

CPD for the Career Development Professional

A Handbook for Enhancing Practice

Siobhan Neary and
Claire Johnson

trotman | t

5 | Becoming a practitioner researcher

Introduction

In this chapter we explore research as a way of engaging in CPD. In particular, we focus on the opportunities and benefits of becoming a practitioner researcher. We will explore:

- how research supports the development of professional practice
- evidence-based practice and how this contributes to establishing the impact and influence of career development practice
- a model to support the implementation of research to inform practice
- opportunities for the dissemination of learning – you have done it, so now what do you do with it?

This chapter can only provide a brief introduction to some of the research skills that you can develop to help you build your practice, but we will signpost you to lots of resources that will help you develop this area of your professional practice.

Why research?

We talked in Chapter 4 about theory and how theory can support you to understand and develop your professional practice. The development of theory and practice can also be enhanced through undertaking research. But what do we mean by research?

The term 'research' can be seen as particularly formal, but you can also call it investigation, exploration, enquiry, study and examination; the terms can often be used interchangeably. For us, research is a systematic approach to solving a problem and identifying new knowledge; it is about asking questions and arriving at some conclusions. That said, much of the learning is in the journey and discovering interesting ideas as you progress through your research.

Research undertaken by Neary and Hutchinson (2009) identified a range of research activities undertaken by practitioners for different purposes. These included:

- finding out information to support clients and to be able to respond to their needs
- finding information or advice to inform practice; this might include learning how to address an issue that they were unfamiliar with
- generating a shared and balanced view of an issue at an organisational level
- pushing the boundaries of knowledge to develop new understanding.

Many practitioners are most familiar and comfortable with undertaking occupational and labour market research on behalf of their clients. While this is important, it is a well-established practice that most experienced practitioners do very well. The following activity requires you to use a wide range of skills.

Activity

Think about the research skills you have already developed through searching for and locating information on behalf of your clients.

Make a list and refer to this as you work through this chapter.

We are interested in research that contributes to developing practice and the body of knowledge that underpins and drives forward the profession. Irving and Barker (2004) suggest that:

Participation in research based activities should be regarded as a key aspect of personal and professional development for academic and practitioner alike.

(2004: 69).

Irving and Barker argue that reading research or actually getting involved in research projects can contribute to the development of new knowledge, approaches to practice, critical thinking skills and a more reflective approach to practice. Within the NICE framework (which we introduced in Chapter 1) a core competency focuses on professionalism. Within this there is a focus on cognitive resources that identify the skills and knowledge that practitioners should have. These specify: **'research theory and methods (social sciences) that test knowledge, basic statistical techniques, survey development and analysis, evaluation research and psychometric quality indicators'**. (Schiersmann et al., 2012: 76).

So, what is a researcher practitioner?

Research can be undertaken by anyone and for any reason. It might be because you are curious and questioning, or to better understand something you have observed. As practitioners we are often interested in learning about why things happen in a certain way or why a set of circumstances lead to a specific outcome. It might just be that you have noticed something new and you want to find out more about it.

Example

You are a career development practitioner working in a school. You are interested in work experience and want to find out what will help the young people you work with learn from practical work activities.

Example

You work with adults and have recently undertaken a course in cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). You want to understand how you might use it with clients who have experienced mental health issues.

Example

You have worked in the careers sector for over twenty years and have seen much change during this time. You would like to understand how this change has been perceived by colleagues and how it has influenced practice.

Each of the above examples would lend itself to a research project that would extend the practitioner's knowledge and possibly that of their colleagues. The size of the research project would depend on the rationale for undertaking it and the resources available to support it. Some practitioners may choose to do this as a small research project that they fit around their work. Others may choose to do something more formal, for example seeking out some funding to support their study or undertake it as part of a formal qualification such as a master's or a PhD. We look at formal qualifications in a little more detail later.

Activity

Using any of the examples above or one of your own, think about what question you might set yourself and how might you answer it.

What might you do to help you answer your question?

There is a range of ways that you can approach undertaking research projects such as these. Throughout this chapter we will provide a general introduction to some. However, there are specialist skills required in research so you may want to explore this in more detail.

