Research in Lifelong Learning in the UK - an English case study

Learning and Skills Research Network

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The overall pattern of research into practice within Further Eduction (FE) in particular and the Learning and Skills sector in general is patchy, uncoordinated and often not disseminated (Hillier and Thompson, 2005:1)

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Office for Standards in Education

Institute for Learning

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Research in the lifelong learning sector
- **Economic and Social Science Research Council (ESRC) – 2012, 62 applications in education, 2 projects, 40% refereed as outstanding**
- **Nuffield**
- **British Education Research Association (BERA)**
- **Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS)**
- **National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education (NIACE)**
- **Awarding bodies – City and Guilds Centre for Skills Development, Edexcel**

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If you inhabit the desert that is most FE, this is a good place to start

Critical practitioner research, whilst providing a good opportunity for professional learning and development, is however sometimes difficult to achieve as what is learned and the status of practitioner knowledge is often questioned or disregarded.

Research-practice networks focus on aligning research with practice, generating research questions from practice and applying research insights to practice.
(Appleby and Hillier, 2012:3)

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The Learning and Skills Research

Decision to be membership network

No formal governance structure or membership fee

Creation of core values and principles

Liaison between Higher Education (HE) and Further Education (FE)

Later inclusion of Adult and Community Learning (ACL) and Workbased learning (WBL)

Local champions supported by regional development directors of Learning and Skills Development Agency (Hillier and Morris, 2010)

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Early beginnings

College Research offers a new way of communicating about research to suit a fresh and modern sector. Its aim is to enable people engaged in systematic inquiry into FE to communicate with one another and to present their findings in a way that is accessible to a wide readership. The challenge for researchers is to find a language that speaks to decision-makers; the challenge for decision-makers is to take time to absorb the findings of research. If we achieve this in FE we will have broken new ground (Morris, 1997:3)

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The Learning and Skills Research Network has continued its existence for the past twelve years because of its independence, its desire to foster collaboration between diverse partners and because it drew participation from people who were 'dipping their toe' in the water, or who had begun their professional lives in one sector and having moved to the academic, research dominated world of HE, continued to work with practitioners in the Learning and Skills Sector and indeed, hold a strong allegiance to that sector.

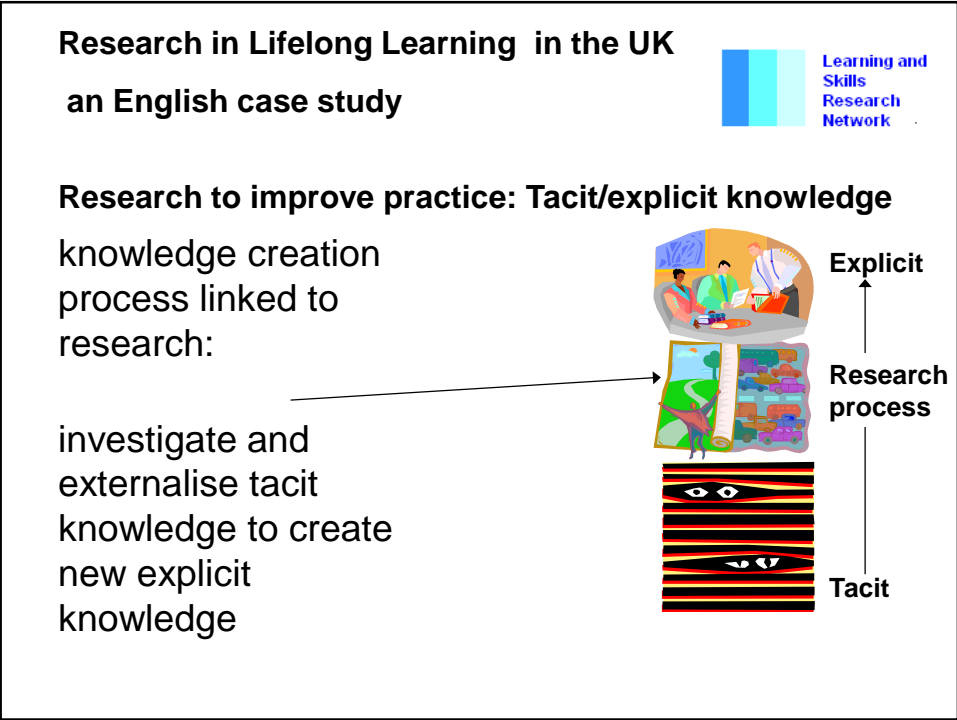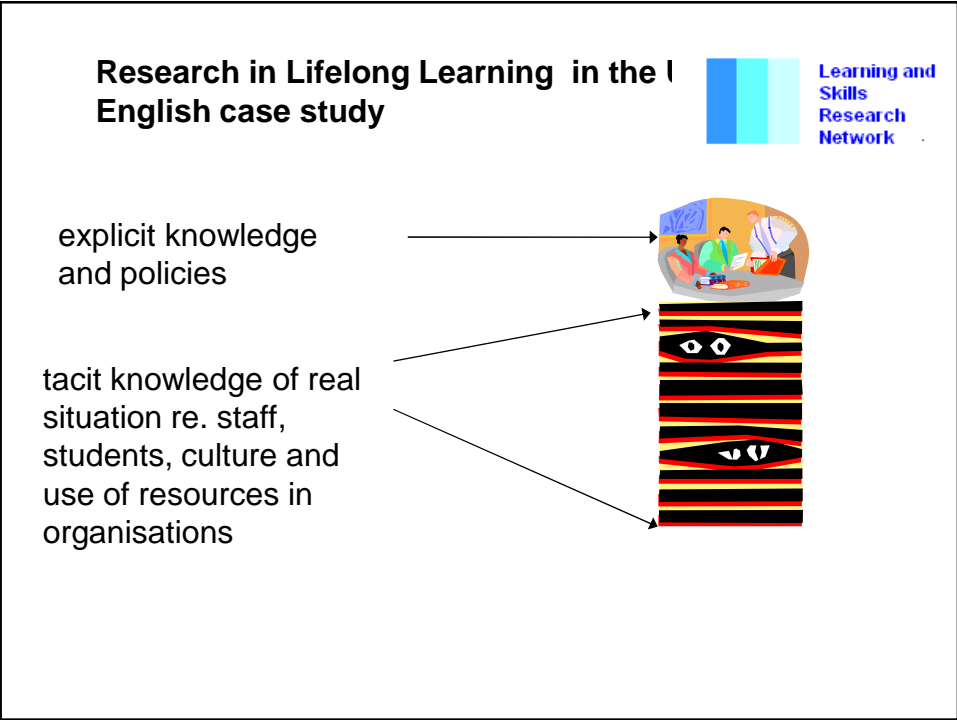**Research in Lifelong Learning in the UK - an English case study**

