

5<sup>th</sup> World Conference Educational Sciences – WCES 2013

## Transforming Research-Learning Performance With Professional Lifelong Learners

Tony Wall<sup>a</sup> \*<sup>a</sup>*Centre for Work Related Studies, University of Chester, Chester CH1 4BJ, United Kingdom*

---

### Abstract

In Europe, universities promote accredited professional development opportunities as a key strand of their lifelong learning commitment. Within this context, learning about research methods can be problematic to busy professionals, as it can appear dis-located from practice and unworthy of the energy and effort it takes to understand what might be perceived as a purely academic pursuit. The purpose of the study was to tackle this situation: to enhance the professional's experience and learning performance in research methods, in the context of work based learning Bachelor's and Master's degrees. Action research was used to develop a pedagogic approach to facilitate learning with busy professionals. The results suggest a significantly more positive experience for the learners, and a verified increase in performance (% grades) in assessed work. This paper gives an overview of the pedagogic approach and tools developed.

© 2013 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. Open access under [CC BY-NC-ND license](#).

Selection and/or peer-review under responsibility of Academic World Education and Research Center.

**Keywords:** practitioner research, pedagogy, lifelong learning; workplace learning; professional development;

---

### 1. Introduction

In Europe, universities have delivered accredited professional development opportunities for some time now, and often promote it as a key strand of their lifelong learning commitment. These opportunities may be referred to as work integrated programmes, workplace learning programmes, service learning, or work based learning degree programmes (Wall, 2010). Within the UK, the latter of these terms is used, and attract busy professionals in full time jobs, and this paper is written from one of the largest centers of negotiated work based learning programmes in Europe (Wall, 2012).

The center has found that the attraction of these programmes is that the busy professional learner can integrate accredited study alongside their work and family commitments, in areas that have direct relevance to their programme of study (Nixon, 2008). Yet the center has also found that within this context, learning about research methods can be problematic to the busy professional learner across industrial sectors; to them, from their perspective, it can feel dis-located from practice, and in some cases, unworthy of the energy and effort it takes to understand the area – it can be seen as a purely academic pursuit.

---

\* Corresponding Author name. Tony wall Tel.: +44-1244-512299  
E-mail address: [t.wall@chester.ac.uk](mailto:t.wall@chester.ac.uk)

Though the tensions of the ‘relevance gap’ of universities and the ‘real world’ have been known for some time, and continue to be reported (Starkey and Madan, 2001; Mintzerg, 2004; Wedgewood, 2008) – but the pedagogic responses to deal with this continue to be stark in the literature. The purpose of the study was therefore to practically tackle this situation at the pedagogic level: to enhance the professional's experience and learning performance in research methods, in the context of work based learning Bachelor's and Master's degrees.

## 2. Method: Action Research

A team of academics within a medium sized UK university adopted a cyclical action research methodology to research their pedagogic practices (including the author as the principal investigator). The particular focus was within the delivery of a research training and preparation course (named ‘Designing Practitioner Research’), which features as one of the final courses in work-based learning undergraduate and Master's degrees within the academic department. This action oriented research approach aligned with the pragmatic orientation of the work-based learning department (learning through action rather than the classroom), and focused on authentic changes in the reality of the context.

Together, the academic team took cycles of planning-action-reflection-re-planning, acting as critical-peers to challenge observations during each cycle (Brannick and Coghlan, 2009). This included reflecting-in-action (Schön, 1992) during interactions; direct instruction to groups during a ‘Designing Practitioner Research’ workshop, and interactions after the workshop. The particular interactions after the workshop specifically included paying attention to the questions raised by the professional learners and the coaching that was required to facilitate learning. And finally, it included reflecting-on-action, which involved: reviewing each learner's draft proposals for practitioner research, formal assessment of the final versions of these proposals by academics, and critical-peer debriefings amongst the academics.

To analyze the experiences and reflections of the team, a grounded, emergent strategy was used, enabling common themes to be identified from practice, which then formed the basis for re-planning and development of pedagogical practices (Brannick and Coghlan, 2009; Creswell, 2009). For each cycle, academic performance was externally scrutinized and ratified within standard quality assurance procedures by external examiners. These are highly specified assessment criteria used by all academics within the team and the external examiners, and have been in operation for over 5 years.

This provided a procedure for independent validation (or otherwise) of the outcomes being created through the pedagogic practices being implemented (James, Slater and Bucknam, 2011). The initial cycle started in 2010, and the team has undertaken four full action research cycles since then. The most important themes and practices are reported below.

## 3. Findings and Outcomes: An Accelerated Practitioner Research Approach (APRA)

A key outcome for APRA has been a significant change in the level and consistency of the learning achievement in the Designing Practitioner Research course, as measured by academic grades and feedback on the learner's final proposals, by the academic team. Most professional learners now achieve what is recognized as a ‘Merit’ in the grading system, which is one classification below the highest grade boundary (the ‘Distinction’).

In comparison to other courses, this is a higher level of achievement, but has been consistently validated by the external examiners. Less measurable, but noticeable for the team, was a shift in focus from a ‘nice to know’ type of academic research to strategic pragmatic research which is focused on addressing important organisational challenges or opportunities.

For example, rather than the learners attempting to generalize about the use of human resource planning in small businesses (perhaps more of an academic interest), all of the professional learners are now focused on their own strategic issues, such as trying to understand and improve the sales performance of particular products. In turn,

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1116125>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1116125>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)