Article

Knowledge, Evidence, and the Configuration of Educational Practice

Jim Hordern

Department of Education Studies, Bath Spa University, Bath BA2 9BN, UK; j.hordern@bathspa.ac.uk

check for updates

Abstract: This paper examines the context of evidence-informed practice (EIP) by inquiring into how educational practice is defined and organised, and how predominant understandings of educational practice are concomitant with preferences for particular forms of evidence. This leads to discussion of how certain educational research traditions speak (or are unable to speak) to these evidence requirements, and how this shapes the nature of EIP. While the rise of EIP can be understood as part of the increasing attention paid by governments to systemic 'improvement' in education systems, it can be argued that the lack of a coherent body of educational knowledge in many national traditions enables governments to exercise control not only of definitions of 'what works' in education but also over conceptualisations of educational practice. For some policy makers and practitioners, the much-remarked dislocation between 'evidence' and teaching practice in many national contexts can only be solved by a narrowing of what counts as knowledge alongside a more prescriptive control over what counts as acceptable educational judgement. However, such an alignment serves to exclude wider educational purposes and arguably instrumentalises pedagogical relations. Meanwhile, some continental European countries maintain traditions that may serve to mitigate such developments, although these traditions are not without challenge.

Keywords: educational knowledge; educational practice; teacher professionalism

1. Introduction

How is educational practice conceived? And by whom? And with what results? Discussions of practice abound in educational research, but there is often a lack of precision as to what we are actually discussing—are we clear what 'practice' is when so many authors consider its meaning 'unproblematic', and use it 'in very diverse ways'? [1] (p. 85). The implications for how we conceptualise evidence-informed practice, and for how evidence and practice are related, are significant. Furthermore, there is often a lack of attention in much educational literature to the thorny questions of who or what shapes (or controls) this practice, and the extent to which it can be changed or transformed by both those involved within the practice and those outside it. Arguably, these latter questions start to intertwine with sociological questions of structure and agency or institutionalist questions that seek to explain adaptation and isomorphism in human and organisational activity [2], much as they could also be seen as intertwined with the exercise of power through discourse (e.g., via Foucault), or through capital or field positioning (e.g., via Bourdieu). 'Practice' can be seen as constituted and re-constituted through micro and macro political and sociological dynamics. We cannot just assume it is constituted in any particular way in any discussion of educational change and reform. Without an awareness of the varied understandings that can be loaded into 'practice' as a phenomenon, we are in danger of being taken off unwittingly into conceptualisations of the world which may be inaccurate, biased, or suit particular political agendas.

This paper enquires into how educational practice can be defined and organised, and how predominant understandings of educational practice lead to preferences for particular forms of

evidence, with consequences for how evidence-informed practice (EIP) is conceptualised. It is argued that certain educational research traditions speak to these evidence requirements while others are unable to, and this shapes the nature of evidence-informed practice (EIP). It is asserted that the lack of a coherent body of educational knowledge in many national education traditions enables governments to exercise control not only of definitions of 'what works' in education but also over conceptualisations of educational practice. This can then lead to a narrowing of what counts as educational knowledge alongside a more prescriptive control over what counts as acceptable educational judgement, potentially excluding wider educational purposes, instrumentalising pedagogical relations, and deprofessionalising teachers. While these developments are particularly prevalent in Anglophone contexts, attention is drawn to some European educational traditions that may serve to mitigate such developments, although these traditions are not without challenge themselves.

2. The Emergence and Recent use of the Idea of Practice in Education

How has 'practice' as a phenomenon emerged from philosophical and sociological work? Hager [1] shows that theorists of practice draw on distinct philosophical and sociological traditions: Prominent theorists are said to be indebted to Aristotle, Heidegger, or Wittgenstein, or to frame practice as a phenomenon within a broader social theory (i.e., Bourdieu or Giddens). Rouse has argued that there are two principal schools of thought in the definition of practice: On the one hand those that are 'regularist' or 'regulist', and on the other the 'normative' tradition [3] (p. 48). The regularist or regulist traditions see practice as relating to habituated patterns of activity, or presuppositions (e.g., drawing on Bourdieu, but also certain strands of philosophical work such as that of Heidegger and Wittgenstein), and therefore encompassing a very wide range of purposive (and possibly non-purposive) human activity. However, the normative tradition requires practices to have agreed purposes, communities, and criteria of excellence [1,4,5], against which activity can be normatively evaluated (see also [6,7]), and this tends to owe more to Aristotelian work. Rouse highlights the 'complex relations of mutual interaction', a sense that there is something at 'issue and at stake' in the practice, and an agreement that any 'resolution' of issues is 'always prospective' [3] (pp. 50–51), accepting that the practice may be subject to continual change and adaptation as new revelations and understandings emerge.

