Developing Inclusive Practice Through Close-to-Practice Research



A practical guide to developing and sharing inclusive practice

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Introduction

What do we mean by inclusive practice?

Inclusive practice is a term that is widely used across international educational contexts, yet it is not always understood or applied in the same way. Within the English context, the Department for Education (2026) has outlined seven principles of inclusion which emphasise the importance of: ambitious leadership that embeds inclusion, evidence-based support, adaptive teaching and curriculum design for all learners, enriching opportunities beyond the classroom, cultures that foster belonging and participation, strong partnerships with families and wider services, and inclusive environments that promote continuous improvement.

The emphasis on continuous improvement is particularly significant because it positions inclusion as an ongoing journey rather than a job to 'finish'. Children, young people and educational contexts continually develop and change, new learners join settings, barriers are addressed, and understanding evolves. For this reason, inclusion is sometimes described as a 'doing word' – something practitioners continually work on rather than a target to achieve.

Internationally, this idea is reflected in UNESCO's (2017p. 13) description of inclusion as a ***process*** of identifying and overcoming barriers to learners' **presence, participation and achievement**. Inclusive practice can therefore be understood as the actions educators take to support this process.

Importantly, inclusive practice is not limited to a particular intervention, programme or approach. Instead, it reflects an ongoing commitment to developing and refining practice in response to the strengths, needs and aspirations of learners within a particular context. This commitment to practice development aligns with the foundations of close-to-practice research and the sharing of practice through the Inclusive Practice Hub.

What is close-to-practice research?

The term close-to-practice research is described by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) as 'research that is closely connected to practitioners' work and professional concerns' (Wyse et al., 2018). Focused on understanding and improving practice within real educational contexts, it is often undertaken as part of a setting's ongoing improvement journey.

As a result, close-to-practice research is frequently shaped by questions such as:

- Why is this happening?
- What is helping?
- What is getting in the way?
- How do learners experience this?
- What are learners and families communicating with us?
- What can colleagues teach us about this issue?
- Whose voice is currently missing?
- What can we learn from the experiences of others?
- What difference is this approach making?
- How might practice be developed further?

Importantly, close-to-practice research does not require practitioners to become academic researchers or undertake large-scale studies. Many educators already engage in enquiry through their everyday practice; close-to-practice research builds on this by making the process more deliberate, systematic and visible.

Close-to-practice research can take many forms, but all involve purposeful reflection on practice. It may draw upon approaches such as Action Research, Lesson Study, or other forms of professional enquiry that seek to better understand and improve practice. Although it can be undertaken by an individual practitioner, collaboration often enriches the process by bringing together different perspectives, experiences, and expertise, helping embed learning more deeply across a setting.

Lawrence Stenhouse (1981), whose work helped establish the idea of teachers as researchers, argued that practitioner enquiry should be shared within professional communities where it can be discussed, refined and developed over time. He recognised that valuable educational knowledge emerges not only through academic journals and conferences, but also through the systematic sharing of practice amongst educators themselves. This principle sits at the heart of the Inclusive Practice Hub. By sharing enquiries and experiences through the Hub, practitioners contribute to a growing body of professional knowledge that can broaden perspectives, inspire new possibilities and support the ongoing development of inclusive practice across diverse educational contexts.

The Inclusive Practice Hub

The Whole School SEND Inclusive Practice Hub is founded on the recognition that inclusive practice can be strengthened when practitioners have opportunities to undertake, share and learn from close-to-practice research.

Close-to-practice research is particularly well suited to developing inclusive practice because both require an understanding of the needs of learners and communities within a specific context. **Developing inclusive practice through close-to-practice research** provides a structured approach to removing barriers, adapting teaching, and improving outcomes for learners with additional needs.

Recognising that significant expertise already exists within schools, colleges and other educational settings, the Hub helps make practice-focused approaches to inclusion more visible and accessible. This enables practitioners to learn from what has been successful in other settings while considering how insights and approaches might be interpreted and adapted for their own context and learners.

Developed in partnership with the Cambridge Teacher Research Exchange (Camtree), the Inclusive Practice Hub provides a structured and searchable collection of practitioner enquiries focussed on developing more inclusive approaches to education. The purpose of this booklet is to help practitioners develop and publish their own projects for the Inclusive Practice Hub.

How to use this booklet

This booklet supports practitioners in developing and sharing their own close-to-practice research projects for inclusion. It can be used to help identify an area of interest, structure a close-to-practice enquiry, engage with relevant evidence/research, include learner and family perspectives, and reflect on what is learned.

Practitioners do not need to read the booklet from beginning to end. Different chapters may be useful at different stages of an enquiry. Reflection questions, close-to-practice research approaches, example projects, templates, and key takeaway points are included to support professional thinking and decision-making.

The booklet has been written to help practitioners contribute to the Inclusive Practice Hub. Whether undertaking a small enquiry, a full Action Research project, or a Lesson Study, the aim is to support practitioners in capturing and sharing learning so others can reflect on, adapt, and build on it within their own contexts.

Key takeaway points

Inclusive practice is an ongoing process of identifying and removing barriers, responding to learners' strengths and needs, and continually refining practice.

Close-to-practice research is an approach to professional enquiry that uses understanding gained through practice to inform and improve practice.

The Inclusive Practice Hub is a searchable collection of close-to-practice research that supports the sharing and development of inclusive practice.

This booklet provides practical guidance to help practitioners plan, undertake, reflect on and share close-to-practice research.

Chapter 1:
Slowing Down to Understand

Introduction

Educational settings are busy places. When concerns arise, there can be a natural tendency to move quickly towards solutions. However, close-to-practice research encourages practitioners to slow down and spend time developing a deeper understanding of a situation before deciding what action to take.

This is not about delaying improvement. Rather, it is about ensuring that decisions about inclusive practice are informed by a richer understanding of what is actually happening, so that approaches are more likely to remove barriers and improve outcomes for children and young people.

Starting with professional curiosity

Professional curiosity is a foundation of inclusive practice. At its simplest, professional curiosity is a willingness to ask questions, seek understanding and remain open to learning. It involves recognising that there may be more to understand about a learner, a situation, or approaches to practice.

This is particularly important within inclusive practice because children and young people experience education in different ways. When barriers arise, there is not always an obvious explanation or a straightforward solution. In these situations, professional curiosity encourages practitioners to pause, listen, ask questions and seek to understand before acting.

Professional curiosity is closely linked to care. One parent involved in a close-to-practice research project explained that they did not expect every professional working with their child to have all the answers. What mattered most was that people cared enough to be curious, ask questions, listen to their child and genuinely seek to understand their experiences. In many ways, this captures the essence of inclusive practice. Inclusion begins not with certainty, but with a commitment to understanding.

Curiosity also helps practitioners see situations from different perspectives. It encourages engagement with learners, families, colleagues, research and wider professional networks. It creates opportunities to challenge initial thinking, recognise barriers that may otherwise go unnoticed, and consider alternative ways of supporting participation, belonging, achievement and wellbeing.

For this reason, professional curiosity is often the starting point for improvement. It helps practitioners move beyond asking, ‘What should I do?’ and towards asking, ‘What do I need to understand?’

Many educators demonstrate professional curiosity every day through reflecting on practice, listening to learners and families, discussing ideas with colleagues, and considering how different approaches might influence outcomes. Sometimes a question, observation or emerging pattern captures their attention and prompts them to look more closely. This may arise from a concern, a school improvement priority, feedback from learners or families, or a recurring issue in practice. Equally, curiosity may be prompted by something positive that practitioners wish to understand, sustain or develop further. Whatever its source, professional curiosity begins with a willingness to pause, look more closely and ask questions.

Sometimes professional curiosity begins with a concern:	**At other times, it begins with something positive:**
➔ Why are some children and young people finding this aspect of learning challenging? ➔ Why is attendance declining for a particular group of learners, or individuals? ➔ What barriers might be preventing participation? ➔ Why does this learner seem to experience school differently from their peers?	➔ Why has this approach been particularly successful? ➔ How can this be developed further? ➔ What can others learn from this experience? ➔ Why are learners responding so positively to this aspect of provision?

Close-to-practice research builds on this existing professional curiosity. By making the enquiry process more deliberate, systematic, and visible, it supports practitioners in exploring questions that emerge from practice, engaging with different perspectives, and reflecting on what they learn.

Professional curiosity is therefore less about having answers and more about being willing to ask questions. It is this willingness to notice, listen, reflect and enquire that provides the starting point for close-to-practice research and the ongoing development of inclusive practice.

Reflection activity

Take a moment to think about your own setting.

- What has recently made you stop and think?
- Is there something you are uncertain about?
- What challenge, opportunity or success would you like to understand more deeply?
- Whose perspective might help you see the situation differently?
- What question keeps returning to your mind?

Your answers may provide the starting point for an enquiry.

Developing a project focus

After identifying an area of professional curiosity, the next step is not to produce a detailed research plan or a perfectly worded research question. Instead, it is simply to identify an aspect of practice that a practitioner would like to understand more deeply.

At this stage, it can be helpful to capture the focus in a simple statement:

I would like to better understand...

For example:

- I would like to better understand how to make our School Council more inclusive.
- I would like to better understand how pupil voice informs decision-making within our setting.
- I would like to better understand the factors influencing attendance for a particular group of learners.
- I would like to better understand how we can strengthen parent/carer partnership in our setting.
- I would like to better understand how we can develop our continuing professional development (CPD) offer for inclusion.
- I would like to better understand whether Thinking Moves is deepening the children's participation in Science.
- I would like to better understand how we can deepen Sam's interest in reading.
- Etc.

These initial statements are not final research questions. They are simply starting points. As understanding develops, they may be refined, narrowed or even completely reshaped.

Many successful enquiries begin in one place and end up somewhere slightly different. This is a common outcome of developing a deeper understanding of the issue. The purpose at this stage is therefore not to identify the perfect question, but to identify a meaningful place to begin looking more closely.

Reflection activity

Complete the following sentence:

I would like to better understand...

Then consider:

- Why does this matter?
- Who might benefit from a better understanding of this issue?
- Is this a challenge, an opportunity, or both?
- What makes this worth exploring?

Collaborative enquiry

Whilst professional curiosity may begin with an individual, understanding is often enriched through collaboration with others.

Different people experience the same situation differently. Learners, families, teachers, Teaching Assistants, Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs), leaders and external professionals may each hold part of the picture. By bringing these perspectives together, practitioners can develop a fuller understanding of an issue and reduce the risk of viewing a situation through a single lens.

Collaboration can also help challenge initial thinking. Questions that seem straightforward from one perspective often become more complex when explored through dialogue. At times this may confirm an initial understanding. At other times it may reveal overlooked barriers, highlight new opportunities, or suggest a different focus for enquiry altogether.

What begins as a response to the needs of one learner may provide valuable insights that benefit many others. Equally, approaches that work well in one classroom, year group or department may need adapting before they can be implemented elsewhere. Collaboration creates opportunities to explore what an approach might look like in a different context, what barriers might arise, and how practice can be refined whilst remaining committed to its original purpose.

Without collaboration, inclusive practice can sometimes develop in isolated pockets across a setting. Learners may experience highly inclusive approaches in one area of school life but encounter very different expectations, cultures or levels of support elsewhere. Collaborative enquiry helps practitioners develop a shared understanding of inclusion and creates opportunities to build greater coherence across a setting. It can also strengthen transitions by promoting dialogue and shared approaches between the different settings, services and phases of education that children and young people experience.

Many successful close-to-practice research projects begin with conversations. These conversations may take place formally or informally, but they share a common purpose: helping practitioners think more deeply about the issue they are exploring.

Collaboration might involve:

- discussing a concern with a colleague, including senior leaders;
- seeking the perspectives of children and young people;
- engaging with families;
- liaising with Teaching Assistants;
- consulting with external professionals;
- participating in professional networks or communities of practice.

Collaboration does not always lead to agreement, nor should it. Different viewpoints can be valuable because they encourage reflection and open alternative ways of understanding a situation.

Professional enquiry is therefore often less about finding a single answer and more about exploring multiple perspectives. By working with others, practitioners create opportunities to broaden their thinking, deepen their understanding and develop richer approaches to inclusive practice.

Reflection activity

Consider an issue you would like to understand more deeply.

- Who already has a perspective on this issue?
- Who might see the situation differently?
- Whose voice is currently missing?
- Who could help you think more deeply about the issue?
- What might be learned if these perspectives were brought together?

Key takeaway points

Professional Curiosity:
Notice, listen, reflect and ask questions before deciding what action to take.

Developing a Focus:
Start with an issue, opportunity or success that you would like to understand more deeply.

Collaboration:
Seek multiple perspectives to build a fuller understanding of the issue you are exploring.

Chapter 2:
Taking Action Through Enquiry

Reflective practice

Many practitioners are already familiar with reflective practice and engage in some form of reflection as part of everyday professional life. Teachers, SENCOs, leaders and support staff regularly think about what has happened, what worked well, what could be improved, and what might or should happen next.

Drawing on UNESCO's (2017) description of **inclusion as a process** of identifying and removing barriers to learners' presence, participation and achievement, reflective practice can be understood as one of the mechanisms through which this process is sustained. By creating opportunities to pause, consider different perspectives, deepen understanding, and adapt practice in response to what is learned, reflection helps ensure that inclusive practice remains responsive rather than routine.

The relationship between reflection, learning and action has long been explored within educational theory, most notably by the philosopher and educationalist John Dewey. Rather than viewing reflection as simply looking back on what happened, Dewey (2009) described it as an active process of making sense of experience in order to better understand what to do next.

Professional curiosity often provides the starting point for this process. A conversation, an observation, a pattern in the data, or feedback from a learner or family may all prompt a practitioner to stop and think about what should happen next. Reflection begins when practitioners choose to stay with these moments for longer rather than moving immediately towards solutions. By exploring observations, questions and experiences more deliberately, practitioners can develop a deeper understanding of what may be happening and consider what action might be needed.

Inclusion is an ongoing process of identifying and removing barriers to learners' presence, participation and achievement, rather than a destination to be reached. *For a fuller discussion of inclusion as a process, see* ***page 8***.

Professional curiosity is a willingness to notice, question, listen and seek a deeper understanding of learners, experiences and practice. *For a fuller discussion of professional curiosity, see* ***page 12***.

Dewey (2009) warned that moving directly from initial observations to solution-focused action can result in what he termed routine action, where responses are shaped by habit, assumptions or established ways of working. Reflection helps practitioners resist this tendency by encouraging questioning, discussion, further observation, engagement with different perspectives, and a willingness to consider that there may be more to understand. In Dewey's (2009) work on reflective practice, this process can be understood through six stages: noticing, pausing, questioning, deepening understanding, exploration and action.

1. Notice Something That Captures Attention

Reflection often begins with something that stands out: a classroom observation, a pupil response, a piece of data, feedback from colleagues, or a pattern observed over time. New experiences are considered alongside what is already known from previous experience. *This stage has much in common with professional curiosity; see* ***page 12****.*

2. Pause Before Reaching a Conclusion

First interpretations are often immediate and instinctive. These initial thoughts can be useful starting points, but they should not be treated as final explanations. Effective reflection involves slowing down, resisting the urge to jump straight to solutions, and taking time to understand the situation more fully.

3. Define the Question

Rather than focusing on what action to take, the next step is to identify the question that needs exploring. What exactly is causing concern? What is the practitioner trying to understand more clearly? Framing the issue as a question can help sharpen the focus for further enquiry. *For more on framing a question, see* ***page 14 and 43****.*

4. Broaden Understanding

At this stage, practitioners seek additional perspectives and sources of knowledge. This may involve talking with colleagues, learners or families, reviewing evidence, engaging with professional reading, research literature, podcasts, videos and other sources of information. The aim is to deepen understanding and challenge initial thinking. *For more on engaging with sources of information, see* ***page 45****.*

5. Think Through Possible Explanations

As understanding develops, possible explanations can be considered and refined. Practitioners explore different interpretations of the issue and think through what each explanation might imply before deciding how to move forward.

6. Test Ideas Through Action

Action is then informed by reflection rather than routine response. Strategies are implemented thoughtfully and viewed as opportunities to learn. The aim is not to find a single perfect solution, but to test ideas, gather further evidence and continue refining understanding.

Through this process, understanding is refined and developed. In this way, reflective practice supports practitioners in moving beyond routine action towards more thoughtful action, or intelligent action as Dewey (2009) referred to it. Importantly, the action itself often generates new experiences, questions and reflections, causing the process to take on a cyclical shape as it begins again.

Dewey's (2009) interest in reflection was closely linked to his belief in democratic decision-making. He argued that better decisions emerge when people participate in the process of understanding and responding to issues that affect them, rather than having decisions imposed upon them. From this perspective, reflection is not solely an individual activity. Understanding is often enriched through engagement with the perspectives of others. *For a fuller discussion of **collaboration** and the role of different perspectives in enquiry, see* ***page 15***.

Reflection activity

Consider an issue that has recently captured your attention.

- **Notice:** What have you noticed that has prompted you to stop and wonder more deeply about?
- **Pause:** What initial thinking or immediate conclusions came to mind when you first noticed it?
- **Question:** What is the most important question you are trying to understand?
- **Deepen Understanding:** What additional perspectives, data or sources of information could help you understand the issue more fully?
- **Explore:** What might happen if you apply your new understandings to the context you noticed?
- **Act:** What 'intelligent' action, rather than routine action, could you take?

Engaging in a structured enquiry

As discussed in the previous section, Dewey's model of reflection can be viewed as a form of structured enquiry. Rather than moving directly from noticing to action, practitioners engage in a process of questioning, interpretation, exploration and reflection that supports the development of understanding. Indeed, structured enquiry sits at the heart of close-to-practice research. Whether practitioners are exploring a question, seeking to understand an issue, evaluating a change, or undertaking a more formal methodology such as Action Research or Lesson Study, they are engaging in a deliberate process of enquiry designed to develop understanding and inform action.

Structured enquiry can therefore be understood as any deliberate and systematic process that seeks to develop understanding, inform decision-making, or improve practice. What distinguishes structured enquiry from more informal reflection is not the use of a particular methodology, but a commitment to gathering information, engaging with different perspectives, and learning through a purposeful process of enquiry.

Within an inclusive education focus, structured enquiry can take many forms. Practitioners may seek to understand learners' experiences, investigate a challenge, explore a success, review data, engage with research literature, gather learner or family voice, observe practice, trial a new approach, or evaluate the impact of a change. Some enquiries are highly structured and follow a recognised methodology. Others are more flexible and responsive to context. What they share is a deliberate attempt to explore an issue in a way that moves beyond initial thinking and first impressions.

One useful way to think about structured enquiry is to consider the role action plays in the process. In some enquiries, the action centres on developing understanding through **gathering information**. In others, a more **direct action** approach takes the form of a planned intervention whose impact is explored through ongoing reflection and review.

