Showdown at the last chance saloon:
research meets policy in early professional learning

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Government funding of educational research has reached a critical stage. The view of those close to the purse strings seems to be that educational research has become increasingly irrelevant to policy development. Consequently, in a political climate of best value for money, the allocation of funding for research now tends to be accompanied by criteria which require, for example, engagement with users, measured impact and knowledge transformation. The extensive Teaching and Learning Research Programme sponsored by the Economic and Social Research Council is a prominent illustration of this; some £26 million has been awarded to a broad range of projects. The widespread impression is, however, that the funding is accompanied by an implicit ultimatum to the community of educational researchers. We are, it is said, drinking at the last chance saloon.

There are, of course, examples of educational research that have made a positive impact on policy in the past, but this paper is more about the future than the past. Its purpose is to present a rationale for research on a major area of current educational policy, namely the development of beginning teachers. Yet it is in past work that we must start to construct the theoretical foundation for such a project. Our conceptualisation of early professional learning (EPL) is built on small-scale research findings of our own, combined with those from others writing in the same field, but often from different disciplines. We also think it is theoretically important, and not simply expedient, to recognise the reality of policy statements and their power over practice, in particular how teachers develop in the early years.

Competence-based professional standards

The arguments against standards based on lists of specific, behavioural competencies have been well covered (e.g. Barnett 1994). We ourselves have been part of this criticism in relation to the learning experience of student and probationer teachers (Stronach et al 1994). How and what these beginners actually learned appeared to us to be radically different from the descriptions and implicit assumptions of published standards at that time (e.g. SOED 1993). Because of this difference, increasingly evident over the years, we consider it important to refer to 'learning' in preference to 'development', a term that tends to privilege management and control of the learning process, in which growth is seen as linear. Such models of development seem to preclude any notion of autonomy or self-actualisation. What has to be recognised, however, is that these policy-based descriptions of performance have continued to serve as the basis of public accountability for a number of professions. In Scotland, the standards for new entrants to teaching have been formally governed by a succession of official documents that have become increasingly expansive in their lists of specific statements of competence (SOEID 1998; QAA 2000; Scottish Executive 2001). Yet contact with practitioners, including interviews with headteachers (McNally 2001), suggests the continuing use of judgements of a more holistic and socially constructed nature, such as 'having the respect of classes taught', 'being valued by colleagues' and 'contributing to
aspects of whole school life'. Although the notion of holistic competence is acknowledged within the standard for full registration (SFR) as a teacher in Scotland (at the end of the induction year), it is overshadowed by the categorisation of discrete competence statements (with some 96 statements of illustration).

The content and form of such professional standards in teaching do not appear to be based on any explicit theoretical foundation, research-informed framework or set of argued principles. They are generally presented in the fashion of our bullet-point culture. Nor do they represent the process of learning to teach, an activity which is a complex, socially situated process of intuition and implicit theorising, with a degree of uncertainty in how its knowledge base develops (Shulman 1986). We know little, for example, about whether or how new teachers draw on theory from their initial preparation as students, or the extent to which this student-to-teacher transition represents the kind of continuity presumed by connected, consecutive standards (e.g. the ITE Standard and the SFR in Scotland). These standards describe aspects of and, more interpretively, levels of performance, not how performance develops or is learned. Furthermore, their routine application to the progress of individual learners is likely to result in decontextualised assessment and reporting of performance. Policy makers might argue that their standards must be in place, irrespective of how teachers learn. The concern is that that the standards agenda may well change approaches to learning (as well as its measurement) because it changes the way people talk about the activity. Nevertheless, any empirical research with a claim to rigour has to be open to the possibility that official competence statements may be genuinely well received and utilised by practitioners. A first and perhaps unpalatable challenge, therefore, will require researchers to bite the bullet on 'standards' and find out how new teachers and their support practitioners actually make sense and use of competence statements, whether holistic or specific in expression, in the early years of practice.

