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Writing research and enquiry summaries



Networked Learning Communities

learning from each other

learning with each other

learning on behalf of each other

Foreword for the writing guidelines

These guidelines grow out of research with teachers carried out by the Centre for the Use of Research Evidence in Education (CUREE). The work started in 1997 and was initially funded by the Teacher Training Agency (TTA). Its aim was to support the development of informative research summaries that are attractive to and useable by teachers. Since the first focus groups and pilot testing CUREE has developed the guidelines for use by a range of schemes and contexts.

The partnership between CUREE and the National College for School Leadership's (NCSL) Networked Learning Group, which led to the version of the guidelines presented here, was conducted through a series of seminars for teacher researchers in networks and network facilitators. It is based on three basic principles:

- 1 Using research always involves professional learning. Research enquiry summaries are, therefore, really learning materials.
- 2 Learning materials from research need to tell the story of the findings not the history of the project.
- 3 Writing first drafts is another form of learning and thinking. It is only in editing, revising or even rewriting that we start to communicate.

Colleagues in CUREE and the Networked Learning Group are always keen to learn and interested in ways of improving practice. That goes for these guidelines too.

We would love to have your comments on them and look forward to seeing the fruits of your labours with them. Above all, we hope they help to make writing about your enquiries manageable and fun.



Philippa A Cordingley

AIMS

This leaflet aims to:

- **provide guidance for NLCs in writing up short summaries of their research**
- **support NLCs in writing summaries which help to meet the learning needs of others**

Why write research summaries?

- Summaries can be a valuable tool for learning

Written summaries are to be made available for Network Learning Communities with the aim of building an accessible collection of research outputs from the huge range of enquiries currently being undertaken within the individual networks. These written summaries, in web form or as hard copies, can then be accessed by teachers and:

- used as a point of reference, to reflect whether making similar changes or undertaking similar activities in their own classrooms and schools could be beneficial
- shared with other teachers and used to introduce colleagues to new ideas and new ways of developing their practice
- kept as a point of contact so that teachers can get in touch to find out more.

- Summaries can help spread ideas

Teacher summaries will also provide help for the networks to support cross fertilisation of ideas and shared learning at all levels. Future enquiries can be built on this growing evidence base, so that networks can use what is known already about learning in a network context as a springboard. Summaries can't replicate the benefits of peer-to-peer interaction, but they can provide a practical means of raising awareness to a wider cross-network audience.

This leaflet offers a framework for producing research summaries which are accessible and 'teacher-friendly' and which have been designed with the learning needs of teacher readers in mind. It's certainly not meant to be prescriptive, but is based on years of feedback from teachers, including recent responses from NLCs. We hope it will be helpful for NLCs at all stages of their enquiries from those still at an early stage, where it could help to structure and organise the enquiry, to those who have completed an enquiry and are ready to report on their findings.

What is the best way to structure the summary?

What teachers say works best for them is:

- a front page that will tell them in 15 seconds whether they need or want to know more, with bullet points that set out key findings or issues
- two to four pages of information about the actual intervention and illustration of the evidence underpinning the front page key issues
- a final page outlining methods and explaining how to find out more.

Teachers said they appreciated:

- use of plain English or 'teacher speak'
- a mix of text, tables and other visuals such as photographs or illustrations of pupils work
- use of quotes and illustrative examples to 'bring the summary to life'.

The ideal length, including the front page, would be four to six pages long.

THE FRONT PAGE

Teachers want a front page which includes concise information on these five elements:

- 1 title
- 2 identification
- 3 aims
- 4 dimensions
- 5 summary of findings or outcomes

1 - Title

This should provide concise information about the essence of the study. Make sure that your title is 'transparent'; include key words that a potential reader might use to interrogate a data base, for example:

- how **gender** affects **mathematics** achievement at **KS3**
- the role of **drama** in **creative writing** at **KS1**
- **subject managers** or **leaders** for **learning?** The role of the **middle manager**

2 - Identification

Identify who you are and who you are writing on behalf of (eg this enquiry formed part of the work of the Cambridge SUPER Network of 12 schools and 2 universities).

