Educational Planning, Sciences, and The Conservation of the Present As The Problem of Change: Should We Take Seriously The Cautions of Foucault and Rancière?

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Abstract
The dream of much of contemporary education sciences is to plan the present in the hope of orchestrating the desired future. The designing of the present for the future appears in the idea that research identifies “what works”, the search for “practical knowledge”, and the reflective practitioners, action research and the expert and effective teacher. The promise of “practical” research captures the modern hopes of fulfilling the desires of democracy, equity and justice. The social commitments are important but ironically impractical for challenging social wrongs. "Practice" is a theory about changing people. The research inscribes a comparative system of reason that excludes and abjests in processes of inclusion. The analysis entails the social epistemology of planning and heeds the cautions of Foucault and Rancière about governing and the paradoxical re-inscription of inequality in the efforts of seeking equality.

Keywords: Curriculum Knowledge; Research on Practice; Social Epistemology.

Introduction

During the final meeting of ten country research report for the European Commission, an argument developed for writing a simplified report for the European Commission and then write an academic one. The assumption was that the report for the Commission would take the findings of the research and direct them to what policy makers should do for providing better governance of educational systems. This assumption of two reports was challenged by Finnish and Swedish researchers who were astonished by distinguishing between academic and what is given to the Commission. In back of this astonishment was the thought that policy makers ask for social science research is to provide new insights into the social problems and issues at hand and not the role of the academic to “tell” them what to do.

The interchange represents, in my mind, a division in the research community about whether the task of social science is not only to describe events but also provide the ‘problem solving’ that enables social planning to correct social wrongs. The idea is itself one that begins to appear in the European and North American Enlightenments. The new philosophes talked about human agency as effecting change and bringing progress. With the political revolutions that enabled republican forms of government and the emergence of the social sciences by the end of the 19th century, the idea of science as social planning became technological and theoretically more possible. Science was to
understand not only how things work, but to provide theories and directions to programs that change society and also people. If I had an adequate survey the field, my guess is the dream of much of contemporary education sciences is to plan the present in the hope of orchestrating what is desired as the future. The designing of the present for the future appears in different nooks and crannies of research; from the idea that research identifies “what works”, the search for “practical knowledge”, and the reflective practioners whose action research is to usher in what desired teacher signified as expert and effective.

The promise of finding the future through science is daunting and enticing. It captures the modern hopes of fulfilling the desires of democracy, equity and justice. While the social commitments are important, I will argue that practical knowledge in research is, ironically, impractical for challenging social wrongs. To argue this:

First, I explore briefly and historically the social epistemology of the idea of research as planning society. Second, I link the idea of planning to change society for the future as simultaneously planning to change people. Third, the idea of planning society and people is given a concrete “context” through exploring research on teacher “practices”. Practice, I argue, is a research strategy about the desired teacher and not to describe what teachers do. Further, the changing of the teacher is bound historically to changing the trilogy of child, family and community who are different from unspoken norms that establish difference – sometimes given as kinds of people such as the immigrant, the ethnic group, and the poor who are feared as outside of the spaces of normality.

My focusing on the history of social science in educational research is to make visible the double gestures of exclusion and abjection in research about inclusion. The argument pursues the cautions of Foucault and Rancière. Foucault, if I can paraphrase, suggests that not all discourses are bad but all discourses are dangerous. There is no totality in understanding and no guarantees. Rancière’s caution is related, although he moves with a different “eye” or style of discourse about the relation of science and social commitments. The part of Rancière’s argument that interests me is of the orthodoxy of researcher as the shepherd who plans who people should be. The shepherding has two consequences. One is it creates a hierarchy between the expert (the philosopher and the social scientists) and the people who are target of the expertise, which he calls “the poor”. The production of a hierarchy is about power relations that paradoxically re-inscribe inequality in the efforts of seeking equality. This role of shepherd and its production of hierarchy, to use Rancière’s words, embody the fear of democracy.

