Starting Your Research Journeys
You have many great ideas which could keep you 'researching' for many many years! Therefore, it can be helpful to start to thrash-out what you would like to start with, what is possible in the time frame you have and with the people and resources you can access. This document has been created to support you starting your research journeying. You may find it useful (I certainly did and do!) to spend some time considering the following questions- it is so important that to merge your hopes and aspirations with time, resources and opportunity. **Please note**: any resources or websites referenced are given as examples only, and their reference does not exclude the credibility of other sources or infer any endorsement by ECUK. It is up to individual practitioners to explore the resources to decide if they are appropriate for research use in their setting.
1. Why do you want to carry out research? It is helpful to think about and list the reasons why you want to carry out research and perhaps who is the intended audience. Is it because you are working towards a specific qualification and you have to, or because the research opportunity and funding has arisen at work and you can do, or as a personal challenge or part of your professional development in your work setting or is it multifactorial? Considering the 'why' helps keep your focus and the research on track.
Date:
2. In your work schedule, realistically how much time can you find/ can be given to 'do' this research project? You will need to 'find time' in your life, especially if this is your first foray into research, as a lot of time is spent going up and down roads that turn out to be dead ends! (Please be reassured this happens to everyone and is part and parcel of the research process). Do you have specific deadlines and if so, who controls/sets them and what are the dates of the deadlines.
Date:

3. **What topics interest, gets you excited - is it just your interest or are there others who have a shared interest**?

Bullet point your interests, is there a theme running through them, could you put them in order of your research/interest priority.

Date:

4. **Thinking particularly about your work practice and environment, what is it that: interests you, puzzles you, makes you feel it could be better and/or you want to 'find out more'. Can you explain why you are interested**

List them, is there a theme running through them, could you put them in order of priority?

Date:

5. **Where (if at all) is there a cross over between your personal and work interests?**

Often research is believed to only be big projects with the potential to change the world. Whilst these contributions are vital and important, sustainable progress also comes about from adopting practices that emerge from experts in the field (such as yourself), which are supported by credible, smaller evidence-based research projects.

Investigate your interests further to narrow down your focus. At this stage this can include a quick light-touch literature trawl but adopt a critical stance to the sources informing your ideas and opinions about the topic of interest. So, reference within your specialism but also briefly look at complementary specialism /disciplines to get a broader overview. On the website there is information to support practitioner research: *'Engaging with research: ECUK Top Tips'*: https://0cb242fb-7e24-4208-86de-d7c876a2f1c2.filesusr.com/ugd/623336_bbbc8dc514304cd7a145c7acc159eeea.pdf
There is also a more detailed article: *'Remember: we are all wearing spectacles! What is research about and what can we do with it?'*: https://0cb242fb-7e24-4208-86de-d7c876a2f1c2.filesusr.com/ugd/623336_096ebdd5c0fd42558509e1c16794bdea.pdf

Date:

6. **With your research interest what do you want to do?**

Do you want to 'describe and explore', 'explain and test', evaluate and ask?

Describing with words offers a qualitative data focus, defining with numbers is a quantitative data focus and using both creates mixed methods data.

It's important to talk with knowledgeable others to describe what it is you are interested in, why and how you would like to go about 'doing' the research. Verbalising ideas that are whizzing around in your head helps you 'to hear' what it is you are actually proposing, it helps to organise your ideas to 'hone and tone' and make realistic and achievable plans.

Date:

7. **What is your research goal- what do you specifically hope to find out? Use this to guide developing a focus for your research question**

Is it to answer a specific question/query you have; to gather information about an already known phenomenon/ approach to affirm others' findings or to focus on its relevance to your specific setting; is it to gather new data to find out more about a specific part of the phenomena/approach?

What research question(s) could you ask to find out information about your research interest: think about questions related to: *who, what why, when, how.*

Additional information: your research goal, your research questions and how you go about your research will both reflect your belief in <u>what</u> you consider is truth and reality (*ontological premise*) as well as what you accept as credible ways to present knowledge and ways of knowing/understanding, so how you know about it (*epistemology*). These then guide your thinking about your research topic (*the research paradigm*- which includes positivism, interpretivism and pragmatism). They also influence your plans on how you choose to go about the research (*the methodology*) including the research design, methods, approaches and procedures used in an investigation and which measures are used as well as influencing the tools you will use to collect information (data).