Gathering information as action	Direct action
Sometimes the most appropriate action is to seek a deeper understanding before introducing change. In these situations, the process of gathering information becomes the action. **Examples might include:** → reviewing attendance information to understand patterns and trends; → gathering learner or family perspectives; → conducting observations; → exploring barriers to participation; → reviewing relevant research literature; → engaging in learning walks or discussions with colleagues. The purpose at this stage is not immediate intervention. Instead, practitioners are seeking to better understand what is happening before deciding what action, if any, may be needed.	At other times, practitioners may feel ready to introduce a change in practice. Here, the action takes the form of an intervention, with enquiry being used to understand and evaluate the impact of that change. **Examples might include:** → introducing person-centred annual reviews; → embedding reasonable adjustments within Modern Foreign Languages; → trialling a new approach to learner voice; → implementing structured conversations with families; → introducing a teaching approach or intervention. The purpose is to learn through action whilst remaining open to adaptation and refinement.

In practice, these two forms of enquiry are often interconnected, often involving a back-and-forth between gathering information and direct action, with each informing the other. Crucially, neither approach should be viewed as inherently better than the other. The key is judging which approach best fits the current close-to-practice enquiry.

Structured enquiry therefore involves more than simply identifying whether an approach works. It encourages practitioners to ask deeper questions:

- What is happening?
- Why might this be happening?
- Who is affected?
- What barriers might exist?
- Why does this approach appear successful?
- Which elements are essential?
- How might it need to be adapted in a different context?
- What can be learned from the experiences of others?

Importantly, practitioners do not need to adopt a formal methodology in order to engage in meaningful structured enquiry. Action Research and Lesson Study are both well-established examples of structured enquiry (see Chapters 4 and 5), but they are not the only approaches available. What matters is a commitment to systematic thinking, openness to learning, and a willingness to develop understanding before, during and after action.

As many practitioners discover, enquiry rarely progresses in a straight line. New information often generates new questions, initial thinking is revisited, and understandings develop over time. For this reason, many forms of structured enquiry make use of **cycles of reflection, action and review**. Understanding why these cycles can be valuable is the focus of the next section.

Refining understanding through a cyclical process

Many forms of close-to-practice research use cycles of reflection, action and review. Whilst different approaches use different terminology and structures, they share the recognition that understanding rarely develops in a straight line.

When practitioners first begin exploring an issue, they do so based on their current understanding. As they gather more information, uncover additional perspectives, and review the outcomes of their actions, that understanding develops. As understanding deepens, new questions emerge, initial thinking is revisited, and previously unnoticed aspects of a situation become visible.

This cyclical process can be particularly valuable for those working to develop inclusive practice. As discussed in the *'Introduction'* (**see page 8**), inclusion is an ongoing process rather than a destination. Cyclical approaches recognise that improvement is not about finding a final answer, but about continually developing understanding, responding to new learning, and adapting practice over time.

This booklet presents both Action Research and Lesson Study through a common **Study → Plan → Do → Review** cycle.

Study → Plan → Do → Review

- **Study:** developing understanding of an issue, question or area of practice.
- **Plan:** deciding what action to take, whether that involves gathering information or taking a direct action.
- **Do:** carrying out the planned action.
- **Review:** reflecting on what has been learned and considering what should happen next.

This language has been deliberately chosen so that it maps onto the graduated response (**Assess → Plan → Do → Review**) described within the Department for Education and Department of Health SEND Code of Practice (DfE and DoH, 2015). By replacing assess with study, the emphasis shifts towards developing understanding through professional enquiry whilst retaining a structure that will already be familiar to many practitioners. Crucially, the review stage often generates new questions, insights and possibilities which lead naturally into another cycle of **Study → Plan → Do → Review**.

Action Research and Lesson Study are two well-established examples of cyclical approaches to close-to-practice research. Although they differ in structure and emphasis, both are built upon the idea that **understanding, action and reflection are intimately connected and develop together over time**.

In some educational settings, Action Research and Lesson Study have become a central feature of continuing professional development and organisational improvement. In such contexts, practitioners are encouraged to investigate questions arising from their own practice, share their findings with colleagues, and contribute to a growing body of professional understanding. Embedding this type of enquiry-rich culture requires strong senior leadership, with leaders playing an important role in creating the time, trust and organisational structures needed for practitioner research to flourish. For example, at Richard Huish College, Action Research and Lesson Study form a significant part of professional learning, with staff engaging in collaborative inquiry pathways and disseminating their work through an annual Action Research Journal and college-wide research events.

Choosing between Action Research and Lesson Study

Both Action Research and Lesson Study provide cyclical approaches to close-to-practice research and share a commitment to understanding and improving practice. However, they differ in their primary focus and the way the enquiry is organised.

Lesson Study for Inclusion has its own history and traditions, although it can also be understood as a form of Action Research. Its primary focus is teaching, learning and the progress of specific learner(s) within a particular curriculum area. A defining feature of Lesson Study is collaborative enquiry. Practitioners work together, typically in a small team, to plan, observe and refine lessons based on careful consideration of learner responses. This makes Lesson Study for Inclusion particularly useful when investigating barriers to learning within a specific subject, lesson sequence or area of teaching.

The findings from one Lesson Study may also have implications beyond the immediate curriculum area being explored. Insights gained from studying learning in one subject may help practitioners better understand a learner's needs in other subjects, or even form the starting point for a subsequent Lesson Study cycle.

Action Research for Inclusion has a broader scope and can accommodate a wider range of questions. Projects may focus on classroom practice, learner voice, parental engagement, attendance, transitions, school culture, staff development, leadership, provision or any other aspect of inclusive practice. Its flexibility allows practitioners to organise the research in ways that best suit their context and purpose. Whilst this flexibility can be a strength, it also means that Action Research provides fewer boundaries than Lesson Study and therefore requires practitioners to make more decisions about how the enquiry will proceed.

Neither approach should be viewed as inherently better than the other, and in practice many practitioners use both approaches over time. A Lesson Study may identify a wider issue that later becomes the focus of an Action Research project. Equally, an Action Research project may uncover teaching and learning questions that are best explored through Lesson Study. The choice is therefore less about selecting the right methodology and more about selecting the approach that best fits the question a practitioner is trying to understand.

The following prompts may help a practitioner decide which approach is most appropriate for their current area of interest.

Action Research for Inclusion is likely to be most appropriate when:	Lesson Study for Inclusion is likely to be most appropriate when:
→ the focus may be on teaching and learning, but could also include wider areas of inclusive practice, such as partnerships with families or inclusive breaktimes; → flexibility is required regarding the direction of the project and the methods used to gather information; → the research team has a flexible structure.	→ the focus is primarily on the curriculum progress of one/two learner(s); → there is an interest in understanding how learners experience a lesson or sequence of lessons; → there is an interest in establishing a structure whereby colleagues within triads support one another's professional development; → a more structured framework for planning, observation and reflection would be beneficial.

Key takeaway points

Reflective Practice

- Reflection begins when something captures a practitioner's attention and prompts them to seek a deeper understanding.
- Dewey viewed reflection as a staged process of making sense of experience in order to inform more intelligent and considered future action.

Engaging in a Structured Enquiry

A structured enquiry is a deliberate and systematic process of developing understanding to inform practice. It may involve:

- *Gathering information* as action to develop understanding before change.
- *Direct action* to introduce, evaluate and refine a change in practice.

Refining Understanding Through a Cyclical Process

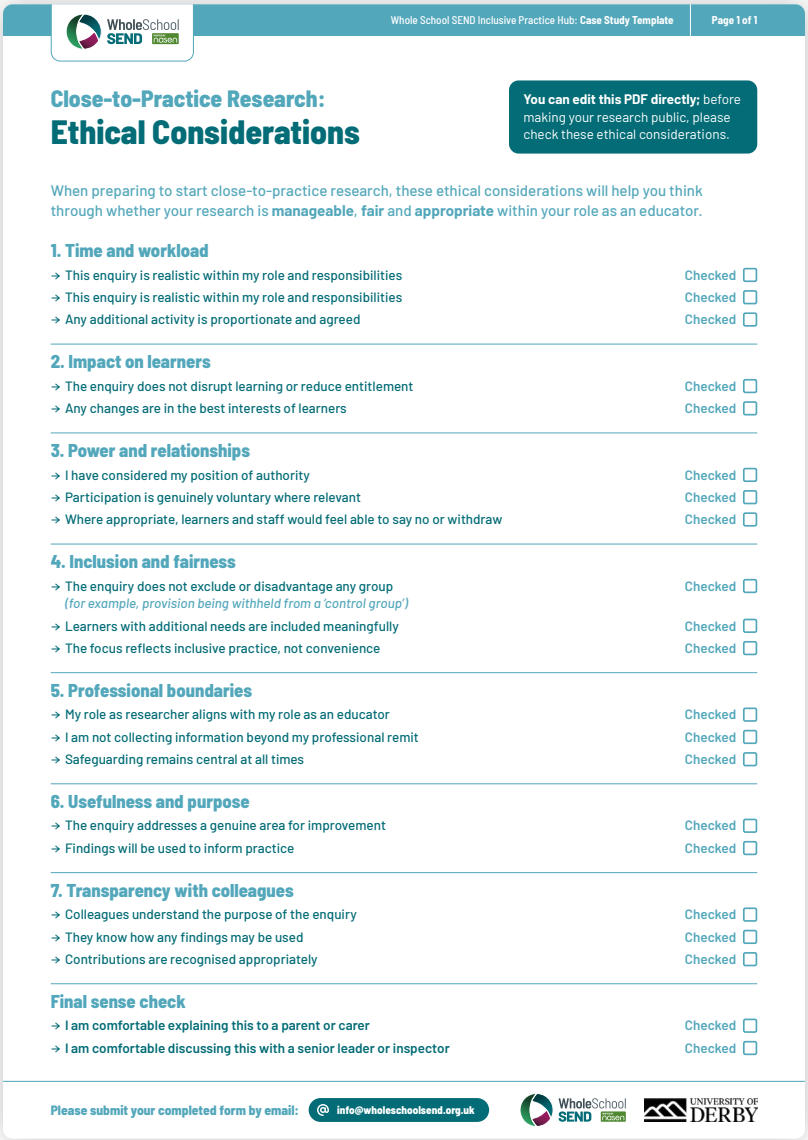
- Cyclical approaches to close-to-practice research are particularly valuable for developing inclusive practice because they recognise practice improvement as an ongoing process.
- The **Study → Plan → Do → Review** cycle supports practitioners to develop understanding, take informed action, and refine practice over time.

Chapter 3:
Before You Begin – Ethics

Close-to-practice research: Ethical considerations

Ethics is sometimes thought of as something that happens at the end of a project, when practitioners begin thinking about consent forms, anonymity and publication. In reality, ethical decision-making begins much earlier and runs throughout the enquiry process.

Close-to-practice research should support learning and improvement without creating unnecessary workload, disadvantaging learners or placing participants in uncomfortable situations. To support this process, the **Close-to-Practice Research: Ethical Considerations** guidance has been developed as a practical planning tool. It encourages practitioners to think carefully about the feasibility, fairness and appropriateness of a project before it begins and as it develops over time.



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Close-to-Practice Research:
Ethical Considerations

You can edit this PDF directly; before making your research public, please check these ethical considerations.

When preparing to start close-to-practice research, these ethical considerations will help you think through whether your research is **manageable**, **fair** and **appropriate** within your role as an educator.

1. Time and workload
- → This enquiry is realistic within my role and responsibilities — Checked ☐
- → This enquiry is realistic within my role and responsibilities — Checked ☐
- → Any additional activity is proportionate and agreed — Checked ☐

2. Impact on learners
- → The enquiry does not disrupt learning or reduce entitlement — Checked ☐
- → Any changes are in the best interests of learners — Checked ☐

3. Power and relationships
- → I have considered my position of authority — Checked ☐
- → Participation is genuinely voluntary where relevant — Checked ☐
- → Where appropriate, learners and staff would feel able to say no or withdraw — Checked ☐

4. Inclusion and fairness
- → The enquiry does not exclude or disadvantage any group *(for example, provision being withheld from a 'control group')* — Checked ☐
- → Learners with additional needs are included meaningfully — Checked ☐
- → The focus reflects inclusive practice, not convenience — Checked ☐

5. Professional boundaries
- → My role as researcher aligns with my role as an educator — Checked ☐
- → I am not collecting information beyond my professional remit — Checked ☐
- → Safeguarding remains central at all times — Checked ☐

6. Usefulness and purpose
- → The enquiry addresses a genuine area for improvement — Checked ☐
- → Findings will be used to inform practice — Checked ☐

7. Transparency with colleagues
- → Colleagues understand the purpose of the enquiry — Checked ☐
- → They know how any findings may be used — Checked ☐
- → Contributions are recognised appropriately — Checked ☐

Final sense check
- → I am comfortable explaining this to a parent or carer — Checked ☐
- → I am comfortable discussing this with a senior leader or inspector — Checked ☐

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Many of the issues raised in the checklist are already part of everyday professional decision-making. Taking time to consider them explicitly can help strengthen the quality of an enquiry, reduce the risk of unintended consequences and avoid projects becoming unnecessarily difficult to sustain or complete.

The following sections provide further explanation and reflection prompts for each area of **Close-to-Practice Research: Ethical Considerations**. Together, they are intended to help practitioners think through key ethical issues before, during and after a close-to-practice research project.

1. Time and Workload

Time is one of the most commonly cited barriers to close-to-practice research. Projects that are realistic in scope are more likely to generate useful insights and inform meaningful improvements in practice. It is often more effective to investigate a focused question in depth than to explore several issues at the same time.

■ This enquiry is realistic within my role and responsibilities

Taking time to consider workload, available resources and competing priorities can help ensure the enquiry remains manageable and achievable.

- ➔ How much time will be needed for planning, gathering information, reflection and review?
- ➔ Can the work be integrated into activities that already take place, such as meetings, observations or discussions with learners?
- ➔ Is the scale of the project realistic given practitioners' current responsibilities?

Starting with a focused question can often help practitioners gain deeper insights than trying to address several issues simultaneously.

■ It does not create unnecessary workload for colleagues or me

Close-to-practice research often benefits from collaboration, but it should not create unnecessary work for practitioners.

- ➔ What will colleagues be asked to contribute?
- ➔ Are there existing sources of information that could reduce duplication?
- ➔ Could the same information be gathered in a simpler way?
- ➔ Is every planned activity necessary to answer the research question?

Consider whether each activity is necessary and whether the value gained justifies the time required to complete it.

■ Any additional activity is proportionate and agreed

Additional activities, such as observations, interviews, meetings or learner voice activities, should be reasonable in scale and clearly understood by those involved.

- ➔ Is the level of activity appropriate for the size and purpose of the project?
- ➔ Have those involved had an opportunity to discuss and agree their participation?
- ➔ Are expectations clear about what is involved and why?

The aim is not to remove all additional activity, but to ensure that it is purposeful, proportionate and supported by those involved.

2. Impact on Learners

The welfare and educational experiences of children and young people should remain central throughout the enquiry. Close-to-practice research is intended to support learning and inclusion, not create additional barriers.

■ The enquiry does not disrupt learning or reduce entitlement

Research activities should fit around learning, rather than the other way round. Learners should continue to receive the provision, support and opportunities to which they are entitled throughout the enquiry.

- ➔ Does the enquiry minimise disruption to teaching, learning and participation?
- ➔ Are learners continuing to receive the provision and support outlined through normal classroom practice, school processes or statutory plans?
- ➔ If any aspect of provision is being amended as part of the enquiry, has this been carefully considered and discussed with all relevant parties, including the learner and their family where appropriate?
- ➔ Could information be gathered through everyday classroom activities or integrated into existing teaching and learning?

Particular caution should be exercised where a proposed enquiry involves changing support that a learner would normally receive. Any such changes should be carefully considered and discussed with relevant parties, including the learner, family and other professionals where appropriate. The purpose of close-to-practice research is to improve understanding and practice, not to compromise a learner's entitlement to education, support or inclusion.

■ Any changes are in the best interests of learners

Introduce new approaches because they are expected to benefit learners, not simply because they are interesting to research.

- ➔ What is the rationale for the change being implemented?
- ➔ How might learners benefit from the proposed approach?
- ➔ Could the approach unintentionally draw attention to, label or single out particular learners?
- ➔ Are there any potential risks or unintended consequences that should be considered?

Consider how the change may be experienced by the learner, their peers and staff, or interpreted by their family. Well-intended approaches can sometimes have unintended effects, particularly if they make learners feel different, excluded, labelled, or highly visible.

3. Power and Relationships

Teachers and other education professionals often hold positions of authority. This can influence how learners, families and colleagues respond to requests or invitations to participate.

■ I have considered my position of authority

People may agree to participate because they feel they should, rather than because they genuinely want to.

- How might your role influence responses?
- Could participants feel pressured to agree or provide positive feedback?
- How can opportunities be created for honest views to be shared?

Clearly communicating that honest feedback is valued, regardless of the views expressed, can help reduce power imbalances and encourage more open responses.

■ Participation is genuinely voluntary where relevant

Where participation involves interviews, questionnaires, focus groups or other voluntary activities, individuals should feel able to decline.

- Have participants been given a genuine choice?
- Do they understand what participation involves?
- Are there alternative ways they can contribute if they wish?

■ Where appropriate, learners and staff would feel able to say no or withdraw

Participation should not feel compulsory.

- Would people feel comfortable declining involvement?
- Can participants withdraw without negative consequences?
- Have clear expectations been communicated?

4. Inclusion and Fairness

Close-to-practice research should reflect the principles of inclusive practice and consider how different groups may experience the enquiry.

■ The enquiry does not exclude or disadvantage any group

Think carefully about who might benefit from, or be affected by, the project.

- Could any aspect of the enquiry unintentionally disadvantage a group of learners?
- Are some learners being excluded from opportunities that others receive?
- Are there reasonable adjustments that should be considered?

Practitioners may also wish to engage with the section on control groups; ***see page 59***. Whilst control groups are common in some forms of research, they are not appropriate for a close-to-practice enquiry.

Learners with additional needs are included meaningfully

Participation should not be limited because of the way a child/young person communicates, learns or participates.

- How can learners access the activities and be included in any information-gathering?
- Are adjustments needed to support communication and participation?
- Have alternative approaches been considered where appropriate?

The focus reflects inclusive practice, not convenience

Practical considerations will inevitably influence who is involved in a project. Children, families, colleagues and other participants need to be willing and able to take part, and the enquiry must be feasible within the available time and resources.

- Have a range of possible project focuses been considered?
- What factors influenced the choice of this particular enquiry?
- Is the focus important enough to justify the time and effort required?
- Is the project small enough to be undertaken well?
- Have decisions about participation been made thoughtfully and transparently?

