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Practitioner Enquiry: exploring method for understanding teacher learning

Kate Wall (University of Strathclyde, UK) and Elaine Hall (Northumbria University, UK)

Abstract

This chapter will engage with the epistemological tradition and associated method of practitioner enquiry as a teacher research approach embedded in pedagogic praxis (Hall and Wall, 2019; Hall and Sylvester, 2018). It will locate this research approach within social science and professional learning (Schön, 1987; Eraut, 1994; Sachs, 2001), particularly tackling the overlap with action research, the ethical imperatives and the embedded nature of researcher positioning it claims (Cochrane Smith and Lytle, 2009; Cordingley 2015). Highlighting key characteristics and terminology, both regarding method(s) and practice(s), our discussion will draw out some of the tensions and dilemmas that are inherent in this kind of professional learning. We will focus on the mirror effect between teacher and student learning (Wall and Hall, 2016) which underpins the connection between research and professionalism, creating productively dissonant, tight feedback loops of metacognition, voice, enquiry and learning community. To reflect on this complexity, issues of quality are of paramount importance, not just in terms of justifying the position of practitioner enquiry in the repertoire of education research, but also to clarify intent and impact in professional learning. Therefore, the second half of the chapter will look at the application of markers of quality (Heikkinen et al, 2012) that might support the practitioner engaging in and with this type of activity.

Introduction – Practitioner Enquiry as one of the many forms of teacher professional learning

Practitioner enquiry is a cyclical model of research targeting professional learning. It has become increasingly popular both as a grassroots movement of professional development (Wyse, 2020) and as a mode of building or directing professional cultures by political, training and management actors in education (Day, 2018; Peleman et al 2018; Mintrop et al,

2018). These personal and cultural aspects are sometimes complementary and sometimes in tension (Imants and Van der Wal, 2019; Holligan, 2020) and we will not attempt to taxonomise versions of practitioner enquiry in different European contexts of training and governance. Rather we trust that readers will draw their own conclusions about the spaces for enquiry in their own contexts and, for the purposes of this chapter, we consider practitioner enquiry as one mode of professional learning that is as subject to context, governance and intent as any other, whilst arguably offering particular degrees of freedom and responsibility to the individual practitioner.

As Phillipa Cordingley (2015, inter alia) has emphasised, the numerous forms of teacher professional learning have a wide variety of Aristotelian *accidents* whilst sharing certain *essences.* There are significant differences in the experience of learning specialist curriculum knowledge; of exploring overarching principles of pedagogy and incorporating the specifics of inclusion support or behaviour management into practice or of the mastery of technological aids to teaching and learning. Moreover, these learning experiences may be highly structured, centralised and 'rolled out'; they may be individually driven by teachers' curiosity; they may be single events of delivery or iterative journeys. However, the *essences* of professional learning are the ethical commitment to the learners and their experience; the professional identity of the teacher as someone with a commitment to maintaining fluid expertise as both a subject and process learner (Blomeke, et al, 2022) and the important – yet often overlooked in learning design – role of synthesising learning through discussion, curious reflective practice and integration (Osman and Warner, 2020).

The teacher engages in and with research (figure XX) (Hall, 2009; Cordingley, 2013) to deepen understanding of their practice. Each cycle has a structure loosely aligned to the plan-do-review process used for teaching more broadly, but with the added requirement for the 'do' element to include some systematic evidence collection and the 'review' element to be made public (Baumfield et al., 2012). This aligns with Stenhouse's (1981) definition of quality teacher research as 'systematic enquiry made public'; although how systematic and how public is a matter of researcher choice in the internal and external debate about quality.

