Development of the Practical Knowledge at the University of Bath

(Dr R.S. Punia)

Introduction

In this collection of four papers prepared for part fulfilment of doctorate in education, I present my understanding of theory/practice interface and the emergent practical knowledge for professionals engaged in similar work elsewhere. I came to the University of Bath with vast embodied tacit knowledge acquired from practice as an international consultant in technical education and training in the form of specific insights, cases, incidents and critical incidents. I aimed to learn to validate my practical experience in other professional knowledge and to share it with other professional educators and academics. The EdD taught units provided me largely with new propositional knowledge based on research, which I used to interpret, explain and expand my practical experiences. This process led to clearer understanding of my past experience and practical knowledge useful to improve practice. The whole process is a form of action research comprised of actions, reflections-on-past experiences in the light of newly acquired propositional knowledge from the EdD taught units leading to written accounts presented in the following papers. Thus the four papers are an integral part of the spiral of academic understanding of current literature, reflections on past professional experience and creation of new professional knowledge, which continues to grow towards my professional growth. I hope to use this material in my future work as a consultant.

The four papers highlight my current concern/values with the global need for the integration of human development with developments in technology. The governments and educators, particularly in technical and vocational education, tend to ignore human development at the expense of economic and technical advances. This imbalance is causing new problems in human relations in the world. Somekh et al. (1999-p.52) expressed their concern as follows.

We need constantly to remind ourselves of the essentially moral and social purpose- not only of education but also of training. Jerome Bruners's three questions what makes people human? How did they become so? How might they be more so? have sadly become instead what makes people wealthy? how do they become so? And how might they become more so? (Crombie White, Pring and Brockington 1995).

For the benefit of professionals striving to become academics and for academic awards I present the following text. It might provide them a clear picture of the context in which they may have to work. To do that I first provide background to my professional learning from MA and MPhil before presenting a review of my four papers submitted for EdD to present the current tensions amongst the academics from the universities and the professional practitioners outside the universities. To value and generate practical knowledge we have to understand and resolve some of the value differences still prevalent in universities, particularly amongst traditional academics. They are reluctant to acknowledge professional knowledge in status to the academic knowledge largely produced in universities. This tension is still on.

MA (1978) and MPhil Dissertations (1992)

I had a very positive experience in writing up my MA dissertation called **Educational Technology in Curriculum Development** at the university of Lancaster in 1978. I followed the standard procedure for conducting and writing up an empirical study based mainly on literature review supported with my personal experience and interviews with other practitioners from UK. I completed a good quality dissertation in two months. This is my experience with the empirical form of research known for producing so-called scientific/academic knowledge. I had to learn much to deal with my next dissertation.

In contrast to my MA dissertation, my efforts to produce my MPhil dissertation (Punia 1992) were exploratory. As such it took longer and great struggle to complete it called **Research on Teachers' Planning and its Use for curriculum, Staff and Institute Development** (Punia 1992). I had sufficient case material from nine studies of teachers' planning I conducted to define and solve the curriculum development problem in the Fiji project. My practical experience of this project consisted of disjointed insights, cases, narratives and documents. I had no experience of constructing an MPhil/ PhD dissertation with such a background. I was not aware of the value of my practical experience for academic awards. In university I later discovered from literature review that at that time the exploratory Research on Teachers' Planning had not been used to improve curriculum development while I had intuitively used it to improve curriculum and staff development in an institute without adequate academic knowledge in this area of research. As a consultant I largely used oral communication and formal reports to share my practical knowledge with other practitioners. I had little practice of writing academic papers. I had to learn to convert my tacit knowledge from practice into explicit knowledge to share it with the academics in the universities for academic awards.

I have now learnt that successful action can take place without theoretical knowledge and that personal practical knowledge is tacit and different from the academic theoretical knowledge, which is explicit knowledge with a degree of generalisation. To create professional practical knowledge we need both kinds of knowledge. Theoretical knowledge is helpful to interpret personal experience and practical experience provides insights, which can be tested and rationalised to create explicit practical knowledge. Writing up this dissertation was a laborious but a creative experience. The MPhil Dissertation has produced valuable practical knowledge for practitioners and academics currently engaged in school improvement as an integrated system including curriculum, staff and management development in a particular context.