The National Guidance Research Forum (NGRF) has some useful information about starting research projects and developing research skills: www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/ngrf/effectiveguidance/research/.

Research is fundamentally a systematic review. What you have to do/find out to answer the question you have set yourself is basically problem solving! There has been much talk in recent years about the importance of the evidence base. Undertaking research activities that contribute to furthering what we know about career development and the impacts that it might have on individuals and society contributes to building and securing the future of the profession.

Using research in your practice

As part of your initial training you will have engaged with some theory and some research about careers work. This may have focused on

how people make decisions, how to structure a career development intervention, what helps build a good working relationship with a client. In fact, everything that you will have learned will be based on either research that has informed practice or evidence of observation that has produced successful outcomes.

As a professional career development practitioner, engagement in research should not end when you get the bit of paper that says you are qualified or competent to do the job. Understanding how practice is evolving and developing is a key element of continuous professional development.

Accessing research is not as daunting as it sounds. There is lots of information made available to us all the time about what works in practice; it is not all in inaccessible academic journals (although there is a lot here as well).

Research to help you develop your practice can be found in a variety of accessible ways.

Journals and publications

- CDI News via Email. In each edition of the newsletter there is a purple tab that highlights research that has recently been published. This provides a useful way of keeping up to date with research specifically relevant to the career development sector.
- *Career Matters*. Includes updates and summaries of research that may be of interest to members.
- The National Institute of Career Education and Counselling (NICEC) produces a biannual journal that includes short articles often presenting research that practitioners have been involved with.
- The CPD Resources Area of the CDI website lists a number of useful publications and online materials.

Research organisations

There is a wide range of organisations, both university-based and commercial, that undertake research aligned to the career development sector. Many organisations will make research reports available on their websites; these include:

- International Centre for Guidance Studies (iCeGS): www.derby.ac.uk/icegs
- Institute for Employment Studies (IES): www.employment-studies.co.uk/
- Warwick Institute for Employment Research: www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/
- National Foundation for Educational Research: www.nfer.ac.uk/
- CFE Research: <http://cfe.org.uk/>
- SQW: www.sqw.co.uk

- Education and Employers: www.educationandemployers.org
- Centre for Career and Personal Development, Canterbury Christchurch University: www.canterbury.ac.uk/education/our-work/centre-for-career-and-personal-development/centre-for-career-and-personal-development.aspx.

Research commissioners

Much of the research that is undertaken is commissioned and paid for by either government or other organisations interested in learning more about a particular topic area. Often the research reports are made available to the general public through their websites; these include:

- Government departments, such as the Department for Education, Department for Business Innovation and Skills, Department for Work and Pensions and UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES): www.gov.uk/government/publications.
- Cedefop (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training): www.cedefop.europa.eu/.
- Sutton Trust: www.suttontrust.com/research.
- CIPD (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development): www.cipd.co.uk.

Both of the above lists include just a few of the types of organisation who publish research relevant to the career development sector.

Using research

All research is undertaken for a particular reason; whether it is to find an answer to a question or to learn more about a particular topic, there is always an agenda. As such, it is important that when using research, you consider possible bias given who it was produced for and for what purpose.

Research can be a useful tool to support the development of practice. Keeping up to date on what is happening in your field helps you to learn about new initiatives, policy and how practice may be developing. Research is no use unless it is used; it needs to be an active tool that raises questions and offers ideas of what can be done.

Using research in your practice helps you to understand:

- the latest theory – what is new in terms of thinking about many of the problems we are dealing with on a daily basis
- strategies and tactics – it can provide ideas about how others may have tackled similar issues as those you are experiencing
- new ways of thinking – it can be a source of motivation and ideas
- priorities – what needs to be done and why.

Activity

When was the last time you used research to inform your practice?

If you have used research, what did this do for you?

In the next section we are going to explore research that is based on practice and informs practice.

