Intervention as a Research Method in Professional and Educational Research

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Explanation

The slides that follow were used or produced during the workshop.

The function was the slides was to structure the work and dialogue during the workshop, so it may not be possible to "read" them as a coherent lecture.
Introduction

For the next hour (or so), we will concentrate on trying to understand what problem we are working on.

Maybe it will seem slow and chaotic (and even a little boring) at first. But I predict this preparation will allow us to go faster and more profoundly later on.
Basic Problem

How to conduct social scientific research, when the aim is to make changes in ongoing practices.
My big assumption

You are interested in making changes in ongoing practices —

— or will accept this perspective for this workshop...
Basic Problem

How to conduct social scientific research, when the aim is to make changes in ongoing practices.
Group Task 1

What practices are you interested in doing research about?

(They can be very specific, even your own research questions!)

Write these points down (as big as possible) on the paper.

5 minutes (maximum)
Group Task 2

A. In relation to specific practices:

A. What kinds of changes are you hoping/wanting/expecting to see at some point?

Make a list — Do not debate!

Write these points down!
Sub-problem: Relation between research and practice

How is it supposed to work?

How will your research address the problems that you have described?
Group Task 3

1. Choose 1-3 (or more) examples from your list from Task 2

2. Try to make a graphic presentation of the role/relation of research in relation to that specific problem.

3. Do not debate. Make proposals. If you disagree make two proposals.

15 minutes?
Task 4

Is it possible to make a general model from the different examples?
Temporary Conclusions

What have we learned from our exercise?

What new questions do we have?
My Goals

- To make you aware of some problems (as researcher) that you did not know that you had

- To examine the idea and implications of ‘intervention’ as a general research orientation

- To introduce and discuss the concepts of practice, activity and action as useful theoretical concepts in working with the basic problem

- Introduce idea of ‘research path/chain’ as way to work with the basic problem
Changing Practice?

If you think the ‘solution’ (to the basic problem) is to tell — then you have the wrong solution — there — I’ve told you.

(a wonderful contradiction, almost like a Zen koan)
‘Intervention’ as research perspective

What is the defining characteristic of research?
I researcher --> theory --> (empirical work) --> phenomenon

II phenomenon <-- (empirical + theory) researcher <-- theory

(describe? explain? implications for action...)

Research-practice relation

Professionshøjskolen UCC
Research-practice relation

- researcher --> theory --> phenomenon

phenomenon <-- researcher <-- theory
Intervention as Epistemological Principle

● Is ‘intervention’ a category in social research methods books?  (validity?)

● Not all research must be ‘intervention’

● For the things we study, is there a ‘natural’ world?  (key question)

● If not? Then what methodological implications?
Intervention as Epistemological Principle

Sometimes necessary to intervene into societal practices as part of gaining basic knowledge.

So.....impossible to always maintain a separation of social science from social action.
Intervention as Epistemological Principle

- Can you make interventions if you don’t know anything about what you are intervening into?

- Is a lot of research more about the lack of knowledge of the researcher than the lack of knowledge of human collective?

(You must decide (evaluate?) how your knowledge state in relation to the practice (should) influence what you want to investigate)

(more or less impossible task)
Intervention as Epistemological Principle

- Need to conceptualise practices
- Intervention in relation to practices
- Meaningful wholes (units vs. elements)
1. These words are familiar words in everyday language.

2. Other disciplines use familiar everyday words in a systematic (non-everyday) manner

physics: work, energy, force
philosophy: absolute knowledge
chemistry: bonds
Implications

Must understand the meaning of our theoretical terms

Theoretical terms are always defined in a system of concepts
1. A teacher asks university students to identify the main characteristics of the introduction to three journal articles in the field of biology.