Close-to-practice research involves balancing a range of considerations, including need, feasibility and willingness to participate. The aim is not necessarily to select the largest or most ambitious project, but to choose a focus that is both worthwhile and achievable. Starting with a smaller enquiry can often provide a strong foundation for future projects involving different learners, families, staff or areas of practice.

5. Professional Boundaries

Practitioners conduct close-to-practice research as part of their professional role, not as independent researchers. The enquiry should sit comfortably within normal professional responsibilities and areas of expertise.

My role as researcher aligns with my role as an educator

The enquiry should sit comfortably within professional responsibilities.

- Does the question arise naturally from the role?
- Is there a legitimate professional reason for gathering this information?
- Would colleagues, families or leaders view the enquiry as appropriate?

I am not collecting information beyond my professional remit

Some questions may require specialist expertise or different forms of approval.

- Is the information being gathered relevant to the role?
- Are there aspects of the issue that should be explored by another professional?
- Has gathering unnecessary or overly personal information been avoided?

Safeguarding remains central at all times

Close-to-practice activities do not replace safeguarding responsibilities.

- Could the enquiry give rise to safeguarding concerns?
- Are reporting procedures clear?
- Do all normal safeguarding processes remain in place?

6. Usefulness and Purpose

Close-to-practice research should be driven by a meaningful question, challenge or opportunity for improvement.

The enquiry addresses a genuine area for improvement

The project should investigate a meaningful question, challenge or opportunity.

- Why is this issue worth exploring?
- Who might benefit from a deeper understanding?
- Is the enquiry linked to improving practice?

Findings will be used to inform practice

The purpose of gathering information is to support learning, reflection and decision-making. Before beginning an enquiry, it can be helpful to consider how the learning might be used and who may benefit from it.

- How might the findings influence future practice?
- Who may benefit from what is learned?
- How will the learning be shared or acted upon?

Close-to-practice research is intended to contribute to improvement, whether for an individual learner, a group of learners, a classroom, a department, a whole setting and beyond. Thinking about how learning may be used at the outset can help ensure that the enquiry remains purposeful and worthwhile. Further guidance on understanding impact and sharing learning can be found in *'Chapter 8: Sharing Practitioner Learning'*.

7. Transparency with Colleagues

Close-to-practice research is often collaborative. Being open about the purpose of an enquiry, how information will be gathered and how learning will be used helps build trust, supports participation and reduces the likelihood of misunderstandings.

Colleagues understand the purpose of the enquiry

People should understand what the project is about and why it is taking place.

- Have colleagues been informed about the enquiry?
- Do they understand its aims?
- Are expectations clear?

When colleagues contribute to an enquiry, it helps them to understand how their involvement supports the project and what, if anything, is being asked of them. Practitioners will also need to consider how they inform learners and families about the enquiry.

Depending on the nature of the project, information might be shared through conversations with learners, child-friendly explanations, letters or emails to families, meetings, or discussions during existing review processes. The aim is to ensure that those involved understand what is happening, why it is happening and have an opportunity to ask questions or indicate whether they are happy to be involved.

They know how any findings may be used

Information should not be gathered without clarity about its purpose.

- How will findings be used?
- Who will have access to them?
- How will learning be shared?

People are often more willing to contribute when they understand how the resulting learning may support practice, inform decision-making or contribute to future improvements. Being clear about this from the outset can help build trust and encourage engagement.

Contributions are recognised appropriately

Close-to-practice research often draws on the expertise of others.

- Who has contributed to the enquiry?
- How will their involvement be acknowledged?
- Are opportunities being created for collaborative learning?

Enquiries are often strengthened by contributions from colleagues, learners, families, and other professionals. Taking time to acknowledge these contributions can help foster a collaborative culture in which practitioners feel valued and willing to engage in future enquiry.

Transparency helps build trust, encourages collaboration and increases the likelihood that learning will influence future practice.

Final Sense Check

Before moving forward, it can be helpful for practitioners to pause and consider whether they would feel comfortable discussing the enquiry with others outside the project.

I am comfortable explaining this to a parent or carer

Parents and carers often bring a valuable perspective to a project. Practitioners may wish to consider:

- Could the purpose of the enquiry be explained clearly and simply?
- Is it clear how learners may benefit from the project?
- Would families understand what information is being gathered and why?
- Would the rationale for any changes to practice be easy to explain?

If explaining the project feels difficult, it may be worth reflecting on whether aspects of the enquiry require further consideration.

I am comfortable discussing this with a senior leader or inspector

Looking at the enquiry through the eyes of someone not directly involved can often help identify issues that may otherwise be overlooked.

- Is the purpose of the enquiry clear and easy to explain?
- How will this enquiry improve outcomes, participation, belonging or inclusion for learners?
- Is this something practitioners can realistically influence through their work?
- Has the project become too ambitious or complex?
- Are the planned activities realistic within the time, staffing and resources available?
- If the enquiry is successful, what might practitioners do differently as a result?

If either question prompts hesitation, practitioners may wish to revisit the enquiry design and reflect on whether any adjustments would strengthen the project.

Publishing close-to-practice research: Quick ethics check

Most close-to-practice research takes place as part of everyday professional activity. Teachers, leaders and other practitioners regularly reflect on practice, gather information, trial new approaches and evaluate their impact. In many cases, this learning remains within a classroom, department, school or college.

The Inclusive Practice Hub provides an opportunity to share this learning nationally and internationally so other practitioners can reflect on, adapt, and build on it within their own contexts. Publishing a case study differs from everyday professional reflection because information about learners, families, colleagues and settings is being shared beyond the immediate context in which the enquiry took place. For this reason, some additional ethical considerations are needed before work is published.



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Publishing Your Research: **Quick Ethics Check** | Page 4 of 4

Publishing Your Research: Quick Ethics Check

Before submitting your case study: please ensure you have answered all statements.

1. Participant consent

Are people happy for this to be published?

- → Adults featured have agreed to publication — Yes ○ No ○ N/A ○
- → Parents or carers have agreed where needed — Yes ○ No ○ N/A ○
- → Children understand how they are included and have agreed in an accessible way — Yes ○ No ○ N/A ○

2. Gatekeeper approval

Has your setting approved this?

- → Headteacher or Principal has reviewed the content — Yes ○ No ○ N/A ○
- → They agree with what is shared — Yes ○ No ○ N/A ○
- → They confirm whether the setting and staff can be named — Yes ○ No ○ N/A ○

3. Identifying participants

Have you decided who will be identifiable?

- → Are you naming yourself? — Yes ○ No ○ N/A ○
- → Are you naming your setting? — Yes ○ No ○ N/A ○
- → Are you naming colleagues? — Yes ○ No ○ N/A ○
- → Are all children anonymised (for example, using pseudonyms)? — Yes ○ No ○ N/A ○

Be clear and consistent about the level of identification you are using.

4. Images and visuals

Do any visuals identify people or your setting?

- → Photos of children or staff — Yes ○ No ○ N/A ○
- → School logo or uniform — Yes ○ No ○ N/A ○
- → Images of the setting — Yes ○ No ○ N/A ○
- → If 'yes', have you gained explicit permission to include these? — Yes ○ No ○ N/A ○

5. Final sense check

- → The case study represents people and the setting fairly — Yes ○ No ○ N/A ○
- → Language is respectful throughout — Yes ○ No ○ N/A ○
- → You are professionally comfortable with this being publicly available — Yes ○ No ○ N/A ○

Name: **Role/Position:** **Date:**

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If publishing research through the Inclusive Practice Hub, the **Publishing Your Research: Quick Ethics Check** should be completed and submitted alongside the case study. The checklist helps practitioners think through the additional ethical considerations involved in sharing professional learning beyond their immediate setting. The following sections provide further guidance on each area of the publication process.

The following sections provide further explanation and reflection prompts for each area of the **Publishing Your Research: Quick Ethics Check**. Together, they are intended to help practitioners think through key ethical issues associated with publishing a close-to-practice research project.

1. Participant Consent

Aim: Ensure the people represented in the case study understand how they are included and are happy for the information to be published.

Publishing a case study involves sharing information about people. Practitioners should therefore consider how those involved have been informed about the project and how their agreement has been sought.

- Have adults featured in the case study agreed to publication?
- Have parents or carers agreed where appropriate?
- Have children and young people been given an explanation they can understand?
- Have learners had an opportunity to indicate whether they are happy to be included?

Agreement and understanding do not always require lengthy or highly formal processes.

Colleagues may provide written agreement, but in many settings projects are introduced through staff briefings, team meetings or professional discussions. What matters most is that colleagues understand the purpose of the enquiry, what participation involves and how information will be used. Practitioners should remain mindful of the power relationships discussed in the previous section and consider whether colleagues feel able to make a genuine choice about participation. Wherever possible, participation should be voluntary, informed and based on a shared understanding of what is being asked.

Families are often informed through letters, emails, meetings or existing communication systems within the setting. Practitioners should follow the approaches normally used by their setting when explaining a project and seeking agreement for publication. For a fuller discussion about involving parents/carers in close-to-practice research, *see 'Chapter 6: Including Children and Parent/Carer Perspectives'.*

It is also important to distinguish between **conducting a project** and **publishing a project**. Close-to-practice research is often embedded within everyday educational activities such as teaching, observation, learner voice work and reviewing practice. In most cases, practitioners **are not seeking permission to undertake these normal educational activities. Rather, agreement is being sought to share information about the project and its findings beyond the immediate setting through publication.**

Children and young people should be given an accessible explanation of the project and how they may be included in a published case study. Depending on the learner, this might involve conversation, visual presentation, symbols, social stories, Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC), photographs or other child-friendly approaches. For a fuller discussion about involving children and young people in close-to-practice research, *see 'Chapter 6: Including Children and Parent/Carer Perspectives'.*

The key consideration is that people understand, as far as reasonably possible, how they are represented in the published case study and have had an opportunity to express their views about being included.

2. Gatekeeper Approval

Aim: Ensure that publication has been discussed with a senior leader, ideally the Headteacher, Principal or equivalent, and that any necessary approvals have been obtained.

- Has the Headteacher, Principal or an appropriate senior leader approved the project to proceed?
- Have they had an opportunity to read and review the case study?
- Are they comfortable with the information being published?
- Have decisions been made about whether the setting, author(s) and colleagues will be named?
- Are there any organisational policies or procedures that need to be considered before publication?

3. Identifying Participants

Aim: Make thoughtful decisions about how individuals, colleagues and settings are represented within the published case study.

Decisions about naming authors, colleagues or settings should be considered carefully before publication. Some practitioners choose to identify themselves and their setting, whilst others prefer to anonymise some or all identifying details.

- Will the author(s) be named?
- Will the setting be named?
- Will colleagues be named?
- Will learners be anonymised?

There is no single correct approach to identifying adults or settings. The key is to make decisions thoughtfully, discuss them with those involved, and apply them consistently throughout the case study. Final decisions regarding publication arrangements should always be agreed with the Headteacher, Principal or appropriate senior leader.

Learners should always be anonymised within published case studies, typically using gender and culturally appropriate pseudonyms, or by using terms like Child 1, Child 2. Using a name as a pseudonym can help readers engage more easily with a case study. On first use, consider including an asterisk (e.g., Sam*) and a note such as: *For ethical reasons, this name is a pseudonym.

4. Images and Visuals

Aim: Consider whether photographs, logos or other images could identify people or settings.

Visuals can bring a case study to life and help readers better understand the approaches, resources and learning being described. For example, practitioners may wish to include photographs of teaching resources, classroom displays, examples of learners' work, adapted materials or environmental changes. However, images can sometimes reveal more information than intended.

- Do photographs identify learners or staff?
- Are logos, uniforms or signage visible?
- Could images identify the setting?
- Has explicit permission been obtained where required?

Where images are used, practitioners should think carefully about whether they support the purpose of the case study and whether appropriate permissions have been obtained.

As a general principle, the Inclusive Practice Hub does not recommend publishing identifiable images of children and young people. In many cases, photographs can be cropped, edited or taken in ways that avoid showing faces whilst still illustrating the practice being discussed.

The aim is to share learning whilst protecting the privacy and dignity of those involved.

5. Final Sense Check

Aim: Ensure the published case study represents people fairly and professionally.

Before submitting a case study to the Inclusive Practice Hub, do read it through in its entirety.

- Does the case study represent individuals fairly and respectfully?
- Would those involved recognise themselves in a way that feels accurate and appropriate?
- Is the language respectful throughout?
- Is there professional confidence in this being publicly available?

A useful final question:
If the people featured in this case study were reading it alongside me, would I feel comfortable discussing how they are represented?

Taking time for this final reflection can often highlight issues that may otherwise be missed.

Key takeaway points

Close-to-Practice Research: Ethical Considerations

- Ethical decision-making begins before an enquiry starts and continues throughout the research process.
- Ethical considerations help practitioners ensure that enquiries are feasible, inclusive, proportionate and beneficial to learners.
- Taking time to consider ethical issues explicitly can strengthen the quality of an enquiry and reduce the risk of unintended consequences.

Publishing Close-to-Practice Research: Quick Ethics Check

- Publishing a case study requires additional ethical considerations because information is being shared beyond the immediate educational context.
- Before publication, practitioners should consider issues such as consent, anonymity, representation, permissions and organisational approval.
- The purpose of publication is to share professional learning whilst protecting the privacy, dignity and interests of those involved.

Chapter 4:
Action Research

Introduction to Action Research

Action Research is one of the most widely recognised forms of close-to-practice research. Developed by the social psychologist Kurt Lewin (1946), its underlying principles are closely aligned with the earlier work of John Dewey (2009) and his emphasis on reflection, enquiry and informed action.

A defining feature of Action Research is its commitment to improvement through enquiry. Practitioners **identify an area of interest, gather information, take action, reflect on what is learned, and use this understanding to inform future actions**. In doing so, Action Research supports the development of both professional understanding and professional practice.

Action Research is also characterised by its close relationship with context. Rather than seeking universal answers or solutions that can be transferred between settings, Action Research encourages practitioners to develop understandings grounded in their own environment, learners and experiences. Research evidence may inform the process, but practitioners interpret findings through the realities of practice and adapt them to local contexts. In this sense, Action Research can be understood as an evidence-informed rather than evidence-based approach (Codina and Robinson, 2024).

Evidence-based practice	Evidence-informed practice
Practice that utilises evidence about what is effective, often with a focus on identifying and directly applying approaches that work.	Practice informed by research evidence, combined with professional judgement, contextual understanding, and learners' needs to inform decision-making.

(Coldwell et al., 2017)

For a fuller discussion about:

- *close-to-practice research and publishing practitioner enquiries through the Inclusive Practice Hub, see 'What do we mean by inclusive practice?', 'What is close-to-practice research?' and 'The Inclusive Practice Hub' (**pages 8 and 9**).*
- *the value of cyclical approaches to enquiry and research, see 'Refining understanding through a cyclical process' (**page 22**).*

Action Research for inclusion – Study → Plan → Do → Review

Action Research for Inclusion combines the principles of reflection, enquiry and action discussed in previous sections and organises them into a practical cyclical framework for developing inclusive practice. Presented as two **Study** → **Plan** → **Do** → **Review** cycles, the second cycle is not simply a repetition of the first; rather, it provides an opportunity to build upon what has already been learned, refine understanding, revisit initial thinking and develop practice further.

Moreover, the Action Research should not be viewed as a rigid sequence of steps (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2007). As understanding develops, practitioners may revisit earlier stages, return to the literature, seek additional perspectives, refine their focus, or adjust planned actions. Action Research for Inclusion is less about following a process correctly and more about entering into a cycle of enquiry that deepens and broadens participation, belonging, achievement and wellbeing.

The overview presented in the following sections should therefore be viewed as a guide rather than a prescription. Its purpose is to support practitioners in organising enquiry, action, and reflection systematically while remaining responsive to the learners, contexts, and situations they are exploring.

Table 1 – Action Research for Inclusion cycle

Action Research Cycle 1	**Getting started**	**Step 1:** Identify an area of inclusive practice you would like to better understand
		Step 2: Familiarise yourself with the Ethical Considerations Checklist and the Quick Ethics Checklist
	Study 1	**Step 3:** Explore relevant literature and professional learning
	Plan 1	**First Plan**
		Step 4: Start the process of refining the close-to-practice project
		Step 5: Decide what action to take
		Step 6: Review the Ethical Considerations Checklist and the Quick Ethics Checklist
	Do 1	**Step 7:** Implement the planned action
	Review & Interpret 1	**Step 8:** *Review* the information gathered from the actions taken in AR1
		Step 9: *Interpret* the information gathered from the actions taken and consider next steps
Action Research Cycle 2	**Study 2**	**Step 10:** Explore further relevant literature and professional learning if required
	Plan 2	**Second Plan**
		Step 11: Based on the 'review and interpret' steps, refine the project
		Step 12: Decide what action to take
		Step 13: Review the *Ethical Considerations Checklist and the Quick Ethics Checklist*
	Do 2	**Step 14:** Implement the second planned actions
	Review & Interpret 2	**Step 15:** *Review* the information gathered from the actions taken in AR2
		Step 16: *Interpret* the information gathered from the actions taken and consider next steps

The following sections provide further guidance on each stage of the Action Research cycle outlined in Table 1.

Action Research Cycle 1: Steps 1-9

Getting started

Step 1: Identify an area of inclusive practice you would like to better understand

The first step in any Action Research project is to identify an area of practice that would benefit from closer attention. This may be a challenge, an opportunity, a question, or an aspect of provision that you would like to better understand. The focus should be sufficiently important to warrant investigation and sufficiently specific to enable meaningful enquiry.

Having identified a focus, it can be helpful to express it as a research question. This does not need to be a highly technical or academic question. Rather, it provides a way of clarifying what you are hoping to understand, explore or improve.

The following examples illustrate how an initial area of interest can be translated into a more focused enquiry question.

Table 2 – Area for research focus and related research question

Area for development, issue, or opportunity	Action Research for Inclusion question
Few learners with additional needs are participating in extracurricular activities.	What barriers are limiting participation in extracurricular activities for learners with additional needs?
Teachers are developing adaptive teaching approaches, but practice varies across the setting.	What does effective adaptive teaching look like across our setting?
Parents and carers attend meetings, but school leaders would like to develop stronger partnerships.	How do parents and carers currently experience partnership working within our setting?
Thinking Moves seems interesting, but the SENCO wonders whether it would be beneficial to introduce.	What can we learn about Thinking Moves, and how might the approach support learning and inclusion within our setting?

Having developed an initial research question, it is helpful to keep it under continual review as the project develops. As practitioners engage with research literature, gather information and reflect on their emerging understanding, it is common for questions to be refined, narrowed or reshaped. This should not be viewed as a weakness. Rather, it often indicates that the enquiry is contributing to a deeper understanding of the issue being explored.

