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Why Systemic, Credible and Trustworthy Research Matters in Vocational Education: the importance of beginning with practice and being present in the conduct of educational research

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Abstract

Context: Set in the context of vocational education and training (VET) in England, this paper draws upon data generated from a large national Practitioner Research Programme (PRP) funded by the Education and Training Foundation (ETF) from 2018-2024. Supervised and taught by the University of Sunderland, the PRP provides research training and support for VET practitioners in conducting systematic research into their educational practice in the contexts in which they work. The aim of each PRP project is to identify how aspects of educational practice might be improved and to investigate how such improvements might be realised in practice in the context of each sector-practitioner's work. Shortcomings and superficialities in contemporary framings of concepts theory and practice in the VET system in England are critically examined. The neglect of other forms of knowledge are discussed with reference to concepts of *savoir faire* - knowing how make something or do a job well for its own sake and *savoir être* - knowing how to conduct yourself in a good way in a particular field of vocational practice as well as in wider social and political settings.

Overarching Research Question: Examples from research conducted in the PRP including contributions from literature, are drawn upon to invite critical consideration of the overarching research question of why, the hypothesis of the empiricist-positivist approach underpinning current models of educational change and improvement continues to be so widely supported and promoted by policy professionals, when the evidence to justify its usefulness in improving educational practice is so weak?

Data are drawn from a sample of 12 PRP practitioner-researchers working in continuing vocational education and training (CVET) and teaching across a range of subjects and disciplines the sector in England including, Construction; Aerospace Engineering; Iron Trades; ICT; English Language; the National Health Service (NHS), Fine Art and Photography. This, small-scale, qualitative research study employs reflexive, systematic, thematic analysis to interrogate data derived from several sources in the study including, semi-structured interviews; critical incidents; case studies; extracts from MPhil/PhD theses as well as VET practitioners' and their students' accounts of experiences of engaging in the PRP.

Findings and Conclusion A finding of this study is that encouraging and supporting VET practitioners to give themselves permission to be authentic and present in conducting research into their own practice in ways which take context and lived experience seriously, is highly impactful in improving educational practice in context. A second Loosening the strength of the grip of empiricist-positivist methodologies and methods upon models of educational change and improvement, including the anonymous authority of the "sciences" is we argue, difficult but not impossible and in the end well worth the effort.

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Key Words: Forms of Knowledge; Models of Educational Change and Improvement; Practitioner-Research.

Introduction

This paper builds upon and adds value to, a previous paper (Gregson and Gregson 2023, https://zenodo.org/records/7808579.) where we draw attention to enduring and deep flaws in models of educational change and improvement which begin from the top-down and move from the outside-in. Such models of educational change and improvement we argue, assume that simply telling VET practitioners "what to do" with reference to blueprints or recipes about "what works" - or more accurately what has "worked' for practitioners working in other contexts, is enough to bring about real and sustainable improvements in educational practice. Our contention is that this is far from the case.

Our purpose here is to bring pernicious superficialities in current concepts of theory and practice as well as assumptions surrounding "knowledge transfer", more sharply into view. A consequence of superficial conceptions of how knowledge is "transferred" from academic research into practice in VET we argue, overlooks/underestimates how different forms of knowledge, interact as well as seriously misconstruing the nature of educational practice and the processes through which educational practice improves in real-world contexts. With reference to the work of Sarason (1990), our previous paper underscores how education reform and models of educational change, improvement and research in education which impose a model of change from the top-down and move from the outside in, are locked into expensive and predictable failure.

Carr (1998, 2005) agrees with Sarason where he notes that models of educational change and improvement which begin from the top-down and move from the outside-in are not only naive but also fundamentally flawed on the grounds that they overlook the very nature of educational practice and the multiple forms of knowledge and ways of knowing involved in the acquisition and development of the skills, qualities of mind and character which underpin the drive and the ability to do a job well for its own sake in VET contexts. Secondly, with reference to the work of Kemmis, it is argued that top-down approaches to educational change and improvement fundamentally underestimate the processes through which practice in VET actually changes and improves in real-time, in real-world situations.

