



# Educational research and Evidence-based policy and practice



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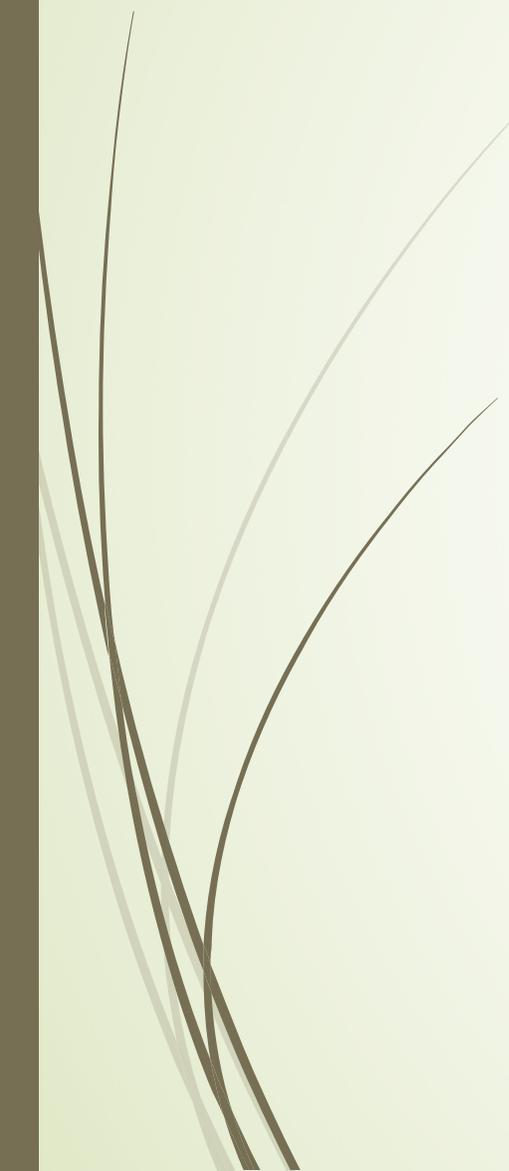
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# How teachers and students are framed through policy and discourse

- Politics of the research-policy interface
  - How research informs practice in schools
  - Implications for teachers as professionals and systemic improvement
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# Politics of education

- ▶ Contestation over values (e.g. culture wars, Safe Schools program )
- ▶ Education as site of parental anxiety in 21stC (e.g. school choice) as I increasingly less able to fulfil its promise
- ▶ Political and media beat up of teachers and teacher education (diverts attention away from educational inequality for which schools can only partially compensate as ses is primary predictor of student achievement in Australia)
- ▶ Who funds education(debates about private/public benefits of university degrees) and Gonski

# Debates over future of the university

Delanty 1998

- *Entrenched liberal thesis*: the university as site of cultural reproduction is challenged, e.g. Bloom (1987) attacks post modernism and defends the traditional canon;
- *Postmodern thesis*: foresees the end of the state and of the university, the latter having lost its emancipatory role due to fragmentation of knowledge and separation of research from teaching and policy, e.g. Lyotard (1984), Ernst and Young Reports (2013)etc;
- *Reflexivity thesis*: sees a new mode of knowledge based on a reflexive relationship between user and produce of knowledge as old forms of knowledge production are increasingly irrelevant to post-Fordist economies, e.g. Barnett (1998); Limoge et als type 1 and 2 knowledge
- *Globalisation thesis*: the instrumentalisation of the university as it embraces market values and informational technology and becomes central to, and fully integrated into, the capitalist modes of production. The new managerialism facilitates capitalism's takeover but makes universities major players in the global market and information-based capitalism, e.g. Slaughter and Leslie's notion of academic capitalism(1997)
- *Post truth*: University as sites of progressivist thinking and death of expertise...#realpeerreview

## Politics of the 'what works' and 'evidence based policy and practice' discourse (conjuncture, coincidence, conspiracy?)

