is | International School
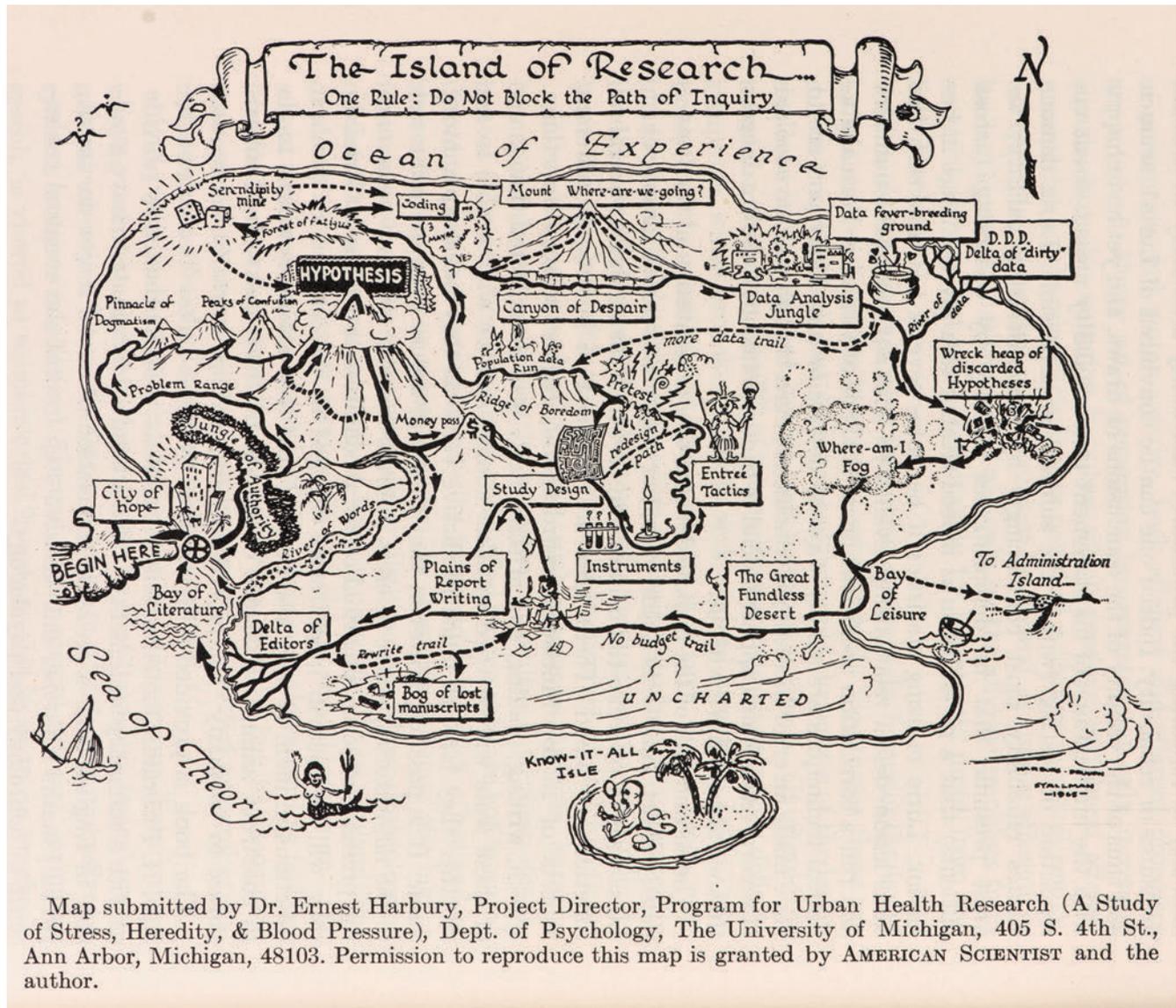
The magazine for
international educators

Developing a positive school culture

Focus on second language learners | Saluting our frontline teachers in the fight against pandemic

The Island of Research...
One Rule: Do Not Block the Path of Inquiry

Map submitted by Dr. Ernest Harbury, Project Director, Program for Urban Health Research (A Study of Stress, Heredity, & Blood Pressure), Dept. of Psychology, The University of Michigan, 405 S. 4th St., Ann Arbor, Michigan, 48103. Permission to reproduce this map is granted by AMERICAN SCIENTIST and the author.