Informal learning and social context

It is clear, however, that context is crucial. Ideas such as a 'community of practice' (Sergiovanni 1994; Wenger et al 2002), 'situated learning' (Brown et al 1989), learning to teach as a 'rite of passage' (White 1989), have a strong presence in the narratives of beginning teachers. We found strong evidence that 'affective engagement with colleagues and classes taught was of paramount importance' in their experience (McNally et al 1994). More recent evidence (Lohman 2000) suggests that an environment which hinders such engagement actually serves as an inhibitor to informal learning. It is also the case that a conceptual understanding of early development in teaching benefits from ideas outside the conventional, largely insular literature on teacher education. There is explanatory power in ideas such as the importance of friendship (White 1990); the formation of human bonds (Almond, 1988); psychosocial support and integration (Jacobi 1991); mentoring in adult development (Levinson et al 1978). We developed the grounded concept of 'relational conditions' - for example 'letting go', 'dropping in', 'always there', 'one of the team' - as a way of explaining the social context within which individual beginners lived the text of their own development between extremes of 'total abandonment' and 'rigidly controlled, stifling support' (McNally et al 1997). The explanation is consistent not only with findings in studies of other teaching contexts (e.g. Oberski et al, 1999) but also with accounts in cultural psychology of the reciprocity between the ontogenesis and sociogenesis of knowledge (Valsiner and van de Veer 2000).
New teachers also rely informally on pupils for their professional acceptance and socialisation. From the established body of knowledge on what pupils say makes a good teacher, we can see that the language children use e.g. 'is a good laugh', 'doesn't shout a lot', 'great at Karate' (e.g. Brown and McIntyre 1993) is, not surprisingly, different from the language of competencies. What we need is a pupil perspective on the new teacher and whether their descriptions give greater emphasis to specific, known aspects of teacher behaviour or indeed indicate categories additional to or different from existing norms. Not that this kind of perspective is exclusive to teacher development. In medical practice, for example, creative writing opportunities have revealed that interaction with the patient perspective results in development in areas unique to neophyte practitioners (Hatem and Ferrara, 2001).

The narrative data of our earlier research suggested that the strong socio-emotional nature of the transition to teacherhood might actually conceal subtler insights into the learning of beginners. Glimpses of 'theory' from their programme of initial teacher education (ITE) appeared in their narratives, a finding further explored by Drever and Cope (1999), who concluded that theory use such as this is highly context-dependent and is explanatory rather than predictive in relation to subsequent thinking and practice. It has always been easy to dismiss the more theoretical elements of ITE within higher education. Empirical evidence is sparse and tends to reveal a prevalence of practice-based knowledge in student accounts of their learning experience. Yet it seems to us from our work so far that there is an elusive presence of ‘theory’ within early teaching performance.

In contrast to competence-based descriptions of early teacher development, our preliminary theorising, though strong on its broad base of evidence, is weak in fine detail. Progressive focusing on this large-scale but vague picture of informal learning could lead to a more detailed understanding. The school as an organisation provides this context. It is the workplace in which individual beginners learn. We have found that there is a dynamic relationship in which individual beginners are dependent to varying degrees on colleagues and others. Does this reliance decrease with time and experience? Is there a shift from 'maximum social relatedness' (Valsiner, 1994) to greater independence of individuals? Does the concept of collective competence (Boreham, 2004) in the workplace, with its constituent sense of interdependency, offer a balance to competence as an individual's responsibility for performance?