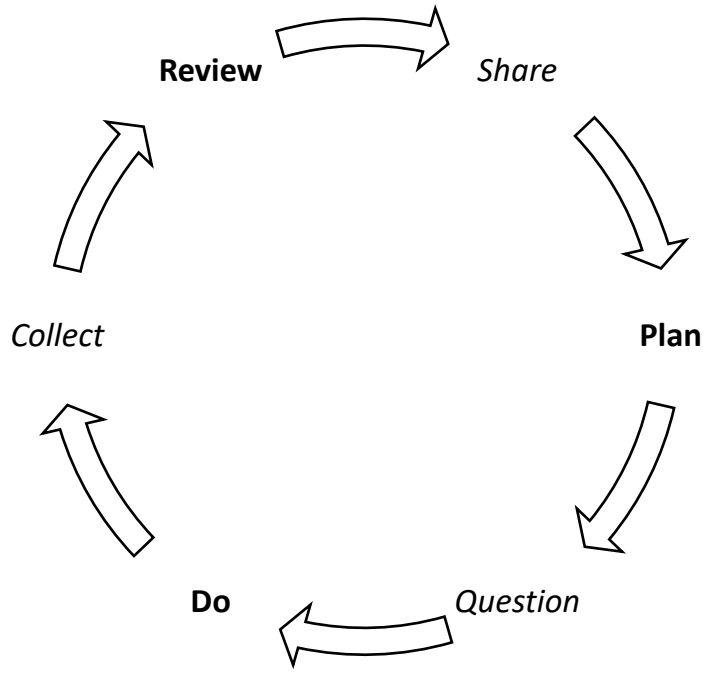

Figure XX: The cyclical model of enquiry (adapted from Hall and Wall 2019: 11)

Starting with key questions the teacher-researcher prioritises an issue of import to them which, given the professional and ethical bent of this praxis, is also strongly related to learner need in their context, relevance and usefulness being fundamental criteria (Timperley, 2008). Our observations suggest that these questions are likely to fall into two broad categories of 'what's going on' and 'what happens if' (Hall and Wall, 2019). 'What happens if' questions are often associated with more quasi-experimental techniques and tend to be centred on making a change, doing an intervention, and exploring impact, falling recognisably in the 'action research' and 'small scale trial' paradigms. There is a tendency for these questions to be more common across practitioner enquiry projects due to prevailing cultures and language of education and education research (Wall, 2017), as they are aligned with everyday assumptions of what research and evaluation look and feel like. Practitioner enquirers often start with 'what happens if' and it is a good way to build up procedural autonomy in using research language and tools and to introduce the new identities and roles of researcher to colleagues and learners. The reflective element of practitioner enquiry means that this kind of question produces (at least) two kinds of evidence: directly relating to evidence for/against the hypothesis and, perhaps more significantly for the professional enquiry, evidence relating to the expression and scope of the hypothesis. The practitioner enquirer finds out whether the anticipated consequences of the 'if I' occur but also whether she has framed the question satisfactorily, which mostly,

reality and practice being what they are, she has not, or not to her satisfaction (Knorr-Cetina, 2001).

This is where the 'what's going on' questions can be seen – not just as equally important, whereby the teacher-researcher takes a step back and finds out a bit more about the context in which the problem is nested- but as complementary to the 'what happens if I' questions. 'What's going on' research seeks to understand the complex relationships and individual experiences of learning spaces, drawing on paradigmatic approaches that privilege rich, deep data: case study, phenomenology, ethnography and participatory research. These more qualitative approaches have arguably less 'science currency' both within the academy and in popular representations of research so that practitioner enquirers and their audiences can relegate this type of enquiry to a secondary status. However, we would argue that placing these approaches in opposition or competition is a fundamental misunderstanding of the relationship between them, the synergy of inquiry/enquiry which is at the core of professional learning (and education research). Our experience suggests that practitioners have these two types of question working in synergy, whereby the findings of a 'what happens if' spark more questions and reveal greater areas of doubt and uncertainty, prompting a 'what's going on' question which in turn gives a new insight on which a more targeted 'what happens if' question can be explored. This process enables us to consider what we mean by success, who is included/ excluded from that definition and to ensure that our enquiries reflect our values and priorities. Our central tenet is that practitioner enquiry is cumulative and this complementary nature of enquiry cycles becomes more practicable and has better fit with learning and practice.

Once a question has been identified then evidence can be chosen to answer it. One of the key considerations of practitioner enquiry is a reflection on which kinds of evidence are privileged and which are ignored (deliberately or as part of a culture): this relates to hierarchies in our understanding of 'proper' science and to the cultural markers of our learning spaces and broader societies. As is probably already evident, we are instinctively pluralist and consider that we live in a mixed methods universe. Ensuring there is a clear line of enquiry between the question and the evidence is important, but that line does not exist until it is constructed by the enquirer, so it is vital that this is a conscious and recursive act: is the phenomenon under scrutiny closely enough linked to the core idea to be considered evidence of its presence? As meta-analysis and its critiques remind us, so much of what we