Some projects remain closely aligned to their original question throughout. Others evolve considerably as new perspectives, information and experiences are encountered. The purpose of Action Research is not to defend an initial question, but to develop understanding.

Step 2: Familiarise yourself with the Ethical Considerations Checklist and the Quick Ethics Checklist

Before beginning an Action Research project, take time to review the *Ethical Considerations* and the *Quick Ethics Check - see 'Chapter 3: Before you Begin – Ethics'*. These tools are designed to support ethical project development by encouraging practitioners to think carefully about issues such as workload, inclusion, participation, professional boundaries and the potential impact on learners.

At this stage, the aim is not to complete the documents, but to identify any ethical issues that may need further thought before the project begins.

Study 1

Step 3: Explore relevant literature and professional learning

Having identified an area of inclusive practice that would benefit from closer attention, the next step is to explore what others have already written, researched, discussed or reflected upon in relation to the topic.

The purpose of this stage is not to find a solution that can simply be lifted from one context and applied directly to another. Rather, it broadens understanding, introduces alternative perspectives, and helps practitioners think differently about the issue being explored.

At this stage of the process, research literature and professional learning can be particularly valuable because they help practitioners move beyond their initial thinking and experiences. They may:

- confirm aspects of current thinking;
- introduce new perspectives;
- highlight barriers or opportunities that had not previously been considered;
- suggest alternative approaches;
- identify questions that warrant further exploration.

For many practitioners, engagement with research and professional learning is one of the ways that understanding becomes broader and deeper. Literature, case studies, professional discussions and other forms of professional learning can all support this process by helping practitioners see an issue through a different lens.

When reviewing literature and other sources of professional learning, practitioners may find it helpful to consider:

- Which ideas resonate with existing experience and understanding?
- Which ideas challenge current thinking?
- What have others learned about this issue?
- What barriers or opportunities do they identify?
- What questions might this raise within the setting?

Finding and Accessing Research

Once a topic has been identified, there are several ways to locate relevant research and professional literature.

Google Scholar: By entering keywords or phrases related to the area of interest, practitioners can locate academic articles, books, conference papers, research reports, and doctoral theses from a wide range of sources.

ResearchGate: In addition to helping practitioners discover relevant publications, it enables them to follow researchers working in particular fields. Where an article is not freely available, authors can often be contacted directly through ResearchGate and may be willing to share a copy of their work.

Memberships:

- Core membership of the **Chartered College of Teaching** provides access to a large database of education journals and to the Chartered College of Teaching journal Impact.
- **nasen** publishes three inclusion and SEND-focused journals: *Support for Learning, Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs (JORSEN) and the British Journal of Special Education*. These can be accessed through the nasen journals hub hosted by Wiley, or via the nasen app available on Apple and Android devices: **https://nasenjournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/**

Many inclusion and education journals are published through **Wiley Online Library** and **Taylor & Francis Online**, both of which provide searchable databases. By entering key search terms, practitioners can search across multiple journals simultaneously and identify relevant Open Access content.

Open Access content is freely available online and can be read without a subscription, journal membership or university login. Most academic journals publish a mixture of Open Access and subscription-only articles, meaning that at least some content is available without cost. Open Access articles are usually identified by an open padlock symbol (🔓). Some journals are fully Open Access, meaning all their content is available without subscription. **Frontiers in Education** is a good example of a reputable, fully Open Access journal.

When searching for literature, it can be helpful to:

- begin with a broad search using a small number of key terms;
- note recurring concepts, authors and references;
- review the reference lists of useful articles;
- follow up sources that appear particularly relevant;
- remain open to ideas that confirm, extend or challenge existing thinking.

The aim is not to read everything that has ever been written about a topic. Rather, it is to broaden understanding, encounter different perspectives and develop a stronger foundation for the next stage of the enquiry.

In addition to academic research, practitioners can draw upon a wide range of other sources of professional learning. These include **professional organisations, blogs, podcasts, webinars, conferences, online CPD and examples of close-to-practice research**. Table 3 provides a selection of useful starting points for broadening understanding, deepening reflection and exploring different perspectives.

Table 3 – Study sources

International/ National Sources of Professional Learning	Examples
Academic Journals	nasen member journals → British Journal of Special Educational Needs → JORSEN → Support for Learning
	ISEND-specific journals → British Journal of Learning Disabilities → Disability and Society → European Journal of Inclusive Education → European Journal of Special Educational Needs → International Journal of Inclusive Education
	Educational research → British Education Research Journal (BERJ) → European Journal of Education → Frontiers in Education → Impact Journal – Chartered College of Teaching → Journal of Education for Teaching → Journal of Teacher Education
Research search tools	→ Google Scholar → ResearchGate
Key organisations that publish education research/ literature	Inclusion specific → Anna Freud – Research Library (mental health charity) → European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education → nasen - Resources → Research Schools Network → What Works in SEND - Resources → Whole School SEND – Resources and publications

Table 3 – Study sources continued

International/ National Sources of Professional Learning	Examples
Key organisations that publish education research/ literature	General → **Chartered College of Teaching - Publications** → **Council for Disabled Children: Resources** → **GOV.UK** - filter for education and SEND → **Education Endowment Foundation (EEF)**
Professional Development Resources	Blogs → **Education Endowment Foundation - Blog** → **Teacherhead** → **Whole School SEND - Blog**
	Online CPD → **Whole School SEND - Online CPD**
	Podcasts → **SENDcast** → **SEND in the Experts**
	Videos → **Research Schools Network - Clips from the classroom**
	Webinars → **Chartered College of Teaching - Events** → **nasen - Events** → **NDTi - Events**
Conferences	→ nasen Live → The BERA TEAN Conference → TES SEND Show (North) → TES SEND Show (South)

Table 3 – Study sources continued

International/ National Sources of Professional Learning	Examples
Close-to-Practice Research	**Inclusion specific** → **Inclusive Practice Hub** **General** → **Camtree digital library**
Other	**Books** Professional books related to inclusion, SEND, educational research, teaching and learning, leadership, coaching and practitioner enquiry.
	YouTube Videos Practitioners may find recorded presentations, webinars or conference sessions by researchers, academics, professional organisations or the developers of particular approaches helpful when exploring an area of practice. *Additional professional judgement is required when engaging with this type of source.*

Local Sources of Professional Learning

Professional learning can also be found much closer to home. Valuable opportunities to learn from others may be found through:

- local authority networks;
- Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) events;
- professional conferences;
- inclusion and SEND networks;
- communities of practice.

These local and regional conversations can be particularly valuable because they enable practitioners to discuss how ideas are being interpreted and adapted within contexts that may be more immediately relevant to their own.

The aim of Step 2 is therefore not to become an expert on a topic. Rather, it is to begin developing a broader and deeper understanding that can inform the next stage of the process – refining the focus of the enquiry.

Plan 1

Step 4: Start the process of refining the close-to-practice project

Having engaged with some form of professional learning, practitioners are often in a stronger position to think more deeply about their original area of interest. New perspectives may have been encountered, initial thinking may have been challenged, and alternative ways of understanding the issue may have emerged.

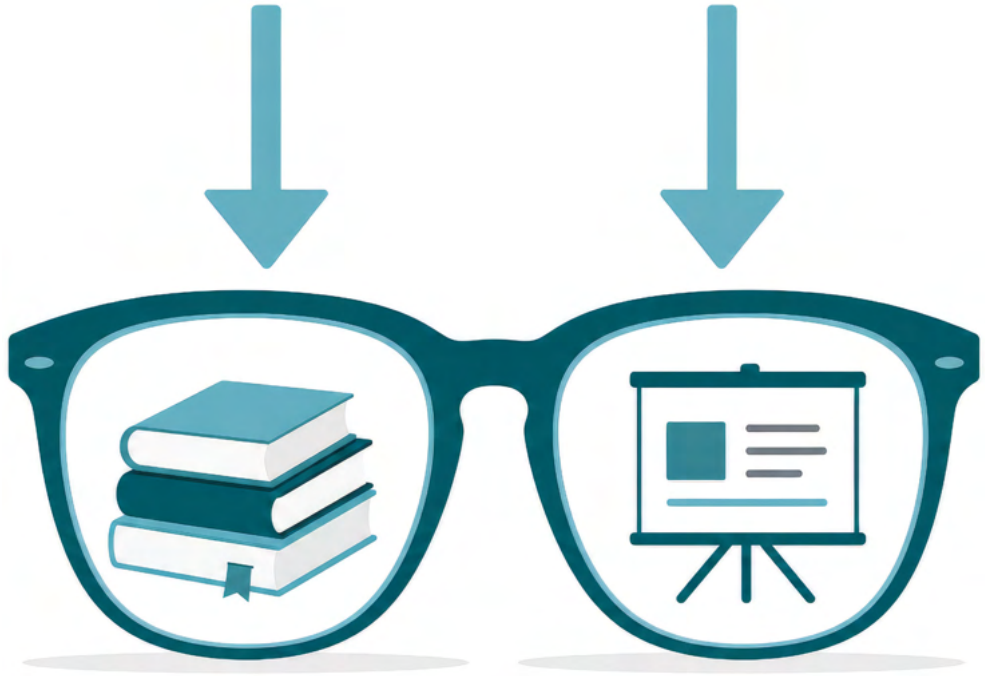
At this stage, it can be helpful to **revisit the original research question** and consider what has been learned through the study process. Sometimes engagement with professional learning confirms existing thinking. At other times, it reshapes understanding, highlights previously overlooked barriers, or raises new questions that warrant further exploration.

Reviewing and amending a research question should not be viewed as a weakness. Rather, it often indicates that the enquiry is contributing to a deeper understanding of the issue being explored.

One useful way of thinking about this process is to view the original focus through the lens of professional learning. Rather than asking whether an idea is right or wrong, practitioners are encouraged to consider **how their understanding has developed through engagement with different perspectives and sources of knowledge**.

Figure 1 – Viewing an area of interest through the lens of literature and professional learning

View your research focus through the lens of the research literature and your professional learning



Does the professional learning:

- provide a new way of understanding the enquiry focus?
- confirm what you were thinking?
- reshape what you were thinking?

Step 5: Decide what action to take

Having reviewed the focus of the enquiry, the next step is to decide what form of action is most appropriate.

As discussed in 'Chapter 2: Taking Action Through Enquiry', **page 21** there are two broad approaches:

> **Gathering Information as Action** - Sometimes the most appropriate action is to develop a deeper understanding before introducing a change. In these situations, the action centres on gathering information through activities such as observation, learner voice, family engagement, gathering colleagues' views, exploration of existing data, etc.
>
> **Direct Action** - At other times, practitioners may feel ready to introduce a change in practice. Here, the action takes the form of an intervention, with enquiry being used to understand and evaluate its impact.

Neither approach should be viewed as inherently better than the other, and in practice, effective enquiry often involves moving back and forth between the two.

Whichever approach is selected, it is helpful to consider what information will be needed to support the close-to-practice enquiry and how that information might be gathered.

Methods for supporting close-to-practice enquiries

There is no single correct close-to-practice method(s), the most appropriate approach will depend upon the focus of the enquiry, the nature of the information required, and the context in which the project is taking place.

The following section provides an overview of some common approaches that practitioners regularly use to gather information and deepen understanding as part of a close-to-practice enquiry. Many of these activities will already be familiar: observing practice, listening to learners and families, reviewing information, asking questions and discussing ideas with colleagues are all part of everyday professional life. The challenge is not learning entirely new techniques, but selecting approaches that align well with the question being explored and using them more deliberately and systematically.

Observation

Observation provides an opportunity to gaze for longer at an issue, situation or aspect of practice before reaching conclusions. Rather than immediately judging what is happening, observation encourages practitioners to notice, describe and document what they see.

The focus of an observation should be shaped by the enquiry question. For example, a practitioner interested in participation may observe how learners engage during group work, whilst a practitioner interested in learner independence may focus on the types of support learners seek during a lesson.

Observations may be:

- **Participatory**, where the practitioner is actively involved whilst observing.
- **Non-participatory**, where the practitioner adopts a more detached observer role.

Within schools and colleges, observations may form part of learning walks, deep dives, lesson visits or more focused enquiries.

Practitioners do not always need to design observation schedules or data collection tools from scratch. Many organisations have already developed high-quality frameworks, audit tools and observation schedules that can be used or adapted for a close-to-practice enquiry. For example, practitioners exploring social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) or wellbeing may find resources such as the Anna Freud toolkit **Measuring and Monitoring Children and Young People's Mental Wellbeing** helpful when considering appropriate ways to structure observation and data collection. Existing tools can often save time, provide greater consistency and help practitioners focus more clearly on the questions they are exploring.

The purpose of observation is not simply to collect information, but to develop a richer understanding of practice and the factors that may be influencing it

Journal

A journal provides a space in which practitioners can record observations, reflections, questions and emerging ideas.

Journals can be particularly valuable because they create a record of how understanding develops over time. Initial thoughts, tentative explanations and emerging questions can be revisited later in the enquiry and viewed in light of new learning.

Some practitioners prefer a written journal, whilst others use audio notes, digital notebooks or structured templates, even a few Post-it notes can be useful.

Interviews

Interviews are especially useful when the purpose of the enquiry is to understand an individual's perspective, experience or interpretation of a situation. They can be used to gather the **perspectives of learners, parents and carers, staff, Teaching Assistants, leaders and external professionals.**

Interviews can be particularly valuable in inclusive practice because they provide opportunities to hear directly from those who experience provision in different ways. In many cases, interviews allow practitioners to move beyond initial thinking and develop a deeper understanding of how inclusion is experienced by others.

Interviews can be:

- **Structured** – using a fixed sequence of questions.
- **Semi-structured** – using planned questions whilst allowing flexibility.
- **Unstructured** – guided by a broad topic rather than predetermined questions.

Semi-structured interviews are often particularly useful because they provide enough structure to maintain focus whilst allowing interesting ideas to be explored in greater depth.

When planning questions for a structured or semi-structured interview, it is helpful to consider both the number of questions and the way they are phrased. Depending on the purpose of the enquiry, practitioners may choose to ask:

1. A number of specific questions designed to elicit relatively focused and concise responses.
2. A smaller number of broader questions that encourage reflection; for example:
    - What is currently working well?
    - What is proving more challenging?
    - What changes would be helpful moving forward?
    - Is there anything else that should be considered?
3. A combination of both approaches.

One of the strengths of interviews is the opportunity to explore ideas in greater depth. If an interviewee says something interesting but brief, a follow-up prompt such as:

"I was particularly interested when you mentioned XXXX. Could you tell me a bit more about that?"

can often generate valuable additional insights.

Unstructured interviews may also form part of wider activities such as learning walks, deep dives, pupil voice activities or conversations with families.

Focus groups

Focus groups are similar to interviews but involve discussion with several participants at the same time.

As with interviews, focus groups may be **structured, semi-structured or unstructured**.

They can be particularly useful when exploring shared experiences, generating ideas, comparing perspectives, or understanding how different people respond to a common issue. Unlike individual interviews, focus groups enable participants to respond to one another's comments, build upon ideas and introduce perspectives that may not have emerged through individual conversations.

The facilitator's role is particularly important. At the beginning of a focus group, it can help to emphasise that there are no right or wrong answers and that different perspectives are welcome. Participants may wish to:

- share their own views and experiences;
- agree with and add to another person's point;
- offer a different perspective;
- respectfully challenge an assumption;
- introduce a new idea for consideration.

When using focus groups, practitioners should be mindful of group dynamics. Some participants may be confident and willing to contribute, whilst others may prefer to listen or contribute less frequently. Silence should not automatically be interpreted as agreement, and facilitators may need to create opportunities for quieter voices to be heard.

Focus groups do not always need to take the form of a traditional discussion. Facilitators may choose to use activities that encourage participation and give individuals time to develop their thinking before speaking. For example, participants might be asked to write responses to a question, a reading, a video or a professional learning session on sticky notes. One participant could then begin by sharing their response, with subsequent participants invited to identify points of connection, difference or extension. Once a topic has been explored, the group can move on to a new question. Approaches such as these can help ensure that a wider range of voices are heard and can reduce the likelihood of a small number of individuals dominating the discussion.

Questionnaires and surveys

Questionnaires and surveys can be useful when a practitioner wishes to gather perspectives from a larger number of people. Like interviews and focus groups, questionnaires present participants with a series of questions or statements designed to explore a particular issue.

Questionnaires can include:

- closed questions, such as Yes/No responses or rating scales;
- open questions, which invite participants to provide more detailed responses;
- a combination of both.

Some questionnaires also make use of branching questions, where participants are directed to different questions depending on their responses. This can help practitioners tailor the questionnaire to different groups and gather more relevant information.

When designing a questionnaire, it is important to think carefully about the purpose of each question. Some questions may be designed to gather straightforward information, whilst others may encourage participants to reflect upon their experiences, perspectives or suggestions.

Questionnaires can be particularly useful for identifying patterns, trends and areas that may warrant further exploration through methods such as interviews or focus groups.

However, it is worth exercising some caution before deciding to create a new questionnaire. Designing a good questionnaire can take considerable time and effort, yet practitioners often receive relatively few responses.

Before creating a new questionnaire, it may be helpful to consider:

- whether similar information has already been gathered elsewhere within the setting;
- whether an existing survey or questionnaire could be adapted;
- whether a publicly available questionnaire already exists or could be adapted;

As with all forms of close-to-practice enquiry, the aim is not to gather as much data as possible, but to gather information that contributes meaningfully to understanding the issue being explored.

Tools such as Microsoft Forms can be used to create questionnaires and surveys to gather views from learners, families, colleagues and other stakeholders.

Analysis of existing data

Many enquiries can begin with information that already exists within a setting. Before gathering new information, it is often worth considering what is already known and what current data may be able to reveal. Existing information can help practitioners identify patterns, raise questions, challenge initial thinking and develop a clearer understanding of an issue before deciding what further information may be needed.

Examples might include:

- attendance information;
- behaviour records;
- participation data;
- attainment or progress information;
- parental/carer engagement information;
- staff development records;
- information relating to additional needs provision.

Sometimes reviewing data confirms an initial line of enquiry; at other times, it reveals that the issue may be different from first assumed or helps practitioners identify a more productive focus for enquiry.

Existing data can therefore provide a valuable starting point, helping practitioners build upon what is already known before deciding what additional information needs to be gathered.

Review of existing materials

Useful information can often be found within documents and materials that already exist within a setting. These resources provide a valuable source of evidence because they offer insights into the priorities, processes and practices that shape day-to-day experiences within a setting. Examples include:

- policies;
- SEND information reports;
- curriculum plans;
- learner profiles;
- provision maps;
- annual review paperwork;
- CPD materials;
- intervention resources;
- guidance documents.