Those who have worked with the regularist and regulist traditions of practice theory have sought to use the idea of practice to build new lenses to understand the social world, and to explore the ways in which the social, the material, and the physical articulate [8]. Schatzki emphasises the 'shared embodied know-how', 'shared practical understandings', and 'tacit knowledges and presuppositions' that constitute the 'arrays of activity' [9] (pp. 11–12) that can be identified as practices. Nicolini suggests that most practice theories 'see the world as a seamless assemblage, nexus, or confederation of practices', and involve the study of 'routine bodily activities' on the 'horizon of intelligible action' available to practitioners [8] (p. 3). Such approaches can lead to an all-encompassing view of practice, and to a specific focus on the character of micro-level activities as practices. The consequence can be difficulties with finding grounds for differentiating between types or categories of practice.

Drawing on MacIntyre's work [4], Hager has sketched out a normative approach to practice that is useful for considering what might be distinctive about occupational and socially purposive practices, by identifying the complex relationship between internal and external goods produced in practice [5]. He argues that the tangible external goods produced by purposive practices (i.e., a building resulting from the practices of construction or architecture) are inextricable from the internal goods of the practice. Noddings, also engaging with MacIntyre's work, has argued that teaching is a 'relational' practice generating internal goods 'directed primarily toward the growth of students' [10] (p. 250). Teachers' activities can therefore be evaluated normatively, providing a community of teachers (or educational practitioners) has established criteria by which the internal goods can be judged. It is important to note that MacIntyre is sceptical about conceptualising teaching as a practice, preferring to see teaching and learning as elements of activity that take place as part of other normative practices [4]. Those writing about practices are not always inclined to fully explore the relationship between the

'normative' and the 'regularist', although it could be suggested that normative traditions can help explain why certain habituated activities sustain over time and why some fall apart, unable to agree on a meaningful purpose to which they are directed [11]. The normative focus on consensually agreed purposes, the development of criteria of excellence, and practitioner mutual accountability are therefore important areas of investigation for those interested in practices.

Practice theories are used extensively in studies of professional and workplace learning [12], often building on the work of Lave and Wenger [13] or influenced by Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), and have seeped into work on teacher education and professional development (i.e., on Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)) [14]. However, much literature on school improvement and teacher learning falls back on conceptualising a separation between 'theory' and 'practice', with practice being related primarily to what educators do in their workplace settings (i.e., including teaching in schools, making judgements in the course of classroom interaction etc.), while theory is often related to knowledge produced external to the practice by research organisations and academics [15]. Moreover, the separation between the two is also relied upon to some extent in discussions of the sociology of educational and professional knowledge, e.g., Furlong and Whitty [16] and Young and Muller [17], echoing long-standing tensions in educational discourse [7].

Such a conceptual separation between theory and practice is popular, and may be useful analytically, but can be challenged from a number of angles, including by practice theorists. Normative thinkers could argue that the distinction is misplaced and that 'theory' (or a form of symbolic understanding) should be seen as generated within a practice to constitute the criteria of excellence by which activity seeking to contribute to the practice could be evaluated. Without such criteria, the practice ceases to be sustainable and dissolves into disconnected individual activities. However, the criteria themselves can only be constituted through the practice, or by acquaintance with and engagement in practice activities—the 'theory' and 'practice' are thus inseparable, interwoven, and mutually constituted. What this leaves open is questions about how the practice adapts to new knowledge that has emerged outwith the practice that may have bearing upon the practice. On the other hand, practice theorists working within a regularist tradition could also seek to challenge the separation between theory and practice, arguing that what we think of as theory is just the outcome of one form of privileged practice (i.e., academic practice). All practices generate forms of knowing and being, some of which crystallise into explicit theories. Much of what could be theory is therefore situated, tacit, or embedded within phronetic wisdom [18].

But to what extent do these debates register with contemporary discussions of evidence-informed practice? The May 2017 Interim issue of Impact, the new journal published by the Chartered College of Teaching (a new professional body for schoolteachers in England), had a particular focus on 'perspectives on evidence-informed education' and sought to make the case for 'connecting research and practice' [19] (p. 1). Many of the contributions published in the issue maintain a distinction between 'theory' and 'practice', provide only a rudimentary discussion of practice itself, and align themselves with the belief that there needs to be a 'double transformation' [20] (p. 2), both of educational research and educational practice, in the name of 'improvement'. Indeed, this can be understood in terms of the ambition for the new journal, which is to 'have a tangible effect on classroom practice and, subsequently, on the outcomes of young people' [19] (p. 1). The introduction promises articles that 'explore the question of what we mean by evidence-informed practice' and includes a final section in which teachers explain how they have 'implemented a concept from a piece of published education research in their practice' [19] (p. 1). There is discussion of 'summarising the best available evidence in practitioner-relevant forms' and the importance of 'translation into effective practice' [21] (p. 7). There is an assumption throughout many contributions that educational practice can be transformed and improved through contact with 'high-quality research and relevant examples', with an 'expectation' that 'its application can improve education' [22] (p. 5). Rather than have excellence criteria generated normatively through the practice itself by a body of practitioners, as MacIntyre [4] or Hager's [5] works might suggest, it is for the arbitrators of the 'best available evidence' to provide the 'tools' so

that 'decision makers' can use 'goal theory' to transform practice. The underlying assumption is that practitioners need to be enlightened: The 'normalisation of evidence-informed education must be the intention to be implemented' [22] (pp. 5–6).

