Paper 8.3 Applying a theory of vocational pedagogy: a college-wide action research project

by

Dr Gary Jones*, Highlands College, Jersey

Presented at the Further Education Research Association Conference
Harris Manchester College, Oxford University

11 - 13 July 2014
**Abstract**

**Applying a theory of vocational pedagogy: a college-wide action research project**

This paper reports a case study of the importation of theoretical research into a small state and provides a provisional report on how a small further education college has imported a theory of vocational pedagogy and adapted it in order to increase its ability to improve the quality of teaching and learning. In co-operation with a higher education partner, the University of Winchester, the college has used a large-scale action research project to test out the practical implications of a model of vocational pedagogy, (Lucas, Spencer and Claxton, 2012). The action research conducted by individual teachers has focused on using the intended outcomes of vocational education and mapping them against effective teaching and learning methods in vocational education. The philosophical approach adopted was consciously modelled on the principles of expansive education (Lucas, Claxton and Spencer, 2013). Rigorous professional enquiry has allowed individual teachers to reflect on how different approaches to teaching and learning have impacted upon student learning outcomes. This paper reports on the provisional findings of the action research project and considers the implications for pedagogy, for small states and for teacher professional development.

**Introduction**

In responding to the increasing pressures of globalisation education systems around the world, are involved in an ‘educational arms race.’ As Jones, Sallis and Hubert (2010) argue one of the ways in which this can be done is through the importation of policy and practice from larger states. This paper provides a case study of the importation of theoretical research into a small state, and its subsequent application. It looks at the particular example of how a small further education college has imported research on vocational pedagogy and adapted it in order to increase its ‘capacity and capability to improve the quality of teaching and learning. In co-operation with the Centre for Real World Learning at the University of Winchester, the college has used a large-scale action research project to test out the practical implications of a model of vocational pedagogy (Lucas et al, 2012). The action research conducted by individual teachers has focused on using the intended outcomes of vocational education and mapping them against effective expansive teaching and learning methods in vocational education (Lucas, Claxton and Spencer, 2013). This has allowed individual teachers to reflect on how different approaches to teaching and learning have impacted upon student learning outcomes. The paper provides a progress report on the implementation of the college wide action research project, and draws upon the work of a research associate who engaged in an on-going evaluation of progress. Finally, the paper attempts to draw upon the initial findings and considers the implications for vocational pedagogy, teacher professional development and policy and practice in small states.
The Jersey Context

The Bailiwick of Jersey is completely independent in domestic and foreign affairs from the United Kingdom. The Bailiwick has its' own legislative assembly, known as the States of Jersey and its own education service. Despite this freedom the education systems is essentially English in curriculum and organisation. As Jones, Sallis and Hubert (2010) state it is an essentially English education system with a Jersey feel. This distinction is neatly encapsulated in the title of a local history *Jersey: Not Quite British* (Le Feuvre, 1993). Highlands College is Jersey’s only further education college and provides a range of further and higher education opportunities for the people of Jersey, and follows a largely English curriculum, although it has been able to find its own solutions to a range of matters including quality assurance, quality improvement and governance. Highlands has approximately 1000 full-time further and students education and approximately 200 full and part-time time undergraduates. In addition, it has over 4000 part-time students who are enrolled on a range of vocational and adult education programmes of study.

Given the ‘offshore’ position of the college, Highlands College has sought to extend its professional network by maintaining good links with a range of organisations, for example, the Association of Colleges, City and Guilds, Centre for Excellence in Leadership and the Learning and Skills Improvement Service. This commitment was reflected in a number of research projects, for example, Hubert, Sallis and Jones (2009) which were undertaken in order to ensure the college was constantly engaging in a critical review of its own practice and processes.

During 2012, with the retirement of the then Principal, Edward Sallis OBE, a new interim structure was put in place for two years, whilst the States of Jersey Department for Education, Sport and Culture undertook a review of some aspects of post-16 education on Jersey. As a consequence, the author, who had previously been the Deputy Principal, became the Interim Head of Highlands College.

