyson
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24 Oct 2017

Homewood School and Sixth Form Centre is a secondary school academy in rural Kent.[11] I have been working as a teacher researcher at Homewood since 2014, and during that time I have produced a number of school-based research reports on diverse aspects of our school community. One project in particular raised the question of ethics for me, and had direct impact on the methods and results of the study.

The project that highlighted the need for an ethics framework was a survey about the wellbeing of high-attaining boys, and in particular their satisfaction with their friendships. An intervention (the Real Project) was planned in response and delivered in June 2014. The project was repeated in June 2016 with a new cohort of boys (Tyson, 2017).

The first cohort were surveyed without parental permission or student assent. There were a large number of participants, and the data was usefully employed to identify students who were in need of additional support. When the study was repeated in 2016 I felt it was more appropriate to seek active parental consent, and as a result fewer boys were available to be surveyed and the sample was biased. I was faced with a dilemma about the conflict between pragmatism (what we can do) and ethics (what we should do). I realised that it was time to review my assumptions about and practice of school-based research.

Back to the literature, where I found a in the work of Gert Biesta (2017, p. 17): 'research cannot supply us with rules for action but only hypotheses for intelligent problem solving.'

The intelligent way to solve this problem is to keep in mind the pragmatist values of democracy and ownership of knowledge, and create a framework for making ethics choices on a case-by-case basis, acknowledging and confronting difficulties as they arise.

11 Original blog post: https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/developing-an-ethics-framework-for-school-based-research-in-the-context-of-a-large-academy-secondary-school

School-based research occupies a grey area that falls between professional development, school improvement and evidence-based practice (Felzmann, 2009). There is debate about where research begins and ends because it is customary for staff and schools to use test results and student data in order to assess student progress and monitor teacher performance. The growth of the teacher-as-researcher movement means that a role conflict can develop, with students unaware that they are being asked to engage with a research activity because it is happening in the context of a task or activity set by their usual teacher.

In order to address these potential pitfalls we have developed an ethics framework at Homewood, using the BERA *Ethical Guidelines* (2011) as our starting point. Staff and students who are planning to carry out research are asked to complete an ethics form asking them to reflect on and respond to questions to explore unintended or unforeseen issues. This is based on a university ethics form, and the results are stored on a central drive where they can be accessed by all staff. I review the form and assess the potential for harm, including emotional, social and psychological factors. If I feel that there is a medium or high risk of harm then the form is passed to our school principal for review.

We are moving to a position in which we see students as having a choice regarding whether to take part in such activities, rather than assuming that belonging to a school entails taking part in data collection without knowledge or consent. A transformative study design (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007) also requires researchers to consider how best to refer to and interact with participants; which sampling strategies will promote inclusiveness; how to actively involve participants in the data collection process; and how to decide how the data collection process and outcomes will benefit the community being studied. A positive school culture also encourages open and honest communication (Kaplan, 2013), implying that the results of teacher research should be shared with a wider audience. This creates additional tensions around issues of participant confidentiality that need to be addressed, firstly at the study design stage and, secondly, when decisions about dissemination are being made.

Our preferred method for most cases would be informed active parental consent with student assent, and we encourage methods that use student-researchers to pilot projects and feed back into cycles of action research in order to create research projects that are more likely to succeed at collecting credible and useful data that have been collected on a sound ethical basis.

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Questions for discussion

1. To what extent is it acceptable to use persuasion (or incentive) to encourage secondary school students to take part in a research project?
2. What role does peer pressure play when large numbers of students chose to opt out of a project?
3. When working on data analysis with a student researcher, how does the adult practitioner respect the voice of the student while acknowledging their lack of theoretical framework?

9. What might a self-extending school system with research evidence at its heart look like?

Megan Dixon
Aspire Educational Trust

3 May 2018

David Hargreaves, in his think-piece 'Creating a Self-Improving School System' (2010), presented a vision of a self-extending, autonomous school system in which 'schools take ownership of the problems'.[12] He suggested that the success of this model would be dependent on the local context and the ability of each school to tailor and evaluate solutions to the challenges they face.

At a recent BERA–BCF event, I shared the journey of the school where I work: from the point of closure, to success as the foundation school within a multi-academy trust, a national teaching school and one of the first schools in the Education Endowment Foundation and Institute for Effective Education's Research Schools Network. This school, I suggested, presents an example of how placing the use of research practices and research evidence at the heart of a school improvement journey not only enriches day-to-day decision-making but enables the development of strong professional capital (Hargreaves & Fullen, 2012) and a framework for self-extending transformation.