The views expressed in that first (interim) issue of Impact have parallels in other prominent recent published work on evidence-informed practice [23]. What is noticeable about these approaches is the extent to which 'theory' (or evidence) and 'practice' are conceived as distinct and subject to different processes. Rather than emphasise a need for 'practice' (and therefore practitioners) to generate and maintain criteria of excellence that are owned by a mutually accountable community (see discussion below), there is instead an explicit claim or implicit assumption that practice needs to be transformed (and will be transformed) by the 'best available evidence'. This is often backed up by data that is said to demonstrate that attainment can be improved through certain approaches to school organisation, management, and pedagogical strategy, e.g., [24]. Disregarding other broader purposes of education [25,26], it is assumed that current educational practice is often flawed and in need of redemption, on the basis of measurements about attainment in specific areas, and that gold standard research evidence can reform it. It is noticeable, for example, that Nelson and Campbell's [23] brief discussion of definitions of evidence-informed practice focuses primarily on defining 'evidence', rather than 'practice', before a more detailed discussion of the differences between 'evidence-based, research-based, or evidence-informed' approaches [23] (p. 128). Practice is seen as something upon which evidence should have 'impact', notwithstanding acknowledgement that practice itself generates evidence, and therefore it is the organisation and 'integration' of different forms of evidence, and their 'mobilisation' and measurability that become central concerns of interested academics and policy actors [23] (pp. 131–132).

3. How Could and Should Practice be Organised?

It could also be persuasively argued that how practice is conceptualised has considerable bearings on how we think practice could and should be organised and controlled. A normative position implies control of practice consensually through a community of practitioners [4]. This can be described as a process of mutual accountability that has parallels with notions of disciplinarity through peer interaction and a distinctive professional logic [3,27,28] or knowledge-based professionalism [17,29]. Without fora through which practitioners can agree on the standards by which practice activity can be normatively evaluated to iteratively produce internal and external goods, there is no 'practice'. Thus, practitioners themselves must have sufficient control in order to set and adapt norms, but the body of practitioners must be comprised of those who are committed to sustaining and developing the criteria of excellence of the practice. We can therefore perceive a requirement not only for practitioners to be capable of critical reflection (based upon scholarship and research activity), but also for scholar-researchers to be in some sense practitioners—to be fully part of a practice community focused purposefully on the practice itself, and cognisant of its objectives and relations with other practices. Arguably, this normative approach has historically underpinned the organisation of many of the classical professions (e.g., Medicine or Architecture), which have required practitioners to strongly identify with the profession and its objectives [28].

On the other hand, a regularist conception of practice makes no such stipulation about practitioner influence on the character of the practice. Practice activities are those which currently occur, and attention is turned to the activities that 'hang together' in a given architecture or those that are habituated and routine [8,9]. There is no necessity for normative questions to be raised in regularist understandings of practice (although they may be). Instead, the emphasis is often on sophisticated description of the practice activities, drawing on ethnographic traditions and other forms of fieldwork, or the development of sophisticated analytical frameworks that seek to interpret the relationships between elements of the practice [8]. The outcome of this is that such conceptualisations allow for activities to be labelled 'practices' in which practitioners have no or limited control over the activities in which they participate, whereas in a normative tradition they would not be considered

as such. There is no requirement for the generation of internal or external goods [4], or normative standard-setting if regularities are enough to be considered practices, although these may nevertheless arise. Indeed, notions of normativity could be seen by some practice theorists as expressions of hierarchy or the selective imposition of values by dominant groups.

For some who publically advocate EIP in education, a version of the normative version of practice seems at first glance closest to their view of educational practice, as a clear purpose to practice seems important, but this normative vision is not characterised by mutual accountability or practitioners' participation in the definition and management of the practice. Instead, it rests upon a preconceived vision of what educational practice should involve, and arguably also a preconceived notion of the purpose of education that may exclude important educational purposes [7,26,30]. The norms and purposes of the practice are set outwith the practice, and thus practice communities are disempowered, losing their capacity for change and adaptation. For advocates of EIP, the key purpose on which evidence and practice must predominantly focus is 'enhancing learning', by improving 'a measure of attainment, derived from a robust assessment process' [21] (pp. 7–9), although other contributory purposes such as examining the introduction of 'assertive discipline with the aim of improving students' behaviour' are also said to be important [21] (p. 9). The criteria of excellence, from which the norms of the practice can be derived, are not derived through practitioner consensus. The experimental methodology from which 'best available evidence' [21] (p. 7) is secured (i.e., 'strong evidence from well-run RCTs') [31] (p. 15), provide the basis for the 'outcome measures' from which evaluation of 'interventions' can be determined [21] (pp. 7–8). Therefore, standards of excellence which will inform how the practice will be judged are liable to be imposed upon the practice community. There is no sense that the process of resolving issues is 'prospective', as Rouse suggests is central to normative practices [3].

