Research informed educational practice: how to help educators engage with research for the common good[1]

Práctica educativa informada por la investigación: cómo ayudar a los educadores a comprometerse con la investigación para el bien común

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Abstract

This paper examines research informed educational practice (RIEP) and how RIEP can become an integral part of how education systems operate. For the purposes of this paper, we define RIEP as the use of academic research by teachers and school leaders in order to improve aspects of their teaching, decision-making, leadership or ongoing professional learning. First RIEP is considered within the broader context of 'research for the common good'. The paper then discusses how, despite the benefits and imperatives associated with

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RIEP, there is still a gap between educational research and educational practice. Considering the extant barriers to RIEP, the paper then concludes with a discussion of the types of 'universal' initiatives that can foster RIEP, regardless of the contextual factors operating at the system-level. In short, we argue that RIEP can materialise subject to: 1) effective capacity building to enhance teachers' research literacy (including within initial teacher education and continuing professional development activity); 2) Top-down initiatives that promote RIEP-centred collaboration between practitioners and practitioners, and practitioners and research/researchers that enable teachers to become partners in the research production process and ensure universities are engaged in practice focused research production and 3) the expectation that school leaders are responsible for implementing collaborative inquiry, focused approaches to RIEP, within their school. Finally, we also suggest these three factors need to be reinforced with consistent support from macro and meso level actors. Consistent support from macro and meso level actors (such as district leaders) in relation to each of the three aspects detailed above, including in terms of governance and accountability. In other words, RIEP is not derailed by new and conflicting initiatives, and is reflected in key structures affecting how schools operate.

Key words: Research informed educational practice, teacher education, education policy, common good.

Resumen

Este estudio examina la Práctica Educativa Informada por la Investigación (PEII) y cómo la PEII puede convertirse en una parte integral del funcionamiento de los sistemas educativos. Para los propósitos de este estudio, definimos PEII como el uso de la investigación académica por parte de docentes y líderes educativos con el fin de mejorar aspectos de su enseñanza, toma de decisiones, liderazgo o aprendizaje profesional. En primer lugar, la PEII se considera dentro del contexto más amplio de "investigación para el bien común". En segundo lugar, el estudio analiza cómo, a pesar de los beneficios e imperativos asociados con la PEII, todavía existe una brecha entre la investigación y la práctica educativas. Teniendo en cuenta las barreras existentes para la PEII, el articulo concluye con una discusión de los tipos de iniciativas "universales" que pueden fomentar la PEII, independientemente de los factores contextuales que operan a nivel del sistema. En resumen, argumentamos que la PEII puede materializarse en relación con: 1) Desarrollar la capacidad del maestro en el área de la alfabetización en investigación (incluso dentro de la formación inicial de maestros y la actividad de desarrollo profesional); 2) promoción de arriba hacia abajo del uso de la investigación que garantizan que la actividad de la PEII se lleve a cabo dentro de un entorno más amplio de apoyo mutuo y que surja una cultura de PEII en todos los actores clave del sistema; y 3) Estrategias y políticas de arriba hacia abajo que posicionan a los líderes escolares como responsables de implementar enfoques

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colaborativos y centrados en la investigación para la PEII dentro de su escuela. Por último, también sugerimos que estos tres factores deben reforzarse con el apoyo constante de actores a nivel macro y meso, incluidos aspectos vinculados a la gobernanza y la evaluación. En otras palabras, PEII no está afectada por iniciativas nuevas o en tensión y está reflejada en las estructuras claves del funcionamiento del centro.

Palabras clave: práctica Educativa Informada por la Investigación, formación del profesorado, política educativa, bien común.