Evidence-based practice

You often hear policymakers and researchers talk about evidence-based practice, but what is it? The concept of evidence-based practice originated in medicine and is used in mental health, social work and education. It supports practitioners to build a body of knowledge through evaluating what they do in practice to identify what works and what might not work so well. This contributes to moving practice forward with evidence demonstrating how the activities may have had a positive influence.

If you want to find out more about the evidence base as a concept, we recommend Ben Goldacre's (2008) book *Bad Science*. This is a readable and funny book that focuses on medicine but provides a good introduction to issues around evidence-based policy and practice.

Policymakers are often interested in seeing 'proof' that careers work has an impact before they fund any new initiative. When they are asking for 'proof' they are really looking for a formal evidence base of research and publications that demonstrates the impact of the work that you do. This kind of formal evidence base has much more power than sharing anecdotal stories about individual clients.

Evidence-based practice according to Trinder (2000) can:

- ensure that new initiatives are likely to be successful as they have been proved in a similar context
- promote value for money as they are directly linked to practice
- empower practitioners and encourage self-directed learning for staff.

Finding and using evidence is important, but we must also remember that what works well in one setting does not always transfer directly somewhere else! Careful consideration needs to be given to contextualisation to ensure what you learn supports what you want to do. But it is also incredibly powerful to take ideas from elsewhere and adapt them to your way of working.

Tristram Hooley (2014) argues that we should actively seek out evidence for our work and contribute to growing the evidence. He suggests the following approach, which we have slightly adapted to meet the needs of a practitioner researcher.

This provides a useful approach to think about how we might engage in research as a practitioner. There are four steps in the model. These provide a process that you can follow which will broadly give you the structure of a research project. They are iterative and, as such, build a cycle of activities that can be repeated to help embed learning, similar to those we explored in the reflective practice chapter.

Some people may be interested in undertaking small research projects themselves. The next sections explore how you might start to do this. We hope to provide you with an overview of some of the issues you may need to consider if you plan to undertake research yourself.

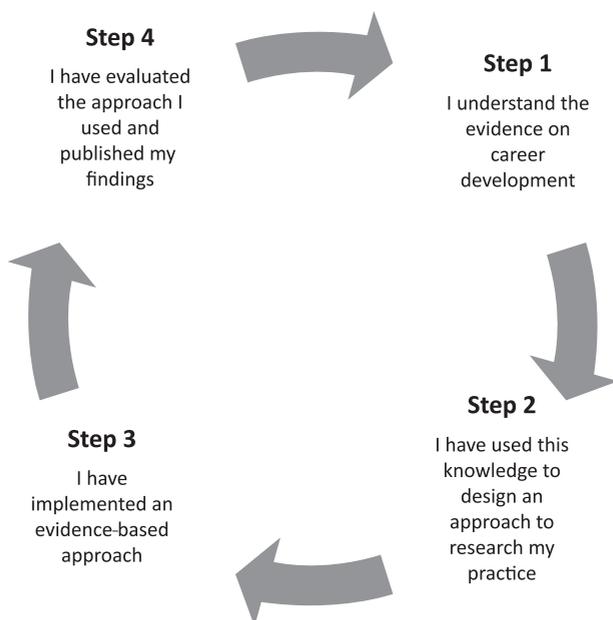


Figure 5.1: Model for evidence-based research to inform practice

Planning your research

We would recommend that you identify an area or problem that you would like to examine in relation to your practice. We have developed a template that you can use to help you think about your project; this can be found in Appendix 1. Have a look at this now and think about how you will populate it as we work through the next sections. You might want to ask yourself a few questions before you start.

- Why do you want to do this research project?
- How do you know this is an issue/problem?
- What evidence do you think you can gather?
- Who will you need to involve, i.e. colleagues, clients?
- Are there any ethical or access problems you need to consider?
- Will you be able to access some support?
- How might it inform your practice?
- How will you share your learning?

Careful planning is essential for success. Does this sound familiar? As with all journeys, you need to plan a route. This does not mean that it has to be totally prescriptive but it will help you understand what you need to do next.

Ethics

With all types of research consideration needs to be given to ethics. As career development practitioners we are familiar with the code of ethics that support and underpin our professional practice. Research is no different. You need to consider if there are any ethical issues that may affect the study you want to do.