The school, situated in a medium-sized town in the north-west of England, serves a community facing high levels of social and economic disadvantage. In 2009, the new headteacher and deputy headteacher recognised that a novel approach to improving the school was needed. Rather than relying on previous experience or advice from others, it was decided to adopt an evidence-informed process, using high-quality research and research principles and practices to build an evidence base with a single-minded focus on teaching and learning (Matthews, Rea, Hill, & Qu, 2014). Furthermore, it was recognised that if teachers

12 Original blog post: https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/what-might-a-self-extending-school-system-with-research-evidence-at-its-heart-look-like

This article was part of the BERA Blog special issue 'Researching the Curriculum in schools and colleges: Practice, Professionalism and Innovation': https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/researching-the-curriculum-in-schools-and-colleges-practice-professionalism-and-innovation

and teaching were to change, they needed to participate in a professional learning community that was focussed on becoming dynamically responsive to the children they taught (Timperley, 2008, p. 19). Put simply, the school sought to discover what worked best, for whom, when and in what circumstances.

'Placing the use of research practices and evidence at the heart of a school improvement journey enriches day-to-day decision-making, and enables the development of strong professional capital and a framework for self-extending transformation.'

Building on the work of Sharratt and Fullen (2009), a process for enquiry was adopted. The first step called for a challenge to be identified and defined with reference to a wide range of data. Pupil attainment data, records of learning, teacher voice, pupil voice and parental voice all contributed to a rich picture of the issue. The senior leadership team, teachers and teaching assistants explored the research together through staff meetings, discussions and iterative, recursive professional development opportunities. Staff were encouraged to transfer their understanding into practice, articulating their interventions and describing what they looked like, felt like and sounded like in the classroom. Six weekly pupil progress meetings provided the opportunity to reflect on the impact of the interventions and adjust (or change) them accordingly. Finally, and most importantly, there was the acknowledgment that while not everything worked, every outcome was positive. If the pupils made gains, the school was richer in knowledge about what worked; if the pupils did not make gains, the school was richer in knowledge about what did not work and so what to avoid in the future.

Quickly, a *menu* of pedagogies, interventions, resources and approaches began to be assembled – a toolkit exemplifying what worked, when, where, for whom and in what circumstances. All staff within the school became co-investigators in the development of the menu – collaborators at every stage, and co-constructors adapting and adjusting teaching practices 'to secure promised outcomes' (Hargreaves, 2010).

The school was recognised as 'outstanding in all areas' by Ofsted in 2013; as a place where it was 'no longer risky to take risks or quirky to try something new' (Matthews, Rea, Hill and Qu, 2014); as a place

where both children and staff excel, and as a wonderful, enriching place to work. It is now at the heart of a self-extending system, training the next generation of teachers and supporting others to tailor and evaluate solutions to the challenges they face in each local context.

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Questions for discussion

1. What skills and knowledge do schools need in order to be self-extending research-rich communities?
2. How can schools be encouraged to develop their own menus of pedagogies?
3. To what extent should we expect schools to be self-extending, self-improving autonomous systems?

10. Building Research in Primary Schools (BRiPS)

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4 May 2018

Given the growing importance of securing a strong evidence base for teaching, there is considerable scope for exploring different ways in which teachers can be supported to engage in research.[13] Ultimately the rationale for such an approach needs to be convincing, showing that it will give an enriched experience and tangible outcomes for both teaching and learning. If this is to be the case, teacher engagement with research needs to be focussed on the real lives and learning of both teachers and pupils. When the national agenda seems to focus on distilling 'what works', teachers can feel pushed to look for particular simple solutions which may or may not be suitable for their context and inclusive for all pupils. The translation of research evidence into real contexts is often more problematic than the research literature suggests. It requires teachers to test, verify and adapt possibilities in their own classrooms (Stenhouse, 1975, p. 143). As is clearly indicated by recent research studies from the Educational Endowment Foundation (no date), 'simply disseminating research summaries and evidence based resources to schools is not an effective way… to support schools to improve learning outcomes'.

John Dewey (1938) talks of the importance of understanding inquiry in context and actively making sense of evidence as a process. Teachers being researchers and understanding their own practice is central to the work of both Stenhouse and Dewey, and is foundational to a study funded by the Association for Primary Education. The aims of this study were to develop research in and across primary schools, recognising that research is messy and complex and demands active participation and reflective action from teachers. It can be best developed through supported and guided action.