The approach is a History of the Present to trace the social epistemology of planning (Popkewitz, 1991, 2008). It is to examining the rules and standards of “reason” that order the social and education sciences and its principles of action and reflection. The history of the reason of science discussed here, however, is not “to learn from the past” as though the present is merely a continuity of what proceeded it. Nor is it concerned with the commonsense of “useful” and practical” knowledge as a way of shepherding change. The irony of the current notions of useful and practical knowledge is the conservatism and anti-intellectualism given.

It is to think of research and change in a different way. Making fragile the causalities and naturalness of the present is a strategy to open spaces for
possibilities other than those framed by the contemporary principles that order reflection and action. My argument, then, in a play of words, is to think about what is “useful” and practical knowledge as unsettling the commonsense so as to enable alternatives that exist outside of the contemporary frameworks of “reason”. The argument, however, is not against planning but to explore the limits of contemporary orthodoxies.

**Designing the present in order to design the conditions and people of the future**

My thinking about science investigating the present is to think historically about the history of the present. That history is one of social epistemology. *Epistemology* is to consider the rules and standards that order and classify what is seen and acted on. It is to ask about the distinctions and categorization that organize the ways of responding to the world, the conceptions of “self”, and the principles which shape and fashion the objects of what is seen, thought about and acted on. Concurrently, *social* epistemology considers historical patterns and principles assembled in different times and spaces to make possible the “objects” of reflection and action. The interest in social epistemology, then, is to explore how “we” know and what is known as not naturally there and descriptions of the world or as representations of social interests. Rather, it is to make visible the principles historically generated about who “we” are and should be; recognizing that “ideas” and knowledge are material and have the effect to intern and enclose what is (im)possible. To explore the limit of the commonsense, I argue in the conclusions is a strategy of change through historicizing what is taken as natural and inevitable.

In some ways, to ask about “reason” and knowledge historically is difficult. It is the knowledge that we inherit that connects us to others. The knowledge that we have of our self and the world is like the fish swimming in water. It is the medium that surrounds us and serves as a security blanket. Its ordering and classifying of things make possible the “reason” of daily life and its manageability, stability, and naturalness; like the fish swimming in the water. When we cross the street, we want to trust in the knowledge that the red light means cars will stop; or that it is a safe bet to think of the children as particular kinds of people who sit in the classroom to grow and develop into “reasonable people” through the right kinds of effective teacher practices.

This notion of ‘reason’ goes against the grain. Analytic traditions of philosophy tend to view epistemology as questions about the underlying and transcendent logic of knowledge. The concern is with the theory of knowledge that focuses on the inherent nature and procedures of justification and belief. Reason is considered as a natural property of the mind (psychology), the method by which humans interrogate their “nature”, or as the universal logic through which the truthfulness of statements are determined. In contrast, “reason” can be examined as a historical event whose rules and standards for seeing the objects of the school- the teacher, the child, the family- as formed through different social and cultural practices. To think of reason as an historical event is a way to undue the dualism of realism and nominalism, text and context, subjective and objective, and discourse and the real – dichotomies that plague contemporary educational research that form the principles about finding “useful knowledge”, practical
knowledge, and notions of “the reflective practitioner”. “Reason” acts on us, ordering reflection and action in what Ian Hacking calls “dynamic nominalism” or “radical realism” and in recent scholarship as “the new materialism”.

**Early twentieth century social and education sciences: designing people in planning the future**

In graduate school I took a course in political science with Alfred de Grazia, a founder of the American behavioral science movement. That movement was the legacy of the Logic Positivists who came to the United States from Vienna in the 1920s and argued for the unity of sciences. Logic Positivists never had a real foothold in the United States and disappeared as a formal academic movement. The American behavioral sciences emerged in the 1950s and adopted the mantle of finding the unity of the social sciences. The central unifying theme was the human sciences as administrative in purpose. Science, it was suggested, describes the conditions of the world through its careful measurements and produces generalizations about how that world works. In one sense, the behavioral sciences captured the turn of the twentieth-century American faith in science and technology as the apotheosis of its Enlightenment’s progressive promise.