When conducting a research project, you need to consider a number of activities to ensure your research is ethical.

- Informed consent – it is essential that those contributing to your research have been fully informed about the research, its methods and aims and what they have to do.
- Avoid coercion – there is always a power dynamic in relationships. Your clients may feel that they have to contribute. Individuals have the right to decide if they want to participate or not.
- Incentives – these can be used but they should be nominal.
- Withdrawal – you need to make sure that your participants are provided with an opportunity to withdraw if they no longer want to continue.
- Anonymity and confidentiality – ideally you will ensure that your participants cannot be identified. This may be through changing their name or the details about them. If you are working in a small organisation it is not always easy to guarantee anonymity.

- Risk assessment – there should be no physical or psychological harm to either participants or the researcher.
- Debriefing – ideally the researcher should have an opportunity to debrief the participants and to share the findings.
- Confirmation – participants should get the chance to check their narratives, especially if you have transcribed the interviews, and confirm they are happy to have their data included.

In the following sections we will explore each of the four steps outlined in the figure on page 88, and provide some ideas as to what you need to do.

Model for evidence-based research to inform practice

Step 1: I understand the evidence on career development

Before you start any research project you need to find out what is already out there. It may be that what you are interested in has already been researched and the answers are already there. Alternatively, you might find there is very little written about it. What you do find will help you to better understand your problem, inform your thinking as to what you want to explore and help you to shape your research question. It also helps to set the scene and the context for your research.

This stage of the research is usually referred to as the literature review. A literature review demonstrates that you have an understanding of the current state of knowledge for your topic area. It demonstrates that you have investigated and understand what has been written or not about the area you are interested in. It will:

- help to define your methodology or approach to research – you can see what approaches others have used to investigate areas of practice
- help to explain your findings and to compare where they may be similar or different
- demonstrate that you have an in-depth knowledge of the topic area and contribute to your expertise in the area
- be required if you want to publish in an academic journal.

Searching for literature

Searching for literature has become much simpler and easier with the internet. The problem now is more about the quantity of material available. Your role is to try and find quality literature. In the same way that you would critique occupational information, similarly you need to

think about the source, age, audience, relevance to you and why the research has been done. You need to filter out literature that is useful to you and literature that is not. It is really easy to get sidetracked reading something you find interesting but not really relevant to your topic. There are a number of things you can do that will help you.

Informal searches

- Start with what you already know – there may be literature or articles that you have already read and may have initially informed your interest in the topic.
- Look at some of the sources of research we referred to in the section above on using research in your practice.
- Always check the reference list at the end of any article – this will help you to find more literature and to check the validity of what you have just read.
- Talk to people you know; they may be able to refer you to materials and resources they are familiar with.
- Consider posting a request on Twitter/Facebook/LinkedIn for recommended resources or materials on your topic area.
- Set up a Google alert – if you have a Google account you can set up an alert that will send you information on a particular topic.

Using search engines

Search engines provide access quickly to information on the internet. This can be both useful and problematic as you can find lots of information that might be relevant but at the same time much of it may be irrelevant to what you need. Think about what literature you are searching for: government reports, policy, journal articles, professional publications, newspaper/magazine articles, blogs, books? There is a lot you can find. It is important to focus your search on the topic or theme you are interested in. The key to this is using search terms; these are the phrases that you use to search the internet. Below are a few ideas that will help you with your search activities.

- Make sure you keep a record of the terms you use and the combinations you use them in. If you wanted to find out what had been written about work experience, for example, you might use the following terms: 'work experience' 'work-shadowing', 'work-based learning', 'work placement' 'young people', 'pupils', 'employers', etc.
- If you are struggling for words, use the synonym or thesaurus function in word-processing packages.
- Using quotation marks around the search terms helps to narrow the search down.
- Define a date range; you might want to set it for the last ten years, for example.