The Building Research in Primary Schools (BRiPs) project developed a small supported network of teachers across six primary schools to develop research linked to their own school's development plans. The research was supported across

13 Original blog post: https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/building-research-in-primary-schools-brips

one academic year by an academic from a local university. Two teachers were selected by their headteachers in each participating school – this offered the potential beginnings of a research community in each school. The research focus could be decided by each school in conjunction with current and emerging school priorities.

The university's involvement included four twilight sessions on research methods, at which teachers were supported in developing their specific research questions, finding any existing research from which they could align their inquiry, designing appropriate methods for collecting data and analysing, interpreting and disseminating their findings. Each teacher was to share their research in their own school and at a conference held at the university. The importance of making the research 'public' responded to Stenhouse's notion of research being 'systematic enquiry made public' (Stenhouse, 1981, p. 104).

Eleven of the 12 studies were focussed on curriculum, pedagogy or assessment. Outcomes and impact were considered in relation to pupil outcomes, pupils' wellbeing and teachers' own professional development. In this work they were not solely limited to quantifiable learning outcomes, as it was recognised that the pupils who were frequently targeted in these research projects were often the most vulnerable or the highest attaining, and were few in number. Furthermore, the research was developed in just one academic year, meaning that no great claims could be made. The studies highlighted the fact that often the strategies that were most effective for the majority of pupils needed more adjustments, extension, creativity and adaptation for those whose learning yielded the highest and lowest outcomes. More importantly, the impact of the research on motivation and wellbeing were also important outcomes for both teachers and learners.

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Questions for discussion

1. How do you encourage research-engaged staff to find research partners to enable them to support and develop one other in making sense of research in their own unique contexts?
2. In what ways do senior school leaders communicate the ways in which research projects (or the application of research findings) can help support developing practice in your school?
3. What further links can your school make to external research agencies and/or resources promoting high-quality research and support which could be useful in your school?

11. Reflexivity in educational research

Challenges and rewards for the practitioner-researcher

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25 Aug 2017

The growing popularity of the professional doctorate means that increasing numbers of practitioners are undertaking research in their own workplaces.[14] But what does it really mean to adopt this dual role in an environment in which you are already embedded? This blog reports on the challenges and rewards of undertaking such a task by looking at my own experiences of conducting empirical research in my place of work.

For the practitioner undertaking a professional doctorate and looking to conduct research, one's own workplace seems the obvious place to start, for two reasons. Firstly, the researcher's area(s) of interest may well have arisen from issues, hunches and anecdotal evidence noted during professional practice – this was certainly true in my own case. When I started my doctorate I was employed as an A-level teacher by a provider of 16–19 education that also offered Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) awards. Why, I wondered, did all the available discourses – policy, the popular press, dialogues with teachers and parents – promote A-levels as the more desirable, more academic route? Consider, for example, the thought processes behind the recent A-level reforms (GOV.UK, 2012), which aim to preserve the elite nature of this qualification through a return to a linear structure. How aware are students of the power processes at work when they decide which pathway to follow?

The second reason for conducting research in one's own workplace is, of course, the comparatively easy access to participants. Twenty-four students took part in individual interviews with me, in which they were invited to narrate their experiences of academic transition, focussing particularly on their motivations for choosing their course and their expectations of the programme of study they had selected. They were recruited

14 Original blog post: https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/reflexivity-in-educational-research-challenges-and-rewards-for-the-practitioner-researcher

by putting posters up around college advertising the study; while volunteers didn't exactly flock at first, a snowball effect meant that students who had enjoyed participating soon told their friends, who then also signed up. Interviews were held in locations familiar to the students as part of their (and my) normal college day, making the process relatively quick and easy. Recruiting and conducting a staff focus group was similarly straightforward.

'This kind of insider research, conducted by a practitioner working within their own profession or setting, is not without its challenges.'

So far, so good. However, this kind of insider research, conducted by a practitioner working within their own profession or setting, is not without its challenges. Ethical considerations must be carefully thought through because, despite the anonymisation of both setting and participants, the necessity of revealing one's own identity means it becomes possible to locate the site of the research. Furthermore, insider research requires the researcher to look carefully at their own experiences, values and beliefs, and question the impact their personal autobiography might have on research design and/or the collection, interpretation and presentation of data (Polit & Tatano Beck, 2009). For me, as an A-level teacher with little to no contact with BTEC students as part of my normal working life, this was a potential area of personal bias, particularly as some of the A-level participants were known to me as members of my teaching groups. And what of the power imbalance here? As a teacher within the site of the research, the relationship between myself and the student interviewees was not starting off on an equal footing, and this potentially affected the dialogue between us.