A system for organising the translation of evidence into practice lies at the crux of the current version of EIP reforms, at least in England. The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) has been ordained by policy makers in England as an authority on educational research and its dissemination. The Department for Education (DfE) 2015–2020 Strategy states that it is the 'continued growth of the Education Endowment Foundation' that will provide the teaching profession with the 'high-quality evidence about 'what works'' [32] (p. 17), foregrounding the EEF as an arbitrator of the quality of educational research. School leaders are directed towards a 'teaching and learning toolkit' which provides summaries of evidence and 'practical tools' that are 'designed to improve practice and boost learning' [33]. It is assumed that educational practice is about improving attainment in explicit, measurable ways, and about 'what works in raising the achievement of the poorest student' [34] (p. 1). It is further assumed that educational practice is improved by the provision of 'evidence presented crisply and cleanly, stripped of academic jargon, to inform their decision-making' and that there is a 'real appetite among teachers and senior leaders' for this evidence [34] (p. 2). Furthermore, it is proudly stated that 'more than half of senior leaders are using it (the evidence provided by the EEF) to inform their own decision-making' [34] (p. 1).

Norms are thus generated for educational practice not by the body of educational practitioners per se, many of whom may hold different views of the purposes of education or the breadth of ways in which students may achieve or progress, but by a network of educational policy actors who are enacting a particular view of the purpose of education and the direction of educational reform. Mutual accountability is irrelevant here—an (instrumental) technical view of teaching prevails, in which teachers are informed of the ways in which they should improve their teaching by the research (filtered according to a definition of quality set by the EEF and ultimately its chief funder, the DfE) [35]. While many of the aims of the EEF may be laudable, the consequence is a deprofessionalisation of teaching. While being 'evidence-informed' may have value as part of 'teacher professionalism' [36] (p. 11), the benefits for professional autonomy and for education more generally only accrue if teachers have greater control both over their practice community and over their knowledge base—they must be able to exercise reflexively objective judgement in regards to the evidence and understand its

provenance [30,37]. Arguably, this can only be done as part of a shared practice, together with higher education practitioners. However, under current arrangements, teaching practice is subject to policy control, and control by 'senior leaders' with their own views of 'what works', which increasingly may be aligned with those of the EEF.

This prescribed model of practice is enabled by the evacuation of the structures of a genuinely normative practice, ignoring requirements for commitments not only to 'truth' but also to 'truthfulness' in establishing normative criteria by which educational knowledge and practice can be judged [38]. Much academic research may be sidelined in such models of evidence-informed practice. It could be argued, furthermore, that the weakening of normative conceptions of practice has been enabled by the (nevertheless necessary) critiques offered by the Heidegger and Wittgenstein-influenced views of practice [1], which have drawn attention to new manifestations of the exercise of power and control, including through language. Such critiques highlight how normative conceptions of practice and professionalism can be offered unwarranted discretion and autonomy as a consequence of elite capture, and thus have strong parallels with work in the sociology of the professions [28,39]. However, to confuse the exposure of power dynamics with a nihilism about the value of a practice based around a professional logic that can achieve public recognition is misguided [28]. It can be argued that educational practice is of such importance to society that teaching must be considered a professional practice requiring specialised knowledge and discretion, but this must be built around a sense of purpose that has resonance amongst practitioners [6,29].

But what should the purpose of this practice be? There are a range of choices, but two principal options can be sketched: The first could be a practice orientated primarily towards achieving measurable improvements in achievement for pupils (i.e., as seems to be outlined in much discussion of Evidence-Informed Practice). The second would be a practice with a commitment to exploring deeper and broader conceptualisations of educational purpose, which might hold in balance aspects of socialisation, qualification, and subjectification [26], or the 'development of individual and collective human virtues', 'the enhancement of civic life', 'economic productivity', and 'the furthering of social equity and justice' [25] (pp. 4–5). While the focus on measurable improvement leads to opportunities for a preconception of the purpose of the practice (not necessarily by the practitioners themselves), the second approach suggests much more scope for nuanced debate about educational purpose, and recognition of the broad relationship between education and society. These two distinctly different visions of educational practice suggest entirely different views of the relationship between evidence and practice, and indeed what we mean by evidence itself.

4. How Understandings of Educational Practice are Concomitant with Certain Requirements for Evidence

What do we mean by evidence in evidence-informed practice? And how does this relate to educational knowledge and the professional expertise which we would hope teachers develop over time? And what would this mean for how evidence-informed practice is configured and accounted for? Winch identifies expertise as requiring not just a familiarity with propositional knowledge, but also the capacity to make inferences between propositions and familiarity with the procedures for establishing the validity of claims to knowledge, in addition to deep acquaintance with the context of practice in which the expert is engaged [6]. The implication of this rounded view of expertise is that practitioners, in order to become experts and make well-grounded judgements, require time and guidance to develop their understanding of how propositions relating to their practice articulate, in order to draw conclusions from a newly-encountered proposition. They require not only know-that, but also special forms of know-how and knowledge by acquaintance. Importantly, expertise is also seen as requiring the capacity to exercise judgement with a degree of autonomy. Practitioners who have acquired a familiarity with expert propositional knowledge must also be acquainted with the procedures for establishing that knowledge [6,17]. They must also be familiar with the relevance of that knowledge for how they see and understand practice. For some, that expertise enables them to

develop a lens which allows them to perceive a practice context differently from a layperson [11,37]. It also enables them to discriminate between activities which are not underpinned by expertise and those that are.