Closer to the field of early professional learning is the typology of 'non-formal' learning (implicit, reactive and deliberative) constructed by Eraut (2000). This is likely to be another useful theoretical starting point in devising a conceptual framework for progressive focussing on the nature of EPL. We are also mindful of the dangers of conceptualising formal and informal (and non-formal) learning as somehow fundamentally distinct, or of claiming superiority of one over the other (Colley, Hodkinson and Malcolm, 2003). Use of 'informal' emerged from our grounded data as a provisional term to describe a strong, tacit dimension of experience as a whole. The main point is that there is a weight of research evidence and practitioner opinion supporting a strong informal, social dimension in the experience of becoming a teacher, which is neglected in policy. If the argument from research is, therefore, that policy ought to accept the centrality of this finding, then a major question concerns the ways in which relationships and communities influence the early professional learning of teachers and how these can be used to develop a clearer map of informal learning in a professional social context.
Rather than continue the standoff between these two seemingly polarised views of early development, there is a need, if policy is to move forward, to try to synthesise a more comprehensive practical theory. Recognition by researchers of the possible positive impacts of policy ought to be balanced against an equivalent level of recognition by policy writers of research findings which may offer a more authentic representation of the realities of practice, and that may be at odds with policy. Mentoring, for example, continues to be a part of the policy package for new teachers. Yet previous mentoring models for new teachers ultimately failed because they represented preconceptions of teaching and of learning to teach, uninformed by grounded theory e.g. the informal, natural mentoring culture that exists in schools, or research findings in other disciplines (McNally, 1994).

**Integrating professional identity**

Although we propose competence-based and informal learning as two main areas for investigation, there are other points of potential interest. One concern is that the development of theory does not overlook the intrinsic personal qualities and diversity of talent that new teachers bring to their work. Policy has undervalued this, though Reid (2001) did address the matter in his keynote speech to the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers. The human components of teachers' qualities are quite clearly valued by children as 'their' indicators of professional competence: a 'good teacher', for example, 'tells the truth' and 'stands up for you' (Hay McBer, 2000). This surely points to the need for a broader conceptual foundation for EPL in which the nature of professional identity is defined beyond the impersonal and decontextualised expressions of policy. While the proliferation of professional standards is not perhaps at the level of a policy epidemic, we do nonetheless share to a degree Ball's (2003) concern about the possible effect on (new) teachers' sense of their professional selves. Becoming a teacher has always been something of an existential struggle, defined through relationships with colleagues and classes taught. Evidence of the replacement or even displacement of these experiences as definitive would indeed tend to locate the new standards within a culture of 'performativity'.

Exploring the interrelation between professional learning and personal development should also recognise that individual life histories and societal shifts do have rather different registers and rhythms (Oleson, 2001). Official documents on standards and professional development do not acknowledge the student-to-teacher transition as problematic in nature. Yet it appears to be essentially and humanly so: new teachers themselves are sensitive to the distinction. The transition may be better understood in terms of the beginning teacher as a developing individual person with a biography, and the wholly different contexts of learning as a student and as an employed new teacher (Flores, 2001).

Understanding the first few years of teacher development as a whole is, as we exemplified earlier, likely to find illumination in the literatures of other disciplines. The ecology of learning communities (Lave, 1996), for example, deserves consideration. New theories of professional practice and learning may also need to accommodate questions of uncertainty, ambiguity and conflict in accounts of diverse, professional selves and emerging identities, as argued by Stronach et al (2002) from their data on teachers and nurses. Atkinson (2004), for example, brings a welcome philosophical perspective to
narratives of identity formation in ITE and is right to argue against the ideological illusion of some symbolisations of reflective practice. Yet his ideas are unlikely to connect with the language of the teaching profession, and are detached from praxis; his ‘real-of-teaching’ is central to our conceptualisation of EPL and the development of identity.

An attempt to reconcile the conflicting paradigms of formal competence with notions of identity formation and informal learning may appear to be disingenuous. We take the view, however, that an ongoing standoff can only be sterile. Firing bullets from the safety of academic journals rarely alters the direction of the policy wagon. It is time to come out from the sidelines and respond to the charges of intellectual dereliction and growing weakness of the academic in society (Humes and Bryce, 2003). Peaceful reconciliation may remain a distant aim but, in the meantime, a short-term showdown seems to be all but inevitable. There is, therefore, a challenging, third question about how an understanding of EPL, which encompasses competence, person and context, can be tested and re-grounded in practice, in a way that accommodates the reality of regulatory bodies with policy responsibilities for professional standards.

