

Effective curriculum research in FE ITE: Linking the theoretic to the practical in education programmes

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- Background and goals of our presentation
- Understanding the curriculum: curriculum theory or curriculum theorizing?
- Traditions of curriculum theorizing: structural, generic and substantive traditions
- Issues of theory– the ‘theoretic vs the ‘practical’
- Illustrations: the theoretic vs the practical
- Current FE ITE engagement with curriculum: theoretic or practical. Potentials for conversion?
- Benefits/ implications for practice

Background & Goals of our presentation

- Why this topic?
- A. Product of our reflection as practitioners (teacher trainers)
- How much do the quotes below resonate with you?
- ‘some students in my class just do not want to engage. How can I.....’I have tried xxx, but I am still not getting xxxxxx’
- ‘you know all those theories we learned about, I simply cannot apply them. The situation does not allow me to use those principles to meet my learners’ needs...’
- So, we think there is a gap somewhere. Is this a problem with the content we provide our trainees in the context of curriculum development or in other areas? Why are our trainees not researching ways in which they can solve some of these problems on their own?
- ‘Just as, for example, physicists try to produce universal explanations for the behaviour of atomic particles, a new breed of curriculum theorists was setting out to establish universal principles and explanation concerning the events surrounding teaching and learning’ (Reid, 2001, P30)

Our goals

- Developing from this, we set out with a simple goal: .To answer two simple questions?
- 1. How well do we use our courses / modules on curriculum development to prepare our students for engaging with curriculum research?
- 2. How can we change the current situation so that it further enhances curriculum research in a fruitful way?
- We would hope that evidence from some examples from what is currently provided will enable us to provide answers to these questions

Illustrations of current focus of the curriculum module in FE ITE

- Current requirements for the Diploma in Education and Training and Cert Ed/PGCE (with variations for level 5 or 6) are as follows:
- Discuss/evaluate/critically evaluate relevant theories and models which underpin the curriculum they teach and appropriate policies and practices which influence it.
- Analyse and explain ways in which theories and models of curriculum development can be applied in developing curricula in own area of specialism.
- Discuss/analyse/critically analyse a wider aspect of curriculum . Employ theoretical critiques of curriculum in ways which indicate a sustained engagement with appropriate literature.
- Evaluate a specified curriculum and discuss and justify possible improvements to it.
- It seems to us that there is something rather limiting with the focus of these tasks. Drawing on the literature, we draw a preliminary conclusion that the focus is 'theoretic (Reid, 2002) rather than practical.

Understanding the curriculum: curriculum theory or curriculum theorizing?

- Theorizing is generally preliminary to theory completion. Contributes to our understanding of the rationales for theory. So, provides an avenue for enlarging 'vision, to present new possibilities, and to bring deeper understanding' (Huenecke, 1982, 290).
- Theory attempts to identify, describe, explain and predict in specific terms (Huenecke, 1982)
- Our preference is for theorizing because:
 - A. It allows us to understand that there might be more than one way of viewing issues, concepts or phenomena.
 - B. We recognise that there might be different views of what the curriculum is.
 - C. Theory is likely to limit us to specific ways of viewing the curriculum.
 - D. Theorizing is more comprehensive and allows an exploration of both potential and reality (see e.g Huenecke, 1982, Reid, 2001). A process which leads us to an understanding of what we are engaging with

Traditions of curriculum theorizing

- A structural perspective to curriculum theorising:- identifies elements and their inter-relationships, design and organisation of learner activities to achieve purpose and evaluation of progress (Rooted in the work of Tyler 1950 and has endured significantly). Focuses on a systematized approach (Beauchamp, 1975) encompassing; a curriculum system (content), an instructional system (teaching and learning) and an evaluation system (assessment and feedback) (See Beauchamp, 1982/2009).
- Generic theorizing: Focus is on underlying beliefs that inform education. Draws significantly from other fields, and embodies a liberation argument. Emphasises person-ness, liberation, diversity etc in the tradition of Apple's hidden curriculum, Macdonald and Huebner. (Apple, 1982/2009, Desai and Sanya, 2016).
- Substantive theorising: Not concerned with structure, systems or values. Focused on perceived omissions. Urges new directions for curriculum because of the perceived failure of relevance (to the individual?) failure to promote excellence and failure to educate the total person (Huenecke, 1982).
- All hold valuable positions. The theorizing approach offers us the opportunity to expand our understanding of what is, and to identify /engage with what could be.

The theoretic vs the practical

- To analyse the current structure of curriculum research in FE ITE, we borrow the framework offered by Reid (1991) – The ‘theoretic Vs. the practical
- The two represent what draws on the Aristotelian tradition of making a distinction between the possible goals of knowledge ‘seeking and using’ (Reid, 1991, p. 3, Schwab, 1978, & Westbury and Wilkof, 1978).
- The theoretic is focused on finding and using knowledge for the purpose of producing explanation
- The practical is focused on finding knowledge as a launching pad for taking action about a specific situation.
- It follows, therefore that in the practical domain, the situation has to be distinct from other situations and, therefore, the action has to be specifically designed for that situation.
- In contrast, with the theoretic, although the search for knowledge might be triggered by a specific event, the knowledge and the explanation it generates is often of a general nature

THE PRACTICAL MODEL

SPECIFIC INCIDENT AROUND THE CURRICULUM

TEACHER
CURRICULUM CONTENT

LEARNER ATTITUDE
RESPONSE TO TEACHING



SEARCH FOR KNOWLEDGE/UNDERSTANDING

EXISTING LITERATURE
KNOWLEDGEABLE OTHERS

REFLECTION
INTERACTIONS



MAP OUT KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

DESIGN SOLUTION
MATCH SOLUTION TO THE
SITUATION

USE KNOWLEDGE AND
SOLUTION TO DEVISE
ACTION AND ACT

THE THEORETIC MODEL

SPECIFIC INCIDENT AROUND THE CURRICULUM

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CURRICULUM CONTENT

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SEARCH FOR KNOWLEDGE/ UNDERSTANDING

EXISTING LITERATURE
KNOWLEDGEABLE OTHERS

REFLECTION
INTERACTIONS



MAP OUT KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

FIND A RANGE OF POSSIBLE
EXPLANATIONS

RELATE POSSIBLE
EXPLANATIONS TO SIMILAR
INCIDENTS

Preliminary conclusions

- 1. Our current focus does not encourage our trainees to devise actions in response to issues they identify
- 2. A good way forward would be to problematize scenarios and ask our trainees to devise actions in response to these scenarios
- 3. We must move our trainees from a focus on answers to questions such as;
 - Explain what...., What might be responsible for , What factors could influence...
 - To questions such as:
 - What steps would you take to ...
 - Identify three strategies you might use in this case and why you think they would work with this group of students

Examples of how we could move towards the practical

- Ideas for curriculum research could include:
- How to get our trainees to develop a local and community curriculum which would involve researching unique local needs
- How to get our trainees to develop their own curriculum for their subject specialism
- Our trainees could be made to explore how to work with their students to devise a curriculum for their subject specialism
- How to respond to unique situations in their classroom
- Illustration: One student teacher who has developed her own curriculum from scratch This is the Creative Butterfly Project for survivors of domestic abuse.
<https://www.thecreativebutterflyproject.com/gallery>