- Originated in the 1990's in context of intersection of epistemological debates about the nature of knowledge production, role of university based research in relation to policy, and location of teacher education
- More applied knowledge and interdisciplinary approaches to solve wicked problems
- Schools and universities as all public service sectors (health and welfare) in NZ, UK and Australia were impacted by New Public Management reforms and producer capture arguments that
  - Public sector professionals were invested in and protected fields for own benefit
  - Public sector service providers (state bureaucracies) were inefficient and should be modelled on private sector and too centralised
  - Market principles to give voice and choice to client ( e.g Kennett in Victoria)
  - Generic management was required as it was best not to have expertise in field you were managing other wise you became 'captured' ( Phase 1 'death of expertise'?)
  - Devolution as those at the interface knew how to use resources best ie subsidiarity
- Policy's role was to steer self managing institutions towards national or organisational priorities and feedback gained through accountability (e.g KPIs for managers, standardised assessment and performance management)

# Research - policy models (Young et al 2002)

- *knowledge-driven model*, it is assumed that research leads policy (Expert on top)
- *problem-solving model*, in contrast, research follows policy, and policy issues shape research priorities (Expert on tap)
- *interactive model* contrasts by positing a more subtle and complex series of relationships between decision makers and researchers in which see research and policy as mutually influential, with the agenda for both research and policy decision shaped within 'policy communities' which contain a range of actors (eg academic or think tank policy analysts)
- *political/tactical model*, which sees policy as the outcome of a political process. The research agenda as politically driven, with studies commissioned and/or used to support the position adopted by the government of the day
- *enlightenment model* is one that portrays research as standing if not aloof, then certainly a little distant from the hothouse of immediate policy concerns. Rather than research serving policy agendas in a direct fashion, the benefits are indirect
- research for policy, researching policy, and policy advocacy

## Anglophone policy pathology

- ▶ David Hargreaves 1996: research remote from practice, of poor quality and a waste of public money. That research in teaching should be evidence based as in medicine, focused more on 'what works' in schools, on learning, and on 'evidence-based teaching and research'
- ▶ Tooley and Darby Report 1998. Attacks educational researchers as too theoretical, lacking rigour etc. particularly feminist research, criticised the relevance and quality of educational research, [Tooley (now promoting school improvement internationally for Pearson – Africa and Asia – transnational white masculinity linked to edu-capitalism etc)]
- ▶ trend to evidence-based and teacher practitioner research fed off US focus on data driven decision-making by principals and teachers which led to *No Child Left Behind* and RCT as norm for funding
- ▶ Cross national discourse of 'crisis in education' in media and by politicians found fecund ground in social conservatism (culture and literacy wars ) and economic radicalism (marketisation and privatisation) of Howard government (1996-2007) with attacks on teacher education as not being practical and too much theory (anti sociology, feminism, multiculturalism, Indigenous etc)



## Wider context

- Evidence Informed Policy and Practice Information and coordinating centre (EPPI Centre (<http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk>). funded by the DfES for £1.9 million (2001)
- director Ann Oakley moved from staunch champion of qualitative 'ways of knowing' to an advocate for quantitative methods with a desire to reduce qual/quant divide
- Medicine: Cochrane Collaboration ( which now has widened its criteria to include qualitative research)
- Campbell Collaboration : systematic research synthesis in the social science and policy
- Iterative Best Evidence Synthesis in NZ government policy section (Alton- Lee); again brings together qualitative and quantitative evidence e.g reports on Quality of Teachers, Inequality etc
- Ongoing desire to centralise evidence base (where evidence is supplied to teachers) where they become users of evidence rather than 'teacher as researcher' where they are producers of evidence and data

# Australian context

- ▶ *The Impact of Australian Educational Research'* (DETYA, 2001)
- ▶ NAPLAN, PISA, TIMSS: big data enabling comparison between schools, systems, nations.
- ▶ Hattie's *Visible Learning* meta-analysis: now going global e.g. Denmark!
- ▶ *Productivity Commission: National Evidence Base 2016*
- ▶ increasingly management consultancy firms do quick and dirty research for government (Death of expertise' (university based research) stage 2?)
- ▶ University – government partnerships: highly reliant on politics and priorities of Departments of Education with cycles of recruiting research, no research, and only evaluation....real politiik of the educational research- policy nexus
- ▶ **SIP DET :- Evidence-based:** *the new approach stresses the use of concrete evidence as critical to support the achievement of goals and an indicator of performance. Evidence is also highlighted as a key enabler for staff to show their impact on their practice (2018)*

