

Magazine Article

Integrating research & practice in schools: an emerging collaborative framework within Welsh education?

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Integrating research & practice in schools

An emerging collaborative framework within Welsh education?



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Education in Wales is evolving. Government-led dissemination of standardised practice, often leading to ‘faddism’ or ‘inspection chasing’, is quickly receding into the past (IEE, 2021). Placing practitioner autonomy in the foreground, increased focus has been placed on remodelling education as an evidence-informed profession through a greater integration of research and practice (Welsh Government, 2021).

However, integrating research and practice is not straightforward (Rycroft-Smith, 2022). Identifying, evaluating and integrating relevant research is intellectually and practically demanding for practitioners, requiring time and specialist skills to deploy. A new approach is needed that enables practitioners to play a leading role in their research while concurrently minimising its demands. As part of a Welsh Government conceived project entitled Talk Pedagogy¹, Glyndŵr University explored a promising new approach.

Talk Pedagogy represents an innovative direction, in which universities and regional consortia collaborate with schools to co-create powerful evidence-informed learning experiences. Across two to three meetings, Glyndŵr University’s interactions with three participating local schools resulted in strong relationships of mutual support. Through an open dialogue, schools shared their interests, context and needs with the university. Following school feedback, the university facilitated schools’ access to, and understanding of, pedagogical research, aiming to bridge research and practice.

Initially, the university helped practitioners access research literature themselves. However, practitioners said they found the volume of literature ‘overwhelming’, struggled to identify relevant research, and found the evaluation and interpretation of research challenging, with insufficient time a key issue. As a result, the university created bespoke research summaries. This was successful; practitioners reported that the research

was clear, concise, relevant and already evaluated by professional researchers, thereby saving them valuable time and energy. Paired with supporting conversations, this led to a shift in practitioner thinking, with increased attention placed on developing meaningful learning experiences through careful planning, experimentation, evaluation and reflection.

This collaborative process represents an innovative approach in which universities do ‘what they do best’ by building and supporting a research foundation for practitioners, and practitioners do what they do best and embed this foundation within their context. Through open discussion, both perspectives coalesce, resulting in an empowering learning culture.

By supporting teacher agency, this approach differs from the ‘top-down’ dissemination practices of the past, while making the vision of evidence-informed practice attainable. Engaging with research can be challenging for practitioners. In this sense, why not collaborate, enabling each to contribute in the way they do best.

¹<https://hwb.gov.wales/professional-development/national-pedagogy-project/talk-pedagogy-think-learning/>

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