

ROUNDTABLE

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OECD Examiners' Report on Educational Research and Development in England

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STEFAN WOLTER. Introduction. OECD Review in England on Educational Research and Development

What is an OECD Review?

There exist two types of reviews the OECD is conducting, country reviews and thematic reviews. Although all country reviews are also thematic by nature, the focus lies more on one country and the analysis serves the specific needs of the country under review and the other member states as a reliable, standardised source of information. So-called thematic reviews treat one theme over many countries – at least five or six – and end in a comparative study that shows differences between countries, best practice in particular countries, tendencies, etpara. and should give an insight into the general mechanics of the chosen topic and be a guideline for all member states.

The review of the educational research policy in England is somewhere in between the two types of reviews. It is a distinct country review as it has been done on the request of the English Government and resulted in a country report on England but it was also intended as part of a larger thematic review on the same topic as other countries should have participated in the same type

of review and the final goal was to conduct a comparative review on the topipara. Besides New Zealand, which was reviewed just before England and that is hardly comparable with England, so far no other country's educational research and development policy has been reviewed and therefore the two country reviews stand alone so far.[1] The fact that no other government has decided to have its research policy reviewed is perhaps also a sign of the importance or non-importance of educational research in the OECD member states.

When conducting a review, the OECD issues guidelines according to which the country under review prepares a so-called national background report. This report should contain all the relevant background information, facts and figures on the topipara. Based on this report the OECD Secretariat plans together with the country a review visit that should allow the external experts to meet all the relevant stakeholders in the field. In the case of the English review, the review team meet with over 100 persons in just one week! The review team is generally composed of four persons, three international experts in the field in question and one member of the OECD Secretariat. The external experts should have relevant expertise in the field at least in their own country or even internationally. Therefore the short length of the visit should not be seen as a significant obstacle for assessing a country.

After the review visit the examiners write a report on the subject. This report is then presented before the relevant body of the OECD, in this case the CERI (Centre for Educational Research and Innovation), where all the delegates from the member countries can make their observations. The country under review responds to the suggestions and proposals in the report and the examiners' report is accepted by the CERI or is subject to revisions. In the case of the present review, the examiners' report had been accepted without changes. The subsequently published report is then free to use for the government that commissioned the review and is also available in the public domain.

What Was the Topic and the Purpose of the Review?

The review was part of a larger study by the OECD on knowledge management in the educational sector. Therefore the review concerned educational research and development *policy* and not educational research as such. It goes without saying that the examiners did not have the time nor the qualifications to comment on the quality of educational research in England. They tried to analyse whether the educational research and development (R & D) policy of the English Government, more precisely the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), sets the frameworks, the incentives to promote high-quality research and whether it supports the processes by which the findings of educational research find their way into appropriate measures in the national education policy. The examiners also analysed whether the R & D system in place and its connection to the education system support processes

that generate a learning environment. This also encompasses the learning environment in the educational system, notably teachers and the question of how they implement R & D in their daily teaching and how they themselves contribute to the creation of scientific knowledge. Scientific research in education is seen as a vital complement to other practical learning and innovation processes.

What Were the Main Findings?

Conceptualisation of an educational research and development system. The reviewers acknowledged the strategy of the English Government to apply a systemic approach to educational research and to make it the foundation for evidence-based policy in education. Educational research is seen in its broad sense that incorporates basic research as well as applied research and their interrelations. Regarding the research strategy and its coherence, the reviewers considered the developments in England as being ahead of most other OECD countries.

Balanced research portfolio. The reviewers considered the creation of the so-called 'dedicated research centres' as a promising way of fostering sustainable top-down research. The dedicated research centres allow the Government as the representative of the educational system to express the research needs of the users, and at the same time guarantee a maximum of academic freedom for the researchers that is necessary to promote the scientific quality of their work. On the other hand, there were concerns expressed that the current way of financing research through the universities does not fulfil expectations.

