

ITE interview – reading and writing task

At interview, you will be given the opportunity to demonstrate effective reading and writing skills.

To help you prepare, please read the article below:

Improving Teaching and Learning in Schools Through the Use of Academic Research.

As you read it, you might think about

- what are the points being made?
- how does the writer support his arguments?
- how well does the writer convey his message?

On the interview day, you will be provided with a ‘clean’ copy of the article to work from.

Improving Teaching and Learning in Schools Through the Use of Academic Research*

By Chris Brown, University of Portsmouth

Research-informed teaching practice (RITP) involves teachers and school leaders engaging with high quality research evidence, with the purpose of using any insights gained to improve specific aspects of teaching and learning in their schools (Coldwell *et al*, 2017; Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2017). Opinions on how to facilitate RITP differ, sometimes vehemently. As such it is worth stating that the project detailed in this article is informed by the idea that most pertinent and high quality research – from qualitative data and case studies, to the work of Hattie (2011) and the Education Endowment Foundation – can be used to inform practice as long as it is appropriate to the questions being asked.

Research Learning Communities

Research learning communities (RLCs) are groups of teachers, typically facilitated by a university researcher, who engage with research-evidence in order to enhance both their practice and also the practice of their colleagues. The RLC approach is grounded in a number of core research-informed ideas. One example is the idea that RITP is most effective when it involves engaging teachers in a facilitated process of learning, designed to help them make explicit connections between research knowledge and experience.

In terms of their practical implementation, the RLC process involves teachers and school leaders engaging in four workshops held over the course of a year, each corresponding to four stages:

- 1) relate the research to their own practical knowledge
- 2) develop an intervention, based on the research findings, designed to improve aspects of teaching and learning
- 3) trial and refine their intervention to maximise its effectiveness
- 4) review the impact and roll out successful interventions within and across schools.

In between workshops, participants are expected to work with school colleagues and share their research knowledge.

Example of an RLC Study

Over the past two years, I have been working with the reception teachers from the Chestnut Learning Federation (name changed to maintain anonymity) – a family of three small church infant schools based in Hampshire. They wanted to use the RLC approach to develop research-informed interventions to improve the writing outcomes of their summer-born children (children born between 1 April and 31 August, who typically have lower attainment than those born earlier in the school year).

The RITP resulting from this RLC study appears to show a significant increase in the federation's summer-born children's outcomes. Prior to the study, 60% of summer-born children achieved the expected level for writing, compared with 87% of autumn-born children. After one year of the RLC, 86% of summer-born children met the expected level for writing: an improvement of 26%. This improvement was sustained in year 2 of the RLC with 82% of summer-borns achieving the expected level for writing.

These figures do not provide a concrete demonstration of causation. However, by undertaking interviews with teachers involved, I was able to show a logical path from engagement with research to intention to act. Interview data revealed that the aim of participating teachers was to improve their understanding of the characteristics of effective learning and to develop an approach that focused on children's ages rather than end-of-year outcomes. Successful changes noted by those interviewed included:

- “changes to teachers' planning activity” – focusing on effective learning
- that “learning values are now driving teaching practice” rather than end of year goals
- and teachers “more actively looking for effective learning behaviours and planning activities to develop these behaviours”
- “getting children to use the language of learning, so reflecting on their own learning”

It was changes in knowledge, practice and children's engagement, participants argued, that then led to a subsequent increase in summer-born attainment. It is suggested therefore that this RLC case study provides an example of how research activity, and the understanding that emerges from it, can be developed into an intervention which can successfully drive improvements in classrooms and schools.

References

Coldwell, M., Greany, T., Higgins, S., Brown, C., Maxwell, B., Stiell, B., Stoll, L., Willis, B. & Burns, H. (2017) *Evidence-informed teaching: an evaluation of progress in England*. London: DfE.

Groundwater-Smith, S., & Mockler, N. (2017) *The study of education in Australia: shifting knowledge interests*. In Whitty, G. & Furlong, J. (Eds) *Knowledge and the study of education*. Didcot: Symposium Books, pp. 123-144.

Hattie, J. (2011) *Visible learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta analyses relating to achievement*. Abingdon: Routledge.

**This article is adapted from an article published in Research Intelligence, BERA, Spring 2018.*