The moral duty to be evidence-informed

Professor Daniel Muijs

Using research in a work-based context

Advanced Teacher Status research

Addressing FE’s ‘wicked problems’

Investigations in e-learning
RESEARCH IS SO VITAL FOR US ALL

Practitioner research has had a life-changing effect on teachers, their networks and their learners. Its importance cannot be underestimated. By Lynn Hart

Recently joined the Education and Training Foundation (ETF) with responsibility for providing the strategic and operational leadership of professional development programmes. My previous roles in senior leadership, quality enhancement and teacher training, and, of course, starting out all those years ago as a teacher in the FE sector, have all been informed and influenced by research and evidence-based practice. Being asked to write this foreword was both an honour and a challenge. It gave me the opportunity to reflect on the importance of research, regardless of the role in the FE sector.

In my current and previous roles I have been impressed by the life-changing effect of practitioner research on teachers, their networks and ultimately their learners. The value and volume of this research within the sector is inspiring. ETF activities and projects, such as the Outstanding Teaching Learning and Assessment (OTLA) Professional Exchange Networks, Teach Too, Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills (QTLS), and Advanced Teacher Status (ATS), support this.

My own practitioner research, as part of an MA in Education many years ago, informed my working life. My dissertation, on mentoring and coaching, led to a clearer understanding of how research supports the capacity building needed in the FE sector. I wish that the ETF’s Practitioner Research Programme had existed all those years ago.

More recently, while leading an ETF-OTLA Collaborative Project, I witnessed advanced practitioners, and the practitioners they supported, finding the ‘space’ to develop research-informed strategies through supported experiments. The importance of all types or practitioner research on self-efficacy, development of professional identity and, more widely, on the institutional culture cannot be underestimated.

Increasingly, leaders of learning in FE are looking to foster a ‘learning culture’, driving capacity and succession planning for our sector for many years to come. This feature heavily within the ETF Strategy, where leadership programmes seek to provide support, networking, and of course research-informed practice for leaders of all levels. How refreshing it is to see this philosophy underpinning the proposed Ofsted Education Inspection Framework (EIF), which is currently out to consultation, where pedagogical knowledge features as an expectation and judgement of the quality of learning (see page 12 in your main Intuition).

Exploring the new EIF caused me to consider the ETF Professional Standards for Teachers and Trainers, and the degree to which they reflect practitioner aspirations. So, I conclude by suggesting that we celebrate the Professional Standards’ fifth birthday and applaud their aspirations, in which practitioners aspire to ‘develop deep and critically informed knowledge and understanding in theory and practice, applying theoretical understanding of effective practice in teaching, learning and assessment drawing on research and other evidence’.

Lynn Hart is executive director of professional development at the Education and Training Foundation.

EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF RESEARCH WITH A RANGE OF PRACTITIONERS

Our supplement looks at everything from apprenticeships to inclusion and motivation, and asks: How can we apply research to practice effectively to make a difference to learners? By Gail Lydon, Lorna Lindsay, Colin Forrest

Welcome to the 2019 inTuition Research Supplement. It has been curated by a team of SET members with a wide range of perspectives and approaches to research. Our inspiration for this curation theme came from the input made by David Russell, the Education and Training Foundation’s (ETF) chief executive, to the 2018 ETF Practitioner Research Conference.

David said: “What really matters is the application of research to practice... because, in truth, neither practitioner research nor big research, in its own right, makes any difference to learners. Whether research informs and applies research – big or small – to proven effect, that’s what makes the difference.”

We took the views of practitioners as our starting point by probing their perceptions of the impact of research on teaching and learning. It is important to note that the notion of impact is contested. Some understand research impact in terms of hard data, such as student retention and grades, whereas others see it as being more concerned with ‘softer’ indicators, such as increased capacity for, and confidence in, research and, in belonging to a research community.

Lorna Lindsay, a sector expert on apprenticeship and technical reforms, presents a suite of research impacts located in employer-facing, work-based settings. Impacts on learners are explored, as is the interplay between research and the development of professional expertise and skills.

Implications for policy developments relating to an academic/vocational divide also emerge. Lorna also comments on research impacts that have their origin in digital learning, including opportunities for personalisation and its relevance in enhancing employer engagement.

We explore inclusion, mental health and resilience as the third set of programmes our participants highlight examples of research impact. We accessed a rich insight into the relationship between research and enhancing staff and learner well-being, learner engagement and motivation.

Gail Lydon is one of the first in the country to achieve Advanced Teacher Status (ATS) and she presents a collection of research impacts linked to attaining mastery. The use of theory, reflective practice, action research, and critical reflection all emerge from this suite.