However, the Winch model of expertise also suggests that a particular form of epistemic community is required to support the development of expertise amongst practitioners [6]. A community is needed to establish procedures by which knowledge claims are judged, and to maintain the epistemic memory of the practice. Practitioners within the community are needed to review and evaluate new developments which may be proposed by individuals with much to gain from their acceptance in the knowledge base. Here we see the value of Rouse's discussion of 'mutual accountability' and a set of established norms which form the basis for judgements which practitioners must accept [3]. New 'evidence' is thus evaluated against existing propositions and the conceptual web in which those propositions are located, to establish the import of the evidence concerned and its bearing on existing understandings.

Prevailing views of evidence-informed practice do not, however, support the development of this form of specialised expertise, or enable the mutual accountability through which claims to knowledge (i.e., new evidence) should be handled (in a genuinely normative conception of practice). The EEF does not seem to recognise the need for a mutually accountable body of expert practitioners (i.e., a disciplinary community or an expert professional body) to judge new claims to knowledge. Instead, the EEF has determined its vision of educational knowledge and practice, supported by sympathetic academics working in empiricist traditions, and is now positioned to exert an increasingly hegemonic hold on definitions of what is acceptable in terms of 'evidence' about education in England through a promulgation of a 'gold standard' research approach.

Evidence, in this view, can be discreet (and free from 'academic jargon') [34], propositions which can be summarised in the 'learning and teaching toolkit' for 'implementation' within the education system. The evidence authorised by the EEF (or at least the research questions which have been determined as priorities) are not open to challenge. Instead, the priority is now to move on to scale up findings so that the (apparently much needed) transformation of educational practice can take place. Thus, a specific (and comparatively narrow) view of what educational practice should be concerned with can be brought about through the flooding of educational contexts with this evidence, assuaging the 'appetite' for supposed 'enlightenment' amongst school leaders and teachers [34]. There is no room for building the inferential capacity or reflexive objectivity of the professional community of educational practitioners in this vision, or of ensuring that they have the procedural capability to assess new claims to knowledge. Instead. what is required of educational practitioners is submission to an evidence authority (the EEF), which is deliberately located outside of the main academic community (who might muddle and subvert the debate). Educational practice and the development of 'gold standard' evidence can thus be directed efficiently and effectively towards a specific purpose: In particular, the raising of measurable pupil attainment (in terms of tests and examinations) in English schools.

In effect, the EEF model leads to a situation in which evidence is 'selected', 'appropriated', and 'transformed' (i.e., recontextualised) [40], to meet a specific 'supervening purpose' [41] (p. 213). This purpose has emerged not through a disciplinary community (which might cut across both academic and professional communities as it does to a greater extent in medicine or engineering), but through a process of division. It entails a dismissal of the 'old' educational academic community, which is to be superseded by a form of 'new science of education' [16], guided by a purpose ultimately determined by policy makers—the improvement of measurable attainment as understood through the lens of PISA and other global indicators. Evidence is therefore selected for prominence (and transferral to school communities via the learning and teaching toolkit) according to a specific (and highly contested) understanding of the purpose of education. This also risks the concomitant downgrading and dismissal of: (i) Any consideration of the 'side-effects' of the implementation of new initiatives and strategies based on prominent evidence, and (ii) studies of educational activity which

are deemed irrelevant or subversive according to the dominant arbiters of evidence (policy makers, school leaders, and the EEF). Furthermore, this is accompanied by the possibility that very different forms of knowledge become de-differentiated and judged only for their efficacy in solving specific problems, as framed by school or system leaders. When teaching practice is 'consciously informed' by 'formal research', 'practitioner inquiry', and 'school or system-led data' [42] (p. 155), there is a risk that once decontextualized from its origins, 'formal research' will be considered only when it can be used to support a desired course of action (as suggested by the school or system data). In Bernstein's terms, the official recontextualising field has control of the pedagogic device, reaching up to control the field of production of educational knowledge [40], and therefore weeding out the (supposedly) irrelevant and subversive elements of knowledge before they reach the wider educational community and the school system.

Policy makers who advocate this model of evidence selection may perceive this change as similar to the transition made in medicine towards a science-based professional discipline from its pre-modern origins to its current form [43]. In effect, the implicit suggestion is that education, as a 'pre-theoretical human practice' [44] (p. 254), has not developed the scientific knowledge base that other (formerly) pre-theoretical practices have (i.e., medicine)—the transition has not yet fully been made. While a lack of a scientific knowledge base in other pre-theoretical human practices (such as religion [44]) may not be problematic for policy makers, it is problematic in terms of education, as governments want education to do something. Educational institutions are required to provide the skilled workforces that are perceived to increase the attractiveness of their economies for industrial investment [25]. Nevertheless, due to the fragmented nature of the educational knowledge community, there are many academics who are more than suited to speak to these knowledge requirements, focusing on (narrowly conceived) school improvement and effectiveness, or the learning sciences [16], and in so doing providing fertile ground for the growth of a new science of education that fits policy agendas.

