

VU Research Portal

Brave research as more than just professional development

Swennen, Anja

published in

Professional Development in Education
2018

DOI (link to publisher)

[10.1080/19415257.2018.1429115](https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2018.1429115)

document version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

document license

Article 25fa Dutch Copyright Act

[Link to publication in VU Research Portal](#)

citation for published version (APA)

Swennen, A. (2018). Brave research as more than just professional development. *Professional Development in Education*, 44(2), 141-144. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2018.1429115>

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

E-mail address:

vuresearchportal.ub@vu.nl



Brave research as more than just professional development

Anja Swennen

To cite this article: Anja Swennen (2018) Brave research as more than just professional development, *Professional Development in Education*, 44:2, 141-144, DOI: [10.1080/19415257.2018.1429115](https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2018.1429115)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2018.1429115>



Published online: 09 Feb 2018.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 1269



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Brave research as more than just professional development

In my last editorial (See volume 2017, issue 2) I expressed my dissatisfaction with professional development activities that seem to focus more on entertaining participants than on supporting them to improve their own practice. In this journal, practitioner and researchers alike discuss various models and experiences with professional activities that aim to increase the, relative, autonomy of teachers (Jones, 2018) and to improve the practice in classrooms that contributes to the transformation of education (Kennedy, 2005). One such method that supports both autonomy and transformation is practitioner research. Increasingly over the last two decades, the results of practitioner research have not only improved practice, but have also given educators the opportunity to share their research in professional and academic journals.

Following my comments, and those of some of my colleagues, about the professional development activities in my own institution, our responsible manager supported the introduction of a practitioner research programme. After wide deliberations it was decided to put in place a project that was named “Scholarly Activities” in which all team members participate. The “Scholarly Activities” are a form of “Inquiry as a Stance” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) and consist of a variety of activities such as reading research on a specific topic, doing practice-based research or writing a paper for a professional journal. Colleagues can choose their own theme, work individually or in groups and participate in one or more activities. Each individual or group develops their own plan and every two or three months the team meets to discuss progress.

The aim of the project is first and foremost to improve our own work with university staff, but also to build a community of scholarly staff developers and to develop an identity of staff as practitioner researchers. Some team members (some more, some less) are sceptic about this project, which is fine with me; some are very happy as their (existing) practice-based research activities are now much more visible, while others are willing to give it a try. All team members have undertaken activities and report new insights in the themes of their choice, reflect on their own practice. Above all, comments indicate that they enjoy learning from each other. This type of professional learning programme is not new and is becoming more common in schools and Teacher Education departments, but there is a sense of irony that universities (deemed to be bastions of learning) have been slow to do what we have been advising others to do for a number of years (as reflected in a number of articles published by this journal).

The project seems to be going well; that is to say... as long as we remain in our assigned place in the world that is called “the university”. Our institution belongs to the Department of Behaviour and Movement Sciences. As in many universities which bring together scholars from different research cultures, the dominant group of researchers believe that measurement is the key to knowledge. Most of them do not value practitioner research as “real research” and sometimes even openly show dismay of research such as self-study or action research and other forms of practitioner research. As one professor of a different university department said: “It is fine to do this kind of research as long as you have no pretensions.” I understand his point, as academic researchers need to publish in high stake journals and receive a high score on Science Direct or at least Google Scholar to be able to receive funding, but this is not an aim all practitioner researchers will be able to reach or even want to reach. Contractually, some have a requirement to publish; others don't. However, academic values should not lead to the exclusion of important and useful research of practitioners. Practitioner research has pretensions that more positivist academic research may not be able to fulfil, such as the pretention to learn about our own work as teachers and advisors and the pretention to improve our work. It would

be very interesting to see academic researchers incorporating these principles in their research. After all, most of them are university teachers.

To give practitioner research the place it deserves, next to all other kinds of educational research, I am now developing the concept of brave research in my institution. The word “brave” in this context is taken from an article written by Arao and Clemens (2013) called “From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces” which deals with new ways of thinking about diversity. I am convinced that more diversity in educational research is beneficial to both researchers and educators, and for this to happen academic researchers as well as practitioner researchers need to be brave.

Academic researchers need to be brave to apply for funding in which practitioners are included as full partners, as funding bodies tend to fund traditional research by well-known professors. I know of two recent cases when the names of teacher educators were excluded from an application as this was perceived to give a lower chance of success. Governments and other funding bodies need to be brave and explicitly fund research that involves a diversity of researchers and research themes.