**Extending the professional context of EPL**

It is these questions then that form our theoretical research framework for a fuller understanding of the actual development of teachers in the early years of practice. From a Scottish perspective, an intensive study of practice in Scotland would be timely, in the ‘new’ professional context which follows the McCrone Report (2001). From August 2002, new teachers have been guaranteed a one year ‘probationary’ post in which time is built in to allow planning, reflection and mentoring support, based on national guidance (GTC Scotland, 2002). Although there is a degree of advice on support for the new teacher, the emphasis is on the competence-based standard for full registration with associated procedures, forms and practical prescription. Research should, therefore, be sensitive to picking up any important features of this formal support structure which illuminate the learning process for new teachers, and assume responsibility for incorporating them in a developing theory of EPL.

Theory development should also encompass a comparative strand of research. Early teacher development has seen recent, separate initiatives within the countries of the UK (e.g. DENI, 1999; DfEE, 1999) and a number of evaluations (e.g. Harrison, 2001; Bubb, 2000; Bubb et al, 2001; Simco, 1999; Tickle, 2000b). In recent research in England (Hustler et al, 2002), respondents cited as many as 16 different types of influence in their early learning experience, suggesting a large hinterland of informal learning.

A broad theory of EPL obviously needs to span a range of professional contexts other than teaching. As teacher educators and educational researchers, we would favour starting from our own knowledge base and extending outwards. We anticipate that early data on potential defining differences between professions would actually be elicited from a broad sample of new teachers, as it could well include some who happen to be mature entrants from other professions. We would also want to build on our work in related areas, for example organisational learning and health professionals (e.g. Boreham, Shea and Mackway-Jones 2000; Boreham et al 2002; Boreham 2000; Cope et al 2000; Stoddart et al, 1996; Stronach et al, 2002). Of evident interest is the issue of
Design Issues

A deep understanding of the nature of early professional learning requires sustained contact with the learners and their context. Immersion in these contexts and cultures is, in our view, best achieved (for new teachers, in the first instance) through the deployment of teacher-researchers, trained and supported as case study ethnographers of new teachers in their own schools. We would want to see developed a theory of EPL in teaching that combines data obtained through ‘user engagement’ with an interdisciplinary review of findings from literature. While this would cover areas of immediate relevance, such as Tickle’s (2000a) induction curriculum and official publications, the review would have to go beyond the conventional boundaries of teacher education. It should also enable a critical review of the process itself, in relation to its relevance to user settings and validity across contexts. We are also inclined to believe that the juxtaposition of a large, contextualized body of empirical data about early professional learning with the results of a critically conducted systematic review is more likely to reach a range of conclusions that are deep as well as broad in their nature. Since they would also be contextually sensitive, there is a better chance of developing and disseminating robust theory and practice in EPL.

The detail of the design of our proposed research is not for this paper. What we wish to discuss are what we currently see as the major issues of that design. However, it may be helpful to present briefly the main features of the design we have in mind. The design depends on combining different areas of research expertise: qualitative with quantitative, theory development with testing of outcomes, teacher development with occupational learning and early development in other professions. We see a need to deploy different methods at different stages of the research. It starts with case studies conducted by teachers as researchers, requiring interviews and field notes, and moves on to experimental testing, seeking to demonstrate outcomes using indicators of professional learning and performance. The fundamental intention, however, is to secure deeper knowledge of authentic learning processes in the early development of teachers and, subsequently, other professional settings. We agree with Eraut (2000) that a new methodological step forward is achievable, albeit through a project on a large scale. In taking this step we hope to develop a new theoretical understanding of EPL and, although this is not therefore pure phronetic research in that sense, it is similar in many respects to Flyvbjerg’s (2001) espoused approach to social science: closeness to reality, practice before discourse, cases in context, for example, could all be said to characterise our proposed method. We are indeed exploring his view that a focus on concrete cases and narrative is ‘perfectly compatible’ with attempts at empirical generalisations.