In their contributions, Suzanne Savage, Professor Vicky Duckworth and Emily Barrett all describe their own personal research journeys. In doing so they also reflect on how their perspectives on research have the potential to enhance engagement with research in others through, for example, #ReimagineFE and the Transforming Lives research.

Professor Daniel Müsj of Ofsted’s head of research, highlights several implications for those undertaking research in, and on, the further education and training sector. This includes the importance of engaging critically with research evidence and some of the barriers associated with this. Daniel signposts the importance of brokers and mediators in these contexts.

“We accessed a rich insight into the relationship between research and enhancing staff and learner well-being, learner engagement and motivation.”

The contributions of Dr Gary Husband, president of the Association for Research in Post-Compulsory Education (ARPCE), and Sam Jones, at Bedford College, build on Daniel’s point in illustrating the significance of networks and collaboration. In doing so, Gary and Sam build a powerful case for research.

Our concluding piece draws together the research impacts from our contributors. In doing so, we acknowledge that the use of research is not universal across all parts of the sector, and explore and address the barriers experienced by colleagues working with independent training providers in particular.

We go on to blend perspectives from school settings with those of the contributors to make explicit what the key enablers may be for enhancing the use of research findings in further education. The British Education Research Association’s (BERA) exploration of ‘close to practice research’ is significant here.

Unbound supplement contributions, with full references, are available on the SET website (see link at the top of this page).

Gail Lydon, Lorna Lindsay and Colin Forrest are curators of the inTuition Research Supplement.
WORK-BASED RESEARCH MAKES SUCH A DIFFERENCE FOR VOCATIONAL TEACHERS

Using research in a work-based context, day to day, can help practitioners develop and improve their practice, says Louise Ford.

Research should not be seen as an exclusive club for college or higher education institutions: you don’t have to be in an academic environment to identify personal development through research. That is why we interviewed practitioner researchers based in independent training providers as well as those working closely in delivering apprenticeships, traineeships and study programmes.

Louise Ford’s piece on using context in vocational teaching (see right), in which she describes a recent action research project - what she calls The 3C Approach, Using Concept to Convey Context - has been adopted by her organisation to fully embed maths and English in all vocational provision.

The Education and Training Foundation’s (ETF) Outstanding Teaching and Learning Assessment (OLTALA) apprenticeship projects engage providers not previously involved in research. The projects demonstrate that there is real value in raising awareness of the Professional Standards for Teachers and Trainers, even though some may say that not all elements are relevant in work-based learning.

The ETF and Cumbria OTLA project report identified that there was a consistent commitment to support participants in achieving the Professional Standards, demonstrating a strong awareness of the need for practitioner-researchers to articulate achievement.

There is still much work to be done to encourage apprenticeship tutors to understand and adopt the standards and see the relevance of practitioner research. The wide range of OTLA projects enables the sharing of good practice through a community of practice and publication on the Excellence Gateway. Resources on the Gateway include a free webinar that can help dispel the myths around research being a heavyweight, academically-only pursuit. The final report of the ETF-funded emfec project in partnership with Nottingham Trent University, Provider Led Research Project Reviews 2016, states that the goal of outstanding delivery in work-based learning is to “provide delivery staff with the opportunity to consider their own practice and the learner journey, and use this to aid destination-focused planning in their delivery.”

The following pieces outline some key elements of practitioner-based research in a work-based learning environment. Full-length versions of these abbreviated articles can be found on the SET website: set.etf.foundation.co.uk/intuition-35-spring-research-supplement

Louise Ford is an ETF associate and director of Magna ETA Ltd, a training and development and project management company.

A CONCEPTUAL ROUTE TO UNDERSTANDING MATHS

By Louise Ford

As part of my Advanced Teacher Status (ATS) programme, I conducted research into the benefits of embedded contextualised maths in learning within post-16 study programmes and apprenticeships, and how to promote effective maths in the way I teach. It has given me validation for embedding vocational content and continues to boost confidence.

I developed an action research model which captured the ‘milestones’ encountered by learners when learning a new concept, aided by the use of contextualised learning. I call my model The 3C Approach – Using Concept to Convey Context. This technique helps learners bridge the gap between the practical activity and the theoretical maths involved.

I am now leading a project in my organisation which fully embeds maths and English across the vocational provision.

This project is being conducted by a team of vocational and educational tutor champions. It ensures we are successfully providing a learning journey that encompasses cutting-edge vocational education that is sought after by today’s employers.

The approach has enabled learners to recognise the value and relevance of mathematical skills within their profession and has made them more aware of their own ability to achieve success.

This research has begun to address some of the main areas that teachers are faced with in a vocational setting: to what extent do learners use their learning work, and does this creative way of teaching provide any additional benefits for our learners?