# Impact of educational research report 2001

- using quantitative and qualitative methodologies ( 5 studies) that explored relationships between policy, educational research, and teacher practice in 1990s Australia : two involved backtracking research into policy and practice. Concluded:
  - The links between educational research and schools were clearly evident. The researchers found that almost all the school principals, professional associations of educators, and school system administrators expressed the view that educational research had benefitted Australian education. (p. 5)
  - Teachers' decisions were strongly influenced by sources that are themselves directly impacted on by research, specifically initial teacher training, professional reading, the advice of other teachers, professional development courses, and formal post graduate studies. (p. 8)
  - Australia ranks a creditable fourth out of 35 nations in terms of its publications and citation record over the period 1987-1998. Australia's share of international publications is greater in education than any other major field in this country except for the earth sciences . . . Despite this record, productivity is very uneven between universities. (p. 10)
- Recognised that the 'relationship between research and practice was complex, diffuse, indirect, unstructured, and largely mediated through individuals and associations, policy and the media'.
- The roles of professional development and professional associations were seen to be highly significant e.g. AARE, Curriculum Association, Maths Ed, History etc....

# Evidence or research based practice?

- Do teachers use research? 2001 Impact report:-
  - while many teachers did not see their work being informed by research, the Impact study indicated that most teachers use key theoretical concepts that originated in recent research, concepts disseminated through policy and professional development and by colleagues.
  - exemplary teachers cited post-graduate research as stimulating their thinking and changing their thinking and practice, building upon the dynamic tension between theory and practice and multiple epistemological positions, more akin to Delanty's reflexivity thesis.



## Teachers focus on multiple aspects of learning

- ▶ *attainment* as measured by one-off standardised test scores (e.g. NAPLAN PISA), classroom assessments and teacher observations;
- ▶ *pedagogical* effects as indicated by improved engagement in learning (proxies such as time on task, self-management);
- ▶ *social* in terms of improved student/teacher, teacher/teacher and student interactions, evidence of increased levels of student interpersonal competencies and team work;
- ▶ *affective* as indicated by a sense of belonging and inclusion, self-esteem and self-confidence;
- ▶ *wellbeing*: physical comfort and health, sense of safety; and
- ▶ *behavioural* changes related to retention, vandalism, absenteeism, suspensions, expulsions, disciplinary incidents, violence, disruption in class, lateness, racial incidents, smoking. (Blackmore et al. 2010, p. 6).



## Multiple sources of 'evidence' teachers use

- Observation of student behavior in and out of classrooms
- Peer discussions/teams
- Interpersonal relationships
- Learning artefacts e.g. range of visual texts
- Intuitive knowledge (experience)
- Research
- School Data
- Formal student Assessments
- System assessments
- Student satisfaction surveys
- Parent surveys etc.....

## How do teachers learn and disseminate professional knowledge? Some of the ways are--

- Everyday conversations with colleagues, students and parents
- Professional learning peer networks between schools, within sectors and online
- Subject associations
- Conferences
- Visiting other schools
- Working in teams
- Teacher professional development: school and system
- Post graduate coursework and research programs
- Collecting data (surveys)
- Doing research (action research, surveys etc)
- Reading research
- analysing extant school and classroom data (attendance data, school reviews, student satisfaction surveys etc NAPLAN, PISA...)
- Reading policy.....

Teacher peer review embedded into a school planning processes is more likely to improve learning that external accountabilities which can be counterproductive (Elmore).