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It has left a range of footprints since it was first created
•**The College Research and Learning and Skills Research Journal**
•**A book of practitioner papers which won the best paper awards at the annual conference**
•**Reports of regional projects**
•**Websites containing practitioner papers**
•**Trails of influence on other practitioner research developments** (Hillier, 2008)

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- **Reflective practice**
- **Tacit knowledge**
- **Action research**
- **A strategy for research**

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explicit knowledge and policies

tacit knowledge of real situation re. staff, students, culture and use of resources in organisations

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Research to improve practice: Tacit/explicit knowledge

knowledge creation process linked to research:

investigate and externalise tacit knowledge to create new explicit knowledge

Explicit

Research process

Tacit

Research in Lifelong Learning
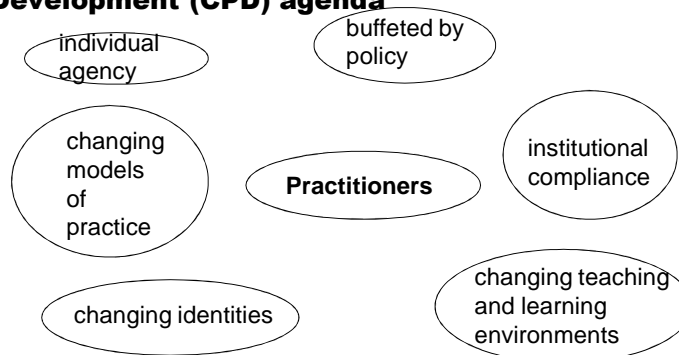## UK - an English case study

This kind of research:

- aims to enable people to improve their own practice, not have improvements done to them.
- is self-critical, located in an approach aiming to develop practice through systematic inquiry and learning.
- is inherently bound up with reflective practice, in which a group of colleagues may challenge the 'taken for granted' and try to create a rationale for their practice.

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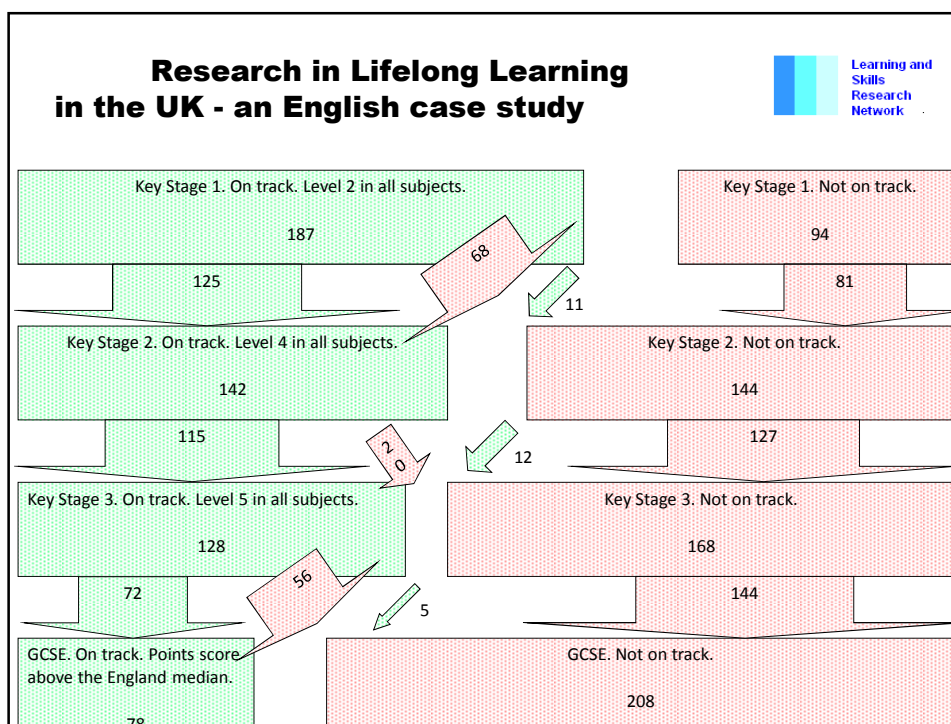**Putting research into the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) agenda**