Accumulating and disseminating knowledge. The reviewers stressed many times that two problems haunt educational research. One is the lack of cumulative research (building upon existing knowledge) and the other a lack of quality control. The reviewers stated some promising initiatives in the field of both problem areas. Noteworthy are initiatives to increase the number of systematic reviews in educational research and in this context the creation of the EPPI-Centre (Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Coordinating Centre).

Capacity building. The reviewers found that the core problems of educational research in England (as in many other countries) lie in the field of capacity building. Two-thirds of the educational researchers in England are aged over 54 and educational research is not seen as an academic field that attracts the most able and motivated young students. Government policies that try to bring more younger people into educational research were analysed and also policies that try to improve the methodological skills of the active researchers. Some of them seem to be promising but the major problems are still unsolved. Although the reviewers found much progress, they recommended that the Government also upskill the qualifications of the main users of research: DfES

employees and teachers. This is necessary to guarantee that the users will be able to use high-quality research in their daily work and through their feedback inspire new and better research to be accomplished.

*Consequences for Other Countries and for
Research in Education in Europe in Particular*

The review on the educational research policy in England proved in the eye of the reviewers that a systemic and coherent strategy in the management of educational research is necessary to improve both the quantity and quality of educational research. In this context other OECD member countries should analyse their own educational research and development strategies. The reviewers were convinced that such analyses and comparisons would generate a great scope of learning opportunities, interactions and cooperation. Besides governmental action the research community itself – through the European Educational Research Association (EERA) or other international bodies – could complement this work through its own initiatives to benefit the development of educational research and its use.

Notes

- [1] The OECD has just released a publication on the two reviews that comprises the two examiners' reports as well as the national background papers (OECD/CERI, 2003). After the Hamburg Roundtable there have been additional reviews for Mexico and Denmark on the same topic.

Reference

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)/Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (2003) *New Challenges for Educational Research*. Paris: OECD.

EDWIN KEINER. Educational Research between Science and Policy

The OECD examiners' report on educational research and development in England (2002) is definitely not an issue restricted only to the governance of English educational research. It addresses educational research governance and policy, however, it will also have a significant impact on, and implies radical consequences for, educational research in Europe in the context of global adjustments, standardisation and value-driven comparability of educational research. In this context it is – looking back to the Roundtable – worth noting that written and oral comments presented by one of the examiners, Stefan Wolter, seem to fall apart. His assessments on educational research in Europe were very differentiated and reflected, and his suggestions regarding further perspectives and directions were very useful and worthy of consideration.

However, none of these comments appeared in the report. This indicates a split between formal, written discourse and more informal, oral discourse on educational research; a discourse split into 'hard' products of examiners' network discussions, and 'soft' interpretations by individual examiners, well informed about processes, conflicts and 'silent background knowledge' within the examiners' network. From an educational researcher's point of view, this split makes governance of educational research rather incalculable, and leaves educational researchers in a state of uncertainty about which side of the discourse to trust and which consequences to expect.

When looking at the kind of educational research addressed by the examiners' report, one finds several branches removed. There is no history of education, no philosophy, no epistemology or methodology (as a research subject, not only as an educational research training issue). And there is also no sociology of education – for example, the report twice refers to the relationship between education and social inequality, but does not see it explicitly as a matter of educational research. Thus, the report reflects attempts to steer broadly ramified educational research communication into the direction of politically desired and needed up-to-date research on education in the medium of organisation and funding.

The basically underlying assumption of the report is a linear transfer from educational research governance, educational research to educational practice, and back again. This is a 'romantic', but also, and more importantly, an unjustified and uninformed idea. The same idea formed the basis of the big educational reform era of the 1970s, and a lot of money was invested both in education and educational research, in psychology, economy and sociology of education. Meanwhile we know the results. The shape of educational systems in Europe changed, however, one of the main goals of these reforms – reduction in educational inequalities and improvement in equal educational opportunities – was not achieved. Neither politics nor research has been able to reduce 'persistent inequalities'. On the other hand, however, at present we know very much more about the societal and educational mechanisms and complexities of social reproduction, societal transformation, change and resistance than before, thanks to educational and social science research.