The theoretical and conceptual framework

This paper and the associated research project has been informed by a number of different theoretical perspectives: vocational pedagogy, small-states, teacher development and action research and which come together within an overall conceptual framework. Each of these theoretical frameworks are now examined in turn.

Vocational pedagogy

The initial impetus for this work came from the publication of *How to teach vocational education: A theory of vocational pedagogy* (Lucas et al, 2012) which was commissioned the City and Guilds Centre for Skills Development. Lucas argues that vocational education has the overall aim of developing not just working or practical
competence but also six additional and specific outcomes - which include: routine expertise, resourcefulness, functional literacies. craftsmanship, business like attitudes, and wider skills for personal growth. However, Lucas suggests that there is insufficient knowledge and understanding about the effectiveness of the methods used in vocational education and training. Indeed, there is nothing in the field of evaluating the effectiveness of methods of vocational pedagogy that approaches the comprehensiveness of Hattie (2008).

Lucas et al subsequently define vocational pedagogy as:

… the science, art, and craft of teaching that prepares people for certain kinds of working lives. It is critically shaped by the decisions which are taken by teachers - both high level strategies, and day to day in the moment ones - and the values which inform all interactions with students. p 21

Lucas goes on to argue that vocational teachers need to have both and awareness and understanding of the variety of teaching approaches and how can they can support the achievement of differing learning outcomes. Furthermore, it the values and beliefs of vocational teachers about the purposes of education will invariably impact upon the decisions made by lecturers and they identify ten key areas which impact upon the optimal choices about vocational pedagogy. These ten areas are:

1. The role of the teacher/teachers
2. Nature of the activities
3. Means of knowing
4. Attitude to knowledge
5. Organisation of time
6. Organisation of space
7. Approach to tasks
8. Visibility of the process
9. Proximity to the teachers
10. Role of the learner

As a result, the quality of a vocational teachers practice and subsequent impact upon on a students learning will be a function of thinking through the relationship between learning outcomes and teaching approaches. However, Lucas cites Faraday et al (2011) that vocational teachers tend not to use pedagogical theories when making decisions about the particular use of teaching strategies, with part of the reason being that appropriate teaching models for use in the vocational have neither been initially developed or fully formed. Lucas goes on to argue that one of the reasons for the absence of pedagogical theory in practice, is that vocational educators may not value theory, and see it as offering little benefit for practice. Nevertheless, as will be discussed later in this paper, the linking theory with practice is a central tenet of this research project.

Small states
In recent years there has been a significant increase in the interest is small states. However, there is a question as to what is meant by smallness. It is possible to define smallness in terms of economic output per capita, population or the range of educational provision. It is recognised that any criteria is purely arbitrary in nature and in this paper a states is defined as small if the population is below 1.5 million (Bray and Packer, 1993).

One of the challenges of educational policy making and practice within the context of small-states which is particular relevant to this study is simplistic policy/practice importations from other larger states, which Crossley and Watson (2003) note is not without some risks, the main being that the scale of operation is completely different in and policy-makers and practitioners can often be the same individuals (Jones, 1996). As such, there is a need to have a ‘critical screen’ by which these key individuals can evaluate or judge the risks associated with a particular innovation.

Fullan (2007) provides a useful list of factors that affect the initiation of an innovation, which could be adapted to provide that critical screen for small states practitioners and policy-makers. These factors include:

- Existence and quality of innovation
- Access to innovation
- Advocacy from central administration
- Teacher advocacy
- External change agents
- Community pressure/support/apathy
- New policy-funds
- Problem-solving and bureaucratic orientations.

Despite the drawbacks, there are, however, advantages to innovating in small-states. The very fact of smallness and the interaction of both policymakers and practitioners within a small state it can make it easier to navigate the policy process initiate an innovation or conduct pilot programme. Indeed, one of the benefits of ‘smallness’ is that it provides opportunities for laboratory like conditions for educational experimentation. Brock (1988) states:

*Fundamental experimentation is possible given the will (p177)*

These quasi laboratory like conditions provide opportunities for the co-development of theory and practice. At times the relationship between theory and practice may be loosely coupled or highly interactive. As such, this study has been designed around Lewin’s (1951) celebrated pithy observation that

*There is nothing so practical as a good theory (Lewin, 1951)*
It is that relationship between theory and practice and its implications for practitioner research that we now turn.