Promoting RIPE: Research Informed Practice in Education

Karen Taylor considers ways to consolidate best practice

In 2017 a group of educators gathered at the International School of Geneva (École Internationale de Genève, known as Ecolint) to discuss the possibility of organising a conference to promote Research Informed Practice in Education (RIPE). Our first conference was held on 30 June 2018 with 39 participants from schools and universities in Switzerland, France and the UK, all of whom presented their ongoing

action research projects. The initial collaborators included Ecolint, the Association Genevoise des Écoles Privées, Evidence Based Education (UK), Durham University (UK), Université de Genève, The Abbey School (UK) and Wellington College China. The purpose of the conference was to lay the foundation for future events that would also bring together classroom practitioners and university researchers

How might we use case studies to generalize about pedagogy?

to promote school-based research in international schools. Since then, the number of both school-based and university-based educators expressing interest in RIPE has grown.

Members of the Principals' Training Center will know that there are frequent requests for information about how other schools are handling particular issues. This seems to me to be indicative of a general tendency toward data-driven and research-informed decision-making amongst school leaders, albeit not systematic. Parenthetically, but not unimportant, is the fact that there may be tensions between understandings of research-informed practice and evidence-based education. The interpretations of these concepts may overlap, inform one another, or conflict.

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) point to a potential problem whereby evidence-based education may 'position practitioners as the *recipients* of other people's knowledge'. What I am arguing for here is *greater learner agency* – with the practitioner as learner. If we consider teachers as learners, then they should have the same complexity, richness and diversity of experience in their own learning process as we offer to students as learners.

Plus ça change ...
In 1975 Laurence Stenhouse described professionalism among teachers as 'a disposition to examine one's own practice systematically' (1975:156) and referred to teachers as researchers. In 1991 Hargreaves and Hopkins linked teacher research to school improvement. One could go back further – John Dewey, for example, or even further – Rousseau: was Emile's mentor a teacher researcher? The terms we use with such frequency today – reflective practitioner, action research, teacher research, practice-led research, mixed mode research, inquiry as stance – are not new, and yet one wonders about the degree of progress we have made in this domain, or perhaps *coherency*. In any case, there is good reason to focus on the relationship between teachers and educational research.

Why?
There is an ever-growing body of research in education, cognitive psychology, neurobiology and other disciplines that contributes to deepening our understanding of how human beings acquire and retain knowledge in order to make meaning of their world. To recognize the complexity of learning and to develop one's practice in response to it is no simple task, yet it is only in doing so that we can ensure student wellbeing. Research-informed practice is what allows for this. Educational research should motivate us to reflect on and modify our practice, especially given the particular challenges associated with teaching the diverse populations that may be found in both international and state schools:

- Challenges associated with teaching plurilingual children in a multilingual context
- Developing inclusive pedagogical practice

So, I find myself thinking more and more about deliberately building a shared body of knowledge. If we are thinking about developing the richest possible environment for learning (a community of learners that includes both children and adults) then we might naturally be led to the importance of *Reflective Practice*, which:

- Embraces a willingness to alter both content and practice in the pursuit of individual meaning;
- Focuses on learning theory, cognitive psychology, developments in brain research and special education;
- Provides a powerful framework for ongoing, fault-free assessment of pedagogy;
- Relies upon the teacher developing knowledge about how specific students learn;
- Depends on colleagues giving and receiving professional help; and
- Models the metacognition we would want for our own students.

(Powell, 2000)

Educators talk endlessly about testing for prior knowledge, about the importance of formative assessment, and so on. But isn't continual assessment (practitioner inquiry) a form of research? How then might we formalize analysis and share our learning? How might we use case studies to generalize about pedagogy? How might we consider or reconsider what kind of research 'counts'?, or consider and reconsider what constitutes a valid source of knowledge? What does quality practitioner research look like? As Heikkinen *et al* (2016) suggest, perhaps we are interpreting reality rather than measuring it … but that does not have to deny rigor.

RIPE: What are the benefits?
Valorizing teachers as professionals, as intellectuals: Reflective practice (and practitioner research) offer an opportunity for potentially 'transformative professional development' (Constable 2018). Think of what we know about effective professional development. Like any learning, it is at its best when it is authentic, embedded, relevant, and prolonged.

Visible learning: 'All good teachers think about and change their work based on experiences, but *teacher research is the act of making that thought visible, documented, systematic*' (Schaenen et al, 2012: 72). What might this mean for students?

Inclusion: if we are to move away from 'deficit' thinking, then we need to meet head-on the particular challenges of teaching plurilingual children in a multilingual environment and in the development of intercultural competences.

