Driving innovation in Higher Education through Professional Enquiry (PE): setting the case for PE as Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

Oscar Odena

Presentation at the Association for Tertiary Education Management 2009 SSC Conference

**Fremantle, Western Australia, 24th April**

1

Contents:

- **A) A definition**

- **B) Some strategies for PE as Reflective Practice**

- **C) Setting the case for Professional Enquiry (PE) as CPD to drive innovation**

- **D) Principles of good practice for PE**

- **E) Potential barriers (and lessons to be learned from practice)**

- **F) Conclusions**

- **G) References**

A) A definition

- **Several terms: Professional Enquiry (PE), enquiry-led practice, 'the reflective practitioner' (Schön, 1983)**

- **A definition: PE can be understood as enquiry undertaken by the professional(s) to understand themselves better as professionals and to improve their practice, when specific knowledge is required for a specific situation**

- **Academics talk about 'praxis' as committed action**

- **PE requires to put in writing personal and professional reflection, to gather data and to share it with others**

  - ◆ **Reflection 'in' action - unlikely to critique routines**
  - ◆ **Reflection 'on' action (Schön, 1983; Day, 1999)**

Reflective Practice Spiral

Planning

(R-**on**-A)

Acting

(R-in-A)
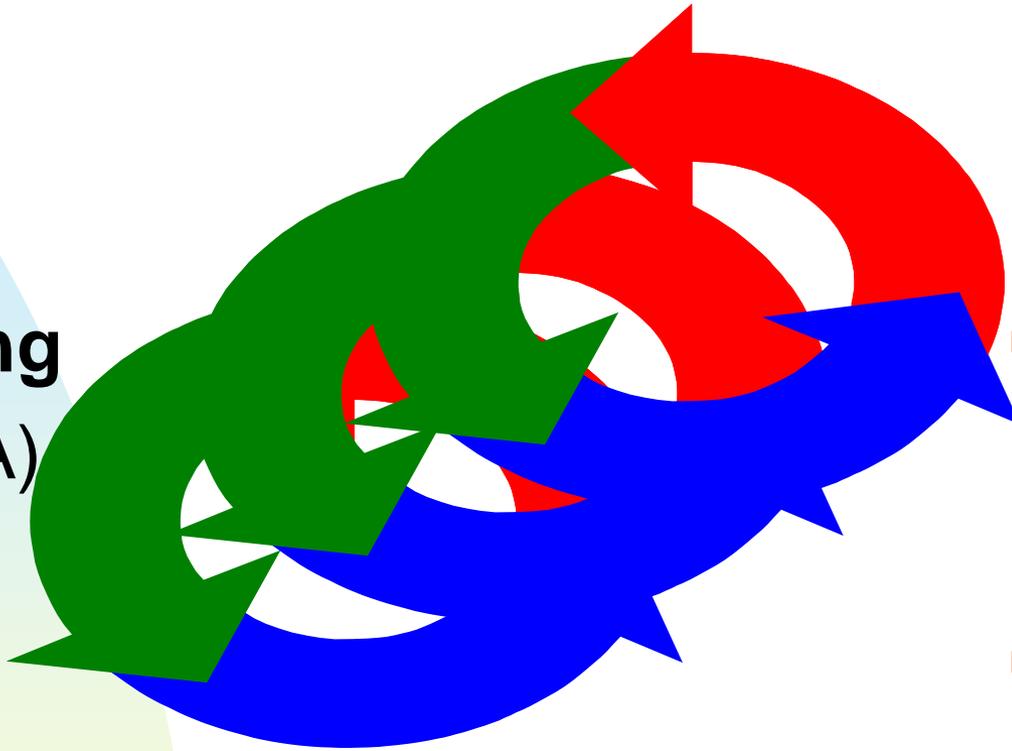
Evaluating

(R-**on**-A)

Observing

(R-in-A)

B) Some strategies for PE as reflective practice

- **REFLECTIVE PRACTICE requires putting reflections in writing using a variety of strategies:**