- It may be helpful to use Boolean operators in your search; this helps with exclusion of texts. The three basic operators are 'AND', 'OR' and 'NOT'. These help focus if your topic has multiple search terms e.g. 'Work experience' 'AND' 'Young people' 'NOT' Placement.
- Google Scholar is useful for finding articles that are more academic: <https://scholar.google.co.uk/>. Here you can search for scholarly articles across different disciplines. This is important for research focusing on careers-related topics as careers research is multidisciplinary and attracts scholars from sociology, psychology, economics, and business-related disciplines.

Step 2: I have used this knowledge to design an approach to research my practice

One of the things that often puts people off research is that it is technical and has a language that is often inaccessible. This is all true! But at the same time it is unlikely that you are aiming to be a professional researcher (although you may get hooked and decide this is what you want to do). This part of the model focuses on designing the approach you will use to research your practice. Here we will look at the basics to get you started in research and guide you to some useful resources if you want to learn more.

Different styles of research collect data in different ways.

- **Quantitative research.** This focuses on things that can be precisely measured (using numbers). For example, how many clients do you see in a year, how many get jobs or training as a result of your service? To measure these factors, you might do a survey or analyse information that you collect from each of your clients. With this type of research, you can count and quantify your client group.
- **Qualitative research.** This focuses on things that you cannot count precisely and may be individual perceptions of a particular topic area. So, using a similar example, you might want to find out how people think your service has helped them. From this question you would not necessarily know how many people used the service but you might find out what they liked or disliked about it.

Each of these approaches may use different tools and methods to collect data. Mixed-method approaches tend to use a combination of both statistical and perception data.

There are many different methods for collecting data, some of which you will be familiar with – surveys and questionnaires, in-depth interviews, laboratory experiments, case studies, action research and ethnography are a few examples. There are many more that you can

find out about from the resources below. It is important to select a method that helps you to answer the research question you have set for yourself; some questions will lend themselves more to one method than another. If you want to find out what people think about something, their views and perceptions, then you would use a qualitative method. If, however, you are more interested in being able to argue something statistically, you are more likely to take a quantitative approach. Information about these research tools can be found in Bell (2008).

In the next sections we are going to consider some of the most common methods used to gather research data.

Surveys

Surveys and questionnaires are one of the most popular tools for gathering data. They are usually constructed with a set of questions for the research participant to respond to. They can be delivered face-to-face, online or through self-completion. They can be used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. They offer one of the most flexible methods for collecting both large and small amounts of data.

You need to think carefully about the type of questions that you use in a survey. Bell suggests the following types of questions.

- Open questions. These offer the opportunity to learn more about what people might think. However, people may not want to write a lot. You need to be specific in what you are asking, e.g. 'Please tell us three things you like about using self-service checkouts in a supermarket.' Everyone you ask may come up with different answers.
- Lists. Provide a selection and ask participants to select which is appropriate, e.g. list of qualifications that people may have.
- Categories. For example, age range or salary range.
- Ranking questions. Respondents are given a choice to order five listed items, e.g. 'Which type of CPD is best for you? Please rank in order from one to five (five being the lowest).'
- Scaling questions. These offer respondents the chance to rate strength of feeling or attitude (1 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree), e.g. 'I always reflect on all CPD activities I engage in.' Please select which response best describes your action.'

There are a number of online survey tools that you can use to undertake a small-scale research project, such as SurveyMonkey (www.surveymonkey.co.uk) and SmartSurvey (www.smartsurvey.co.uk). Some of these provide basic free services, but others may charge a fee. Find out about any costs before you make a decision about what will be useful to you.

Interviews

Interviews are verbal and may be conducted face-to-face, by phone or through social media, such as Skype. The interview can be constructed in a number of different ways:

- structured, where there are a limited number of responses that have been previously defined by the researcher
- semi-structured, where topics have been defined but they are a prompt for the researcher to focus on what main areas need to be covered
- unstructured, where the interviewer is interested in what the respondent has to say and doesn't want to constrain them. These interviews require a lot of expertise but can provide a wealth of information.