PRACTITIONER RESEARCH OFFERS A CHANCE TO EXPLORE

By Louise Doyle

There are 10 Outstanding Teaching Learning and Assessment (OLTALA) apprenticeship practitioner research projects being conducted by a range of organisations, including colleges, independent providers, local adult education and assessment organisations. While the individual focus for each project differs, the collective aim is to pursue the next knowledge which can inform and improve apprenticeship delivery. Their outputs and research case studies will be published in March.

Good practitioner research is most concerned with creating reflective space to explore existing problems and challenges, consider why they may be occurring and test new ideas that may result in a different outcome to what we currently experience. It can be an individual pursuit or, in the case of the projects, that engages a group of practitioners undertaking research in their work context.

Practical considerations that can be used to support others to undertake meaningful research in their own setting:

1. Open the conversation with the organisation and engage and address insecurities with those who see research as being an intellectual activity only undertaken by researchers.

2. There is a challenge in defining the research question, but it should be seen as a learning opportunity: moving a statement of inquiry to a question of inquiry.

3. Set realistic expectations for the time, effort and energy to undertake research.

4. Use the ETF Professional Standards as a COP baseline to identify and review individual development; consider how they can inform HR practice.

5. Review the plethora of data, publications and information available to inform or support the research brief.

6. The confidence to fail is critical to encourage exploration without limits. Too much focus on the end result risks research becoming a vehicle for tactical change.

Louise Doyle is an English, maths and ICT tutor for PM Training and is an undergraduate in Human Bio Sciences. She was among the first cohort of practitioners to complete ATS (see our Tuition page 24 for more details).

DETAILED STUDY OF CURRICULUM CONTENT AIMS TO IMPROVE THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

By Amy Hollier

As part of the University College Birmingham’s (UCB) Curriculum 2020 project, four of the constituent schools – Business, Food, Sport & Creative Services, and Education – have undertaken a careful analysis of curriculum content, consulted with leading industry specialists on the demands and challenges of modern-day industry practices, and conducted a rigorous internal skills audit across each of the teaching teams to develop a comprehensive and targeted CPD plan.

The key driver of Curriculum 2020 is the impact the project will have on student experience, satisfaction and, importantly, the competitive advantage of the students when they enter employment.

It is hoped that learners will be better prepared for real, current challenges in the workplace as the teaching staff will be acutely informed through strengthened professional development and research findings from industry.

The Curriculum 2020 project will evolve throughout the remainder of the academic year. The effective collation and dissemination of research undertaken by each school will be carefully managed to ensure all information is effectively analysed and utilised.

ACHIEVING ATS OPENED THE DOORS TO THE POSSIBILITIES OF ACTION RESEARCH

By Dr Stavroula Bibila

During the Advanced Teacher Status (ATS) programme that I completed recently, my mentor, colleagues, students and trainers helped me see that action research involved taking a good look at the past in order to establish ourselves in the present, so that we can further our knowledge of who we are, and more importantly, of where we wish to be in the future.

As a member of the ATS programme, I was also able to see the benefit of using the research journey to improve our teaching. In my role as a senior associate with InTuition, using my previous experience gained in industry and working on the ATS project, I was able to introduce this concept to my colleagues and trainers to cultivate a non-judgmental work environment among peers.

By Dr Stavroula Bibila

Dr Stavroula Bibila is a work based degree apprenticeship tutor at Leeds Trinity University. Using her previous experience gained in cooperative development (CD) whilst working on her PhD, Stavroula was able to introduce this concept to her colleagues and trainers to cultivate a non-judgmental work environment among peers.
BRINGING OUT THE BEST IN PEOPLE

By Elaine Battams

Undertaking the Advanced Teacher Status (ATS) and the research project proved to be quite a jigsaw, not least because my advanced learning practitioner (ALP) role came under threat of redundancy. During the interview that secured my role, I discussed my research findings and made suggestions to develop the ALP role.

As Dodd (2015, p. 434) notes, it is often about using what they have and moving it in another direction. What I have learnt is that it is vitally important to get to know the person and find out what will help them to engage and develop in their own way. I considered how to support my colleagues more effectively by empowering them to try out different ways of thinking and different strategies. The research helped me to do this by finding out staff perceptions and what they wanted in terms of support.

The early signs are that staff are beginning to be more receptive to support, and less threatened by working with an ALP.

I see the way forward within the college as developing a culture in which teachers feel that they can have support with any aspect of their work, not just when there is a problem. They must feel that it is all right to make mistakes as long as they learn from them, and that they must be a move away from a blame culture. Teachers must be encouraged to become more exploratory and reflective and to know that there are ALPs to help and guide them.

