'Traditional' versus 'Non-traditional' research in (Post-compulsory) Education: A false Dichotomy?

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Structure of the presentation

- The debate on relevant research methodology to the educational enterprise
- Importance of aims of education
- What we can learn from the business approach (focusing on the needs)
- The importance of a practice-based that takes into account the complexity of reality
- The relevance of Action Research
- Is AR/Practicality reflected in academic practice?

Criticism of the current aims/methodology

- Education as a value based political enterprise (Elliot, 2013)

- Academia being considered as irrelevant to social concerns (Levin and Greenwood)

- Alternative university (Neary et al, 2013)

- Academic Journal publications, a proxy for quality that erodes diversity, innovation, critical evaluation and creativity"

Help from an unexpected quarter (?): The Business perspective.

- Where are we now?

- Where do we want to be?

- How do we get there?

- How do we know when we get there?)

Where are we now?

- Triple bottom line (Elkington, 1998)
- PESTLE analysis (Political, Economic, Socio/cultural, Technological, Legal and Economic)
- SWOT (Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats)

Where do we want to be: Ethical considerations?

- Pseudo arguments:
  - Friedman (Profit)
  - Cultural relativism (depends on culture)
  - Righteous moralist (Same rules everywhere)
  - Naïve Immoralist (when in Rome do as the Romans)
- Genuine arguments:
  - Utilitarian (greatest good)
  - Kantian view (people as ends in themselves)
  - Right Theories (Fundamental rights)
  - Justice theories (Rawls)

Criticism?

- Yes (e.g. universalism) but how many researchers consider the ethical consequences before, during and after research?

- Need to creatively combine these options through concerted discussions

- Do our quality research criteria integrate the ethical dimensions (or is this an add on?)?

How do we get there?

- Type/process of research is key (more relevant 'evidence-based' findings)

- Who we target/involve is key (STP model): government, community, HE, publishers/editors of journals (today's 'priests'?)

- Action Research should be more widely adopted (Elliot, 2013, Levin and Greenwood, 2013)

How do we know when we get there?

- When more research is directly relevant to solving practical educational problems
- Short-term vs long-term
- Specific vs broader/wider horizons
- Multidisciplinarity
- Multi-level/multi-stakeholder

The relevance of AR

- Problem focused
- Spiral of circles/iterative
- Participatory
- Questioning assumptions (including own)
- Evidence-based
- Critical analysis (social/historical constructions)
- Political (effects on social life/practice)
- Ideological (Habermas?)

Criticism of AR?

- Subjectivism? (we are multi layered animals)
- Foundation research?
- Rigour? (validity/reliability)

A little exercise

- 7 Journals selected (vocationally focused and more general)

- Dropped AR journals from the exercise as our argument is for all educational journals to allow for a problem-solution perspective

- Looked at the statement of the aims and considered whether a researcher wanting to publish an AR paper would be encouraged to do so (Red, Orange, Green)

Author's perception

Journal	Traffic light decision
Harvard Educational Review	Orange
Educational Review	Orange
International Journal of Training and Development	Orange
Journal of Vocational Education and Training	Orange
Oxford Review	Orange
Research in Post-compulsory Education	Orange
Cambridge Journal of Education	Orange/Red

Solution: Identify table of criteria to remove ambiguity about targeted papers

Some concluding thoughts

- The aims of education should be routinely referred to by researchers

- Ethical considerations help identify what type of research is useful

- Action research, by nature, espouses the problem solving approach and should be routinely considered as a method of research by educators

- Using technics from other disciplines (e.g. business) can help solve solutions

- Stakeholders such as academic editors should make it clear if action research is welcome or not