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Leaders' views on the values of school-based research: contemporary themes and issues

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Leaders' views on the values of school-based research: contemporary themes and issues

Abstract

In 2004, McLaughlin, Black-Hawkins and McIntyre published a literature review that explored the ways in which individual teachers, whole schools and groups of networked schools were engaging in practitioner research and enquiry. In the light of significant changes to the education landscape, the empirical research~~-~~ in this paper gives an account of engagement~~s~~ with 25 school leaders to explore what schools are doing in the area of practitioner 'research' or 'enquiry' today. Although teachers in schools may both *use* research and *generate* findings,~~:~~ this research was particularly concerned with the *generation* of professional knowledge through research and enquiry in schools in England today. A sample of school leaders was interviewed to establish their current approach. Findings include questions about the effects on teachers' dis-satisfaction in the face of a revealed gap between actuality and idealism, the possible evolution of a new teacher-educator population and the effects on those working in Higher Education as they address the shifting needs of 21st Century teacher education. As school-based research continues as a factor, this represents a timely scoping of the thinking of school senior leaders and considers the implications of this developing practice.

Keywords: professional learning, development, research, senior leader,

Introduction: background

Since 2010 in England, ~~there has been a revived~~ interest has revived in the idea of schools, and their staff, becoming engaged with research, although interest in this field has been very much alive around the world (Hattie, 2003~~.~~)[1] for some time. One of our recurring concerns is to maintain this historical perspective, to position this latest interest as a recurrence rather than something completely new. In this way, it is possible for the latest generation of teacher-researchers to learn from the mistakes of the past.

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[1] "An introduction to teacher research - Learn NC." 2007. 10 Jul. 2015 <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/pages/659>

They will certainly be unable to do this if they have no knowledge of the work of colleagues who have preceded them down this path.

As far back as 1929 Dewey was considering the relationship between teachers and education research. The English interest in this field has waxed and waned: Laurence Stenhouse (1981) and John Elliott (1991) both promoted the school Action Research movement where the teacher enquiring into his or her own practice and generating local knowledge was championed and it was Stenhouse who coined the phrase 'teacher as researcher' in 1975.

At this time,Action Research ~~seeks~~ sought "the realization of an educational **ideal** (e.g. as represented by a pedagogical aim); it focuses on changing practice to make it more consistent with **the ideal**; it gathers evidence of the extent to which the practice is consistent/inconsistent with **the ideal** and seeks explanations for inconsistencies by gathering evidence about the operation of contextual factors" (Elliott, 1991, p.25). The notion of 'the ideal' is interesting ~~here~~ and will be considered further in this paper. Whilst Action Research has the potential to empower the teacher and the learner, based as it is upon principles of social justice, the parallel notion of the generation of professional knowledge remaining local has been challenged, where such knowledge is regarded "merely as an outcome of a professional development process, devalued into something that concerns only the individual who carried out the action research – local, private and unimportant" (Somekh, 1993, p.25). Somekh is a champion of~~, too, champions~~ Action Research but calls for a wider dissemination of the findings: for her, the generation of professional knowledge should be afforded status alongside academic research findings. However, historically this has presented problems. The General Teaching Council in England acted for a while as a repository of school-based research, but issues including small sample size, variable design and methodologies (and hence issues of replication) reduced its effectiveness and value for a wider educational audience. At that time, this professional knowledge remained valuable only to the local audience.

On a parallel path, in~~In~~ 1991, Hargreaves and Hopkins introduced a new dimension to the notion of 'teacher as researcher' by aligning research activity to school improvement. Characterised by a closer relationship with the Department for Education, centralized practices and a new public profile, 1992 saw the launch of school performance tables and from 1997 these were published on an annual basis (Gray et al, 1999). The White Paper Excellence in Schools (DfE, 1997) called for teachers to 'take

responsibility for raising their own standards' (1997, p. 13) and by 2006 the OfSTED report The Logical Chain: Continuing Professional Development in Effective Schools (DES, 2006) proposed that professional development activity that was aligned to school improvement issues raised standards. The school improvement discourse took hold swiftly in England, driven by a Secretary of State for Education, Ruth Kelly, whose concept of the 'New Professionalism' built upon the Strategy for Professional Development (DfEE, 2001) in aligning teacher development with school improvement. By 2008 the introduction of the Masters in Teaching and Learning (MTL) in England saw an initiative that was both "Master's degree and policy initiative" (Bryan and Blunden, 2013, p. 10) where "Performance management arrangements would provide the context for…the selection of elective modules" (DCSF, 2008, p.10).

