



CULHAM ST GABRIEL'S



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Can CoRE's National Entitlement recommendations work in Primary RE? A Primary RE practitioner-research project.

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Trust

Project description and aims....

Understanding Primary RE teachers' experiences of practitioner-research.

To find out the benefits, if any, teachers gain from practitioner-research.

To find out the best ways to support teachers in practitioner-research.

methodology: Community of Practice (Wenger)

sustaining a group in social learning

Shared domain of interest.

Teachers' shared expertise and experience of Primary RE.

Becoming a community.

Teachers built mutually supportive relationships with each other through their shared interactions within the group.

Shared practice.

Teachers supported each other in improving their skills and confidence as researchers, and in carrying out research.

Methodology and sample

Participants were 9 Primary School teachers experienced in RE.

Regular meetings at the University: September 2019 two full day meetings; October 2019 three half-day meetings; following by monthly half day meetings until March 2020; then on-line meetings (lockdown!).

At the meetings we engaged in a range of research-orientated activities; including training in research skills, and planning and carrying out teacher-researcher projects.

Teachers attended Strictly RE January 2020.



Six Teacher-researcher Projects

Contribution of study-visits to pupils' knowledge, understanding and memory in RE

Teachers use of texts and stories in RE, focusing on Sikhi and Islam

Pupils' engagement in multi-arts RE classes

'Spirituality' in the curriculum: pupils' perspectives

The new Ofsted framework in Primary Schools: Head teachers' responses to how CoRE's National Entitlement can help.

Can Big Ideas can enhance a LA syllabus?

Methods

Base-line short answer questionnaire at the project start to record teachers' experience and confidence as researchers.

Reflective journals in which teachers reflected on their developing experiences as practitioner-researchers. Teachers made individual monthly journal entries between October 2019 and June 2020.

4 focus-group discussions (October 2019, February 2020, May 2020, December 2020) during which teachers reflected together on their experiences of engaging in teacher-research and its impact on their wider professional practice; as well as other matters relating to RE in professional practice.

Semi-structured interviews (October 2020) during which they reflected on any enduring impact on their professional development of attending Strictly RE in January 2020, as well as further reflections on engaging in teacher-research.

Closing short answer questionnaire at the end of the project to record teachers' transitions since the project start and their overall project evaluation.

Closing long, qualitative questionnaire to record teachers' reflections on the impact of their individual research projects on their own professional development and on RE more widely.

Supporting Teachers in practitioner-research

10 points from the findings (1-5)

- 1. Create 'head-space'.** Pockets of protected time away from the immediate demands of school-life. In our project teachers appreciated our project meetings so they could concentrate on their research.
- 2. Create a mutually supportive community.** The collaboration, mutual support and reciprocal affirmation between group members helped teachers stick with their research.
- 3. Research in teams.** Advantages include sharing tasks to mitigate time barriers; sharing ideas, problem-solving together and being accountable to others. Where members of a research team work at different schools, data collected from different settings can enhance the validity of the findings.
- 4. Regular check-ins and accountability.** Updating the community of practice and/or research team regularly helps to keep research targets on track and applies a level of soft accountability to stick to targets.
- 5. Purpose, relevance and an interested audience.** This finding came to life when the teachers attended Strictly RE 2020. At the conference they discussed their research with teachers newly acquainted to them. Through those discussions teachers came to realise that their research projects held genuine interest for others and that there was a potential audience interested in their findings. This was a powerful motivator to stick with the research.

Supporting Teachers in practitioner-research

10 points from the findings (6-10)

- 6. Teacher agency and autonomy.** In our project teachers were treated and respected as professional experts. They chose their own research projects, within broad criteria, that were interesting to them and relevant to their practice. This helped to sustain teachers' enthusiasm and motivation.
- 7. Structured training in research methods.** Structured training and some ongoing support in research methods to plan and carry out their projects was needed for novice researchers. Having completed their projects, teachers' knowledge and confidence was strengthened for future practitioner-research.
- 8. Opportunities to discuss real-world research with active researchers.** Meeting other researchers helped normalise research for teachers. Learning about different methods of data collection gave teachers ideas for their own projects.
- 9. Take things at an easy pace; don't rush.** Through our regular meetings teachers came to see themselves as researchers at a gradual pace rather than being confronted with a rapid transition. This slower pace of transition helped build teachers' confidence as practitioner-researchers.
- 10. Create an alliance with a university department.** Teachers reported that alliance with a University department gave their involvement in the project, and their own practitioner-research projects, credibility with their schools and senior leadership.

Supporting Teachers in practitioner-research

Summary of findings...

Agency: teachers are empowered to be their own decision-makers and to embark on projects that they deem meaningful.

Purpose: teachers' belief in the purpose of a project and knowing there's an audience interested in its outcomes makes a project worth doing.

Access: teachers' need access to the knowledge and support required to complete a project.

Community: collaborative social learning, shared problem-solving, idea-sharing, task-sharing and accountability to a group or team sustains engagement and is more likely to lead to project completion.

Affirmation: validation of professional knowledge from peers builds self-confidence and courage to take on and complete new endeavours.

References and further sources of information...

Baumfield, V. (2021) *Teachers' engagement with research* oral report <https://www.reonline.org.uk/research/research-of-the-month/teachers-engagement-with-research/>

Baumfield, V. (2021) *Teachers' engagement with research* written report

<https://www.cstg.org.uk/grants/projects/case-studies/university-of-exeter/>

BERA (2018) *Report on Close-to-Practice Research*. <https://www.bera.ac.uk/publication/bera-statement-on-close-to-practice-research>

RE X Change Festival (2020) <https://www.reonline.org.uk/research/in-conversation/> For conversations related to practitioner research

Salter, E & Lyn Tett (2021) *Strictly teacher-researchers? The influence of a professional RE conference on primary RE teachers' agency and self-identities as teacher-researchers*. *British Journal of Religious Education*, 43:3, 253-264. DOI: 10.1080/01416200.2021.1878456

Salter, E & Lyn Tett (2021) *Sustaining teacher engagement in practitioner research*. *Journal of Education for Teaching*. DOI: [10.1080/02607476.2021.1959267](https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2021.1959267)

RE:ONLINE Research <https://www.reonline.org.uk/research/> For many more examples of practitioners and academic reporting on their research

Wenger, E (1988) *Communities of practice: learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge University Press. More information is also at the Communities of Practice website, <https://wenger-trayner.com/>

Getting involved

Culham St Gabriel Masters and Doctoral students <https://www.reonline.org.uk/research/research-bulletin/>

Culham St Gabriel Leadership Programme <https://www.reonline.org.uk/leadership/leadership-programme/>

Thanks for listening!

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