Fortunately, these issues can be overcome. By acknowledging and reflecting on my existing beliefs and experiences I have been able to adopt a level of reflexivity which mitigates the impact of my own professional autobiography and helps foster confidence in the validity of the research and my credibility as a researcher (Patton, 2002). Transparency of approach has been key from start to finish: from the design and piloting of the study to the collection, analysis and presentation of data. Regular meetings with my supervisor and the completion of a research diary helped me track and record this process, enabling reflection each step of the way and the documentation and justification of each decision. I followed ethical guidelines closely in considering what exactly I could promise participants

in terms of anonymity, and while the location of the research could potentially be identified, individual participants cannot. My role as researcher rather than practitioner was emphasised throughout the study both verbally and in writing, and recruitment was conducted anonymously through an agent to eliminate the risk of selection bias.

Thus, while insider research is not necessarily the easy option, the benefits it can confer – in my opinion – outweigh the potential issues. The joy of a professional doctorate is that it locates research in real-world contexts, allowing us to examine social phenomena in situ while drawing upon a wealth of professional experience and knowledge. I, for one, am grateful for the opportunity to have followed this rewarding route.

A presentation based on the author's research, Post-16 Transitions and new School-university partnerships*, was delivered at the BERA Annual Conference at the University of Sussex, Brighton, UK, on Wednesday 6 September 2017.*

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Questions for discussion

1. Do you think practitioner research is taken as seriously as research conducted by non-practitioner academics?
2. What other advantages does practitioner research offer beyond the ones suggested here?
3. This article can only provide a very brief introduction to reflexivity. What other strategies can a practitioner researcher adopt in order to maintain a reflexive stance?
4. Which areas in your own field or workplace might benefit from practitioner research?

About the authors

Chris Brown is professor of education at the School of Education and Childhood Studies, University of Portsmouth. Chris has a longstanding interest in how evidence can and should but often doesn't aid education policy and practice. To that end he has authored four books, including *Achieving Evidence Informed Policy and Practice in Education: EvidencED* (Emerald, 2017) and several papers, and has presented and keynoted on the subject at a number of international conferences in Europe, Asia and North and South America. In 2015 Chris was awarded the American Educational Research Association (AERA's) Emerging Scholar award (Education Change special interest group), an award presented to an individual who, within the first eight years of their career as an educational scholar, has demonstrated a strong record of original and significant scholarship related to educational change. Chris was also awarded the 2016 AERA Excellence in Research to Practice award.

Christine Challen is a lecturer at South Tyneside College, and teaches biology to Access applied science and healthcare level 3 students and functional skills maths to engineering, beauty, health and social care as well as music and art students. She has taught in higher education, at Newcastle University, to stage 1 dental students, and at Northumbria University to biomedical science students, and has also been a principal supervisor to final-year biomedical science project students. She has also taught at Sunderland University to master's in applied clinical practice postgraduate international students. Her specific interests include the power of reflection in learning, the use of case studies to develop critical thinking skills, as well as innovative methods to improve her teaching areas. She is passionate about supporting students and preparing them for higher education. She believes taking risks and continual reflection in practice are the keys to successful teaching and learning.

She tweets @ChallenDr.

Ruth Dann is senior lecturer in curriculum, pedagogy and assessment at University College London. She was formerly a school teacher, and has led initial teacher education at both Keele and Manchester Metropolitan Universities. She is chair of governors at an 'outstanding' school. Her research and writing are mainly focussed on the area of formative assessment,

and her latest book, *Developing feedback for pupil learning: Teaching, learning and assessment in schools* (Routledge, 2018), looks at how feedback forms part of a relational interaction between teachers and pupils in classrooms. She is deputy editor of the journal *Education 3–13*, is part of the British Curriculum Forum steering group, and is one of the convenors of the BERA Curriculum, Assessment and Pedagogy special interest group (SIG). She has worked with teachers and leaders from other professional organisations to support research engagement in schools and colleges through both the Coalition of Evidence Based Education (CEBE) and the Association for the Study of Primary Education (ASPE).

