

## Some educational principles for supporting schools in raising attainment

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# Raising attainment in schools

- Changing educational practices in a sustainable and systematic manner is incredibly challenging;
- Having an impact on attainment is even more difficult;
- There are many tensions in what the government is trying to achieve;
- For example, it is worth considering what the ideal level of attainment across the educational system would look like.

# Why is it so difficult to transform educational practices?

- The history of education is littered with innovations claiming to represent the beginning of the end of education as we know it. For example:
  - MOOCs;
  - Television;
- Such innovations often work well with the original group of innovators and but tend to lose their effectiveness they are extended to later adopters (Elton 2003).
- Why?

# A standard explanation of the difficulty of transforming educational practices

It is usually argued that this is due to a combination of:

1. The originators having greater resources than the later adopters;
2. The later adopters misunderstanding the innovation.

This explanation means that the answer to this difficulty is to develop stricter protocols to ensure **THE METHOD, BEST PRACTICE, or WHAT WORKS** is followed more rigorously.

# An alternative explanation of the difficulty of transforming educational practices

Two related alternative ways of answering:

1. Innovators and the later adopters are engaging in different kinds of practices. Innovators are solving educational problems; later adopters are following protocols.
2. Education is a local achievement – it involves helping particular students to engage with particular bodies of knowledge in particular settings. Therefore, effective educational practices change depending on the students, the forms of knowledge, and educational settings involved.

This explanation means that educators need the space to solve educational challenges and reinterpret innovative practices.

**Universities work with schools can help to provide such a space.**

# The potential impact on educational practices

- We need to think about how partnerships with schools can support local educational practices;
- The local nature of teaching and learning means it is better to have 'low-definition' visions that can adapted to local educational settings rather than highly specified 'high-definition' visions of the future (Trowler et al. 2014);
- Drawing on to develop evidence- informed principles that provide a space for schools to use their knowledge of their particular educational context and intentions to make judgements about how to enhance education in their setting.

# Six educational principles

Ashwin (2020) argues effective education:

1. Starts from an understanding of who students are;
2. Is based on a deep understanding of the knowledge being taught and how to make this accessible to students;
3. Is designed as a coherent set of experiences that will enable particular students to develop an understanding of particular bodies of knowledge;
4. Is based on a clear sense of how students are expected to change through their engagement these experiences;
5. Evaluates students' learning in terms of their understanding of these bodies of knowledge;
6. Is collectively produced.

# Using the principles:

Universities' partnerships with schools could focus on:

- Better understanding who schools' students are;
- Supporting a deep understanding of the knowledge being taught;
- Supporting work on how to make knowledge accessible to students;
- Supporting schools to review how its curriculum in a particular area enhances student understanding;
- Working with school to support students to understand why their current education is relevant to their future live

It is about providing a space for schools to develop ways of working that are fit for their local educational context.



# Assessing the impact of partnerships with schools

- In assessing partnerships, it is more useful to think about evidence in terms of a courtroom than a laboratory – we need to aggregate different kinds of evidence and build a case about what it is reasonable to conclude (Saunders 2011).
- The impact is evidence-informed – it involves making a **judgement** based on an interpretation of the available evidence.
- We might need to present this evidence in particular forms for particular purposes but should not lose sight of its imprecise nature.

# Assessing Impact



# So what?

- Partnerships with schools can have an impact on educational practices;
- However, the partnerships we develop will be in low-definition with the precision of sledgehammers rather than lasers;
- Education always comes back to thinking about how particular students can develop an understanding of particular bodies of knowledge in a particular setting.

# References

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