The faith in social intervention carried different trajectories in the practices of social sciences. One was the designing of the social conditions that would bring forth the hope of the future embodied in the nation. For example, the Swedish social sciences by the early years of the twentieth century embodied the social democratic image of a peaceful nation and the cosmopolitan people who strived to bring progressive (and Lutheran) moral good to an international context. In contrast, the American social sciences brought Calvinist reformism into the moral optimism of the nation as a unique experiment in the development of cosmopolitan values. The formation of the American republic in the late eighteenth century re-assembled a Christian millennial belief that the proper object of study was God into an Enlightenment cosmopolitanism that rejected, at one level, the universality of religious morality as the basis for a common mankind (Schlereth, 1977, p. 56). That rejection, however, did not eliminate religious notions of the soul and salvation but brought elements into the idea of the citizen who performed “good works” and embodied civic virtue (Tröhler, 2011). The republic joined “the health of the soul and the regeneration of the Christian and the virtuous citizen, exultation of the divine and the celebration of design” (Ferguson, 1997, p. 43) with the designing of human improvement to enable “the pursuit of happiness.”

The planning of people can be historically connected with the problem of design. Contemporary notions of design portray the sensibility of an openness that enables democratic participation and human agency through research projects of planning. Planning is portrayed as the natural expression of a democracy that develops objective knowledge derived from the ‘evidence’ of rigorous data. That knowledge serves the democratic ideal about reason and rationality as the universal principles through which different interests make decisions. The democracy at bay here, however, is not only about participation. It embodies a utopian quality about the proper planning of society as enabling the fulfillment of a utopian future.
Folded together are religious themes of salvation, political theories of the republic, science and the new mass school into the notion of research as design. Up to the nineteenth century, design proved the existence of God, which was based on evidence of intelligence or purposefulness in nature (Reuben, 1996, p. 31). By the end of the 19th century in the United States, the notion of desire travelled into the new social sciences. Design social conditions embodied the secular promise of the nation through fabricating a future cosmopolitan citizen who would truly be universal and a model to the world (Popkewitz, 2008). Translated from philosophical thought of the enlightenments into political theories of human history and agency, thought and logic became a reflective practice to understand human development and establish autonomy and authority to knowledge in processes of change. Design was given in the name of an individuality whose agency and participation was essential to governing practices.

The autonomy of the subject of human agency, paradoxically, was an object to be calculated and designed. The turn of the century American sociologies and psychologies instantiated theories and methods to design the trilogy of the child, family and community. The change in the trilogy was to bring harmony to the envisioned future society. Agency was to be calculated and administered in designing of the interior of the individual. The sciences of humanity were, in practice, cultural theses about the modes of living of the citizen

Design was embodied as the task of the school pedagogy. The radicalism of the new republics was to make the individual as an actor and agent of change and reason as a historical problem. Pedagogy was the “converting ordinance”, written with an evangelizing and calculated design on the souls of their readers. The method of reason was to build revelatory, spiritual fulfillment. Community was part of the course of life or one’s curriculum vitae. For the progressives, such as Dewey, the problem of design embodied the triumph of cooperation over competition as the natural destiny of human progress (Sklansky, 2002, p. 161). William James’s notion of a pragmatic psychology placed a premium on habit formation as the main means of acting in accord with one’s design (Sklansky, 2002, p. 146). Frank Lester Ward (1883), a founding figure in American sociology, viewed science as ordering and modifying the contemplative “man” by allowing for the artificial construction of evolution. The psychology of Edward L. Thorndike was to shape and fashion ‘the mind and the spirit of man [sic]’ so individuals could be responsible for their progress or entrusted with their future. Science, Thorndike argued, enables education to achieve its purposes of bringing happiness to people. To fulfill “the ultimate purposes of education, we have to measure each study’s service in making man’s wants better and in making him able to satisfy them” (Thorndike, 1912/1962, p. 143).

The ideas of progress captured this. Progress entailed making visible the processes of social life and the interior “mind”, so as to design the rules and standards that ordered change itself. The interiority of the individual was given a sequence of past, present and future, the latter inscribed in notions of growth and development. The mind, for example, was discovered as having consciousness and unconsciousness, personality, attitudes, behaviors. The different classifications of individuality were ordered as processes of learning that can be studied and calculated to understand how and why the child comes into being
and develops (Steedman, 1995). That development embodied images of the future that fulfills the hopes of the present.