> "Despite the apparent recognition among *avant-garde* theorists that practitioners are not mindless functionaries performing in accordance with the theories of others, or the apparent recognition that practice and theory develop reflexively and together, many

> researchers, still proceed to study practice 'from the outside', believing that the insights won in the intellectual struggle of the postgraduate seminar at the invitational international conference will produce changes in the educational practice of teachers who attend neither."
>
> Kemmis in Carr 1998, pp. 2-3

Having said that, it is important to acknowledge how and why practitioner-research sometimes gets a bad name (see for example, Tooley and Darby 1998; Tooley, 2001). The most strident and frequent of these criticisms are grounded in discourses which claim that practitioner-research is not as systematic, credible and trustworthy as research routinely conducted in Higher Education (HE). It is important to note here that research studies in HE are often typically framed by a positivist-empiricist epistemology and a realist ontology, coupled with deductive logic. As several of the above authors contend, sometimes criticisms of practitioner-research are deserved. However, the argument we make in this paper is that increasingly they are not. A perennial problem is that much of the work of teachers as practitioner-researchers in VET does not get completed, shared or published. Little is known about the reasons why practitioner-researchers from the schools sector do or do not publish. Less is known about why those from the VET sector publish least of all. This paper argues that published qualitative peer-reviewed research is routinely judged against inappropriate positivist standards. Discussions of theory are often separated from discussions of practice, methodology and method and these fail to provide authentic and holistic accounts of experiences of engaging in research which aims to change and improve educational practice in VET contexts.

The Research Problem and Research Questions

This work of the above authors informs the overarching research question (see below) that infuses the discussion presented in his paper. For example, Coffield (2007, 2008, 2017, 2024) points out that, despite decades of expensive, positivist-empiricist-quantitative evaluative research into educational practice which have long and stridently laid claim to being "robust", [it is worth noting that this body of work includes the British government's £156 million expenditure of taxpayer's money to date spent on the model of educational change and improvement currently employed by the Office Standards of Education (OfSTED)] there is little empirical evidence to justify the effectiveness of the "para-mechanical" hypothesis (Ryle 1949/2000, p.278) around which the cornerstones of OfSTED rest.

Coffield (2024, p.89) cautions against regarding educational policy derived from empiricist-positivist research as some kind of "wonder drug" – a self-evident good, which on its own, will solve many (if not all) of the pressing and enduring issues we face in educational practice. Edwards (2000) is particularly persuasive in his support of this position where he argues that,

> " ….research can only inform practice because it can never replace other knowledge which teachers bring to bear on practical problems; and that even the best research evidence is not available as fixed, universal relationships between methods and outcomes, but as local, context-sensitive patterns which have to be interpreted by practitioners within their particular working environments."
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> Edwards 2000, p. 301

Research Question 1 : The focus of the overarching research question which infuses discussion throughout this paper is upon why the hypothesis of the empiricist-positivist approach underpinning current models of educational change and improvement continues to be so widely supported and promoted by policy professionals ,when the evidence to justify its usefulness in improving educational practice is so weak?

Research Question 2: This raises further research questions regarding what might be done to address the conundrum of how the current widely used and heavily promoted model of educational change and improvement might respond and adapt to evidence of conceptual and practical shortcomings in the existing approach. This includes questions of who should be allowed to conduct research into the improvement of educational practice and how.

Research Methods: The project from which data sets in this study are drawn is the Practitioner Research Programme (PRP) funded by the Education and Training Foundation (ETF) the national body for the improvement of educational practice in the VET sector in England from 2018-2024. Research participants contributing to this small-scale, mixed-method, study consist of 12 CVET teachers pursuing their studies at MPhil/PhD level at the University of Sunderland with the support of the PRP over a total period of 6 years. Data are drawn from a number of sources including semi-structured interviews, critical incidents and case studies and extracts from MPhil/PhD theses. The data collection phase of this study took place as part of 6 x 3-day, University of Sunderland supported, Residential Research Development workshops over a 2-year period 2022-2024. Each Residential Research Development workshop is followed by a series of individual tutorials where PRP participants are provided with individual mentoring and supervision.

Data analysed in the study are drawn from the above sample of 12 PRP practitioner-researchers (from a total research population of approximately 400 PRP practitioner-researchers supported by the PRP to date). Practitioners from the sample of 12 work across a range of subjects and disciplines the CVET sector in England including, Construction (Plumbing); Aerospace Engineering; Iron Trades; ICT; English Language; Fine Art and Photography as well as vocational training professionals from the National Health Service (NHS). Data are also derived from a recently completed PhD thesis exploring accounts of the experiences of VET tutors as they engaged in their research at MPhil/PhD level This, small-scale, qualitative research study employs the six-step approach to reflexive thematic analysis advocated by Braun and Clarke, (2006) and Nowell et al (2017). These are put to work to ensure that data are analysed in systematic, trustworthy, accessible and credible ways. Actual examples of PRP participants' accounts of their experience of engaging in research in VET contexts are also provided.

