Learning from the Past and Looking to the Future: Reconceptualising Practice-based Research

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Contexts for educational change

Social, cultural, political, geographical and economic changes across the developed world

The threat of climate change

Increasing social, cultural and linguistic diversity in many countries

Rising levels of social inequality in some

Increasing political turbulence and rejection of so-called 'expert' views

Fast pace of technological changes

Changes in how the world is understood, and how we see knowledge production & dissemination

My focuses

- Teacher education – **policy changes** and their effects at all levels
- **Educating the educators** – in teacher education and practice-based areas
- The InFo-TED project - https://info-ted.eu/
- **The importance of educators in learning**
- Professional preparation – pre-service learning, setting expectations
- On-going professional learning –

Induction and lifelong learning

Through formal learning events and workplace learning

The integration of all learning forms in meaningful ways

Practice-based research: what has been achieved?

Practitioner research established as

▶ an integral part of individual professional learning during pre-service

▶ an effective form of individual Continuing Professional Learning

▶ part of individual professional validation / recognition structures

Practitioner research as empowering and developmental for the individual –

and sometimes for a collective

And yet……

Issues persist –

- around the validity of practice-based research
- its on-going relevance in some forms of professional 'training'
- its quality as research
- its meaning and relevance beyond the individual practitioner
- the forms of its dissemination
- its impact on teaching and learning

Three examples of how these factors can play out negatively -

The Research Excellence Framework for Education research (UK)

▶ De-legitimising many forms of practice-based research in education as 'local' and therefore lacking 'international significance'

▶ 2* = 'Quality that is recognised internationally in terms of originality, significance and rigour'

▶ 'The (research) activity required to compete successfully in social scientific terms is, in my opinion, becoming increasingly distinct from the activity required to flourish in the rapidly changing fields of teacher education.'
Professor Andrew Pollard (2015) in address to the British Educational Research Association.

The Practical Turn (international)

Reforms to make teacher education more 'practical' – **the 'practicum turn' or 'practice turn'** in teacher education (Furlong and Lawn, 2013; Mattson et al, 2011; Reid, 2011)

European Commission (2015) identifies:

A trend towards re-modelling Initial Teacher Education for student teachers to learn in school settings so that they can get into real classrooms early in the programme, spend more time there and receive stronger support in the process (2015, p. 4).

The Practical Turn (USA)

Parts of the USA – teacher preparation becomes increasingly instrumental 'training' rather than education

Takes place entirely in the busy workplaces of schools, away from Higher Education

And over a short time frame

Epistemological and location changes in pre-service work including

"a hyper-emphasis on clinical practice - extensive immersion in the field, (and) limited (or no) emphasis on research or 'theoretical' course work" (Goodwin & Kosnik, 2013, p. 335)

Dissemination of practitioner research

▶ Burgeoning cultures of social media

▶ New and powerful ways to make research public

▶ So many voices, so many opinions, so many 'truths' being communicated

▶ Breaking the tyranny of journal and book publishers as traditional gate keepers

▶ But now too few new gatekeepers …..?

▶ Further blurring of the boundaries between opinion and evidence-based, practitioner research?

▶ Generating further concerns about meaning, quality, relevance etc?

Dissemination and impact on practitioners and their learners?

Practice-based research: present and possible futures

Returning to -

▶ Teacher education – **policy changes** and their effects at all levels

▶ Educating the educators – in teacher education and practice-based areas

The importance of educators in learning – their own and that of their 'students'

Practice-based research as the foundation of professional learning and *critical* understanding of practice

The Effects of Globalisation

Pressures from globalisation contribute to change and 'marketisation' of education

Growth of neo-liberal regimes of performativity and audit in our institutions

'Policy borrowing' trends: reform as contagious

Increasing government intervention in and regulation of education over broadly similar time scales

New, changing policies to improve education through 'reform'

Systematic politicisation of education

Interventions at the Macro Level

Political significance of education, schools, colleges and universities internationally

GERM (Global Education Reform Movement): Sahlberg (2011)

GEMI (Global Education Measurement Industry): Biesta (2015)

Understanding **education as a socio-economic driver** for national development

Glocalisation and policy change

But, despite **globalisation,** policy changes play out very differently across various countries and institutional settings

Hence

glocalisation as "the simultaneous occurrence of both universalizing and particularizing tendencies in contemporary social, political, and economic systems" (OECD)

Policy as all-powerful, practitioners as powerless

Policy as a static and pre-formed entity, generated by (often) anonymous government agents

Handed down in fixity to stakeholders to undertake the (essentially straightforward) and homogeneous processes of implementation

