

## **Outputs, impact and audience: disseminating practitioner research**

Turner Rebecca, *Plymouth University, UK*

Dissemination is an integral aspect of the research process and the practice of being research active (Grant & Knowles, 2000). Through the presentation of research outcomes at conferences and the submission of papers to journals, researchers publicise their ideas to communities of peers and demonstrate their expert knowledge (McGrail et al., 2006). This is essential in building reputations and can underpin future successes in obtaining research funds (McGrail et al., 2006). However, this is an aspect of the research process commonly overlooked particularly with respect to the preparation newer researchers receive (Lee & Boud, 2003). Possessing sufficient knowledge of disseminating practices has been cited as a significant barrier for college-based lecturers becoming research active (Anderson et al., 2003). This confounds the perspective of FE colleges as consumers rather than producers of knowledge (Child, 2009), and has further implications for those seeking to gain recognition and build reputations for their research activities.

The challenges HE in FE lecturers face in becoming research active are considered through the contributions of Bathmaker, Gregson and Hillier to this symposium, as well as been documented by researchers working in college and university settings (e.g. Lea & Simmons, 2012; Mason et al., 2010; Young, 2002). Although these challenges do broadly impact on the dissemination of practitioner research, as will be considered, there are issues specific to dissemination that HE in FE lecturers need to consider in order to engage successfully in this practice.

The motivations driving college-based lecturers' engagement with research are different from those driving their university colleagues, and this is fundamental in shaping HE in FE lecturers expectations regarding dissemination (Lea & Simmons, 2012). As with other practitioner-researchers, HE in FE lecturers regularly use their practice as the source of their enquiries seeking to initially inform oneself, and perhaps their colleagues (Turner et al., 2009). They perceive the outcomes of their work as having implications for their own practice and being of local relevance in terms of the resulting knowledge (Turner et al., 2014). Supporting college-based lecturers to perceive their research as having relevance and impact beyond the immediate confines of their college community (or even to their peers across a partnership network) underpins their transition from consumers to producers of knowledge (Turner et al., 2009). Undertaking this shift is essential in promoting engagement with dissemination practices in a more coherent and focused way which may, in the longer term, signify the contribution college-based researchers can make, particularly with respect to enhancing the academic communities knowledge of this under-researched sector.

Undergoing this transition is only part of the process; HE in FE lecturers express fears and concerns as they consider writing for publication and presenting at conferences.

Underpinning these concerns is a lack of knowledge regarding the process of dissemination, for example, issues such as journal choice and peer review, can be viewed as daunting, with the possibility of rejection by a journal identified as a barrier before writing ever commences (Turner et al., 2014). This situation can be further exacerbated by the perception that the writing central to any dissemination activity can only take place in large periods of quiet, dedicated time, a commodity rare in the life of the HE in FE lecturer (Lea et al., 2012; Turner et al 2014). These are all legitimate concerns expressed by researchers of all experiences (e.g. Cameron et al., 2009; Murray, 2001) not solely those working in FE colleges. However, due to limited opportunities to network with other researchers, college-based lecturers were unaware of this, a situation where the isolation of the HE in FE professional impedes their on-going development (Lea & Simmons, 2012).

Turner et al. (2014) report a number of strategies successfully introduced to familiarise HE in FE lecturers with the technical and practical aspects of writing, as well as introducing the practice of peer-review in a supportive fashion. Through a series of interventions writing was constructed as a social activity, centred on the discussion and sharing of ideas across researchers. This served to challenge traditional perceptions of academic writing taking place behind closed doors, and also stimulate the formation of a community of researchers who met to discuss research ideas – a novel enterprise within the world of HE in FE. Alternative ways of writing were also explored which allowed issues of time to be addressed and experimentation with form and styles of writing promoted to build individuals confidence (Turner et al., 2014). These resulted in changes been made in their views of, and engagement with, academic writing without the supply of any financial or physical resource. Given engagement with research and scholarship for the college-based lecturer is constrained by the absence of time and money to support their work (Anderson et al., 2003), realistic strategies to overcome these barriers were provided.

Becoming research active is noted as providing a number of benefits to the HE in FE lecturer, particularly with respect to ensuring subject currency and professional updating. However, for many it is the successful publication of research outputs and / or the presentation of findings at conferences that provides a sense of credibility to individuals practice as HE lecturers (Turner et al., 2009). It is also seen as offering a source of recognition for their research activities, recognition that is rarely forthcoming from their own

institutions. Finally, and most importantly, successful dissemination provides the HE in FE lecturer with a new professional space to explore as published researchers.

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