

Practitioner Research

What is it?

It is any kind of self-study that explores practice

Practitioner research involves an idea that is then investigated in the classroom. Some would say that the idea is just normal, everyday teaching problem and the investigation is a way seeing what works to fix the problem. For example: you come to the realisation that curricular involvement rapidly declines from year 10 onwards - especially with girls. You think that traditional activities are "turning kids off" so you decide to try something new. But what?

Introduce a year long unit of 'lifestyle activities'

The Idea

You want to try something new and decide that the curriculum needs a revamp. You decide to adopt a key stage 4 curriculum that looks at activities such as swimming, walking, cycling, yoga, boxercise etc. But how do you get the choices right?

You explore the web and find the top ten activities for men and women and then survey the students to see what they would like.

You talk to colleagues and find out their ideas?

You plan a curriculum?

Then what?

How do you know it is working? How do you know if it has created a better learning environment? How do you know if your efforts have been worthwhile? Has involvement increased? Are kids more motivated? What do the parents, governors, senior leadership team think? How do you feel? What does the wider world tell you about post-school physical activity?

PRACTITIONER RESEARCH

The decisions you make as a teacher are reflections in action i.e. you see something and you react. When you plan units of works you reflect on action i.e. you use your experience and the experience of your peers to develop a plan that you think will work. This is basically what practitioner research is except you formalise it. Instead on depending on your memory of things you make a conscious effort to record your memories as soon after an event as possible. Initially this is simply an account of the events as they occurred. Yet the more you reflect on those records and consider them in light of your other experiences the more they become reflections. These reflections can be recorded in a note book, on a voice recorder, in a word document, on a discussion board or on a blog. **That is stage 1.**

You might then share these reflections with a critical friend, a colleague or a community of practitioners and ask them to help you contextualise your thoughts in the wider education community. That is a possible **stage 2.**

You may decide to ask your pupils what they think. You might ask them some informal questions or you might use a questionnaire. You might develop those questions into some group interviews. That is a possible **stage 3.**

In all these process you will uncover information that helps you plan and develop your ideas and address your problem. Yet your decisions are based on more than a hunch. They are now based on

1. **The literature**
2. **Your reflections**
3. **Your colleagues' observations**
4. **Your students' experiences**

These four process all become lenses of reflective practice and allow us to understand the learning that occurs in our lessons rather than assume we just know.