Also, teachers, teacher educators and those responsible for leading staff development need to be brave as they learn to take themselves seriously as “practitioner researchers”. They need to improve the way they present their research and talk about it. No more: *“I have done a small scale research project. Not so important. Just for myself. I cannot generalize the results, but I hope you like it anyway. It is just about my own teaching. Perhaps not real research, but I liked doing it.”* Practitioners need to gain confidence about the value of their own research and develop a strong identity as practitioner researchers (Swennen & Geerdink, 2017).

As a first step, practitioners and academic researchers have to accept each other’s research as a valuable contribution to understanding and improving various aspects of education. But acceptance is not enough as it could lead to co-existence of researchers each in their own world with their own culture and language without real understanding and appreciation, let alone integration. To fully understand a diversity of cultures and languages of educational research it is not possible to just learn *about* the various research traditions. In my ideal world academic researchers as well as practitioner researchers collaborate as equal partners in projects that have common goals, such as high academic standards, improvement of their own work as (university) teachers *and* contribute to the knowledge and autonomy of educators and the transformation of education.

Of course, this assumes that the quality of practitioner research is good and that the principles of validity and integrity apply. Practitioners involved in research must therefore engage in their own professional learning to enable this and therein lies another agenda: to identify the most appropriate forms of learning needed for practitioner researchers to underpin this.

The first article in this issue written by Emily Perry and Mark Boylan and is titled *developing the developers: supporting and researching the learning of professional development facilitators*. It deals with the professional development needs of professional development facilitators. The comment that there are fewer studies about the professional development of practitioners who facilitate professional development seems an understatement. This is one of the very few studies on professional development facilitators and the authors necessarily rely on literature about teacher educators as there is limited research about professional development facilitators themselves. The article reports on a pilot programme for professional development facilitators rooted in a cycle of action research. It is informed by a categorisation of professional knowledge and skills of facilitators, in the “developing the developers” programme. Professional development facilitators enquired collaboratively into their practice using video observation and peer review and engaged with theories of professional learning. The authors state that the participants gained insights into their practice to develop it further and to identify their learning needs and that the theoretical frameworks developed may support the design and evaluation of similar programmes.

The second article has a different theme, *A research-informed, school-based professional development workshop programme to promote dialogic teaching with interactive technologies*. Sara Hennessy, Tatjana Dragovic and Paul Warwick wanted their workshop to be research informed and school-based. Their workshop aimed to develop a dialogic approach to teaching and learning mediated through more

interactive uses of the interactive whiteboard through a model of active participation of students, collaborative knowledge building, learning through inquiry and evaluating ideas. The workshops were co-developed and conducted with an “ambassador” within each of the school clusters. Findings strongly support the potential of this ambassador-led workshop model to involve teachers in developing their understandings of classroom dialogue and devising new approaches to support it. The research additionally confirms the potential of the interactive whiteboard as a tool to support dialogic teaching.

Aoibhinn Ni Shuilleabhaina and Aidan Seeryb report on a qualitative case study in their article with the title *Enacting curriculum reform through lesson study: a case study of mathematics teacher learning* in the Republic of Ireland. The research investigated how teachers’ pedagogical practices and beliefs on student learning, specifically related to a revised curriculum, were impacted as a result of their participation in lesson study. Analysis of the data suggests that due to their collaborative planning, teaching, observation and reflection of research lessons, teachers began to incorporate and develop new pedagogical practices both inside and outside lesson study. This study suggests further that in the introduction of centralised curriculum reform, lesson study can act as a powerful model of professional development which can encourage the introduction of new pedagogical practices.

Emily Howell, Sarah Hunt-Barron, Rebecca Kaminski and Rachel Sanders from the US contribute an article with the title *Teaching argumentative writing to teachers and students: effects of professional development*. The article discusses professional development for English language arts teachers focused on improving the teaching of argument writing. They used a multiple-case study design which examined a two-year professional development program in which two rural districts in the USA received at least 90 hours of professional development. The researchers interviewed, surveyed and observed both a high-adopting teacher and a low-adopting teacher from each case. The data from these high-adopting and low-adopting teachers serve as the embedded units of analysis. The researchers found that teachers did adopt and adapt the professional development, as seen in their increased time spent on writing and survey data indicating their adoption of strategy instruction. Student outcomes also showed a positive impact because student writing sample scores increased after the professional development. The findings from both of the overall cases and the embedded units led the researchers to five discussion points regarding the adoption of professional development.

