

Action Research: What is it, and where can I get some?

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The session

- Aim is to:
 - Provide an explanation of some of the principles which CUREE encourages schools & other teaching practitioners to consider when conducting action research/teaching inquiry projects
 - Explore a few expansions on/alternative approaches to the model of action research which CUREE employs
 - Discuss ways in which the content of the session could prove helpful for participants



What CUREE offers



What CUREE does

- Supported teaching and learning and school improvement efforts, including work with Right To Succeed in secondary schools in Blackpool, and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation for the Teacher Development Fund
- Acted as Teaching and Leadership Advisers to the NCTL for the West Midlands
- Provides research and evaluation for national organisations and programmes, e.g. Teach First, NCTL, BFI, the National Gallery, SSAT
- Helps networks and individual schools to evaluate and enhance provision including through reviews and peer reviews
- Develops strategies to effectively integrate research into everyday CPD and teaching activities through e.g. coaching tools, RfTs and Route Maps



A quick starter activity

- Take a moment to think about a learner in one of your classes (past or present), whom you do or did want to make a difference for
- What specifically were the learning barriers they were facing which you wanted to help them address?
- Talk quickly with someone sitting next to you about the learner's obstacles, and what you would or did do to respond to them
- A quick debrief



Effective CPD/ Use of research

Both reviews highlight the importance of:

- linking pupil and teacher learning
- specialists providing range of sustained, structured support
- specialists setting up and supporting peer collaboration
- leaders showing their support by e.g.
 - providing time for teachers to plan & reflect , and
 - encouraging experimentation and learning





Action research/inquiry-based teaching: what is it?

- Simple version: a process by which an individual practitioner or small group works/work to explore a burning issue through practice, and document their findings so that others can attempt to draw and/or build on them in their practice



Burning issue

- Most important: should be focussed on the needs of one or more learners
- Should be connected to what is happening in the classroom (though not necessarily directly)
- Should be something practitioners can influence
- Should be an issue which does not have a quick/simple fix



Reading around

- Important aspect of inquiry, but often neglected (in my experience)
- Vital because:
 - Prevents you from re-inventing the wheel
 - “Show your working” – helps others see context you’re building from
 - There’s a lot of good research out there!



Places to look for research

- (note that this is a major topic in its own right)
- Research support – organisations like CUREE, NfER, The Key, Education Development Trust, offer ability to access research (sometimes at a cost)
- Open Access journals allow you to get at academic research yourself
- Chartered College of Teaching membership also an avenue to professional knowledge
- Twitter! (with some caveats)





What teaching issues are suitable for inquiry-based practice?

- Almost anything!
- No requirement to be based solely in what happens in classroom – homework, marking strategies, curriculum design, all suitable as well
- Only strict requirements are that it be something you have influence over, and that it be likely to make a difference for learners (equipoise - hence importance of prior research)



Demonstrating impact

- One of the most difficult things to judge in inquiry-based practice
- Critical element is to decide on impact measures that are **realistic** and related to your intervention
- Note that student feedback is a valuable tool, as long as not being taken as sole proof of success
- Principal of triangulation very helpful – any one data point is stronger when combined with others
- Ideally (i.e. if appropriate to your intervention), should draw on “naturally-occurring data” – if target area is related to tests students take anyway, use them
- You can also use more custom tools, including ones bought commercially or which you design yourself



Writing it up

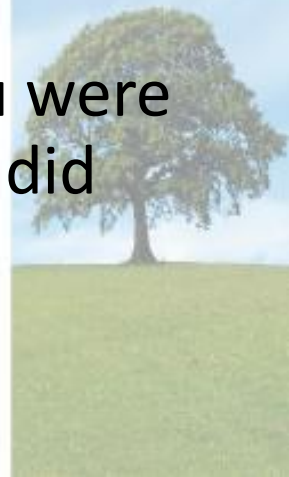
- Easiest in terms of conceptual rigour, hardest in terms of motivation
- BUT – important, because:
 - “If I got hit by a bus tomorrow” – your learning is valuable, make sure it’s not lost!
 - Helpful as source of structured professional reflection
 - When done right reveals strengths, weaknesses, and possible next steps for the project





Important things to remember during writing process

1. Context – what students did you work with? What barriers to learning relevant to the topic were they experiencing?
2. What you did – important point is that should be written in a way that allows others to retrace your steps if they want to
3. What happened – in other words, why should someone else bother to do the same thing?
4. What next – what might you do differently if you were trying it again in future? Alternatively, what else did your project make you want to explore?