Introduction

This paper explores research informed educational practice (RIEP) and what is required for RIEP to become an integral part of how education systems operate. RIEP is first considered within a broader framework of how ideal societies are supposed to operate: in other words, through the utopian lens of 'research for the common good'. The paper then discusses how, despite the benefits associated with RIEP and the moral imperative that educationalists should engage with research evidence, there is still a gap between the two worlds of educational research and educational practice. The paper then considers the extant barriers to RIEP, before concluding with a discussion of the types of 'universal' initiatives that can foster RIEP, regardless of the macro-level contextual factors affecting the operation of education systems. In short, we argue that RIEP can materialise subject to: 1) effective capacity building to enhance teachers' research literacy; 2) top down promotion; 3) and the formal expectation that school leaders are responsible for implementing collaborative, inquiry focused approaches to both RIEP and educational innovation within their school. Finally, we suggest that these factors need to be reinforced by consistent and stable support from both macro and meso level actors.

Research use: the utopian ideal

In etymological terms, the word utopia actually means 'non-place'. But if we read the initial 'u' as a Greek 'eu', the meaning of the word

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transforms into 'excellent place'. Writing in 1516, Thomas More played on this ambiguity to present a fictional account of a journey to a newly discovered island, *Utopia*, which he used to establish his vision of a 'rational' society (More, 2012). The purpose of education in Utopia is to produce good citizens. By this, More means that it should instil 'principles that benefit the life of the community'. Such principles include freedom of speech, as well as tolerance of other beliefs. Of course, the notion of utopia is not new: thinkers have been conceiving of ideal societies for more than 2,500 years. For example, the *Analects of Confucius,* written by Chinese philosopher Confucius (551-479BC), propose a harmonious society where rulers enforce justice and subjects pay taxes (Claeys, 2020). Likewise, in the 1st Century, historians Plutarch and Tactitus both depicted societies in which simpler cultural values brought about a way of life conducive to virtue and decency. For example, in the *Life of Lycurgus*, Plutarch considers the origin of Sparta (from which came the notion of spartan living); the *Germania* of Tacitus, meanwhile, deals with contemporary life of tribes on the outskirts of the Roman Empire (Claeys, 2020; Eco, 2015). Other more recent examples of such societies include Campanella's (1602) *City of the Sun*; Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1629) and Harington's *Oceania* (1656). Shakespeare's *The Tempest* contains similar motifs; while Gulliver's Travels (1726) also takes a well-worn path of a traveller's story, to depict the follies and downsides to our own community in a distorting mirror.

We can learn a lot about the notion of 'research for the common good' by engaging with such texts. For example, the Muslim philosopher Ibn Sina (980-1037) imagined a future world based on the liberated intellect where rationality (informed by knowledge and truth) reigned supreme (Claeys, 2020). In a similar vein is Plato's *Republic:* a society in which truth is actively sought out and valued (Plato, 2007). These notions provide the basis for Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* (Bacon, 2008). Central to the narrative and to the success of the society described by Bacon is *Salomon's House*, a centre for scientific research. In Salmon's House the experimental method is given maximum encouragement, with the aim of establishing 'the knowledge of causes and secret motions of things, and the enlarging of the bounds of human empire, the effecting of all things possible'. In principle, this involves experimentation to improve the quality of foods, medicines, manufacture and the study of science: with the paternalistic nature of Bensalem's government meaning that all

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research is undertaken fully in the public interest (Claeys, 2020). Other conceptions of utopia place a premium on different ideals, including the role of community and communal behaviour. For instance, in his treatise *The Politics*, Aristotle (385-323 BC) explores how society should be ordered to best ensure the happiness of individuals (Aristotle, 1992). While some of Aristotle's ideas regarding tyranny and slavery are now rightly consigned to the trash heap, the importance of citizenship, community (the *polis*) and the ability to exchange both ideas and goods (which occurred in the *agora*) still remain desirable today.

