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The Knowledge Economy in Inclusion: Developing Critical Mass

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Background

The importance of research to improving practice is seen as a general 'good' to the extent that one way of defining a profession is as a body of workers committed to research as a means to develop knowledge and improve practice. Beyond such areas of agreement there are a number of stances and strands which rest on differing assumptions and values as well as methods and procedures.

Research Questions

This paper reports on a series of linked projects directed at enhancing capacity by developing the knowledge base concerning inclusion and special educational needs. Each of these projects has been directed at enhancing capacity through related research and development. This paper will summarise the key characteristics of each of the strands and show how these different initiatives in research and special educational needs have developed and interacted. The five strands differ in their approaches to research, development and application.

Methods

The differing bases in research for each of five strands of support for development will be explained and appraised. The strengths and limitations of each of the approaches in supporting professional development and practice will be reviewed together with an appraisal of the merits of a research agenda led by practitioners. The extent to which these approaches complement or interfere with each other in developing evidence-informed practice will be outlined. The sources of evidence for these appraisals is the networks of participants in each of the strands taken together with the views of the funder

Frame

The strands are:

1 Systematic Review of Research Reports

Systematic literature reviews have applied techniques to the review of research in education that were developed essentially in relation to the weighing of evidence in medical practice and used to compare 'treatments'. This approach polarised educationalists with overt hostility at one end of the spectrum and whole hearted enthusiasm at the other. The contested nature of this methodology has been rehearsed in the forums of this conference.

The extent to which a mature appraisal can be found will be explored in this paper.

2 The Teacher Training Resource Bank

The Teacher Training Resource Bank < <http://www.ttrb.ac.uk/> > provides a platform for professional and academic review of work in the public domain building an accessible evidence base for practice. The TTRB attempts to tailor, focus and contextualise reviews to specific audiences – trainees, beginning and experienced teachers. Extensive independent evaluation has revealed some critical

points and an important challenge has been articulation of principles of selection of material for inclusion.

3 Research and Development Projects

A series of Research and Development Projects has provided both developments of practice based research and evidence and also a community of researchers. On the plus side these have allowed professional input into the agenda for research and developments led by the profession to be underpinned by research. However, 30 years after Stenhouse's work, the challenge to build a really substantial body of researched evidence from small scale researches remains unrealised and research into transfer of practice from one setting to another remains woefully underdeveloped. The paper will explore conceptualisations of the ways in which the whole can be bigger than the sum of the parts.

4 Teachers' Television

Broadcast television offers a great opportunity to display research as the way of improving practice led by the profession for the profession. The extent to which television programmes can feed back into the research and whether or not the time and painstaking attention to detail needed for research is well portrayed by television is more problematic. A series of three programmes has been examined to identify the lessons to be learned in terms of research dissemination

Research and Development in SEN --Movement

<http://www.teachers.tv/video/35088>

Research and development in SEN __Working with Families

<http://www.teachers.tv/video/34482>

Research and development in SEN --The Wider Work Force

<http://www.teachers.tv/video/34701>

5 Briefings for Trainees and Beginning Teachers.

Printed and on-line guidance for new teachers in special educational needs has been produced specifically to support practice. A challenge for teacher trainers is enhancing extent to which the new teachers are able to develop a research-critical stance with which to scrutinise and also use such documents.

Research findings

The paper concludes by proposing ways in which the interdependence of research and professional development can be conceptualised and how ways of thinking about research which use that which is counter and contested can be incorporated into professional development.

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