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Facilitated Practice-based Research

F.P.R.

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Empowering social work practitioners to **lead**, in practice-based research

Dr Lesley Deacon

Plan for today

1. Relationship between social work research and social work practice.
2. Reflecting on 'research' breakout task – 15 mins
3. Facilitated Practice-based Research
4. ASYE Research – initial findings



Dr Lesley Deacon

- Social Worker 2007–2011, Children’s Services, Newcastle City Council
- Lecturer in Social Work, 2011–2016, University of Sunderland
- Senior Lecturer in Social Work, 2016–present, University of Sunderland
- Vice Chancellor’s Research and Knowledge Exchange Fellow. 2023–2025
- Research projects: harmful sexual behaviour, dyslexia, social isolation and loneliness, parent carers and psychosocial support, child poverty and social deprivation, social workers’ understanding of procurement, practitioner reflections on the impact of Covid, emergency response grants as an emerging necessity, social work practitioner research, whole schools’ approach to mental health and wellbeing; consent-based services; multi-agency safeguarding; ASYE.
- Wallsend Children’s Community, Board Member.
- Volunteer, Safeguarding Team, Diocese of Newcastle, Church of England



Academic-based Practitioner Researcher

Research in Social Work Practice

- ‘Keep my practice up to date and record how I use research, theories and frameworks to inform my practice and my professional judgement (4.3)’



<https://www.socialworkengland.org.uk/cpd/cpd-guidance/#professionalstandards>

But...

there is a ‘continual tension’ between practice and research

(Fouche, 2015, p. 10)

(Ref: Deacon 2023)

Prof. Irwin Epstein

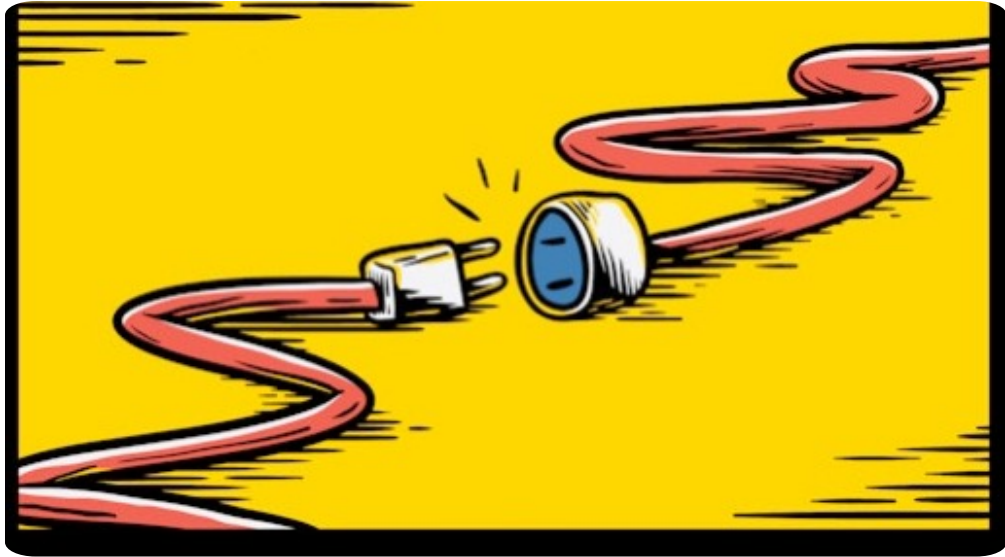


- '...no other part of the social work curriculum has been so consistently met with as much, groaning, moaning, eye rolling, hyperventilation and waiver-strategizing as the research course'

- (Epstein 1987,p. 71)

- 'still rings true today' (Epstein 2016, p.4)

Research and Social Work Practice



- **Have never been easy bedfellows...**
- **Evidence-based Practice (EBP)**
 - scientific evidence-base
 - not necessarily framed in practice
 - positions Social Workers as research consumers - **use** research
- **Practice-based Research (PBR)**
 - research conducted by practitioners for practice
 - academically-framed research
- **Social Work Practice Research (SWPR)**
 - Knowledge development to improve practice
 - Collaborative partnerships between researchers and practitioners
 - Aim to move social work practice into being research-driven not just theoretical/experiential

‘Social work research [is] dominated by academic discourse’, p.105

(Ref: Deacon 2023)

Example academic discourse*: The Intellectualisation of Language



Methodology

Constructionism

Objectivism

Ontology

Interpretivism

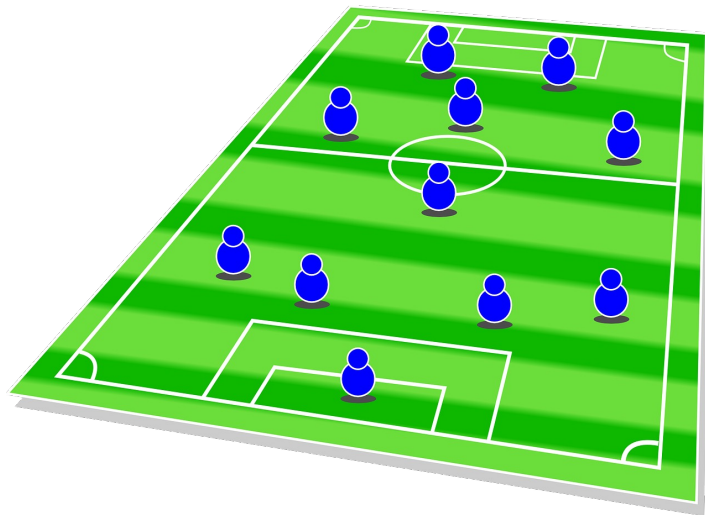
Epistemology

Positivism

*discourse: the language used to talk/communicate about a subject

Research anxiety

'You need to have confidence in your own ability to do it, as it can seem massive.'