Thus, the renewed assumption of a tight linkage between educational research governance, educational research and educational practice seems to reproduce the same mistakes which were made 30 years ago.

Not only educational research, but also policy, is under pressure. Processes of 'marketisation' lead to an increasing demand for reliable information providing 'certainty' for structurally uncertain decisions and their consequences. 'Good decisions are informed decisions' (Ross & Mählck, 1990, p. 65), one of the great promises of modern concepts of rationality. In this context, the report attributes to educational research the task of providing useful and reliable information which, in close connection with educational planners, is intended to be used for political decisions to improve education. However, the assumed tight linkage between educational research governance,

educational research and educational practice is based on the implicit assumption that – reversing the quote – informed decisions are good decisions. Furthermore, there is also an assumption that the quality of decisions increases with the amount of good and ‘cumulative’ information available. The first assumption leads to an underestimation of the difference between information and scientific knowledge and the importance of variety and diversity of concepts, theories and research findings based on scholarly, theoretically and methodically framed knowledge. The second assumption leads to an underestimation of the basic function of politics, to make decisions according to democratic regulations under conditions of uncertainty, not instrumentalising educational research and research findings as a more or less arbitrary pool from which to draw useful information for legitimisation and relief strategies. Educational research is not an instrument for politically reducing complexity. Educational research provides the opposite: it enriches diverse perspectives and breaks with common assumptions and opinions and makes them relative, i.e. it increases knowledge complexity which, then, might be reduced by political decisions.

There is no doubt that educational research itself contributes to the above-mentioned problems. The broadly ramified and diverse educational research communication appears at the same time as a rather fragmented one, which is not only indicated by European Union declarations and programmes, but also by everyday experiences of educational researchers. Firstly, we find a ‘national fragmentation’ of educational research depending on national traditions and national educational policies. Not only different speeds and directions of educational research, but also different forms of knowledge primarily referring to national problems and challenges show this diversity. Thus, knowledge of education and learning seems to remain locked into the respective national educational discourses. Secondly, a ‘disciplinary fragmentation’ can be observed, which consists of different disciplinary cultures, cognitive textures and languages, often locked into traditions of both national research cultures and educational systems. Educational research is not only carried out in the frame of different disciplinary approaches – e.g. sociology, psychology, economy. These approaches also form communicative spaces or – metaphorically speaking – spaces of ‘scientific parochialism’ more or less separated from each other, using different concepts and criteria of methodological standard and scientific quality. Thirdly, we find a ‘theory-practice fragmentation’, about which politicians, professionals as well as researchers often complain. These complaints are based on different concepts, modes and structures of coupling or decoupling research and practice, on differences between educational research, its methodologically and epistemologically more or less solid and valid results, and its usefulness for educational governance and applicability to practical fields (Keiner, 2002). On the one hand, the traditional concept of a close relationship between theory and practice seems to be exceptionally resistant to acceptance, compared to everyday experience. On the other hand, the modern concept of distinction

between theory and practice as different forms of knowledge leads to a more complex problem conceptualisation, reduces possibilities for knowledge use and application, and forces (cost-intensive) organisational solutions of mediation, e.g. through networks, knowledge-transfer institutions and 'hybrid' organisations.

These fragmentations, however, are not only 'problematic'. They also mirror complex and fragile relationships of different interests, perspectives and forms of knowledge, embedded either in nations' and/or disciplines' histories or in different epistemological points of reference of knowledge and action, discipline and profession. They are characterised both by multifaceted relationships and disturbing interruptions. One major task of educational research is to recognise and remain aware of these complexities. The report, however, tends to politically reduce this scientific awareness to a policy advice function and, thus, reduces critical possibilities and necessities of research through attempts to politically merge incompatible cognitive textures. It tries to force a 'model of action', not a 'theory of knowledge', by defining the relationship between theory and practice as a practical-political, not as a theoretical, problem. This is indicated for example by the equivocal use of 'information' and 'knowledge' in the report.