Our principal design has given very positive feedback on my recommendations and is supporting a second cycle of action research. I am hoping that there will be some positive outcomes, with teaching staff feeling more supported and valued.

GAINING TRUST WITH COLLABORATION

By Joyce Chen

My small-scale research investigated how a collaborative method of professional learning might have an impact on teaching and learning in the context of FE colleges. One element of this is the production of student voices in improving TLA: educators. ‘Just because we have encountered something before, doesn’t mean we can’t discover new depth and meaning to it.’ When stretching and challenging others, it is often about using what they have and moving it in another direction.

“Enhance the quality of TLA: educators.” – Politicians

My ATS portfolio must demonstrate mastery in teaching and learning. This is to ensure that staff are supported with mutually respectful and were able to discuss ideas and explore strategies together without feeling obliged to do so.

The JPD model (Fielding et al, 2005) enabled me to gain trust and build relationship with colleagues and managers whom I work with in the Faculty of Technology at the College of West Anglia. There was an improvement in staff morale and motivation. Colleagues felt that they were supported with mutual respect and were able to discuss ideas and explore strategies together without feeling obliged to do so.

Reports from external consultants showed improvement in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Our college self-assessment report 2017-2018 shows the overall judgement on teaching, learning and assessment changed from ‘requires improvement to ‘good’. The key summary from the report states: “Staff are confident to debate and discuss ideas and strategies to continually improve teaching, learning and assessment.” Ofsted’s 2019 report judged the college ‘good’ overall. I continue my journey of engaging lecturers in professional development and learning. I know that by using JPD within the faculty I am working with, a professional learning community has developed. Although it is still early days, with time and consistent implementation of JPD, this community will grow stronger and become sustainable.

By Dr Alison Drew

One of my motivations in undertaking Advanced Teacher Status (ATS) was to take the opportunity to take a step back from my practice and devote some time to reading research and reflecting on my role. My role with St Giles Trust involves training prisoners (peer workers) to deliver positive advice and support services for other prisoners. I have been encouraging my learners to become reflective practitioners in their advice and support roles.

By visiting different prisons and interviewing learners in focus groups, I could see the benefits of a variety of methods of reflection. Themes that emerged from the focus groups related to both the challenges and the benefits of reflection for peer workers in prison. Research brought to light the benefits of reflective practice for learners’ personal development and well-being, providing they are encouraged to identify their strengths as well as areas for further learning. The focus group discussions suggested that using a model such as Gibbs’ reflective cycle was helpful for learners, preventing unproductive rumination about incidents and encouraging objectivity.

My own reflective practice has been informed through critical reflection, reflective writing, sharing my experiences and with mutual respect and potentially challenging assumptions about power relations. Power imbalance is inevitable in prison, but it is a challenge. My role includes empowering learners to experience empowerment as they train to assist others through advice and support. My research has also been an impetus for discussion with colleagues, in prison and community-based projects. Those teaching in the community have felt that the findings apply to learners in community as well as prison settings, as those in the community deal with similar challenges and share the same need for effective self-care in work placements.

‘What do you already know?’ – A starting point

By Sallyann Wright

During my ATS I completed two case studies to consider Dylan Williams’ challenge: “Under what circumstances does this work?” I focused on the impact of building learner confidence through positive verbal feedback, linked directly to GCSE English exam criteria.

My starting point was ‘what you already know’ and I focused on the positive. This was very powerful. I would then support students to apply this to an English skill relevant to the exam. This method requires the students to be familiar with the exam assessment objectives. Students explain why they have gained a mark, requiring them to analyse and justify their work.

Students composed their own authentic exam paper. They chose the texts, worded the questions and created success criteria (all in line with the exam board specifications). Their peers then shared and ‘saw’ these exams, and marked each other’s work, thereby building confidence as they analysed the work and gave feedback.

The impacts of my research:

• Effective verbal feedback;
• Increased learner involvement;
• Improved success rates 99 per cent (national average for resit is 33 per cent);
• Transferable to colleagues within department;
• Desires to undertake further research in developing verbal feedback skills;
• Colleagues are now using this approach with other room students.

While reading for ATS, I explored Ross McGill (2017) and Daisy Christodoulou (2014), who, inspired by Hattie’s research (2008) into direct and positive verbal feedback, linked this to positive outcomes for students through powerful feedback that speaks to them and not at them.

SHAREING THE INSIGHTS FROM RESEARCH WORK

‘FE colleges have led the way in listening and responding to the voices of their students and of local employers, but there are other voices that deserve to be heard: the voices of tutors. Politicians are convinced of the efficacy of student voices in improving TLA, yet they remain deaf to the voices of those who have the most power to enhance the quality of TLA: educators.’ – Cooffield, F. (2019) Will the Leopard Change its Spots?