**Action research**

The approach in this project to action research or professional enquiry draws on a number of thinkers including Lewin (1946), Stenhouse (1975) and Argyris and Schon (1974). It focuses on the generation of small scale enquiries, attendant hypothesising as to their solutions (theories of change), practical actions and a range of evaluation methods. Stenhouse (1979) was particularly influential in the movement to engage teachers in learning from research through professional development that involves them investigating their own pedagogy through action research. Subsequently, Hattie reiterates this argument by pointing out that ‘the biggest effects on student learning occur when teachers become learners of their own teaching, and when students become their own teachers’ (Hattie, 2008)

A fundamental assumption underpinning this study is that action research reaches across the theory-practice divide. Indeed, this study involves putting into practice a theory of vocational pedagogy through a large-scale action research project shows the symbiotic relationship between theory and practice. As Carr and Kemmis (1986) state:

> Teaching …. can only be understood by references to the framework of thought in terms of which its practitioners make sense of what they are doing. Teachers could not even begin to ‘practise’ without some knowledge of the situation they are operating and some idea of what it is that needs to be done. (p113)

Carr and Kemmis go on to highlight what they see as fundamental relationship between the two:

> The twin assumptions that all ‘theory’ is non-practical and all ‘practice’ is non-theoretical are, therefore, entirely misguided …. Theories are not bodies of knowledge that can be generated out of some practical vacuum and teaching is not some kind of robot-like mechanical performance that is devoid of any theoretical reflections. Both are practical undertakings whose guiding theory consists of the reflective consciousness of their respective practitioners. (p113)

As, this project involves a number of staff undertaking action research within a single institution it is necessary to try and locate this type of project within a typology of action research. Ferrance (2000) provides a useful classification for understanding the differing types of action research, in that action research may involve an individual teacher or lecturers investigating an issue, a group of teachers/lecturers on an issues of common interests, a wider group of teachers, lecturers and leaders working together on a school-college wide issue, or something which is relevant to the LEA, federation or group. Indeed this particular project could be categorised as either college-wide action research,
if not  system wide research given the small states context

What is clear from this very brief discussion, it is important to explore the implications of action research for teacher development, particularly when it is being undertaken as an institution wide initiative.

**Teacher development**

One of the underpinning stances taken in this study is best summarised by Whelan (2009), who argues that the quality of teachers is the limiting factor in the development of any school system, or indeed educational organisation, such as a school or college. As Fullan (2014) argues facilitating the on-going professional development of teachers is a central task of the leadership of any educational organisation. However, this task is not without its challenges, and as Cole (2004) argues in his article “Professional Development: A Great Way to Avoid Change,” much of what is called professional development is often ineffective, with people going to workshops and roadshows, hearing about new developments or approaches but afterwards rarely implementing anything of worth.

This view is supported by Timperley et al (2007) who in an analysis of 72 studies on the impact of professional development on student outcomes. Timperley argues that what is known to be effective is not always practised, and this is evidenced in the preponderance of one-off workshops, courses and conferences with the latest ‘educational guru’ and which rarely bring about changes in student outcomes. On the other hand, there is also little evidence to support the view that providing teachers with the time, space and resources so that they can pursue Continuing Professional Development opportunities has any discernible impact on student outcomes. Temperley identifies seven effective contexts for promoting teacher professional which impacted on a range of student outcomes:

> .... providing sufficient time for extended opportunities to learn and using the time effectively; engaging external expertises; focusing on engaging teachers in the learning process rather than being concerned about whether they volunteered or not; challenging problematic discourses; providing opportunities to interact in a community of professions; ensuring content was consistent with wider policy trends: and, in school-based initiatives having leaders actively leading the professional development opportunities. (Temperley, 2007 page xxvi)