I would state that the 'usefulness' of research in general and educational research in particular results from decoupling and distinguishing different ways of knowing and seeing, of different cognitive, theoretically and methodically framed textures. We first have to recognise the different forms of knowledge and then, in a second step, to make attempts to relate them – either theoretically through consistent relational concepts or practically, e.g. through networks. Otherwise the different fields of knowledge are unable to unfold their breaking strength and translation power (Bourdieu, 1998, pp. 18ff.), and, thus, their capacity of productively irritating each other. This is a precondition of innovation and reform within a society which describes itself as a 'knowledge society'.

Germany is not a good example of government-expected standardisation and standards of useful educational research. However, it is a good example of the 'knowledge problem'. Therefore I refer to some findings on educational research performance based on data drawn from assessments of university disciplines which aim at ranking the disciplines according to 'quality' indicators. These assessments are carried out by the Centre for Higher Education Development; the respective data were used as sources for an analysis of educational research (see Hornbostel & Keiner, 2002).

Publication productivity. About 80% of professors of education reported at least one publication, mainly articles in scholarly journals, between 1997 and 1999. However, about 25% also reported non-scientific publications, for example didactic material and instructions. When matching these self-reports with entries in the main German educational database (*CD-Bildung*), we found a significantly lower amount of publications. We do not believe the publication productivity was overestimated, but we assume that a huge amount of

publications remain invisible because they do not meet the criteria or range of database collection regulations. However, the database also contains 16% of its entries classified as non-scientific, didactic material. On the one hand, this points to the problem of quality, selectivity and content of information tools. On the other hand, these findings indicate a rather unclear demarcation of types of educational knowledge, which makes it relatively easy to use this knowledge (including educational research knowledge) as a means to political ends.

Research funding. According to acquisition of research funding, educational research is already rather engaged in being 'useful'. In contrast to natural sciences and jurisprudence, for example, educational researchers address a relatively high number of applications to government institutions for research funding, i.e. the Federal Government or the German 'Länder'.

Relation between research funding and publications. However, the correlation between the amount of external funding per professor and the amount of publications per professor (weighted according to the journals' recognition within the scientific community) is near zero (Pearson's Correlation = 0.045; $p = 0.795$). That means that many of the funded research results seem to be written for educational administration and government, only to be filed away. From a policy standpoint, one could take the view that this knowledge remains invisible as an indicator of the 'usefulness' of educational research knowledge.

From a scientific standpoint, however, these findings indicate a high propensity of educational research to include various forms of knowledge, which makes definition and assessment of the 'quality' of educational research difficult. Thus, a more active and constructive contribution by educational research in the further development of standardised, scientifically justified, but also politically acceptable, indicators is required. In addition, it is necessary to put the questions of 'usefulness' and 'quality' into a broader context. From an historical point of view one could argue that psychology, sociology and other social sciences and humanities professionalised their research fields, and standardised and 'normalised' their definition of commonly accepted 'sound research', whereas the sciences of education and educational research took over the 'rest', i.e. research and reflection on more or less unsolvable problems. Thus, two things are to be done: firstly, to meet the methodological and theoretical standards commonly shared in social sciences and humanities. And, secondly, to confront them with the 'rest' in the form of challenging questions, based on common standards in the mode of division of work, on recognition of knowledge distinctions and efforts to theoretically relate these distinctions, and on attempts to model and interpret complexity and variety as a resource, not as a deficiency. This is all – no more and no less – a necessary and 'useful' precondition of politically justified decisions. And, in this respect, the OECD examiners' report on educational research and development in England is both a strong and a weak document. The only way in which we, as educational researchers, can reflect upon this report is the one we are experts at: analysis, research and critique.

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DONATELLA PALOMBA. Examining Educational Research: the OECD Report on England

First of all, I would like to thank EERA, and Professor Martin Lawn personally, for the invitation to participate in the present debate on a theme of great topical interest.

