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The significance of practice-based research: from personal understanding to shared knowledge.

Jane Rand

Action-oriented research strategies are built upon collaborative and reflexive development of understanding (Pedler, Burgoyne and Brook, 2005). Two such strategies – action *research* and (critical reflection) action *learning* – share characteristics and values, but are differentiated by their primary aim:

Research is a form of learning which is more systematic and rigorous, and its outcomes are normally made public. The outcomes of learning are usually confined to the individual or fellow members of the learning group or class...[A]ll action research projects are, then, action learning projects but the converse does not hold true (Kember, 2000:35).

Fundamental to both approaches are 'the principles of praxis, process, proactivity and reflexivity' (Rigg and Trehan, 2004: 152), and their strength lies in their ability to turn personal *understanding* into shared *knowledge* (Bourner & Simpson, 2005: 145, original emphasis) – to influence others, and others' practice.

There is a space, and a voice, in 21st century research for both approaches, for example through the development of professional postgraduate taught programmes, through those who champion practice-oriented postgraduate research, and through conferences such as this. To further strengthen that voice my presentation will focus on the work of David Coghlan and Mike Pedler (2006), in which they make a case for three criteria for evaluating the quality of action (learning) dissertations: (i) evidence of real problems being addressed, (ii) action being taken, and (iii) learning taking place.

My view is that these criteria are applicable to *any* action-oriented research, but it is the third criterion which underpins the conference theme of *significance* – the impact our research has, and the extent of its influence. Coghlan and Pedler (2006) offer three lenses through which to consider this criterion: (i) personal-learning, (ii) practitioner-learning and (iii) wider system-learning.

This presentation will explore ways in which I have considered my own research through these lenses, and provide an opportunity for me to evaluate collaboratively the significance of my research to date: 'in the good company of those who can help to explore emergent issues with fresh questions' (Simpson and Bourner, 2007: 184). Through this I hope we can learn together, develop a shared understanding and, rather than confine the outcomes of our learning to our group, propose ways in which we might share knowledge of ways to enhance the influence and impact of practice-oriented research.

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