The implications of the above for practitioners is best summarised by Coe (2013) who argues that the kind of CPD that best helps teachers should be:

- **Intense:** at least 15 contact hours, preferably 50
- **Sustained:** over at least two terms
- **Content focused:** on teachers’ knowledge of subject content & how students
Coe argues that for many teachers and lecturers this type of professional learning opportunity is not the norm. Indeed, there maybe a prevailing culture with the current leadership and management cadre within schools and colleges which may find such an approach inconsistent with prevailing models of accountability. Coe quite rightly argues that professional learning is hard work and that we should keep a focus on evaluation and the impact upon the learning outcomes for pupils and learners.

Given the preceding discussion it is clear that this study involves the interweaving together of a range of differing conceptual frameworks that draw from a number of perspectives and traditions. As such, this multi-strand approach provides rich opportunities for the development of both theory and practice, which may be applicable in a range of settings and contexts.

The Project

As part of the process of managing a period of organisational uncertainty and transition at the college, the author took the view, that it was important to have an appropriate strategic plan and operating framework to guide decision-making within the college over this period of uncertainty. A new set of values and core aims for the college were developed in November 2012, which placed staff and development of the staff’s capacity and capabilities at the centre of decision-making within the college. As such, the publication in December 2012 of How to teach vocational education: A theory of vocational pedagogy could not have been more timely, as the author was looking for an initiative which would allow the College to have a pedagogic focus as a positive distraction from the organisational noise/chatter of a prolonged period of transition.

In January 2013, initial contact was made with Professor Bill Lucas and the Centre for Real World Learning (CRL), based at Winchester University. There followed a series of telephone calls and email exchanges as we sought to develop a working relationship whilst at the same time developing an understanding of what could be achieved by working together. Initial discussions centred around development work which would focus not just on vocational pedagogy but on also developing the leadership capacity and capability of college middle managers. In addition, consideration was also being given to extending the project to a number of local secondary schools who were delivering vocational programmes of study.

At this stage the idea for the project did not have the explicit support of the three other members of the College Leadership Group, as it was perceived that the aims and
outcomes of the project were still to ill-defined, whilst at the same time the total costs associated with a project were deemed to be too high. However, there was agreement that the project was worthy of further investigation and it was agreed that Professor Lucas would undertake a fact-finding visit to the college, so that a greater shared understanding of what could be achieved together could be formulated. Unfortunately, due to bad-weather this visit had to be cancelled and a Skype video conference was held in its place with other members College Leadership Group (the Interim Deputy Head Curriculum and Quality and another senior manager, the Head of Faculty for Vocational Studies. As a result of this video conference the Interim Deputy Head for Curriculum and Quality became convinced of the potential of the project and this contributed to gaining the full support of the College Leadership Group. It was at this stage further discussions took place with Professor Lucas, with the intended project having a focus on a college-wide action research project on how to implement aspects of Lucas’s thinking on vocational pedagogy, whilst at the same time undertaking a college-wide evaluation of the project as a whole.

Up until this point the intention had been to fund the action research project from the college’s own resources. However, regardless of the source of funding, given the nature of financial regulations in which my college operates in, it was necessary to gain the explicit approval of the States of Jersey’s Directory of Education, Sport and Culture and this is where we got a lucky break. Given an increased Island-wide focus on improving the vocational education, the Director of Education, decided to fund the project from central resources, rather than asking for the college to fund the project internally.

Having secured both ‘financial’ support and ‘administrative’ approval it was now possible to formally begin to deliver the project. The timeline for project is outlined in the following table.