At that time I was not aware of the tensions between academic knowledge and the practitioners' knowledge and politics in the academic world. A new form of scholarship was emerging in universities to include **the scholarship of discovery; the scholarship of integration; the scholarship of application; and the scholarship of teaching** (Boyer 1990). A new form of research methodology was emerging to cater for the new conception of scholarship. According to Schon (1995) the new epistemology implied action research. He wrote:

The new categories of scholarly activity must take the form of action research. What else could they be? They will not consist in laboratory experimentation or statistical analysis of variance, nor will they consist only or primarily in the reflective criticism and speculation familiar to humanities (Schon 1995-31).

In (1992) my supervisor told me that my dissertation could not be accepted for a PhD because practical knowledge of professionals is not acceptable to make academic awards in the UK but it was acceptable in the USA for Doctorates in Education. This situation has now changed in British universities. After spending five years in Mauritius on two new projects I returned to England in 1997. I found that EdD had emerged in England to cater for the needs of practitioners like myself. This new opportunity brought me to join the EdD programme offered at the University of Bath.

<u>The EdD Learning Experience</u>

I joined the EdD programme at the University of Bath in 1998. The academic requirements for the completion of an EdD at the university of Bath included a successful completion of four taught units and a 40,000 words thesis. I completed four units including Educational Research, Educational Policy, Curriculum Philosophy and practice and International

Education. Each unit was examined on the basis of a written academic paper of about eight thousand words. The writing of these assessed papers enabled me to convert my personal and practical knowledge into practical knowledge, which might be useful to other professionals and academics. A brief introduction to these papers now follows.

The First Paper: International Education in Search of the Problem

Based on my personal experience and professional literature **the first part** defines the concept of formal international education generally. Based mainly on professional literature, some research and reports from the practitioners engaged in international education in international schools **the second part** explores international education in the context of international schools. There was and there still is no consensus on the meaning of the concept of international education generally, even in the context of international schools. The title of this paper aims to express this finding.

This paper shows that formal international education is an evolving concept and international education is viewed either as a means of political and economic exploitation of the developing world or a strategy of bringing about social and cultural unity in the world to match present technological advances in communication technology. Although informal international education is now available in many forms but formal international education in the past evolved in two independent disciplines: comparative education in the context of universities and international education in the context of the work of aid agencies. At present it is being developed in International schools formally.

The focus of this paper is on the development of formal international education in international schools. International schools claim to offer academic excellence and international-mindedness to children of international elite. With increased economic activity across the national frontiers the numbers of the international elite are rapidly on the increase and international schools cater for this lucrative and expanding market. They have done useful work to develop formal international education as a component of their academic curriculum aimed at enhancing international-mindedness amongst its students. I believe this paper provides sufficient details of their work for national and international schools aspiring to introduce a component of formal international education in their academic school curriculum.

The two assessors were moderately satisfied with my writing as an academic paper. They rightly commented that the paper lacked adequate critique and synthesis of the literature. Of

course my original paper needed tightening up to enhance clarity. One of the examiners seemed to have acknowledged my conclusion but the other examiner made no mention of it. He/She remarked: *I still do not understand the problem of international education*. Initially I was rather surprised at this remark. Of course, I could have presented my own version of it.

On the whole I learnt much about international education from this unit, which included later stimulating discussions on the subject with Professor Thompson and John Lowe. The process of writing this paper gave me a better understanding of international education as an evolving concept and that of my own work as an international educator employed by the aid agencies. I believe this paper with my MPhil dissertation (Punia 1992) and my EdD thesis (Punia 2004) on my lifetime experiences as an international consultant in many countries makes a very useful professional contribution towards the knowledge base in international education.

The Second Paper: **In Search of a Problem-based Research Methodology**

This paper with the above title is a review of a new research methodology (Robinson 1993) to explore a new theoretical framework for my MPhil dissertation (Punia 1992) and for my future work as an international consultant engaged in solving educational problems. My research in MPhil dissertation was based on the tradition of research on **Teachers Thought processes'** (Clark & Peterson 1986). This research provided me with new insights about the work of teachers but it had two shortcomings. Firstly, it was mostly exploratory and fragmentary research. Secondly, it failed to show how findings might be used to improve practice. My MPhil dissertation (Punia 1992) shows how I conducted my own research on teachers' planning, overcame some of the shortcomings of previous research and used the findings to improve curriculum, as an integral aspect of staff and institute development. However, my MPhil dissertation does not offer an overarching framework/theory to solve ill-structured problems elsewhere. (Robinson 1993), introduced in the unit on Education Research: philosophy and practice, claims to offer such a framework from researchers' perspective. With this background I decided to review this new methodology and my dissertation from a consultant's background as follows.