- Identify the NLC levels of learning involved:

Pupil	Adult	Leadership	School-wide	School-to-school	Network-to-network
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- Identify the topic, age/phase, curriculum area, leadership issue etc covered by the enquiry through key words (eg thinking skills, distributed leadership, KS2, history).
- Identify your intended audience (eg this summary has been written to provide fellow teachers with an insight into our research. Contact details are provided at the end of the summary. We welcome all enquiries.).

3 - Aim(s) of the research

Identify what you actually researched. Carefully state your overall aim and specify the questions that you researched. These need to be the foundation of your reporting, so be sure to revisit them later in the summary in terms of what you did in the classroom, staffroom or network and in terms of outcomes. Some examples of aims from recent teacher research include:

I aimed to investigate whether the use of thinking skills strategies within a year one class could:

- *improve the children's comprehension of literacy texts*
- *encourage more active participation in speaking and listening sessions.*

(Babs Anderson, NTRP Conference, 2004)

Aim:

- *to improve children's confidence and develop a 'can do' culture throughout the school*
- *to develop a visual and kinaesthetic (VAK) approach to teaching and learning*
- *to motivate pupils and teachers through a different approach to learning.*

(Maureen Cain, NTRP Conference, 2004)

The overall aim of the research was to develop specific strategies to support pupils in their written French work at KS4. This was addressed through exploration of the following research questions:

- *what attitudes do pupils have towards their writing in French?*
- *can training in other strategies to support their writing help to develop pupils' confidence?*
- *is the success of this training dependent on ability?*
- *will increased independence at KS4 lead to greater uptake and retention at KS5?*

(Belinda Bartley, NTRP Conference, 2004)

4 - Dimensions of the study

This section should be brief. Just include the who, where, what and when aspects of your project. Five or six lines should suffice. For example:

The Greenfield School is an LEA 11-18 comprehensive with 1,350 pupils and 78 members of staff, situated to the south of the city of York. The project was undertaken with four departments: science, mathematics, history and art. Seven classes were involved in the project, from years seven to nine. In total, over 200 pupils took part in the project. It took place over two terms, starting in September 2002.

(anonymised example)

5 - Summary of the main findings

or Pupil and teacher outcomes

or What we have found so far (if project is still ongoing)

Whenever applicable, report on benefits to the pupils, teachers, managers, whole school or network.

Teachers are particularly enthused and motivated to take new ideas on board when they have evidence of positive benefits to learning. So your summary needs to include the 'headline' results or outcomes of your work for pupils, teachers, schools or network. Although the results of small scale case studies are not generalisable, putting your main findings 'upfront' in the summary often encourages other teachers to decide to try and adapt the research strategies for working with their own pupils in their own contexts.

These headline findings should be simple bullet points which you then go on to amplify in the main body of the summary (see below). To show that you are not trying to make claims about generalisability, always write summaries in general, and main messages in particular, in the past tense. For example:

- *standards in the school have risen steadily and significantly since the introduction of this initiative*
- *using ICT made analysis of pupil data a simple process, saving teachers time*
- *using data diagnostically enabled us to target teaching resources towards the needs of both the individual and the cohort*
- *tracking progress made by different groups year on year enabled us to set realistic targets*
- *questions raised by anomalies in the data have prompted further investigations as part of the whole school monitoring and evaluation process*
- *availability of pupil data has encouraged meaningful and focused dialogue between teachers, parents and pupils about the progress of the whole child*
- *use of assessment and pupil data has led to raised expectation, consistency of practice and a sense of collective accountability about children's progress.*

(Two Mile Ash School)

BODY OF THE SUMMARY

6 - Background and context

This section should aim to help teacher readers to understand why you started the enquiry in the first place, what it is that you were or are trying to do and how it relates to the network context. For example, if the work is based on one class in one school, it helps to describe the school environment, pupils' background characteristics and any other distinctive features which are relevant to your work - such as the ability and age ranges of the pupils, ethnicity and exclusion or attendance rates.

