

## **Research-informed teacher development: Perspectives from international initial teacher training**

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In *RI 154*, Cat Scutt highlighted her perspective that ‘evidence-engagement has, arguably, gone mainstream’ (2023, p. 22). Research on promising interventions is more accessible than ever before, thanks to the growth in organisations that generate, curate and promote evidence in education research, such as the Education Endowment Foundation, BERA and the Chartered College of Teachers. This creates a continual need to support teachers to engage critically with evidence and make appropriate changes to their practice. Building this kind of research capacity (Siddiqui & Wardle, 2020) in initial teacher training (ITT) is the logical first step in cultivating research literacy throughout the teacher professional development process.

Regardless of provider, whether university-led or school-based, tutors and mentors supporting beginning teachers act as conduits for the ITT Core Content Framework (CCF), where ‘learn that’ statements are coupled with an evidence-informed ‘learn how to’ approach to reflective practice (DfE, 2019). The sector is geared towards developing a research-rich and self-improving educational system predicated on the capacity for teachers to engage with research. During ITT, beginning teachers take their tentative first steps on the research path that will lead to implementing promising findings into their teaching, especially in terms of addressing educational disadvantage and improving education generally (Perry et al., 2017).

### **Propagating research literacy**

During initial teacher education, providers embed school-based assignments into their teacher training curricula. Through this initial engagement, beginning teachers interact with research and evidence and begin to trace the connections from theory and research to the practice they see in their schools and classrooms. For instance, they might be asked to explore how struggling readers are supported through small-group or one-to-one interventions, thereby identifying the factors leading to the uptake of evidence-informed practice at school level. Once an initial understanding of research and evidence is established, they will be encouraged to adopt a divergent thinking approach by exploring possible solutions to problems in their own practice. This opens the door for literature searches that suggest options for action research cycles depending on the developmental issue at hand. A beginning teacher planning to trial a specific pedagogic approach can take systematic and incremental steps based on the best available evidence from research, scaffolded professional judgment and an understanding of the context of the school (Scutt, 2018).

### **International perspectives**

A recent ISC Research study (2023) cited 13,190 international schools around the world as of January 2023 – a 52 per cent increase in the last decade. In addition to this increase in demand for teachers, the mobility of expatriate teachers in response to geopolitics and the Covid-19 pandemic is a significant factor in teacher availability. International schools are increasingly embracing a school-based approach to local teacher development in order to

increase their pool of teachers trained in the main international curricula, such as the English national curriculum, US Common Core or International Baccalaureate (IB). This usually involves graduates employed by the school as co-teachers or educational assistants, for example, being supported to access a programme of ITT, using their current school for the assessed teaching experience component.

International schools may offer a hybrid or 'glocal' curriculum, where local practices are integrated with a global curriculum to provide a more culturally meaningful solution (Jackson & Yoon, 2016; John et al., 2017), but one which can increase the challenges of learning to be an international teacher (Li & Chen, 2023). In addition to an international curriculum, education is provided either partly or wholly in English where English is not that country's official language, or through English as a medium of instruction (EMI) where English is one of the official languages. Teaching in multilingual or EMI schools places an increased expectation on the teacher: the need for 'pedagogical knowledge and skills to support students' learning of both academic content and English language' (Richards & Pun, 2022, p. 272). This is not just a case of adapting guidance on English as an additional language for the international school context: it is a reimagining of teaching that requires every teacher to embrace the additional level of challenge of using intercultural communicative competence to bridge the divide between local and global curriculum themes (Probert, 2022).

Picture the scenario where an international school follows a curriculum aligned to the English national curriculum. Promising research outcomes embedded in Department for Education expectations for school improvement and the CCF are tailored to English schools, but international schools overseas find that minimal attention is paid to relating these findings to their differing contexts. School-based beginning teachers conducting their own master's-level research as part of a PGCE programme may therefore encounter school policy misalignment and struggle to connect or leverage their findings institutionally. For example, how can research into supporting struggling readers be made more relevant in a context where pupils are learning to read in their second language in an EMI school in Egypt? How can findings on behaviour for learning be made more relevant when faced with a class of silent, respectful pupils in an IB school in Hong Kong? Considering these nuances speaks to the skill at the heart of evidence-informed practice as practitioners seek to tackle such problems.

### **Them & us: a challenge**

The more teachers at all levels can think of research as being *here among us*, instead of *over there among them*, the more the profession can focus collectively on identifying and addressing the gaps in our knowledge. This needs research literacy and a questioning approach to seeing what works in each classroom, school and region, anywhere in the world. Beginning teachers are exposed to research to inform their pedagogical development, influence curriculum planning and empower them to adapt their teaching to support their students. Fostering a practitioner researcher identity in their professional development embeds reflection and self-improvement.

A challenge for BERA is that of reciprocal research and knowledge exchange: how can this profession of local, regional, national and international practitioner researchers best be mobilised within the wider educational research environment to research, reflect and disseminate as part of the research-rich and self-improving educational system described in the introduction?

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