If Bourdieu's field theory is applied this means, 'social work students, practitioners and educators **have essential research skills and knowledge** but do not possess the symbolic capital to reframe these in the field of social work research and are habituated into research anxiety'. (Deacon, 2023, p.102)

Reflecting on 'Research'



- In small break out groups, take 15 minutes to have a think about 'RESEARCH' and your own experiences of it
- What words come to mind about:
 - (a) what it means;
 - (b) what your experiences/thoughts are of it; and
 - (c) how it relates to your practice?

Facilitated Practice-based Research (FPR) ©University of Sunderland

- FPR is an empowerment model designed by Dr Lesley Deacon, in collaboration with the Wallsend Children's Community (WCC), to teach participatory research to practitioners, in action, within practice. (Deacon, 2023)
- The approach assumes practitioners already have research skills and knowledge that they use every day in their practice e.g. investigating problems to understand them and develop intervention strategies.
- The aim of FPR is to support practitioners to see these links and reframe their skills and knowledge, thus developing their research capacity.



practitioner : researcher



How is research capacity developed?

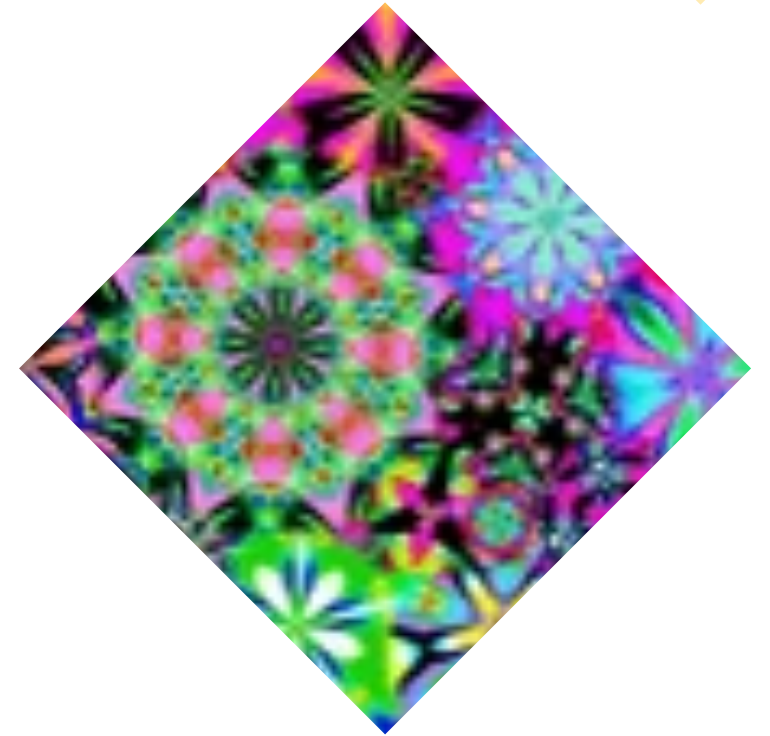
- Through an intensive teaching programme **facilitated** by Dr Lesley Deacon with a small group of practitioners, within the practice setting.
- The teaching sessions are **based** in practice settings, interactive with clear links made between practice and research, with potential barriers such as **research terminology, temporarily moved to one side.**
- Practitioners develop their research capacity **by doing** as the whole programme is based around co-constructing and conducting a group **practice research** project, together.

empower practitioners to be researchers

Eclectic conceptual framework

- Reflexivity – good research starts with supporting practitioners to engage with their experiences of research (anxiety) and how services are received.
- Emancipatory Practice Development – service evaluation should start with those who receive services; it should be creative and collaborative; it is not a quick fix but about engaging ALL stakeholders in working together.
- Participatory Research – practitioners are supported to frame research from how it is received, as a starting point; to reflexively engage with whether services are authentically person-centred.