Stenhouse's (1981) notion of the teacher as researcher and Elliott's (1991) belief that action research could be a means by which to achieve the 'educational ideal' position the teacher at the heart of the decision making process. Indeed, in terms of research, Stenhouse argued that the education academic should "see himself as notionally employed by the teacher and as accountable to him" (Stenhouse, 1975, p. 192). The school improvement agenda arguably altered the gaze of research from that which was determined by the teacher, or teachers, to one that emerges from, and is framed by, school improvement needs. Elliott's 'educational ideal' takes on a new shape when regarded through a school improvement lens.

~~This~~ There is also a clear desire, by teachers, to become engaged~~ment~~ with research~~, by teachers, is wide-spread~~. Although it may not take the form of initiating or cooperating in a research programme, a considered awareness of relevant research and its potential to affect the practice of school teachers often leads to auditing of practice, with a view to change. Contemporary accounts detail the range of such practices ~~In~~ in Europe (Zehetmeier et al, 2015) and China (Wong, 2014) ~~as well as the more familiar Singapore a variety of research engagement is on record.~~

~~Now, in the most recent turn of the wheel,~~while the educational world in England is being pushed by two drives, one grass-roots and one of political origin. ResearchEd is a grass roots development, begun by Tom Bennett in 2013 (www.workingoutwhatworks.com/en-GB/About/History) and possibly the first conference organised entirely through social media. The drive and enthusiasm for this series of educational conferences has come from the current population of young teachers, who have shown their willingness to engage with and also participate in

classroom-focussed research by giving up weekend time. Organisations such as the National College for Teaching and Learning, the National Foundation for Educational Research, independent organisations such as CUREE – the Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education - (Cordingley, 2013) and EEF – the Educational Endowment Foundation (~~but~~ although Thompson (2015) has a well-argued response to the randomised-control medical model that is currently favour) as well as many Universities (Hill, 2014) have been quick to foster and build on this new enthusiasm. The development, in England, of Teaching Schools, "outstanding schools that work with others to provide high-quality training and development" (www.gov.uk/teaching-schools-a-guide-for-potential-applicants) has provided a corresponding pressure for school Senior Leadership Teams and governors. As part of the remit for this new class of schools, there is the expectation that they will not only "build on existing research" but also "allow staff time and support to take part in research" (ibid).
Schools that do not qualify as eligible for Teaching School status can become a part of this movement through the school associations that the Teaching Schools have created. Government figures tell us that, in 2013, "almost 1 in 10 schools nationally have joined a Teaching School alliance" (https://www.gov.uk/government/news/teaching-schools-making-their-mark) and there is little to suggest that this number has fallen over the last two years.

Introduction: the research

With this major upswing in interest, the authors became concerned about the new risks to rigour in research. Was there a danger that this new tidal wave of research would suffer the fate of earlier iterations - becoming undermined through an evident lack of rigour and care (Foster, 1999)? Was there also an issue in terms of the ethics of the school research environment? These issues are framed in the following two discussion areas:

(1) What, if any, is the boundary between an excellent teacher doing what they should be doing in terms of enquiring into their own practice, and a teacher who is undertaking research?
(2) If a teacher is actually acting as a researcher, then is there a corresponding change in the unspoken contract with the children in their care - from teacher/pupil to researcher/participant? (Stutchbury & Fox, 2009).

This paper provides an account of a small piece of research conducted, partly at the request of the University Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET). We shall report on two parts: an initial online survey to establish whether there was a question to answer and a follow up series of interviews intended to explore in greater depth the thinking of senior leaders involved in the implementation of these innovations in their own schools. This mixture of methods is intended to provide a more rounded approach: the questionnaire acting as the long-shot in film - establishing context and "feel", while the interviews provide the equivalent of a cinematic close-up, to give the richness and depth of information that would otherwise be missing.