<p>| <strong>Table Two - Timeline of events</strong> |
|---|---|
| <strong>Date</strong> | <strong>Activity</strong> |
| May 2013 | Initial visit to Highlands and planning meetings with differing groups of staff |
| June 2013 (1) | Detailed planning event with the CRL team plus meetings with external stakeholders |
| September 2013 (2) | Launch event with academic staff |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>October 2013 (3)</th>
<th>Action Research workshops led by Bill Lucas and Janet Hanson</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>November 2013</td>
<td>Leadership and Change Conference led by Guy Claxton and Bill Lucas and support sessions for academic staff</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| December 2013 - March 2014 | One to one drop in support workshops - delivered by Highlands staff  
Fortnightly management meetings with project as agenda item |
| April 2014     | Submission of action research reports                     |
| May - June 2014| Review of the action research projects                    |
| 16 June        | College-wide dissemination of the outcomes of the report and initial evaluation by CRL team |
| TBC            | External Dissemination of research outcomes               |

As can be seen from the timeline there were three critical intervention points where the CRL team met with Highlands staff during the project.

On the first occasion in June, Highlands’ staff were invited to meet the CRL team to find out more about the Centre’s research into vocational pedagogies and how to start the planning process for the individual inquiries they would undertake when the project was launched in the autumn term. They were introduced to the six broad outcomes of vocational education within the three vocational areas identified by CRL’s research.

The discussion then focused on the ways in which vocational learners learn and the ten key areas that have an impact on the choices an FE lecturer makes when deciding which vocational pedagogy to employ.

In the light of this background research, staff were asked to consider their own intended learning outcomes for their specific subjects and discuss any gaps they had noticed between their desired outcomes and the reality of practice in their classrooms, workshops or other practical areas. By undertaking a self-audit of their teaching practice using a series of prompt questions derived from the CRL material, they began to identify potential areas for investigation in the autumn. Even at this early stage, interest in the project was encouragingly high, with over 40 academic and learning support staff attending the workshop. On-going reflection on current practice was encouraged through the completed of the self-audits using an online form on the college virtual learning environment.

While the initial workshop with staff focused on vocational pedagogies, the second meeting, the launch event in September, focused on introducing the action research approach that would underpin the individual inquiry projects undertaken by staff. This second meeting with staff again attracted an attendance of over 100 individuals, almost 100% of the college’s academic staff. After a review of the features of vocational
education, staff were reminded that expansive vocational education requires the teacher to adopt a different role, i.e., that of inquirer, but it was also important to reassure staff that action research is an accessible activity focused on noticing what goes on in their classroom and deciding how to make it a better environment for learning. Staff were encouraged to discuss their areas of interest with groups of colleagues and explain their emerging thinking about their projects. They were encouraged to frame their enquiry using the question format ‘If I do X will Y happen?’ where X is an intervention that they carry out themselves and Y is a learning outcome that they would like to see developed in their students. For their interventions (X), they were encouraged to explore new teaching methods such as flipped classroom or peer learning. For their students’ learning outcome (Y), they could either select a specific vocational outcome associated with their subject, for example, routine expertise, craftsmanship or business-like skills and attitudes, or a more generic learning disposition associated with expansive education, for example, resilience, resourcefulness or collaboration.

The session then introduced a range of methods they might use to gather data to evaluate the results of their intervention. These ranged from surveys to gather information about student attitudes, interviews and focus groups and observation of each other’s practice.

Having thought about ways in which they were going to collect their own data, the lecturers began to ask questions about the experience of others who had used similar learning and teaching methods and they began to realise how educational research might have an influence on their own practice. Naturally, one indicator of success was an improvement in their students’ grades but it was stressed that solely using grades as an indicator, although important, was not the most important effect to be looking out for.

At CRL’s third visit in October we had meetings with staff grouped within their curriculum clusters to review their action plans, to hear about their progress and to provide support in finding existing research on the topic of their intervention. We also provided guidance on the format for writing up their reports. This emphasised the importance of reflecting on the outcomes and identifying some implications for others, as well as what they might do differently next time if they repeated the intervention. As with the other two meetings, the enthusiasm for the project was still high; some had already started their intervention, while others drew upon our input to refine their plans. The timetable for undertaking their individual projects and completing their reports was clearly established and adhered to. It was evident that they were developing in confidence to try different ways of doing things which was fostering innovation in their classrooms.