London: UCL IOE Press.

On these pages Gail Lydon shares research findings from practitioners/managers working across the sector who were among the first to gain Advanced Teacher Status (ATS).

The ATS portfolio must demonstrate mastery in teaching and/or training, and one element of this is the production of two case studies or a piece of research. These varied responses to research – their own and the research they read and engaged with during the process – ably demonstrate the power of research to impact on practice, learner outcomes and providers.

The authors come from different backgrounds, work in different contexts and have varied experience of engaging with research, but all have used the ATS process to support their own research journey.

By Dr Alison Drew

achieved a PhD in teacher education at the College of West Anglia. She is an English lecturer and Level 4 CET tutor at Dudley College.

Dr Alison Drew

Gained an MPhil supported by the ETF.

By Elaine Battams

is an advanced learning practitioner at Barnfield College.

Gail Lydon

is a Fellow of BET. She holds ATS and a Masters in Education degree. She is an experienced researcher and Regional Specialist Lead for the ETF.

By Joyce Chen

is a lecturer in professional development and teacher education at the College of West Anglia. She is doing an MPhil supported by the ETF.
WHY RESEARCH IS SO VITAL FOR AN EVIDENCE-INFORMED PROFESSION

The best possible evidence for its work. Being evidence-informed is a moral duty and a social justice issue, argues Professor Daniel Muijs.

Being evidence-informed is a moral duty and a social justice issue. Formal education is of particular benefit to learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, who are less able to draw on the resources and cultural capital of their home environment. This issue is especially important in the further education and training sector, which is not just an engine of local and regional economic growth, but also an engine of social justice. When successful, it insists that ordinary young people who live in social leafier suburbs.

We also need to consider whether it translates to our context, which is not a given if the research has been conducted under very different circumstances. Think, for example, of the difference between a strictly controlled laboratory in which a lot of research on learning is conducted, and the rather less readily controlled workshop in which we may want to apply it.

All of this makes it hard for the busy practitioner to directly access and judge the evidence. This is why it is so important that we work with mediators and brokers who can make the link between theory and practice for example, by providing us with more accessible summaries of findings in a particular area. This is of course where organisations such as the Education and Training Foundation (ETF) and the Society for Education and Training (SET) come in – and if you have not yet done so, I would advise you to check out the resources in its Research Supplement and online communities, and access papers in SET’s online research library.

One challenge for the sector is that, as mentioned earlier, the evidence is variable in quantity and quality across fields and subjects. This, alongside the need to translate evidence into context, means that not all evidence is relevant for all of our context, which is not a given if the research has been conducted under very different circumstances.

The further education sector includes too many evidence-based practitioner research projects or mini-experiments with your own students are very helpful and relatively easy to set up. You can, for example, divide your learners into two groups to test an intervention or use an action research cycle approach to look for solutions to a particular problem.

One thing not needing considering, when you do research yourself and when you look at research done by others, is to heed the importance of ethical practice. Look at ethical guidelines, such as those of the British Educational Research Association, before conducting research. As a profession, we need to be evidence-informed. Research does not have the answers to all of our problems, and it always needs to be translated into our context if it is to work.

However, where we have strong research evidence, using it is going to give us a far better chance of improving outcomes and life chances for our learners than following the outdated and discredited creeds of the snake-oil salesmen of education.

Professor Daniel Muijs

Becoming evidence-informed is a moral duty. As a sector, we should make use of, and develop, the best possible evidence for what we do. If we don’t, and are therefore potentially using unhelpful practices, we are short-changing our learners – and ultimately society – as we forego the benefits of the knowledge and skills those learners could have developed.

Being evidence-informed is a social justice issue. Formal education is of particular benefit to learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, who are less able to draw on the resources and cultural capital of their home environment. This issue is especially important in the further education and training sector, which is not just an engine of local and regional economic growth, but also an engine of social justice. When successful, the sector gives local people the chance of meaningful employment; it targets the most disadvantaged and isolated people in the community; it insists that ordinary young people who live in social leafier suburbs should have the same chances as their wealthier peers from leafier suburbs.

Perhaps one of the best things about research is that it is almost never do. We need to be aware of the best evidence on effective practice in our field. But this is often hard. Much of the robust evidence is published in academic papers. These are often too technical. Here is an excerpt from one of my papers “TSL 5 estimation was used, all models converged and no non-admissible parameters were generated.”

How on earth are we supposed to know what that means if we are not steeped in the jargon of specific statistical techniques?