Preliminary work

The online survey was carried out in 2013. We contacted all the schools associated, in any way, with our respective HEIs by personalised email, inviting our contact, or another (better qualified in the view of the participant) member of their staff, to complete the brief SurveyMonkey questionnaire. In the event we received an 8.5% return (44 responses out of 520 contacts) - somewhat better than predicted by some of our colleagues. These could, of course, only provide a very superficial and specific response, not a body of data from which we would be able to make any significant broad claims. However, the findings were of some interest.

The questions were few, the first being: "Approximately how many pieces of research have taken place in your school over the last three academic years?" Respondents were invited to respond under three categories, according to the source of the research. We allowed the schools to define the word "research" for themselves. We were interested in the schools' own views at this point. If they felt that they were conducting research, then that is what we hoped to see recorded. We asked them to distinguish between research initiated by individual staff members, a university or the school itself.

The range of responses was unexpectedly wide. Under the first category, 'research initiated by individual staff members', the range went from zero to ten (pieces of research). The most common response was two (18 respondents), the mean being 3.9 and the median being four. There were two responses of zero, and five respondents failed to provide any answer. Under the second category, 'research initiated by universities', the most common response was two (20 respondents), the mean being 2.6 and the median two. Here 5 respondents gave zero and 11 gave a null response. In the

final category, ‘the school being the initiator of the research’, the most common was again two (with eight participants responding), the mean being 3.5 and the median three. In this case 9 respondents made a zero return whilst 14 failed to make any response at all in this category. These may be summarised in the following bar chart:

[Figure 1: Answers to “How many pieces of research over the last three years?”~~: at this point~~]

The second key question was: “How often over the last three years have staff been asked to conduct research as part of the school’s in-house CPD programme?” The range again went from one to 10, with a mean of 2.3 and a median of three. However, there were 12 respondents who entered zero as an answer and only one who failed to complete the section.

[Figure 2: How often over the last three years, have staff been asked to conduct research?~~: at this point~~]

Of themselves the picture from this data is inconclusive, reaffirming the un-startling and familiar range of practice across a small sample of schools. We were surprised however at the range of responses: that three schools were able to identify 10 instances of staff-initiated research over a three-year period, for example, seemed high at the time. 2013 was at the very start of a new emphasis on teachers’ research and this seemed, at a first glance, to represent a high rate of independent activity.

On the evidence of this initial survey and the resulting discussion at a second UCET Continuing Professional Development (CPD) committee meeting, we decided to look more closely at the practice and ideas emerging from a small number of schools.

To this end we again approached those schools with which we already had links. We took this purposive sample as a consequence of the time in which we had to work and in the expectation that school SLT members who already knew of us and our work, might well be more inclined to give up a couple of hours for an interview. This proved to be the case. In all we secured semi-structured interview data from 21 schools, sampling from primary and secondary phases, from specialist and non-specialist Teaching Schools and from private and state institutions. Interviews were conducted, in all cases,

with SLT members (or in two cases senior middle managers) who carried responsibility for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in their school.
The interviews sought to explore the understanding and practices of the school, as expressed by the participant, focusing upon two key questions:

- What is the boundary, for you, between a teacher who is researching – and a teacher who is actively enquiring into the learning of their pupils?
- At what point should you and your school be concerned about the ethical issues of children as research participants? (responses to this second question are discussed in our next paper)

Findings from the interviews

Before considering the findings of the interview data, it is worth noting that, in every interview, these two questions (generally reached after over 30 minutes into the interview) resulted in the participant halting, and taking time to consider their response. In the majority of cases they commented on the difficulty of the question and in some cases that it was the first time they had ever considered them. This in itself convinced us of the significance of what we were doing in this very small piece of data gathering. Transcriptions were made of each interview and these were then analysed using MaxQDA. The analysis followed a qualitative route, identifying key words and phrases to allow for the emergence of codes. These were then examined to allow for possible grouping of codes which gave rise to the themes. At this stage in what is hopefully a preliminary stage in a larger piece of research, the prime interest was in identifying commonalities and differences across the sample of schools. Table 1 lists the emerging codes. These suggested the following themes:

- how school leaders distinguish between "research" and "professional enquiry";
- how schools developed a research focussed approach;
- how schools support research;
- teacher-researcher autonomy: is failure possible?
- a comparison of each school's practice with the senior leader's stated ideal

[Table 1: Codes following analysis~~: at this point~~]

The convention we have followed in reporting our data is to rename all our participants. Names reflect the participant's gender and their pseudonym starts with a "P" if the participant is a primary teacher and with an "S" if they work in the secondary phase.