Reviewing existing materials can help practitioners develop a richer understanding of how an issue is currently being approached within a setting. In some cases, a document review may simply be used to gather background information about a topic. In others, it may help identify strengths, reveal gaps, or highlight areas that warrant further exploration.

Sometimes practitioners may choose to compare documents to explore how consistently an idea is represented across a setting. For example, an enquiry focused on adaptive teaching might involve reviewing relevant policies, curriculum plans, assessment approaches, and learner profiles.

Using more than one method

The methods described above are not mutually exclusive and are often most powerful when used in combination. A practitioner interested in adaptive teaching, for example, might begin in **Action Research Cycle 1** by exploring learners' experiences of classroom learning. The perspectives gathered from learners may then lead, in **Action Research Cycle 2**, to a review of curriculum plans and pupil passports.

Early findings often raise new questions, highlight areas needing closer attention, or reveal perspectives not previously considered. Rather than collecting all information at the outset, understanding develops progressively through a process of enquiry, reflection and action.

The approaches introduced in this section are explored in greater depth in '*Chapter 6: Including Children and Parent/Carer Perspectives*', which considers learner voice, family voice and other ways of developing a richer understanding of inclusion in practice.

Do I need a control group?

A control group can seem like an attractive way to show whether an approach is effective. However, control groups are not appropriate or necessary within close-to-practice enquiry.

Ethical considerations

Practitioners may wish to consider whether it is appropriate to provide a potentially beneficial approach to one group of learners whilst deliberately withholding it from another. This is particularly important where the approach is intended to support inclusion, participation or learning.

Scale

Formal experimental studies that use control groups typically involve large participant groups and sophisticated statistical methods. Most close-to-practice enquiries operate on a much smaller scale and are designed to develop understanding within a particular context rather than establish universal cause-and-effect relationships.

Complexity

Educational settings are complex environments in which many factors influence outcomes. Learners differ in their experiences, strengths, needs, relationships and circumstances, making it difficult to create truly comparable groups. Even when differences in outcomes are observed, it can be difficult to determine whether these are the result of an intervention or other factors operating at the same time.

For these reasons, practitioners are better served by focusing on rich sources of evidence such as observations, learner voice, family perspectives, work samples, practitioner reflections and other forms of information that help explain how an approach is experienced and why it may be helpful. In many cases, these sources provide more meaningful insights for developing practice than attempting to create a control group.

The purpose of close-to-practice enquiry is not to prove that an intervention works in all contexts. Rather, it is to develop a thoughtful understanding of what appears to be happening within a specific setting, why it may be happening, and what can be learned from it.

Step 6: Review the Ethical Considerations Checklist and the Quick Ethics Checklist

Before implementing the planned action, revisit the *Ethical Considerations and the Quick Ethics Check* – see *'Chapter 3: Before You Begin – Ethics'*. This provides an opportunity to confirm that the proposed activities remain manageable, fair and appropriate, and that any new developments have been considered before proceeding.

Do 1

Step 7: Implement the planned action

Having completed the Study and Plan stages, and having considered any relevant ethical issues, practitioners are now ready to implement their planned action, be that gathering information or direct action.

At this stage, it can be helpful to keep a record of what is happening. This might include:

- notes from observations;
- reflections recorded in a research journal;
- examples of learner work;
- interview notes or transcripts;
- photographs;
- survey responses;
- copies of relevant documents;
- meeting notes
- etc.

The purpose is not to gather as much information as possible, but to capture information that will help answer the research question and support later reflection.

Where discussions are taking place through interviews, conversations or focus groups, it can be useful to keep a record of what has been said. Practitioners may choose to take notes during the discussion or, where appropriate permissions have been obtained, make an audio recording which can be reviewed later. A growing number of practitioners now make use of tools such as Microsoft Word, Microsoft Teams, OneNote, Copilot and other transcription services to convert audio recordings into text and support the organisation of information.

As the action is implemented, it is often helpful to remain open to surprises. New questions may emerge, initial thinking may be challenged, and aspects of the issue may become more visible than before. These emerging insights form an important part of the learning that will be explored during the Review stages.

Review & interpret 1

Step 8: Review the information gathered from the actions taken in AR1

Having implemented the planned action, the next stage is to review what has been learned. The purpose of this stage is not to rush towards conclusions, but to spend time becoming familiar with the information gathered.

Depending upon the nature of the enquiry, practitioners may choose to review information as it is being gathered or wait until the first phase of information gathering is complete. In either case, it is often helpful to metaphorically step back from the information and re-engage with it as a whole before considering what it might mean.

The length of time required for this process will vary according to the amount of information gathered and the extent to which it has already been reviewed during the enquiry. For example, this may be the first opportunity a practitioner has had to sit down and review a collection of interview notes, learner voice activities, observations or questionnaire responses together.

Review Individually or Collaboratively

There is no single correct way to review information. Some practitioners prefer to work through information independently, making notes about emerging ideas, patterns and questions before discussing these with others. Others find that reviewing information collaboratively helps them notice connections, perspectives and interpretations that they may not have identified on their own.

Collaborative review can be particularly valuable because different people often notice different things within the same information. One person may identify a recurring theme, whilst another notices an exception, an unexpected perspective, or an important absence.

What is significant?

As the information is reviewed, begin making notes about anything that seems significant, interesting or unexpected.

For example, practitioners may notice:

- comments, experiences or ideas that appear repeatedly;
- patterns emerging across different sources of information;
- differences in perspective between groups of participants;
- similarities between what was found and what was expected;
- findings that challenge initial thinking;
- examples that appear unusual or unexpected;
- topics that participants discuss frequently;
- topics or issues that are noticeably absent;
- connections with the literature and professional learning explored during the Study phase.

At this stage, it is often helpful to **resist the temptation to explain findings immediately. Instead, focus on what is being noticed**. In research texts, this process is often referred to as coding, but in simple terms it involves identifying the main things that came out of the data, including any themes, patterns and key points that appear significant.

Step 9: Interpret the information gathered from the actions taken and consider next steps

Having reviewed the information gathered during the first cycle of enquiry, the next step is to consider what it might mean and, more specifically, **what is this information telling practitioners about the research question?**

Practitioners can undertake this process individually or collaboratively. Some practitioners prefer to interpret findings independently, whilst others choose to share the outcomes of the Review phase with colleagues and discuss possible meanings together. Whether undertaken individually or collaboratively, the aim is to move beyond reviewing the information gathered and begin developing a deeper understanding of what it may be communicating about the issue being explored.

What can and can't the information tell practitioners?

As practitioners begin interpreting information, they should consider both what it can tell them and what it cannot.

Educational settings are complex environments in which many factors operate simultaneously. For this reason, practitioners should be cautious about making strong claims that a particular action directly caused a particular outcome.

For example, a practitioner may notice that attainment improved after the introduction of a new approach. Whilst this may suggest that the approach was beneficial, it is difficult to know whether the improvement resulted entirely from that change, from other factors occurring at the same time, or from a combination of influences. Claims of direct cause and effect can sometimes reduce the credibility of a project's findings.

In many close-to-practice enquiries, some of the most valuable information comes from observations, learner voice, family perspectives and practitioner reflections. These forms of evidence can provide rich insights into how and why an approach appears to be helpful, how it is experienced by learners, and which aspects seem most significant. Such findings are often more useful for developing practice than attempting to 'prove' that a single intervention alone 'caused' a particular outcome.

The purpose of interpretation is therefore not simply to identify change, but to develop a thoughtful and credible understanding of what may be contributing to that change and what can be learned from it.

Moving towards a second cycle and next steps

Interpretation often raises as many questions as it answers. As practitioners develop a deeper understanding of an issue, they may identify new avenues for enquiry, previously unnoticed barriers, unexpected strengths, or possibilities for further action.

At this stage, it can be helpful to ask:

- What do we now understand that we did not understand at the beginning of the enquiry?
- Which initial thoughts have been confirmed, challenged or refined?
- Are there questions that still need answering?
- What additional information, perspectives or expertise might be helpful?
- What should happen next?

The answers to these questions will help shape the second Action Research cycle. For some practitioners, the next step may involve introducing or adapting an action. For others, it may involve revisiting the literature, gathering additional learner, family or staff perspectives, exploring an unexpected finding in greater depth, or refining the research question itself.

In this way, the end of the first Action Research cycle often becomes the starting point for the second. Rather than viewing interpretation as a conclusion, it is often more helpful to view it as a point of transition, where developing understanding informs the next phase of enquiry and action.

Action Research Cycle 2: Steps 10-16

Having completed Action Research Cycle 1, practitioners are now better positioned to build on what they have learned. By this point, a richer understanding of the project's theme will have developed, initial thoughts may have been reconsidered, and new possibilities for action or further enquiry may have emerged.

The second cycle should therefore not be viewed as a repetition of the first. Rather, it provides an opportunity to refine, deepen and extend understanding. In many cases, the second cycle is a more focused and informed version of the first cycle, shaped by the learning that has already taken place. Some projects will continue along the trajectory originally anticipated. Others, however, may take a different direction as understanding develops. This should not be viewed as a weakness or a sign that the first cycle was unsuccessful. Rather, it often indicates that the enquiry has helped practitioners see the issue more clearly. For example, a project may begin with a focus on supporting a small number of learners with additional needs, only for the first cycle to reveal that the approach could benefit a much wider group of children and young people. In such circumstances, what began as a targeted enquiry may evolve into a focus on universal provision and whole-setting practice. Similarly, there may have been an initial expectation that parents/carers were feeling unsupported, but the first cycle may reveal that they are largely satisfied with existing support. Rather than representing a dead end, this finding may redirect the enquiry towards a more productive question involving partnership, participation or communication.

Study 2

Step 10: Explore further relevant literature and professional learning if required

In some projects, the enquiry continues broadly along the same trajectory and the professional learning already explored remains highly relevant. In these circumstances, there may be little need to undertake further study.

In other projects, however, new questions, unexpected findings or shifts in direction emerge through the Review and Interpret stages. Where this occurs, additional literature, case studies, resources or professional learning may help deepen understanding of the developing focus and inform the next stage of the enquiry.

The purpose of Study 2 is to check that the second cycle is informed by the most relevant knowledge and perspectives available in light of what has been learned so far.

Plan 2

Step 11: Based on the 'review and interpret' steps, refine the project

Use the learning from the first cycle to refine the direction of the project. This may involve:

- continuing with the same research question;
- refining the research question;
- exploring a newly emerging question;
- focusing more specifically on a particular aspect of the issue
- reshaping the direction of the enquiry in light of new understanding.

Unexpected findings are often amongst the most valuable outcomes of Action Research Cycle 1 and may provide a productive focus for the second cycle.

Step 12: Decide what action to take

Based on what has been learned through Action Research Cycle 1, decide on the most appropriate next action or actions. This may involve gathering further information, introducing a new action or intervention, adapting an existing approach, or exploring a particular aspect of the issue in greater depth.

There is no single 'correct' trajectory for Action Research. For example, projects that involved direct action in the first cycle do not necessarily need to move to gathering information as action in the second. Equally, projects that focused on gathering information in the first cycle may continue to do so if further understanding is required. Whilst many practitioners choose to move from one form of action to the other between Action Research Cycles 1 and 2, this is by no means a requirement. The most appropriate next step will depend upon what has been learned so far and what practitioners feel they still need to understand.

The purpose of the second cycle is therefore not to follow a predetermined sequence of activities, but to ensure that future actions are informed by the developing understanding generated through the first cycle of enquiry.

Practitioners may find it helpful to revisit the approaches to gathering information outlined in *'Step 5: Decide what action to take'* ***(page 52)***, i.e., observation, interviews, etc.

Step 13: Review the Ethical Considerations Checklist and the Quick Ethics Checklist

It is a good idea at this stage to read back over the Ethical Considerations Checklist and the Quick Ethics Checklist – see 'Chapter 3: Before You Begin – Ethics'. Changes to the project focus, methods or participants may require additional considerations, permissions, communication or consent.

Do 2

Step 14: Implement the second planned action(s).

Having refined the project and agreed the next actions, implement the second cycle of enquiry.

Practitioners may find it helpful to revisit the guidance provided in 'Step 7: Implement the planned action' ***(page 60)***.

Review & interpret 2

Step 15: Review the information gathered from the actions taken in AR2

Review the information gathered and reflect on what has been learned.

Practitioners may find it helpful to revisit the guidance provided in *'Step 8: Review the information gathered from the actions taken in AR1'* ***(page 61)***.

Step 16: Interpret the information gathered from the actions taken and consider next steps

Interpret the information gathered and consider what it might be communicating about the issue being explored.

Practitioners may find it helpful to revisit the guidance provided in *'Step 9: Interpret the information gathered from the actions taken and consider next steps'* ***(page 62)***.

For some projects, this second cycle will generate sufficient understanding for the practitioner to move towards sharing and disseminating their learning. For others, a third cycle of enquiry may help deepen understanding, build on promising findings, or extend an approach beyond its original scope. Action Research is therefore best viewed not as a fixed sequence with a predetermined end point, but as a cyclical process through which understanding and practice continue to develop over time.

Whether practitioners choose to conclude their enquiry at this stage or continue into a further Action Research cycle, the learning generated has the potential to inform both local practice and wider professional understanding. *'Chapter 8: Sharing Practitioner Learning'* explores ways of capturing, sharing, and disseminating this learning.

Key takeaway points

Action Research for Inclusion

- **Action Research for Inclusion** uses cycles of enquiry, action, reflection and review, recognising that developing inclusive practice is an ongoing process rather than a destination.

Action Research Cycle 1: Study → Plan → Do → Review

- The first cycle establishes the focus of the enquiry, broadens understanding through professional learning, and generates insights that inform the ongoing process of developing inclusive practice.

Action Research Cycle 2: Study → Plan → Do → Review

- The second cycle builds on learning from the first cycle, recognising that inclusive practice is continually refined through deeper understanding, reflection and action.

Chapter 5:
Lesson Study

Introduction to Lesson Study

Lesson Study is an established form of close-to-practice enquiry that originated in Japan and focuses on improving teaching and learning through collaborative professional enquiry. Like Action Research, it provides a structured framework for practitioners to investigate questions emerging from their own classrooms and settings. Because Lesson Study is fundamentally focused on teaching, learning and pedagogy, the core Lesson Study team is typically made up of qualified teachers. External professionals may contribute specialist knowledge where appropriate, but the enquiry remains rooted in classroom practice.

In *'Chapter 2: Taking Action Through Enquiry'* ***(page 18)*** reflective practice was described as the process of moving beyond routine action towards more thoughtful and informed decision-making. Lesson Study supports this process by creating opportunities for practitioners to jointly investigate questions that emerge from their own classrooms and settings. It therefore represents another form of close-to-practice research, grounded in everyday professional concerns and focused on developing a deeper understanding of teaching and learning.

Within a Lesson Study cycle, practitioners work collaboratively through a sequence of preparation, planning, teaching and evaluation activities focused on understanding learning through the experiences of case study pupil(s).

The focus is not the teacher's performance in delivering the lesson, but the learning experiences of the case study pupil(s) and what these can teach the Lesson Study team about effective practice.

Lesson Study has particular relevance for inclusion because it enables practitioners to explore learning in considerable depth through the experiences of specific learners. By focusing attention on one or two case study pupils, practitioners are often able to identify barriers to participation, investigate how teaching approaches are experienced, and develop a richer understanding of the adaptations that may support learning. Whilst the enquiry itself focuses on a small number of learners, the professional learning frequently extends beyond those individuals and informs wider classroom, departmental or whole-setting practice.

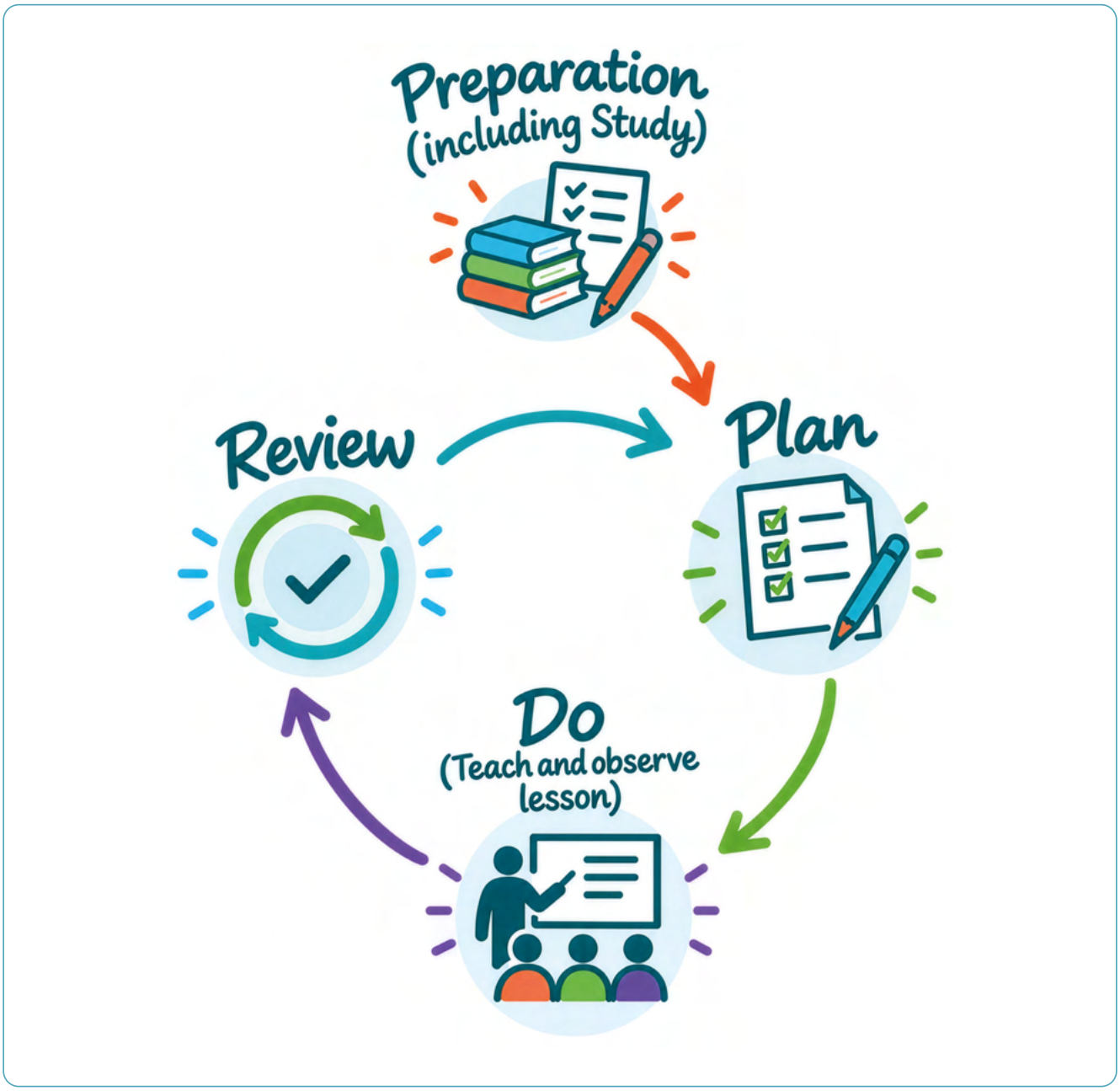
Importantly, Lesson Study is not about creating the perfect lesson. Nor is it a lesson observation process designed to judge teacher performance. Rather, it is a professional learning process that uses research lessons as a vehicle for developing knowledge and understanding about teaching, learning and inclusion. In many cases, the most significant learning occurs during the review-and-planning discussions that follow the lesson, where practitioners collectively interpret what they have observed and consider the implications for future practice.