According to Robinson 1993 the problems are usually caused by gaps between the practitioners espoused theories and theories in action and the researchers might help them in closing this gap and solve the problem of dissemination of research findings amongst practitioners. Recently DeFillippi (2001) explains the theory as follows.

This theory is associated with the tradition called action science and associated with the work of Christ Argyris and Donald Schon (1974, 1979). Action science seeks to uncover unspoken or taken-for-granted assumptions that prevent learning or that defensively channel experience processing into unreflective self-repeating patterns. Action science intervention requires that project participants engage in significant self-reflection on their learning assumptions or theories-in –use. Such reflection generally occurs under the guidance of a facilitator (P 5).

Unlike Robinson 1993 from an outside researcher's perspective, the FIT project in Punia 1992 presenting the collaborative work of a consultant, the teachers and the management. In FIT project the problem of need for a systematic approach for curriculum development in the Institute became clear to stakeholders gradually with nine studies of teachers' planning as an integral part of staff development and discussions and observations of the practice. The teachers and the management of the Institute decided to improve the current situation under my leadership as a consultant only when they developed sufficient **trust** in me. The solutions to the problem embedded in the current practice and desired practice developed from the identification of constraints on achieving the desired state and strategies planned to overcome them through a series of initiatives from the consultant, management and teachers. At the end there was a general agreement amongst the stakeholders as to the success of this project in closing the gap between the planned and operational curriculum aimed at improving the quality of student learning. The methodology used in this project seemed to provide only a degree of fit with Robinson (1993). There are other significant value differences in FIT project and Robinson 1993.

First, my relationship with the host institution was not based on critical dialogue as mentioned in (Robinson 1993). It was based on mutual trust and respect apparent in professional dialogues combining advocacy and inquiry skills judiciously. Secondly, my studies and Olson and Easton (1987) showed that generally teachers' responses to innovations are reasonable under given conditions. It means that solving educational problems is more a case of an **add-on model**, not that of a deficit model. Thirdly, practitioner's theories are implicit and they find it difficult to articulate them adequately to share it with others. Fourthly, finding consensus on the criteria for success in a project amongst researchers and practitioners is highly problematic. Fifthly, researchers working with practitioners need a considerable time and expertise in working with practitioners for long periods.

In spite of these drawbacks Robinson (1993) provides a useful research methodology for researchers to solve educational problems collaboratively with practitioners. In my view the new framework blends research on teachers' thinking with related action to become a new

form of action research aimed at improving practice and practitioners systematically. This is what I had attempted to do in my MPhil dissertation. I have added new contexts for the use of Robinson 1993 as follows.

Drawing on personal experience as a teacher educator and a consultant I proposed clinical supervision of trainee teachers as an alternative context/ epistemology for the use of Robinson 1993 in teacher education. I had used this model in the past as a teacher educator, but without a discursive consciousness (Elliott 1997) presented in this paper. This paper extends PBM from researcher's perspective to that of a curriculum developer and a teacher trainer.

The second paper is an improvement on the first paper on international education. On the whole the two assessors found the paper interesting to promote further research work and to improve practice in curriculum and teacher development. To improve the structure they rightly suggested to presenting the theoretical framework before the review of my MPhil work.

The Third Paper called 'To What Extent will the Top-down or Centralised Initiatives be Successful in Determining the Nature of Teaching, curriculum and assessment?

I could have answered the above question in the light of my research in Hong Kong Technical Teachers' College based on teacher reports in a particular context. I could also answer this question based mainly on a literature review. But I chose to use the cases study approach based on my personal experience in answering the above questions to policymakers in several contexts. There were several reasons for making this choice. Firstly, it is difficult to get consensus amongst stakeholders to measure the success of a long educational project before and after the completion. Secondly, Fullan (1999) states: **"Understanding change is just as much a matter of doing reform as it is studying it."** He further declares that third most profound observation is that there will never be a definitive theory of change. Thirdly and most importantly I wished to learn to make use of case study approach to research. The case studies show that the degree of success of educational projects is largely dependent on the degree of consensus amongst powerful stakeholders on the problem and its solution and the use of a systematic and an integrated approach to teaching, curriculum and assessment.

The two assessors made useful comments. The first assessor approved of my approach and found the paper interesting and worthwhile. He suggested to synthesising the case studies to further enhance the quality of the paper. The second examiner made two useful suggestions

for writing academic papers to answer such a question with the use of an appropriate research study and/or with a theoretical framework.

