

Understanding the Differences Between Practice Articles and Applied Research Articles

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Welcome to the rebirth of an old friend. Between 1989 and 2008, the journal known as *RE:view* was published by Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER) to provide an outlet for practitioners to share innovative practices with their colleagues. After a long hiatus, the journal has been reenvisioned, and this is the first issue of *The New RE:view* (TNR). It is the intent of this journal to provide a peer-reviewed venue for publication of promising and proven practices that are designed to enhance instruction to children and adults with visual impairment. The journal will contain a mix of articles that focus on practice and will form a continuum including idea pieces known as practice reflections, practice reports, and applied research relating to practice. TNR has the goal of publishing two issues in its first year, three issues in its second year, and four issues in each subsequent year. It is an online journal but will have a print version to coincide with the AER biennial conferences. Initially, it will be provided free of charge to all. Beginning with the second year, it will continue to be free to all members of AER and available on a subscription basis to others. Please join this community of practitioners and scholars by submitting your ideas and research to TNR.

Practice Articles Compared With Research Articles

In the field of visual impairment and blindness, there is room for both formal research and reports on practice. The editors and developers of TNR believe that many practitioners are in situations that allow them to document insights they gain from practice and that publishing those insights can benefit the field.

The purpose of this article is twofold. The first is to inspire both potential and experienced authors to submit quality practitioner-based manuscripts to be

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considered for publication in TNR. This new journal has been established to provide practitioners with information that will enable them to learn from the experience of other practitioners as they strive to improve their instruction. This article's second purpose is to identify the differences between two types of practice articles and applied research, all of which are welcome in TNR.

Innovation in practice can be communicated through formal research studies that use controlled research methodologies but also through approaches that describe impactful practices developed during the day-to-day teaching of learners. TNR strives to host a healthy mix of both research and practice articles with both focusing on practice-based inquiry.

Traditional empirical research is defined in federal regulations as "a systematic investigation including research development, testing, and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge" (45 CFR 46.102). Research is an activity that is specifically intended to provide answers to questions that can be added to the knowledge base of a discipline. When relating to practice, this includes conducting experiments with a sample population that will provide outcomes that may generalize to the larger population.

If, instead, an individual is reporting on normal educational or rehabilitation activities in the setting in which they normally occur and the outcomes are not tied to specific individuals, the activity is not considered research in the formal sense. This is an important distinction because research that involves human subjects must be reviewed by an Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure the protection of subjects. Conclusions reached from everyday educational or rehabilitation practices that do not relate to identified participants do not require IRB review. TNR encourages these less-formal manuscripts and classifies them as either practice reflections or practice reports. These two kinds of articles provide insight into approaches that may be effective and can later be studied through more formal research.

Understanding empirical research can be a daunting task for many practitioners, requiring practitioners to recall their earlier education regarding statistical analysis. They often must review research concepts and practices as well as the many types of analyses. Faced with this predicament, many practitioners concentrate on the abstracts and conclusions. TNR focuses on practitioner-generated reporting that is easily digestible and jargon free. Certainly, there will also be articles that include more formal research, which we call applied research reports. We believe that this mix of articles will be attractive to practitioners and researchers alike.

Types of Articles for TNR

TNR accepts manuscripts in three basic categories: practice reflections, practice reports, and applied research reports. The first two types may negate the need for IRB approval. Both of these—practice reflections and practice reports—are appropriate for authors who work daily with learners who are blind or have vision loss.

The following segments detail the nature of the three manuscript types that TNR publishes.

Practice Reflections

Practice reflections describe ideas and instructional strategies that have been effective with learners. Such articles will provide other practitioners with ideas and approaches that may allow them to enhance the effectiveness of their instruction. Practice reflection manuscripts do not follow a prescribed format. However, they should follow American Psychological Association (APA) style guidelines and may not exceed 2,000 words.

Practice Reports

Practice reports are descriptions of methods and materials that implement evidence-based or promising practices and include outcomes consistent with progress monitoring. They may report on activities with learners on a practitioner's caseload as long as they are part of usual educational practices and anonymity is ensured. Practitioners may use the information collected as part of progress monitoring to report on the effectiveness of procedures used. However, the instructor must be certain that the procedures being used are a part of regular instruction and are not connected with identified individuals. If doubt remains, before collecting data, the practitioner must seek guidance from TNR about whether or not an IRB review is needed.

The format of a practice report manuscript should consist of the following:

- Title
- Abstract
- Introduction
- Context
- Staff (including the author's role)
- Procedures
- Outcomes
- Conclusions

- Application to practice
- References

Practice Reports should closely follow APA guidelines and may range between 1,000 and 3,000 words, including references.

