



# Using Everyday Classroom Experiences to Advocate for Young Children

The early care and education workforce is large, with more than 2 million center- and home-based teachers and caregivers directly working with children birth through 5 years old<sup>1</sup>. As engaged early childhood professionals and members of the ZERO TO THREE Policy Network, we are a large coalition that has the ability to mobilize in order to create positive change for the well-being of infants, toddlers, and their families. We can provide valuable insight into key policy issues that we see affecting children and families on a daily basis, and we can work with policymakers and researchers to produce the best outcomes for kids. Practitioners—giving voice to the challenges that they see in the classroom and proposing solutions—are essential for the creation of sustainable and meaningful policy changes in this field.

As a practitioner, have you ever wondered about the efficacy of the policies that affect your classroom? By asking a simple, specific, and genuine question about the routines of children and their families, practitioners can help evaluate whether certain policies or procedures within a classroom, center-, or home-based facility are helpful to the children they serve. Asking such questions is a form of practitioner research, which is defined as “the intentional and systematic inquiry done by teachers [and caregivers] with the goals of gaining insights into teaching and learning, becoming more reflective practitioners, effecting changes in the classroom or school, and improving the lives of children.”<sup>2</sup> For example, a possible research question might be: “Does the use of yoga positions during transitions help facilitate greater self-regulation

## Understanding Action-Oriented Research

“I came to understand that my research collaborations with community agencies had a name—‘action-oriented research.’ In these collaborations, we generated research questions that were relevant to their efforts to improve the quality of life for the children and families they served, and I was still able to generate sound scientific knowledge about young children’s development.

Indeed the purpose of action-oriented research is to generate knowledge that can be used to address practical concerns of local communities, organizations, and groups, and then incorporate local understandings of specific practices and issues (Small & Utall, 2005). Action-oriented research projects can focus on any issue or concern and usually have some type of change as an ultimate goal.”

—DR. EVA MARIE SHIVERS

Read the rest of the article here:  
[http://main.zerotothree.org/site/DocServer/AccidentalAdvocate\\_3\\_14\\_08.pdf?docID=3021](http://main.zerotothree.org/site/DocServer/AccidentalAdvocate_3_14_08.pdf?docID=3021)

among the children in my classroom?” One could then collect data to inform this question by observing the children’s behavior after transitions on days with yoga vs. days without yoga, charting these observations in daily anecdotal notes observing trends over time. To learn more, check out the [Teacher Research Articles](#) available from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

Author:  
Shayna Cook, Policy  
Fellow, ZERO TO THREE

August 2014

©2014 ZERO TO THREE

<sup>1</sup> Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation. (2013). *Number and characteristics of early care and education (ECE) teachers and caregivers: Initial findings from the National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE)*. Retrieved from <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/index.html>

<sup>2</sup> Henderson, B., Meier, D. R., Perry, G., & Stremmel, A. J. (2012). *The nature of teacher research. NAEYC Voices of Practitioners*. Retrieved from [www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/vop/Nature%20of%20Teacher%20Research.pdf](http://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/vop/Nature%20of%20Teacher%20Research.pdf)

## Teacher Research in Action

“This year of teacher research has changed the way I teach and understand young children. I can no longer teach without using teacher [action] research, whether it is a formal study...or daily analysis of my classroom practices.”

—JEFFREY W. WOOD

Read the rest of the article here:

<https://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/vop/VoicesWood.pdf>

Source: Wood, J. W. (2005). *Voice of practitioners: Moses's story*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

After engaging in an inquiry within a classroom, center-, or home-based facility, practitioners can then use this data to advocate for research-based changes that are in the best interest of their children and families. However, this research does take time and must be conducted intentionally in order to gather enough evidence to answer a research question. Despite the many tasks and

requirements a caregiver or teacher must fulfill, action research can be incorporated into a daily routine and can also be a source of renewed analysis of teaching and learning. For example, your daily anecdotal notes, pictures, and student work can easily be changed into field notes for your research. The collection of a variety of different sources adds to the validity of your research. As practitioners, we have the ability to conduct research with evidence from our daily interactions in order to create policy recommendations that are in the best interest of children and families.

## Transforming Research Into Advocacy

Studying a topic for a period of time and viewing daily activities through the lens of a research question can help you to develop expertise on a particular aspect of teaching and learning, health, or development. Using your expertise and stories will allow you to advocate for children in one of the most compelling ways—with stories that correlate with data. Here are a few ways that you can share your stories with policymakers:

- Use ZERO TO THREE’s [Find Your Elected Officials](#) tool to find the contact information for your U.S. Senators and Representative, as well as your state and local legislators. Then, arrange a meeting to share your expertise with your policymakers.

- Invite policymakers into your classroom. Allow your policymakers to come visit your classroom to see how a specific policy is impacting children and their families. Use ZERO TO THREE’s [How to Plan a Site Visit](#) to help you to plan and schedule a visit.
- Download ZERO TO THREE’s [Using Data to Advocate Effectively](#) to understand the best ways to present the results from your research when advocating change to policymakers.

## Research Groups for Practitioners

As current or future practitioner researchers, there are many organizations that you can join in order to be a Big Voice for Little Kids™ within the greater education community. Here are a few examples of groups you can join and there are many more teacher research groups that you can find locally:

- [NAEYC Teacher Research Initiative](#)
- [Action Research Special Interest Group of American Educational Research Association](#)
- [Collaborative Action Research Network](#)
- [Action Learning, Action Research Association, Inc.](#)

You can also start your own local collaborative practitioner research group among your own network. It can begin with practitioners meeting and brainstorming questions or it could be a new initiative for an established local early childhood network.

## Conclusion

Practitioners can make a significant impact by advocating for policies that produce positive outcomes for children and their families. They are in a unique position to understand how effectively programs are being implemented and how policies impact their community—information which is extremely valuable to policymakers. The ZERO TO THREE Policy Center encourages you to use practitioner research to be a Big Voice for Little Kids™.