rely on as markers in education are in fact 'proxy indicators' (Hattie and Yates, 2013) of success, linked to race, class and gender rather than actual learning or progress. However, advantageously, the teacher-researcher embedded within the setting has an embarrassment of riches: a broader range of evidence can be considered, multiple cycles can be enacted. Teachers collect evidence all the time using the structural reporting of their context in combination with pedagogically appropriate techniques (Wall, 2019). Using this naturally occurring data makes the enquiry more manageable but it requires the teacher to see their practice-generated information as ***data.*** Dominant research discourse can mean that certain research techniques are seen as the 'proper' way to collect evidence, but questionnaires and interviews may not have good fit with the maturity of learners in the setting under scrutiny. It can also mean the teacher-researcher needs to find time outside of normal teaching and learning for these research activities to be undertaken. This is difficult in a busy job like teaching. So, creative definitions of evidence (Kara, 2015) can be useful in facilitating permission to be flexible. It is essential for the teacher-researcher to tap into their normal pedagogic repertoire of techniques, with assessment strategies (formative and summative; formal and informal) being a particularly rich category of evidence sources. The more evidence for answering practitioner enquiry questions is embedded in the context the more authentic the potential answers to enquiry questions become and this connectedness into real life practice means that the outcomes, the learning arising, is more likely to be useful.

Within the practice of practitioner enquiry two predominant traditions can be seen (figure XX): project and stance (Wall, 2017). Both emphasise the cyclical nature of enquiry highlighted above and can be considered as a way into the activity of practitioner enquiry. However, in order to understand the effects of project/ stance we need a third element: intent (Baumfield, Hall and Wall, 2013). The initiating agent – whether government, partner organisation, school, management or individual – aligns (consciously or not) with practitioner enquiry as project or stance, privileging the immediacy of the presenting problem (project) or the ongoing personal/organisational learning (stance). While it is not intended to place one as better than the other, they can feel quite different to the participant and have different affordances and constraints as a form of professional learning or research. Practitioner enquiry by project tends to be instigated by a strategic group, an outside agency or programme. As a result, the research focus (for example, outdoor

learning, writing, language learning or student leadership) can be pre-determined by the powerful within that hierarchy which can make it difficult for the individual to tie into their own priorities and values. The model of research tends to be more traditional and aligned to the way research is taught in the university, with the privileging of certain kinds of knowledge and evidence and the exclusion of anything not already recognised. This 'project' kind of practitioner enquiry has a finite length often ending with a celebratory public sharing of outcome, which makes it attractive, manageable and a great way to engage in research and build confidence. Simultaneously this can mean that once the sharing has concluded then practitioner enquiry is seen to be finished and a 'been there, done that' attitude can prevail. With enquiry as stance, then the specific research project is less important, since the dominant agenda is ongoing professional learning in practice (Schön, 1987) over multiple projects in dialogue with each other. Where there are multiple projects, uniformity and central control become less important, practitioners can have (some) ownership of their enquiries, creatively engage with the gathering of evidence and reflect against internal personal success criteria as well as the external. It is epistemologically orientated: part of the professional world view of the practitioner (Cochrane-Smith and Lytle, 2009) her ongoing learning and development supported by cumulative cycles of enquiry. Without the security of the 'project' however, there can be a disconnect to strategic organisation or community where learning can be shared. This can make practitioner enquiry by stance quite a lonely activity and as a result can mean dissonance between the ongoing learning and the system in which it is located.

