



DEVELOPING GOOD PRACTITIONER RESEARCH: AN AGENDA FOR RESEARCH COMMISSIONERS, AGENCIES AND PRACTITIONERS

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POLICY, PRACTICE AND RESEARCH WORLDS

'Unless we understand the different natures of these two worlds, we risk forever misunderstanding each other and failing to draw on joint strengths' (Duncan and Harrop, 2006)

FOUR ASPECTS OF OUR TOPIC

1. What is practitioner research?
2. the nature and practice of practitioner research in the UK
3. the experience of doing practitioner research
4. questions that may help steer how good practitioner research can be taken forward

WHAT IS PRACTITIONER RESEARCH?

National differences, but involves:

1. Direct data collection and management, or reflection on, existing data.
2. Professionals set its aims and outcomes.
3. It has intended practical benefits for professionals, service organisations and/or service users. These hoped-for benefits are usually expected to be immediate and 'instrumental'.

WHAT IS PRACTITIONER RESEARCH? (2)

4. Practitioners conduct a substantial proportion of the inquiry.
5. The research focuses on the professionals' own practice and/or that of their immediate peers.
6. It is typically small scale and short term.
7. It is self-contained, and not part of a larger research programme.
8. Data collection and management are typically (but not always) carried out as a lone activity.

THE NATURE AND PRACTICE OF PRACTITIONER RESEARCH

classifying social work research

1. Who are the participants or subjects of social work research?
2. What research problems are addressed by social work research?
3. What methods of inquiry are employed in social work research?

WHAT IS SOCIAL WORK RESEARCH?

What kinds of social work research are undertaken? An empirical question.

How can we understand and explain the nature of social work research? A theoretical question.

What kinds of social work research should be done? A value question.

WHO ARE THE PARTICIPANTS OR SUBJECTS OF SOCIAL WORK PRACTITIONER RESEARCH?

Actual or potential service user or carer grouping	31
Children and families	10
Young people (not offenders)	1
Adult offenders/adult victims	3
Adults with housing, homelessness, education or employment difficulties	1
People with mental health problems	5
Older people	7
Adults/children with health/disability difficulties (including learning disabilities)	2
Equal focus on two or more different user and/or carer groups	2

WHO ARE THE PARTICIPANTS OR SUBJECTS OF SOCIAL WORK PRACTITIONER RESEARCH? – 2

Citizen, user and community populations	3
People as members of communities	1
People as service users, carers	2
Women or men	0
Professional and policy communities	15
Social work practitioners/managers	8
Social work students	0
Members or students of other occupations	3
Policy, regulation or inspection communities	0
Jointly social work and other professional communities/agencies	4
Not applicable. For example, theorising that crosses categories; methodology	1

A BASIS FOR DISCUSSION

do we have assumptions about what practitioner research is focusing on?

How do figures like these compare with what we may think is desirable?

How similar or different do we assume that practitioner research will be from one country to another?

RESEARCH PROBLEMS ADDRESSED BY PRACTITIONER RESEARCHERS – 1

Understand/explain issues relating to risk, abuse, challenging behaviour, loss, separation, vulnerability, trauma	3
Understand/assess/strengthen user/carer/citizen/community involvement in social work; community organisation; partnership; empowerment	9
Understand/explain issues related to equality, oppression, diversity, employment, housing, education, poverty and social exclusion	2
Understand/promote the nature and quality of informal care, carer activity, volunteering and their relationship to formal care	3
Understand/develop/assess/evaluate social work practices, methods or interventions, including their recording/documentation	10
Understand/evaluate/strengthen social work/social care services, including voluntary services/independent sector	14

RESEARCH PROBLEMS ADDRESSED BY PRACTITIONER RESEARCHERS – 2

Beliefs, rights, values, ethics, faith	0
Understand/explain practice or promote good practice in social work/social care organisations and management	2
Ethnicity, race, racism	0
Demonstrate/assess the value of inter-disciplinary or inter-professional approaches to social work services	4
Understand/promote learning and teaching about social work or related professions, and entry to career	2
Demonstrate or assess the value of comparative research	0
Development of theorising about social work	0
Understand and assess the quality of social work research	0

RESEARCH PROBLEMS THAT SERVICE USER RESEARCHERS BELIEVE TO BE IMPORTANT

Coping
Identity
Information needs
Support needs
Self-help
Carers
Women's issues
Rights and opportunities.

