Practitioner-led Action Research Programme 2014

Summary of blended learning strand

The East Midlands Centre for Excellence in Teacher Training (emCETT) has provided blended support through the practitioner–led action research programme to 63 practitioners or groups of practitioners from organisations reflecting the diversity of the education and training sector across England. This programme, part of The Education and Training Foundation's practitioner research support programme, has helped practitioners to design and undertake their own action research projects. Projects have supported the practitioners' organisational improvement strategies and the Foundation's commitment to supporting professional development in the sector, and delivering better outcomes for learners. A complementary strand of the Foundation's programme was provided by SUNCETT, offering residential support.

Practitioner-led action research (PLAR) aims to **improve** and to **involve**. There should be improvements in:

- practice;
- understanding of the practice by its practitioners; and
- the situation in which the practice takes place.[1]

The aim of the programme was to:

- enable practitioners to identify and enquire into **real** problems or issues that they encounter in their work;
- develop practitioners' capacity to critically question their experience and reflect upon their actions;
- link practice to its underpinning theory by using theory to question practice and practice to question and inform theories; and
- be accessible to and usable by other practitioners in similar situations.

A blended model of support was provided through peer working groups; face-to-face meetings/ email/ telephone conversations with regional advisers; webinars; an eCPD module; and e-guide to multimodal reporting. Practitioners were also offered the opportunity to undertake accreditation. Materials were also developed for the team of regional advisers and CPD leads.

The opportunity to take part in the programme was advertised through a wide variety of networks.This resulted in:

- 76 applications
- 63 bursaries awarded
- 60 action research reports produced
- 15 participants undertaking the accreditation route

Find out more about the types of providers engaged and what happened during the programme by watching the Prezi produced for The Education and Training Foundation's Practitioner Research conference held on the 8th July 2014 and **visit the programme summary website to access the programme resources and practitioner action research reports**.

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[1]Adapted from Carr, W. and Kemmis, S. (1986) *Becoming Critical: Education Knowledge and Action Research,* Routledge *p165*

Impact

How has your research impacted on learners?
An example from [Business Impact](#):

> *Overall this research project has been very successful. In terms of outcomes we can say that our initial aims of reducing learners leaving in the first 3 months of a programme, and ensuring they make progress towards their learning goals, have been met. 100% of the sample set are still on programme. 100% of the sample set have made progress that at least meets our expected levels, most have exceeded their expected progress.*

How has your research impacted on you and your work?
An example from [Easton and Otley College](#):

> *This action research has been an exciting learning process for me. I have learnt so much in such a short space of time. And as a result I have developed (and still developing) new skills that I am embedding in my daily teaching practice and sharing with my colleagues.*
>
> *Secondly, and the most insightful process is, that although the data I have collected was my main focus and I was purely interested in gaining opinions from the staff and students , I under appreciated the distance I needed to travel as well, and through my reflective blogs, I hope you can share that journey with me.*
>
> *I would recommend anyone given the opportunity to take part in some action research to do so. Not only do you gain a whole new skills set; you share good practice, meet interesting people, attend some great training days, and finally open your eyes to a new approach of learning and reporting!*

How has your research impacted on your colleagues?
An example from [CableCom Training Ltd](#):

> *Trying out new ideas in the classroom has had a positive impact on tutors. This has led to extra confidence and self-esteem to create new resources for the vocational part of the course, which has led to more innovation in the classroom.It has:*
>
> - *Encouraged the use of different teaching strategies with-in sessions with something to appeal to everyone's individual needs e.g. use of specially adapted ruler to teach the concept of high value numbers*
> - *Encouraged differentiation to create different resources for learners at different levels.*

How has your research impacted on your organisation?
An example from [The City Literary Institute](#):

> *The results of this research has generated a potential for the training module developed and piloted during the project to become part of the induction and probation process of new, untrained teachers joining the academic staff at the City Lit.*

How has your research impacted on employers?
An example from [Philips Hair Academy](#):

> *Based on the launch of the new blended learning programme offering the salon a tailored programme approach for their apprentices, seven new salons are working with us rather than other training providers.*

How has your research impacted on society?
An example from [Calderdale College](#):

College community cohesion increased as staff and students from college were invited to a Festival of Cultures event alongside members of the local community. Members of the community who attended have contacted the college about enrolling on courses and using college facilities.

