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Paper Session. Continued in 23 SES 06 D

Time:2009-09-29
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Room:HG, HS 21

Chair:Lisbeth Lundahl

Contribution

Research, Policy and Practice-- Commitment,Complexity and Uncertainty: a Case Study of a Government Research Council funded Project, Engineering the Future

Evidence based policy formation, both at EU and national level, built upon close linkage of research, policy and practice is regarded by many as an optimum solution. However, while there are many examples in European education of any two of these communities collaborating in development, the realisation of meaningful inter-relationships among all three communities is complex (Ball 1997). Evidence is often contested, while policy is determined not only by explicit political philosophies but also by deeply embedded assumptions. This paper examines this complexity through the lens of a case study in one country, Scotland, which illuminates relationships among the policy, research and practitioner communities at national and local levels and the nature of their contributions to national curriculum development. The paper explores potential tensions between the development of participative ways of working and the existing structures and ways of thinking within an education system, and examines limitations on what can be effected within existing governance systems. Since 1999 the Scottish Parliament sets the legal framework for education in Scotland; within this the Scottish government has full responsibility for education policy and provision. Following the outcomes of a government initiated National Debate on the purposes and practices of school education, Scotland's school system has for the last six years been the locus of an extensive and radical development programme in curriculum, assessment and pedagogy (Curriculum for Excellence). Policy makers state their intent to take forward development through engagement and partnership based on critical reflection, using research to inform policy and recognising the centrality of practitioners to development processes. A number

of means have been established to promote engagement. This philosophy contrasts with management models based on new public management principles. This paper uses this case study to explore critically the actual constraints on the realisation of such intentions. Engineering the Future (EtF) is a project funded by the UK government's Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council designed to explore ways of promoting participation and engagement in engineering in sustainable ways. The project itself built on models of partnership and transformational change (Senge & Scharmer, 2001) which are already drawn on within Scottish school education. Systemic integrity (coherence in development at all levels of the education system), professional integrity (significant roles for teachers in programme development) and educational integrity (a clear focus on improving learning) are crucial to these processes (Hayward et al, 2006).

Method

The study provides a critical account of the processes of engagement between the EtF project and the constituencies of the policy community responsible for school science curriculum and pedagogy. It examines critically evidence from a number of sources thereby affording opportunities for triangulation. These include: documentation from the research council which provided funding; documents produced by the Scottish government and public agencies developing the curriculum; records of discussions and correspondence between the project and these bodies; internal project records; critical reflection by members of the project team on their activities as participants in this and other aspects of Curriculum for Excellence development work. This evidence is compared to practice in a number of other European school systems and is used to examine critically the model of engagement used by the government and explore the constraints on its development and realisation.

Expected Outcomes

The study concludes that the relationship between government commitment to develop models of engagement and partnership, including the use of research in education policy formation, and the existing systems of governance, formal and informal, is marked by considerable tensions. The study illuminates some of the tensions that are often invisible to participants and often underestimated, indeed unrecognised, in official discourse. This can lead to a potential gap between stated policy and its implementation. The session concludes by exploring means by which the informed views of practitioners and the outcomes of research can be brought into effective dialogue with policy communities; and reflects on the implications for the governance of education in a democracy of ensuring the development of systems which will sustain integrity at all levels and which will permit space for more open discussion of contested issues.

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