

There's No Such Thing as Best Practice

NEWBUBBLES CONFERENCE

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FRAMEWORK

- Best Practice (BP) to reform FE & Skills?
- First doubts
- Transfer: 4 variables and 5 stages
- The curse of knowledge
- Importance of context
- Implementation → Enactment
- Criticisms of BP
- The alternative: Joint Practice Development (JPD)
- How to evaluate JPD
- JPD: the evidence
- JPD since 2005
- JPD in FE & Skills

References

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BP to reform FE?

- Govt strategy for 30+ years: all 3 parties
- “*Identify and disseminate BP*”
- Where’s the evidence? No evaluation
- BP deeply embedded in govt and sector literature eg DBIS, ETF, OFSTED, SFCA etc
- Not a straw man; Blunkett review, 2nd aim: “*Spread BP*”
- An unquestioned assumption...until now

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First Doubts

- Semmelweis question: “*what in my practice is causing difficulties for my Ss/colleagues?*”
- Video of “*outstanding teaching*” to education Ss
- 12 well behaved, dressed, and motivated pupils; NQT of the year, able, attractive, young
- Complexities of teaching made to look easy; video simplifies.
- Implicit message: “*Transfer her BP to your class in run-down area, refugees, little English, no jobs.*” Importance of context.
- Ss and Ts left to work out how to transfer the BP
- Process caused feelings of inadequacy in even the best Ss.
- Transfer a difficult, lengthy process, largely unrecognised. M Eraut’s 5 stages

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5 STAGES

1. Can understand the principles and can extract the relevant knowledge
2. Understand the new situation, Ss' abilities
3. What knowledge and skills to transfer? In what order?
4. Making them fit the new situation: simple application? Adapt? Major problem to be solved?
5. Integrating new skills into smooth performance requires many repetitions. Learning to drive.

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The Curse of Knowledge

- It's difficult to imagine what it's like for someone else NOT to know something that you know very well.
- The better you know something, the less you remember how hard it was to learn.
- One of the key problems for all Ts.

TRANSFER

- "...profound ignorance of the nature and amount of (new) learning involved"

Michael Eraut (2004)

- 4 variables

- : what's being transferred? Easy? Complex?
- : difference between contexts. Similar? Unfamiliar?
- : attitudes of teacher. Experience v open to ideas?
- : time and effort always underestimated.

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Transfer of knowledge to new situation



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Transfer = Iceberg

- One third above the surface = new knowledge & skills
- Two thirds below the surface = new learning required
- Transfer found difficult → Ts either blame themselves or reject the new knowledge
- Transfer needs more learning than that needed to acquire the original knowledge
- Dedicated time has to be set aside for this learning: task of managers to make this available.

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CONTEXT what features are most important?

Please write down what you think are the most important features which make up the context in which you work.

I thought of four general features and omitted one of the most important of all.

These features are not a backdrop: they are dynamic, interact and overlap.

Importance of Context

1. Location: catchment area, intake, history.
2. Professional cultures: management style (by data?), values, no. of NQTs, training of staff
3. Physical/material: budget, buildings, staff levels, IT
4. External: pressures from Ofsted, league tables, policy changes

Implementation → Enactment

- I ≠ learning new practices and implementing them
- I = a way of learning new practices and understanding them more deeply
- We only really understand X when we try to implement it
- Implementation is the wrong word; suggests a tool that will always work. Enactment?
- “Policy formation hard; implementation easy” King & Crewe (2013)
- So if it doesn’t work 1st, 2nd or 3rd time, go easy on yourself. Hundreds of replications needed.

Criticisms of Best Practice

- Good, best & excellent practice used interchangeably. Six nations rugby.
- Diversity & complexity of local contexts
- "*So is my practice poor?*" Resistance built in
- What criteria? Value for money? Effective? Consistent? Debated & agreed? Another observer? Effective with all groups/subjects? Who says it's BP? Evidence?
- No sure-fire, student-proof recipes: no panacea for complexities of TLA
- No consistent, causal connection between BP and higher outcomes for Ss
- No context-free practices that guarantee better outcomes
- There **IS** an alternative: JPD. How many familiar with the term?

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Joint Practice Development

- Teams share successes & struggles
- Move to observe & evaluate each other's practice
- Trust & mutual respect. Trust takes time to develop. Equality v top down approach of BP
- Everyone has something to offer and to learn
- Getting started: two good questions:
What could I offer?
What do I want to learn?

Source: Fielding et al (2005)

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How to evaluate JPD

- What student outcomes do you want?
- What new teaching practices are needed?
- What support do Ts need eg time, resources?
- What new knowledge and skills do Ts need?
- What learning opportunities will the Ts be given to gain the new knowledge and skills?

Source: Vivienne Porritt (2014)

JPD: Research Evidence

- 120+ Ts in 27 English secondary schools
- “*Best CPD I ever had*” Why?
- Both partners give and receive advice
- Ts put in touch with each other and given space to grow
- Requires investment of time, resources and commitment from Ts, SMT, & govt

Source: M Fielding et al (2005)

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JPD since 2005

- Why not rolled out nationally?
- Minister: “*expensive re transport & T cover*”
- Researchers: “*loss of control from centre*”
- Restores trust in professional judgement of Ts
- Collaboration rather than competition

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JPD in FE

- “*Ts value learning from each other...carry out double the 30 hours CPD*” Fazaeli and Boon (2014)
- Ts thrive in a community of learning: “*the working conditions of Ts are the learning conditions of Ss*”
- ETF/ Sunderland Uni’s RDFs: “*current practice not dismissed but enhanced by supportive colleagues*” (Gregson et al, 2014)
- A new model: **from** CPD = attend courses with no impact on practice
to Professional Learning = “*a collective process where Ts create new craft knowledge through interaction.*”
- Professional Learning for all levels of the system from classroom to DfE → we need a system that learns. But DfE a prime example of a non-learning organisation.
- “*Blunders of govt not unrelated but a repeated pattern*” King and Crewe

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