Quick discussion activity

- Think back to your learners that you had in mind at the start
- What (if anything) has this discussion made you think differently about with regard to how they can be helped?
- Quick chat





Models of inquiry/ Examples of process in action

- CUREE's own (what I have been talking about)
- Research Lesson Study – provides a more structured version of the process, with greater emphasis on reflection and revising process incrementally (NB: because it's a triad structure with regular debriefing, bigger staff time commitment – consider getting a leader involved)
- Supported student inquiry – take flipped learning, add teacher inquiry. Shades of PBL which is risky, but if scaffolded well with quality tools has potential to be powerful. See Wellcome Trust Rapid Evidence Review
 - <https://wellcome.ac.uk/sites/default/files/review-of-practical-independent-research-projects-in-science-wellcome-apr16.pdf>



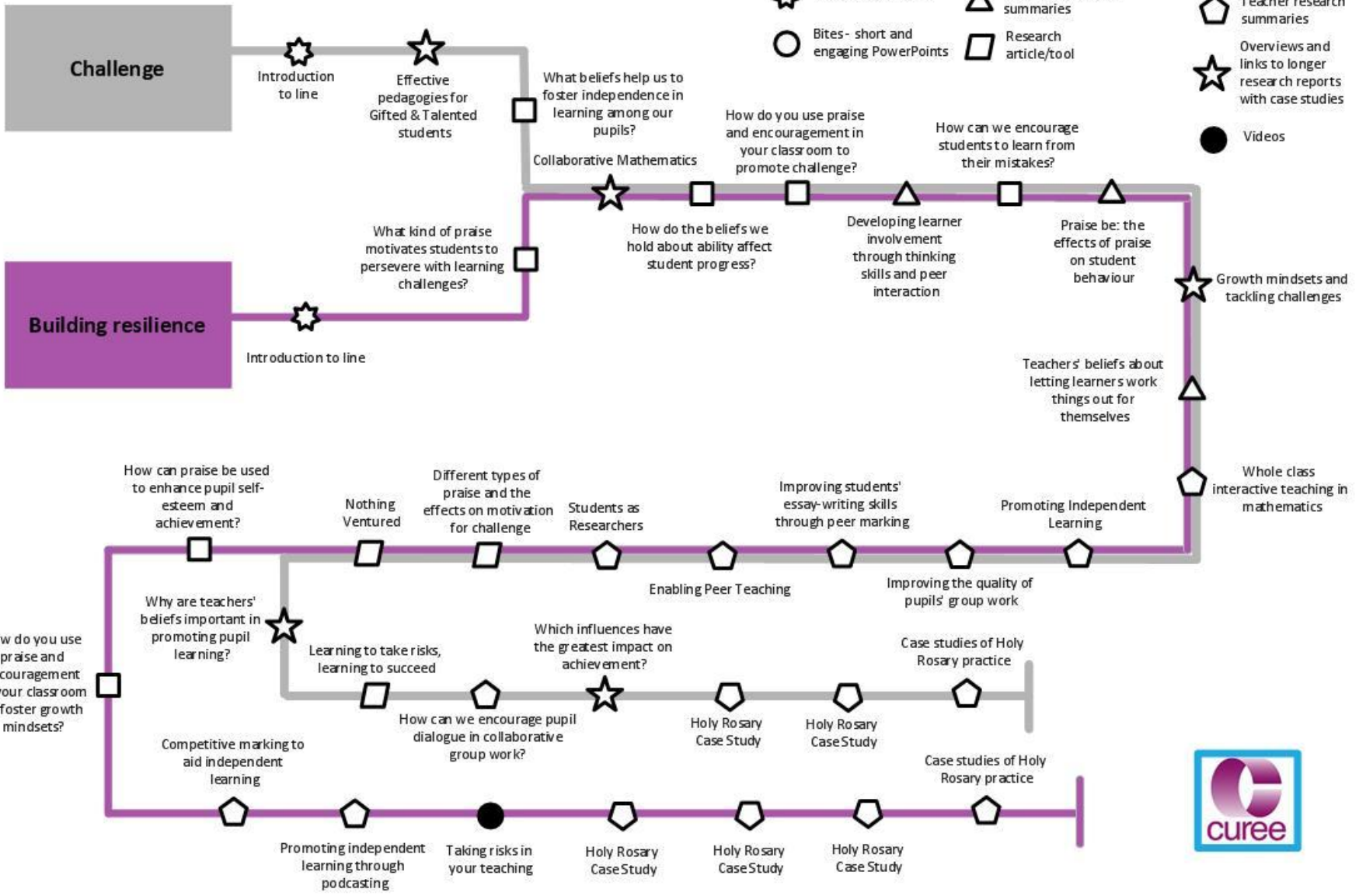
A quick addendum

- CUREE's approach often includes use of Research Route Maps – suite of tailor-made CPD resources, research summaries
- Benefits of this are:
 1. Provides handy reference point for existing research knowledge
 2. Contains plenty of “style guides”
 3. Also provides platform for practitioners to share their write-ups with colleagues
 4. Iterative - we can design a new RM which builds on previous examples



Holy Rosary Route Map - 2016

- Key**
- Introduction to line
 - Bites- short and engaging PowerPoints
 - Tasters- micro enquiry tools to try with your students
 - Practitioner friendly summaries
 - Research article/tool
 - Case studies from Holy Rosary TSA
 - Teacher research summaries
 - Overviews and links to longer research reports with case studies
 - Videos





Any Questions?





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