In the modern age, while not a utopian text *per se*, the work of German sociologist, Jürgen Habermas also adheres nicely with many of the principles above. Habermas was principally concerned with how rational decision-making can be facilitated in modern democratic societies. Habermas's ideas are dependent on his theory of 'communicative action'; action oriented towards reaching agreement, which, Habermas contends, is *the* fundamental type of social action. In turn, communicative action depends on a further premise; the notion that discourse is used by people as an everyday process of making claims to validity. These two premises enable Habermas to conceive of civic life as comprising networks of relationships that display two principle characteristics: firstly they are cooperative – this is because the success of any interaction depends upon the interdependent activity of both narrators and audiences; secondly that discourse must have a rational dimension: a narrator will seek to provide reasons for the validity of their communicative act, knowing that their counterpart (the audience) may either accept it or counter it with a better argument. Habermas's twin premises of mutual agreement and discursive validity also allow him to set out a vision which positions valid and rational arguments as the basis for all major decisions. In other words, in a Habermasian-based society, public acts of praxis are ultimately determined by what Habermas describes as the force of the better argument, which represents a cooperative and knowledge-informed search for truth (1999).

Research informed educational practice

In education, we can translate these ideals into the notion of Research Informed Educational Practice (RIEP). For the purposes of this paper,

we define RIEP as the use of academic research by teachers and school leaders in order to improve aspects of their teaching, decision-making, leadership or ongoing professional learning (Brown, 2020; Walker, 2017). There are strong reasons to encourage this extant conception of research for the common good. For instance, a nascent evidence base indicates that, if educators engage with research-evidence to make or change decisions, embark on new courses of action, or develop new practices, then this can have a positive impact for both teaching and learning (e.g. Cain, 2015; Cordingley, 2013; Godfrey, 2016; Mincu, 2014; Rose *et al.,* 2017). There are also a myriad of social and moral imperatives which, together, present the case that educators 'should' engage with research-evidence if it is possible for them to do so. This argument is nicely encapsulated by Anne Oakey, who some 20 years ago argued that: 'those who intervene in other people's lives [should] do so with the utmost benefit and least harm' (2000: 3). Oakley thus contends that there exists a moral imperative for practitioners to only make decisions, or to take action, when armed with the best available evidence. In other words: 'we [all] share an interest in being able to live our lives as well as we can, free from ill-informed intervention and in the best knowledge we can gather of what is likely to make all of us most healthy, most productive, most happy and most able to contribute to the common good' (2000: 323).

The occurrence of RIEP

Nonetheless, despite this growing body of evidence and these extant imperatives, to say nothing of the dedicated efforts of a range of organisations, movements and academics to foster research-informed practices, RIEP – as a 'business as usual' way of working – is yet to take hold in the vast majority of schools; in either Spain or England (the home countries of the authors of this paper), or indeed more widely (Biesta *et al.,* 2019; Graves & Moore 2017; Wisby & Whitty, 2017). Instances of this 'research-practice gap' can be found in the findings of a mixed methods study undertaken by Coldwell *et al.,* (2017) to examine England's progress towards a research-evidence-informed school system. Coldwell *et al.'s* (2017: 7) analysis suggests that educators generally did not feel confident in using research-evidence and that there was 'limited evidence from this study of teachers directly [using] research findings to change

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their practice'. Later work, such as the recent survey of 1,670 teachers in England undertaken by the National Foundation for Educational Research, also presents a similar picture. Here it was found that academic research had only a 'small to moderate' influence on teacher decision making. Instead, teachers were in fact much more likely to draw ideas and support from their *own experiences* (60 percent of respondents identified 'ideas generated by me or my school'), or *the experiences of other teachers/ schools* (42 per cent of respondents identified 'ideas from other schools') when deciding on approaches to improve student outcomes. In addition, *non-research-based continuing professional development (CPD)* was also cited as an important influence (54 percent of respondents). These compare to the much lower figures of 13 percent and seven percent for 'sources based on [the] work of research organisations' and 'advice/ guidance from a university or research organisation', respectively (Walker *et al.* 2019). A similar picture emerges when we explore the Spanish context. For instance, in a recent study conducted with teachers in Madrid and Catalonia, 68.1% of teachers and 77.3% of school heads declared that they frequently or always engaged with research (Ion and Gairín, 2019). Yet when it came to actually engaging in innovation and pedagogic development, however, teachers acknowledged limited use of scientific evidence: preferring instead to rely on experiential and peer knowledge (Ion *et al.,* 2019).