Guided by the work of Braun and Clarke, (2006) and Nowell et al (2017) recommedning the adoption of a six-step data analysis process, all of the semi-structured 45-minute interviews were conducted, recorded and transcribed on Zoom. Playback of each interview required careful observation and active listening. This involved the use of a Data Analysis Notebook/Codebook where aspects of the data that appeared to be meaningful to participants which were also linked to the research questions were noted. This provided opportunities to recall gestures and intonations that may not have been able to document in interview notes alone. In the process of data analysis in the interests of rigour, balance, triangulation and transparency, Multiple Coders (MCs) then read through each of the 12 transcripts independently, identifying and noting interesting or meaningful categories of data by circling

key words and phrases and making notes in the margins of each document. Notes that we made individually at this stage sequentially informed the interpretation and construal of the final thematic framework underpinning this study. Each transcript was then independently preliminarily coded by each of the MCs. Following this, the Coders arranged a series of meetings to compare and discuss the categories each of us had identified in each transcript. This helped to make sense of the categories of data identified and enabled open discussion of any ambiguities, problems in interpreting meaning. It also helped us to begin to notice early commonalities, recurring phrases, metaphors, discrepancies and broad/emerging patterns etc., across data in the 12 interview transcripts.

Background

VET practitioners are continually faced with a number of challenges regarding issues curriculum design, content, pedagogy and assessment. The first challenge requires sector practitioners to pay attention to epistemic issues surrounding how teachers and their learners acquire and develop the different forms of knowledge and ways of knowing in VET contexts. The second, involves addressing issues surrounding the pedagogic support teachers and learners need in order to learn how to become, *(savoir faire)* and know how to be, (*savoir être)* (i.e., 'good' vocational teachers, learners , credible researchers and pivotal members of the workforce of the skilled VET professionals of the future (Méhaut in Brock *et. al.* 2011). This paper highlights the importance of policy professionals curriculum designers, researchers, teachers and learners in not underestimating the challenges of addressing issues surrounding the holistic, multi-contextual and epistemic plurality of factors involved in framing what we mean when we speak of "good work" and "good practice" and "quality" in VET contexts (Sennett 2009; Carr 1996) .

Problems in the Para-Mechanical Model of Educational Change and Improvement: Issues of Lived Experience, Trustworthiness and Presence in Qualitative Educational Research in VET

Learning how to become, *(savoir faire)* and knowing how to be, (*savoir être),* a teacher or a learner in vocational education are, and have always been, steeped and cultivated in vital, vivid and "lived through" experiences of vocational learning in practice. This is the case for both teachers and learners alike. As discussed above, this involves not only a recognition of the importance of the acquisition and development of different forms of knowledge and ways of knowing. It also involves strengthening the capacities of vocational teachers and their learners in engaging in problem-finding, problem-solving and critique in relation to the ongoing improvement of VET (Sennett, 2009). In other words, the capacity to conduct research into vocational practice in order to improve vocational practice is pivotal to what we mean by "good practice", "good work" and "quality" in VET. Dewey (1916, 1933, 1934/2025) and Stenhouse (1979) concur where they argue that *using* educational research means *doing* educational research. In support of this claim, Kemmis (in Carr 1998, pp. 2-3) notes that taking an idea from educational theory or academic educational research and making it good in practice, *is* a form of inquiry and therefore a legitimate form of educational research. The issue here is not the question of whether vocational teachers and their learners are consumers *or* producers of educational research. In practice they are *both*. A central contention of this paper is therefore that, in an inclusive and egalitarian system of VET worthy of the name, vocational teachers and their learners need to be encouraged and enabled to learn how to become, *(savoir faire)* and know how to be, (*savoir être)* researchers in vocational education their own right, capable of

successfully engaging in individual, collaborative and collective problem-finding, problem-solving and critique in the contexts in which they work. From this perspective, vocational teachers are of necessity required to conduct systematic enquiry into improvements in their own practice, in order to bring about lasting improvements in the quality of VET in context now and in the future. That is why, Stenhouse (1975, p.145) argues that, "It is not enough that the work of teachers be studied, they need to study it themselves."