The **University of Exeter Lesson Study for SEND** (Norwich, 2020) materials provide comprehensive guidance, templates and examples for practitioners wishing to undertake a Lesson Study project. The overview provided in this chapter is intended to complement rather than replace those resources.

Implementing Lesson Study

Lesson Study is typically implemented through a series of connected **Preparation (including study)** → **Plan** → **Do** → **Review** activities.

Figure 2 – Lesson Study: Preparation (including study) → Plan → Do → Review



The process consists of four broad phases:

- **Preparation (including study)** – identifying the pedagogic focus, selecting case study pupil(s), agreeing team roles, consulting relevant study and making practical arrangements.
- **Plan** – meeting as a team to plan a research lesson.
- **Do** (Teach and observe) – deliver the research lesson while observing the learning of the case study pupil(s).
- **Review** – reviewing what has been learned about the case study pupil(s') learning and considering the implications for future practice.

Typically, a **team of three teachers** work together to progress through a sequence of **three research lessons** and **four meetings:**

Meeting 1: The first meeting is primarily concerned with planning the initial research lesson.

Meeting 2 & 3: The middle two meetings usually combine review and planning, enabling the team to reflect on one lesson whilst preparing for the next.

Meeting 4: The final meeting focuses on reviewing and consolidating learning, as there is no subsequent lesson to plan.

Rather than being viewed as three separate lessons, the research lessons should be understood as a connected sequence. Through repeated cycles of *Plan* → *Do* → *Review*, the team develops a progressively richer understanding of the case study pupil(s), the barriers influencing participation and learning, and the adaptations to teaching that may be required to support inclusion.

Figure 3 – Lesson Study for Inclusion Cycle

<table>
<tr><td>Step 1:
Decide on case study pupil(s) and the pedagogic focus</td><td>Step 2:
Arrange who will be in the LS team; decide on roles and how the team will function</td><td>Step 3: Study
Decide on what knowledge base to inform the pedagogic focus*</td><td>Step 4:
Decide on the research questions relevant to the 2 case study pupil(s)</td><td>Step 5:
Decide on timeline and how this can be arranged</td></tr>
<tr><td>Step 6:
First review and planning meeting</td><td>Step 7:
Teach the first research Lesson and observe learning</td><td>Step 8:
Second review and planning meeting</td><td>Step 9:
Teach the second research Lesson and observe learning</td><td>Step 10:
Third review and planning meeting
AND
Teach the third research Lesson and observe learning</td></tr>
<tr><td>Step 11:
Final review, evaluation and communication of learning</td><td colspan="4">*If completing interprofessional Lesson Study, consider what knowledge the outside professional will bring to the Lesson Study process?
➜ Pink = Preparation and study
➜ Cream = Review and Planning meeting
➜ Blue = Do (teaching)
➜ Green = Review meeting</td></tr>
</table>

Lesson Study: Steps 1-11

Step 1: Decide on case study pupil(s) and the pedagogic focus

The starting point for Lesson Study is to identify both the **case study pupil(s)** and the **pedagogic focus** for the enquiry. Often, for practical reasons, these decisions are developed together rather than in isolation.

It is generally recommended to select two case study pupils, although a single case study pupil may also be selected where appropriate. The team then agrees the pedagogic focus through which their learning and experiences will be explored.

For example:

- a learner who finds the large, open environment of the Physical Education hall or school field overwhelming;
- a learner who finds the volume of text within literacy lessons hard to access;
- a learner who works well with a Teaching Assistant but has yet to engage in short periods of independent work.

Where two case study pupils are selected, they share the same curriculum or pedagogic focus, although the barriers influencing their participation and learning may differ.

For example, if the Lesson Study focus is **Physical Education**:

Case study pupil 1
Reason chosen: To better understand how the physical environment of the sports hall and playing field influences participation and engagement for a learner who finds large, open spaces overwhelming.

Case study pupil 2
Reason chosen: To better understand how teaching approaches, activities, equipment and learning environments can be adapted to support the participation of a learner who uses a wheelchair.

Whilst both learners share the same curriculum focus, in this example the factors influencing their participation and learning differ. Studying both learners enables the Lesson Study team to develop a richer understanding of the adaptations needed to support participation, engagement and learning within the curriculum area being explored.

Step 2: Arrange who will be in the Lesson Study team and decide how the team will function

Lesson Study is a collaborative form of professional enquiry and therefore requires teachers to work together throughout the process. At this stage, the team should agree which three teachers will participate in the Lesson Study.

Once the team has been established, teachers should discuss:

- who will teach the research lessons;
- who will observe Case Study Pupil 1 and who will observe Case Study Pupil 2 (if only one case study pupil is selected, both observers can focus on the same learner);
- how observations will be recorded;
- who will gather learner voice from the case study pupil(s) following each research lesson, typically the observer responsible for that pupil;
- who will facilitate the review-and-planning meetings; and
- how decisions, reflections and key learning points will be recorded.

In most Lesson Study models, team members remain in the same roles throughout the enquiry. Maintaining consistent teaching, observation and learner voice responsibilities helps support continuity and enables deeper understanding of the case study pupil(s) over time.

Where Lesson Study involves a fourth external professional, such as an Educational Psychologist, specialist teacher or therapist, the team should also agree how and when that individual will contribute to the process.

Step 3: Decide upon the knowledge base that will inform the pedagogic focus

As discussed in the *Study 1* phase of Action Research, close-to-practice enquiry is strengthened when practitioners explore what others have already written, researched, discussed or reflected upon in relation to an issue. Lesson Study adopts the same principle.

At this stage, the Lesson Study team considers what knowledge, evidence and professional learning may help inform the pedagogic focus. The purpose is not to find a solution that can simply be lifted from one context and applied directly to another. Rather, it is to broaden understanding, introduce alternative perspectives, and deepen thinking about the teaching approaches being explored.

Sources of knowledge might include:

- relevant research literature;
- curriculum guidance;
- professional guidance;
- practitioner resources;
- previous professional learning;
- knowledge and experience within the team;
- specialist advice from colleagues or external professionals.

The aim is not to conduct an extensive literature review, but to ensure that the Lesson Study is informed by more than existing experience alone. As with Action Research, engagement with research and professional learning may:

- confirm aspects of current thinking;
- introduce new perspectives;
- highlight barriers or opportunities not previously considered;
- suggest alternative teaching approaches;
- raise questions that warrant further exploration.

Where Lesson Study involves an external professional, such as an Educational Psychologist, specialist teacher or therapist, the team should also consider what additional knowledge and perspectives that individual may contribute to the enquiry.

By taking time to explore relevant knowledge before teaching begins, the Lesson Study team is better positioned to design research lessons that are informed by evidence, professional expertise and the learning needs of the case study pupils.

For a fuller discussion of approaches to Study, ***see page 44****.*

Step 4: Decide on the research questions relevant to the case study pupil(s)

The team identifies one or more research questions that will guide the enquiry. These questions focus attention on what the team wishes to understand about teaching and learning and help shape observation, evidence gathering and discussion throughout the Lesson Study process.

Research questions should be linked to the *case study pupil(s) and the pedagogic focus* selected by the team. They should be open enough to support enquiry and reflection, rather than simply confirming whether a particular strategy has been successful.

Example research question	What this research question is doing
Which strategies will support students' independence, reduce reliance on a Teaching Assistant and support the development of vocabulary, writing and spelling confidence?	This question is primarily focused on the outcomes the team wants to achieve for the pupil(s). The specific teaching approach has not yet been decided. Instead, the enquiry is concerned with improving independence, confidence and literacy outcomes. Through the Lesson Study process, the team can identify, try out, and refine promising approaches, adapting their practice in response to evidence gathered about the case study pupil(s') learning.
How do *dual-coding* transactional support resources improve students' persistence and metacognitive behaviours during a skill-based task?	In this example, the team has identified a pedagogical approach that may help remove a barrier to learning. However, the question is not simply asking whether dual coding 'works'. Instead, it focuses on the specific aspects of learning the team wishes to understand better, namely persistence and metacognitive behaviours during a skill-based task.
How can we encourage the use of *Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)* to support literacy development?	Here, the pedagogical approach has also been identified. The enquiry focuses on how AAC might support literacy development for a learner who was reluctant to use their communication system. The team's attention remains on the learner's engagement with communication and literacy, rather than on evaluating AAC as an intervention in isolation.

Step 5: Decide on the timeline and practical arrangements

Lesson Study requires time for preparation, planning, teaching, observation and review. At this stage, the team establishes a realistic timeline for the enquiry and agrees the practical arrangements needed to support participation.

The team should consider:

- when the three research lessons will take place;
- when the four review-and-planning meetings will be held;
- how sufficient time will be protected for observation and collaborative review;
- what arrangements are needed for class cover, if required;
- how evidence, including observation notes, photographs, video recordings and learner voice, will be captured;
- any ethical considerations associated with the project, including consent, confidentiality and the use of images or recordings (see *'Chapter 3: Before you Begin: Ethics'*); and
- what support is required from senior leaders to facilitate the process.

Support from senior leaders is often critical in creating the time and conditions needed for Lesson Study to be successful. The timeline should also allow sufficient time between research lessons for the team to review evidence, reflect on pupil learning and refine plans for the next lesson.

Step 6: First review and planning meeting

The initial review-and-planning meeting is used to design the first research lesson. Building on the work undertaken in Steps 1 to 5, the team draws together information about the case study pupil(s), the pedagogic focus, the knowledge base (study conducted) and the research questions in order to jointly plan the lesson and agree how evidence will be gathered.

The team should consider:

- **Learning outcomes:**
  - What is the intended learning outcome for the whole class;
  - What is the intended learning outcome for each case study pupil;
- **Removing barriers:** the teaching approaches, resources and adaptations to be used;
- **Anticipated response:** what each case study pupil is anticipated to say, do or demonstrate during the lesson;
- **Observation focus:** the observation focus for each observer; and
- **Learner voice:** how learner voice will be gathered following the lesson.

A key outcome of this meeting is a shared understanding of how each case study pupil is anticipated to respond during the research lesson. These anticipated responses provide a focus for observation and a reference point against which the team can compare what actually occurred, helping to deepen understanding of the learner and inform planning for the next research lesson.

Learner voice is also an important source of evidence within Lesson Study. Following each research lesson, observers typically conduct a brief interview with their allocated case study pupil.

The **University of Exeter Lesson Study for SEND** (Norwich, 2020) guidance suggests asking learners the following questions:

- What did you enjoy most about that lesson?
- What did you learn?
- What can you do now that you could not do before?
- What can you do to improve?
- What aspect of the teaching worked best for you?
- If the lesson was taught again, what would you change and why?

These questions should be adapted to meet the communication needs of the learner.

For a fuller discussion of gathering learner voice, see 'Chapter 6: Including Children and Parent/Carers', **page 82.**

Step 7: Teach the first research lesson and observe learning

The roles agreed during Step 2 now come into action. One member of the team teaches the research lesson whilst the remaining team members observe the learning of the case study pupil(s). The focus is not on evaluating the teacher, but on gathering evidence about the learning, participation and engagement of the case study pupil(s) in relation to the research question.

During the lesson, observers gather evidence relating to the case study pupil(s), guided by the plans developed during the review-and-planning meeting.

- **Observation focus:** Observations are guided by the anticipated responses and observation focuses established during Step 6. Observers pay particular attention to how the case study pupil(s) respond to the teaching approaches, resources and adaptations that have been planned.
- **Evidence gathering:** Where appropriate, the team may also gather additional evidence, such as examples of pupil(s') work, photographs or video recordings, in line with the ethical considerations discussed in *'Chapter 3: Before You Begin – Ethics'*.
- **Learner voice:** Following the lesson, observers gather learner voice from their allocated case study pupil(s).

Together, the observations, learner voice and any additional evidence collected form the basis of discussion during the next review-and-planning meeting.

Step 8: Second review and planning meeting

The second review-and-planning meeting focuses on reviewing the evidence gathered during the first research lesson and considering what has been learned about the case study pupil(s) in relation to the research question. The team uses this learning to refine the next research lesson.

- **Case study pupil(s) learning:** What were the case study pupil(s) able to do? What progress, participation or engagement was observed?

  Note:
  - Were there any challenges, barriers or unexpected responses during the lesson?
  - How did the observed responses compare with those anticipated during Step 6?
  - What insights were gained through learner voice?
  - What knowledge, research or professional expertise might help explain what was observed?

- **Refining the lesson:** What changes should be made to the intended learning outcomes, teaching approaches, resources or adaptations for the next research lesson?

A central feature of this meeting is comparing the anticipated responses identified during Step 6 with what was actually observed during the lesson. Differences between the two can often provide valuable insights into how the case study pupil(s) experience learning and help the team refine both their teaching and their understanding of the learners.

The meeting concludes with the team planning the next research lesson and agreeing any revised anticipated responses and observation focuses for the next cycle. **Team members will typically continue in the same roles throughout the Lesson Study process.**

Step 9: Teach the second research lesson and observe learning

The revised research lesson is taught, and the agreed observation and evidence-gathering processes are repeated. The purpose is to explore the impact of the refinements made following the second review-and-planning meeting and to further develop the team's understanding of the case study pupil(s), their learning and the teaching approaches being used.

As with the first research lesson:

- **Observation focus:** Observations are guided by the revised anticipated responses and observation focuses agreed during Step 8.
- **Evidence gathering:** Observers collect evidence relating to the learning, participation and engagement of the case study pupil(s).
- **Learner voice:** Observers gather learner voice from their allocated case study pupil(s) following the lesson.

The evidence gathered forms the basis of the next review-and-planning meeting.

Step 10: Third review and planning meeting AND third research lesson

The process follows the same approach described in Steps 8 and 9.

Step 11: Final review, evaluation and communication of learning

The final review meeting provides an opportunity for the team to look across the entire Lesson Study cycle and consider what has been learned about the case study pupil(s), teaching and inclusive practice more broadly. The focus is not simply on whether the research lessons were successful, but on how the team's understanding has developed through the enquiry process.

The team should consider:

- **Learning about the case study pupil(s):** What has been learned about the pupil(s') learning, participation, engagement, strengths, interests and barriers to learning? How might the findings be shared with other practitioners who work with the case study pupil(s)?
- **Learning about teaching:** What has been learned about the teaching approaches, resources, and adaptations that supported learning?
- **Learning beyond the research lesson:** How might this learning inform teaching for these pupil(s) in other lessons, subjects or contexts?
- **Learning for other pupils:** Are there aspects of the learning that may be relevant to other learners with similar needs?
- **Learning for universal provision:** Are there approaches that could strengthen everyday classroom practice and become part of universal provision?
- **Sharing learning:** How will the learning be communicated to colleagues, departments, leaders or the wider setting?

As the enquiry progresses from a focus on individual case study pupil(s) towards broader questions of teaching and inclusion, the team should consider how insights gained from the Lesson Study might support practice at classroom, departmental and whole-school level.

The meeting concludes with the team identifying the key learning points from the enquiry and agreeing how these will be shared and used to inform future practice.

Key takeaway points

Lesson Study for Inclusion

Lesson Study for Inclusion is a collaborative approach that seeks to enhance the learning experiences of one or two case study pupils whilst generating insights that can inform more inclusive approaches to teaching and learning for a broader range of children and young people.

Lesson Study 1: Preparation (including study) → Plan → Do → Review

- The first lesson study sequence establishes the pedagogic focus, develops understanding of the case study pupil(s), and generates initial insights into learning, participation and engagement of the focus case study pupil(s).

Lesson Study 2: Preparation (including study) → Plan → Do → Review

- The second lesson study sequence builds on learning from the first sequence, enabling the team to refine teaching approaches and deepen understanding of the case study pupil(s).

Lesson Study 3: Preparation (including study) → Plan → Do → Review

- The third lesson study sequence consolidates learning from the enquiry, refining understanding of inclusive teaching approaches and their implications for future practice.

Chapter 6: Including Children and Parent/Carer Perspectives

Gathering learner voice

As long-held views regarding children's entitlement to express their views have changed, so too have the legislation and practices that seek to ensure the voices and perspectives of children and young people with additional needs are heard, valued and taken into account.

Shaped by the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNICEF, 1989), children and young people are increasingly recognised as active participants in decisions that affect their education, support and wider lives. Article 12 establishes children's right to **express their views on matters that affect them**, whilst Article 13 recognises that those v**iews may be communicated through a range of different forms and media**. These principles have influenced current policy and practice in England (e.g., DfE and DoH, 2015), with more recent reforms placing increasing emphasis on participation and co-production with children and young people (e.g., DfE, 2026). Extending beyond educational decision-making, there is now an established expectation that children and young people will be involved, where appropriate, in research and enquiry that seeks to understand and improve their educational experiences.

For close-to-practice enquiry, this is particularly important because children and young people need to be recognised as informed experts in their own daily experiences. Their perspectives can illuminate unnoticed barriers, highlight overlooked strengths, and draw attention to priorities that may differ from those assumed by adults. As a result, learner voice can deepen understanding, challenge initial thinking, and reshape a project's direction. For examples of how close-to-practice researchers have drawn upon learner voice in their enquiries, see *'Chapter 7: Example of Past Projects'*.

The benefits also extend beyond the enquiry itself. Being listened to and having opportunities to share perspectives can support children and young people to develop a positive sense of self and recognise that their experiences and opinions matter. It can encourage them to see themselves as active participants in their own lives rather than passive recipients of decisions made by others. Opportunities to share views, solve problems, reflect on experiences and contribute to change can also support the development of independence, confidence, relationships and a growing sense of agency.

In turn, listening carefully to the perspectives of children and young people with additional needs encourages practitioners to see the individual rather than the label. Learner voice reminds adults that children and young people are not simply the subjects of research or recipients of provision. They are individuals with knowledge, experiences and insights that can make an important contribution to understanding and improving inclusive practice.