How school leaders distinguish between research and professional inquiry

Participants displayed a variety of opinions in their responses to this area of questioning: some were in doubt, or undecided. Patsy, for example felt that research was "not just informal conversations and thinking and having informal discussions - it was actually giving people time to go off and visit other places, read and do that in a more formal way" – so, in many ways a traditional "CPD equals an external course" position. Patricia stepped even further back from the issue, when she says that "research that occurs with staff happens on a private basis. Examples of this are where different people do their own thing…~~.~~we don't formally organize."

The question could become even less well defined. "I wouldn't have a clue what anybody else does. As far as I'm aware no one is. They wouldn't share it with me even if they were" (Priscilla). This is at both an admission of ignorance – both of the question itself and also of her staff involvement – and also says something of her perception of the relationship that she has with her teaching body. Patsy, however, seems to be unsure about the meaning of the words themselves: "You're trying things out as you're researching. I don't think it is necessary do the research first".

It may be a reflection of the small sample size, but the lack of certainty, or clarity in this area seemed to be mainly in the primary phase. Indeed, the definition of what research constitutes is opened up with one primary head teacher~~-~~ - Padraig - commenting that, "We've also been developing blogging. So the Business manager, my PA, the Deputy and Team Leaders with a sense then of sharing their practice nationally and internationally as well, with the caveat that it's not all academic (Padraig's emphasis) research but as a result we've had several pieces published by the large research based Twitter sites. It's getting out there". The emphasis on 'academic' suggests that this Head Teacher regards blogging and sharing practice as research, but not of an 'academic' nature. That there might be some sort of continuum of 'research' through to professional enquiry begins to emerge from the data.

One primary head teacher, Pierre, had introduced a form of action research into his school, "something that I instigated in the school, it hadn't really been done before. But what I would be thinking of is something that is generally focused in the classroom and led by teachers who are trying to find…who can look at data and are trying to find some of the things they can see as patterns or areas of weakness or areas for development and moving that forward in terms of themselves trying out different hypotheses in terms of what might improve the things they were seeing in the data". Whilst this activity – which we could align with action research - was not systematically or formally integrated into his teachers' practice, it had status by virtue of the fact that it was led by the Head Teacher, and had a particular starting point of school data. These two factors emerged in the interview with Perdita, another primary Head Teacher who, in playing a key role in a school alliance research project commented, "and then obviously we've had staff doing the… research project. That was fantastic [we were]– very pleased with it. That was really good for CPD and for driving our own school improvement because obviously we tied it in really closely. It was very relevant to what we were trying to achieve". Here we see research questions emerging from issues in the school data, and framed by Head Teachers in terms of school improvement. Unsurprisingly, then, there is a fusion of professional enquiry and research activity, and notions of 'relevance to' and 'direction of' the school begin to surface. As Sorrell ~~(secondary Catholic comprehensive leadership team member)~~ comments, "learning walks… that's been a really big one this year. So that's research that's being carried out in a broad sense". Sorrell goes on to detail the ways in which learning walks (where the school Senior ~~Management~~ Leadership Team observes teaching) are regarded as 'research' where the intention of the learning walk is to grade teachers' practice. This type of teacher observation with a view to classification of practice against set criteria is, in this school, ~~is~~ regarded as 'research'. As Sorrell explains, "the Deputy Head emailed us the results but there wasn't really any discussion about what was going to be found out and how it was going to be found out, so it was very much his view on how the research should be collected and how~~, um,~~ the sort of data that was going to be collected because he's very much into numbers …he's very much into quantitative data". What would once have been regarded as leadership activity is now being framed in this school as 'research' and Sorrell (who is studying for a part-time professional doctorate) has concerns about the ways in which research is interpreted in her school.