individual agency

buffeted by policy

changing models of practice

Practitioners

institutional compliance

changing identities

changing teaching and learning environments

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CPD needs to:

- foster creative exploration and experimentation which will foster professional knowledge
- provide autonomy and control and re-appropriate definitions of excellence
- help transform organisational culture
- help develop wisdom and phronesis

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Key Stage 1. On track. Level 2 in all subjects.	Key Stage 1. Not on track.
187	94

125   68   11   81

Key Stage 2. On track. Level 4 in all subjects.	Key Stage 2. Not on track.
142	144

115   20   12   127

Key Stage 3. On track. Level 5 in all subjects.	Key Stage 3. Not on track.
128	168

72   56   5   144

GCSE. On track. Points score above the England median.	GCSE. Not on track.
78	208

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Turning Point – Connected Education

Working together, parents as researchers

An innovative and unique form of action research using parents and young people as peer researchers. It enables parents and young people directly to define and influence the development of school policy and practice. By engaging parents as researchers, Connected Education is able to reach those parents most in need and least engaged with schools and the learning process (Turning Point, 2011: 11)

TURNING POINT
turning lives around

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- What aspirations parents hold for their children and to what extent are these influenced by their own life experiences
- How Children's Centres can capitalise on the willingness of parents both to support their children and their Children's Centre
- How Children's Centres can minimise the barriers faced by some parents in engaging with their children's learning
- How Children's Centres can reach parents whose children need the most support
- How Children's Centres can facilitate positive parent/child interaction
- Who in Children's Centres and the wider community can make a difference to parental involvement

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- Questionnaire design
- Parent volunteers recruited
- Parent volunteers trained
- Pilot of questionnaire by parent volunteers
- Recruitment of parents (first attempt!)
- Recruitment of parents (second attempt)
- Analysis of questionnaire responses
- Focus group questions identified from analysis
- Focus group participants recruited (first attempt)
- Focus group recruited and undertaken (second attempt)
- Analysis
- Report writing

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- Parent volunteer now employed in the Children's Centre
- Centre about to introduce Facebook for parents
- Keen to use social networking to engage parents in further research and development
- Parent researchers now in demand for other projects

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- Practice involves change, by definition. Practices are emergent in the sense that the ways that they change are not fully specifiable in advance. They are emergent from the context of unanticipated and unpredictable ways. Thus context transforms practice in an ongoing creative process.
- It does not matter what the professional knows or can do if this is not deployed appropriately in a particular context with requisite others
   (Boud and Hager, 2012:23)

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Empowering Researchers

Keeping connected

> Structurally through national initiatives and professional requirements

> Locally through whole institutional approaches to quality assurance

> Individually through professional development and genuine desire to find out 'what works' and tell others!

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Current policy context

2012   Lingfield Review of Professionalism

2013   FE Guild to be established
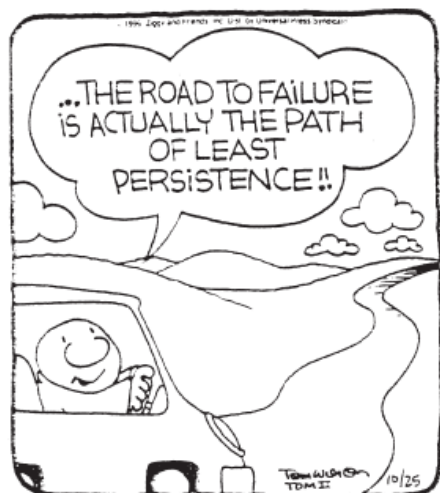
Consultation on roles and responsibilities

LSIS to be disbanded August 2013

ESRC achievement rate lowest of all research councils

Concern for future funding of practitioner research

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...THE ROAD TO FAILURE IS ACTUALLY THE PATH OF LEAST PERSISTENCE!!

Thank you

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References

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