The approaches used to gather learner voice will vary depending on the age, communication preferences and needs of the children and young people involved. Whilst interviews and conversations can be highly effective, children and young people do not always find it easy to explain their experiences through direct questioning alone. Creative and task-based approaches can give learners time to think, offer different ways into the question, provide alternative means of communication, and support the expression of ideas, experiences and perspectives. They can be particularly useful for encouraging discussion, reflection, helping children and young people communicate ideas that can be difficult to express through direct questioning alone.

Rather than viewing learner voice as a single method, it may be more helpful to think of it as a family of approaches that create opportunities for children and young people to communicate their experiences, perspectives and priorities. Table 4 provides an overview of some of the main approaches available to practitioners.

Table 4 – Overview of approaches to gathering pupil voice

Approach	Examples
Verbal	Interviews, conversations, focus groups
Visual	Photographs, drawings, Blob Trees, Talking Mats
Experiential	Guided tours, observation, place-based activities
Symbolic	Rating scales, colour or texture feeling charts; objects of reference
Communication Supports	Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC), Picture Exchange Communication System, signs, symbols, eye pointing boards, communication devices

Methods for gathering children's and young people's perspectives

There is no single 'correct' method to gather the perspectives of children and young people. Different methods create different opportunities for participation and may be more or less appropriate depending on the purpose of the enquiry, the age of the child, and their communication strengths, preferences and needs. Table 5 outlines a range of commonly used approaches that practitioners can draw upon to support meaningful participation.

Further examples of creative approaches can be found in **The Evaluator's Cookbook**, (McCabe and Horsley, 2008) which provides a range of activities designed to help children and young people communicate their experiences, perspectives and ideas.

Table 5 – Methods for eliciting children and young people's voices

Method	Description
Observation of actions, choices and interactions	Practitioners observe how children engage with activities, interact with others, use different spaces and respond to learning experiences in order to better understand their perspectives and experiences.
Interviews and conversations	Structured or informal discussions exploring experiences, views and perspectives.
Focus groups	Children create drawings to illustrate experiences, feelings, relationships or aspects of school life.
Drawing and visual representation	Rating scales, colour or texture feeling charts; objects of reference
Photo elicitation	Children take or discuss photographs as prompts for conversation and reflection.
Guided tours	Children lead practitioners around a setting and explain important spaces, routines and experiences.

Table 5 – Methods for eliciting children and young people's voices continued

Method	Description
Rating, sorting and ranking activities	Children use rating scales, Blob Trees, smiley faces, sorting activities or ranking tasks to communicate preferences, priorities, experiences and viewpoints.
Diaries or journals	Children record reflections over time through writing, drawings, photographs or audio recordings.
Symbolic and Metaphorical Approaches	Children communicate experiences, emotions, preferences and viewpoints through symbols, colours, objects, textures, sounds, movement or other forms of metaphorical representation.
Pupil passports and learner profiles	Children contribute information about their strengths, interests, preferred ways of learning, support needs, aspirations and important relationships.

Observation of actions, choices and interactions

Learner voice is not always expressed through words. Valuable insights can be gained by observing how children and young people:

- participate in different learning activities
- interact with peers and adults
- use different spaces within the school environment
- respond to teaching approaches, activities, routines and transitions
- make choices about activities, resources or social groups
- demonstrate engagement, enjoyment, avoidance or withdrawal

Patterns in these actions, choices and interactions can provide important insights into how learners experience school, including their sense of belonging, participation and inclusion.

For a fuller discussion about observation as a method of data gathering, ***see page 52****.*

Interviews, conversations

Individual conversations can be a powerful way of understanding a learner's experiences, interests, worries and aspirations. Interviews may be informal conversations, structured discussions or more semi-structured explorations guided by a small number of prompts.

Questions might explore:

- what a learner enjoys;
- what they find difficult;
- what helps them learn;
- who supports them;
- what changes they would like to see.

Interviews can be particularly valuable because they allow practitioners to explore ideas in greater depth. When a learner raises an interesting point, follow-up prompts such as *'Can you tell me a bit more about that?'* can often generate valuable additional insights.

For a fuller discussion about interviews as a method of data gathering, ***see page 53****.*

Focus groups

Focus groups are similar to interviews but involve discussion with several children and young people at the same time. They can be particularly useful when exploring shared experiences, generating ideas or understanding how different learners experience the same issue. Unlike individual interviews, focus groups allow children and young people to listen to one another, build upon ideas and introduce perspectives that may not emerge through individual conversations.

The facilitator plays an important role in creating an environment where all contributions are welcomed. Children and young people may:

- share their own experiences and viewpoints;
- agree with and build upon another person's ideas;
- offer a different perspective;
- introduce a new idea for consideration;
- respectfully challenge a perspective;

For a fuller discussion about focus groups as a method of data gathering, ***see page 55****.*

Drawing and Visual Representation

Drawings can provide rich insights into a child's experiences and are not wholly reliant upon spoken language. Drawings may be used as standalone activities or as starting points for discussion, including interviews/conversations and focus groups.

Children and young people might be invited to:

- draw themselves learning;
- draw their classroom;
- draw a favourite or least favourite part of the school day;
- draw what helps them learn;
- draw a worry, challenge or aspiration.

Drawings provide children with time to think and reflect before responding. They can help communicate experiences, relationships and emotions that might be difficult to express verbally, particularly when a child is unsure how to describe an experience through direct questioning alone.

The discussion that follows the drawing is often as valuable as the drawing itself. Rather than assuming the meaning of what has been drawn, practitioners should invite children and young people to explain their pictures in their own words. A drawing may reveal important perspectives, but it is the learner who provides the meaning.

Drawings can also be revisited over time, enabling children and young people to reflect on changes in their experiences, feelings or aspirations as an enquiry develops.

Photo elicitation

Photographs can be a particularly effective way of exploring learner perspectives.

Children and young people might be invited to photograph:

- favourite places;
- important people;
- activities they enjoy;
- things that help them learn;
- aspects of school belonging.

The photographs then become prompts for discussion. Sometimes what appears in the photographs is informative; equally, what is absent from a collection of photographs can provide valuable insights. Digital photographs can be reviewed in real time with the child or young person, allowing them to explain their choices whilst the experience is still fresh. Photographs, printed or digital, can be revisited later to support further dialogue and reflection.

Guided tours

In a guided tour, the child or young person becomes the guide and takes an adult through an environment that is important to them.

Prompts might include:

- Show me your favourite places;
- Show me where you learn best;
- Show me places you do not enjoy being;
- Show me important parts of your day.

Guided tours often reveal aspects of school life that adults may otherwise overlook, including corridors, playgrounds, lunch queues, transition points and other 'in-between' spaces that can have a significant impact upon feelings of belonging and participation.

Mapping

Mapping activities encourage children and young people to represent their experiences visually by creating a map of their environment, relationships or daily routines. Mapping can be used as a standalone activity, but it can also follow a guided tour, enabling children and young people to record, organise, and reflect on the places, people, and experiences identified during the tour.

Learners might be invited to:

- map their school day;
- identify places where they feel included;
- identify places that feel challenging;
- map important relationships and sources of support;
- show routes they take around the school.

Maps can be created using drawings, symbols, photographs, colour coding or written annotations. They can also be revisited and developed over time as learners reflect further on their experiences.

Mapping can help practitioners understand how children and young people experience places and relationships, rather than how adults assume they experience them. They can be particularly useful for exploring belonging, participation, safety, support networks and the impact of different environments within the school day.

Rating, Sorting and Ranking Activities

Rating scales provide a simple and accessible way of helping children and young people communicate their views.

Examples include:

- 1-10 scales;
- red, amber and green ratings;
- smiley or sad face cards;
- wellbeing thermometers.

Similarly, sorting and ranking activities can be used to organise statements, pictures or ideas according to importance, preference or experience.

The discussion that follows is often more informative than the rating or ranking itself:

"What makes this a 6 rather than a 3?"

"What would help move it one step higher?"

Diaries or journals

Diaries and journals provide opportunities for children and young people to record experiences and reflections over time.

These may include:

- written reflections;
- drawings;
- photographs;
- audio recordings;
- digital journals.

Journals can be particularly useful when a practitioner wishes to understand how an experience changes over time rather than capturing a single moment.

Diaries and journals can also be valuable reflective tools. Looking back through earlier entries, drawings or photographs can help children and young people identify changes over time, recognise achievements, revisit experiences and reflect upon what has been important over a given time period. A photo journal, for example, can provide a useful prompt for discussions about interests, successes, relationships and aspects of school life that learners value.

Symbolic and metaphorical approaches

Some children and young people find it easier to communicate feelings, experiences and viewpoints indirectly through symbols, metaphors and sensory representations. These approaches can be particularly helpful when discussing abstract ideas, emotions or experiences that are difficult to express through words alone.

Examples might include:

- selecting a figure on a Blob Tree to represent how they feel about a lesson, activity or aspect of school life. Revisiting responses over time can support reflection and discussion about changing experiences, confidence and participation. For example, learners may use a Blob Tree to explore how their confidence in mathematics develops over time.
- selecting from a swatch of textures or materials to express comfort, discomfort, enjoyment or anxiety;
- choosing a colour, scarf or piece of fabric that reflects an experience or emotion;
- choosing an object to represent a person, place or experience;
- communicating through sound or music, for example by creating loud or quiet sounds on a percussion instrument, selecting particular instruments, or using rhythm and tempo to express feelings, experiences or preferences;
- using movement, gesture or positioning to express an experience, preference or feeling.

As with many learner voice activities, the value often lies in the discussion that follows. A child's choice can provide a useful starting point for exploring their thinking, helping practitioners develop a richer understanding of experiences and perspectives that may otherwise remain hidden.

Pupil passports and learner profiles

Pupil passports provide a structured way of gathering learner voice whilst simultaneously creating a practical resource for others.

Passports may include information about:

- interests and strengths;
- preferred ways of learning;
- worries and concerns;
- helpful adjustments;
- important relationships;
- aspirations and goals.

Importantly, passports should be developed with children and young people rather than about them, helping to ensure that the learner remains at the centre of the process.

Gathering parent/carer voice

Families can play an important role in close-to-practice research, having unique knowledge of a child's strengths, interests, experiences and support needs, developed over many years and across a range of contexts. Taking family perspectives into account can help practitioners develop a richer understanding of the issue being explored and avoid relying solely on school-based information.

Earlier chapters discussed the importance of collaboration and the role of different perspectives in deepening professional understanding. Families can be a particularly valuable source of insight because they are generally the constant in a child's life, observing how experiences, needs and preferences change over time.

Family involvement might include:

- discussing an initial area of professional curiosity;
- contributing to the understanding of a learner's strengths, interests and barriers;
- helping practitioners interpret observations and findings;
- providing feedback on proposed approaches;
- sharing perspectives on changes observed at home;
- contributing to review and reflection discussions.

Family perspectives can also be valuable when developing or reviewing policies, systems and processes. For example, practitioners may wish to explore how families experience communication, decision-making, learner voice activities, annual reviews, transitions, parent/carer engagement strategies or wider aspects of inclusion. Involving families in these discussions can help ensure that developments are meaningful, practical and responsive to the needs of those they are intended to support.

Importantly, partnership with families should move beyond simply informing them about decisions that have already been made. A family-centred approach places children, young people and their families at the heart of the process and recognises them as active contributors to understanding and decision-making.

Projects that begin with learner voice can often deepen and broaden family engagement. When children and young people are given opportunities to express their views, wishes and feelings, these perspectives can provide a valuable starting point for more meaningful dialogue with parents and carers. Families are then able to respond to, reflect on and build upon their child's perspectives, often leading to a richer shared understanding of the issues being explored. Several examples of this approach can be found in *'Chapter 7: Examples of Past Projects'*.

As with learner voice, there is no single correct way to involve families. Conversations, structured discussions, surveys, focus groups, meetings, email exchanges and informal feedback can all be valuable approaches depending on the purpose of the enquiry and the preferences of those involved.

Key takeaway points

Gathering Learner Voice

- Learner voice recognises children and young people as informed experts in their own experiences whose perspectives can deepen understanding and strengthen inclusive practice as a process.
- Learner voice can be gathered through a range of approaches, including conversations, observations, drawings, photographs, mapping activities and guided tours.

Gathering Parent/Carer Voice

- Parents and carers bring unique knowledge of a child's strengths, interests, experiences and support needs that can deepen understanding and inform inclusive practice.
- Meaningful parent/carer voice moves beyond consultation, recognising families as partners in understanding, decision-making and the development of more inclusive practice.

Chapter 7:
Example of Past Projects

Introduction

Throughout this booklet, close-to-practice research has been presented as a process of developing understanding through enquiry, reflection and action. The examples in this chapter illustrate how practitioners have used Action Research and Lesson Study to explore questions arising from their own contexts.

The projects featured demonstrate the wide range of questions that can be explored through close-to-practice research. Some focus on individual learners, whilst others examine wider issues relating to curriculum, communication, attendance, partnership working, identity, inclusion or organisational practice. Together, they illustrate how professional curiosity can develop into structured enquiry and ultimately lead to changes in understanding, practice and provision.

The summaries are not intended to provide a detailed account of each project. Instead, they offer an overview of the enquiry: the question explored, the knowledge that informed the work, the role played by learner and/or family voice, and the outcomes that emerged. Readers may wish to use the examples as a source of ideas, inspiration and reflection when developing their own enquiries.

Each example includes a link to the full case study within the **Inclusive Practice Hub** repository for practitioners who would like to explore the project in greater depth.

Action Research Primary, Mainstream

Project title	Age of learners
Structured Conversations and Person-Centred Planning	Children aged 3-11 years

Enquiry Focus

Starting point: How can parental engagement be strengthened for learners with SEND?

Refined focus: Can structured conversations deepen parent-school engagement and partnership in the assess, plan, do, review process?

Collaboration

The SENCO worked with parents, learners, school staff and Parent Carer Voice representatives.

Study

Research highlighted the importance of equitable partnerships, family participation and person-centred approaches.

See the full case study for referenced details of the professional learning that informed the enquiry.

Action Research Cycle 1

A parent survey and Parent Carer Voice drop-in session explored parents' experiences of communication and engagement. Findings suggested parents were generally satisfied with existing communication, leading the SENCO to move beyond communication itself and investigate ways to deepen partnership and involvement.

Action Research Cycle 2

Structured conversations and person-centred planning were trialled with two families. Incorporating learners' views helped make meetings more child-centred and celebratory. Parents reported greater confidence, understanding and participation in review meetings.

Evidence Gathering

Parent voice through questionnaires and discussions with Parent Carer Voice representatives.

Learner voice through person-centred approaches to participation in Structured Conversation meetings.

Family voice through Structured Conversations.

Conclusion

Structured conversations strengthened parental confidence, participation and understanding of the review process. Involving children helped create more collaborative and celebratory discussions.

Read the full case study

https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14069/980

Action Research College, Mainstream

Project title	Age of learners
SEND and Race	Young people aged 16-19 years

Enquiry Focus

Starting point: The relationship between SEND identification, race, and ethnicity?

Refined focus: Is intersectionality considered within SEND referral processes and support systems?

Collaboration

The Specialist Engagement Practitioner (ADHD) worked with learning support staff and senior leaders across the college to explore issues relating to SEND, race and intersectionality.

Study

Research suggested that SEND identification can be influenced by racial bias and highlighted the importance of intersectionality when understanding learners' needs and experiences.

See the full case study for referenced details of the professional learning that informed the enquiry.

Action Research Cycle 1

Two staff focus groups explored the relationship between SEND, race and ethnicity. Discussions identified concerns about bias in SEND identification, trust in support systems, representation, staff training and cultural competence.

Action Research Cycle 2

College referral processes and SEND support systems were reviewed through an intersectional lens. The review found that intersectionality was rarely considered explicitly and often depended on the awareness and relationships developed by individual practitioners.

Evidence Gathering

Two semi-structured staff focus groups exploring SEND, race and ethnicity.

Professional dialogue with staff working across learning support provision.

Review of SEND referral processes and support systems through an intersectional lens.

Conclusion

The enquiry identified the need for greater awareness of intersectionality within SEND processes. Cultural competence, anti-racist practice, trust-building and diverse leadership were highlighted as important elements of more equitable SEND identification and support.

Read the full case study

https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14069/962

Action Research Through School, Special

Project title	Age of learners
Attendance for Children with Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities	Children and young people aged 4-19 years

Enquiry Focus

Starting point: How can attendance and engagement be improved for pupils with PMLD following the COVID-19 pandemic?

Refined focus: Does improving family engagement and multi-agency working increase the attendance of pupils with SEND?

Collaboration

The Assistant Headteacher worked with parents/carers, health professionals, transport services and school staff to identify and address barriers to attendance.

Study

Research highlighted post-pandemic attendance challenges and the importance of parental engagement, targeted interventions and supportive school-family relationships.

See the full case study for referenced details of the professional learning that informed the enquiry.

Action Research Cycle 1

Analysis of attendance data identified three key barriers: medical appointments, illness and authorised absences. Strategies focused on strengthening communication and engagement with families through a digital learning platform and parent/carer open mornings.

Action Research Cycle 2

The school introduced on-site health clinics, enhanced support when illness was reported and worked with families and agencies to address transport and care-related barriers. Positive improvements were seen in absences linked to medical appointments and illness.

Evidence Gathering

Attendance data analysis.

Parent/carer engagement through Seesaw and open mornings.

Review of barriers relating to health, transport and care support.

Conclusion

The most significant improvement came from hosting physiotherapy and seizure clinics in school, reducing the need for pupils to miss learning for medical appointments. Family engagement and multi-agency working provided additional support to improve attendance.

Read the full case study

https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14069/953

Action Research Secondary, Special School

Project title	Age of learners
Thinking Moves: PSHE	Year 7 learners (aged 11-12 years)

Enquiry Focus

How effective is the use of Thinking Moves in supporting students' language acquisition, comprehension and verbal interactions?

Collaboration

The Lead Practitioner for Teaching and Learning worked with a group of Year 7 learners to explore the use of Thinking Moves within PSHE and Philosophy for Children (P4C).

Study

Research highlighted the importance of classroom talk, shared language, interaction and cultures of thinking in supporting reasoning, communication and learning.

See the full case study for referenced details of the professional learning that informed the enquiry.

Action Research Cycle 1

Thinking Moves was introduced during PSHE lessons. Students quickly adopted the vocabulary, recognised Thinking Moves in their own and others' contributions, and demonstrated improved listening and collaborative discussion.

Action Research Cycle 2

Thinking Moves was used to explore increasingly complex concepts and social issues. Discussions helped students develop vocabulary, consider different perspectives and engage with topics such as stigma, discrimination and identity.

Evidence Gathering

Reflective practitioner journal.