Barriers to RIEP

Using research-evidence to facilitate educational improvement typically involves educators (either collectively or individually): 1) accessing academic research; 2) being able to comprehend academic research; 3) being able to critically engage with research-evidence, understanding both its strengths and weaknesses, as well as how its warrants for truth can be justified; 4) relating research-evidence to existing knowledge and understanding; and, where relevant, 5) making or changing decisions, embarking on new courses of action, or developing new practices based on a combination of research findings, practical knowledge and contextual understanding. Reasons traditionally given for the disconnect between research and practice invariably relate to each of these five steps. For example, in terms of steps 1) and 2), it has been suggested

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that educators can often struggle to get hold of academic research, which is typically situated behind pay walls (Goldacre, 2013). It can also be hard for educators to engage with academic research, due to the esoteric nature of the language used (Cain *et al.,* 2019; Goldacre, 2013; Hargreaves, 1996). With regards to step 3) (critical engagement with research), teachers indicate that they often feel unprepared to use research information or even to conduct inquiry processes about their practice (Ion & Lopez, in press). In particular, teachers express concerns regarding their research literacy, and their own skills to use and produce research (Olmos & Pattier, 2021). Step 4), meanwhile (relating research-evidence to existing knowledge and understanding), can be problematic if academic research is either too context independent or when it reports on very specific contexts; both situations meaning educators can find it difficult to know how best to apply findings to their settings (Biesta, 2007; Cain *et al.,* 2019; Wrigley, 2018).

Finally, step 5) is often hindered as a result of both practical and methodological concerns. Beginning with the former, and an often-cited reason for the research-practice gap is that teachers and school leaders do not always have enough time to engage with research (Brown, 2020; Brown & Flood; 2019; Brown and Greany, 2021; Galdin-O'Shea, 2015). But a lack of time is the result of school leaders prioritising other activity over and above RIEP. It is instructive, therefore, to consider studies undertaken in the tradition of institutional theory, which indicate that, when seeking to solve problems, educators often privilege legitimacy: i.e. acting according to public expectations of what is appropriate, over effectiveness (Mintrop & Zumpe, 2019). For instance, in high autonomy/ high accountability systems, such as England, educators are more likely to focus more on the short-term requirements of accountability and performativity; and not REIP related processes, which tend to require a longer term time scale (Cain *et al.,* 2019; Mintrop & Zumpe, 2019). Alternatively, in systems where there is high regulation, such as Spain, REIP will not occur without the presence of government policies, initiatives or curricula materials which explicitly promote the use of research by teachers. Methodological issues related to step 5), meanwhile, centre on critiques of the quality of educational research, as well as the concomitant suggestion that it should not be trusted to provide a firm basis for practice development (Biesta, 2007; Goldacre, 2013; Hammersley, 1997; Hargreaves, 1996; Wisby & Whitty, 2017).