Design had double qualities. It brought to bear the possibilities of human “reason” as a force of change. And it made possible the planning of society through interventions to alter and make possible progress. Life was a continuous event of planning through time, shedding the past through the development of the self for the future. Continued calculations organized one’s career to assign identity, self-image, and material prospects in an expanding universe (Bledstein, 1976, p. 159). Dewey’s pragmatism, which was important to American progressive education and today’s reform, entails principles about the agentive individual whose rational actions design life as temporal sequences geared to the future. Life became a planned series of events, for example, through problem solving to calculate and order experience.

The hope of designing the citizen and the child as the future adult also gave visibility to the double gestures and a comparative mode of thought. Design was not only about producing reason and the reasonable person. The optimism of progress travelled with fears of degeneration and dangers. As Chamberlin and Gilman suggest, “hope was looked after by progress and seemed as the tenor of the times, but fear was contagious” (1985, p. xiii). The early American disciplines of the social sciences, for example, were concerned with calculating and designing the self-managed and responsible urban trilogy of child, family and community whose self-development and growth were linked with standardized public virtues. Literature and science spoke of race as associated not only with the idea of authenticity and national principles (The American Race) but also with the elevation of race to a determining position in theories of history.

The new sciences would change people through producing the moral dispositions, sensitivities, and skills for participation and inclusion of the poor and particular immigrant and racialized groups. Early American social scientists spoke of social engineering as changing social conditions by making the poor and immigrants into morally responsible citizens. The domestic sciences at the turn of the twentieth century rationalized the household. The managing of life was through learning accounting measures to control expenditures with wage income and by ordering the interactions in family relations and childrearing. The community sociologists invented theories about social communications, community, and primary and secondary groups that overlapped with Progressive Protestant reformers’ concerns about the moral disorder of urban everyday life. The formation of the American school curriculum gave attention to the needs for social adjustment and social efficiency in urban, industrial life (Franklin, 1987).

The planning of people, however, is not merely in education. Advertising does this all of the time to create people called “markets”. Less obvious are the new technological weapons of the military that require efforts to re-design individuals. Current military research related to human limits involved in flying of unmanned air drones for long times, aims to make an individual who is “extracted” from the natural environment and natural elements of control. Crary (2008) explored military studies of the white-crowned sparrow that can fly for seven days without sleep; these are to consider how to create the combatant who can go for a minimum of seven days without sleep as the soldiers work with the Internet and the stealth fighter-bomber. The use of neurochemicals, gene
therapy, and even transcranial magnetic stimulation is considered “to facilitate the imposition of a mechanistic or robotic model of time, efficiency, and functionality onto the human body” (p. 4).

The elixir of science as design and impracticality in contemporary practical knowledge

Contemporary salvation themes of science as planning people are connected to the future called the Knowledge Society and the kind of person called “the lifelong learner”. That future is inhabited by a particular human kind that contemporary policy and research is given as the lifelong learner. The principles governing change and planning is expressed as the search for useful and “practical knowledge”.

Design as making people is embodied in the evocation of “practice”. Practice is the contemporary equivalent of the medieval Philosopher’s Stone, seeking educational perfection through reforms that change teaching and teachers. The focus on practice is, at one level, born in the frustration that the massive efforts to reform schools since the second half of the 20th century have not been successful. The concern for practice is also historical. It embodies a particular style of reasoning about science found at the turn of the 20th century American Progressive social sciences to provide knowledge for responding to the changing urban and industrial society. Today, research on practice is defined as essential for educators to find successful strategies for meeting the social and educational commitments of quality and equality. The research on benchmarking of best and “core” practice of the professional teacher in teaching and teacher education that I explore express these social values in their strategies of change.

Current research about practice is, at one level, about the desired kind of person who is qualified with the expert professional knowledge to produce children’s success. The principles of the profession are defined by common knowledge and course of study. Upon examination, these professional principles are what is desired and imagined as professions and less about what is historically or sociological substantiated. The category of the professional emerged in the 20th century as a particular category cultural and social authority of certain social occupations in Anglo-American contexts that have been historically and sociologically debated.