Theory: The Grip of the Shadowy, Yet Persistent, Empiricist-Positivist Inheritance of British Educational Research

As discussed above although there has been a significant level of public investment in Vocational Education and Training (VET) in England, the return on this financial outlay has not always yielded discernible value for public money in terms of actual improvements in the form of raised levels of achievement for learners. In short, this paper argues that the "para-mechanical model", which has dominated research in education in England for so long, assumes that teachers just need to be told what to do by external "experts" who presume to know better in order to successfully "transfer" theoretical/academic knowledge into practice. As also previously discussed this is not only naive but also not nearly enough to secure real and sustainable change and improvement in vocational educational practice. The power and influence of the "para-mechanical model", in England (and elsewhere) is formidable in that in England studies in educational research have tended to rely upon research conducted from the outside-in, largely dominated by a view of the social world grounded in a linear, technocratic, input-output model of causality. Consequently, educational improvement is currently widely construed in England as being powered by a complex set of "para-mechanical" (Ryle 1949/2000, p.278), policy levers and drivers, putatively assumed to be capable of driving educational practice forward. Hamilton (1998, p. 78) traces the problem back to long-term preoccupations with the, "shadowy yet persistent, empiricist and positivist inheritance of British educational research", which simultaneously fractures the concept of practice while relegating human lived experience to a position of irrelevance.

As already noted, the most frequent criticisms of practitioner-research In England tend to be levelled by empiricist and positivist researchers (in British contexts see for example, Tooley and Darby 1998; Tooley 2001), who claim that practitioner-research is second-rate in that it is not as systematic, credible and trustworthy as research routinely conducted by professional researchers in Higher Education (HE). A consequence of this is that research studies in HE in England are still widely regarded as being more important and worthy of being taken seriously when they are framed by a positivist epistemology, a realist ontology and guided by deductive logic. Gregson and Gregson (2018), Gregson and Spedding (2020) point out that for some educational researchers, the lure and status of 'pure' research and research concerned with theory development is strong, particularly in situations where the theoretical is routinely elevated above the practical. In these contexts, grappling with issues of policy implementation and the tensions and challenges involved in putting good ideas from educational research into good educational practice often hold little or no attraction. Ironically, many if not most, educational researchers come to research through the practitioner route. Indeed significant numbers of researchers in Higher Education (HE) and those involved in the provision of HE in Colleges of Further Education (FE) continue to work in departments which have their origins in teacher training and still see the initial and continuing professional development of teachers as being important not only to the profession but also to society more broadly. However, the inferiority complex, deep fissures and troubling insecurities that vocational teachers have to overcome in believing in themselves as researchers, academics and scholars can be difficult

and sometimes impossible to shed, even for more experienced and confident teachers. For beginning teacher-researchers in vocational education these can even prevent them from seeing themselves as legitimate researchers in education at all. Not surprisingly, much of the work of teachers as practitioner-researchers in VET does not get completed, shared or published. Little is known about the reasons why practitioner-researchers from the schools sector do or do not publish. Less is known about why those from the VET sector publish less than those in any other sector of education.

Sometimes, criticisms of practitioner-research are deserved particularly in cases where the research concerned is insufficiently systematic, credible and trustworthy (see for example Tooley 2001). Increasingly, however, as discussed later in this paper with reference to the Practitioner Research Programme (PRP) - they are not. While in theory, the same research standards exist for research of a quantitative and a qualitative nature and also (at least in theory) apply equally to research conducted by professional academic researchers and practitioner-researchers, published qualitative research is routinely judged against inappropriate positivist standards as being inferior or in some way second-rate (see for example, Tooley and Darby 1998; Tooly 2001). The problem here is not so much a problem of the quality of the research itself but the extent to which different peer-reviewers are able to recognise, admit and accept the value of a plurality of ontological, epistemological and methodological perspectives in educational research. In the worst cases, discussions of theory are often separated from discussions of practice, methodology and method and as such fail to provide authentic and holistic accounts of the lived experiences (not only of the researcher but also the experiences of "the researched") of engaging in research endeavours in VET contexts. In addition, it is now reluctantly, but increasingly recognized that articles published in peer-reviewed journals in the field of educational research are scarcely read and reach few outside of the academy. It is also not difficult to find many examples of large-scale and expensive studies conducted from an empiricist-realist-positivist-quantitative peer-reviewed, perspective which have had little or no discernible impact upon practice in VET and other sectors of education and sit unread on the shelves of academic libraries and remote research databases.

