Research Informing Practice: Increasing its Impact.

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Research Informing Practice: Increasing its Impact

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Research and Practice Context

- Traditionally two separate communities
  - Research
  - Practice
- Growing recognition of the need for stronger links between the two
  - Who owns the knowledge concerning practice, and
  - Who benefits from the research
- Recognition of the need for research to contribute to solutions
- Serious concerns remain among the scholarly community
  - Wary of push towards commercialization
  - Need for “pure” theoretical research vs. pragmatic concerns
  - Standards and means for developing and improving practical inquiry are not well established nor understood
- Recent studies have begun to explore the ways in which practitioners access, engage with, and make use of research
Practice-Based Research

- **Practical Inquiry** – undertaken by practitioners to help them understand their contexts, practices, and students
- **Formal Research** – undertaken by practitioners or researchers to contribute to an established and general knowledge base

Evidence-Based Practice

- Operates at two levels:
  - Utilization of *existing evidence* from worldwide literature
  - **Establishing sound evidence** where existing data is lacking or of a questionable, uncertain, or weak in nature
Practitioners Need to be able to:

- Pose an answerable question
- Know where and how to find evidence systematically and comprehensively
- Retrieve and read such evidence completely and critically
- Organize and assess the validity of the evidence; and
- Determine its relevance to their needs and environments (Davies, 1999).
Where Practitioners Access Research

- Most frequently used sources are colleagues, professional development/training programs, reports and journals found on campus.
- Uncertain about how to develop effective research strategies for online information beyond clicking aimlessly—difficulty finding what they want is a key complaint among practitioners.
How Practitioners Use Research

• We know little about what type of research is being consumed and in what depth it is being read or used
• Research use is more likely among staff who are more senior/experienced and have postgraduate qualifications and positive beliefs about improvement (Bevan, 2004)
  – NAFSA’s 2006 Membership Survey:
    • BA/BS: 30%; MA/MS: 47%; PhD: 12%; Other: 11%
• Practitioners use research in ways that are:
  – Active: making sense of, and finding meaning in, the research
  – Selective: in idiosyncratic ways, using very individual processes
• The process can be both:
  – Values-rich: weight of evidence is rarely sufficient to change practice; claims must also resonate with prior beliefs and experience
  – Rewarding (Rickinson, 2005)
Improving Practitioner Access

• Nature of the **Research**
  – Technical, specialized nature of language used is a barrier
  – Specialized nature of disciplines
  – Failure to incorporate contextual features and qualities
  – Topic of study is of most interest, not methodology

• Nature of the **Practitioner**
  – Far from empty vessels; active and selective
  – Knowledge and beliefs need to be considered

• Nature of the **Professional Context**
  – Does it foster learning and value research?
  – Time, time, time…

• Nature of the **Wider Context** of Support
  – Role of professional associations (Rickinson, 2005)
Recommendations for Increasing Impact

• Incorporate contextual features and qualities central to the practitioner when scoping and framing a study
• Disseminate abstracts more widely and strategically in order to help the practitioner quickly decide whether the study is likely to be useful
• Package research findings into tangible and useful formats, using plain language, and provide clear implications for practice—consultation and collaboration with practitioners from the beginning will help ensure relevance and applicability
• Continue to improve the consolidation and indexing of research and scholarship in international education
• Provide online resources that are: easy to navigate, visually appealing, free of dense text, user-friendly with good printing capabilities and other tools that promote dissemination
• Continue efforts in establishing an evidence-based culture within IE
References


Using Research to Improve the Student Experience of Internationalisation:

A Case Study of Research Informed Practice

Associate Professor Betty Leask
University of South Australia
Research Informed Practice to Address a Particular Issue …

• ‘in tutorial class … beside me it’s an empty chair, but this girl she … I remember I smiled at her, then she just walked back and she sat at the back of the class. Why didn’t she just sit here?’

International student 2003

Important to ‘fill the empty chairs’ – but how?
Outline

• Interventions that have been taken to improve interactions between international and domestic students in a Faculty of Business in Australia
• How research was used to shape the interventions
• What the effects of the interventions were
• What we have learned about how to connect research with practice
But it did give us some guidance

• we made a small change to a mentoring program, evaluated it and found it had a dramatic positive impact

• we developed a taxonomy of intercultural competence and are using it to embed the development of intercultural competence into the formal curriculum

…and we entered into an action learning cycle that is ongoing
Resulting in some changes to the way we did things

• A student mentoring program
  – designed to assist students with the transition to the university
  – we added an additional objective

  *facilitate social interactions between students, in particular international and domestic students*

  - resulting in ‘paired’ mentors vs ‘unpaired’ mentors in a parallel program
And had an impact

• ‘I feel I have improved my skills in communicating across cultures’

  – Paired student mentors agreement rate 81%

  – Unpaired student mentors agreement rate 58%
Knowledge

Identifies cultural foundations of own and others' norms, values and interactions

Analyzes how diversity influences interaction (and how culture manifests itself in interaction)

Reflects on and evaluates capabilities and limitations in interactions in varying cultural contexts

Attitudes

Acknowledges the practical significance of own and others’ beliefs, values, norms and biases (cultural identity) and their impact on behaviour and interactions

Adapts to differences between oneself and others in interactions in varying cultural contexts

Values intercultural interactions and experiences

Skills

Applies basic skills or directions to routine tasks and interactions to accommodate specified cultural differences

Implements appropriate processes and behaviours for interactions with different cultural settings and audiences

Practises complex skill sets in interactions under conditions of uncertainty, risk and change in professional business situations
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Effectively work in multicultural team  
 Raise awareness  
 Develop understanding  
 Facilitate autonomy
How did we use research to help resolve this issue?

• we actively sought out research (in the traditional ways) that could help us to find ways to resolve the issue
• we scanned reports of research and related dissemination workshops for any relevant ideas, hints, tips, leads
• we developed a strong team commitment – a small Community of Practice dedicated to finding ways to solve the problem
• we linked with other like-minded people seeking to solve the same problem, shared what we had learned with others, learned from them
Facilitators and Enablers

• an identified issue/problem
• a commitment to doing something about it
• an organisational culture which models and rewards evidence-based practice
• leadership at the ‘local’, on-the-ground level
• practitioners with dedicated research or professional development time and resources
• mechanisms to monitor progress such as work plans, team meetings and performance reviews
• ease of access to related research e.g. a national database of research into international education
Obstacles and Barriers

• competition between empirical knowledge and other types of knowledge
• practical barriers to access to research/evidence – time, money, ‘busy-work’, rules/traditions about who can go to conferences and who can’t
• practical barriers to use of research/evidence – lack of leadership and a ‘we don’t do it that way’/risk averse culture
• lack of local support – leadership not supportive; no sense of team/shared goals; no ownership of need to find solutions to problems
Conclusion