In *We are all talking: a whole-school approach to professional development for teachers of English learners* by Lauren M. Shea, Judith Haymore Sandholtz and Therese B. Shanahan, the authors investigated the impact of a professional development program that included two distinct components: strategies for infusing student talk into grade-level lessons in science and mathematics, and school-level learning communities focused on readings and discussions of student-talk research. This article reports the program’s impact on longitudinal school level outcomes in a high-minority, low-socioeconomic school district in the United States. Based on linear regressions that cluster standard errors at the school level, the findings show greater increases in Test scores for English learners (and all students) in participating schools than in non-participating schools. The results suggest that professional development which integrates language with content and focuses on school-level collaboration is a potential model for addressing needs of English learners.

The Australian team of authors, Sandy Schuck, Peter Aubusson, John Buchanan, Meera Varadharajan and Paul F. Burke acknowledge the attention that is given for many decades to the support of beginning teachers, hence the title of their article *The experiences of early career teachers: new initiatives and old problems*. They mention that “numerous initiatives have been implemented”, but a lot of work still has to be done. In this article they investigate the experiences of early career teachers in New South Wales, Australia, at a time when their employing authority mandated the provision of mentors and a reduction in face-to-face teaching for early career teachers. It emerged that many of the issues of the early years that have caused problems for early career teachers remain intractable or at least unresolved for some. The research indicates that despite support that has been mandated by some employers, we cannot be complacent about the transition of early career teachers into the profession. There remains a need to address the elements of school environments that impact on early career teachers’ experiences.

The topic of the article of Annemarieke Hoekstra, Jeff Kuntz and Paul Newton, is receiving increased attention. The report on a study named *Professional learning of instructors in vocational and professional education*. The article presents insights from a study into instructor professional learning in vocational and professional education in Canada. While most studies on instructor learning focus on learning through formal professional development programmes, this study specifically focusses on professional learning as it happens in day-to-day practice. The analysis shows that instructor learning is mainly focused on developing pedagogical content knowledge. The authors argue that educational leaders within institutions for vocational and professional education should consider encouraging professional development models that include collegial dialogue, such as mentoring and communities of practice, as well as the implementation and enactment of professional learning plans.

The purpose of the study from Takahiro Satoa and Justin Haegele was to investigate *Physical educators' engagement in online adapted physical education graduate professional development*. The program includes two online courses (Introduction of adapted physical education and Practicum in adapted physical education). The authors found four interrelated themes emerged from the physical education teachers' narratives: interactions with an with their professor while enrolled in online adapted physical education graduate courses; peer interaction in online adapted physical education practicum courses; assessment practices with peers; and sharing through online discussion. This study recommends that online course instructors may consider changing their instructional style (pedagogical orientation) to problem-solving learning styles (andragogy orientation) that enhance teachers' engagement in online learning.

The last article is from three Dutch researchers, Antoine van den Bogaart, Hans Hummel and Paul Kirschner and it titled *Explicating development of personal professional theories from higher vocational education to beginning a professional career through computer-supported drawing of concept maps*. This article explores how personal professional theories develop. The personal professional theory development of nine junior accountants and nine novice teachers was monitored by repeated measurements over a period of 1.5 years, from the last year of vocational education until the second year of their professional careers. Computer-supported construction of personal professional theory concept maps was used at three moments to test hypotheses derived from theories on expertise development. It could be concluded that on average personal professional theories became more complex. The personal professional theories of teachers also became richer, but the generality of personal professional theories did not significantly increase. Appearance and disappearance of concepts and changes in their importance were observed and appeared dependent on the professional environment of the participants. The findings indicate that personal professional theory development is an important manifestation of expertise development which could be used to support the professional development of students and beginning workers; and the concept map method can be used to reveal this development.

References

- Arao, B. and Clemens, K., 2013. From safe spaces to brave spaces: A new way to frame dialogue around diversity and social justice. In: L. Landreman, ed. *The Art of Effective Facilitation: Reflections from Social Justice Educators*. Sterling: Stylus Publishers, 135–150.
- Cochran-Smith, M. and Lytle, M., 2009. *Inquiry as Stance: Practitioner Research in the Next Generation*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Jones, K., 2018. Intervention and resource provision: crucial elements in professional learning. *Professional Development in Education*, 44 (1), 1–4.
- Kennedy, A., 2005. Models of Continuing Professional Development: a framework for analysis. *Journal of In-Service Education*, 31 (2), 235–250. doi:10.1080/13674580500200277.
- Swennen, A., Geerdink, G. and Volman, M., 2017. Developing a researcher identity as teacher educator. In: P. Boyd and A. Szplit, eds. *Teachers and teacher educators learning through inquiry: Internal perspectives*. Prague: Jan Kochanowski University, 143–167 <https://atee1.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Teachers-and-teacher-educators-learning-through-inquiry-international-perspectives.pdf>.