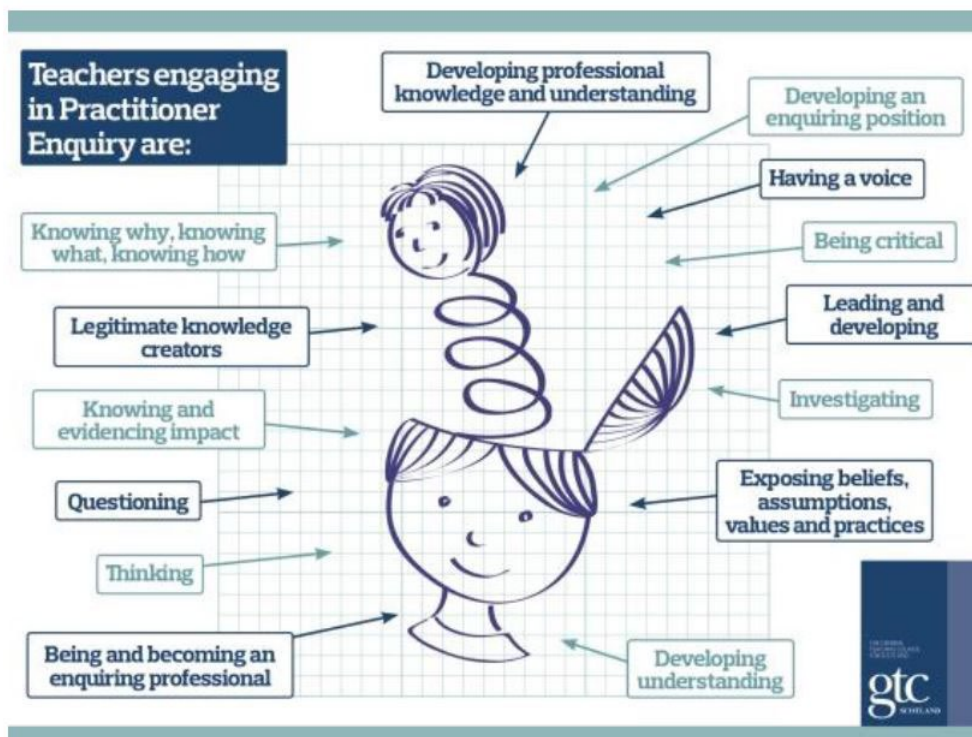


What is Practitioner enquiry?

It is a means to investigate something in your classroom that is not working as well as you would like. It could be a teaching strategy you do not think you are implementing well. It could be the response you are getting from pupils. You decide to focus on what is happening and what you can do about it. You start by finding out what you could try – by reading, and discussing with your mentor and other expert teachers. You plan what you are going to try in one or more lessons and decide what evidence you can collect to evaluate if it has worked. You teach the lesson/s – you might invite a teacher to observe you - and afterwards you look at the data you collected and analyse what you have found out. You self-evaluate and decide how you are going to take forward the new practice – or not. Or do you need to do some more investigation?

In a nutshell practitioner enquiry is situation specific. It is a way to look deeply into one aspect of practice. It enables you to examine your own teaching and develop your understanding of the context. It is an ongoing process that will help you to develop as a teacher, with support from colleagues. It does not have to be a major research project; it can be small scale but effective for you.

The [ITT Core Content Framework](#) (DfE, 2019) and the [Early Career Framework](#) (DfE, 2019) both require new teachers to take an evidence-based approach to practice. This means that you need to use evidence of ‘what works’ in teaching and consider how it can help you to develop and improve your practice.



The General Teaching Council for Scotland (2016)

Study the diagram above from The General Teaching Council for Scotland which summarises the benefits for you and read the article by Manion (2018). This will set the scene about evidence-informed practice and how it is relevant to a teacher in the classroom.

What steps do you need to take?

1. Identify a question to investigate about your geography teaching. Start off with you and your learners and ask *What happens when I?* or *Why to the students in my class?*. It needs to be a real question or challenge for you at that moment. Formulate it into a suitable enquiry question – every good geographer should know how to do this!
2. When you have identified the issue to be addressed, discuss your enquiry question with your mentor who will be able to advise you about how to investigate it. They will also be able to advise you about what research literature you should read, what resources you could explore and other teachers to talk to. It is important to find out as much as you can before you start so you can formulate a strategy to improve the issue you have identified.
3. Plan your enquiry. Take time over this because good planning will maximise your success. Make sure the data collection is manageable, both for collection and analysis. (Warning, it takes a long time to transcribe oral evidence!) Decide if you need a baseline to enable comparison with outcomes. This is often very useful. Plan your lesson/s and decide if you are going to involve another teacher as an observer or assistant.
4. Implement the plan and analyse the data. Try to understand it as deeply as possible. Discuss it with a critical friend. What does it tell you? What does it not tell you? Did you find what you expected? What conclusions can you draw?
5. Consider the implications and evaluate your enquiry. Can you use the findings to inform your practice in future? If so, how? If not, why not? What went well? What aspects were challenging? What would you do differently if you did it again?

A manageable practitioner enquiry should help you to investigate and implement change in your practice of teaching. It should be an approach that becomes embedded in your normal way of teaching to help you reflect on your practice. It should also help you to view research evidence more thoroughly and ask critical questions about how the results were achieved and their validity.

Reading

- Education Endowment Foundation 'Making evidence accessible', *The profession* (Chartered College of Teaching) June 2018
- Mannion, J. 'Evidence-informed practice: The importance of professional judgement', *The profession* (Chartered College of Teaching) May 2017
- Firth, R. and Brooks, C. (2017) 'Evidence-based practice and research in geography education' in Jones, M. and Lambert, D. (eds.). *Debates in Geography Education* London: Routledge

Case study projects

The case study is another approach you could use to collect evidence to influence your practice. You could investigate in depth an aspect of geography teaching, innovation, a resource or teaching strategy. Look at these articles published in *Teaching Geography* that report the outcomes from such projects. Consider contributing the results of your case study project when you have completed it.

- Doyle, L. 'Do we give EAL students the opportunity to study their own personal geographies?', *Teaching Geography*, Spring 2019
- Matthews, A. 'It's virtually a glacier', *Teaching Geography*, Spring 2020

- Sassoon, H. 'Teaching the geography of development from the 'big picture', *Teaching Geography*, Autumn 2012

Further examples of research projects can be found in the [Journal of Trainee Teacher Educational Research](#) which is an open-access journal which publishes some of the research undertaken by graduate students of the University of Cambridge during their PGCE.

- Ellis, C. *Should we accept Syrian refugees? 'Developing Year 8 students' understandings of place with reference to the European refugee crisis*. Volume 8
- Hicks, K.A.J (2010) *Yawning Sixth Formers: An action research project examining how we can move beyond passive Learning in Sixth form teaching of case studies in urban management*, Volume 1.
- Holyoak, L (2013) *'Someone else's shoes: A case study exploring how an extended role-play can support year 8 students' learning about malaria in Mozambique'*. Volume 5.

(Last updated January 2022)