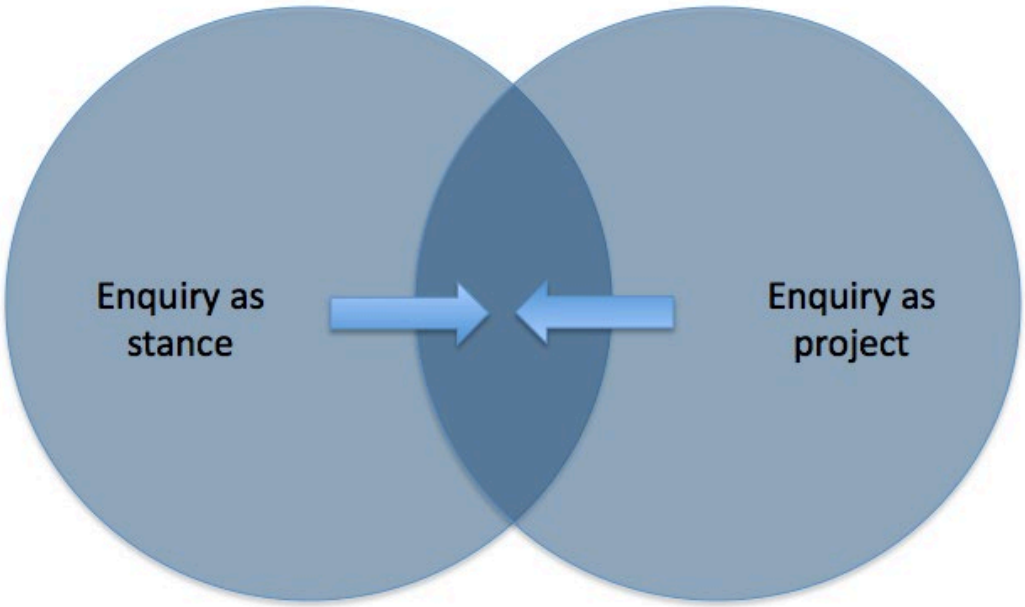

Figure XX: Bringing the two predominant practitioner enquiry stances together (adapted from Wall 2017)

To reconcile these different approaches to enquiry and to facilitate their co-existence then the community to which the individual belongs and with whom they share their ongoing learning, whether through project or stance, is essential. Practitioner enquiry as a solitary activity can be problematic and isolating and so a productive, inclusive culture of practitioner enquiry can help ensure productive mingling of those working in different ways. To achieve this, we have suggested four principles of a practitioner enquiry community (Hall and Wall, 2019; Wall and Hall, 2017):

- Autonomy (to own the process and ensure outcomes are addressing questions of need within a participants' practice);
- Dialogue (the commitment to make public the process and outcomes undertaken as part of a community of learners);
- Disturbance (the willingness to challenge and to be challenged by your own process and outcomes as well as others'); and
- Connected (how well the process and outcomes connect into practice).

All four of these principles emphasise the process as (at least) equivalent to the outcome of enquiry. Tidy narratives retro-fitted to research serve no-one: they mask moments of learning and exclude new researchers who cannot see their mistakes and doubts in the

work of others. Sharing at only the end point tends to encourage this shiny 'no problem' orientation, but sharing as an integral part of the enquiry process at all stages encourages researchers to embrace professional learning about research and about pedagogy as complex and full of ups and downs. The community needs to be supportive of teacher voice and create inclusive spaces where individuals can be tentative and speculative as they make sense of different aspects of their enquiry (Wall, 2020). For this to happen, senior and experienced figures need to 'show their working', crossings out and coffee stains not redacted. We all need to put our ideas and our status as experts in harm's way or we have stopped participating in enquiry learning, our expertise will ossify, and we are asking of practitioners in the field something we no longer ask of ourselves. The community around the practitioner enquiry therefore becomes as important as the process undertaken.

Within such a community then there are multiple, parallel learning trajectories that are useful to consider as influenced by practitioner enquiry (figure XX). The teacher-researcher will likely end up thinking about and being informed by complex, complementary learning trajectories, including the thing we are interested in (the classroom practice), and the learners' experience of learning in our context (progression, achievement and affective elements). It will also involve learning about ourselves, as learners (in regards to professional progression, achievement and affective elements) and learning about the research process and outcomes including how we strategically find out answers to our questions, share them effectively and why we do (or do not) feel confident in our own and others' research practices. This ecology (Kemmis, 2012) of learning and influence is dynamic and inter-related, with learning in one aspect informing and impacting about learning in other areas. We would suggest that greater the awareness of these different trajectories and how different elements of the ecology might interact from a micro- and macro perspective brings about tighter, catalytic feedback loops between the different elements. These more frequent instances of feedback tend to lead to greater empathy and identification in learning space, to dismantle unhelpful binaries (us/them; teacher/learner) and this leads us to suggest there is a mirror effect in the practice of enquiry that is productive to make explicit.

