Classroom-Based Research

“Classroom-based research may be simply defined as ongoing and cumulative critical inquiry by faculty into the nature of teaching and learning in their own classrooms. This is a tremendously freeing idea, that what we are being asked to do is what we do anyway, intuitively, anecdotally, implicitly as part of our own teaching. “This makes it a little more systematic, formal, explicit, and accessible to be shared as a part of a faculty learning and teaching community looking at improving learning with the classroom as a learning lab.

Classroom-based research shares goals with traditional educational research. However, it is different:

- It’s a valid and useful alternative to the “scientific method.”
- It supports use of faculty observations and insights, and supports the struggles and triumphs of teaching and learning as valid and important.
- It supports individual applications, in contrast to “generalizable” findings and applications.
- It asserts, with Cronbach (1975) that the pursuit of generalizable truths might be set aside in favor of “working hypotheses” to be tested in new contexts.

Some principles of Classroom-based research:

- The study should be relevant and important to the real-life needs of the faculty and students, or there is no point.
- The strength of the faculty researcher lies not in technical methodology, but in their closeness to the learning needs and realities of the classroom.
- Small, local studies of real needs are most useful and relevant.
- There is equal interest in how the majority may confirm a hypothesis and how a minority may depart from it.
- You can do it over time (and classes) or between classes.
- Don’t try to save the world—just find out something important to improve your teaching and your students’ learning.
- You don’t have to have earth-shaking, quantitatively-solid data. Almost any kind of information that adds to your understanding of teaching and learning is important.
- Remember that the focus is on students and their needs primarily.

How to get started:

- Be realistic in the scope of your design.
- Develop an assessment question based on your curiosity about your students’ learning and your teaching.
- As experts, you have ideas about how to improve their learning. To see where this might sit in the literature or have been researched, locate some research literature out there that relates to your topic.
- Develop your research design—how are you going to test your idea and how will you know how successful (or not) it was.
• Write up your findings to share with colleagues.
• You can use quantitative data (X amount of students did # better/worse/the same).
• Student self-reports/interviews
• Case studies

Works Cited