In current research about reforms, educational change, and making the teacher as professional, the research inscribes a particular kind of desired person as an ontological fact. There is a redemption narratives about who the teacher should be that are given as the fact of what the nature of the teacher should be. In examining the three different reform programs concerned with research on “practice”, the qualities and characteristics of the teacher have little to do with describing what teachers do. The study of teacher “practices” give expression to philosophical claims about universal qualities of the teacher that are made into calculations and measurement that give the abstraction as “the social facts” to be actualized through reform programs about “the effective” teacher.

This making of a philosophical claim and abstraction about the desired teacher to be actualized through reforms is evident in Teach For America [TFA] (2013A/B), a national alternative teacher education program for urban and rural
schools. The program is organized around Teaching As Leadership Comprehensive Rubric (TALCR). The rubric, originally a liturgical tool, is an abstraction that is applied to manage changes in the teacher. The rubric identifies the qualities and characteristics of what the teacher should be. The practices or actions are ordered in a hierarchy of functional behaviors that progress as stages from the novice to the expert teacher. The “practices” (and “actions”) are then placed in a developmental or stage theory that are used for self assessment and program assessment for the making of the teacher. The actions or behaviors in the TFA rubric and research programs directed to practice are to transform the individual. That transformation is about a mode of living and the moral dispositions and states of the mind of an imagined and desired teacher. The desired characteristics are planning purposefully, working relentlessly, and having the mindsets and optimism to fit into the model of the desired kind of teacher and to provide continuums of values for its assessment.

The “core practice” of the professional teacher, a second and seemingly different reform oriented research program, calls the desired teacher as someone whose actions express process as “high leverage” or “high impact” qualities. These qualities are given standardized rules, such as - (1) identifying the representations of practice in teaching school subjects; (2) decomposing those representations through analytically parsing the elements of existing practice; and (3) engaging novices in the approximations of practice that “are more or less proximal” to the practices of a profession (Grossman et al., 2009, p. 2058). Research is to actualize that imagined teacher. The teacher is to understand “how professional knowledge of practice can be examined, developed, and refined, and the crucial nature of that process in terms of conceptualizing what it means to be a teacher educator…” (Loughran, 2013, p. 13).

Seemingly third genre of reform-oriented research about practices embodies the abstraction of “the effective teacher” that teacher education is to produce. In an article in a leading educational research journal, the methodological research problem was to create research designs to identify “the effective teacher” who enables successful achievement of “all children” (Day, Sammons & Gu, 2008). The research was to identify “value-added” factors of the teacher that account for children success beyond external measures, such as those of class and educational level of parents. The “value added” dimensions in teachers’ practices was to identify “a more robust” relation between the capabilities of the teacher and the children’s achievement results. The research begins with the assumption that the capacities of the teacher are part of a system of psychological and organizational qualities whose identification will enable “all” children’s success in school achievement. The value added factors are directed to cultural and social practices that have embedded in them particular models of the desired trilogy of the sciences: society/community, the child, and teacher. Homologous to the core practice research that talks about collective relationship and habits of the mind, the effective teacher research focuses on student motivation, school culture and leadership, the biography and career of the teacher, but with a more direct emphasis on these characteristics as enabling student attainment and achievement.

The claims about outcomes and measures are philosophical claims of the professional teacher constructed through the aggregate produced in research
and registered as significant in planning change. The principles of the teacher as professional do not exist as singular “fact”. They connect with other images and narratives about theories of learning and systems theories of organization that become encapsulated with the category of “practice”. In the research examined, practice emphasizes what people do in schools as the origin of human improvement.

