



**Title:** Developing, Sustaining and Promoting NEARI as a Collaborative Research Network for Educational Practitioners

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### **Summary:**

As conveners of the Network of Educational Action Research in Ireland (NEARI) we aimed to develop and strengthen NEARI as a national network and to forge links with other educational research networks on this island and globally. NEARI is a network for educators conducting practitioner research. We hold three face-to-face NEARIMeets per year as well as an ongoing online discussion group.

Adopting a self-study action research methodology, our questions included:

- How, by providing a space for educators to articulate their own needs/concerns/ideas/theories, can we support educators in initiating change in their practice?
- How do we enable research networks to give voice to collaborations between practitioners working at all levels of education, who are conducting a variety of forms of research?

There were three strands in our research activities: action in terms of organising and enhancing NEARIMeets, reflection based on data collated, and acknowledgement of learning as outlined below.

At NEARIMeets, participants got opportunities to take ownership of their work, to share their ideas with others and to learn from the process of sharing and listening. A key finding was that participants especially valued the safe and objective space for educational dialogue that NEARI provides - a space that demonstrates a sense of mutual respect for all. We also learned the importance of the role of dialogue as a key method, if not methodology, in the research process.

During this project, the number of NEARI participants increased from 98 to 143 and there was an increase in the range of disciplines represented. We discovered from their evaluations, that participants felt professionally invigorated by the NEARIMeets. Feedback also showed that, as a result of participating in NEARI, many felt that they learned to engage in critical reflection about their work,

to read more widely and to work towards enhancing their practice. We saw how stimulating and authentic professional conversation inspired us to become better practitioners, and how teacher-researchers placed huge emphasis on their own learning and the learning of their students.

We found that participants from other networks liked having opportunities to engage with people from a variety of disciplines for example, Early Years, Primary and Post Primary Teaching, Engineering, Speech Therapy and Teacher Education. Participants stated that engaging in professional conversations with others, who are also researching their practice, was illuminating and empowering. Participants indicated that they 'gained a better understanding and appreciation for relationships and the power dynamics in education' and 'expanded my reading list' (feedback from NEARIMeet January 2018).

The provision of a venue by various third-level institutions for facilitating NEARIMeets helped to promote NEARI, and enhance members' attendance, on a regional basis. The gifting of these venues regionally reinforces the value which the academy, as well as participants, derive from the work of our network which operates without any funding.

We invite reflective practitioners to become part of our online community of educational action researchers as we exchange ideas, questions/answers, and reflections about action research today. We offer a safe space for support and conversation. You can find us at:

Website: [www.eari.ie](http://www.eari.ie)

Email: [info@eari.ie](mailto:info@eari.ie)

Twitter: @InfoNeari

Discussion Group: <https://groups.google.com/d/forum/neari-group>