A major challenge of course, even for practice-based theory, is its translation or reconstitution into an operational model that will serve new teachers and their colleagues in schools. Although acknowledge the legitimate expectation of testable outcomes by funders and policy makers, this does not preclude the prior need for narratives and
indeed genealogies in establishing a base of understanding and so determining what is important and what to pursue. Goodson (2003), for example, makes the case for a vernacular of the particular, personal and practical. Ethnographic case studies of new teachers in their schools are perhaps the obvious means of providing this kind of specific knowledge in context. Testing the emergent theory does tend to draw us toward the development of a quasi-experimental study (which could proceed from one sector into another and across other countries and professions). Such a move into the quantitative paradigm would, it is often argued, subject qualitative theory to a more rigorous ‘scientific’ kind of scrutiny (while also extending and refining an evolving model through identifying contextual differences). What this strategy does recognise, however, is a need to move beyond simply producing yet another set of case studies, which it is argued by some (e.g. Tooley, 1998), fail to enhance professional practice, and also a need to try to bring different traditions of educational research to bear on an area of educational policy. It responds to the plea for paradigmatic tolerance (Smeyers, 2001).

In this way the research design would at least encompass the early learning experience of a large number of new teachers and their supporting colleagues. On the basis of this and other practitioner involvement in translating a grounded theory into a workable model, it becomes more than a groundless hope that ‘knowledge transformation’ amongst the ‘user community’ is more likely to occur, as practice-based theory is developed into theory-based practice. The level of user involvement here is neither simply presumed nor merely symbolic. It is surely the case that time, effort and trust underlie efforts to make an impact on the professional culture of teaching (Thomas et al, 1998) and that, whatever research-based knowledge is gained, it is likely to be enhanced through sustained interactivity with practitioners (Huberman, 1999).

An enduring weakness in studies of professional development has been the absence of longitudinal data. This would generate insights on the extent to which there may be stages of early development or indeed discontinuities at, for example, the key transitions of ‘student to inductee’ and ‘inductee to fully qualified teacher’. Such an understanding is important for the development of meaningful policy formation on induction with perhaps a direct bearing on policy relating to teacher retention.

The defining design tension, however, lies in the co-existence of qualitative and quantitative methods within the one project. The credibility of any conclusion rests on their compatibility and ultimate co-productiveness. The design is first and foremost naturalistic in that it depends on humans as instruments, but this still makes it subject to criteria appropriate to naturalistic investigation, for example transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). When this is coupled with the demand for ‘measurement’ of outcomes and the inclusion of quantitative means, research design becomes problematic on a grand scale. Two specific, crucial aspects of the design, each at opposite ends of the methodological spectrum, are discussed below: the deployment of teachers as ethnographers in their own schools and the testing of the emergent model.

**Teachers as ethnographers in their schools**

Further understanding of learners in the workplace through more progressive focusing is supported by the experience of Eraut (2000), who also concluded that a strategy reliant
on interviews by outsiders was limited in its potential for eliciting ‘evidence of processes that, if not entirely tacit, do not come readily to mind’. A more prolonged workplace presence would present more naturalistic opportunities for gathering richer evidence on the activities and social transactions that take place during actual practice. Teachers as the researchers themselves would have sustained contact with the new teachers and their colleagues in their own institutions. Not only would they be uniquely close to the action as researchers, their closeness to the lived experience of learning to teach has the advantage of allowing day-to-day access to studying the nature of individuals’ learning through a broader range of professional settings e.g. post-lesson discussion, staffroom conversations, and also different types of interview e.g. lesson-focused, biographical.