## Either quantitative or qualitative?

- ▶ Quantitative research can identify patterns and trends over time,
- ▶ Qualitative research can assist in the interpretation of results of meta-analysis etc
- ▶ ‘Qualitative data can assess aspects of an intervention in greater detail or in ways not amenable to numerical measurement. Such data can help to clarify the ways in which different issues and events are interpreted and responded to by participants in a study and thus provide clues to the process by which an intervention did or did not have various different outcomes. Qualitative data therefore help to explain the statistical results and generate theories about cause and effect’ (and question assumptions about cause and effect)
- ▶ ‘Alternatively, qualitative research can be the primary source of data for a systematic review. Systematic synthesis can ask questions other than efficacy including issues of process and of prevalence and the appropriateness of services and needs assessment’

## Policy research problematic

- National policy-making is inevitably a process of bricolage; a matter of borrowing and copying bits and pieces of ideas from elsewhere, drawing upon and amending locally tried-and-tested approaches, cannibalising theories, research, trends and fashions, and not infrequently a flailing around for anything at all that looks as though it might work. Most policies are ramshackle, compromise, hit and miss affairs that are reworked, tinkered with, nuanced and inflected through complex processes of influence, text production, dissemination and ultimately recreation in contexts of practice. [. . .] In short, national policies need to be understood as the product of a nexus of influences and interdependencies, resulting in ‘interconnectedness, multiplexity and hybridisation’ [. . .] that is, ‘the intermingling of global, distant and local logics’.

(Ball, S. J. (2001b). Global policies and vernacular politics in education. *Curr.culo Sem Fronteiras*, 1(2), xxvii–xlili.)

# Paradoxes of research-policy nexus

- Produced the 'best practice' and evidence based practice movement which as much ignores complexity of context and is reductionist, with a focus only on the classroom
- Governments impose policies that are often a mix of ideology and evidence
- Policies are informed by selective research post hoc as justification
- Little evaluation is undertaken prior to policies travelling across schools systems and countries e.g. Independent Public Schools based on faith not evidence
- Researchers considered to be too critical and not positive enough
- Time lapse between educational research ( e.g. ARC) and need for quick solutions for policymakers
- Policies are often symbolic and performative exercises – research irrelevant
- Research has only a limited role in governance because these policies are driven more by ideology, economic theory, and political expediency than the need to improve clinical effectiveness (Packford 2002)
- Great deal of research has already been carried out on a wide range of social problems, providing policy makers with pointers that they rarely follow.
- 'the paradox of policy analysis' arises from a mismatch between notions of how the policy process should work and its actual messy, uncertain, unstable and essentially political realities.

# Issues

- ▶ privileging one form of research over others in policy or practice ( quantitative over qualitative, RCT over other forms of research)
- ▶ Suggesting there are a suite of solutions that are generalisable across contexts when context and social mix factors are ignored ie recipes to teachers re visible learning
- ▶ Unexpected consequences at systemic, school and individual level of universal high stakes standardised assessment which are not diagnostic
- ▶ Abuse of assessment data in terms of invalid comparisons by media and politicians
- ▶ Failure to provide resources when issues are identified ie. Performative and not diagnostic
- ▶ Issue becomes what can teachers and schools do when resourcing and policy frames are more disabling than enabling particularly for some school contexts who deal with a more complexity in disadvantaged communities ?



## Productivity Commission 2016: National Evidence Base

- ▶ We assert that the nature of evidence required to inform improvements in early childhood education and care (ECEC) and school-based practice is more complex than acknowledged in the draft report. The models being promoted for linking data and evidence privilege quantitative large scale data at population level, with the effect that issues of translation of policy and research findings into the environments of classrooms and schools, and recognition of context, are ignored or silenced. There is a need to expand understandings of evidence beyond quantitative data sets. There is a further risk that a medical model of epidemiological research will simply be applied to the education sector and that this would fail to address the social, emotional, physical and cognitive nature of learning as well as contextual factors that inform learning. (Deakin Response)
- ▶ judgment of effectiveness is reliant on the completeness of the data base in terms of its relevance to the aims of a program and its capacity to address the multiplicity of student/child outcomes. Currently much of the data referred to within the draft report relates to relatively simplistic models of learning and high stakes tests based on narrow outcomes and as such these have a distorting effect on practice.

