Introduction

This work presents the preliminary findings of the third phase of a small scale research study conducted by the authors with a small number of serving secondary school teachers of design and technology based in the North West of England.

The work originates from a study designed to improve the ability of Flexible PGCE design and technology trainee teachers to gain a ‘Level 7’ in the submission of their research assignments utilising a classroom evidence based approach (Bell et al. 2011). It was during this study that unanticipated findings emerged, which set a new course of enquiry; to explore the potential to support teachers in the generation of evidence based classroom practitioner research, of which the preliminary ‘pilot’ work is reported here.

Methodological Approach

The methodological approach adopted throughout this research programme has been constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2005; 2006). This approach allows the simultaneous gathering of data which, following analysis, allows the findings to enter the research field to inform and help set the direction of subsequent phases of enquiry. The pilot findings presented here draw upon empirical data which was gathered during focus group work, a series of semi-structured interviews and private email correspondence with the research participants (n=6).

All research conducted has been in accordance with the ethical guidance provided by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2004). Participants were assured that all research was anonymous and where appropriate the names of respondents and institutions have been changed. The rights of participants to either withdraw from the study or to refuse to allow materials to be used at any stage of the work was made clear.

“I didn’t think the work I competed was anything particularly new or special, but writing about it raised my profile within school and I’ve no doubt it helped me to secure my recent promotion.”

Teacher research participant 1

Results and Discussion

Early findings of this small pilot study illustrate how this emergent research programme is facilitating design and technology teachers’ in the production, promotion and validation of their classroom based practice.

Thus far research participants have reported a range of positive outcomes which have arisen as a direct result of engagement with the study. Selected findings in the form of abridged interview transcripts, presented in the form of vignettes, are offered below:

Vignette One

Darren is a teacher of design and technology at a technology college and is a curriculum mentor. As a Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) Darren was eligible to access the North West consortium’s Masters in Teaching and Learning (MTL) programme and as such is aware of the (previous) government’s desire to make teaching a masters profession. Darren is an enthusiastic teacher with an interest in continuing his professional development. Due to the demise of MTL, he has withdrawn and is in the process of transferring onto a University based Masters Programme. Darren teaches a single gender group of underachieving pupils. The trainee teacher he worked with expressed an interest in working with this particular group for his research project and as Darren explains “as a result of sharing ideas, after talking to my trainee I began to adapt my own teaching”. As a result Darren developed new strategies and radically reviewed the scheme to improve the design and technology delivered, which included off site teaching. He intends to write his findings up for his own masters and is keen to share his findings with others “to help raise the profile of design and technology because it has helped raise the profile of the department amongst colleagues across the school”.

“Writing up what I do has helped me reflect upon the work I do in school. It has given me more confidence and I’ve just applied to begin a Masters degree”

Teacher research participant 2

Potential Areas of Future Study

Given the positive outcomes from the pilot work the authors envisage that subsequent study will investigate which ‘vehicles’ are most appropriate in supporting practitioners in the creation and corroboration of practice based research.

The intrinsic ‘value’ of this research will also be explored. Not only in terms of the potential to improve learning and teaching in the classroom, but given the current uncertainly surrounding education within the UK; cuts in teacher training numbers, introduction of new training schools, the populous dip in secondary school age students and the introduction of the new shortage subjects, it is intended that future study will also investigate the impact that engagement with research activity of this kind has on the teacher participants, in retaining current or securing new employment, gaining promotion or enhancing CPD.