If there are several schools involved, you will need to include very brief descriptions of each, together with the scale of the research, activity or practice in each school.

Explain why you chose to focus your enquiry on this area. Was it a burning school issue? Or was it external pressure, for example the need to get to grips with externally imposed changes? How does the study relate to previous learning and research? How did you become interested in following your specific line of enquiry? Was this a result of reading literature or attending a seminar etc?

7 - The intervention: processes and strategies

- Illustrate wherever possible

Real examples and illustrations of your intervention process are very powerful. They help move the reader through possibly unfamiliar technical or theoretical ground into the realm of the familiar and the practical. They are important in generating a 'can do' approach to research and evidence informed practice. If you are conducting classroom-based research try to include a selection of lively classroom-based examples such as:

- quotes from pupils
- illustrations of teacher actions
- samples of pupils' written work.

You can use these to explain your strategies as well as to illustrate them. Those conducting research into other aspects of learning, for example leadership issues, might be able to share survey instruments, and the themes that proved useful in generating professional reflection and discourse. Exemplify your outcomes through use of illustrative quotes from leaders and teachers.

- Offer to share your resources and materials

Can you offer to share your resources and materials with your readers? Could you include a brief sample to whet the appetite?

- Explain what went on

Teachers also appreciate getting an insight into the business of conducting an enquiry: What actually went on in terms of how often people met, the topics for reflective discussion including reference to the work of other networks, relevant literature or the nature of external expertise input.

Include what didn't work as well as what did.

8 - The detailed findings

or **Pupil and teacher outcomes**
or **Early outcomes**

Think through your main findings and outcomes before you write up your summary. Ensure that these findings or outcomes actually expand on those bullet points in the headline findings on the front page. You will have interested the reader with some of the headline findings and they may be keen to follow these up in more detail in this section - try not to disappoint.

The summary should include the evidence on which the headline findings were based. Readers will want to know:

- what did pupils learn?
- what did teachers learn?
- what did leaders learn?
- what helped the teachers?
- what influenced teaching and learning?

Include any relevant tables and graphs but remember tables don't always speak for themselves so add an explanation or commentary where necessary.

Were there any unexpected findings?

9 - Research or enquiry methods

Teachers need to know how the study was conducted because they need to be able to trust your findings. You will need to show how you chose, collected and analysed data and why you chose to collect these data in particular. Your summary should include a short note on the methods used in the study. For example, did you use any of the following research or enquiry processes:

Qualitative processes	Quantitative processes
For example: Pupil diaries Interviews Video Lesson observations	For example: Tests (whether conducted pre, mid or post intervention) Questionnaires Course work grades

Could you offer to include a sample questionnaire for example as an appendix?

Most researchers can design better methods at the end of the project than at the beginning. Since others might want to adapt what you did to use in their own contexts, tell them how you would do it differently with the benefit of hindsight.

10 - Conclusions

How do your findings help to answer your research questions? What do you see as the implications for your own practice and that of others? Has your work raised any further questions for investigation?

Include information about how you are moving forward from the enquiry. What are the next steps?

11 - Further Reading

Avoid setting out long lists of references even if you have used them all. Try and pick those that you think will really help other teachers to get to grips with the issues if they want to pursue the topic for themselves.

Remember, readers might also want to get in touch with you to ask direct questions. No matter how good your summary it will always raise questions in the minds of your readers. If you can, include your contact details (or details of a designated contact person if you have been working in a partnership with colleagues) so that teachers can find out more or gain access to materials or research reports arising from the work.

12 - Author and Contact Details

Who could teachers contact if they want to find out more about your work?

What might my completed summary look like?