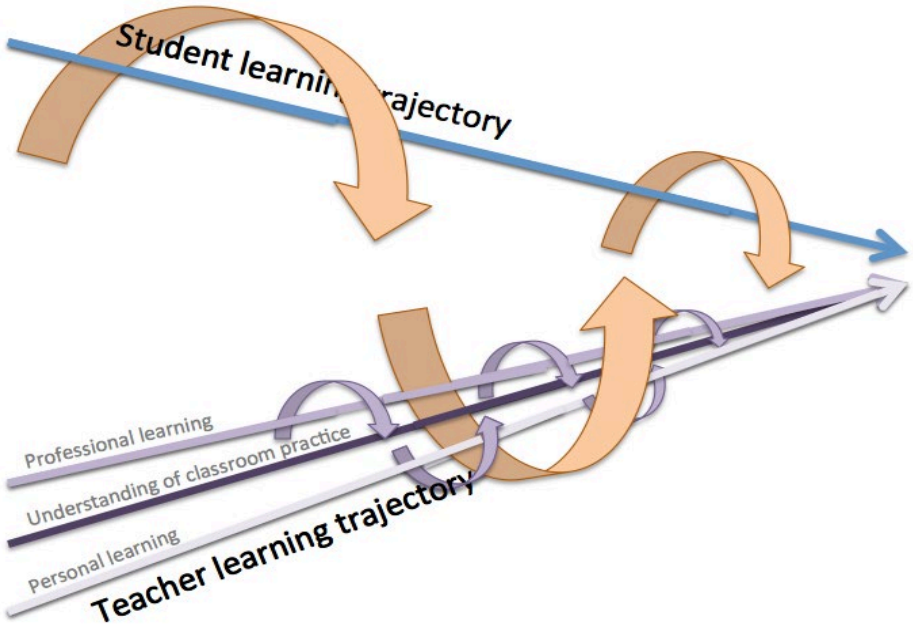

Figure XX: Catalytic tools for learning tighten the links across the different dimensions of teacher learning and between student and teacher learning trajectories

Mirror Effect

The enquiry cycles and their emphasis on reflection (what happened) and strategic action (what to do next) can be seen to encourage teacher-researchers to be metacognitive in relation to their practice: to think about their thinking (Flavell, 1979). Indeed, in Moseley et al.'s (2005) framework for thinking, the metacognitive realm is called *reflective and strategic thinking* and this has a neat fit with the way that we are talking about practitioner enquiry process. In the literature, metacognition is mostly considered in regard to children's learning where there is strong agreement around potential impact on outcomes (Hattie 2008, Higgins et al., 2016), however, the relevance of the concept for teacher's learning is becoming more influential, whether because it teacher's knowledge about the concept (Wilson and Bai, 2010), how it enables them to act as a learning role model for children (Zepeda, 2019) or, and this is more emergent, whether it can be considered as a methodology for professional learning (Porthilo and Modina, 2016). We believe that the way cycles of enquiry support professional learning mirrors effective metacognitive learning: in looking back at previous work without defensiveness or paralysing shame; being reflective about success and failure both as outcomes and as ideas to be challenged; taking

informed action with the primary goal of learning more in a continuous process rather than a closed loop of problem solving; and being strategic by setting priorities that are manageable for everyone and in line with values. All these facilitate a liminal space where there is a greater likelihood of a metacognitive turn for the teacher and as the feedback loops between their own learning and the learners tightens. We see a mirror effect that is mutually reinforcing.

This connection, between learners' and teacher's metacognition when considered within a practitioner enquiry frame, enhances the parallels and as a result is catalytic of the applied nature of the research process as well as enhancing the likely usefulness of the process and outcomes (Wall and Hall, 2016). As awareness of these parallels is shared and reinforced within practitioner enquiry communities then this mirror effect can be seen to be repeated in many ways. For learners to be metacognitive then it helps for teachers to be metacognitive; for learners to have a voice then it helps if teachers feel they have a voice; when teachers are active enquirers then they tend to encourage active enquiry in their pedagogic practice; teacher leaders often facilitate learners to lead their own learning, teachers who conceive of themselves as activists are likely to encourage similar dispositions in their learners, and so on.

This mirror effect adds a level of complexity to the practitioner enquiry practice. Being aware of the multiple parallels and how they are connected can be challenging to keep track of and can lead to an organic fast-paced affirmative spiral of radical change in practice and systems. This can be particularly powerful when the professional learning community within a setting or group builds capacity through a conscious sharing and explicit engagement with the mirror effect. This is no small thing as it leads to a resilience in the professional body and a multifaceted, often political engagement with pedagogy and its development for all learners. Key here then is how we think about the quality of the process behind the change to ensure that there is accountability, authenticity and clarity in the decisions being made.