The Fourth Paper: A Relations' Approach to Relevance in Curriculum Development in Vocational education and Training

Relevance of vocational education and training to meet stakeholder performance needs is a longstanding problem. Throughout my career in education many strategies have been tried to overcome it without significant successes. Kessels and Plomp (1999) had developed a model after a long empirical research to bridge the gap between training and trainee performance on-the-job in the context of corporate education in Netherlands. I had recently used a similar approach as a consultant in Mauritius Institute of Public Administration and Training without developing a discursive consciousness of this experience. This paper provided me with an excellent opportunity to understand the K&P 1999 model more fully in the context of my professional experience.

This paper is essentially a review of Kessels&Plomp (1999) model. The authors have improved the traditional models of curriculum development based on **consistency** in objectives, methodology and evaluation (Tyler 1949) in planned curriculum, implemented curriculum and evaluation (Stenhouse1975) by adding **consistency** in stakeholder perception of training needs and direct participation in all stages of curriculum development. They emphasise the human relations aspect in their model and the operative word is consistency in needs assessment and in elements of curriculum development in a collaborative culture under the leadership of an experienced curriculum developer in the context of a sound HRD policy. I first analyse the K&P 1999 model and then examine it in my practical experience.

In the light of this model I reflected on two cases of curriculum development from my personal experience. In the first case I failed to achieve the desired results by being oblivious of the human and contextual elements recommended in the kessels/Plomp (1999) model and in the second case I intuitively made use of this model fully to achieve the desired effect. In my view Kessel/Plomp (1999) model is a useful guide for vocational education and training at large. However, according to my professional judgement Kessels/Plomp model does not explain the nature of stakeholder participation and the HRD policy of the organisation adequately. I have added my own HRD framework to meet such a goal. Thus I placed training in a Human Resource Development in policy context. The MIPAM case would have added further to the explanation of this model in practice in a particular context.

This final paper is an improvement on the previous papers, indicating continuous improvement in my professional knowledge and experience of writing academic papers. Both assessors seemed to appreciate this paper. One of the assessors rightly remarked that I could have said more about the relations' side of the model to make up the deficiency in the K&P model from my MIPAM experience. However, the other comment from the two examiners did not make sense to me. They suggested to examining the model from the trainer and trainee perspectives as well. But this would have defeated the tenet of the Kessel/ Plomp (1999) model, which is to seek consistency in training needs and direct stakeholder involvement in curriculum development and performance on-the-job within an appropriate HRD policy. In my professional judgement this paper provides a useful theory to those engaged in tackling the problem of enhancing the impact of training on on-the-job performance in hierarchical organisations based on industrial age model.

The Content of the Four papers Summarised

The content of the first paper generally shows that the concept of formal international education is an evolving one. The International schools are engaged in this form of education. Their work is useful for others wishing to introduce this form of education in their institutions. The second paper indicates that top-down policies in education cannot achieve the desired results, when there is no consensus amongst stakeholders on the very nature of educational problems and their solutions using fragmented approaches to curriculum development. The third paper presents that 'problem-based research methodology' has the potential to bring researchers and the practitioners together to solve educational problems more effectively and it has the potential for use in other contexts including teacher education and school-based curriculum development. The last paper proposes that relevance in curriculum development in vocational education and training, the performance problems might be resolved not only through the improved curriculum development systems under the leadership of competent curriculum developers, but also by stakeholder direct involvement in training function in the context of a clear HRD policy within organisations.

My whole experience of learning from the taught part of the EdD shows the need for the new scholarship in education blending the traditional scholarship of discovery of knowledge with practical experience of practitioners to generate a new scholarship of integration. Action research provides a suitable methodology to practitioners aspiring for doctorate in Education and professionalism in their professions. I used this methodology in my EdD thesis (Punia 2004).

The Emergent Epistemology of Practice

In these papers I have presented practical professional knowledge derived from theory and practice interface as a form of action research. I have used a variety of inquiries to achieve this end. For instance, the first paper is largely based on a literature review and the second paper examines a new research methodology in the light of personal experience and adds a personal perspective. The third paper uses case studies derived from personal experience to answer a difficult question for policy makers generally. The final paper reviews a new theory of curriculum development to enhance the impact of training on human performance in organisations with my own contribution to enhance the impact of the new model.

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