2. A teacher asks basic school pupils to give examples of situations where measurement is being used.

3. 
Some reflections
(after 23 oct session)

1. Good ideas are important — not only a question of time (in the practice) — (but often time in the research)

2. All research involves some intervention..... but....

2. Intervention is in relation to the relations in the practice — acting in relation to material demands in the practice (activity). (not determining)

3. The activity is teaching / teaching activities

    teaching is activity
Agenda

0. How do we identify a practice?

1. Research path / chain

2. Ethics of intervention – role of researcher

3. Relation to action research

4. Scaling up
- Effective intervention
- Evaluation of intervention
- Engage? In the practice?
- Example of existing intervention
- Intervention as a possibility of developing theoretical thinking
- How to incorporate knowledge produced by research into practice (teachers’)?
- What kind of knowledge are we producing?
- Awareness of motives.
- Enfatize the relation between activity and practice

Questions/issues from participants
A ‘societal need’ is something that is missing, but needed for producing conditions of life.

A ‘product’ is the ‘thing’ that satisfies the need.

Practice is the tradition for how to produce that product.

Aristotle / Hegel / Marx
A practice is

- historically developed
- institutionally structured
- tradition of action directed to producing products
- that aim to satisfy a generalised (collective) need

A practice is embodied in activity (at same time/two perspectives)

Activity as *psychological* form oriented to practice

Not all activity is practice, but all practice involves activity
For now...

We can concentrate on only a few practices... (teaching, research).

...without having to evaluate if the general idea is viable.
Research-practice relation

phenomenon $\leftrightarrow$ theory

research problem

researcher

Product of research as practice: Knowledge production
Research-practice relation

phenomenon \(\leftrightarrow\) theory

research problem

researcher

educational practice
Main Challenge

- how to introduce knowledge (i.e., research product) into activity (practice)

How is knowledge produced in one practice (educational research) going to be used in another practice (or activity)? (new form of the basic problem!)
**Basic problem:** How is knowledge produced in one practice (educational research) going to be used in another practice (or activity)?

1. Educational practice is autonomous. It does not depend upon or require educational research. Historically, educational practice has preceded educational research.

2. Educational research depends on educational practice, in the sense that educational practice (or activities within the practice) are an object of investigation.

3. All practices are organised around production, where the production responds to a societal need.

4. All practices are manifest in activity.

5. All activity depends on knowledge.

6. Knowledge production is the key feature of educational research practice.

7. Knowledge (produced from educational research) can be relevant to both educational practice and/or activities within that practice.
New Challenge

If we (as researcher) want to take full responsibility (from beginning to end) to find out what is involved or required in doing this, then what do we need to consider?

(this question leads to ‘research path/chain’)
research path (as contextual model) as guide, with general layer as important (necessary) starting point
Example of Research Path (chain) for ‘Subject-Matter Teaching’ (implicit activity)

1 Toward what goals (in terms of pupil capability) are we working?

2 What principles do we have to create instructional interventions that realise those goals?

3 What conditions are needed for teachers to make instructional interventions that realise the goals?

4 How can those conditions be realised within existing organisational conditions?
Features of ‘research path’

- focused on particular activity (meaningful whole) (in a practice)
- identifying knowledge needed to develop / improve that practice
- general layer
  - necessary components of a sequence that will develop a practice (abstract!)
  - important to have some general agreement
- specific layer
  - operationalising the general layer (rising to concrete)
key answer to basic problem

change of action (as way to allow knowledge to be in activity) (p. 172)

research needed to identify actions and how they can be changed
Research or social action?

Technical division of labour —

— researchers with focus on knowledge production

— others with focus on practice

When does the researcher responsibility start to run out — and start to appear among others?
Research-practice relation

phenomenon $\leftrightarrow$ theory

research problem

researcher

educational practice

researcher?
Some questions

Why is research often conducted by people who are not involved in practical problems? (division of labour)

What is going to be the relation between what was produced and what is going to be used? (role of knowledge)

What forms/kinds of cooperations with non-researchers? (democratic)
1) What is the adequate amount of time for intervention research?

2) How to overcome the difficult conditions for intervention research?

3) Can you consider the involvement of all the school agents in the research? If so, should we have a group of researchers rather than a sole researcher?

4) What do you mean by “principles”?

5) Are those four pieces (1-4) enough to create knowledge that will be incorporated into practice?

6) Is there a sequence to be followed to do research work?
How to deal with an object that has not yet been described and explained?
References


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