Thinking about quality

When thinking about quality in practitioner enquiry then a crucial question is what we mean by good and to what extent is that judgement based on historical, cultural and contextual

qualifications i.e. 'good right here, right now'. The positioning of the teacher-researcher, the close nature of the evidence being collected and the foregrounding of professional learning alongside research process means that characteristics of 'good' can become difficult to pinpoint. This is additionally so when recognising the parallels and multiple influences suggested by the mirror effect and how judgements of quality, as a result, need to be multifaceted and flexible to encompass these different influences.

There is a need for us all to engage with the beautifully clear and concise dissection of the catch-all 'quality' by Witteck and Kvernbekk (2011) which reminds us that not only are there (at least) five types of quality but they are not congruent with one another: choosing 'quality as transformation' means sacrificing many if not all of the elements of 'quality as fitness for purpose'. There are value judgements embedded in the choice of quality criterion chosen and this is a core site of inquiry for exploring our intent when engaging in the cumulative process of enquiry. Personal attachment to definitions of quality will be scrutinised repeatedly, they may persist or change, we may be forced to consider that our espoused values are not as visible as we would like in our actual practice: again, this is meant to be a place for learning not shame and the supportive community is key when practitioners are sitting with their discomfort. It is important to recognise that this discomfort stems primarily, in our view, from the core human need and desire to be 'good enough' – a personal, professional and ethical commitment for the teacher (Winnicott, 1960).

When we begin to discuss research quality, practitioners are understandably concerned that, as researchers, they are not sufficiently specialist to produce evidence that is robust enough, by which they seem to mean *veridical,* which produces the strongest kind of evidential support for a hypothesis (Kvernbekk, 2011, p519). In this construction, the evidence must be objective and the hypothesis true, a final and conclusive position which ought to be daunting to everyone – rather, Kvernbekk argues, we should focus on *potential* evidence, where evidence remains objective but the hypothesis remains potentially falsifiable, as new evidence comes in. To assuage this discomfort and operationalise this fallibilistic position, therefore, practitioner enquiry makes use of the concept of 'warrantable assertibility' (Dewey, 1938). Each piece of evidence is treated as part of a

process of argumentation (Toulmin, 2003) and professional learning (Hall and Wall, 2019) that produces not a 'final truth' but something that is recognised by the community as justification for action (or inaction) in an identified site of enquiry. In practitioner enquiry potential evidence is used to endorse action, without shutting down discourse; to enable variation in practice justified by local conditions; to encourage caution when 'rollout' is mandated.

Discussions about quality in the research literature are useful and we do not want to dismiss them or discourage the teacher researcher from incorporating them as they consider their approach. It is simultaneously important and difficult for the practitioner to juxtapose their enquiry process against the research literature. The literature is huge, with the onus on the practitioner to search to find the terms that fit with the dynamic we've outlined so far (Lewthwaite and Nind, 2016), so we recommend some of the work that has shaped our thinking and allowed us to explain and defend our stance. It is particularly important to us that we do not have a hard boundary between 'research standards' and 'professional standards' or indeed the standards that we use to make important decisions in our daily lives. Reflecting on the kinds of evidence we choose (and reject) when selecting a new bed enables our natural evidentiary preferences to themselves become a site of enquiry. This produces space to tweak the combination of different kinds of evidence chosen - more reviews or more price comparisons or more information about sustainable materials? - to produce enough warrant to make that decision. This analogy is not intended to make study of research intent, field decisions and quality considerations more everyday in the sense of less rigorous but to emphasise that the everyday patterns of our decision making are replicated in our research designs, so this pattern recognition is a way to break down assumptions about the underlying epistemologies of research praxis, particularly that they are in any way neutral.

Ideas from the Interpretivist tradition (Guba and Lincoln 2005) are helpful: ***transparency*** perhaps is the most critical since all of the others rest upon us being brave enough to show the messiness and mistakes inherent in all enquiry. The requirement to note down ideas, decisions, processes as they happen and return to them critically is not the paperwork chore that externally required 'accountability' regimes can be, rather it is the living record of the enquiry. From transparent accounts of praxis we can describe our attempts at ***credibility,***

transferability, dependability, and ***confirmability***. The extent to which we approach these is one metric, but since we can never perfectly (or veridically) achieve them, a paired metric is the reflection upon what the gap between our hoped for and actual research means. Is the enquiry fatally impaired, or do the shortcomings or cracks allow for different learning? - Larsson's (2009) paper on generalisability is very helpful in applying this concept to practice. Micro judgements about quality (is this a credible measure of reading ability?) are connected to wider praxis, so the transparent account is also useful to encourage thinking about overall intent, the links between aspects of the enquiry and rigour in decision making over time. In particular, using the transparent account to consider who was consulted, who influenced or who was invited to comment on the decisions made by the researcher is a fertile source of data related to voice, ownership and impact. All of these considerations are aspects of reflexivity (Schon, 1983; Etherington, 2004).