And then of course, we have to consider the motivation for educators to want to engage with research in the first place (Malin, Brown, Ion *et al.,* 2020). Motivation can have a range of aspects. For instance, recent studies suggest that Spanish teachers tend to view academic research as being disconnected from educational practice and epistemologically opposed to their needs. In other words, findings indicate that teachers do not view research as a viable source of knowledge: it is perceived as too abstract, too far removed from their teaching practice and so useless for their daily needs (Murillo and Perines, 2017; Murillo, 2006). From a psychological perspective (e.g. from the perspective of *Expectancy Value* theories), this would suggest both the expectation for success (e.g., the perceived possibility of positive benefits), and the subjective value of engaging with research, may often be considered by teachers as low: hence there can be an absence of RIEP-related behaviour. Furthermore, motivation can also have an emotional aspect. For instance, leading design academic, Donald Norman (2013: 47) argues that 'the emotional system is a powerful information processing system…that determines whether a situation is safe or threatening, whether something that is happening is good or bad, desirable or not.' In tense and threatening situations, the emotional system will trigger the release of hormones that bias the brain in preparation for action. In calm, non-threatening situations, the emotional system triggers the release of hormones that bias the brain towards exploration and creativity (Norman, 2013). A positive emotional state is therefore ideal for reflective thought, while a brain in a negative emotional state provides focus: precisely what is needed to maintain attention on a task and finish it (Brown *et al.,* 2021). Too much of either, however, results in tunnel vision, where people are unable to look beyond a narrow range of options (Norman, 2013). This perspective links nicely with the educational perspectives provided by Schildkamp and Datnow (2020), who argue that when it comes to research use, how practitioners view the purpose of RIEP is vital: with RIEP efforts focused on accountability being far less fruitful than those focused on continuous improvement, or an explicit focus on equity and expanding students' opportunities to learn. Likewise, when teachers experience negative experiences with RIEP, such as shaming and blaming or feel that their time is being wasted, they are far less likely to be engaged. Positive experiences, on the other hand, (for example, working with a productive

team that is delving deeply into learning) are likely to encourage teachers to become more engaged (Schildkamp and Datnow, 2020).

Attempting to overcome these barriers

At the same time, there have been a range of national and local initiatives which have attempted to address the separations between research and practice. Most recently, in England, these include the establishment of the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF): a 'what works' centre for education, which provides freely available and accessible summaries of what works research-evidence for educators to use. In addition to this substantial investment, in 2014 the EEF launched a £1.4m fund for projects to improve the use of research in schools. This initiative was followed up in 2016 with the launch of the EEF's *Research Schools* initiative; schools charged with leading RIEP development in their local area. There has also been a substantial rise in bottom-up/teacher-led initiatives, such as the emerging network of 'Teachmeets' and 'ResearchED' conferences (Wisby & Whitty 2017), designed to help teachers connect more effectively with educational research. Furthermore, a prominent example of a teacher-led initiative was the 2017 launch of England's Chartered College of Teaching: an organization led by and for teachers and whose mission, in part at least, is to support the use of RIEP (Wisby & Whitty 2017). RIEP is also increasingly promoted and supported at a government level. For example, England's Department for Education ensured the inclusion of references to RIEP within its standards for school leaders and in the pilot Early Career Framework for newly qualified teachers. Finally, the periodic Research Excellence Framework (the 'REF'), via which UK universities are funded, now requires them to account for the 'impact' their research has had on, 'the economy, society, culture, public policy or services … beyond academia' (HEFCE 2011: 48). In other words, the government's aim is to use REF to encourage universities to ensure that their research is used in the world beyond academia, for example, by directly working with teachers and schools (Cain *et al.* 2019).

In the Spanish context, meanwhile, the notion of 'evidence informed practices' has not only entered into the public discourse, it has also started to be operationalised vis-à-vis school practice. For instance, in Catalonia, one of the Spanish autonomous communities, the recent Education

Act (Decret 274/2018), marked a milestone in policy making, with its incorporation of a visible and formal commitment to the promotion and use of research in the educational school practice. This is nicely reflected in the declared aim of the Act, where it is stated: 'With this strategy [of developing evidence informed schools] Catalonia makes a leap in the articulation of an ecosystem that bring together the set of educational agents and research groups from the universities who are already working on it, promoting and recognizing the academic talent that exists in the country and putting it at the service of improving education in Catalonia' (Department for Education, 2018). Furthermore, research is understood as a driver of educational improvement that requires collaboration between researchers and practitioners if it is to be achieved. Such collaboration has been facilitated with the proposal of the 'Schools of Evidence'2 strategy, jointly with the Catalan Institute of Public Policy Evaluation (*Ivàlua*) and the *Jaume Bofill Foundation*. The objectives of the program were to: a) collect, disseminate, and generate solid evidence on educational policies and practices, including with regards to effectiveness and efficiency; b) create opportunities to share and transfer knowledge about what works to improve education; c) instigate pilot initiatives based on evidence, and d) promote an assessment culture and the practice of controlled and rigorous experimentation within the Administration and the educational community, connecting decision-making processes with international evidence-based/informed trends.

