

## **Film 3: What is educational research?**

The purpose of this video is to introduce you to the concepts and ideas that are associated with educational research. My aim is to help you understand what you need to know so that you can make sense of the research process.

Hitchcock and Hughes, (1989: 3–4), propose that educational research is all around us, it can be viewed as ‘...the collection and analysis of information on the world of education so as to understand and explain it better’. It should be viewed as a critical, reflexive and as a professionally orientated activity.

Newby (2010, p.6) suggests that educational research has not one heart but three – one whose beat provides the life-support for academics as ‘searchers after truth’, one for practitioners and the third for policy makers.

Educational research is not always clear cut and well structured, it’s messy. To solve the research puzzle as an educational researcher you will need to make key decisions and judgements. You can choose to work within one of the traditional research approaches and follow their rules. However, you do not have to; you can mix approaches and styles of research to answer the question you are asking. As an educational researcher you need to understand the consequences of doing or not doing something, so that you are able to make appropriate decisions that fit your particular circumstances.

### **Why do we carryout educational research**

I want to concentrate on three reasons why you might carryout research in education.

#### **To explore issues**

Undertaking research here includes everything from:

- finding answers to a specific question (What counts as an educated 19 year old in this day and age?)
- to identifying and specifying a problem or issue that should be the subject of further research.

For example, if you think there could be a relationship between coaching and the educational attainment of cohorts of young people, it would be interesting to know if any colleges or areas within a college bucked the trend.

## **(ii) To shape policy**

This type of educational research is conducted to collect information and can be used to make a judgement that informs policy. It could also be undertaken to find out the impact of a particular policy.

For example, NEET (not in education, employment or training) is a policy construct of successive governments. Robin Simmons, Ron Thompson and Lisa Russell who are colleagues here at Huddersfield have researched the policy construct of NEETS and pose questions about the articulation between education, work and training for those seeking to enter the labour market. This could be viewed as a piece of educational research that might help to shape policy or to gauge the impact of a particular policy.

## **(iii) To improve practice**

Trying to do something better than it is done presently is a common reason for undertaking educational research. The sorts of improvement that can be investigated are:

- improving educational outcomes;
- achieving the same outcomes with less resource;
- improving behaviour;
- improving your effectiveness as a teacher / lecturer;

For example, if you are monitoring the introduction of a behaviour management strategy to AS students, and it does not produce an improvement in behaviour as quickly as you hoped it might, you may want to think of the reasons for this:

- This might be because the behaviour strategy is new to teachers and they have problems adjusting to it.
- A programme that identifies a way of introducing behaviour management strategy to help teachers/lecturers adopt and adjust to the new approach could raise the performance of both teachers and their students.

### **As an educational researcher you need to:**

- be flexible
- plan

- organise
- reason
- analyse
- synthesise
- compare
- contrast
- evaluate
- examine
- Etc, Etc, Etc

(Acknowledge a debt to Newby, 2010)