Let me very briefly summarise what I understood to be the purpose and the main points of discussion in the Roundtable as they were expressed in the presentation, and to which I shall try to respond.

'The purpose of the Roundtable is to use the OECD *Report on Educational Research and Development in England* to ask questions about the direction of educational research within the European Educational Research Space.' This stems from 'a strong interest within EERA about the changing nature of educational research and the collection of comparative data about performance in research' as well as from the discussions that have been going on for some time within EERA 'about the purpose and features of a European educational research observatory'.

The key focus of the report being 'on the relation between educational improvement and "effective" research, and how knowledge about educational improvement could be applied to practice', if the report's approach will be followed, it is probable that 'educational research will be focused more on research capacity building and evidence-based practice, for the purpose of delivering educational improvements'.

Therefore, it is understood that the focus of the debate will be not so much on the OECD report on England as such, but on the methodological-political-scientific criteria on which it is based, and the consequent possible advisability of applying in a more extensive way the approach that has been adopted, in the 'reasonable assumption' that it could be a model for future research audits.

In this framework we are supposed to offer our comments on the present and future of educational research. My comments will be made from three

main viewpoints – strictly connected – corresponding to the three ‘capacities’, so to speak, in which I find myself when confronted with the theme we are examining. I shall speak as a comparativist, as an educationalist, and as a person who, being a university teacher, is involved in an educational process, irrespective of the subject taught or the research field followed.

From all three standpoints there are elements of interest and elements of criticism regarding the report. A comprehensive reflection would certainly be worthwhile: however, in this limited time, I will try to underline at least some points which seem relevant to me.

Undoubtedly, the importance of the ‘European Educational Research Space’ can hardly be overestimated. Besides the well-known need for a more competitive ‘knowledge society’ on a world level, the notion of research itself cannot survive without wide-ranging and intense interaction, especially in an area such as Europe that represents a cultural and scientific space of exceptional richness.

Fragmentariness and, most of all, reciprocal unawareness and lack of cooperation are obviously pernicious. Very aptly, the report points out that, in the general effort to improve the accumulation and dissemination of knowledge, a specific aspect to be addressed is that, in education, ‘international research is often not taken into account’ (para. 47). I will come back to this later on.

However, some doubts can arise when considering the notion of research underlying the analysis which is carried out, and particularly the respective weight and the reciprocal relation between ‘pure’ and ‘applied’ research.

As a comparativist, I work in a field where the debate about the respective places of the theoretical and the ‘meliorist’ aim of research, with specific reference to educational systems, has always been particularly lively. This debate, that can be traced back to the historical origins of the discipline itself, runs the length of the nineteenth century, comes up again in the twentieth, and is at its most topical today.

It can be said that comparative research in education was born with a marked orientation towards practical purposes, but it soon had to confront all the contradictions and the methodological difficulties which stem from this approach, and it has been labouring in a never-ending search for identity. In this search, it is not dissimilar from other kinds of educational studies which struggle to clarify their place within the scientific system. But in comparative research there is an additional complexity linked to the close connection with the international dimension – the same which leads us today to confront the question of comparative research about research itself. As has been said by one of the most distinguished scholars in the field, Wolfgang Mitter, there is always a ‘tension between the epistemological goal, given by the theoretical quality of our discipline, and its policy-orientation with special regard to international commitment’ (1988, p. 94). This tension – and this dilemma – affect a number of aspects – methodology, object of study, the discipline itself of comparative education as a study subject in the different curricula that are offered in

universities; and of course they affect the positions of the researchers, between 'self-constraint to scientific analysis and engagement in political decision making' (p. 94).

Is Comparative Education an educational or, in a wider context, social science whose legitimation is rooted in its contribution to exploring, analysing, explaining and appraising the field of education within its neighbouring areas? Or is Comparative Education primarily legitimised by its engagement in improving educational practice and advising political decision-making? (Mitter, 1988, p. 94)

This is especially important when we talk not only about comparative research, but about comparison of educational research policies and their effectiveness.