Action research

Here we are going to focus on action research as an approach, as it links well to developing practice and reflection. This is not a method or technique in the sense of data gathering, rather it is applied research based on an identified need for a change or improvement (Bell, 2008). However, you are likely to be gathering information from different sources to help you evaluate how effective what you are doing is. Action research in the UK is specifically defined around the development of practice.

Action research is simply a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by practitioners in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out.

(Carr and Kemmis, 1986: 162)

However, in other parts of the world its focus is more around social change and the gathering of information to address this. We are interested here in the development of practice but that is not to say that social change may not be an outcome of this. Jean McNiff and Jack Whitehead have written extensively on this topic and their work can be found at www.actionresearch.net.

Action research is a process of enquiry that helps you to think about and reflect on your work. It has a strong relationship with reflective practice as it is a developmental process that requires the researcher to implement an activity, then reflect on learning, then apply the learning. The Kolb model of reflective practice we looked at in Chapter 4 provides a useful framework for this. You may wish to refer back to it.

Activity

Action research project (see also Appendix 1)

You have just introduced a new feedback system for your clients. You want to find out how well this is working, using the Kolb model of 'Do, Review, Conclude and Plan':

Do – Introduce your new system.

Review – You may want to compare the level and/or quality of responses you receive now with the previous system. You may want to talk to your clients about the new approach and find out if they consider it easier to provide feedback now.

Conclude – What have you learned? Is the new system providing more/better/more useful feedback?

Plan – If you find there are other things that you can do you may want to build these into the system and start the process again.

Action research is essentially an iterative model. As such, it does not really end as you will be continuing to review what you do to find out what is working and what could be enhanced.

The above is just a brief selection of approaches that can be used to support practitioner research. There are others that you might want to explore if you are interested in learning more about research methodology. At this point you have hopefully defined the approach that you wish to use. You now need to think about how you are going to build your evidence base.

Step 3: I have implemented an evidence-based approach

In this stage of the model you are implementing your research or the practice you want to review. You need to think carefully about who you will select to partake in your research and why you think they can help you to answer your research question. Research requires transparency and clarity about the process, so you need to be clear about who you are involving and why. The implementation stage is where you are gathering your data, so it is important that you collect it from the right people in the right way. You will need to consider the ethical implications of your study.

If you are focusing on your own practice you may include yourself as one of your participants. If this is the case, refer back to Chapter 4 on

reflective practice to consider methods that will help you to reflect and record your thoughts.

This step focuses on using what is already known about the activity that you are doing. If, for example, you have recently been trained in cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), you will have not only engaged in the skill development but you will have explored studies or literature about which clients will most benefit and in what circumstances the approach is most effective. So, your research project may be to follow up on the training to build on the skills you have learned.

Example

You are finding that you are seeing an increasing number of clients who have mental health issues and you think it would enhance your practice to be able to offer them something more. You talk to colleagues who have trained in CBT and feel this might offer an interesting approach that you could use. You research who offers the training and identify an organisation that has a good track record and has been recommended by colleagues. After your training you decide you would like to test out your new skills and you want to see what difference it might make to your clients.

Within this example you would need to decide which clients you are going to work with. You may have identified a couple who you think would benefit. You will need to get consent from your client. For more on this, refer back to the section on ethics. Within this example you may choose to include yourself and, for example, record reflections of your clients after you have seen them and how you think they responded to the CBT techniques that you used.

You might also want to get feedback from your client using one of the approaches we discussed in Step 2. You might ask your client if they would be willing to complete a brief questionnaire or to answer a couple of questions about their experience. To ensure that your client can be really honest and open, you may want to ask a colleague to interview them or make sure that their questionnaire is anonymous.

In this stage of the model you are using the best evidence available to support and inform your practice. Here you are using what you have learned and reflecting on it, so you may be analysing your own behaviour and observing your client. How are they reacting to the techniques you are using? Are they appearing more positive or less negative about their particular issues? How do you know this? You might decide to use an action research approach as a structure to help

you review your practice and learn about how you can best use the new skills and knowledge that you have developed.

The next stage of the model focuses on what you do with the data once you have collected it.