In our own reflexive practice, we have found it helpful to shift perspective by overlaying a theoretical model on our own messy accounts. In recent work we have used Heikkinen et al.'s (2012) five principles validating action research (table XX) and this is probably a reflection of the similarities between action research, practitioner enquiry and professional learning, especially around the simultaneous commitment to research and action. Many of these are challenging to apply from the position of the teacher-researcher-learner but as ever, the goal is not 'quality as perfection' in self-assessment but a fruitful conversation sparked by the dissonance between experience and framework. As with definitions of quality, readers will note potential tensions between principles: polyphony might be sacrificed to evocativeness or to emplotment, since multiple voices tend towards accounts where stories are not linear, nor does the choice of the most poignant example necessarily include everyone. There would be nothing wrong with that, unless we tried to pretend that this was not the case, that our work was perfect and complete.

Table xx: Five principles for validation of professional learning (adapted from Heikkinen et al. 2012: 8)

Validation principles for self-assessment of learning

1. Principle of historical continuity *Analysis of the history of learning:* how has the learning evolved historically? *Emplotment:* how logically and coherently does the narrative of learning proceed?
2. Principle of reflexivity *Subjective adequacy:* what is the nature of the learner's relationship with his/her object of learning? *Ontologic and epistemologic presumptions:* what are the learner's presumptions of knowledge and reality? *Transparency:* how does the learner describe his/her chosen material and methods of learning?
3. Principle of dialectics *Dialogue:* how has the learner's insight developed in dialogue with others? *Polyphony:* how does the narrative of learning present different voices and interpretations? *Authenticity:* how authentic and genuine are the protagonists of the narrative?
4. Principle of workability and ethics *Pragmatic quality*: how well does the learning succeed in creating workable practices? *Criticalness:* what kind of discussion does the learning provoke? *Ethics:* how are ethical problems dealt with? *Empowerment:* does the learning make people believe in their own capabilities and possibilities to act and thereby encourage new practices and actions?
5. Principle of evocativeness *Evocativeness:* how well does the learning narrative evoke mental images, memories or emotions related to the theme?

Judgements of quality taken from a research perspective can therefore feel like a murky realm for practitioner researchers to navigate, particularly if they are setting unachievable benchmarks for adequacy. If we explore the practitioner or professional community for

potential answers to this issue of quality, we come upon the same issue, where evidence does not always come with the transparent account of what the values, intent and success criteria of the instigators. The 'what works' and evidence-based policy field (for example, Hattie, 2008 ; Biesta, 2010; Kvernbekk, 2013) gives some perspective on one way of framing quality in teaching and learning. 'What works' is problematic for many: sometimes because of an over-reliance on certain kinds of research - positivist approaches and meta-analyses/ systematic reviews- and sometimes because of the strong political and/or centralising influence, both of which tend to minimise the importance of context and relationships. Despite these issues of application, this field gives us useful vocabulary, since it encourages specificity when discussing impact (when, how much, to whom, with what degree of variation) which builds a foundation for talking about ***confidence*** in research results. Whilst this is a term with very specific meaning in positivist and statistical studies, we can, in our mixed methods universe, translate the underlying concept of strength to practitioner enquiry reflection. How confident are you that the evidence answers your question, that the process and the evidence combine to find a solution that is strong enough to warrant action? This could be considered from a solely personal perspective: how useful are the answers to you for moving your practice forward (a personal judgement of quality)? The more confident you are the more likely the findings are going to prompt strategic thinking and strategic action as a result. This is not to say of course that making these judgements on your own is unproblematic. Here we return to our principle of Dialogue (Wall and Hall, 2017), we have an ethical duty to think out loud, expose our inevitably somewhat flawed uncodified thinking within our collaborative community.