As said earlier, a similar problem can be found in most fields of educational studies, linked with the question of whether a scientific knowledge of education is possible or not, and more specifically if a 'science of education' can exist – as Dewey and Durkheim maintained – or whether we should talk of 'sciences of education' in the plural, or whether the claim should be abandoned, and education should be engaged in achieving practical results with little or no claim to theoretical knowledge.

The existence itself of this long-standing debate shows that the question is not clear-cut, and that it is perfectly legitimate to take one position or another. Therefore, what is surprising in the report is not so much the clear bias – of the examiners as well as of the policy makers – for research producing 'usable knowledge'; after all, we are dealing with government research policy and investments, and concern about effectiveness and a 'return' is not only acceptable but creditable. What leaves me uneasy are some implicit assumptions that can be detected about the nature of educational research and of education itself – namely, the assumption that the status of 'discipline' should not be recognised in education.

'The faculty of Schools of Education often try to emulate their colleagues in the discipline faculties. ... [P]restigious journals in education ... often attempt to emulate discipline-based journals' (para. 40). The implicit consequence of this assumption is that educational research should not be oriented to investigating the theoretical basis of education, but rather to understanding and solving practical problems. It is interesting to note that the reverse criticism is made by the report to some aspects of the present situation: 'in HEFCE's [Higher Education Funding Council for England] distribution of research funds for education, it is assumed that education is a discipline, and the funds are expected to be used for the development of theory and fundamental laws and relationships ... rather than for developing a basis for understanding and solving problems of practice' (para. 32).

Now, it is clear that government funding will try to orient research to produce results that are useful for solving the many problems that can be found in education today. But this does not mean that education should be denied the

status of a discipline, with the right – and the duty – to search for fundamental laws and development of theory.

More generally, it should be obvious that the claim to exclusivity of one or the other kind of research does not make a lot of sense. However, from an educationalist's point of view, this is still not the real problem. The crux of the matter is not so much in contrasting or balancing 'pure' versus 'applied' research but whether and to what extent research can and should be autonomous in defining its own priorities, *both* at its fundamental and applied level. From this answer follows the role of the different social agencies in expressing demands on educationalists.

The problem is apparent in the report when, while discussing "blue sky" research' (para. 19), two possible definitions are indicated: (a) theoretical research with little obvious or immediate practical application for education, (b) investigation that challenges the status quo or does not relate to current policy. Even the present funding process – accused of favouring 'academic-style' research – is said to be less effective in sustaining the (b) type. A fortiori, stronger promotion of 'use-inspired basic research' (para. 21) can result in a further worsening of the conditions for really challenging, innovative thinking about education – and this, in the long run, is not necessarily the best situation for producing 'useful knowledge'.

Actually, this is closely related to the basic question of the nature of education.

Right at the beginning of the report, the review team praises the 'refreshing lack of ideology' found in the discussions of research during the interviews they conducted. Personally, I can easily understand and even share this sense of relief. Coming from a country where the ideological debate is often so strong and so heated on every subject as to virtually prevent any actual implementation of whatever measure is proposed, I can appreciate the 'refreshing' quality of its absence. Unfortunately, on the other hand we cannot but acknowledge that education is an ideological issue, and trying to bypass this feature is not really useful for its quality. Going back to the question of defining priorities, it must fully be taken into account that only if educational research is autonomous can it make a real contribution to 'quality' and 'improvement', first of all by helping to define what 'quality' means, and therefore according to what standards 'improvement' or 'worsening' should be evaluated.

It would be more than naive, perfectly unrealistic, to assume that research which needs substantial funding could be absolutely unconditional; but the fixing of balances and counterbalances in the safeguard of freedom – freedom in defining research priorities as well as in conducting the research itself, is one of the necessary premises for promoting the production of knowledge that in the long run proves really useful.

Finally, I would like to make a comment from a third point of view, the perspective of a person who, as a university teacher, has for many years been engaged in the educational dynamics as such, and in all the professional problems that ensue from it.