This resonated with other secondary SLT members ewho were most definite in their views. Several were quite clear that their staff were not researchers at all, “Every good teacher constantly reflects on their practice and reads up on the subject” (Susan). In fact Simon, in suggesting that “They are examining their own context in more detail – wouldn’t call it research. It won’t be published” is in opposition to Pierre’s and Perdita’s position, which is that examining one’s context is research.

A final factor to emerge in this exploration of research and professional enquiry in school is the presence of the university. Susan’s position on this is clear, “In teacher-led development they are teacher-pupil [as opposed to a researcher-participant relationship]. If they move on to a Masters then they become researchers.” The comments from Susan and Simon reflect a feeling among some participants that true research has only taken place if a university is involved in some way, or if the work is to be published beyond the immediate, local audience. This area of common ground is further explored by Shelley, who “asked an academic colleague from [a] University if we can use some of their staff to help teachers to conduct the action research because it’s different from normal work”. Susan, however, from a position of greater experience in this practice, reports running into a problem: “[The University] are certainly very twitchy about the Masters that has been running for all of these years because they're saying "Well it doesn't really fit our recognised [criteria]", so none of it is research, if you want to be really academic about it.”

This last comment brings this area of discussion into a closed loop, along the lines of:

- it’s only research if a university is involved;
- our university partner feels that we are not conforming to their expectations;
- therefore we are not doing any research at all…

…all of which seems a little defeatist.

From a consideration of all participants’ comments in this area, a continuum of ‘professional enquiry to research activity’ seems to be emerging in terms of how schools are describing what they are doing and that:

- participants who had undertaken Masters degree or who were undertaking a part time doctorate were likely to bring ‘research’ activity into their school and in some cases (largely primary schools), lead this activity;

- participants who had research activity taking place in their schools but who did not have a Masters degree or doctorate had worked with a university in some research activity and had taken this forward themselves subsequently;
- universities seem to have played the role of catalyst to activity that schools are referring to as research.

How schools developed a research focussed approach

Participants were more of a mind when considering the effects on their staff of a research or enquiry focussed CPD environment. Pam is clear that "They don't want it done to them - they want to be involved in the doing of it. When they are involved in it – the results will be better." Susan agrees with this: "I think that's got a lot to do with the fact that our staff feel that they are taken seriously as professionals." Shelley extends this into a long term policy, "There's not a lot of movement at the top. So we need to build ways to support staff who are progressing through their career but hold on to them in some way."

Pam, in an extended reply to this question, provides anecdotal support for the premise:

> "We are very, very stable – no one is looking to leave because they find that their roles…One of them went to go for another job and she went: 'I have more responsibility here than there'. So because we have given those opportunities, they feel that if they move to another school, there is no sense of what they will be doing."

Padraig was passionate about the potential for research as an agent for collective improvement,

> "It changes the mind set of everyone - everyone has a story to tell - and it's taken our school to a place that I couldn't have taken it personally as a Head because I've only got so much energy – having research based practice means I've got practitioners who are pushing in every corner of the school to drive practice forward".

His is the language of school improvement: he refers to the way in which research has 'taken our school to a place' and by this he means as an 'Outstanding' school following

an Ofsted inspection. We see here a vision for the empowering potential of research, yet this, too, is framed within school improvement language when he refers to how research has enabled him/them to 'drive practice forward". The concept of improvement needing to be 'at speed' is also discussed by Padraig, "Because it's led by them, research based practice has moved us on apace".

Pierre articulated something rather different,

> "~~And~~ Actually it's a system of…about empowering teachers -you can pull something off the shelf if you think that's appropriate but it's not about delivering the latest wheeze that's come down through the Department for Education - it's about the children in your care and you knowing them intimately".

For him, the research environment in his school enables a personalised, contextualised response by teachers.

From our responses, three themes emerge in relation to the school research environment. Firstly, there is a focus upon the individual teacher who can be given opportunity to progress in their career through this activity, and to experience satisfaction in their work. Secondly, the way in which research can be used as an engine to 'take a school somewhere' emerges in relation to a school improvement agenda.~~, and~~ Thirdly, there is a notion that such activity will enable staff to respond to context, and specific children in their care.

