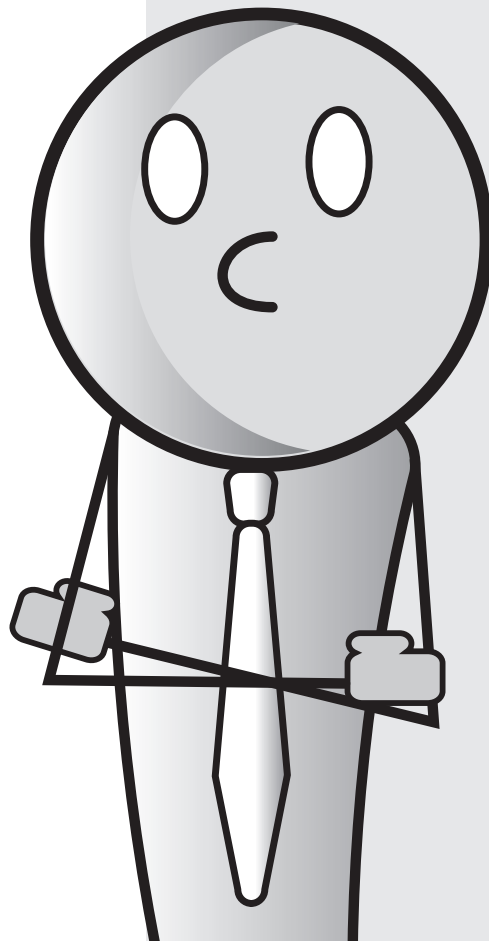


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Making the Case

The term research may conjure up images of dry academic journals or reports that are hard to read through and harder to understand. Practitioners should not fear the term research. Using it within a program should be as commonplace as using learning activities and training plans.

Research in practice simply means using the evidence of research and applying it in some way to your own experience. It includes all the resources, products, tools, training and communication developed and linked to a subject area. Anything from a newsletter article on Essential Skills to a report on Learning Disabilities can be considered research. *Using* the knowledge of the research is *research integration*.

Key Benefits

The process of reviewing, reflecting upon and integrating research into a program is an important aspect of working within a Continuous Improvement Performance Management System (CIPMS). Using research effectively contributes to efficiencies, improvements and quality services being offered in a program.

Other benefits of putting research into practice:

- helping practitioners improve day-to-day program practice, including developing more effective learning activities and designing new teaching methods and curriculum.
- enabling program planners and instructors to deal with specific problems in a program, such as learner motivation and attendance.
- prompting further studies and research in a particular area of interest and helping to support or justify grant applications.
- validating existing program practices.
- providing evidence of quality programming (politicians, funders, management, etc. look to research to demonstrate that programs work).

While some may interpret research integration as having to replicate exactly a program or process, in reality, it often needs to be adapted to fit into a local context. The key is in finding a balance and applying a 'what works' lens that can be applied, tested and adjusted as required.¹ There are countless studies and articles that show this is something sectors in all parts of the world are looking at closely. In particular, in recent years, evidence of successful research integration has been seen in the health, law and business sectors.

¹ *Using Evidence: How Research Can Inform Public Services*. The Policy Press, Bristol, UK. 2007

Research – Just Part of the Job

Literacy practitioners are professional educators. More and more practitioners are seeking ways to improve their own skill level through professional development opportunities and through reviewing and reflecting on program practices. Reading and reviewing research is as much part of a practitioner's job description as lesson-planning. It can encourage practitioners to reflect on their own practices and not only alter practitioner knowledge and understanding, but also shape attitudes and directly influence decision-making.

The role of practitioners is to become critical consumers of [the production of academic research], which implies the ability to read, reflect upon, and apply research findings to their realities"
(Schugurensky, 2002).

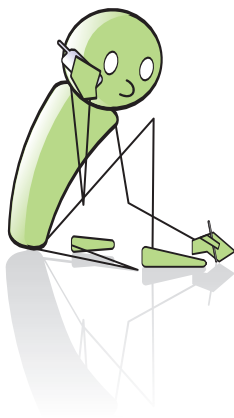
It is not uncommon to see that research in practice often happens in small, local 'hand-crafted' programs under strong leadership and research influences, or in single classrooms of individual outstanding teachers. Educational studies across the United States support this scenario and also show these programs rarely survive after the withdrawal of the key research and teaching personnel.

Practitioners change the way they use research across the course of their professional careers.

- Early in their careers they look at research on an individual basis as it relates to their values.
- At mid-career they start to extract research and apply it to their own contexts.
- In the final stages of their career they are more likely to experiment with the findings from research.²

Getting Directly Involved

Regardless of how they use research, most practitioners agree that research needs to relate to their reality and practices and be something they can learn from as well as be able to use. For this to happen, practitioners benefit from being engaged in the research process. Evidence shows that the transfer and communication of the research, as well as the development of the research itself, should be done in conjunction *with* practitioners in structured but flexible forms that recognize the constraints on practitioners of access, time and incentive.



Practitioners need to be involved in the integration practice. There needs to be a balance between strict replication of research and adapting it to local needs. In this context, one needs to draw on his or her own 'professional wisdom' when using research in decision-making.

² *Using Evidence: How Research Can Inform Public Services.* The Policy Press, Bristol, UK. 2007

Using Research the Right Way

It's easy to get overwhelmed by the amount of new research, resources and products that practitioners are exposed to. Some experts support the use of standards to determine whether research is worth reviewing and exploring further.³

Quality Standards

When presented with research, determine if:

- The research has been published and has gone through a peer review process.
- There is duplication or support of results by other researchers.
- There is consensus within a community toward the particular conclusion(s).

Making good decisions about applying research findings also means understanding individual learners, groups and classroom settings. Judgment acquired through experience enters the decision-making process. This is 'professional wisdom'.⁴ Most research in LBS is experimental in that if a teacher does 'x' then the learning result is 'y'. Applying logic, or 'professional wisdom', allows the practitioner to rule out other possible causes for the result.

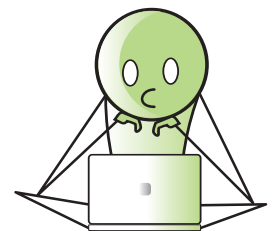
Useful research may include a literature review, validation by stakeholders, and information that can have a practical application. Some researchers will say that no single study carries enough weight to support a claim about an instructional practice.⁵

Misuse vs. non-use

Research can play just as an important role in a program through its 'non-use'. In other words, practitioners can spend time reviewing, reflecting and analyzing research only to determine it is not valid or appropriate for their program, either due to a lack of resources or a mismatch between the research and the program's area of interest.

In these instances, even though the research wasn't used, it still had value as it enabled the practitioners to examine and evaluate their program practices. The 'non-use' of this research should still be documented and used as evidence in a continuous improvement model.

Misuse of research can mean using poor-quality research which can put the program at risk, or it can mean applying research to justify bad practice. Overuse of research can be a misuse issue as well, especially when tentative findings are taken up too zealously.



^{3 4 5} *Applying Research in Reading Instruction for Adults: First Steps for Teachers*. Susan McShane. National Institute for Literacy/National Centre for Family Literacy. 2005