

Stranger Things: The estrangement of theory, practice and research in Vocational Education in England

Daniel Gregson, Prof. Maggie Gregson

University of Sunderland, the United Kingdom

Abstract

This paper discusses how educational practice, educational theory and educational research have become separated in contemporary discourses surrounding vocational education. This is particularly striking in debates surrounding the nature of educational practice and how it is acquired, developed and improved. The ways in which vocational curricula are currently perceived, designed, delivered and assessed where the development of practice is construed and something that only takes place in the workplace and theory is construed as something that only takes place in a college of Further Education (FE) is taken to be problematic. This paper challenges the legitimacy of how the development of research, theory and practice are falsely framed as being separate in vocational education in the UK. It also challenges the assumption that theory somehow comes before practice and should be regarded and taking precedence over practice (i.e., that theoretical knowledge somehow comes before practice and is therefore superior to it). In addition, this paper casts doubt upon the legitimacy of historical, social, political and cultural constructions of a vocational-academic divide and the different forms of knowledge that are putatively peculiar to each. It argues that instead of merely following rules made by others or by simply assuming that what has worked in one educational context will automatically work in another, teachers' judgments in context are pivotal in the improvement of educational theory and research because it is teachers who test theory out in the arena of practice and it is teachers who move theory, practice and research forward.

Keywords: Theory, Practice, Educational Research, Vocational Education