From this perspective, I find some convincing features in the report, specifically where it stresses the importance of involving school teachers in the research activity, and recommends 'programmes promoting capacity building in research for teachers'. Besides enabling the continuation of classroom-based research, this is something that by itself enhances the quality of teaching and the quality of education, involving the actors in real educational interactions in a research dynamipara. Moreover, it is true that practitioners with research experience are needed in order to have an impact on research findings in the classroom (para. 68); but the positive impact of bringing together researchers and teachers goes further: the link back to research is also there, and it is relevant. Actually, research in education must have a knowledge of education in its reality, of the nature of educational interaction in all its aspects, in order to permit a valuable theorisation, otherwise the risk is to be unduly influenced by 'ideology' in its most questionable meaning. The method of research is productive for the practitioner as well as for the theoretician – and the latter needs to have *real first-hand knowledge* about the matter of his reflection.

A final note, which reverts to the crucial question of research in the international context, and to the purpose of the Roundtable, is to ask questions about the direction of educational research within the European Educational Research Space. Reaffirming the absolute necessity of dissemination, given that 'research itself suffers if new research does not systematically take account of and build upon the findings of earlier studies', the report states that a specific aspect of research in education is that international research is often not taken into account (para. 47).

Undoubtedly, for the dissemination of the findings of educational studies there is an additional difficulty in the international context, related not only to the circulation of information but also, and even more, to a correct analysis and interpretation of results, which need to be accurately contextualised if serious misunderstandings are to be avoided.

Therefore, the development of specific comparative skills, at least on the interpretative side, should probably be one of the priorities of methodological training for educational researchers, if a real accumulation of knowledge is to be pursued.

For Europe, particularly, on the one hand it is important to have research conducted by international teams, but it is perhaps even more important for all researchers to be able to understand and interpret the results of research obtained in different contexts which all belong to the European Space but each with specific features. Both elements are essential for advancing European research. The first kind of research needs considerable investment – and is the type which is currently funded by the European Union. But real accumulation will not be possible until the second kind of skill is much more widespread. This of course needs to be supported by specific tools, reinforcing reciprocal communication between scholars and fostering the 'comparative awareness' in all educational fields. This could be – and actually is, I trust – a common point on the agendas of associations such as EERA itself and CESE (Comparative

Education Society in Europe), each with its own characteristics but with a common goal to improve the quality of educational research.

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SVERKER LINDBLAD. On the OECD Review of Educational R & D in England

The OECD reviewed the educational research and development (R & D) system in England with a specific focus on the production of knowledge that is usable to improve policy and practice. In this text I will examine their review. I ask four questions: 1. what problems are constructed in the OECD review? 2. what knowledge is produced? 3. from what position? and 4. with what tools? Based on this examination I will discuss the review in relation to (a) the use of such reviews in R & D policy making, and (b) the location of the OECD review in tensions within the field of educational research.

Conducting the Review

The review was carried out with the following purpose:

to review the extent to which educational R&D system within a country is functioning as an effective means for creating, collating and distributing the knowledge on which practitioners and policy can draw ... Thus, the report may be viewed as an evaluation of the effectiveness of England's R&D system in developing and applying usable knowledge to improve the quality of educational practice and policy. (p. 6)

In their review of recent reports on educational R & D in England, some interesting notions are presented. It is astonishing to read that other reviews concluded that educational research was too theoretical and too concerned with being published in high-quality journals, almost as in contradiction to being useful for the actors in education systems. Thus, it seems that criteria of relevance of research are used as being in opposition to criteria of scientific quality. Another, but similar, point is made that the connections among research, policy and practice were weak and that research followed rather than took a lead in policy issues (p. 9). The reviewers turn to other countries – to the initiation of standard-based reforms and to the current notions of evidence-based policy making in the USA (p. 13). The reviewers state that other nations face the same problems as those that are faced in England.

(Re)Conceptualisation of the R & D Problem

In order to obtain a better conception of this problem, the reviewers decided to translate it into a knowledge management problem, referring to OECD texts (OECD, 2000, 2002). They criticise linear R & D views (p. 15) and integrate categories of interpretation and dissemination as well as policy and practice into the R & D model.