Interviews and field notes from the inside, for example, would lead to the construction of an ongoing narrative and genealogy for each new teacher and to progressive probing of emergent themes related to the learning and wider experience that takes place. Areas for initial exploration could be the experience of the first few weeks after starting; the support persons and events, both within the prescribed structure and informally; which of these are experienced as important, positively or negatively; what is learned from them and how this learning occurs; examples of developing competence and specific competencies; how competence-based expressions of standards are understood and used by practitioners; how ‘being a teacher’ is different from ‘being a student’. There is the potential for insider insights over a longer period into, for example, transitions, critical incidents and relationship patterns. Given a protected, flexible time allocation teacher-researchers are in a unique situation to exploit their native status and to be participant observers in a range of situations. Access to more personalised documentation, e.g. development portfolios and learning diaries, could explore their function: whether they actually do serve as a narrative instrument nourishing self-discovery and professional learning (Farr Darling, 2001).

The deployment of teachers would be guided by introducing them to ethnographic methods (e.g. Spradley, 1979; Hamilton, 1999) and to the need for sensitivity to the emergence of ‘new’ data and theoretical refinement (Glaser, 1978). It is their closeness to the action as teachers, however, particularly if they have some mentoring responsibility themselves, that may also make them too close to the action as researchers. They may need to be exploratory in relation to their ethnographic selves and the textual form and style of their reporting (Coffey, 1999). Another layer of training would be knowledge of bias awareness, perceptiveness and support of recent recall by providing observation training based on cognitive interview methodology (e.g. Fisher and Geiselman, 1992).

While this kind of academic background knowledge of ethnography is clearly important, there are at least two main issues it does not address. The actual primary identity of the intended researchers is as teachers in a school. In what ways will their identity change in the perception of their colleagues (and themselves) once they assume this rather singular position as researchers of some of these same colleagues? The position of part-time teacher and other-time observer could well cast them in a surveillance role. This raises the second question, that of selection. Being seen as respected and trustworthy by school colleagues does become a fairly important criterion if we accept the scenario of identity stress. Potential as an ethnographer is perhaps a secondary criterion; it can be supported.
In a wider school context, the importance of the departmental unit in teacher identity (in the secondary school) and the better prospect of change through contact with this group (Thomas et al, 1998), suggests that the teacher-researchers might focus on a limited number of departments. Theoretical insights from organisational learning (e.g. Boreham, 2002; Senge, 1990) indicate that the support of senior school management is important but in a way that acknowledges that the 'leaders' of action will also be chalk face teachers. A sense of this could be important in negotiations with schools at the case study and testing stages.

Testing the model

An extensive grounded theory, however robust its qualitative base and practitioner support, may not ultimately be enough to persuade those looking for 'hard' evidence as a basis for policy. As we have argued, a research-based model of early teacher learning which is to be adopted by the profession and its regulatory bodies, will be expected to demonstrate how it could improve on current practice. In what ways, for example, would new teachers supported by the model benefit in relation to their 'unsupported' counterparts? The quasi-experimental design envisaged would include indices or indicators that would cover the informal dimension of professional learning as well as more behavioural dimensions of teaching. The process of evolving such a test instrument would involve a degree of innovative methodology and testing and refinement in use. Based on our current knowledge of EPL, we consider that there could be indicators in the areas of a) interaction with colleagues or the extent of socio-professional integration; b) the extent to which they feel comfortable with their role as teachers, the degree of job satisfaction; c) children's descriptions of new teachers. Taking account of professional performance and judgement would require possibly two additional areas of d) pupil achievement or attainment in context and e) expert judgement of teaching performance.

The instrument would have to be specially designed for its purpose but some indicators could be constructed or adapted from existing well-validated measures (e.g. Frederickson and Furnham, 1998; Yezzi and Lester, 2000) and follow standard piloting procedures. They would also be supplemented and triangulated by qualitative assessments from interviews with support colleagues and, subject to permission, official reports on the new teachers themselves.