As this becomes more alien and confusing, we suggest turning around the direction of conceptual travel and returning to the expertise of the teacher. Teachers are assessing children's learning all the time (formally and informally; formatively and summatively), for many progressions in learning is what they are looking for within their enquiry, so rather than substituting all this useful knowledge that fits with the context and what fits with the learners within it we should value the expertise that is already there. This has led us to suggest a practitioner enquiry orientated quality judgement that tries to do this: pedagogically appropriateness (Wall, 2019). By doing so we are encouraging the teacher-researcher to see their research as contextualised within teaching and learning, while also

providing a mechanism with which to draw on their pedagogic expertise about the appropriateness of both evidence and approach to answering their own questions about practice. This does not exclude or dismiss some of the other concerns about quality but enhances that consideration from a position of power – a teacher that is tapped into their experience about summative assessment is likely to understand concepts such as reliability and validity much more effectively than to meet those concepts uncontextualized (***Is** this a credible measure of Jo's reading ability? What does it capture, what does it miss? Is it fair and useful in helping Jo?)*.

We return to a consideration of how useful you and colleagues find your outcomes (in terms of answering questions and developing practice). A more collaborative community-based approach to thinking about quality is strongly influenced by Stenhouse's (1981) conceptualisation of practitioner research: "systematic enquiry made public". Of course, how useful depends on complex networks of politics, dissemination process and relevancy which are not necessarily objective (Kvernbekk, 2011). The absence of or limits to objectivity are not an obstacle but rather something that should be openly recognised and embraced, in line with the spirit of reflexivity within a community. This conception of quality, developed as part of a public forum, requires an ongoing dialogue with other professionals engaged in all forms of learning where language and understandings are developed as a shared understanding of practice and research in dynamic relationship. This can be especially impactful if sharing is not left to the end of the enquiry or learning process and therefore a scary summative ordeal in itself, but rather is formative and inherent at all stages of the process: when refining and defining questions, deciding on evidence, synthesising the key outcomes, presenting the outcomes of the enquiry and determining whether there is warrant for action. If this reflexive thinking or, to continue the bridge into pedagogy, this metacognitive thinking about research (Wall and Hall, 2020), is considered as fundamental to the process, then not only is the individual enquirer required to talk through their thinking and listen to peer feedback at regularly points in the process, but the community also builds capacity and develops a shared, complex and nuanced understanding of what quality means to them in their shared context.

Concluding thoughts

In this chapter we have engaged with practitioner research in two ways. Firstly as a productive contribution to the repertoire of professional learning techniques, a modality for encouraging the cognitive, affective and ongoing development of professional fluid expertise. Secondly – and we believe, dovetailing - as a methodologic lens contributing a useful and complementary perspective of education. We have argued for a bridge between pedagogy and methodology on which the practitioner enquirer is positioned. There is strength and value in this positioning for the individual, but also the respective fields if commonality in the connections can be found and enhanced. The issue of quality is key, and we have suggested a number of productive avenues that can be used to develop a shared language of pedagogy and research. However, there are many examples where competing demands can pull against each other, and this can be hard to navigate, especially for a novice. The cycles of cumulative enquiry, their complementary commitment to review and action, and the parallels that can be drawn to both research and teaching practices, recognise the expertise of the insight provided by the teacher-researcher as well as codify the process and outcomes into social science more generally.

Resolving the issue – or rather, coming to a temporary pragmatic understanding of the issue - of how quality judgments are made is crucial in facilitating legitimacy as well as authenticity. The windows of opportunity can be found in both the research and professional communities and as such we have suggested several different kinds of quality criteria that can be used. The way that we talk about the enquiry process and the associations made and their alignment to pedagogy and methodology make the most of this positioning and hopefully accentuate the potential for a mirror effect in both thinking and practice. Finding a middle ground is possible, but a curiosity about language and intent is needed to get beyond and behind the taken for granted. Indeed, when done thoughtfully in a critically friendly community, the connections between different learning trajectories, between theory and practice, and between practitioners and learners, makes for a robust, complex engagement within an ecology of practice. We can and should use the quality and ethical criteria of teaching and research as mutually critical friends: if a practice from either tradition does not meet the standard, then this is an area of inquiry. The nuanced viewpoint that arises should be useful to practitioners and researchers alike, feeding a useful dialogue

supportive of the learning in context and also, through a procedural autonomy in research language and concepts of quality, productive engagement with wider debates. There is no doubt that teachers are good at talking about *what* they do, but this practitioner enquiry intends to support them in articulating *why* they do it and then - because we are never finished learning - to launch them with into the next set of learning experiences.

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