How schools support research

The strategies used to support this CPD environment fell into four categories: money, time, guidance and expectation. Sven had the most supportive framework of the sample:

> "We probably spent between £7000 and £10,000 purely on cover and logistical elements, in order to give the time and increased capacity to carry out the process."

This is closely followed by Shelley, "An Innovation Award where staff get up to £1500 in money because we can't give them time".

Sven is clear about the benefits and the ideology behind his school's strategy, "The whole nature of it was about empowering and providing time and opportunity for teachers to talk to each other about what they do and why they do it." Padraig takes a similar approach, "I gave them a research ticket of £150 pounds and they can use that

on resources that will support research - the Learning Ticket - and I also gave them two in-service training days: 15 hours". Patricia on the other hand had a rather more world-weary view, as she "supports them with time not money….an afternoon off every two weeks rather than two grand towards it. My experience is that if schools pay, what they get back is relatively limited."

Guidance was viewed as important in some cases. Susan incorporates methodology into the regular CPD programme, "about how you do your research and how you can access journals and so on", while Pam is rather more casual about it, "We will say for example: "You know about assessment with no levels? Go and do some research in a fresh manner. Find some articles, read about it and come back and tell us about it". Both of these schools were also subscribers to the Elsevier publisher's website to give their staff some access to academic journals.

Guidance of a different kind emerges in discussion with Persephone, a primary Head Teacher. Persephone leads research in her school, "I've also looked at bullying where I researched the children's perspectives on bullying and it was a big issue when I arrived at the school which I had to tackle …the staff did the research". For Persephone there is clearly no question that her staff will take part in the research that she determines is necessary. This is clearly about guidance, but also about expectation, the fourth theme to emerge in this section. In his school, Seb had designed an in-house CPD leadership programme that incorporated research, "The Classroom Leadership Programme formed part of that. That took up 10 sessions and then additional sessions or workshops that people could opt into as well. But it did form part of the professional development time so it wasn't an optional programme". Research activity in Seb's school is now a formal requirement and is linked to appraisal.

Padraig's expectations of his staff were clear, "There was some resistance in the first round because it was new and change is always an interesting thing – educational or institutional – I think some needed more steering than others. We were developing the concept of mentor coaching across the school and we used mentor coaching to get under the skin of the issues that teachers had".

For one school, however, the whole idea was beyond comprehension:

> "I don't know, in a primary school, where there would ever be time for that. It's really, really hard to find the time. We just finished this Comenius project and that's taken the class teacher out of class for quite a lot of time and we get parents at the gates saying 'She's not in class again today. When is she coming back to work?'" (Prudence)

This comment is of interest in that it is the only one which calls attention to a parent view that demands the teacher's presence in the classroom. Anecdote suggests that this is a common attitude, but Prudence was the only participant who felt it worthy of mention. All the other parental comments tend to offer a much more favourable view of the relationship between parents and school.

A most revealing comment was made by Sorrell, who, on resisting a school governor's request to undertake a piece of research that she felt was worthless, mused, "…if I hadn't been doing the Masters I wouldn't have had the understanding and confidence to turn round and say 'I'm not doing that'. I think that is when knowledge puts you in conflict with leadership". For Sorrell, the guidance from her tutor afforded her, along with the knowledge gleaned about research questions from her Masters degree, the confidence to resist this request. Sorrell reflected that this caused her subsequent problems in her school.

Teacher-researcher autonomy

This was a question that was initiated by the participants. Doubts were expressed by some participants about just how genuine the research experience could be, given the relative positioning of the teacher and senior leaders in the leadership hierarchy, especially given the increasing importance of the performance review process in determining pay. Simon is very clear. He is engaged in the recent active research environment in English schools, and so may be considered to have some experience in the field. In his opinion "it is very rare to hear of a piece that didn't work. If you can make educational research on a larger scale, generally projects failed to differing degrees. And this is a very real reservation. Schools researching – you can get over 100 and they all say "It's great" because it's tied into performance related pay."

