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What is practitioner research?

The starting point for all Practitioner Research is the recognition that your teaching can be improved. This is also the starting point for reflective practice, which is something that most teachers already engage in, though they may do this implicitly. Figure 1 shows a typical reflective practice cycle, which involves: identifying needs, planning how to address those needs, implementing your plans, reflecting on how well your interventions worked, and then repeating that cycle.

The danger with reflective practice is that it doesn't necessarily involve engaging with the wider professional body of knowledge.

Adding two steps (shown in darker blue in Figure 2) overcomes this problem and turns reflective practice into practitioner research.

Thus, having identified a need practitioner research involves finding out how other people have addressed similar needs, before planning what to do yourself. This avoids the dangers of going down 'known' dead ends or re-inventing wheels.

Having reflected on your practice and learnt something from the process the other additional step in practitioner research is to share that learning with colleagues.

Practitioner research therefore necessarily involves learning from and sharing with other people. It provides a mechanism for extending the knowledge base of the community, and establishing your expertise as a professional within the community. Learning from and sharing with the wider education community is central to teachers being seen as the experts in education.

Action Research is a particular form of practitioner research and many people (incorrectly) use these two terms synonymously. Selwood & Twining 2005 provides a useful summary of what Action Research is and how it can impact on education (with a particular focus on its role in relation to ICT in education).

References

Selwood, I. & Twining, P. (2005) Action Research. Coventry: Becta. <http://is.gd/MgwPpq> (accessed 11-Nov-2011)

Figure 1 A reflective practice cycle

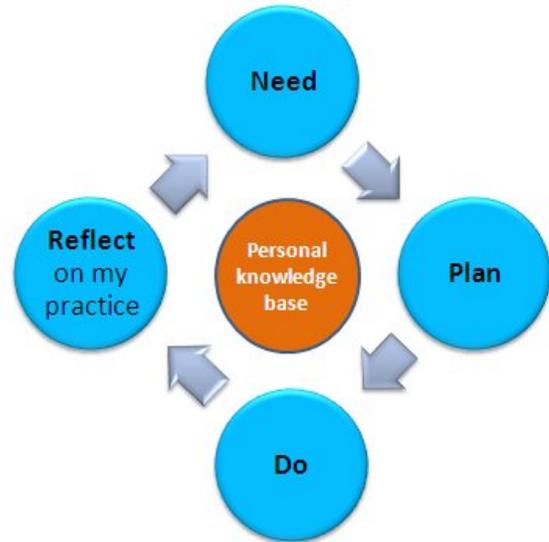


Figure 2 The Vital Practitioner Research Cycle