In November a further range of support was made available to colleagues participating within the project. This included a guide to the content and structure of the action research report was made available in November, as well as exemplar reports in January, to support the writing-up of the projects. In December 2013 the college set up weekly dedicated support sessions for tutors. These sessions were staffed by a senior manager,
experienced in teaching and leading action research projects for the college.

During the spring term, in an attempt to ensure the project was integrated within other on-going CPD activities. For example, the scheduled programmes of peer observations were conducted where tutors were paired with others of similar research interests, and this involved two observations and a peer coaching session. Finally, in order to maintain senior leadership focus on the project, the fortnightly meeting between members of the senior team and Heads of Department/Curriculum Managers had as a standing item progress on implementing the project, with ideas shared about how to remove barriers. Faculty meetings dedicated agenda time to the project to provide ongoing monitoring and support.

**Provisional analysis and outcomes of the action research projects**

In April 2014 forty-four reports were sent to the CRL team for editing. CRL went through each report and lightly edited them, ensuring that they were consistently structured to aid comparative reading and staff learning. CRL analysed the subjects of the reports and created six topic areas which reflected the research areas selected by staff:

- Assessment for Learning and Feedback;
- Resourcefulness - stopping to think to deal with the non-routine;
- Peer learning;
- Perseverance;
- Real World Learning
- Flipped Learning.

These six areas give a strong indication of the aspects of pedagogy and of expansive education in which staff were interested. The reports offer a rich source of data for us to use about habit change (teacher and student), current approaches to vocational pedagogy and levels of confidence and competence in professional enquiry. Overall CRL considered that the high level of completed reports represented a huge achievement on the part of the staff and its leaders and managers.’

At the time of writing of this paper (May 2014) further work is being undertaken to review:

- The level of staff engagement in the process of action research and all that entailed in terms of changing practices
- The level of action research project completion
- The level of action research report completion
- The level of staff understanding of vocational pedagogy
- The evidence of staff’s ongoing concern for student welfare and potential for success
- Staff confidence in their ability to change practice
The theoretical and conceptual framework - an initial discussion

In seeking to consider the implications for the theoretical and conceptual framework it is necessary to consider each of the main strands i.e. vocational pedagogy, small-states and teacher development in turn. However, it needs to be emphasised that this discussion is tentative and is based on work in progress rather than the final outcomes of the project.

Vocational pedagogy

As Lucas (2012) states vocational pedagogy concerns itself in the way in which lecturers engage in the orchestration of classroom talk, activities, challenges, resources for the benefit of learners. Vocational teachers need an informed understanding of how different approaches to learning bring about different outcomes. As such, a teacher’s effectiveness is only as his or her ability to bring about the desired learning outcomes. Unless, this process takes place neither teaching or learning are likely to be as good as they could be.

However, what is noteworthy is a sense in which some teachers choose to start by shifting their pedagogy (with the outcomes of this shift as of secondary interest) where others focused on their desired expansive outcomes (resourcefulness for example) and then worked back from this to plan a suitable intervention. The second of these approaches tended to be the more mature although a willingness to try new ways of teaching is itself desirable.

Small states

An underpinning assumption about small states is that they are the consumers of other system’s policies and practices. Indeed, if it was not for the existence of the original How to teach vocational education: A theory of vocational pedagogy report this project would not have been initiated and implemented. However, when looking at this innovation from the perspective of a small-state it may well be the case that not only do small states provide the opportunity to experiment, they also provide the opportunity to create, synthesise or ‘mash-up’ approaches in a way that leads to something new being created, be it the further the interaction of theory and practice. The combination of theory and practice may lead to the exportation to a large-state of a new approach or way of working, alongside the further embedding of theory into local practice. In this example case study the actors in the small state are attempting to operationalise and turn into practice an emergent theory, and as such, there were no pre-existing examples of implementation. Accordingly, a highly provisional way of conceptualising this case study is illustrated in the following figure.