On the other hand, Sven stated that "risk taking is encouraged. More often than not, in most cases, because it is self-selected, what the focus is, on who the focus is, is that you are already saying 'I'm struggling with this' and so immediately you're embracing the

sense of ‘I need to learn, together with you, how I can overcome this barrier’”. Pam, too, was clear that freedom to test and reject was a responsibility valued by staff and which contributed to her staff stability and involvement.

There was a correlation between this attitude to ‘permission to fail’ and the perceived leadership style in the school, with the more autocratic leaders tying research activity into performance review, with the resulting perception by staff of some mismatch between freedom to research and permitted outcomes. The more democratic leader tended to be more encouraging of their staff researchers taking greater risks in this area.

A comparison of each school’s practice with *the senior leader’s stated ideal*

SLT members offered a wide range of views under this heading. Sven has a clear and thoroughly described take on this:

> “I am a reflective practitioner through lesson study and, beyond lesson study [and] with what I do in my department. I am taking concepts, ideas, and theories of learning. I am applying them in my classroom, collaboratively with colleagues, taking a real in-depth look how I’m going to measure the impact of that on learning. I’m then reflecting on that to see how I can embed that in my practice. So yes.”

But he then thought again:

> “Am I writing that up and sharing in journals? Am I reading huge amounts of academic literature about teaching and learning? “No I'm not.” So actually some “Yes” – there is some blogging - but a large number “No”.”

Sean is also very clear, but from a rather different standpoint:

> “The traditional understanding what action research is that i.e. ‘There appears to be a problem some sort. Let’s devise some sort of intervention and assess the effectiveness of the intervention’ - and so on - that is not how it's being understood. It seems to have reverted to what it was 20 or 30 years ago which is: ‘Oh, there’s a problem, I'm doing things about it. That must mean I’m doing action research’.”

Seb was rather more cautious in stating,

> "We spent time formulating research questions and there was then a period of time when staff were gathering their data and …we invested in some lesson observation cameras and so teachers were able to observe themselves teaching and …have some dialogue with a coach to be able to reflect on their practice and to bring about improvements that way so I would say that was probably the closest we've got to Action Research".

Simon, with his current involvement and interest, was also reflective on this:

> "I've been in the ResearchEd world for a little too long and you have to talk about effect size and a quantifiable number – and for me that's not what's going on – not in anything like the medical model. I think that's more a limitation of the model itself. I think my problem is that research is a contested term when I hear "research" in a ResearchEd context then it has to be medical quality and that's an issue."

Concluding thoughts

From this range of commentary and thinking on the part of the SLT contributors, a number of conclusions can be drawn:

The relationship between leadership style and preferred CPD format.

It was very interesting, though not perhaps surprising, to see that head teachers and deputy head teachers who revealed in their conversation that they tended toward the autocratic, highly job-focussed (as opposed to people focussed) end of the leadership style range were those who tended to be opposed to research, often for the implied freedoms that it presented. This was most apparent in the leaders' attitude to failure in their staff's research outcomes.

Commonalities across phase and sector.

There was remarkably little to choose between the opinions of SLT members, if any division across these nominal boundaries was attempted. The only clear differences were, as stated the clarity of definition about what constitutes research in schools being rather more acute in the secondary colleagues. The private sector was notable only for their reluctance to publish any findings. On two occasions it was made clear that this was seen as being a potential threat to their school's unique selling point – with an implied endangering of pupil intake, and hence income. No evidence was made

available to support this opinion, and perhaps it had never been tested in practice, being rather a fear of possible consequences.

Successful and inspirational blends of CPD/research in one primary and one secondary school.

In summary, we present a possible typology, as revealed by this extremely small sample. It is safe, in that the categories seem reasonable and are all represented multiple times both in the interview data and also in our experience in many other schools. We would be most interested to hear of examples that lie beyond our range, or that suggest the addition of new categories within the spectrum.

The figure below proposes four categories (forming the top row of the diagram). The first of these has no research component at all. The second and third distinguish between schools who impose, in some way, the overall CPD structure. The second suggests a school that recognises research as important, but only visualises teachers as consumers of existing research data (the Singapore model). The third visualises a research-active staff. It is possible to imagine a single school that would sit quite happily within both these categories.