(Shaw, 2012)

METHODS OF PRACTITIONER RESEARCH

Methodology	Number	Percentage
Quantitative	5	10
Qualitative	36	72
Mixed qualitative and quantitative methods	5	10
Systematic reviews	4	8

QUESTIONS

- the dominance of qualitative methods
- How are research ethics dealt with in practitioner research?
- What fields of knowledge and kinds of literature influence how practitioner researchers frame their research questions?
- What judgements can be made about the quality of such research?
- What benefits flow from practitioner research?

WHAT BENEFITS FLOW FROM PRACTITIONER RESEARCH? (LUNT ET AL 2012)

	Skill development	Delivery	Communication	Theory
Stakeholder Benefits				
Individual practitioners				
Team/site colleagues				
Agency				
Profession				
Service User				
University				

MOTIVATION, CAPACITY AND OPPORTUNITY

Personal *motivation*.
Personal and professional *capacity* to carry forward the research.
Timely *opportunity*

MOTIVATION

It does require the individuals to be hugely motivated, hugely proactive really. (Jean)

I want to make sure it's a good piece of work so I will work really hard to do that, I won't just produce any old thing, that's how I feel, that's just about me about my personality (Shona)

CAPACITY

1. the role of academic support; and
2. the capacity nature of pre-existing capacity;
3. the significance of clusters of related projects

individual capacity may not be recognized in advance, and indeed will often be latent, waiting, perhaps, to be illuminated by the conjunction of motivation and opportunity

ACADEMIC SUPPORT

One sad thing for me is I wanted to – I don't know whether to say it, or if it is the place to say it but – I wanted to use the children as asking the questions to other children and I really, really wanted that. I have been counselled out of it!

Have you? By your tutor?

Yeah. I just had two wonderful, an eight and a nine year old, who I think could ask these questions. And really it was about confidentiality and how they would maintain confidentiality within the families. But I think it is a real pity that.

NETWORKS OF PRACTITIONER RESEARCH PROJECTS

How do larger teams of practitioners come together and manage in working together in research?

How far does it make sense to think of such projects as part of a team?

What motivates these teams in terms of organizational or professional cultures?

What facilitates achievement?

OPPORTUNITY

Opportunities are as much *made* as *given*, and what may seem an opportunity to one person in an organization may be interpreted differently by someone with different interests in the same organization.

A 'FRAMEWORK OF OPPORTUNITY'

'Whilst still providing these resources during the lifetime of the project the major needs of individual projects proved to be around time management, forward planning and maintaining motivation. Although the GRIP team did indeed offer input and advice around research skills and conduct, overall our contribution is perhaps more appropriately seen as providing a *framework of opportunity* for projects.... Whilst at times cultural expertise is required there was – within what we call the 'framework of opportunity' – a broader sense of cultural 'permission' and affirmation being given to groups. This support allowed them to forge ahead with their work and maintain a belief that what they were doing had value (Lunt et al, 2008)

RECOMMENDATIONS?

1. an understanding of practitioner research that does not set it in a deficit model as a rudimentary or 'thin' version of academic research.
 - In saying this, I do not want to adopt a sentimental or romantic picture of practitioner research
2. practitioner research should not be seen as a homogenous form of inquiry
 - resist invidious distinctions of naive versus mature; simple versus complex; and practitioner versus practitioner+academic models of practitioner research

RECOMMENDATIONS? – 2

range of studies and the value of methodological diversity
 practitioner research that takes place through different kinds of networks,
 including funded networks and informal partnerships.
 funding stream
 the importance of understanding the experience of doing practitioner
 research

RECOMMENDATIONS – 3

national and regional government bodies could support ways in which
 support functions for such work could become part of organizational roles.
 good practitioner research should address issues of both local application
 and wider interest
 dissemination and utilization plan for each project.

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