



Practitioner Enquiry in Stirling Council

Information for schools and early
years establishments

Educational Psychology Service
August 2017

Contents	Page
-----------------	-------------

Introduction	2
--------------------	---

What is Practitioner Enquiry and why is it relevant?	3
---	---

Model for Improvement: a tool for enquiry	5
---	---

Practitioner Enquiry: how does it work?	7
---	---

Things to consider	8
--------------------------	---

Getting started: what are my options?	10
---	----

References	11
------------------	----

Introduction

Practitioner Enquiry is an increasingly popular methodology for developing and improving learning and teaching practice. It provides opportunities for increasing innovative practice and supports continuous improvement in our classrooms and schools. The Practitioner Enquiry approach goes beyond the sharing of good practice; it brings depth to professional learning by developing professional understanding and knowledge in order to systematically investigate an area of improvement.

Embedding a Practitioner Enquiry approach into an educator's practice provides increased opportunities to contribute to the local and national priorities.

For example the National Improvement Framework (NIF) priorities are:

- Improvement in attainment, particularly in literacy and numeracy
- Closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children
- Improvement in children and young people's health and wellbeing
- Improvement in employability skills and sustained, positive school leaver destinations for all young people (National Improvement Framework, 2016)

The NIF priorities have been adopted by Stirling's Schools, Learning and Education Team.

The Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) is additional funding from the Scottish Government allocated directly to schools to target closing the poverty related attainment gap. Practitioner Enquiry is one approach that would provide a robust process in developing professional enquiry skills to implement and evaluate a PEF intervention or approach, with the aim of securing improved outcomes for children and young people.

What is Practitioner Enquiry and why is it relevant?

Practitioner Enquiry, as defined by Menter et al (2011), is a 'finding out' or an investigation with a rationale and approach that can be explained or defended. The findings can then be shared so it becomes more than reflection or personal enquiry.

Hattie (2009) stated that international research highlights the quality of teaching as the most significant within-school factor influencing pupil performance and further, that teachers engaging in research have a positive impact on learning in their classrooms (Baumfield & Butterworth in Menter et al, 2011).

Practitioner Enquiry was highlighted in *Teaching Scotland's Future* (Donaldson, 2010) as a way to support teachers to become more engaged with research, to support their own learning and ultimately pupil experiences.

Practitioner Enquiry is a key part of 'The Standard for Career-Long Professional Learning: Supporting the Development of Teacher Professional Learning' (GTCS, 2012) and the approach is embedded within Stirling Council's Educational Leadership Framework¹.

'Education professionals will be expected to develop an enquiring disposition towards their professional practice. This expectation is embedded throughout the new Professional Standards. Adopting enquiry as a core aspect of being an education professional is likely to demand different understandings and practices' (GTCS, 2012).

2.3.2 Have knowledge and understanding of the importance of research and engagement in professional enquiry (GTCS, 2012).

Professional Actions

Registered teachers:

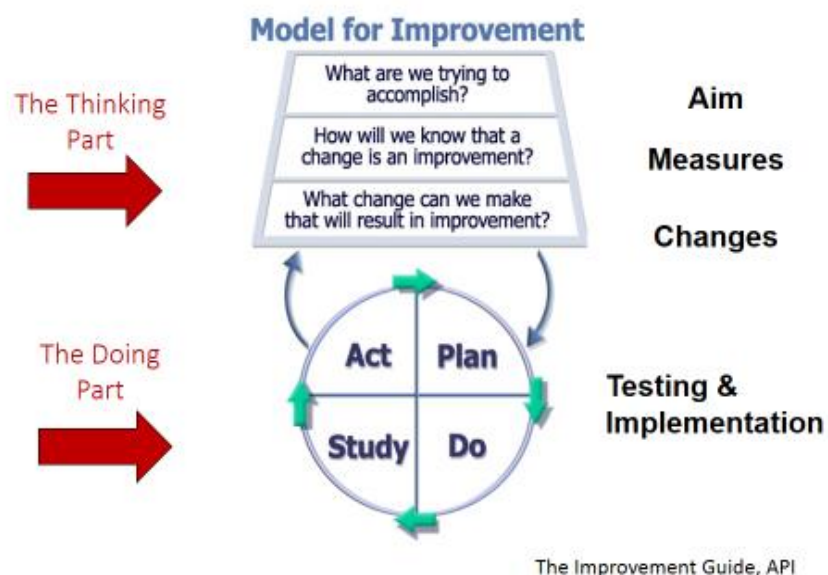
- know how to access and apply relevant findings from educational research;
- know how to engage critically in enquiry, research and evaluation individually or collaboratively, and apply this in order to improve teaching and learning.

¹ Refer to <http://source.stirling.gov.uk/pages/educational-leadership-framework>

The **National Practice Guidance on Early Learning and Childcare: Building the Ambition (Scottish Government 2014)** makes the link between enquiring practitioners and outcomes for children:

‘Professional knowledge and putting this into practice makes a difference to the experiences for children from birth to early primary school. Practitioners need to be self-aware, know what they don’t know but be willing to find out, experiment and evaluate.’

Model for Improvement: a tool for enquiry



The Model for Improvement is a quality improvement tool widely used in healthcare improvement and is the methodology used by the Children and Young People's Improvement Collaborative. Stirling Council has adopted this model as the key methodology within the Children's Service Plan (2017-2020).

The Model for Improvement provides a framework for developing, testing and implementing changes leading to improvements. When we are thinking about improvement we are not talking about having a perfect solution, it is about trying things out. If something works we can build on it, if it doesn't we can try and tweak it or we can go back to the drawing board and start again. In essence, adopt, adapt or abandon.