The evocation of the desire of the teacher as professional is not merely about practice. “Practice” is as a theory about a particular kind of person that teacher education is to produce. The research on practice is to identify strategies to actualize what is to be desired, the expert or the ambitious teacher. While the syntax in the research is about “real setting of practice with actual clients” (Grossman et al., 2009, p. 2093; italics added), what is made visible as the objects of reflect are ordered through social, psychological and communication theories that are to effect the desired qualities of the predicted successful teacher. The words of communities, learners, instruction, and meaningful experiences, among other distinctions, talked about as practice are abstractions that instantiate theories that, if I return to the first section, produce cultural thesis about “human nature”, change, and the moral individual (Tröhler, 2011; Biesta et al., 2011). Research is, for example, to “conceptualize expertise as holistic, meaningful, and applicable in the work of teacher education” and the conceptualization for it to “inevitably impacts on a teacher educator’s identity” (Loughran, 2013, p. 19).

The calling for the professional teacher and the focus on practice inscribes change as the redesigning of the interior of people. Research on practice, it is argued, can “open up new pathways and social futures for youth, particularly youth from non-dominant communities” (Gutiérrez & Penuel, 2014, p. 20). As with the turn of the 20th century, the sciences of the child and teacher are given as the panacea for democracy and equity. Its current reiteration concerns “practice” as its theories of change.

The transformation is in the soul of the teacher. The notion of the soul is no longer attached to religious forms but to the sciences of planning which are to change the inner qualities of the teacher. No longer finding the moral qualities that provide grace in the afterworld, the soul is today the kind of person who embodies dispositions, sensitivities and awarenesses. The “transformation” of the novice and professional knowledge are learning “habits of mind and character” that “develop new ways of thinking” (Grossman et al., 2008, p. 2060). It is to govern the emotions, motivation, and “mindsets” or habits of the mind. In critical research concerning urban teacher education, the “soul” is expressed as the individual who embodies “the professional virtues, qualities, and habits of mind and behavior” that should be intrinsic to the individual after their teacher education” (Boggess, 2010, p. 73). Teacher education is to “tailor” the teacher’s acceptable dispositions and eliminate the unacceptable ones (Boggess, 2010, p. 73).

The “transformation” of the teacher that relates the actions of teachers to the desired changes that often have a particular focus on the trilogy of the urban or disadvantaged, at-risk child, family and community. The redesigning of people is expressed as the commitment for changing society and social improvement. It is argued that the research on practice can “open up new pathways and social
futures for youth, particularly youth from non-dominant communities" (Gutiérrez & Penuel, 2014, p. 20). By focusing on practice, the core practice research is to provide the paths to identify and master variations and to learn from so teachers can make productive adaptations to produce a more equitable society (Gutiérrez & Penuel, 2014, p. 22).

The language of change is one of correcting social wrongs. Research on practice is to provide the paths to identify and master variations and to learn from so teachers can make productive adaptations to produce a more equitable society (Gutiérrez & Penuel, 2014, p. 22). The transformation of the urban teacher in one program is to provide the practices that enable "critical and activist teacher" in urban schools. The problem of urban research is the "tailoring" of the teacher "to possess specific sets of dispositions in which quality is discussed in systems terms "to meet the instructional needs of each district" (Boggess, 2010, p. 65). Teacher education is finding out "what activist dispositions" would be valuable (p. 88), and how the tailoring "will positively impact the academic performance and democratic engagement of urban students" (p. 89).

The changing the soul entails double gestures. The problem of change is to identify those elements and characteristics of people who bring the educational system into states of disequilibrium that reduces to harmony and challenges the consensus of the system. The instantiation of disequilibrium as the problem of change is to bring to the fore the relation of pathology and normality. Difference is expressed through the continuum of value that distinguishes the stages of development or processes in becoming what is given as the universal, desired teacher that research on practice is to bring. The assumed unity is spoken about as the kind of person who brings success to schooling - the effective, expert, or ambitious teacher. The search for unity and homogeneity plays down differences by emphasizing what is common - or what should be common - by which professional practices serves the mission to bring the universal of "human improvement" to all. Change has its origin in the unity, consensus and harmony of the kinds of people that the research on practice is to actualize through measuring and calculating differences in the processes of "transformation".