Practitioners and other stakeholders as essentially passive and powerless – servants of the state

Has led to 'internal soul-searching and self-questioning about teacher education's and teacher educators' place in the world' (Davey, 2013)

Caused professional pessimism for some and even paralysis

Foucault and power (1)

Michel Foucault (1988): power is a relation exercised through the social body and at the micro level of social relations

It is not purely owned and exercised by governments or regulatory organisations

It can be productive and reproductive as well as repressive

The effects of policy when it is understood as a mechanism of power, in Foucauldian terms as part of a 'discipline'

Diffuse power relations within the field

Foucault and power (2)

Policy is rarely implemented without the accompaniment of complex professional and social power struggles

Contestation, struggle and resistance are also integrally involved in implementation - Foucault (1990: 23) 'where there is power, there is resistance'.

Adopting this way of understanding power relations, and how multiple 'capillaries of power' operate

Policy reform, becomes essentially mediated by key stakeholders, with subsequent shifts in identities, practices and knowledge

Policy adherence superficially, but also the creation of new spaces?

Effects on Practitioners

Acknowledging the impact of political intervention through centralised policy changes in education

Changes may have had adverse, uncomfortable or unwelcome effects

Leading to -

senses of pessimism from insiders

difficult conditions in workplaces

new requirements for practice

Constricting opportunities for positive workplace learning to take place, particularly through forms of practitioner research?

Practitioner power

Policy changes create new regulatory demands

but also new spaces and new opportunities

Renewing our understanding of power relations within the field of education as complex

Seeing insiders as central and powerful in implementing and mediating learning

Practitioners create meaningful learning opportunities not policy makers

New spaces and opportunities for practitioner research

Professional agency is shown and deployed when professionals –

'make choices, take stances, and have an influence on their work and/or professional identities' (Hokka et al., 2019:34)

Key ideas - the exercise of agency and autonomy

Individual agency is powerful, collective agency even more so

Leading to the emergence of different and innovative practices and knowledge, including in practice-based research

Policy changes: transnational and national

Murray (2015) 'the university turn' in teacher education:

The Bologna Accord (1999) - the European Higher Education Area with a common qualifications framework led to -

The development of Masters level teacher education awards in EU countries, including Ireland, Finland, Portugal and Hungary.

Norway and the Netherlands, similar reforms increasing the length of time of study and the qualification level for all new teachers still underway.

The university turn brings epistemological changes to the curriculum of teacher education

Signifies national commitments to strengthening the 'academic' & 'cognitive' elements & bringing extended opportunities for practice-based research

Return to the Practical Turn (international)

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The Practice Turn (in different guises)

The Finnish model of 'research-informed practice' in both universities and schools

Finland - specialist 'training schools', with specially trained and well qualified teachers supporting pre-service students

The Netherlands (Van Velzen et al. 2019) – collaboration between schools and teacher education institutions

School-based teacher educators in new and extended roles beyond mentoring

Extended opportunities for practice-based research **communally, within micro communities of practice**

Politics, power and teacher education

Some policy changes open up new spaces and opportunities for practice and innovation to the benefit of all who learn and / or teach in the field

Spaces may be small, but at the all-important micro levels of teacher education

Professional agency as an invaluable tool in taking advantage of opportunities

Keeping our focus on the development of educators through *critical* models of practice-based research

Use the power of collaborative research to offer new ways of understanding the broad parameters of practice

Educators' understanding leads to more **meaningful learning opportunities**

Understanding the glocal

▶ **Globalisation,** policy changes play out very differently across various countries and institutional settings

▶ **Glocalisation** as "the simultaneous occurrence of both universalizing and particularizing tendencies in contemporary social, political, and economic systems

▶ **Practice-based research – communally enacted – as a way of understanding the glocal**

▶ Provides **meaningful learning opportunities for educators**, leading to enhanced critical understanding and practitioner power

Centring educators

*N*ew spaces and opportunities for practice, often at micro levels of education

Communal **professional agency** as an invaluable tool

The importance of **(micro) communities of practice**

Keeping our focus on the development of educators through *critical* models of **practice-based research**

Use the power of **collaborative research** to offer new ways of understanding the broad parameters of practice – somos mas

Educators' understanding leads to more **meaningful learning opportunities**

Final questions

For the benefit of all educators (as learners and practitioners) and all their own learners -

▶ How can we give greater relevance and impact to practitioner research?

▶ How can we contribute more strongly to the generation of new theory, knowledge and expertise through practitioner research?

▶ How can we develop / extend national policies for practitioner research through active engagement with policy makers and key professional agencies?