More information available from the free, online Open University 'Openlearn' course:
https://www.open.edu/openlearn/education-development/education/engaging-educational-research/content-section-0?intro=1

Link to You tube video on explaining the 'ologies:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hkcqGU7l_zU

Date:

8. **Consider how you could further investigate your research goal**

How will you go about finding what you are looking for or what would be the best approach to access the information you need to address your research goal?

Think about the following: Do you want to focus on a specific example and describe it?(perhaps look into case study); do you want to study many examples to identify /measure/ relationships and commonalities (perhaps look into mixed methods or grounded theory) ; Are you interested in describing the detail of the phenomena (perhaps look into ethnographic approach); Are you looking to prove/disprove application or expectations of the phenomena (perhaps look into experimental approach); Do you want to try to change practice by introducing an intervention/approach (perhaps look into action research); Do you want to capture others lived experience of the phenomena - perhaps look into participatory/multimodal/narrative approach/method. For example the mosaic approach- article:
https://pureadmin.qub.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/13808523/Research_with_children_methodological_issues_and_innovative_techniques.pdf

Openlearn -OU course on Mosaic approach

https://www.open.edu/openlearn/ocw/mod/oucontent/view.php?id=105431&section=4

If you have journal access through university more information is available /access:
https://methods.sagepub.com

Date:

9. What tools will you use to collect your information (data)

How do you think you may go about collecting the information, so setting up and gathering the data?

Quantitative research largely uses experiments, tests, scales, numerical focussed surveys and closed question questionnaires.

Qualitative prefers interviews, open question questionnaires, observations, audio, visual documentary evidence.

Find a text/book (online or actual) that 'speaks to you' and can act as a guide, suggesting applicable tools to gather data and how to use them. Look and see if there are You Tube videos and tutorials on appropriate use and potential abuse(!). See if there are 'online' research communities, where like-minded researchers share ideas. An example of a research community interested in using interpretative phenomenological analysis is referenced in this online article: https://thepsychologist.bps.org.uk/volume-24/edition-10/methods-interpretative-phenomenological-analysis.

Date:

10. Think about how you will evidence academic rigour in your research approach and plan. This includes consideration of ethical issues relevant to carrying out this type of research, e.g., consent, gatekeepers, capacity, vulnerability, effects of research experience on participants, anonymity, power disparities and free will (to name but a few!). Who will need to be informed/involved from your work setting?

Although your research project may be small it is imperative you maintain academic rigour which includes justification and transparency about what you did and what you discovered. Time and consideration must be given to ensure high standards of ethical rigour are in place and remain so throughout the research. At all times researchers must evidence that 'no harm can come to participants as a result of participation' and respect for individuals rights.

Codes of Conduct:

https://www.bps.org.uk/news-and-policy/bps-code-ethics-and-conduct
https://www.bera.ac.uk/resources/all-publications/resources-for-researchers
Free, online Open University 'Openlearn" course: ethical researcher
https://www.open.edu/openlearn/ocw/mod/oucontent/view.php?id=103462

Date:

11. Whose support do you think you need from your work setting and when?

These include: management, colleagues and resources -including financial, time for academic study, administration support.

Date:

12. **Where in your research journey do you think you would like/will want/need additional support from others outside of your work setting?** (For example, research supervision, peer support, academic support, advice/support from Emotion Coaching UK).

Date:

13. What type of support do you think you may need for your research project?

e.g., support in creating the research journey timeline, planning the project, with the literature trawl, delivering interventions, carrying out data collection, analysing the data, writing it up – none or all the above!

Date:

14. Try to create a timeline to start to visualise the research project and help with planning and monitoring research progress

These timelines often get extended and redrawn, but it does give you an idea of the sequencing needed to get the research up and running and opportunities/deadlines for the various phases of the project: Preparation phase (may include literature review, planning, consents, pilot project, review), active data gathering phase, analysis phase, writing-up phase, publication and information dissemination.

Date:

15. **Keeping a Research Journal is useful to evidence the process and product of your research.**

It becomes a useful data source, evidencing your academic rigour by chronicling the progress of the research project and support of interpretation of data; referencing the origins and development of explanation, records ideas which you can revisit and develop when writing up, evidencing reflectivity, contextualising a researcher perspective on data gathering.

This is for your use only- but top tips I learnt the hard way are: make sure your research diary is dedicated for use just for this piece of research, always date your entries, however brief, always take time to write a few comments about the 'context' of interviews and observations as this helps when interpreting the event/data, keep it handy and jot down ideas as soon as you can- however brief and keep it safe so it never gets lost!!

Date:

Notes