The fourth category, of which we identified two schools, we see as populated by schools who still leave most of the decision making about professional learning to individual staff. Typically they will allocate a budget for teachers to spend very much as they wish – subject to some moderation by the senior leadership.

[Figure 3: A possible spectrum of practice for schools engaged in research as part of their CPD programme: at this point]

The comments that form the bottom row of the figure are labels that identify the specific form that the research takes in three cases. The first two (reading from left to right) differentiate between the two “school imposed”categories. As can be seen, at the right hand end of the figure, we came across “free” research schools – who are comfortable with staff engaging in unstructured and non-directed enquiry, and a final group who exert no apparent control (apart from financial) on the professional development of their staff and who are still in the mind–set of CPD being the same as “going on a course”.

Returning to the original discussion statements, then, we have in this paper only had space to address the first statement: "What, if any, is the boundary between an excellent teacher doing what they should be doing in terms of enquiring into their own practice, and a teacher who is undertaking research?" Discussion of the findings addressing the second statement form a second paper in this brief series.

As mentioned earlier, all our participants found this to be a testing question. All paused for a while to consider their answers, and for some it seemed to be a new problem that they were addressing for the first time during our interview. This is why the range of answers, as may be read in the findings section, seems vague and unformed at times.

Afterthoughts

There are two further thoughts, or questions, that emerge from this first exploration: Firstly, to return to Elliot's notion of action research as "making practice consistent with the ideal", there may be a further distinction to be made here, between the ideals of teaching and the pragmatic demands imposed by the authority to which the school owes allegiance. This is an interesting field for further study. How much of a balance is there to be negotiated between these two sets of demands? How "dangerous" might it be, for a head to allow inquiry to take place which runs the risk of creating a dissatisfied staff who have revealed a significant gap between the" ideal" – in terms of what the research tells them about the effectiveness of their research and their teaching - and the "actual" – being the demands and expectations placed on the teacher by their leadership, acting as interpreters of government, trust or federation policy?

Secondly, there is the issue of the evolving relationship between the practising teacher and the practising teacher educator (Murray, 2002, Maguire, 1994). Murray argues most persuasively for the particular "second order" stance of the teacher educator – expertly bridging the gap between their own practical school experience and the theoretical/research-embedded requirements of the educator of prospective and practising teachers. We can now suggest the possibility, as a result of the successful growth of the teacher/researcher, of the evolution of a new role, or stance. Can we picture this second order mindset – the "distancing" and "analytical" approach so necessary to post-graduate study – to become a part of the successful active teacher/researcher? In other words, as the expectation on Teaching Schools to provide for the pre- and in-service education of teachers grows ever more independent of Higher

Education, should the existing teacher-educators be looking to a future as second, or even third, order educators – acting as mentors, oracles or facilitators – providing the school based hybrid teacher/teacher educators with the digests of research (and the vital reminders concerning rigour and ethics) which they cannot possibly find the time and capacity to provide for themselves?

The outcomes from this small scale study are necessarily specific to the sample, but are, we feel, of interest, especially in this newly re-emerging area.

We were struck by the wide range of practice we heard about, but also just how many schools (of this small sample) were actively involved in some form of research related activity. Overall, however, the emphasis was on the use of existing research knowledge to improve classroom practice rather than producing a new population of researcher/teachers. That said, where research questions were generated, they were, without exception, framed within a School Improvement agenda. The Action Research 'ideal' proposed by Stenhouse is inevitably being altered by contemporary pressures and approaches.

The return, by teachers and schools, to a research focus is most welcome. Schools, however should positively affirm their position with respect to their pupils., parents and staff. This is not to suggest that they enter into a box ticking exercise, but that they are doing "the right thing" (Stutchbury and Fox, 2009).

University tutors also have a clear route to follow. Murray has suggested a space that they need to occupy, and others have set a variety of examples by their work: Ainscow and his various colleagues (2004, 2006) have acted as facilitators within inner-city schools as have Brindley (2016) and Frost (2014) with their collaborative work. A reading of their work offers a range of methodologies to help university tutors and independent consultants address the real needs of schools and their staff at this stage in the professions progress and development.

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