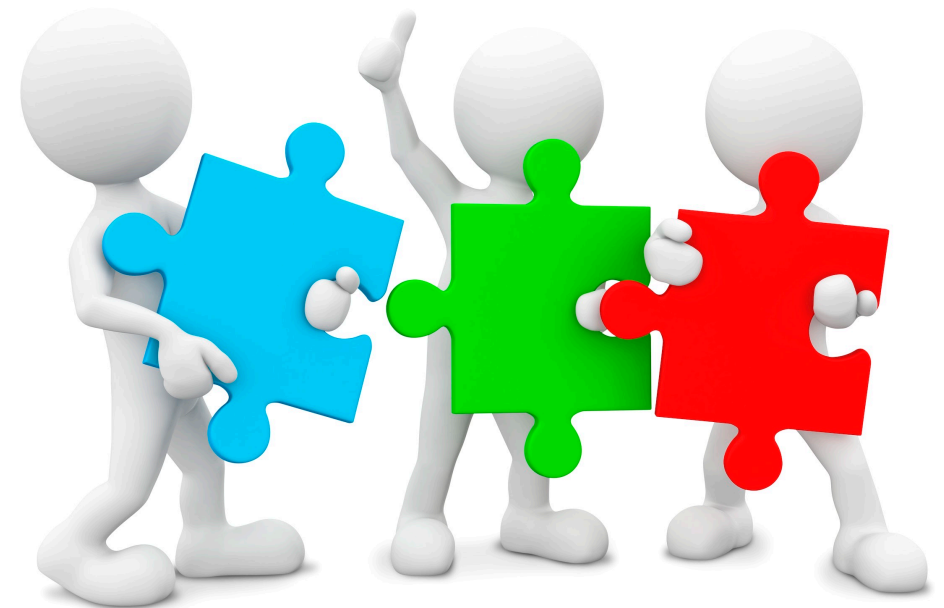
'I have never liked research; I find it very dry and annoying because of all of the processes you have to do.'



The FPR programme

Terminology temporarily moved aside, linguistic habitus (Deacon, 2023)

- Seven direct teaching sessions
 - 1. Reflecting on Practice and Research
 - 2. Thinking about Research
 - 3. Understanding Previous Research
 - 4. Emancipatory Practice Development
 - 5. Meaningful Research
 - 6. The Chosen Approach
 - 7. Ethical Research
- Followed by three supervision sessions
 - Participants complete the research
- Completion of a Practice Report



rawpixel

Programme: 20 hours over 10 months

Intended outcomes

'Very approachable and very knowledgeable, they came across as very passionate. So, that gave us confidence in what we were doing. Also, no question was a silly question, we could ask anything.'

- It is suggested that practitioners learn better by doing i.e. in action, so their research capacity develops over the entirety of the programme as they develop the piece of research.
- This developing research capacity can help alleviate potential research anxiety in practitioners as research confidence develops.
- The piece of practice research conducted can be put into practice and its impact can be evaluated through the emerging research capacity of the practitioners.
- This can foster a culture of research-informed practice.

not a quick fix but about sustained transformation

Projects

Current Practitioner-led FPR projects

1. What do service users understand by the concept of 'consent', based on their lived experiences of giving 'consent' to being referred to the Early Help Service? [Semi-structured interviews]
2. How do Partner Professionals perceive and experience safeguarding children and adults? [Online survey]
3. How do NQSWs and their mentors perceive and experience the support given for the first year of the ASYE? [Online survey]

ASYE Research: Draft initial findings from NQSWs


- NQSWs find ASYE programmes helpful, especially the ASYE academy.
- They reported specific benefits including: protected caseloads, *additional* supervision and work shadowing opportunities. In particular, good-quality and regular supervision was equated with improved wellbeing (self-reported).
- Workload was reported as a potential negative to wellbeing with the 'additional' ASYE documentation seen to have a negative impact.
- Participants felt it would be beneficial for the support to continue.

Academy set-up has been superb in my opinion, had the luxury of management support whenever it was needed, regular reflective supervision and learning opportunities with allocated cases.

The structure for supervision works well as this affords the opportunity for regular case discussion, reflective supervision and identify learning opportunities. This all impact[s] on good wellbeing by feeling supported and to be able to see development.

Too much is required in the ASYE portfolio on top of workload pressure even though the workload is protected

I feel continued support remains key to becoming an effective practitioner

The background of the image is a vibrant teal color, densely populated with numerous speech bubbles of various colors including red, yellow, pink, and light grey. Each speech bubble contains a large, dark blue question mark, creating a pattern that suggests a Q&A session or a period of inquiry.

Thank you for listening!
Any questions?

Bibliography

ARTICLES

Deacon, L. (2023) 'Facilitated Practice-based Research: A model of Empowerment to Reduce Research Anxiety in Social Work Practitioners and Reframe Cultural Capital, *European Journal of Social Work Research*, inaugural issue 1(1), pp.102-117.

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Deacon, L. and Lonbay, S. (2023) 'Narrowing the Gap between Social Work Research and Practice: how social workers make use of research and what impact does it have on practice?' European Conference for Social Work Research, Milan, Italy.

FORTHCOMING

Deacon, L. (forthcoming) 'Facilitated Practice-based Research: A Trauma-informed Pedagogical Approach to Reframing Research Anxiety to Build Research Capacity in Social Work Practitioners'

Deacon, L., Phillips, C. and Bikova, Z. (2024) 'Facilitated Practice-based Research: An empowering Pedagogical Approach to Reframe Research Capacity in Social Work Practitioners', SWSD, Panama.

Deacon, L. and Aggar, E. (2024) submitting Abstract to next European Conference for Social Work Research in Lithuania.