Accessing research is often too expensive: the article that except comes from can be yours for around £6 (£4.50) for 48 hours or £38 (£30) for the PDF.

And, in many fields, there is too much evidence. A review I did of research on self-regulated learning a few years ago turned up more than 1,500 papers written since 2000. That said, in some areas of further education and training, particularly subject-specific practices, there actually isn’t enough evidence.

We also need to admit that not all the evidence we see, or are presented with, is of high enough quality or relevance. We need to be critical consumers of research and evidence, not least to ensure that we don’t continue to keep using thoroughly debunked practices such as the ‘learning pyramid’ or ‘learning styles’. We need to know whether the evidence we are presented with is of high quality, is robust, is rigorous and is valid.

SET OFFERS A HUGE RESEARCH DATABASE

Society for Education and Training (SET) members have free access to thousands of journals, e-books and conference papers through SET’s online research database. The database, powered by EBSCO, offers exclusive online library access to articles from more than 1,300 education journals, 530 e-books and monographs, and 2,300 education-related conference papers.

Additionally, EBSCO’s specially-curated selection of articles on teaching, leadership, career development and personal development will provide the latest advice and information to help you develop your employability and management skills.

To access SET’s online research library you need to be a member. Then it is simply a case of logging in and clicking on the Research Under the Publications tab.

If you are not currently a SET member, join now to access the full range of member benefits. Joining is easy and only takes a few minutes at set.foundation.co.uk.

For more information on courses, resources and research opportunities, click on the Research tab on the Education and Training Foundation (ETF) website: www.et-foundation.co.uk

REFERENCES

> Professor Daniel Muijs is head of research at Ofsted and is a visiting professor at the University of Southampton.

> Wiliam, D (2006). Speech to the ETS Europe Breakfast Salon. Download the paper at tinyurl.com/y5fn4pd4


> tinyurl.com/y5fx8pk8

To read unabridged versions of the articles in this Research Supplement visit set.foundation.co.uk/inspection-35-spring-research-supplement
The pieces on these two pages offer different examples of routes into teaching and research in the FE sector. Three professionals from the sector describe their personal research journeys and the importance of research in developing their practice. We encourage you to read the full pieces on SET’s Research Supplement page (see link, top of page 11).

**REFERENCES**


Emily Barrell is product development manager at the Workers’ Educational Association (WEA).
PERSONALISING THE E-LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) include increased flexibility, productivity and enhanced personalisation.

Looking at developing e-portfolios, Iona Wallace and Louise Carr found that their curriculum suited a constructivist learning model. However, the course design team also recognised that in order to make progress to the higher order reflective practice skills, the activities would need to be actively facilitated and scaffolded.

Using technology is not new in education. The sector has responded by adopting the recommendations of the Further Education Sector Technology Action Group (FELTAG), which has driven research work, along with internal development priorities and a general need to meet learners’ development needs and expectations.

ENGAGING WITH E-PORTFOLIOS

By Iona Wallace and Louise Carr

Although an e-portfolio is not new for a number of qualifications, the course teams and tutors have adopted a specific teaching and learning approach to support students and trainees who are curating, creating and communicating their work.

This approach aims to embed the features of 21st-century skills into aspects of building the e-portfolio by providing opportunities to engage in critical thinking, communication and collaboration.

Feedback from the course design teams is that the pedagogic changes, and engagement from most trainees and students, along with the depth of reflection, have been positive, and we are looking forward to developing these aspects further in the coming modules. The team has been positive, and we are looking forward to developing this approach in other areas.

EXPLORING ASSESSMENT ONLINE

By Wendy Coley

At the College of Haringey, Enfield and North East London (CONEIL), plumbing teachers on different sites share online quizzes (auto-assessments) and videos with each other’s learners. Sharing resources provides colleagues with confidence in using the VLE, while a plumbing e-book enabled learners to revise from their phones while commuting and on breaks at work. The videos of all the practical plumbing demos were accessed frequently and the teacher let learners access them in the workshops. This reduced the need for the teacher to repeat generic instructions and enabled personalised instruction.

Feedback is being used in an OTLA project led by Havant & South Downs College in collaboration with Westminster Kingsway College and CONEL (both part of the Kier Group College Group). The learners construct work online and the teacher provides screencast assessment feedback, recording their screen and voice as they assess the learners’ work. This is being compared to other forms of digital feedback.

The OTLA project and associated activities proved to be a central vehicle for embedding research-informed approaches across the organisation. The finding of this research and case study also informed the college-wide e-learning strategy, with the approaches transferable to other curriculum areas.

Iona Wallace, a lecturer in education, and Louise Carr, an advanced learning practitioner, work in the Hadlow College Group, using e-platforms to support reflective learning practices and promote a 21st-century skills approach across various levels, courses and campuses.

