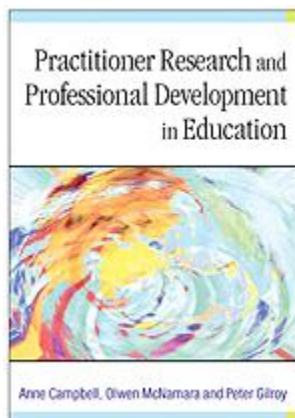


## Book Review



### **Practitioner Research and Professional Development in Education**

By Anne Campbell, Olwen McNamara and Peter Gilroy  
London: Sage Publications (2004).

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Reviewed by **Helen Darlington**

This book provides a good introduction into the role that practitioner research (teachers and other professionals carrying out small-scale investigations into their own practice) could play in the professional development of teachers, both as individuals and/or in collaborative communities, or indeed for the whole teaching profession. The writing, particularly the first few chapters, is grounded in the political landscape prevalent in the United Kingdom at the time of writing the book (2004). The arguments put forward for furthering professional understanding through practitioner research still resonate with the current (2014) political environment following the introduction of the new appraisal system within schools. The accessible and varied writing style means that this book has the potential to encourage individuals and, if the authors' vision is realised, learning communities to use practitioner research as an effective part of their professional development.

Following an outline of the key research traditions in education and a discussion of how these have developed (Chapter 1), the authors present a detailed discussion of the issues surrounding professional development within schools (Chapters 2 and 3). Once the scene has been set, the authors provide a comprehensive and reasonably easy to follow description of planning a research project (Chapters 4 and 5), data collection techniques (Chapters 6 and 7) and analysing data, both qualitative and quantitative (Chapters 8 and 9). The final two chapters explore the issues of writing up and disseminating research - areas that are often taken for granted and yet, some would argue, are the aspects of research that require the most support.

The authors have included a number of useful features to help the reader navigate the text, including summaries at the start of each chapter and 'signposts' to other parts of the book. The use of the same quotations from certain references in Chapters 2 and 3 also helps to focus on the key issues that are being discussed. The reader is encouraged to develop their thinking as they work through the book by the provision of examples, exercises, learning aids and illustrations. In particular, the exercises suggested in Chapter 3 help the reader to develop self-awareness and an understanding of the professional point from which they are embarking on their transition from teacher to researcher. There is further support through the inclusion of references for additional reading, with short descriptions of each one, and comprehensive lists of websites and key journals that may be of use.

The authors keep you engaged through a variety of writing styles and illustrative examples from actual research papers. For example, Chapter 4 consists mainly of transcripts from a project-planning discussion that took place among the authors. This use of the authors' own voices highlights some of the complexities and nuances that are often lost when someone tries to explain the thought processes and the extent of collaborative negotiation that must occur when planning a large scale project. The theme of collaboration is developed in detail

in Chapter 6 which presents detailed advice on how to manage 'critical friendships' and 'critical communities', both of which can have a significant impact of the sustainability of practitioner research projects.

Unfortunately, the structure of the book is, at times, challenging to follow as the first few chapters do not seem to flow logically from one to the other. Furthermore, there is a lack of clarity as to the authors' views of research conducted as part of a formal qualification, such as through a Higher Education institution or the UK government agency of The National College for Teaching and Leadership ([www.nationalcollege.org.uk](http://www.nationalcollege.org.uk)), as opposed to teachers working entirely independently. This could have been remedied with some examples of research titles covering a range of project sizes and some advice about what sort of training, both knowledge and skills, individuals should undertake before tackling practitioner research. In addition, there is mention of action research but a clear description of the cycle and rationale behind action research is notable by its absence.

With regards to the research process itself, there is a great deal of advice and numerous techniques for collecting and analysing data are described. However, there is little mentioned of the role of the researcher in ensuring that their projects are ethically sound. Ethical considerations are a minefield, especially when working with children and colleagues, and I feel that the importance of having awareness of these issues could have been emphasised more strongly. There is, however, a reasonably detailed description of the legal, and associated ethical, considerations that should be borne in mind when writing up and publishing research. This is a welcome inclusion as it is rarely covered in such detail in introductory texts.

In summary, I feel this book is a good introduction for anyone wishing to embark on their own practitioner research project as it will highlight the key areas that must be considered before this sort of undertaking. However, as with all such texts, no matter how extensive the examples and ideas included they cannot provide the individualised advice and constructive discussion that helps to nurture the seeds that can grow into high quality practitioner research.