# Context in 2010s : Political economy of Edu-capitalism

- Forty years of neoliberalism with its functionalist assumptions and push to economise and quantify all educational relationships ie financialisation and quantification
- new philanthropic and private providers informing policy (e.g. McKinsey on School Improvement, Telstra, Pearson , Gates.....) including statistical or technology companies, testing companies etc
- Education as transnational business (\$4 trillion annually)
- ‘What works’ is the primary discourse as solutions to ‘problems’ – circulating school effectiveness and improvement models that are decontextualized (Gates, Pearson etc )
- **PISA for Schools** test (OECD, 2017) and now **PISA4 U**(March 2017): online teacher professional learning platform whereby teachers ‘learn from education experts from around the globe’ to ‘improve teaching and solve real problems’, via the evidence and solutions derived from PISA for Schools (OECD, 2017a, np). Teachers to learn from the educational evidence and expertise of the OECD and ‘high performing’ schooling systems (e.g., Singapore), as well as the opportunity to network with fellow pisa4u participants to develop a global repository of free teaching resources. The first round of over 6,000 teachers and school leaders participating from 171 countries (Lewis 2018)
- **Apple Teacher**: This is ‘a free, professional learning program[me] designed to support and celebrate teachers’, and to ‘empower teachers to use Apple products for teaching and learning’ (Apple Inc., 2017, p. 2), via the resources and modules made available online in the *Apple Teacher Learning Centre (ATLC)*. Participating schools can also seek the assistance of Apple Learning Specialists *Apple Distinguished Educators* , (e.g., via #AppleTeacher or #ADEchat) who offer targeted schoolwide professional learning planning, workshops and individual coaching at the school level (Lewis 2018, p1)
- What does this mean for teacher education, teacher education credentials, how teachers position themselves etc (or the MOOC effect?)

# What kind of teaching profession do we need for the 21<sup>st</sup> C?

- The dominant approach to evidence-based practice in teaching ignores the benefits of epistemological pluralism...as well as the significant tradition in teacher practitioner research of teacher professional knowledge, teachers as action researchers and intuitive practitioners, traditions that also recognise the social, emotional, and ethical dimensions of teaching (e.g. Cochran Smith and Lytle, 1993).
- These critical traditions are based upon a range of capacities that allow teachers to make their work meaningful as well as provide a will to act on understandings that are not merely gleaned from evidence or just data.
- It fails to recognise the role of professional discourses around what constitutes good teaching, and in turn how multiple forms of evidence is produced, read, interpreted, and acted upon by practitioners as they exercise professional judgement in their particular classroom, mediated through their local knowledge of their students, the conditions of work made possible in that school, the community attitudes and involvement, and their own individual and collective sense of professional and ethical practice.
- Evidence alone, without a wider analytic framework of how policy works and an understanding of social relationships, lacks epistemological depth and a professional and ethical base upon which to build teacher practice
- Current push signals what Bernstein suggests as the divorce of knowledge from the knower, where knowledge is `separated from inwardness, commitments, from personal dedication, from deep structures of the self' (Beck, 1999: 227).

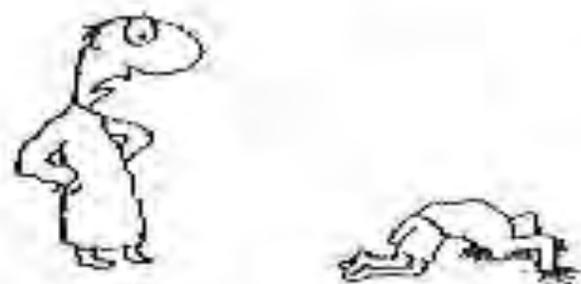
# Teacher professionalism

- ▶ *Being professional:* working towards professional standards through acquiring technical (content, pedagogical) and other knowledges and forms of evidence
- ▶ *Being in a profession:* contributing to the profession in terms of knowledge production and dissemination, being proactive in sharing in and contributing to teacher knowledge base
- ▶ *Being for the profession:* about seeing the potential of education for all, having a commitment to all students and not just those in your classroom or school, advocating for all children and a fair and just education, an advocate for education
- ▶ *Research can serve the public good just as effectively when it seeks to enlighten and inform in the interests of generating a wider public debate. Not evidence-based policy, but a broader evidence-informed society is the appropriate aim. (Young et al 2002, 224)*

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