The Model for Improvement comprises two parts:

- 1) The **thinking** part – 3 questions to help you set out your aims, measures and what changes need to be made.
- 2) The **doing** part – the PDSA cycle allows you to test out your ideas and theories about what is required.

Staff can work at their own pace in identifying what they want to change in their own setting and in using the Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) cycle to test out what they think will make a difference. Using PDSA cycles

enables practitioners to test out changes before wholesale implementation, therefore allowing them the opportunity to see if the proposed changes will work.

Practitioner Enquiry: how does it work?

- Problem identification
- How does this problem impact on local and national priorities?
- What is already known about this problem?
- What change ideas do I have?
- What data do I need to gather to find out if my intervention is making a difference?
- Spread the word!

Problem identification:

What is causing you and your learners most concern? Choose something that you are really interested in resolving. You will be guided through how to do a needs analysis which allows you to confirm if the 'felt' need is the 'real' need. Questionnaires and focus groups are ways of doing this.

How does this problem impact on local and national priorities?

You will consider the local and national policy context. How does your area of enquiry fit into the Curriculum for Excellence, the National Improvement Framework, and your school/nursery improvement plan?

What is already known about this problem area?

It is good practice to research your topic further. This is called a 'literature review' and can help you gain a broader understanding of your chosen area. This reading will inform you of what is already known and what interventions/solutions have been tried before.

What change ideas do I have?

You may be keen to get to the intervention part as quickly as possible. At this stage the Model for Improvement (or other improvement tools) can be utilised to help you define your aim, your measures and change ideas.

What data do I need to gather to find out if my intervention is making a difference?

In more traditional research, you might do a pre-intervention and post-intervention test but using the Model for Improvement, for example, you will be able to test small and often and use your learning to adapt your intervention.

Spread the word:

It is usually the case that those undertaking Practitioner Enquiry are seeking to develop and improve their own practice. But in order to ensure that the enquiry is more than just personal reflection, it is desirable for others to benefit from hearing about and responding to your research findings.

Things to consider

Senior Management Team (SMT) support:

Ensure you have the full support of your SMT as you will need time and flexibility to carry out your data gathering and data analysis.

Time available:

Give yourself enough time to have ongoing discussion in your establishment and perhaps recruit colleagues to work with you. You will need planning time and time to execute the next steps of your enquiry.

Roles:

Good projects are well managed and well organised. You may wish to have a project manager to ensure each phase of your enquiry runs smoothly and is kept on schedule. Encourage the development of a support network within your setting, as you may wish to involve colleagues in your PDSA cycles.

Ethical considerations:

There are certain rules that need to be adhered to when conducting research, especially if your research involves children and young people. You will already be aware of the need to get permission from parents and carers for certain aspects of your work. When conducting research in your setting, there are four key factors to take into account:

Confidentiality

All raw data that you gather (i.e. data that you have collected before it is summarised) should be kept safe, in a locked cabinet or password protected computer, for example and should only be shared with people directly involved in the research. The identity of participants should be protected by ensuring that they are not referred to by name. One idea would be to assign a letter or number to each participant.

Informed consent

Before anyone takes part in your research, you need to gain their consent. This consent needs to be informed consent (i.e. the participant should know the aims of your research and what they will be expected to do). It is good practice to seek informed consent from parents/carers.

Rights of participants

It is the right of all participants to withdraw from your research at any point. Researchers should consider the possible effects the research will have on the participants. The research should not impact on them negatively, so you may need to adjust your methods of data collection to accommodate this.

Debriefing

It is good practice to tell your participants about your research findings once your project is complete. This could be a useful process for you, as researcher, as they may want to give you feedback on their experience, which could be useful for future studies.

Getting Started: what are my options?

For further information on how to get started, you can contact your link educational psychologist (early years and school staff) or the Educational Psychology Service, for all other practitioners.

Educational Psychology Service
Children, Young People and Education
Stirling Council
Wolfcraig
Dumbarton Road
Stirling
FK8 2LQ

Email: psychological@stirling.gov.uk

Telephone: 01786 237818

References

Children and Young people's Improvement Collaborative (Scottish Government, 2016)

Donaldson, G. (2010) *Teaching Scotland's Future: Report of a review of teacher education in Scotland*.

General Teaching Council for Scotland. *What is practitioner enquiry?* Available at: www.gtcs.org.uk/professional-update/research-practitioner-enquiry/what-is-practitioner-enquiry.aspx (accessed April 2017).

General Teaching Council for Scotland. *Overview of the Standards*. Available at: www.gtcs.org.uk/professional-standards/engaging-with-the-standards/overview-of-the-standards.aspx (accessed April 2017).

Hattie, J. (2009). *Visible Learning. A synthesis of Over 800 Meta-analyses Relating to Achievement*. London: Routledge.

Langley G.L. Nolan K.M. Nolan T.W. Norman C.L. Provost L.P (2009) *The Improvement Guide: A Practical Approach to Enhancing Organizational Performance* (2nd Edition). Jossey Bass, San Francisco.

Menter, I., Elliot, D., Hulme, M., Lewin, J., & Lowden, K. (2011). *A Guide to Practitioner Research in Education*. London: SAGE

Model for Improvement. Available at: www.ihl.org/resources (accessed April 2017).

National Improvement Framework (Scottish Government, 2016). Available at: <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2016/01/8314/0> (accessed April 2017).

National Practice Guidance on Early Learning & Childcare: Building the Ambition (Scottish Government, 2014). Available at www.gov.Scot/Publications/2014/08/6262 (accessed April 2017).