Step 4: I have evaluated the approach I used and published my findings

So far, you have reviewed the evidence for your study, identified the approach and the question you want to focus on, developed your research tools and implemented them with yourself, your client or others who you think can contribute to helping you understand your chosen topic.

You will have collected a lot of data by this stage, and it is likely to be in the form of narratives or numbers. You will need to consider how you are going to analyse the data you have collected. If you are collecting numerical data you are likely to be looking at producing descriptive statistics, which may be in percentages. There are a number of specialist software packages, such as Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), that can help you to undertake sophisticated analysis of your numerical data. For small projects, most people will export the data into Excel. If you used a tool such as SurveyMonkey, for example, it will automatically analyse the data for you; you can also export the data to Excel for additional analysis.

Alternatively, your data will be narrative, in which case you will be analysing it to identify patterns and themes that support the arguments. If you have recorded your interviews, you may want to transcribe them so that you have a written document to use. This is not always necessary as you may have taken in-depth notes or have written responses from the respondent. You will need to identify how often themes occur, and to do this you are likely to code your data. The code is basically a label that you use to identify a particular theme. If you undertook a literature review at the start of the process, you might have defined a series of codes that you wanted to look for in your data; alternatively, you might identify the codes when you are examining the data. Using the CBT example from page 96, if you are analysing your data about how the use of CBT is benefiting your clients you might identify that a couple of people feel more confident in how they are interacting with other people. You would then start to look for other incidences of confidence as this may be a common theme.

Once you have analysed your data, you will be able to identify your key findings. If you undertook a literature review, you can compare your findings with that of other research on similar topics. Your findings

summarise what you have discovered in relation to your research question or the practice that you have been exploring.

Dissemination of learning

It is important to plan the dissemination of your research early on. This will provide you with a timeline and a goal to aim for.

Verbal dissemination

You may want to focus on presenting your research verbally.

- Workshop to colleagues as part of a staff development programme.
- Workshop to other colleagues in your network.
- Professional association event – this may be regional or national.
- Conference – again this could be local/national/international. The CDI, AGCAS (Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services) or NICEC conferences are always good venues to reach a wide range of practitioners.

Written dissemination

There is a wide range of media that can support you to share your research.

- Blog – write a blog as part of your research so that you are sharing your experiences with others. There are many in the careers field who already do this. Have a look at Chapter 7, which explores the internet and social media.
- Organisation newsletter – you may be able to write an article for your organisational newsletter and share it with your colleagues.
- Professional association publications – you might want to write an article for the CDI publication *Career Matters* or AGCAS's *Phoenix* (the ACGAS journal) in the UK. There are a number of other professional associations in other countries that have newsletters and welcome contributions. Have a look at the newsletter for the Canadian Education and Research Institute for Counselling (CERIC), the E-zine of the Career Development Association of New Zealand (CDANZ), and the practitioner magazine of the Career Development Association of Australia (CDAA).
- Journals – you may want to write something that is aimed at researchers and others in the field. The *Journal of the National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling* is a really good starting point for this.

- Peer-reviewed journals – these are aimed at academics and researchers within the discipline. When considering peer-reviewed journals you need to make sure that you have focused your article to meet the requirements of the journal, as they focus very precisely on topic areas. You might want to consider the following: *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance*, *Australian Journal of Career Development*, *Career Development Quarterly* and *Career Development International*.

Writing up, publishing and presenting your research is really important. Often you learn as a result of the process of writing up your research. Tony Watts in his final lecture said:

My main reason for writing is simple: I do not know what I think until I have written it.

(Watts, 2014)

Through thinking and reflecting as we are writing we are learning. It also helps us to construct the arguments and the messages we want to promote to our audience. If you are the only one who learns anything from your research then it has a very limited impact. As a professional you have a duty to share your learning from your research and to ensure that you are contributing to the evidence base that supports our area of work.

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the concept of the researcher practitioner. Engaging in research can have many positive effects, not just for the researcher, but also for the participants as well. Many participants often say they found that being part of a research project enhanced their confidence in themselves. You may want to get involved as a participant as well as undertaking your own research or evidence-based practice.