This paper reports and explores the lived experiences and the research journeys of 12 CVET practitioners who at the beginning of the PRP felt that they were not capable of engaging in educational research, academic writing and scholarship. It provides illustrative examples of how many of these practitioner-researchers from the VET sector were enabled to subsequently progress to successful study and postgraduate research degree graduation at MPhil and PhD level.

Findings

Overarching Finding

An overarching finding from the PRP is that encouraging and supporting vocational teachers to give themselves permission to be authentic and present in their own research in ways which take lived experience seriously is no easy task. Data from the PRP suggest that the strength of the grip of what Gadamer (1975 cited in Greene 1995, p.55) describes as the, "idolatry of scientific method and the anonymous authority of the sciences [as] the peculiar falsehood of modern consciousness", is difficult to loosen but not impossible to shake off. Data from this study support the claim that, encouraging and giving PRP participants opportunities to begin

with their own experiences of practice in VET in the early stages of conducting their own research , enabled them to put their own direct, first-hand experience of practice into linguistic forms.

In turn, this allowed them to think and write about their experiences of teaching, learning, assessment and research in scholarly ways with more confidence and authenticity as they collaborated and cooperated in developing their academic writing and scholarship together with the support of research-active HE staff from VET backgrounds

1. Many PRP participants come to the programme with feelings of anxiety and a sense of Imposter Syndrome. Most also held the perception that educational research has to be largely numerical, statistical and [most notably] is seldom for people like them . This finding draws attention to the high levels of apprehension and anxiety coupled with deep feelings of being 'imposters' in the field of educational research that the PRP practitioners who participated in this study brought with them to the start of their research training. For many, their conceptions of knowledge and what counts as "real" research was based upon a number of troubling assumptions and beliefs. Firstly, the assumption that "real" research requires quantification and the application of statistical techniques in the pursuit of objective knowledge and "the truth". A consequence of accepting this assumption is that it carries with it a secondary assumption that all research phenomena can and should be reduced to what is measurable. The deeper problem here, as Eisner (2002) reminds us below, is that much of what needs to be understood in educational research needs a narrative more than it needs a number.

> "Not everything that matters can be measured
> And not everything that is measured matters."
>
> Eisner 2002, p.178

For other PRP participants in the study, this problem was compounded by a sense that, as lecturers and education leaders in the VET sector, they did not have "the right" to be educational researchers. PRP participants tended to regard educational research as being "beyond them" - the property and territory of research specialists in universities and "not for them" located largely in the possession of a small, privileged, middle-class elite.
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Finding: Opening up time, spaces and in creating vivid moments of experiential learning and engagement in narrative, aesthetic accounts experience enabled PRP participants to collaborate and cooperate in increasing their confidence in thinking, reading, writing and talking educational research through sharing stories and engaging with accounts experiences of research conducted by themselves and other educational researchers. In addition, the provision of a range of practical examples of educational research of varying quality allowed PRP participants to give themselves permission to be authentically 'present' in their thinking, writing and talking about their own experiences of research in the past and in the present.

Finding: Teachers of research methodology and methods in initial and continuing teacher education can improve pedagogic practice by helping their research students to "see" the variety of ways in which experiences of educational research can be put into words and represented in a range of linguistic and other forms.

Finding: Providing opportunities for sector practitioners to experience and discuss at first-

hand the strength and limitations of positivist and other methodological perspectives in educational research helped them to see that good educational research does not all have to be represented in a way which requires practitioner-researchers to be detached from and invisible in terms of the conduct of the research. It also helped PRP participants to see that educational research does not have to be written in impenetrable or inaccessible "academic" language in which human experience has no place.

Finding: Purposefully attending to and meaningfully harnessing the "heightened vitality" of narrative accounts and aesthetic experience (Dewey, 1934, 2005), sparked a "wide awakeness", … an existential awareness of what it is and what it means and feels like to be a human being in the world (Greene 1995). Data from this study suggests that this enabled a heightened sense consciousness, ignited by aesthetic experience in education, which served to enhance cognition and expand learning mediated through engagement with the arts (Eisner, 2002). Data from this study suggest that in PRP Research Galleries the writing and scholarship activities enabled drafts of chapters from PRP participants helped them to see these as artistic artefacts and works in progress in circumstances where (often but not exclusively literary, text-based) artistic artefacts could be simultaneously seen as works of art and acts of scholarship.