- **Writing plans for a period of time (e.g. new scheme/project)**

- **Writing detailed plans for each week**

- **Writing evaluations for each week:**

  - ◆ **Diaries, self-assessment forms**

  - ◆ **Others – departmental supervisors, external facilitator, etc.**

- **Sharing practice in and out of the work setting (*Communities of Practice*, conferences, formal postgraduate courses, etc.)**

Reflection as self-development

- **Spiral is good for improving the technical aspects of practice but…**

- **Professionals have personal views (and emotions) which can also be made explicit through reflection**

- **Not easy, requires deliberate effort and time for:**

  - **Asking questions, engaging in introspection, synthesizing experiences, integrating knowledge, finding patterns, as well as observation, reading and writing**

- **Some strategies: journal writing (*letter to yourself, unsent letter, snapshot, conversation*); writing stories; auto-biography**

C) Setting the case for Professional Enquiry as CPD to drive innovation

- **Current emphasis on 'enquiry-led practice' in all knowledge areas at all levels, e.g. UK Higher Education Academy advice to develop effective practice, sharing 'case studies of discipline-based practice' (Jenkins *et al*, 2007)**

- **Work in HE on practitioner development has convinced me of the crucial role that Professional Enquiry plays into practitioners' CPD.**

- **Enquiry-led practice helps professionals to access, understand and do research, which will feed back into and improve their professional skills and practice.**

- **The potential of Reflective Practice/PE as CPD is not new:**

  - **In Education the tradition of enquiry-led practice goes back to Stenhouse (1975) and others, e.g. Collaborative Action Research Network (since 1976)**

- **Some examples of Reflective Practice/PE at ATEM 2009:**

  - ***Training professional staff in Web 2.0* – Dr Lisa Cluett on staff training and the 'Online Student Journey'**

  - ***Changing a team through training and personal development* – Carole Jackson on changing a team's perception of itself**

- **'Transmissive' / traditional delivery mode approaches to CPD (Kennedy, 2005), are often implemented with a 'tick-box' mentality which make them less useful.**

D) Principles of good practice for Professional Enquiry:

- **Needs to be self-motivating, following the professionals' interests**

  - ◆ **CPD aimed at developing understanding of and improving the participants' own practice**

- **Facilitators acting as guides: the professionals are the experts on their unique work settings.**

- **Sharing of practice: professionals-facilitator, critical friend, department team, network, national/international (e.g. AERA Action Research SIG & Research and Reform SIG, ATEM, etc.)**

- **Delivered by energetic staff, capable of awakening and infusing the learning potential and curiosity that <u>all professionals have</u>, listening and encouraging them.**

E) Potential barriers (and lessons to be learned from practice)

- **When professionals are given little choice in implementing ideas (developed by others)**

- **Isolation - can be solved with 'critical friends' and collaborative projects (e.g. Day, 1999)**

- **Micro politics within the department/school**

- **Lack of time due to departmental pressures (i.e. performativity). Time is needed to develop praxis.**

- **The (perceived?) research-practice gap.**

F) Conclusions

- HE professionals have to adapt to changing educational policies and initiatives

- Developing professional knowledge through enquiry and collaborative networks can empower and transform staff (even those who enrol for other reasons!)

- Reflective practice is crucial; its processes and results deserve to be shared with:

  - Other professionals, policy makers and academics (nationally and internationally)

  - Through journals (e.g. *Educational Action Research, NASPA Student Affairs Administrators in HE*), Networks, Internet, Media

- Through developing professional knowledge <u>locally</u>, in departments and networks, it is possible to change <u>nationally and internationally</u>.

G) References

- **Day, Ch. (1999) *Developing Teachers: The Challenges of Lifelong Learning*. London: Falmer Press.**

- **Jenkins, A., Healey, M. and Zetter, R. (2007) *Linking Teaching and Research in Disciplines and Departments.* York: The Higher Education Academy.**

- **Kennedy, A. (2005) Models of Continuing Professional Development (CPD): a framework for analysis, *Journal of In-Service Education*, 31(2), 235-250.**

- **Schön, D. A. (1983) *The Reflective Practitioner. How Professionals Think in Action*. London: Basic Books.**

- **Stenhouse, L. (1975) *An Introduction to Curriculum Research and Development*. London: Heinemann.**