Applied Research Reports

Applied research reports are based on a recognized research methodology, which may include quantitative (group or single-subject designs), qualitative, or mixed-methods research. An IRB review must be sought when the procedures being tested are not part of everyday instruction, are part of a controlled study that involves human subjects, and are intended to be generalizable. It is unethical to engage in such research without putting such safeguards in place. Authors submitting research manuscripts to TNR must indicate the approval of the study by an IRB.

The format of research manuscripts should include the following elements:

- Title
- Abstract
- Introduction
- Literature review
- Methods
- Results
- Discussion
- Application for practitioners
- References

Applied research reports should closely follow APA seventh edition guidelines and may not exceed 5,000 words, including tables and references. The abstract should follow the above structure, should not include references, and may not exceed 300 words.

The goal of applied research reports is to gather data about individuals to generalize from a sample to a larger population. This often requires asking subjects to participate in designated procedures designed to determine the effectiveness of a strategy. This approach is not a part of the everyday instruction that is normally provided in typical education and rehabilitation settings. As with all formal research, an IRB review must take place to make sure that those who participate are protected from physical and psychological harm. IRB review is most often left up to a

university or a large educational entity to protect participants. Usually, an IRB review is only within the reach of someone who is employed by a university or a by school district that administers its own IRB.

When IRB review is required, there are various standards that must be met in protecting participants. One of the most succinct descriptions of these protections was formulated in what is considered to be the “common rule” (National Archives, 2022, October 01a). The common rule spells out the criteria an IRB must use in evaluating a study:

1. Risks to subjects are minimized: (i) by using procedures which are consistent with sound research design, and which do not unnecessarily expose subjects to risk, and (ii) whenever appropriate, by using procedures already being performed on the subjects for diagnostic or treatment purposes.
2. Risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to anticipated benefits, if any, to subjects, and the importance of the knowledge that may reasonably be expected to result. In evaluating risks and benefits, the IRB should consider only those risks and benefits that may result from the research (as distinguished from risks and benefits of therapies subjects would receive, even if not participating in the research). The IRB should not consider possible long-range effects of applying knowledge gained in the research (for example, the possible effects of the research on public policy) as among those research risks that fall within the purview of its responsibility.
3. Selection of subjects is equitable. In making this assessment, the IRB should take into account the purposes of the research, and the setting in which the research will be conducted and should be particularly cognizant of the special problems of research involving vulnerable populations, such as children, prisoners, pregnant women, mentally disabled persons, or economically or educationally disadvantaged persons.
4. Informed consent will be sought from each prospective subject or the subject’s legally authorized representative, in accordance with, and to the extent required by §46.116.
5. Informed consent will be appropriately documented, in accordance with, and to the extent required by §46.117.
6. When appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provision for monitoring the data collected, to ensure the safety of subjects.
7. When appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of data.

The common rule states the basic elements of informed consent (National Archives, 2022, October 01b):

1. A statement that the study involves research, an explanation of the purposes of the research, a statement of the expected duration of the subject's participation, a description of the procedures to be followed, and identification of any procedures which are experimental.
2. A description of any reasonably foreseeable risks or discomforts to the subject.
3. A description of any benefits to the subject or to others which may reasonably be expected from the research.
4. A disclosure of appropriate alternative procedures or courses of treatment, if any, that might be advantageous to the subject.
5. A statement describing the extent, if any, to which confidentiality of records identifying the subject will be maintained.
6. For research involving more than minimal risk, an explanation as to whether any compensation will be provided, and an explanation as to whether any medical treatments are available if injury occurs and, if so, what they consist of, or where further information may be obtained.
7. An explanation of whom to contact for answers to pertinent questions about the research and research subjects' rights, and whom to contact in the event of a research-related injury to the subject; and
8. A statement that participation is voluntary, refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled, and the subject may dis-continue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits, to which the subject is otherwise entitled.

The common rule standards help ensure that subjects will be protected and can freely decide to withdraw from the study at any time. There are additional requirements when subjects are from a group considered to be vulnerable, such as children or prisoners.

Conclusion

As stated previously, TNR is a practitioner-based journal and, subsequently, it is your journal, where you may share your knowledge and experience with like-minded professionals. Reports of promising practices may stimulate others to try innovative approaches similar to yours. Sharing information with others through TNR provides you an opportunity to make a great profession even better.

References

- National Archives, (2022, October 01a). Code of Federal Regulations, § 46.111 Criteria for IRB approval of research. <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-45/subtitle-A/subchapter-A/part-46/subpart-A/section-46.111>
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