LIVING AND LEARNING – REFLECTIONS ON TEACHING ABOUT EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY, MENTAL HEALTH, RESILIENCE, AND INCLUSION

Three contributors provided rich insights into the impact of research in these areas.

Dr Vicky Finn is the Equality and Diversity (E&D) lead at Darlington Learning and Skills Service and has completed a PhD exploring issues of loss with marginalised young people in using storytelling and arts-based methods. She discusses how action research illuminated learners’ perspectives on E&D in an E&T-funded Outstanding Teaching Learning and Assessment (OTLA) project undertaken with Bishop Auckland College and South West Durham Training.

Jennifer Lindsell teaches media studies and graphics at Joseph Chamberlain College and is doing an MA in Art and Education. She explored the impact on her own mental health of sketching for a few minutes every hour for a week. This became a release for her and demonstrated the potential for teachers and students alike.

Fionnuala Deavers is an English Lecturer at London South East Colleges, with a master’s degree in screenwriting. Her research informed developing e-portfolio models, Iona Wallace and Louise Carr.

All three researchers were clear about the impact of their research on learners as well as wider organisational change. Vicky’s adopted a constructivist approach in drawing out connections on Equality and Diversity using prompts (see images, right).

These prompts allowed impact to be analysed from learners’ perspectives. Vicky and colleagues needed to assess if a perceived increase in staff confidence to promote E&D translated into learners’ everyday experiences. Some struggled with the terminology of E&D, preferring to talk about what was ‘fair’ or ‘unfair’. Others discussed how E&D contexts helped them challenge prejudice within their own communities.

Vicky and colleagues found the positive evaluative approach, ‘What can we do with our learning?’ and ‘What can we teach others about?’, created a motivating (and unusual) sense of responsibility in their learners. Evaluation thus became an emerging aspect of learning and development, rather than an afterthought that would have little meaning for future action. Jennifer identifies broad impacts from her research: “It is so important to continue looking at, and completing research on the topic of mental health within the education system. Teachers need support in this area, as well as resources and coping mechanisms to help them, not only to stop them leaving their careers, but to help them realise how easy it may be to improve their mental health. Students need support to help them to continue their studies, avoiding the struggles of a life lot more, and have the means to move forward from struggles they have.”

Fionnuala reports that, over three academic terms, a small cohort of learners developed a positive mindset and attitude to learning, as well as a positive ethos in the classroom. This improved self-belief and self-esteem, and generated more positive attitudes towards English. Students explored their identities and attitudes in projects. Their interest levels were enhanced by digital media, the students reported.

Vicky’s, Jennifer’s and Fionnuala’s enquiries are grounded in their own practices and challenges for their learners, colleagues and organisations. Their findings have significant potential for policy makers and other agencies. Wallifa Rashheed Karim (2018) and Matilda Battersey, for example, take this policy narrative further. (Malilda’s research was commissioned by SET). Many readers will also be aware of the 2015-2018 BIS/DfE Community Learning Mental Health Research (October 2018).

REFERENCES

• HE and Cumbria OTLA: https://api.excellencegateway.org.uk/resource/eff/2869
• Developmental How to Remember: The Psychology of Success. Rainbo House: The full text is accessible through SET’s online research library.
• For Professor Myhill’s publications, see http://socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/education/staff/profile/index.php?web_id=debra_myhill
• Let’s Think in English: https://www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/departments/education/research/Research-Centres/crestem/Research/Current-Projects/CogAce/Lets-Think.aspx
• MHEF - a network for anyone with an interest in adult education and mental health. https://mhel.co.uk/
RESEARCH IN FURTHER EDUCATION: WHY WE MUST MAKE A FUSS ABOUT IT

If FE wants a powerful voice in deciding its purpose and place in society and education, a policy to build research capacity in the sector is needed, say Dr Gary Husband and Sam Jones.

Dr Gary Husband: I left further education (after years of teaching and management positions) specifically to try and secure funding for teaching and management positions (providing me with paid PhD study leave). This sort of work is rare in FE, but it does exist. There are examples of colleges leading the world in areas such as solar-powered generation and electrification of fleet vehicles. FE, by its very definition, is filled with experts from many industries, many of whom are able to provide the bridge between industry and researchers. There are also distinct advantages to enhancing the learning of students through their own engagement with research work.

We hold the view that those working in FE know and understand its purpose and the role it fulfils within education. If research is being used to shape the sector, decide its future and inform the decisions made about it, then the expertise of those working in it should be given primacy.

If FE wants a powerful voice in deciding its fate, remit, purpose and place within society and education, then informing that debate through the creation of new knowledge and understanding developed at the heart of the sector potentially offers more than observations conducted from outside.