Finally, we may find ways of *building a shared body of knowledge*. I am thinking here in terms of the sociology, or even the *geography,* of knowledge. Consider the concept of geography itself. One might speak of physical geography, political geography, cultural geography etc. One might be making reference to the location of entities in physical space *or* to *the location of ideas in conceptual space* – which has implications in terms of knowledge and power and opportunity. I would like to encourage us to collectively build a shared body of knowledge that challenges notions

People and places

of traditionally legitimate sources of knowledge about pedagogy. I'm talking about the 'epistemological power' of practitioner research, not practitioner researchers as the academic world's 'other'.

Anderson and Herr (1999) spoke of 'catalytic validity': 'the degree to which the research process reorients, focuses and energizes participants toward knowing reality in order to transform it' (p16). We are looking at the space of intersection between theory and practice, at generating knowledge about pedagogical practice in order to improve it. International education is complex, and difficult to define. At the same time, despite the diversity of specific contexts we share many of the same challenges, and although questions of equity and inclusion are context-specific, we might learn from one another. We might learn from approaches such as Reggio Emilia, from lesson study methods, from colleagues in the public system, or from academics collaborating with individual schools and from the work of NGOs and international organizations such as UNESCO.

The more I talk to people the more I realize how much research is out there, and yet it feels as though the results of practitioner research are simply too widely dispersed. I am wondering how we can bring it all together. Jackson and Temperley (2007) spoke of the need for schools to become 'networked learning communities'. It is our aim to create a network of international research schools. Let us know if you would like to be involved!

References

Anderson G L and Herr K (1999) The new paradigm wars: is there room for rigorous practitioner knowledge in schools and universities? *Educational Researcher*, 28, 12-21

Cochran-Smith M and Lytle S L (2009) *Inquiry as stance: Practitioner research for the next generation*. Teachers College Press.

Constable H (2018) Universities, supporting schools and practitioner research. *Research in Education, 101*(1), 39-62.

Hargreaves, DH and Hopkins D (1991) *The Empowered School*. London: Cassell.

Heikkinen H L, Jong F P and Vanderlinde R (2016) What is (good) practitioner research? *Vocations and Learning, 9*(1), 1-19.

Jackson D and Temperley J (2007) *From professional learning community to networked learning community*. In Stoll L and Seashore Louis K (Eds), Professional Learning Communities: Divergence, Depth and Dilemmas. Maidenhead: Open University Press

Powell W (2000) Professional Development and Reflective Practice. In Hayden M and Thompson J J (2000) *International schools and international education: Improving teaching, management & quality*. London: Kogan Page.

Stenhouse L (1975) *An Introduction to Curriculum Research and Developmen*t. London: Heinemann.

Dr Karen Taylor is Director of Education at the International School of Geneva, Switzerland and Associate Professor in Practice at Durham University's School of Education.
Email: karen.taylor@ecolint.ch

Ecolint Institute of Learning and Teaching www.ecolint-institute.ch/ course/ripe-research-informed-practice-education
Durham University School of Education www.dur.ac.uk/education/ripe

If you are interested in writing an article for International School magazine, we would like to hear from you!

The editors of *International School*, Prof Mary Hayden and Prof Jeff Thompson, would like to encourage teachers and leaders/ managers/administrators to consider how they could contribute to this magazine. We would love to hear from you with your article ideas.

Articles have as their focus the sharing of ideas and good practice which may be of relevance to others with an interest in international education in schools – whether international schools, or national schools and other organisations encouraging an international dimension to education.

We will be pleased to receive articles relating to international education including:

• good news stories
• articles about good practice
• articles about interesting initiatives
• provocative articles that will stimulate discussion and debate

Please get in touch with us at editor@is-mag.com. We look forward to hearing from you.

Articles should be submitted as Word files, ideally accompanied by a good quality photograph, to editor@is-mag.com [Please note that a photograph relevant to the theme of the article is preferable to a photograph of the author(s)] A one-sentence biographical note about the author(s) should also be provided, as well as email address(es), which will be included if the article is accepted for publication.

Please also include a postal address so that, if the article is published, a copy of the relevant issue of International School can be posted to you.

When including photographs for publication, please note that:

• photographs need to be of high quality (at least 300dpi, file size at least 6MB), and supplied in JPEG or TIF format. Images taken from the internet are not suitable.

• photographs must be submitted as separate files from the Word file article to which they relate, and cannot be reproduced if they are embedded in Word or any other programme.

• the article author(s) need(s) to have obtained permission to publish the photograph from anyone who can be seen in it.