Abstract

In this paper we propose the use of translational research, more often associated with medicine, but here to refer to evidence-based resources for educational practitioners enabling knowledge mobilisation. Smith and Helfenbein identified that translational research ‘creates a space for collaborative, co-constructed inquiry that values and utilizes the expertise of all stakeholders involved’ [1].

We present the development of a founding model, MESH (Mapping Educational Specialist knowHow, www.meshguides.org), for translational research and knowledge mobilisation in schools to support improved student attainment. MESH provides the ‘space’ for co-created, peer reviewed, evidence-based educational resources.

1. Introduction

“The results from TALIS suggest that in many countries, education is still far from being a knowledge industry in the sense that its own practices are not yet being transformed by knowledge about the efficacy of those practices.” [2]

This paper will consider how issues of continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers in schools might be addressed through the translational research and mobilisation of knowledge opportunity of the new initiative of MESH - Mapping Educational Specialist knowHow (www.meshguides.org). The concept and processes of MESH will be outlined to highlight its potential to augment and enhance the existing and emerging evidence bases in this area of education.

MESH is an educational knowledge management system with the aim of underpinning professional judgment with evidence. MESH uses an accessible multimedia map approach to present a diagrammatic database of subject-specific research-based knowledge about the teaching and learning of topics across the curricular disciplines. MESH builds upon existing portals and evidence bases for education with the aim of summarising and making accessible the existing evidence whilst also documenting gaps in knowledge and mapping points of contention.

The approach is inspired by the resources available to professionals and academics in other disciplines, such as the ‘Map of Medicine’ health guides, but recognises the challenges that education has as ‘a discipline across disciplines’. Wikipedia provides an example of how easily searchable a large database can be and that, over time, and through collaborative effort to pool knowledge a high quality result may be achieved.

A MESH guide on a particular theme presents an interactive schematic map of key areas of concern or challenge for practitioners within that theme. These are then subdivided into three or four sub-areas, summarising existing research, debates or research questions, context and implementation issues and links to other MESH guides. This may be augmented by links to references, video and further guidance or documentation. The resource is peer review and open to moderated comment providing an iterative resource that has the capacity for future proofing.

2. Research Rationale

A participatory methodology is being used supported by the Education Communities software platform linking academics and practitioners across countries working in collaboration to create MESH reviews. MESH operates in a similar way to that used for the production of edited books or journals. It is intended MESH Guides are regularly reviewed and improved as the evidence base builds. Individual Educators can be involved as members of MESH Editorial Boards, as authors of MESH Guides and as Partners in Review Groups and in Scaling Up research groups. Organisations can be involved. MESH Guides are created by educational experts from schools,
universities and colleges and are quality assured by peer review groups. A MESH guide has been established to remap the evidence base as well as document the different models and metaphors utilised in the area of CPD for teachers and the use of research to inform practice.

The quality of teaching has been identified internationally by a large body of educational research as having a critical impact on student attainment e.g. Murnane [3]; Rockoff [4]; Sutton Trust [5]. The Sutton Trust stated that for England ‘improving the effectiveness of teachers would have a major impact on the performance of the country’s schools, increasing the attainment of children across the education system’ [5]. The Academies Act (2010) has increased the number of independent, state funded schools in England, which has allowed greater consideration than ever before of performance-related pay systems for teachers. In order to achieve the standard expected in the classroom, teachers benefit from continuing professional development (CPD) [6] that enables access to robust resources with which to inform their practice.

3. Contribution to Knowledge

MESH guides provide a research informed evidence base to teachers, lecturers and academics accessed by the internet for a global audience. The quality of the content of MESH guides is peers reviewed and open to comment from any educational professional, creating outstanding opportunities for academic discourse. The MESH guides ‘remap’ the evidence base, as well as document the different models and metaphors utilised for CPD in schools and colleges, which is being used to inform teaching and learning. By examining the impact of MESH guides on teachers’ CPD in schools and the learning of their students, a contribution can be made to our understanding of how translational research can be used in schools through research informed teaching and knowledge mobilisation.

4. Conclusion

In this paper we propose the use of translational research, more often associated with medicine, but here to refer to evidence-based resources for educational practitioners enabling knowledge mobilisation. Smith and Helfenbein identified that translational research ‘creates a space for collaborative, co-constructed inquiry that values and utilizes the expertise of all stakeholders involved’ [1]. MESH provides the ‘space’ for co-created, peer reviewed, evidence-based educational resources.

Findings emerging from an ongoing qualitative investigation into teachers’ perceptions of the impact of using MESH on their teaching and students’ learning are presented. We argue that teachers, as the largest resource in schools [4] need access to an evidence-based resource that is accessible through common technology e.g. smart phones and the internet, to improve their pedagogic content knowledge and thereby support school improvement.

5. References