The problem of access to training and the understanding of the important theoretical underpinnings of good research can be mitigated either through strong research partnerships with universities, or through development and retention of individuals within the sector.

When considering policy on vocational education, McDonald and Grubb (1991) conclude that while inducements such as money are popular policy levers, it is capacity building that tends to be the mechanism that is the most successful.

We argue that what is required is a policy of building research capacity within FE. This may require a change in culture in the sector to allow researchers to consider wider questions than simply ‘what works for teaching, learning and assessment’, and within universities a change to consider ways of engaging with colleges to co-create research.

Sam Jones: As a researcher in FE I am pleased that practitioners are starting to raise their voices; the Dancing Princesses books are a notable example, as are movements like Tutor Voices and Research meets, both of which are sector-led movements. Increasing numbers of FE staff are convening it, or involved in the Learning and Skills Research Network (LSRN), and sharing their research at conferences like the Association of Research in Post Compulsory Education (ARPECE) and the British Educational Research Association (BERA). There are changes within colleges – my own college has a research network and a blog, and it convenes for, or involved in, the Learning and Skills Research Network (LSRN), and sharing their research at conferences like the Association of Research in Post Compulsory Education (ARPECE) and the British Educational Research Association (BERA). There are changes within colleges – my own college has a research network and a blog, and it provides me with paid PhD study leave.

REFERENCES


Dr Gary Husband is a lecturer in education at the University of Stirling and Sam Jones is an advanced practitioner at Bedford College.

REFLECTIONS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

By Gail Lydon, Lorna Lindsay and Colin Forrest

The contributors to this supplement reported a wide range of impacts resulting from their research. These impacts illustrated how their own practice and that of their colleagues were enriched for the benefit of students and learners. Our curation was enhanced not only by our contributors but by those who engaged in interviews, including Colin Bentwood, director of the Strategic Development Network, and Jacklyn Williams, education author and consultant.

Organisational culture and leadership

Many contributors benefited from considerable organisational support to engage with research, and significantly, research that made a difference to their learners. Elements included: support and inspiration from peers and managers, protected space and time, and sponsorship for higher degrees. Engagement with initial teacher education (ITE) provision was often important too. The notion of scholarship also emerged.

Capacity building

Many of the research impacts reported had their origin in research approaches. Several contributors were from SET’s first cohort to achieve Advanced Teacher Status (ATS), building on the Professional Standards where pedagogical mastery is coupled with the development of high-level research skills. Multiple research journeys were described, such as progressing from Research Development Fellow through Masters and M.Phil degrees to doctorates. SET’s Practitioner Research Programme, partnering with the University of Sunderland, is significant here. Several contributors held PhDs, but did not see their research training as complete. For example, engaging with action research emerged as a significant enhancement to highly-refined portfolios of research skills.

Mediation and brokerage

The research impacts described by the contributors often had their origins in collaborative practice. The influence of a rich and growing ecosystem of research networks and communities emerged as important in supporting individual and collective research journeys. These groups invariably centred on exploring the interplay between research evidence and teacher practice. A wide range of approaches was important here, but all involve some degree of brokerage and boundary spanning (Forrest and Morris 2018). A wide range of EFT programmes, including the Outstanding Teaching Learning and Assessment (OTLA) programmes, contributed to fostering the development of research.

Looking forward

In undertaking the curation, it was clear that FE research is alive and well and we hope that the contributions bring this to the surface. Challenges emerged for us too. There is no neat route or pathway that provides an exemplar of a research journey for others to follow. In addressing multiple priorities, the learning and skills sector is so diverse that it is unsurprising that the research journeys of FE practitioners are more complex than reflected in the toolkits for the schools’ sector.

The importance of shared and collaborative spaces for fostering research in further education emerged strongly. Such entities owe much to Joint Practice Development and its advocates and resonate with the emerging findings from the BERA close-to-practice research project. Here ‘close to practice’ is defined as research that ‘focuses on issues defined by practitioners as relevant to their practice, and involves collaboration between people whose main expertise is research, practice, or both’. We were fortunate that the curriculum resulted in rich contributions from all three groups.

To read unabridged versions of the articles in this Research Supplement visit set.foundation.co.uk/ntuition-15-research-supplement
UNPARALLELED PROFESSIONAL CAREER SUPPORT

One of the many benefits of SET membership

As the only membership body for professionals working across further education, teaching and training, we are here to support you in your career. Membership grants you access to the latest research and ideas in addition to opportunities to achieve excellence and to gain recognition in your profession and community.

Not yet a member? Join now at set.etfoundation.co.uk or call 0800 093 9111