

NAFOL Conference: Validity and Value in Teacher Education Research – Abstract
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Title: The value of understanding teacher learning in innovative schools

Education has not changed much from its industrial shape in 19th century, even though much of the world around schools have drastically transformed (Echazarra, Salinas, Méndez, Denis, & Rech, 2016; Shapiro, Haahr, Bayer, & Boekholt, 2007). The need to change is more pressing than ever, but for most of the education there are strong institutional traditions which seem almost impenetrable for innovative practice to settle (Resnick, Goldman, Spillane, & Rangel, 2010). To break the stagnant state of play, it is important to examine and understand the elements, the threats and the opportunities that make the education as it is today and how it ought to change (Mattila & Silander, 2015). Hence, the value of educational research stems from its relevance and the validity towards this change.

The current study primarily seeks to understand the complexities of school-based education, by looking into schools that oppose the traditional forms through innovating the pedagogical core. More specifically, the research focuses on teachers' professional development as one of the key elements of well-functioning schools and changing educational paradigms. By comprehensively understanding different components of a complex systems such as (innovative) school, together with the role of teachers and leaders, the study brings forth a valuable reflection for the sampled schools as well as a helpful input for those schools interested in changing.

Scientific research is essentially an attempt to discover the truth, thus validity and quality of it needs to be embedded into a systematic, controlled and well-reflected activity (Cohen & Loewenberg Ball, 2000). In order to seek for the honest representation of truth, the current study was designed around a methodological approach that best fits its aims. Starting with the premise that innovation and disruption of the traditional constrains are beneficial for educational change (Kovacs & Tinoca, 2017; Resnick et al., 2010; Schleicher, 2015), the aim was to generate insights into teachers' continuous development and what is its significance in the schools that function as innovative learning environments. Nested case study was selected as an adequate mechanism that can capture the intricate layering that the topic carries, thus providing good understanding of contextualisation and globalisation effects (Wen, Pei Wen Chong, & Graham, 2013). The overall approach to case study was appropriated to Merriam's (1998) notions, thus this qualitative inquiry included semi-structured interviews, focus groups and unstructured observations mainly in order to understand the meaning behind the lived experiences (Seidman, 2006).

The study points out that teacher learning, as well as innovative schools, are indeed nested into their contexts. The layers of the context play a significant role, from national to interpersonal (from macro

to micro) levels, of which the meso level of school leaders seemed of utmost importance. Furthermore, the notion of routinisation of practice versus continuous innovation (Hammerness et al., 2007) carried a valuable learning outcome pointing to the importance of workplace balance, reflection and motivation in understanding the grounded elements of teacher learning.

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