Lesson observations.

Student interviews and reflections.

Conclusion

Thinking Moves supported the development of students' language, comprehension and verbal interactions. The approach also strengthened confidence, resilience, collaborative thinking and the ability to explore complex ideas through dialogue.

Read the full case study

https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14069/981

Lesson Study Primary Mainstream

Project title & Curriculum Focus	Age of learners
PSHE: Using Technology to Support Group Work Skills	Key Stage 2 learners (aged 7-11 years)
Enquiry Focus How can the use of technology encourage positive social interactions for children with autism?	
Collaboration Deputy Headteacher (Project Lead) Key Stage 2 Teacher (Lesson Teacher) Reception Teacher (Lesson Observer) Year 2 Teacher (Lesson Observer)	**Study** Research highlighted the importance of recognising and building upon learners' interests, creating more inclusive environments and challenging stereotypes about learners with autism. *See the full case study for referenced details of the professional learning that informed the enquiry.*
Lesson Study Cycle 1 Using Cosmo Explore, pupils were introduced to collaborative games and worked alongside a peer. Both pupils demonstrated positive engagement and emerging turn-taking skills.	**Lesson Study Cycle 2** The two case-study pupils worked together using the technology. Both demonstrated increased collaboration, sharing and positive social interaction.
Lesson Study Cycle 3 The activities were extended to a larger group of children. One pupil demonstrated strong teamwork and participation, while the second found the larger group more challenging, identifying a focus for future support.	**Conclusion** Building on pupils' interest in technology, Cosmo Explore supported the development of turn-taking, collaboration and positive social interaction. The highly engaging nature of the activities encouraged participation and provided authentic opportunities to practise group work skills.
	Read the full case study **https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14069/992**

Lesson Study, Secondary, Mainstream

Project title & Curriculum Focus	Age of learners
Literacy: Adaptive Teaching - Frayer Model	Year 9 learners (aged 13-14 years)

Enquiry Focus

Which strategies will support students' independence, reduce reliance on adult support and develop confidence in vocabulary, spelling and extended writing?

Collaboration

Deputy Lead for English (Lesson Teacher)

Science Teacher (Lesson Observer)

Key Stage 3 Maths Lead (Lesson Observer)

Study

Research highlighted the value of visual vocabulary organisers, scaffolded instruction and independent practice in supporting vocabulary development and subject learning.

See the full case study for referenced details of the professional learning that informed the enquiry.

Lesson Study Cycle 1

Frayer Model was introduced to support understanding of key vocabulary from Animal Farm. Both case-study pupils reported that the model was useful and wanted to continue using it.

Lesson Study Cycle 2

The Frayer Model was used to support retrieval and extended writing. One pupil increasingly used the model independently, while the other reduced reliance on adult support when recalling vocabulary.

Lesson Study Cycle 3

Using the Frayer Model, both students completed spelling and vocabulary retrieval tasks before applying key language in extended writing. Both pupils demonstrated greater confidence, independence and accurate use of subject vocabulary.

Conclusion

The Frayer Model supported both pupils in developing vocabulary knowledge, improving extended writing, and working more independently. The structured visual approach increased confidence and was found to benefit the wider class, not just learners on the SEND register.

Read the full case study

https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14069/998

Lesson Study, Primary Through School, Special

<table>
<tr><th>Project title & Curriculum Focus</th><th>Age of learners</th></tr>
<tr><td>Literacy: Colourful Semantics and AAC</td><td>Year 5 learner (aged 9-10 years)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Enquiry Focus
How can we encourage the use of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) to support literacy development?</td></tr>
<tr><td>Collaboration
English Lead and Class Teacher (Lesson Teacher)
Speech and Language Therapist (Lesson Observer)
Communication Lead and Class Teacher (Lesson Observer)</td><td>Study
Research highlighted the importance of shared reading, AAC modelling, staff confidence in AAC use and inclusive approaches to literacy for learners with complex communication needs.
See the full case study for referenced details of the professional learning that informed the enquiry.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Lesson Study Cycle 1
Using an interest-based story and visual symbols, Pupil A engaged in a shared reading activity and matched symbols to characters. The symbols increased engagement and supported participation in the story.</td><td>Lesson Study Cycle 2
A new text linked to Pupil A's interest in sea animals was introduced alongside Colourful Semantics. Pupil A remained engaged throughout the story, identified characters and began answering 'who is it?' questions.</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Lesson Study Cycle 3
Colourful Semantics was extended to include 'what doing' prompts. Pupil A began selecting symbols linked to actions, anticipated characters before they appeared and demonstrated increased comprehension and engagement.</td><td>Conclusion
Interest-based stories, AAC and Colourful Semantics increased engagement and comprehension during shared reading. The approach supported communication, encouraged greater use of AAC and laid foundations for future literacy development.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Read the full case study
https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14069/1041</td></tr>
</table>

Lesson Study, Secondary, Special

Project title & Curriculum Focus	Age of learners
Life Skills: Videoing Lessons, Noticing and Building on Micro-Progress	Year 7 learners (aged 11-12 years)
Enquiry Focus How do dual-coding transactional support resources improve students' persistence and metacognitive behaviours during a skill-based task?	
Collaboration Teacher (Lesson Teacher) Assistant Headteacher (Lesson Observer) Teacher (Lesson Observer)	**Study** Research highlighted the importance of metacognition, dual coding and explicit instruction in supporting learning, independence and problem-solving. *See the full case study for referenced details of the professional learning that informed the enquiry.*
Lesson Study Cycle 1 Dual-coded task boards were introduced alongside a life skills activity. During the lesson, progress appeared limited; however, video review revealed subtle moments of engagement, persistence and interaction that informed the next cycle.	**Lesson Study Cycle 2** The lesson structure remained largely unchanged to explore the impact of familiarity and repetition. Students demonstrated increased fluency, confidence and engagement with the dual-coded task boards.
Lesson Study Cycle 3 Students were challenged to construct their own task boards before making the milkshake. Both pupils showed increased persistence, independence and confidence, completing more of the task with minimal support.	**Conclusion** Videoing lessons enabled the team to identify moments of micro-progress that may otherwise have been missed. Dual coding, repetition and explicit instruction supported increased fluency, metacognition, independence and confidence in learning a new life skill.
	Read the full case study **https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14069/994**

Key takeaway Points

The projects included in this chapter illustrate the breadth of questions that can be explored through close-to-practice research. They demonstrate how Action Research and Lesson Study can be used across different settings, age groups and areas of practice.

- **Projects often begin with a simple question:** Professional curiosity is the starting point for all of the enquiries.
- **Questions can evolve over time:** Several projects refined their focus as new insights emerged through study, collaboration and evidence gathering.
- **Study before acting:** Professional learning, research evidence and different perspectives help practitioners deepen their understanding of an issue before deciding what action to take.
- **Collaboration strengthens enquiry:** Learners, families, teachers, leaders, specialists and external partners can all contribute valuable perspectives and expertise.
- **Cycles support improvement:** Both Action Research and Lesson Study use cycles of planning, action, review and refinement to support ongoing learning.
- **Evidence can come from many sources:** Practitioner observations, learner and family perspectives, professional dialogue, interviews, surveys, lesson observations and organisational data all have a role to play.
- **Understanding learners leads to better decisions:** Careful observation, discussion and reflection can help practitioners notice strengths, barriers and progress that might otherwise be overlooked.
- **Professional learning is an outcome:** Enquiries often generate changes for practitioners and organisations as well as learners.

Chapter 8:
Sharing Practitioner Learning

Why share close-to-practice research?

Close-to-practice research generates a wide range of professional knowledge. Every enquiry, whether large or small, has the potential to contribute to a growing understanding of teaching, learning and inclusion. However, valuable learning is often lost if it remains only in the minds of individual practitioners or within a single classroom, department or setting.

Stenhouse (1981) argued that teachers' research reaches its full potential when it becomes part of a wider professional conversation. Sharing professional learning allows ideas to be discussed, refined, challenged and developed over time. It also enables practitioners to learn from one another rather than repeatedly solving the same problems in isolation.

Inspired by Stenhouse's vision of teachers as researchers and his belief that professional knowledge should be shared, discussed and refined, this booklet is designed to support teachers in publishing their research through the Inclusive Practice Hub.

By sharing enquiries in a structured and accessible way, practitioners can contribute to a growing body of professional knowledge that supports reflection, innovation and more inclusive practice across the education sector. Every published enquiry contributes to the mission of the Inclusive Practice Hub, helping to build a culture of professional enquiry in which practitioners learn from one another, contribute new knowledge and collectively advance understanding of inclusive practice as a cyclical process of refinement and development.

Writing a Close-to-practice case study

For many practitioners, writing about their work can feel more daunting than undertaking the enquiry itself. It is often easier to improve practice than to sit down and explain what was done, why it was done and what was learned. However, it is important to remember that the purpose of writing a case study is not to present a perfect project or claim that a particular approach is the solution. Rather, it is an opportunity to share what was learned in a particular context, with particular learners, at a particular point in time.

Close-to-practice research is inherently contextual. An approach that was successful in one setting may need adapting elsewhere, and an approach that worked well for one learner may not work in exactly the same way for another. Case studies should therefore be read as contributions to professional knowledge rather than prescriptions for practice. Their value lies in helping others consider new questions, explore different approaches and reflect on what these insights might mean within their own context.

To support practitioners in sharing their work, the Inclusive Practice Hub provides a **Whole School SEND Practice Hub: Case Study Template.**

When writing a case study, it can be tempting either to document every detail of the enquiry or to provide only a brief account of what happened. Effective case studies strike a balance between these extremes. They focus on the key decisions, observations, challenges and learning that help others understand both the enquiry process and its outcomes. The examples in *Chapter 7* each include a link to the full case study and can be used as examples of completed projects. The summaries also demonstrate how key information can be communicated in a concise and accessible way.

Case Study Template

The template offers a structured framework for capturing and communicating learning in a clear and accessible way. Practitioners do not have to use the template; it is simply a helpful starting point for those who find it useful.

Whole School SEND Inclusive Practice Hub

Case Study Template

You can edit this PDF directly: add your content to the boxes below, save when complete, and then submit.

This template is intended as a guide and may be adapted to reflect your context. We are happy to accept submissions in alternative formats; however, all submissions must include a completed Quick Ethics Check.

Context

- School/setting type, phase, size
- Percentage of SEND/key groups
- Local/contextual factors

Focus

- What was the key issue or need?
- What question were you trying to answer?
- Why did this matter (brief data or observation)?

Rationale*

- What evidence or experience informed this?
- What inspired your thinking behind this?

* Optional

Please submit your completed form by email: info@wholeschoolsend.org.uk

Whole School SEND Inclusive Practice Hub

Case Study Template

You can edit this PDF directly: add your content to the boxes below, save when complete, and then submit.

Implementation

Actions

→ Key strategies/ interventions

How it was implemented

→ Timeline, staff, training, resources

What helped/hindered

→ Enablers

→ Barriers

Building expertise and capacity

→ Staff development / professional learning

→ Partnerships (families, agencies, community)

Impact

What changed?

→ Pupil outcomes

→ Staff practice

→ Systems/culture

Evidence (if available)

→ Data

→ Observations

→ Pupil/staff voice

Please submit your completed form by email: info@wholeschoolsend.org.uk

Whole School SEND Inclusive Practice Hub

Case Study Template

You can edit this PDF directly: add your content to the boxes below, save when complete, and then submit.

Reflection

- → What worked well?
- → What would you refine or change?
- → Any unintended outcomes?

Sustainability

- → What will continue?
- → What will scale or change next?

Key Takeaways for Other Settings*

- → Three to five practical recommendations

* Optional

Supporting materials may be uploaded alongside your submission

Please submit your completed form by email: info@wholeschoolsend.org.uk

Using the Case Study Template

The following sections describe each part of the **Whole School SEND Practice Hub: Case Study Template** and illustrate the type of information that practitioners may wish to include.

Context

Close-to-practice research is inherently contextual. This section helps readers understand the setting, learners and circumstances that shaped both the enquiry and its outcomes, allowing them to understand how the learning may relate to their own context.

Focus

The Focus section captures:

- the professional curiosity that prompted the enquiry
- the issue, need or opportunity being explored
- the close-to-practice research question that emerged from it

This section helps readers understand what prompted the project and why the enquiry was undertaken.

Rationale

Earlier chapters in this resource encouraged practitioners to begin with professional curiosity, exploring questions that arise from their own practice. The Rationale section explains the curiosity that sparked the enquiry, the thinking and evidence that informed it, and how growing understanding shaped the early direction of the project.

Implementation

The Implementation section is often the most substantial part of the case study because it describes what actually happened. This is where the Plan and Do phases of close-to-practice research become visible within the narrative. Readers should be able to follow the journey of the project, understanding what was implemented and in what order, and how reflections informed subsequent decisions.

The substantive part of this section is often organised around a cycle of:

- **Action taken:** What was done?
- **Findings:** What was observed or discovered?
- **Reflection:** What was learned and what happened next?

The section may also include information about:

- **Implementation:** How the project was put into practice, including timelines, staffing, professional development, resources and practical arrangements.
- **What helped:** The enablers that supported implementation, such as leadership support, collaboration, professional learning or family engagement.
- **What hindered:** The barriers, challenges or unexpected issues encountered during the project and how these were addressed.

Readers should come away with a clear understanding not only of what was done, but also how the enquiry developed over time and how emerging reflections shaped the direction of the project.

Whilst this section is substantive, this does not necessarily mean writing a lot. A small number of carefully chosen subheadings can do much of the work. For example, summarising what happened in each cycle, alongside key reflections and learning, can help readers understand the enquiry.

See *'Chapter 7: Examples of Past Projects'* for examples of how key information can be communicated through short, concise statements.

Building Expertise and Capacity

Close-to-practice research rarely happens in isolation. Throughout this booklet, practitioners have been encouraged to engage with professional learning, research, learner voice, collaboration and different perspectives. The Building Expertise and Capacity section explains how knowledge, skills and understanding were developed throughout the enquiry.

This section might include:

- **Professional learning:** Research articles, guidance documents, training, webinars, conferences, podcasts or professional reading that informed the project.
- **Collaboration:** Discussions with colleagues, research groups, professional networks, departments or Multi-Academy Trust colleagues.
- **Family partnerships:** How parent and carer perspectives informed understanding of the issue or shaped the enquiry.
- **External expertise:** Contributions from Educational Psychologists, therapists, specialist teachers, advisory services or other professionals.
- **Learner expertise:** Insights gained through learner voice and participation that helped build understanding of the issue being explored.

Readers should come away with an understanding of how knowledge and expertise were developed, and how these contributed to the direction and quality of the enquiry.

Impact

As discussed throughout this booklet, impact can take many forms. Whilst practitioners often think first about pupil outcomes, close-to-practice research can also influence professional understanding, classroom practice, systems and organisational culture. The Impact section provides an opportunity to reflect on what changed and how those changes were recognised.

This section might include:

- **Pupil outcomes:** Changes in participation, engagement, achievement, attendance, behaviour, communication, confidence, independence or wellbeing.
- **Staff practice:** Changes in knowledge, understanding, confidence, teaching approaches or professional decision-making.
- **Systems and culture:** Changes to policies, processes, provision, collaboration, CPD or wider organisational practice.
- **Evidence:** The information used to support these conclusions, such as observations, learner voice, family perspectives, staff reflections, other sources of data, or examples of work.

Practitioners should avoid overstating impact. As discussed earlier in this booklet, close-to-practice research rarely proves that a single action caused a particular outcome. Instead, the focus should be on what was observed, what was learned, and what the available evidence suggests may have changed as a result of the enquiry.

Reflection

Reflection sits at the heart of close-to-practice research. Throughout this booklet, practitioners have been encouraged to revisit initial thinking, consider different perspectives and take carefully considered actions that work towards the process of broadening and deepening inclusion.

The Reflection section captures:

- **What worked well?** The aspects of the enquiry, implementation or approach that were particularly successful.
- **What would you refine or change?** Opportunities for improvement if the project were repeated or developed further.
- **Any unintended outcomes?** Unexpected findings, benefits, challenges or areas for further investigation.

This section provides an opportunity to think critically about the enquiry and identify what has been learned, not only from successes, but also from challenges, surprises and areas for future development.

Sustainability

Close-to-practice research is intended to support ongoing improvement rather than a one-off initiative. The Sustainability section looks forward, considering how the learning generated through the enquiry may continue to influence practice and what might happen next.

This section captures:

- **What will continue?** Approaches, resources, routines or changes that have become established and will remain part of practice.
- **What will change next?** Areas that require further refinement, development or investigation.
- **What will scale?** Aspects of the project that may be extended to other learners, classes, departments, settings or networks.

This section encourages practitioners to think beyond the immediate project and consider how the learning generated through the enquiry may inform future action, professional learning and further cycles of improvement – in short, *what next?*

Key Takeaways for Other Schools

One of the purposes of publishing close-to-practice research is to make learning accessible to others. Stenhouse argued that professional knowledge should be shared, discussed and developed through professional communities, rather than remaining within a single classroom or setting.

This section captures:

- **Practical recommendations:** Three to five key messages that other practitioners may find useful.
- **Transferable learning:** Insights that may be adapted to different settings, age groups or contexts.
- **Lessons learned:** Important reflections arising from the enquiry.
- **Points for consideration:** Factors that others may wish to think about before adopting a similar approach.

The focus should not be on telling others what to do. Instead, this section should distil the most significant learning from the enquiry into clear, practical takeaways that others can reflect on, adapt, and build on within their own contexts.

Key takeaway points

Close-to-practice research reaches its full potential when learning is shared. By communicating what has been tried, what has been learned and what questions remain, practitioners contribute to wider professional knowledge and help strengthen inclusive practice across the profession.

- **Professional knowledge should be shared:** Valuable learning should not remain within a single classroom, department or setting.
- **Schools and colleges are producers of knowledge:** Practitioners generate insights that are valuable to wider professional communities.
- **Recognise the importance of context:** Case studies describe learning within a specific context, with particular learners, at a particular point in time.
- **Write with honesty and reflection:** Case studies should communicate learning, including challenges and refinements, rather than claim perfection.
- **Focus on significant learning:** Sharing the most important insights is often more valuable than documenting every detail of the enquiry.
- **Use local professional networks:** Staff meetings, clusters, MAT networks and professional communities provide valuable opportunities to share close-to-practice research and learn from others.
- **Contribute to wider communities:** Platforms such as the Inclusive Practice Hub and Camtree enable practitioner learning to reach broader audiences.
- **View publication as professional contribution:** Publishing an enquiry contributes to a growing body of professional knowledge and supports ongoing professional dialogue.
- **Keep Stenhouse's vision alive:** Practitioner research reaches its full potential when it becomes part of a wider professional conversation.

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