The model we have suggested offers a structure that will help you to explore research projects and develop the evidence base to support career development growing as an academic discipline and reinforcing the professional nature of practice. We have only been able to provide a brief introduction to the skills and knowledge to engage in research; there are many publications and websites that can help you if you are interested in pursuing this in more depth. In addition, you may be interested in undertaking a higher degree at either master's or doctoral level. These will provide you with the opportunity to engage in an in-depth research project focusing on an area you are interested in exploring further.

References

- Bell, J. (2008). *Doing your Research Project*. (4th edn). Maidenhead: McGraw Hill.
- Carr, W. and Kemmis, S. (1986). *Becoming Critical*. Lewes: Falmer.
- Goldacre, B. (2008). *Bad Science*. London: Fourth Estate.
- Hooley, T. (2014). *The Evidence Base on Lifelong Guidance*. Jyväskylä, Finland: ELGPN Tools No.3. Available at: www.elgpn.eu/publications/browse-by-language/english/elgpn-tools-no-3.-the-evidence-base-on-lifelong-guidance-extended-summary [Accessed 9 June, 2016].
- Irving, B.A. and Barker, V. (2004). Living in the real world: Developing and delivering qualitative research. In H. Reid and J. Bimrose. (eds) *Constructing the Future: Reflection on Practice*. Stourbridge: Institute of Career Guidance.
- Neary, S. and Hutchinson, J. (2009). More questions than answers: the role of practitioner research in professional practice. In: H.L. Reid. (ed), *Constructing the Future: Career Guidance for Changing Contexts*. Stourbridge: Institute of Career Guidance. Available at: <http://derby.openrepository.com/derby/handle/10545/197210> [Accessed 9 June, 2016].
- Schiersmann, C., Ertelt, B-J., Katsarov, J., Mulvey, R., Reid, H., and Weber, P. (Eds). (2012). *NICE Handbook for the Academic Training of Career Guidance and Counselling Professionals*. Heidelberg: Heidelberg University. Available at: www.nice-network.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/NICE_Handbook_full_version_online.pdf [Accessed 9 June, 2016].
- Trinder, L. (2000). A critical appraisal of evidence-based practice. In: L. Trinder and S. Reynolds, (eds.), *Evidence-Based Practice: A Critical Appraisal*. Oxford: Blackwell. pp. 212–241.
- Watts, A.G. (2014). Career development: looking back; moving forward. iCeGS 17th Annual Lecture. Derby: International Centre for Guidance Studies. Available at: www.derby.ac.uk/media/derbyacuk/contentassets/documents/ehs/icegs/Career-development.pdf [Accessed 9 June, 2016].

Useful resources

Below are some publications that will help you explore more about research and evidence-based practice.

Blaxter, L., Hughes, C., and Tight, M. (2010). *How to Research*. (4th edn). Buckingham: Open University Press.

Bowes, L., Hartas, D., Hughes, D., and Popham, I. (2003). *A Little Book of Evaluation*. Derby: University of Derby. Available at: www.proveandimprove.org/documents/LBE.PDF [Accessed 9 June, 2016].

Bryman, A. (2004). *Social Research Methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). (2014). *Higher Education Outreach to Widen Participation: Toolkits for Practitioners. Toolkit 4: Evaluation*. (3rd ed). Bristol: HEFCE.

Tristram Hooley's blog, Adventures in Career Development: <https://adventuresincareerdevelopment.wordpress.com>

Hughes, D. and Gration, G. (2009). *Evidence and Impact: Careers and guidance-related interventions*. Reading: CfBT. Available at: www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/ngrf/effectiveguidance/improvingpractice/curriculum/cfbt_ei_online_resource_2009.pdf [Accessed 9 June, 2016].

Machi, L. and McEvoy, B. (2012). *The Literature Review: Six Steps to Success*. Thousand Oakes: Corwin.

Oliver, P. (2010). *Understanding the Research Process*. London: Sage.

Silverman, D. (2011). *Interpreting Qualitative Data*. (4th edn). London: Sage.

Reflection page