Here are some building blocks

Front page



- 1 Title -**
Include key words to tune the reader into the focus of your enquiry.
- 2 Identification -**
Include yourself and your network, keywords, levels of learning, intended audience.
- 3 Aim(s) of the research -**
What problems or issues did the study tackle? What actual questions were researched?
- 4 Dimensions of the study -**
Concise information about the who, what, where and when aspects.
- 5 Summary of main findings -**
What were the headline findings? Is there any evidence of positive impact on teachers and pupils?

Definitions or glossary box (optional) -
To provide vital information for the 'lay reader'.

Body of summary



- 6 Background and context -**
Why and how did the project start? How does it build on existing knowledge? Include relevant details about the school and network context and the pupils and teachers involved.
- 7 The intervention: processes and strategies -**
What actually happened in the school or classroom? Examples of strategies and how they were implemented are useful. Mention pitfalls and how they were overcome as well as successes.
- 8 The detailed findings -**
Explain each of the front page findings in more depth. What evidence is there to support these findings? Use pupil or teacher quotes or examples of work to bring the summary 'alive'.
- 9 Research or enquiry methods -**
What sort of data were collected? How were they collected and analysed? Can you include a sample data collection tool in an appendix eg questionnaire?
- 10 Conclusions -**
What are your thoughts about the study? How have the findings affected your school or the way you do things now? Have they raised any further questions for investigation?
- 11 Further reading -**
How was your work linked with what is already known about the issues you were researching? What literature could you recommend to teachers who want to find out more?
- 12 Author and contact details -**
Who could teachers contact if they want to find out more about your work?

Watch out box (optional) -
Let readers know how you overcame problems such as time, getting support from colleagues, senior management etc.

Reflections on teaching and learning box (optional) -
What are the implications for your practice and that of others?

Writing guidance for teachers

Front page - Construct a clear, uncluttered front page stating aims, dimensions and summary of findings. Use a mix of stem sentences and bullets which enables readers to scan for relevant information so they can decide whether to read on.

Title - Ensure that your title is transparent, enabling readers, and those searching for studies on the web data base, to grasp the focus of the enquiry straight away. Snazzy titles may feel good to you, but can be frustrating for the reader who needs to know quickly what your enquiry is about.

Enquirer turns communicator - If you want others to understand your work:

- decode all jargon
- spell out acronyms the first time
- explain everything
- take nothing about your readers for granted.

Avoid use of:

- the present tense in reporting findings. It can look as though you are generalising so it's nearly always better to stick to past tense.
- passive tense eg "The data were collected by means of questionnaires." It can sound dull and ponderous. Better to write, "We used questionnaires as our main data source."
- strong adjectives in reporting outcomes, they can appear to 'oversell' a small scale study, eg "Pupils' work improved dramatically." Better to use terminology which accurately reflects the measured increase in improvement.

Consider your readers - All information should be easy to access. In particular:

- get straight to the point at the beginning of a paragraph, don't bury it in the middle
- set the school and classroom context as vividly as possible - you want readers to be able to relate to the work as well as understand it
- illustrations (eg quotes) are important, they help the reader to 'glimpse inside the classroom'
- use line breaks and sub headings to guide the reader in any longer sections
- consider the use of charts, diagrams, excerpts of pupils' work or photographs to break up long sections of text.

Overall length - Try to keep your summary to four or five pages, up to six if an appendix is included (eg sample questionnaire, interview pro forma or excerpts from teacher or pupil diaries).

Relative weighting - The length of each section will depend on the nature of the enquiry. As a rough guide, the two sections on intervention processes and strategies and the actual research findings will need more exemplification than the other sections and thus be longer, possibly about a page each. In general, the sections on background, research methods and conclusions will be much shorter, probably less than half a page each.

Share your draft versions - it is useful to give your draft summary to a 'critical friend' to read. Ask them what they have understood and gained and what questions remain unanswered.

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