Megan Dixon is the director of literacy for the Aspire Educational Trust, a small multi-academy trust based in the north-west of England, and also works for the Aspirer Teaching Alliance. She has been a teacher, a consultant, a senior leader and a specialist literacy teacher and trainer with expertise in teaching children who find it hardest to learn. Megan is fascinated by how we can transfer research evidence into effective classroom practice. She is often found reading research and working with researchers to develop practical strategies to transfer their work into teaching and learning. She is always involved in at least one research trial.

Liz Gregory was, at the time of writing, just finishing a part-time professional doctorate at the University of Manchester, where she is now a research supervisor for Teach First and Education master's programmes. She is interested in the impact of academic transition upon learner identity. Her research looks at how young people narrate their experiences of academic transition within an educational setting, and recognises the impact of academic choices and of policy issues upon an individual's sense of self within this particular context. She is also interested in the interplay between the identities assigned to learners embarking upon different academic pathways by external actors such as parents, teachers and educational institutions, and their own sense of self perception while making the transition from school to college. As part of her research she has developed a theoretical framework, called the MERITS Plus model, to help conceptualise and understand the fluid nature of identity and its interplay with societal structures.

Ian Horsewell is an experienced science/physics teacher based in the Midlands. Since September 2014 he has been working as a teaching and learning coach with the Stimulating Physics Network, linked to the Institute of Physics. He is a chartered science teacher,

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He has an independent blog and is active on Twitter, but the best way to contact him is usually by email. Building on his classroom and coaching experience, he has produced teaching resources and delivers external science education courses.

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Ken Jones taught in London for 13 years before returning to Wales to work in higher education, and is currently senior consultant for professional learning and development at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, based in Swansea. He has been involved locally in the training and continuing education of teachers and headteachers; nationally as a consultant in the field of school leadership and through work for government departments; and internationally through his position as managing editor of the journal *Professional Development Education* and as one of the founding members of the International Professional Development Association (IPDA).

He has served on government working groups in Wales in areas such as induction and early professional development, and revising the professional leadership standards. His work with the former General Teaching Council for Wales has included advising on the setting up of a national framework for the professional development of teachers in Wales, and on co-piloting the accreditation route for chartered teacher status. His international work has included the organisation of symposia on professional learning in many European countries, the United States and India.

Louise Kay is a qualified teacher and has worked across all three primary key stages, with the majority of her career spent teaching in the early years. She is now employed as a lecturer at the University of Sheffield. Her current research is in collaboration with Monash University and the Australian Catholic University, and explores learning-rich leadership in the early years workforce. Her research interests include pedagogy in the early years, curricular and assessment frameworks, and the impact that policy has on children and teachers.

Iro Konstantinou is the researcher-in-residence at Eton College, based at the Tony Little Centre for Innovation and Research in Learning. Her role focusses on facilitating evidence-based teaching and learning, and engaging in discussions of educational research

among schools. She recently completed her PhD in sociology at the University of Warwick. As part of her research she conducted an ethnography in an educational setting. She tweets @Eton_CIRL.

Ian Potter is the chief executive of the Gosport and Fareham Multi-Academy Trust, the first local multi-academy trust in Hampshire, UK. Prior to its formation in 2017 he was the headteacher of Bay House School, during which time all five Ofsted inspections judged the leadership to be 'outstanding'.

Ian's research interests include system leadership. He co-coordinates the International School Leadership Development Network's Social Justice Strand project, which researches social justice leadership in schools internationally. He is vice-chair of the council of the British Educational Leadership, Management and Administration Society (BELMAS), the society's co-ordinator for international affairs and its representative on the board of the Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration and Management. He is a member of the BERA Conference and Events Committee, the Association of School and College Leaders' local representative for Hampshire, and a fellow of the Chartered College of Teaching.

Val Poultney is a senior fellow of the Higher Education Academy and a senior lecturer at the University of Derby. She teaches on postgraduate and initial teacher education programmes. Her research interests include developing teachers as researchers, school leadership and governance.

Claire Tyson is a science teacher and teacher-researcher based at Homewood School and Sixth Form Centre, Tenterden, Kent. She is in her eighth year of teaching science. In the last four years she has been helping the senior leadership team by developing the role of teacher researcher. One of the primary goals of this role is to support the school improvement plan. She graduated with a PhD from Queen Mary, University of London in July 2016, and her thesis explored the ethics and challenges of evaluating complex interventions such as complementary and alternative medicine, clinical trial design and patient participation. The focus of her research work at Homewood is on developing methodologies and a research framework to evaluate the complex interventions that occur in schools and classrooms. She speaks regularly at educational conferences and her work has been published via a variety of websites and journals.

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