

Practitioner research as the construction of knowledge-in-practice

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This session raises questions about the emergence of a form of knowledge which has not been widely recognised within the literature. It is argued that practitioner research, which is research by a practitioner (architect, teacher, lawyer, nurse, musician, farm adviser, psychiatrist ...) into collective practices and understandings within their profession, generates forms of knowledge which are neither pure nor applied: the knowledge which is generated by practitioner research is emerging knowledge which is informed by both theory and practice.

Under this construction, practitioner research generates insights and understandings which will later be formalised and interpreted by traditional forms of academic investigation and interpretation: in turn, the theory developed in this pure research may be applied in practice. The notion that the professional (or the consultant or facilitator) who works with clients (or patients or students) is "applying knowledge" that has been generated elsewhere has been superseded by understandings of knowledge construction as an ongoing emergent process. Within *practitioner* research, knowledge 'emerges in practice'; within *applied* research, knowledge is 'applied to practice' - these can usefully be thought of as two distinct forms of research..

This workshop is designed to tease out issues related to the notion that practitioner research is an emerging form of research. Practitioner research addresses the complexity of decision making in an era where professional practice changes so quickly that it cannot be guided *only* by existing theory: practitioner research is informed by both experience and theory, and the product is fresh experience and fresh theory-in-practice.

This discussion is particularly relevant at a time when the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) is clarifying the definition of research being used within the Performance Based Research Funding (PBRF) process. There is an argument to be made that this form of funding discriminates against the emergence of knowledge in practice, or professional knowledge. Contrary to current rhetoric, this is not because practitioner research (in the form of action research, for example) is not accepted by PBRF panels: in cases where practitioners have reported their work in established journals it has been recognised.

Practitioner research is discriminated against because practitioners are not commonly funded to produce knowledge in the forms recognised by TEC through its PBRF panels: the knowledge remains tacit, awaiting traditional researchers to name it so that practitioners can later apply it. This process needs to be streamlined in order to capitalise on knowledge which emerges in practice.

The argument revolves around questions concerning (a) what knowledge is valued by whom, and (b) under what conditions might knowledge production be recognised as research?

Literature associated with this re-construction includes: situated cognition; communities of practice; complexity and emergence; post-structuralism; ecological models of development; and mode 2 knowledge. It is beyond the scope of this workshop to discuss these theories or a paradigm shift related to knowledge construction: instead, we, the participants will clarify our understandings of practitioner research and how it relates to professional practice.