Based on this reconceptualisation, the reviewers put forward four dimensions that structure their report:

- balance in the nature of research;
- quality and availability;
- capacity;
- relationship of the research to school improvement and reform.

How then to deal with these dimensions and the questions that emanate from them? The review team is described as bringing

a variety of perspectives and experiences regarding educational R&D and national policies. Each of the reviewers has been actively involved in OECD activities for decades and all have served in positions in their nations' governments.

Thus, it is a team of players where each has specific competencies and networks that are of potential use in the review. Their report was based on the following information:

A 'background report' was submitted to the OECD by the Department for Education and Skills (CERI/CD(2002)11). A five-day visit was carried out with interviews in London plus a one-day visit to Newcastle. Besides that we can read in the report that the reviewers were referring to other reviews and recent debates on education R & D in England. Here, the reviewers refer to Hargreaves (1996), Hillage et al (1998) and Edwards (2000).

Implications Found in the Review

The reviewers define a need to conduct research that is basic as well as useful. Based on this definition, they discuss different strategies to carry out such research in terms of centres, studies and networks of researchers and practices. Quality and availability of research is dealt with in terms of accumulation and dissemination of research. Capacity building among researchers, teachers and policy makers is presented and discussed in relation to methodologies and the assumption that evidence-based research contributes to producing high-quality research. The reviewers put forward a demand to recruit young educational researchers with stronger methodological training – meaning, for example, more training in well-designed experimental evaluation. To this is added capacity building for evidence-based practice by teachers. Finally, different ways to improve education are presented.

Based on these considerations the reviewers present a number of recommendations in the different dimensions presented above. This is underlined by the emphasis given to the R & D system to improve education quality and practice.

Reviewing the Review

The review of education R & D in England is a fascinating and highly important piece of work. It presents itself in an almost inductive way. The R & D system in England was examined and discussed as an empirical study. I was concerned that this examination was based on a background report, the reading of some other texts plus a five-day visit to England. To me it was not possible to conduct a study of an R & D system by means of such evidence alone. The empirical foundations were far too weak and too little informed by recent discussions on knowledge production and practice. This was illustrated by the superficial way that research methodologies were debated as well as the way that the problems of cumulativeness of research in different paradigms and disciplines were neglected (see e.g. Wagner & Wittrock, 1993).

However, when looking closer at the review, an alternative understanding appeared. The OECD review was not a story of an inductive study. Instead, it was a story about changing the premises of education R & D, about the making of a new system of R & D. The review as such is part and parcel of a regulator of such a new system, where collaboration between different actors is important as well as the integration of users into making the new system. The argument in the review is based on a mix of critical experiences from work with education reforms and innovations, with general statements of new social relationships in the production and use of knowledge. Stated otherwise, it is a mix of 'what we have learned' and 'what we hope for the future' by trying to control this future.

In summary, I think the review is an interesting example of the establishment of new networking in education where the R & D system is taking on a more integrated position, a position that puts demands on it to be more useful and more evidence based. The universities and their education departments are partly considered to be obstacles in the making of such a new R & D system, a system of vital importance in developing improved, evidence-based schooling and education.

Read as a story of the making of a new R & D system, the OECD review fits well in with current research on changing universities and policies of knowledge production (see e.g. Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Nowotny et al, 2001).

However, to me it is still a problem that the review report is dealing with basic research and development problems in a somewhat superficial way. The review reproduces old problems in the new education R & D system. Such old problems concern the construction of research objects in relation to different knowledge interests, conflicting conceptions of relevance among different users

of research, as well as a misrecognition of social relations that are the basis of an R & D system in education.

To conclude, the OECD report is important as a way of setting the agenda for the current debates on educational research and of implementing a new system for educational research and development. From the research community we need to follow this agenda setting and implementation carefully and to view critically such reviews as attempts to make the future a specific future.

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