Here, the fragmented structure of the study of education (in England at least) provides opportunities for the policy makers to exercise their intent. As Furlong and Whitty have shown, the study of education contains a range of different knowledge traditions which have different levels of salience in each national context [16]. In England in particular (but also in different ways in other Anglophone contexts), the tradition of the Foundation disciplines is itself not cohesive and draws on a wide range of sociological, philosophical, historical, anthropological, psychological, and comparative disciplinary work [16]. Much of the knowledge produced by this foundational tradition has for some time been contested by: (i) Critical and post-modern theories from within academia, and (ii) school improvement and effectiveness traditions that sit astride the academic, policy maker, and practitioner communities [45]. The consequence is that it is hard to conceive the study of Education in England (and in similar ways in the U.S.A and Australia) as a cohesive discipline with a (relatively) distinct disciplinary community that is capable of maintaining a set of mutually accountable disciplinary norms that have relevance to the educational knowledge produced for and about practice [46,47]. While some educational knowledge retreats into a disciplinary space and distances itself from practice problematics, other elements of educational knowledge end up with a taken-for-granted view of practice problematics as they are constructed by dominant voices (i.e., policy makers, school leaders, and the EEF). While a fully normative view of educational practice underpinned by an inclusive disciplinary community could exist for the national tradition in England, it struggles to achieve this at present. The consequence is that researchers end up playing the policy makers' games in their disciplinary spaces in order to maximise their chances of being heard [48,49]. Educational evidence becomes subject to the logic of the market place, where entities can use resources to maximise their 'impact', or simply seek to monopolise or dictate the market (i.e., the EEF). This logic is quite distinct from the professional disciplinary approach that could underpin the development of systematic expertise across the educational community and amongst individual practitioners.

However, the situation in England is not necessarily shared elsewhere around the world. In Scandinavia, Netherlands, Germany, and parts of Eastern Europe, there are educational traditions

which have historically offered a more coherently 'Educational' view of education, including conceptualisations of educational practice that are distinctly infused with considerations predicated on more social-democratic understandings of the interface between education, society, and the individual [16,26,50,51]. In such traditions, which often place concepts such as 'Bildung' (in Germany) or 'Wychowanie' (in Poland) to the fore, the role of education is not so easily subsumed as a midwife to national economic ambition, as it has arguably been in England. This is not to downplay the considerable contests underway over the future of education in those nations [52]. Nevertheless, how educational practice is conceived and enacted (including by educational practitioners who often have to attend lengthy periods of formation which involve extensive university and professional study) remains strongly influenced by these national and supra-national educational traditions, and such traditions generate normative processes by which claims to knowledge and professional judgements can be evaluated against the disciplinary body of opinion.

5. Concluding Remarks

While the rise of EIP can be understood as part of the increasing attention paid by governments to systemic 'improvement' in education systems and a focus on teacher quality, it can be also argued that the lack of a coherent body of educational knowledge in many national traditions enables governments to exercise control not only of definitions of 'what works' in education but also over norms of educational practice [6,16]. For some policy makers and practitioners, the much-remarked dislocation between 'evidence' and teaching practice in many national contexts can only be solved by a narrowing of what counts as knowledge alongside a more prescriptive control over what counts as acceptable educational judgement. However, such an alignment serves to exclude wider educational purposes and arguably instrumentalises pedagogical relations. At risk, at least in the Anglosphere, is the very idea of education itself. Meanwhile, as noted above, some continental European countries maintain traditions that may serve to mitigate such developments, although these traditions are not without challenge.

But what could be an alternative? Cain discusses experiences of practitioners engaging with research, and points to the need for 'space for long, focused discussions' involving not only the 'voice' of external research but also the voice of colleagues [53] (p. 491). Such practice activities have the potential to improve the development of mutual understanding and accountability, and the development of normative criteria by which new claims might be assessed and judged. However, any sense that this could be detached from the practices that higher education and professional communities uphold would be problematic. No specialised professional community (medicine, engineering, law, and architecture as examples) seeks to detach itself from higher education, as there is a recognition that the socio-epistemic practices of higher education provide a strong guarantor of integrity, truthfulness, and the most sophisticated manifestations of objectivity (although these are never perfect) [17,54]. Cain's voice, therefore, as the facilitator of the discussion [53] (p. 489), may thus be crucially important.