The homogeneity is paradoxically a double gesture that excludes, objects in the intention to include. The pathologies of the system are pathologies of the inner soul - the dispositions, sensitivities, and awareness of kinds of people who do not fall into the spaces of consensus and unity. The making of the desired teacher is not only about effective teaching. The transform of the teacher is directed to the trilogy of the child, the family, and the community who are different from unspoken normality - the trilogy implicated in the term "achievement gap". Practice as the transformation of the teacher is to transform low achieving children in US urban and rural areas. The strategy is to making the kind of people desired through, as discussed earlier, "the tailoring" of teachers for urban schools were directed to governing the dispositions and habits of the mind. The focus was dispositions are "intrinsic" to the individual and is a "more powerful concept than beliefs as it can be changed and assessed" (Boggess, 2010, p. 73).

There is an irony to practice as a strategy of change. What is given as having a revolutionary potential, "practice" is a theory that conserves and stabilizes rather than as principles about change. The research is bound to "system" principles that form the analytic for the reforms. That analytic entails
seeking states of equilibrium through assuming a consensus and harmony of the
goals of the “school system” and reforms are to maximize the components that
achieve these outcomes. The research is to “fit” the different components and
elements of teaching and schooling into a comprehensive and organic “whole”, a
word that continually appears. The search is to find the right balances of things
and qualities teachers “need in any setting, regardless of variations” in curricula
or teaching styles (Ball et al., 2009, p. 461). The conservatism of conceptualizing
practice as the object of explanation and the origin of change is not obvious at
first glance as the language is about change, transformation, and reform.

**History of the present**

If I return to the introduction and Sverker’s understanding of the social role
of research in the discussion of the EGSIE, the chapter is to honor that position
through exploring and historicizing the stance that he has consistently taken®. My
discussion follows this understanding of research is a continual critical adventure
in making causal what seems nature and seeking to understand the rules and
standards that order and classify the relation of what we know and how that
knowing is accomplished. In pursuing this critical stance of research, I realize that
I have come to an ironic conclusion that research as planning people is
conservative, embodies double gestures of exclusion and abjection with its
inclusionary hopes. The irony in the planning of people and being “practical” is its
conservatism that is given as a theory of change and often an anti-intellectualism
as its “reflectivity”.

That research that strives to be practical is impractical. Impractical as it
denies the very complexities and uncertainties that the planning is to tame. As a
model of research it is impractical for addressing social complexities. The
naturalizing of “practice” as a concept of everyday life stabilizes that life. What is
taken as a theory of change, ironically, conserves the existing frameworks and
encloses the possibilities of alternatives to what already exists. Ironically and
drawing on a discussion of social science research that resembles what is
discussed here, “It leads you nowhere except in the equally spurious question of
its ‘resemblance’ with the original model- that is created by the representation
itself” (November, Comacho-Huber & Latour, 2010).

The search for practice in school reform research is built on assertions
whose assurances are impractical for the conditions of their realization. Even in
turning to economics, the current nobility of the human sciences, the assumptions
of harmony, consensus and certainty are inadequate and impractical as a theory
of change. While the economist is the high priest of contemporary social science
– everyone seems to want to imitate its modeling and language, the economist
Noble Prize Winner Paul Krugman (2009, 2010) may provide some hesitation to
this certainty of planning and forecasting the future. He argues that economists,
the current nobility of educational research at the turn of 21st century Depression
believed that they had the real world under control and had solved the problems
that would prevent the reoccurrence of the failures of the 1930s. The economists
“mistook beauty, clad in impressive-looking mathematics, for truth” (Krugman,
2009). The reigning theories of the rational individual who interacted with perfect
markets and ‘gussied up’ with fancy equations” turned a blind eye to the
limitations of human rationality, the imperfections of institutions and markets, the
irrational and often unpredictable behavior, and the idiosyncratic imperfections of markets.

The inscription of practice in science is an effect of power, not merely about social improvement. The early discussion on the formation of the republic gave attention to its founders as simultaneously engaging enlightenment hopes with fears that the masses could not reason and needed to be guided by dispositions and sensitivities. It was assumed then that only elites could reason. Today that hierarchy is re-inscribed in the notions of practical and useful research that establishes hierarchies of expertism in transforming people. The object of change in research is the teacher (child or family) on which research (and the researcher) act on to change (on broader point, see Rancière (1983/2004). The constituting of practice separates the researcher from the objects to be planned. Further and important to this strategy of change is that it re-inscribes inequality rather than equality. The paradox is the instantiation of the hierarchy to design people in a manner that places human agency in confined spaces shaped and fashioned by the system which is naturalized as "practice".