Steps towards RIEP, have been made also by private foundations. For instance, programmes such as 'What Works in education: evidence for the educational improvement'3 is one of the first initiatives focused on providing, to the education community, scientific evidence based on systematic reviews and rigorous programmes evaluations. Its objective is to collect, summarize and share international evidence about effective international educational policies and practices, including recommendations for how they can be implemented within in the Catalan Educational System. The programme also includes a biannual publication of two systematic reviews on a specific topic, as well as seminars open to the educational community. Another initiative is the EduCaixa programme, promoted by LaCaixa bank foundation, which

[2] At the date of the publication of the present paper, this initiative was not implemented
[3] See: https://ivalua.cat/ca/projecte-tematic/educacio/que-funciona-en-educacio

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offers the resources from England's *Teaching and Learning Toolkit* and *The Best Evidence in Brief,* translated into Spanish and Catalan.

Research for the common good

Nonetheless, despite the presence of these initiatives, the evidence-practice gap shows no sign of narrowing. This would imply that what has been instigated to date, is not fully 'hitting the mark'. In other words, that there are a range of factors preventing RIEP which are still unaddressed. So how can such issues be resolved? In part, the factors affecting the presence of RIEP are systematic in nature. It goes without saying that, globally, school systems differ, both contextually and structurally, across a myriad range of elements. At their most simplistic, we can identify these elements as relating to the level of social cohesion in a system and how regulated a system is. Here, s*ocial cohesion* refers to the institutions, norms and networks that bind societies together. Systems with high social cohesion have a higher propensity and readiness to engage in collaboration. Low socially cohesive systems, on the other hand, are those in which there are high levels of deregulation and privatisation. Regulation, meanwhile, refers to the institutions that determine control and accountability. In a high regulation system, there is typically a dominant, hierarchical culture and associated bureaucratic controls. High regulation systems often also typically involve 'high stakes' accountability systems: i.e. systems in which not meeting particular standards can incur major penalties. By contrast, systems displaying low social regulation typically evidence much flatter, non-hierarchical cultures, with improvement achieved through partnership rather than, for example, top-down accountability.

Combinations of high/low social cohesion and high/low social regulation necessarily result in four types of educational system (Hood 1998). In more detail, these are: 1) *fatalist* systems, those characterised by rule-bound approaches to organization, with little cooperation related to achieving sought-after outcomes; 2) *hierarchist* systems, which display social cohesion and cooperation in order to meet rule-bound approaches to organization (and which are often characterised by bureaucracy); 3) *individualist* systems, which utilise atomised approaches to organization. For instance, bargaining/negotiation between actors; and 4) *egalitarian* systems. This latter type are characterised by high participation structures,

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with all decisions being 'up for grabs,' combined with an egalitarian culture and peer-to-peer support. While classifying systems in this way is useful for understanding what factors affect RIEP across different system types, it also enables to ascertain, in a more systematic fashion, what factors and solutions might aid RIEP across all system types. In other words, it enables us to identify the universal strategies that might promote RIEP globally.

In particular, recent reviews of education systems based on this typology have explored some 25 case studies of education systems, from across five continents, and covering the entire range of system types (Malin, Brown, Ion et al., 2020; Brown and Malin, 2022). Case study authors were asked to situated their system within the typology above, before applying a common analytic framework to describe RIEP-related patterns within their contexts. Vitally, a subsequent cross-case analysis of these 25 cases suggests that the combination of the following four factors can encourage RIEP no matter what the system:

1. Building educator's capacity in the area of research literacy (including within initial teacher education and continuing professional development activity). This helps ensure teachers can engage with research and data, so improving the likelihood they will do so;
2. Top-down initiatives that promote RIEP-centred collaboration between practitioners and practitioners, and practitioners and research/researchers. Likewise, initiatives that enable teachers to become partners in the research production process and ensure universities are engaged in practice focused research production. Such initiatives, ensure RIEP activity takes place within a wider environment of mutual support, and that a culture of RIEP emerges across all key system actors;
3. Top-down strategies and policies that position school leaders as responsible for implementing collaborative, inquiry focused approaches to RIEP within their school. In other words, RIEP becomes a formal responsibility of school leaders and so is attended to; and
4. Consistent support from macro and meso level actors (such as district leaders) in relation to each of the three aspects detailed above, including in terms of governance and accountability. In

other words, RIEP is not derailed by new and conflicting initiatives, and is reflected in key structures affecting how schools operate.

We now conclude by discussing each of these factors in detail, below.

Discussion

What is clear from this list is that achieving teachers' engagement with research is a multidimensional challenge and includes co-responsibility from both research producers and research users and multilevel collaboration between all actors involved. At the level of the individual level, RIEP requires a certain level of research literacy (Flores, 2018). This is needed if teachers are to engage effectively with research data and research informed resources, if they are to display positive attitudes towards research (and overcome epistemological barriers) and if they are to be motivated to engage with it (i.e. see its potential benefits) (Ion & Lopez, in press). Here the role of universities is key, and the role of researchers critical. Specifically, it means there is an onus on researchers to build their capacity to engage in meaningful dissemination, transfer, and research mobilisation. For instance, moderating technical language, and instead, showing how findings can be applied to specific contexts. User engagement is also vital, and researchers need to create room for teachers in their projects and initiatives: involving teachers in the co-design and co-conducting inquiry process with researchers can both stimulate their interest and motivation for research (Oancea, 2014). Furthermore, a 'third space' is required in which both researchers and teachers are respectful of one another's professional cultures and traditions but are, simultaneously, oriented towards understanding that research is part of both social development and the public good (Brown and Greany, 2017). Achieving this goal, also relies on and requires co-responsibility in terms of developing a safe and healthy research ecosystem, where all the agents show commitment with the public good and social development. This goes beyond short term policy fashions and towards an understanding of research as a formative, communicative, epistemically rigorous and ethically robust enterprise (Winch, Oancea, & Orchard, 2015).

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At the school level, education policies must position school leaders as responsible for building organizational cultures that empower teachers to innovate and experiment, using research as a valid source of innovation and development (Brown, *et al,* 2017). Such cultures are best underpinned by collaborative inquiry processes as well as encourage distributed leadership that values each teacher's individual potential, and stimulates individual and collective reflection on teaching practices as fundamental steps towards creating a culture of trust and school development (Brown, 2020; Ahumada, et al, 2017). Such leadership values each teachers' potential and fosters teachers' agentic capacity and autonomy to make decisions adapted to pupils needs and class realities.

Universities, as research producers, clearly have their role. And researchers need to be encouraged to engage in practice-focused research and to promote research as an engine for school and social change (Ion & Castro, 2017). But schools and universities are not isolated institutions (Douglas, 1986) and cannot be successful without the support of policy makers, educational administrators, municipalities and other local/ regional stakeholders involved at some level with educational reform (Guillen & Zeihner, 2018). Local, regional, national and international administrators and policymakers should be aware of the importance of the potential of research for the common good and social change. They must also both consistently promote and contribute to, as well as be equipped to productively join RIEP endeavours aimed at educational improvement. Promoting a collaborative approach: encouraging collaboration at different levels and shifting the rationality of school accountability away from one based solely on outcomes is a necessary pathway here. In England and Spain, as in many other contexts, RIEP is still far from being a part and parcel of the educational landscape. Change involves placing research and practice as part of the same discourse, introducing research as an instrument of both the political system and governance and creating stable conditions for research to fulfil a social function. We believe this is highly possible. It just takes the political will to do so.

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