

A window into some practitioner-led projects

Practitioners from provider organisations around the country are busy gathering evidence to improve aspects of their practice, as part of the Research Development Fellowship scheme provided by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) and the University of Sunderland Centre for Excellence in Teacher Training (SUNCETT), in association with the Institute for Learning (IFL).

Here, three of these Research Development Fellows talk about their experiences.



Linda Croudace, from TDR Training in Gateshead, looked at students' abilities in listening and note taking in preparation for university.

'Most did not enjoy note-taking, and there was a tendency among teaching staff to just give them what they needed. But, if you are not actually taking proper notes, then you are not properly engaging with the subject. It is this lack of engagement which could lead to problems on entering university or the work place, where listening skills become essential tools for engaging with subjects.'

Having the research grant meant I could give up time in my day job to concentrate on my research. The support offered by the Fellowship programme, particularly at the residential meetings, gave a focus to the project that might not have happened otherwise'.



Andy Smith, a senior tutor at Blackpool and Fylde College, researched how informal learning develops using online virtual environments.

'I set up an informal area for students on a virtual learning environment to monitor who used it, what they used it for and how they interacted with it. I found the students used the environment as a question and answer area, where they could talk informally amongst themselves, asking for quick fixes etc. Having an informal learning area embedded on courses helps tutors get an insight into what their students are thinking, what they are using, and if there are any problems/issues.'

The Fellowship has provided me with very good support. I liked the action research side to it – it allowed me to think about why things were or were not happening'.



Pam Garside, head of School for Initial Teacher Training at West Suffolk College, looked at the supervision of mentors in the learning and skills sector, collecting evidence across four colleges.

'What emerged was that teacher educators were best placed to take on the role of supervisor.'

I would like next to develop an online distance learning CPD package, quality assured by the University for teacher educators to gain some recognition and qualification in supervising mentors, which would also be recognised by IFL and their CPD records.'

The Fellowship has allowed me to really concentrate and focus on my research. The strict timeline maintained by the programme was very good at keeping the research on track'.

Inside Track

Carol Dweck's website

We featured Carol Dweck's research on what motivates learners to persevere on page 3. You can hear her theory being discussed at: www.youtube.com

For a summary of her work, see the General Teaching Council's Research for Teachers website: www.gtce.org.uk

Teacher case studies of research

The campaign for learning website houses a number of teacher case studies of research which explore a range of questions, including:

- What makes learners resilient in their learning?
- Can practical activities help learners with their numeracy skills?

Here's a quick link to the site:

www.campaign-for-learning.org.uk

Prisoners education trust

How does learning in prison change lives? On this website, prisoners and ex prisoners speak for themselves through a series of case studies: www.prisonerseducation.org.uk You can also read about the learning and skills projects helping prisoners and offenders build a new life: www.prisonerseducation.org.uk

Reader panels

We would like to thank members of our reader panels.

Practitioner panel:

Alistair Woodcock, quality and standards manager, Oxford and Cherwell Valley College

Sara Hunter, chief executive, Royal Artillery Centre for Personal Development (RACPD)

Alison Ashworth-Brown, head of engineering academy, NG Bailey LTD

Tony Pattison, director quality: learning and teaching, Stockton Riverside College

Elizabeth Johnson, assessor, Royal National College for the Blind

Researcher Panel:

Kathryn Ecclestone, professor of education and social inclusion, University of Birmingham

Ann Hodgson, professor of education, consultancy and knowledge transfer / co-director, centre for post-14 research and innovation, Institute of Education, University of London

Garth Clucas, HMI, principal officer, strategy directorate, Ofsted

Andrew Morris, independent consultant

David James, professor, Bristol Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning and Education (BRILLE)