I recognize that to disturb the claim of practice and useful knowledge is also to disturb the mesmerizing image of the claim that science can find future. The claim is told that research identifies what works, or will find useful knowledge, and that maximizing of the utility is a device for change that finds the desired life of the future. It is a chimera of the Alchemists’ Philosopher Stone reinvented hundreds of years later. It is important to reiterate that the sciences in-use elide their well-recited assertion of uncertainty through inserting certainty in the objects of study and a comparative style of reasoning that excludes in its impulses to include. It is then necessary to ask if it is time to think about different modes of inquiry whose sciences recognize the difficulties of finding causality, and the need to find an adequate theory of change bound to the complexities of modern life and schooling? Stephen Toulmin (1990) raised this issue when arguing that the sciences have been dominated by Newtonian mechanics and determinism for the past century. He then commented, look where it got us and perhaps it is time to think of other ways of engaging in the study of humanity.

Perhaps this is a way of thinking about the important contribution that Sverker has made over his career and which continues today. It is to give intellectual integrity of the sciences of education by thinking seriously and deeply about the phenomena of education which goes against the grain. For me a beautiful iterated of this career is present in the current review of international comparisons of school results that we (Sverker, Daniel Pettersson and myself) are completing for the Committee for Educational Sciences, Swedish Research Council (The Systematic Review of Research on International Comparisons of School Results. 2014). The report tackles the assumptions and implications of an increasingly important arena that stands as an actor that moves in-between spaces of research and policy. Sverker’s identifies the limits of current examples in the field of systemic review which take for granted the problematics of international research as the basis in organizing such “reviews”. At the same time, Sverker makes visible a substantive strategy of analysis that asks about the conceptualizations, organization and principles of research that organize and make possible what is seen, talked about, and acted on in the international large scale assessments.
Notes


2. The Finnish researcher was Risto Rine of Turku University. The Swedish was Sverker Lindblad of The University of Gothenburg of whom this essay was initially written.

3. I capitalize Enlightenment to signal particular intellectual and social movements that move across Northern European and North America during the long nineteenth century, recognizing that it was not a single movement but with a plurality. Like Cassirer (1932/1951), my use of the word is to signal particular systems of reason through which the subject was constructed and which makes possible the knowledge of the social and education sciences. See Popkewitz (2008).

4. This notion of the citizen of modern republics has different cultural theses of the relation of the political authority and individuality than, for example, Greek city-states. This relation is bound to notions of agency and time, discussed earlier. See, e.g. Foucault (2008/2010) and Rancière (2007).

5. The alchemists are considered as the predecessors to modern chemistry, which as many of the other sciences seeks to find the clues to the origin of life. So the analogy may be more fitting than I want to admit.

6. A different register for ‘seeing’ practice as not as an object of change but as a way of understanding change, see, e.g., the sociology of Bourdieu’s The Logic of Practice (1990) and the history of science in Daston, 2011.

7. There is a large body of literature in history, historical sociology and sociology that expresses the complexities of what are called professions in Anglo-American contexts. For some of the discussion and the literature, see Larson, 1979; Burrage & Thorstendahl, 1990; Thorstendahl & Burrage, 1990.

8. This program has been exported to many nations under the banner of Teacher for All, and its specifics in Teach for Sweden (http://www.teachforsweden.se/).

9. This commitment to the intellectual integrity of the sciences of education is beautifully reiterated in the present review of international comparisons of school results that we (Sverker, Daniel Pettersson and myself) are completing a report (A preliminary report from a Systematic Review of Research on International Comparisons of School Results) as part of a commission given by the Committee for Educational Sciences, Swedish Research Council. The review addresses both the limits of current examples in the field of systemic review which take the problematics of international research for granted by asking about the conceptualizations, organization and principles of research related to the international large scale assessments.

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Received: 12 March 2015
Accepted: 23 April 2015