What this might suggest, therefore, is the importance for school educational practice to be conceived as inseparable from higher education practices—the mutual accountability of teachers should be conceived not just to other teachers but also to the educational academic community (and vice versa!). A more scholarly teaching profession needs a more scholarly academic community, both with better understandings of the diverse and yet potentially complementary purposes of education [25,46]. A fuller, more nuanced understanding of education means a specialised understanding that is distinct from that of a layperson (and yet reasonably accessible to that layperson with guidance and support). It also requires a space not only for discussion but also a socio-political awareness of how topics of discussion are selected and transformed, and the possibilities for other discussions about other topics that might be just (or more) important. That is the beginnings of a road towards a genuinely knowledge-based professionalism or specialised professional practice in which practitioners (of all kinds) have more control, and in which specialised knowledge is valued, rather than the current road offered by EIP and its bedfellows.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

1. Hager, P. Practice as a key idea in understanding work-based learning. In *Learning, Work and Practice: New Understandings*; Gibbs, P., Ed.; Springer: Dordrecht, The Netherlands, 2013; pp. 85–103.
2. DiMaggio, P.J.; Powell, W.W. (Eds.) *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*; University of Chicago Press: Chicago, IL, USA, 1991.
3. Rouse, J. Social Practices and Normativity. *Philos. Soc. Sci.* **2007**, *37*, 46–56. [CrossRef]
4. MacIntyre, A. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed.; University of Notre Dame Press: Notre Dame, Paris, 2007.
5. Hager, P. Refurbishing MacIntyre's Account of Practice. *J. Philos. Educ.* **2011**, *45*, 545–561. [CrossRef]
6. Winch, C. *Dimensions of Expertise*; Continuum: London, UK, 2010.
7. Carr, W. *For Education: Towards Critical Educational Inquiry*; OUP: Buckingham, UK, 1995.
8. Nicolini, D. *Practice Theory, Work and Organisation: An Introduction*; Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, 2013.
9. Schatzki, T. Introduction: Practice theory. In *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory*; Schatzki, T.R., Knorr-Cetina, K., Von Savigny, E., Eds.; Routledge: Abingdon, UK, 2001; pp. 1–14.
10. Noddings, N. Is teaching a practice? *J. Philos. Educ.* **2003**, *37*, 241–251. [CrossRef]
11. Hrdern, J. Differentiating knowledge, differentiating (occupational) practice. *J. Voc. Educ. Train* **2016**, *68*, 453–469. [CrossRef]
12. Gibbs, P. (Ed.) *Learning, Work and Practice: New Understandings*; Springer: Dordrecht, The Netherlands, 2013.
13. Lave, J.; Wenger, E. *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*; Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK, 1991.
14. Vescio, V.; Ross, D.; Adams, A. A review of research on the impact of professional learning communities on teaching practice and student learning. *Teach. Teach. Educ.* **2008**, *24*, 80–91. [CrossRef]
15. Muijs, D.; Reynolds, D. *Effective Teaching: Evidence and Practice*, 3rd ed.; Sage: London, UK, 2011.
16. Furlong, J.; Whitty, G. Knowledge traditions in the study of education. In *Knowledge and the Study of Education: An International Exploration*; Whitty, G., Furlong, J., Eds.; Symposium: Didcot, UK, 2017; pp. 13–57.
17. Young, M.; Muller, J. Towards the Sociology of Professional Knowledge. In *Knowledge, Expertise and the Professions*; Young, M., Muller, J., Eds.; Routledge: Abingdon, UK, 2014; pp. 3–17.
18. Duguid, P. The Art of Knowing: Social and Tacit Dimensions of Knowledge and the Limits of the Community of Practice. *Inf. Soc.* **2005**, *21*, 109–118. [CrossRef]
19. Scutt, C. Editorial: Connecting research and practice. *Impact J. Chart. Coll. Teach.* **2017**, *Interim Issue*, 2–4. [CrossRef]
20. Biesta, G. Why 'what works' won't work. Evidence-based practice and the democratic deficit of educational research. *Educ. Theory* **2007**, *57*, 1–22. [CrossRef]
21. Coe, R. Evaluation: Why, what and how. *Impact J. Chart. Coll. Teach.* **2017**, *Interim Issue*, 7–10.
22. Kime, S. From intentions to implementation: Establishing a culture of evidence-informed education. *Impact J. Chart. Coll. Teach.* **2017**, *Interim Issue*, 5–7.
23. Nelson, J.; Campbell, C. Evidence-informed practice in education: Meanings and applications. *Educ. Res.-UK* **2017**, *59*, 127–135. [CrossRef]
24. Nelson, J.; O'Beirne, C. *Using Evidence in the Classroom: What Works and Why?* NFER: Slough, UK, 2014.
25. Spiel, C.; Shwatzmann, S.; Busemeyer, M.; Cloete, N.; Drori, G.; Lassnigg, L.; Schober, B.; Michele Schweisfurth, M.; Verma, S.; Bakarat, B.; et al. The Contribution of Education to Social Progress. In *Rethinking Society for the 21st Century*; International Panel on Social Progress: Paris, France; Princeton, NJ, USA, 2017.
26. Biesta, G.J.J. Good education in an age of measurement: On the need to reconnect with the question of purpose in education. *Educ. Assess. Eval. Account.* **2010**, *21*, 33–46. [CrossRef]
27. Bridges, D. The disciplines and discipline of educational research. *J. Philos. Educ.* **2006**, *40*, 259–272. [CrossRef]

28. Friedson, E. *Professionalism: The Third Logic*; Polity Press: Cambridge, UK, 2001.

29. Hordern, J. Teaching, teacher formation, and specialised professional practice. *Eur. J. Teach. Educ.* **2015**, *38*, 431–444. [CrossRef]

30. Gale, T. What's not to like about RCTs in education. In *Mobilising Teacher Researchers: Challenging Educational Inequality*; Childs, A., Menter, I., Eds.; Routledge: Abingdon, UK, 2018; pp. 207–223.