For further feedback on immediate and expected impact [click here](#).

Feedback from programme participants

Participants in the programme were invited to provide feedback mid-way and at the end through the use of an online survey.

- 75% of participants completed the end of programme survey
- 47 practitioners worked on the research with nearly 200 other members of staff
- 47 practitioners worked with nearly 1,500 learners

On a scale of 1 – 5 (with 1 being not helpful to 5 being very helpful) participants rated the support they had received on average as:

- their regional adviser - 4.8
- the Introduction to Action Research module - 4.3
- the Multimodal Reporting Guide - 4.4
- the programme Pearltree - 3.5

Support and resources were excellent and really helped me to conduct the research in a robust, professional and timely manner.

On a scale of 1 – 5 (with 1 being not at all to 5 being to a large extent) rated how their knowledge, understanding and skills in the following areas had increased with a rating average of:

- deepening knowledge and understanding of your project topic - 4.5
- understanding how action research process can improve learner outcomes - 4.4
- increasing your skills in using technology in your practice - 4.4

Participants intend to share their findings in the following ways:
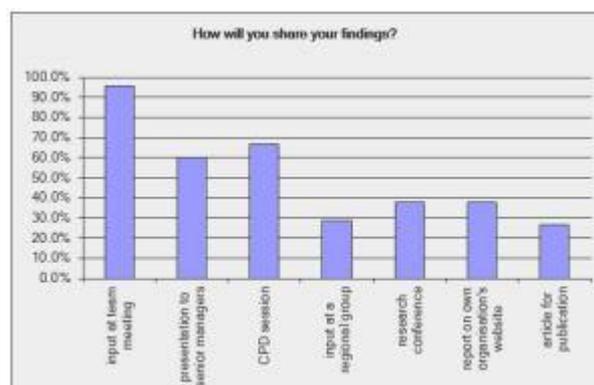
96% intend to continue their involvement in research/use of research.

What lessons will you share?

It works only when the learner, employer, training provider and assessor work together and keep up the communication.

Be organised right from the beginning; make sure you are clear on what your research question(s) is/are; get as many people (you know can help or contribute) involved as possible.

That technology use does not rely on availability of devices, expensive software or learners using their own resources. Many mobile apps have webpages that allow their features to be used. Learners do not need to pay for 3G as long as college Wi-Fi is stable - a priority for future development.

Although it was a comprehensive plan at the start, the feedback from the employers threw that plan 'out of the window'. As a result from their feedback, I had to revise the plan altogether and go into a different direction for the research project. Lesson learned NEVER ASSUME!

Be willing to try new approaches and new technology - the wider impact has been amazing.

How could the Foundation improve its support for practitioner research/ research in the sector?

Having a regular meeting time, whether this was face to face or virtual, that practitioners could join. If this was formalised within a project bid, organisations would have to agree this time for research & it would become a priority rather than something that is done in a practitioners own time or sidelined.

A calendar of meetings and activities to be published well in advance.

Not sure - it was very good! Maybe support practitioners with wider dissemination e.g. how to submit an article for publication.

This was great. Sum of money wasn't too scary, but did allow release and time to do the work.

The support we have had has been excellent, as has the networking, so I cannot suggest a better way for these things to be done.

Longer time allowed for the project. Bursary made available from the start of the project. Clear signposts to previously published projects on the Excellence Gateway.

Keep funding research - it makes a difference. Without funding, I probably wouldn't have innovated and developed something new. It values doing something out of the box which benefits learners and tutors and potentially the wider audience of tutors and learners in general.

The above quotes are taken from the mid and end of programme evaluation surveys.