Conventional testing using 'matched pairs' of schools also presents a considerable challenge. In the first instance, will it be possible to obtain the professional goodwill of schools and teachers in the interests of longer-term educational benefits? Will it be possible to maintain an ethic of responsible collaboration? Secondly, the research questions, and indeed the policy area itself, are too complex for simplistic experimental and statistical methods. Particular care will have to be taken in drawing on quantitative methods, interpretation of data and generation of findings, given the readiness with which many spuriously attribute reliability to this approach. Despite our concerns about our 'quantitative' findings acquiring the appearance of a rigour that they may not merit, we do think it worth attempting to be quantitative about robust qualitative evidence.

Concluding Comments
The study proposed here argues for the synthesis of two traditionally disparate theories of learning to teach, an over-structured competence-led view of professional development, on the one hand, with an essentially different, informal learning process dependent on social context and identity formation, on the other. It also unites the student experience of initial teacher education and the formal 'induction year' as a new teacher into an early learning phase of professional development, while recognising the possibly inherent discontinuity in the turbulent transition form one to the other. We have interrogated our own initial doubts of naive optimism in the face of what we know can be seen as irreconcilable research-policy clashes. In developing the argument for this paper we have indeed alluded to other tensions: holistic or specific competence; appointed mentors replacing natural mentoring; diverse, talented selves in conflict with a controlling standard for all.

With educational research under pressure to show some practical impact on policy, however, there is an obligation to envisage what that impact might be. Foremost perhaps is a fairly comprehensive grounded understanding of early professional learning. A closer policy connection is the location of a competence-based standard within an extended framework of grounded principles governing early professional development. In addition, it should be possible to establish the relative importance of particular areas of competence or specific competencies in different contexts and at different stages and transitions. There is no such refinement within policy at present. Nor is there evidence (in an evidence-based practice culture) that the standards can be applied with any reliability or predictive validity. The development of a tested theory and 'indicators' might actually help in making better judgements of teachers' progress. At a broader professional level, the identification of commonalities and defining differences across a range of professional situations would contribute to inter-professional understanding.

We consider that it is possible to construct a model of EPL, with and for new professionals and their colleagues, which recognises that performance is enhanced through a diversity of learning experiences and support, informed by sensitivity to person and context. We would also want to see the eventual research findings translated into a form that would assist in enabling the immediate, local community of support to be confident in identifying, providing, and responding to, a rich range of authentic learning experiences for the new practitioner.

The research would be strongly collaborative. It proposes a research partnership between higher education and schools, and gives school practitioners a substantial, supported research role and responsibility as teacher-researchers. In due course their developing research experience and confidence could conceivably stimulate awareness in their own schools and amongst their own colleagues. Their work would also take them as credible practitioners into other schools as researchers, giving credibility to the prospect of a research-based theory becoming embedded in practice. The role of teachers as researchers may be crucial, given the negligible influence of researchers so far on teacher education policy. The limits of our potential contribution, as Hagger and McIntyre (2000) remind us, are that generalisations from research can offer insight and guidance, but the practice of teachers is about subtle judgements in unique situations.

Our proposed project is something of a showdown in which we confront ourselves as well as policy. We have set out a research rationale and agenda which challenges the insular
assumptions of policy. The concomitant tensions could result in anything from a research-policy gunfight to more peaceful and collegial illumination for both sides. For our part, we have to face up to the sometimes conflictual nature of our responsibilities within higher education for teaching standards, as we work with the dynamic tension that can exist between policy critique and implementation. Engagement with users in matters of fundamental ideology and evidence could well make our research lives less comfortable; yet we agree that engagement with other communities is the right if not a comfortable option (Edwards, 2002). We shall have to put our findings to the test and be open to the possibility that policy has got it right in this case. The development of a model of EPL that might make a difference for the better will be put to the test in more ways than are presently envisaged in the design (we have largely ignored internecine research warfare). Well, you would expect the last chance saloon to be tough going. The stiff drink is not the problem; it is the thought of coming back for the humble pie.

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