Figure 1
So in this context, it may be necessary to amend Lewin's pithy statement to *There is is nothing so practical as a good theory which has been refined by practical application and further theory-making.*

**Teacher/lecturer development**

If the view is taken that the key to understanding the effectiveness of teacher development is consider the impact upon student outcomes, then it is not possible to make any substantive claims on the effectiveness of the approach adopted as changes in student outcomes was not an explicit aim of the project. However, it is possible to consider whether the project met some of the conditions for effective teacher development and whether any tentative initial observations can be made.

Using Coe’s (2013) description of the type of CPD that best suits teachers the following table details the extent to which those conditions had been met.

**Table Two**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intense at least 15 contact hours, preferably 50</th>
<th>Three days of CPD time committed to the project,</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sustained:</strong> over at least two terms</td>
<td>Direct lecturer engagement for two terms, with additional activity taking place before and after the individual action research projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Content focused:</strong> on teachers’ knowledge of subject content &amp; how students learn it</td>
<td>A focus on the application of vocational pedagogy in the individual lecturers’ classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Active:</strong> opportunities to try it out &amp; discuss</td>
<td>The use of an action research approach and curriculum area discussion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Supported:** external feedback and networks to improve and sustain

External experts used to lead the ‘delivery of the project and support the on-going implementation of the individual action research projects. Internal support provided by action research mentor plus curriculum area support groups.

**Evidence based:** promotes strategies supported by robust evaluation evidence

Based on an evidence led action research method

However, even though the majority of staff completed the action research projects, a number of colleagues were unable to do so. What this would suggest that even if the conditions for effective CPD are met, that this is a necessary although not sufficient condition in ensuring individual teachers/lecturers engage in effective CPD.

**Implications for policy-makers, researchers, school/college leaders and practitioners.**

Whilst accepting that this case-study has yet to be finally completed, there are some provisional implications for policy-makers, researchers, school/college leaders and practitioners which may be worth of further discussion and debate.

**Policy-makers**

Given the special conditions of small-states there may be opportunities for policymakers from small and large states to work together in developing educational innovations, and in doing so take advantage of the laboratory-like conditions and opportunities for hypothesis testing and theory development. However, given the potential ‘power’ imbalance between big and small states this will need to be done with a high level of skill and mutual respect. In addition, policymakers in small states will need to create appropriate critical screens to allow themselves to differentiate between theories and innovation which are worthy of importation and those which are the latest educational ‘fad’.

**Researchers**

This project’s focus has been on building vocational teachers’ capacity and capability and has provisionally shown that it is possible to undertake college/institution wide pedagogical development, with such development bridging the theory/practice divide. Future work in this field needs to look at the impact of such approaches on student outcomes.

**School/college leaders**

School and college leaders should seek out opportunities to embark in partnership work
with university partners as this will provide opportunities for rich and transformative continuous professional development, and which is upon based rigorous professional enquiry. Our experience is that this can be done. However, school and college leaders should never underestimate the time, space and resource necessary to implement such institution wide action research projects, with the preconditions for successful capacity and capability building not being taken for granted.

**Vocational teachers**

As Faraday et al (2011) note vocational teachers tend not to use pedagogical theories when making decisions about the particular use of teaching strategies, with part of the reason being that appropriate teaching models for use in the vocational have neither been initially developed or fully formed. If the notion of the vocational teacher professional is to be more than rhetoric, then as the theories associated with vocational pedagogy develop it is essential for vocational teachers to engage in deep and profound professional development to inform both their understanding of theory and implications for their practice.

* The author would like to acknowledge the contributions of Professor Bill Lucas and Dr Janet Hanson, of the University of Winchester for their contributions to this paper. In addition, the author would like to the States of Jersey Department for Education, Sport and Culture in financing this project. Finally, I would like to thank my colleagues at Highlands College, and in particular Joanne Terry-Marchant, for their hard work in for their participation and engagement with the project.

**References**


Cole, P (2004), Professional development : A great way to avoid change. Seminar Series


Lewin, K. (1951). Field theory in social science: Selected theoretical