1. **Recommendations:** Programmes of research training, professional learning and development for teachers working in the VET sector should:

Be mindful that practitioner-researchers may suffer from "imposter syndrome" and believe that they have neither the right nor the ability to conduct systematic educational research. They may also come with the impression that all educational research *must* be quantitative in nature and that *all* educational researchers must write in a detached way in the third person singular in order to be taken seriously. Providers of research training for practitioner researchers might attend to this by harnessing the educative potential of studies which present accounts of researching lived experience and opportunities for encountering vicarious experience in the form of stories, case studies, accounts of experience and narrative enquiry and anecdotes of other researchers' experiences of conducting educational research. Providers of research training for practitioner researchers should also attend to how the value, potential and power of aesthetic experience might be harnessed in to support practitioner-researchers in developing pluralistic concepts of knowledge as well as ways of coming to know and of knowing, through the use of music, song lyrics, poems, autobiographies anecdotes, film/video clips and humour.

2. Recommendation

Tell and share stories and experiences of research (their own and those of other educational researchers) with their students, not only to enable beginning researchers to "give themselves permission" to be present in their own educational research but also to see (in the examples of others) what that permission might look and sound like in practice in different ways.

3. Recommendation

4. Encourage and enable students to secure aesthetic forms of experience in everyday life; encourage the development of aesthetic frames of reference; encourage the aesthetic appreciation of nature; encourage an appreciation of artefacts from popular culture and in other everyday objects, linking discussion of artefacts from the arts and nature to ideas and concepts in educational research. Programmes of research training should endeavour to provide a variety of practical examples of such artefacts from the arts and nature as well as offering suggestions of where to look for aesthetic experiences elsewhere. The main purpose here is to encourage practitioner-researchers in education to look for opportunities to harness the power of aesthetic experience in their own research landscapes and in their own teaching with the intention of heightening the vitality and energies of experiences of and journeys into educational research.

5. Recommendation

6. Policy professionals, leaders and managers may find Bernstein's (1996) *Framework of Pedagogic Rights and Pedagogic Device* to be useful in supporting curriculum planning, dialogue, and discussion among teachers and curriculum planners. On the basis of the argument that the working conditions of teachers are the learning conditions of students, practitioner- researchers in their research training, need to be given the time, space and opportunities to experience *Pedagogic Rights* and *Pedagogic Device* in action for themselves and at first hand. This is so that they then have a direct experience of this theoretical framework as well as the direct knowledge and the capacity to build similar opportunities for their students to experience these *Pedagogic Rights* by building them into their own curriculum design and assessment activities. In this way, practitioner-researchers can open up opportunities for their students to encounter *Pedagogic Rights* and *Pedagogic Device* in action in the subjects and disciplines which practitioner-researchers teach in VET contexts.

7. Recommendation

8. Create conditions for learning that provide opportunities which promote, imagination, autonomy, choice and judgement in the conduct of educational research and CPD in ways which both encourage and enable practitioner-researchers to harness previous experiences of boundaries and barriers to their successful participation in educational research, not as prisons or shackles to the past, but to see them for what they are - barriers and boundaries erected by others (and sometimes by themselves) that are not insurmountable obstacles but forms of exclusion that they can overcome. The same participants report that having direct and prolonged experiences of this pedagogical approach (Bernstein 1996, 2000; Freire (1974, 2000) in turn came to influence how they approached teaching, learning, assessment with their own students and their colleagues in the contexts of creating opportunities for CPD in their own practice in more experiential and democratic way**s**

9. Conclusion

The paper concludes that where you stand in relation to the nature and purpose of research in VET influences not only policy priorities surrounding approaches to educational change and improvement but also in determining what we mean when we speak of "good work" and

"quality" in VET including the extent to which they inhere in practice. In other words, the positions we adopt regarding the virtues of theory and research in education and their relationship to each other, their operational significance in the improvement of practice and their importance in determining matters of "good work" and "quality" whether we like it or not … whether we mean them to or not… reveal our ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions about what VET is *for,* who should be responsible for the improvement of practice in VET, why and how (Carr 1998).

Word Count:

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