31. Collins, K. The importance of randomised controlled trials in education. *Impact J. Chart. Coll. Teach.* **2017**, *Interim Issue*, 13–16.

32. Department for Education (DfE). *DfE Strategy 2015–2010: World-Class Education and Care*; DfE: London, UK, 2016.

33. Education Endowment Foundation (EEF). *Our mission*; EEF: London, UK; Available online: www.educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/about/history/ (accessed on 15 May 2018).

34. Education Endowment Foundation (EEF). *Annual Report*; EEF: London, UK, 2017; Available online: https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Annual_Reports/EEF_Annual_Report_2018_-_print.pdf (accessed on 15 May 2018).

35. Hordern, J.; Tatto, M.T. Conceptions of Teaching and Educational Knowledge requirements. *Oxford Rev. Educ.* **2018**, *44*, 686–701. [CrossRef]

36. Stoll, L. Five Challenges in moving towards evidence-informed practice. *Impact J. Chart. Coll. Teach.* **2017**, *Interim Issue*, 11–13.

37. Shalem, Y. What binds professional judgement- the case of teaching. In *Knowledge, Expertise and the Professions*; Young, M., Muller, J., Eds.; Routledge: Abingdon, UK, 2004; pp. 93–105.

38. Young, M.; Muller, J. Truth and truthfulness in the sociology of educational knowledge. *Theory Res. Educ.* **2007**, *5*, 173–201. [CrossRef]

39. Larrson, M.S. *The Rise of Professionalism: A Sociological Analysis*; University of California Press: Berkeley, CA, USA, 1977.

40. Bernstein, B. *Pedagogy, Symbolic Control and Identity*; Rowman & Littlefield: New York, NY, USA; Oxford, UK, 2000.

41. Muller, J. Forms of knowledge and curriculum coherence. *J. Educ. Work* **2009**, *22*, 205–226. [CrossRef]

42. Brown, C.; Schildkamp, K.; Hubers, M.D. Combining the best of two worlds: A conceptual proposal for evidence-informed school improvement. *Educ. Res.-UK* **2017**, *59*, 154–172. [CrossRef]

43. Foray, D.; Hargreaves, D. The production of knowledge in different sectors. *Lond. Rev. Educ.* **2003**, *1*, 7–19. [CrossRef]

44. Carr, D. Rival conceptions of practice in education and teaching. *J. Philos. Educ.* **2003**, *37*, 253–268. [CrossRef]

45. Hordern, J. Bernstein's sociology of knowledge and education(al) studies. In *Knowledge and the Study Of Education: An International Exploration*; Whitty, G., Furlong, J., Eds.; Didcot: Symposium, 2017; pp. 191–210.

46. Hordern, J. Is powerful educational knowledge possible? *Camb. J. Educ.* **2018**, *48*, 787–802. [CrossRef]

47. Whitty, G.; Furlong, J. *Knowledge and the Study of Education: An International Exploration*; Symposium: Didcot, UK, 2017.

48. Francis, B; Archer, L.; Hodgen, J.; Pepper, D.; Taylor, B.; Travers, M.-C. Exploring the relative lack of impact of research on 'ability grouping' in England: A discourse analytic account. *Camb. J. Educ.* **2017**, *47*, 1–17. [CrossRef]

49. Cain, T.; Allan, D. The invisible impact of educational research. *Oxf. Rev. Educ.* **2017**, *43*, 718–732. [CrossRef]

50. Hordern, J. Educational knowledge: Traditions of inquiry, specialisation and practice. *Pedagog. Cult. Soc.* **2018**, *26*, 577–591. [CrossRef]

51. Hopmann, S. Restrained teaching: The common core of Didaktik. *Eur. Educ. Res. J.* **2007**, *6*, 109–124. [CrossRef]

52. Schriewer, J. Between the philosophy of self-cultivation and empirical research: Educational studies in Germany. In *Knowledge and the Study of Education: An International Exploration*; Whitty, G., Furlong, J., Eds.; Symposium: Didcot, UK, 2017; pp. 75–99.

53. Cain, T. Teachers' engagement with research texts: Beyond instrumental, conceptual or strategic use. *J. Educ. Teach.* **2015**, *41*, 478–492. [CrossRef]

54. Muller, J. Every picture tells a story: Epistemological access and knowledge. *Educ. Change* **2014**, *18*, 255–269. [CrossRef]