Developing a narrative knowledge base:
Storification by teachers on their role as designers

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Abstract
This paper presents a study aimed at the articulation and dissemination of practitioners’ knowledge about their roles as designers of new learning arrangements. Practitioners possess tacit (Modus 2) knowledge based on experiences that is hardly used in the development of educational theory and practice. One reason seems to be that practitioners are not aware of the fact that this knowledge is of value to others in the field, and subsequently do not know how to articulate and share it. A narrative technique called freewriting was used to engage practitioners in a process of storification that helped them become aware, articulate and share their knowledge about conducting design research in schools. At five kick-of meetings of different design research projects, freewritings of all the participants were collected. The paper presents the first findings about how practitioners view their role as designers and design researchers of new learning arrangements, and subsequent ideas about storing the freewritings in an electronic database of anecdotal evidence. We conclude that narrative techniques are promising to help practitioners articulate and share their knowledge. By applying them, practitioners could in future become co-designers and co-researchers, and schools could become knowledge-creating places.

Introduction
The lack of relevancy of educational research for the improvement and innovation of educational practice is a frequently discussed topic nowadays. In general, it is argued that research conducted by educational scientists and instructional designers is too far from reality. It lacks coherence and leads to a diversity of guidelines for practice. Furthermore, many studies seem to be conducted in idealized (laboratory) situations that do not reflect the daily practices that can be found in most of the schools. As a result, teachers find it difficult to translate findings to their classroom practices. On the other hand, it is also stated that educational practice holds too strongly to its existing practices, and does not use its full potential to implement new strategies and means that turned out to be effective. So the problem goes both ways.

Governmental reports and scientific publications in many countries across Europe and abroad have emphasized that educational research and practice should become better related, and they have
suggested ways to improve the relationship by structural collaboration between the two (e.g., Burkhardt & Schoenfeld, 2003; Lauriala, 1998; Levin, 2004; Pieters & De Vries (eds.), in press).

But building structural collaboration between researchers and practitioners is more easily said than done. The problem gets even more complicated when we realize that there is not only a lack of collaboration between researchers and practitioners, but also amongst subgroups of researchers and practitioners. For instance, studies have reported structural gaps between academic and vocational teachers, and between novice and expert teachers between schools and even within the same school (e.g., Lauriala, 1998; Little, 1993; Sim, 2006; Thomas et al, 1998). The same scatteredness seems to hold for the scientific world where specific domains and differing methodological approaches often exclude each other rather than combine their efforts (e.g., Maxwell, 2004).

The gap between theory and practice seems to be fundamental as well as practical. Of course, there are practical obstacles to overcome. They are related to how things can be organized to undertake long-term, intensive collaboration. Amongst the problems reported are severe time constraints, limited (ICT) resources, and being used to work in relative isolation (e.g., Bickel & Hattrup, 1995; Hargreaves, 1999). But there seem to be more fundamental differences between researchers and practitioners laying underneath this. Researchers and practitioners often think differently about what constitutes (usable) knowledge, what are useful ways to express new ideas and insights, and what are the needed outcomes of research. Those fundamentally differing opinions lead to deeply rooted misunderstandings and disagreements that are not just solved by sharing thoughts or working together (e.g., Bartels, 2003; Geddis, Lynch & Speir, 1998).

In the context of the study presented here, a closer look was taken at how researchers and practitioners differ in what they find usable knowledge and, therefore, useful research. The impression exists that both researchers and practitioners investigate classroom practices, but that they take a different stance in how to do this. The approach of practitioners could be described in terms of ‘local narrative and action research’. Its main procedures are participating in certain practices, experiencing or noticing problems in the learning environment or with one or several students, and trying some solution to see if things improve. The research method used could be described as trial and error, and its outcomes are accepted as long as they are practically and emotionally valid: the problem disappears or decreases, and the teacher develops certain beliefs about the way it works. Researchers, on the contrary, aren’t satisfied when the problems have disappeared. They are not so much looking for experiences but for explanations. In other words, they want to know how and why the problem disappeared, so that they can formulate rules or principles that could be applied elsewhere. This approach could generally be described as ‘generalizable controlled experimental research’. The procedures are formulating a research question, designing a study, collecting and analyzing data, and drawing conclusions. The method research could be characterized by systematic change, and the results have to be rationally
valid. Researchers categorize facts about the way things work rather than develop beliefs. And those facts need to be generalizable to other contexts.

What seems to be behind those different research approaches, is a fundamental difference between the kinds of knowledge that both parties seek. Researchers aim at logical evidence that is causally related. The knowledge they possess is public, and made explicit in models and theoretical concepts. This so-called Modus 1 knowledge is characterized as generic and explicit (Gibbons, Limoges, Nowotny, Shwartzman, Scott & Trow, 1994; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Practitioners, however, aim at anecdotal evidence. Their knowledge is and often remains private and implicit. This kind of knowledge is called Modus 2 knowledge, and characterized as contextual and tacit (Gibbons et al, 1994; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995).

Most of the solutions presented to bridge the gap between what researchers and practitioners think and do, are aimed at increasing the amount and intensity of the collaboration between both parties. The solutions aim at solving the gap. In the present study, we explored a different solution that boils down to enlarging the gap between researchers and practitioners by emphasizing their difference in know-how and explicitly inviting practitioners to participate in research with their Modus 2 knowledge. Most practitioners are not aware that they have knowledge that might be interesting to others - both researchers and practitioners - in the field. In addition, they often do not know how to make this knowledge explicit and disseminate it to others. Whereas for researchers, talking about what they know is their second nature. The project presented here, therefore, is aimed at helping practitioners to:

(1) become aware of the tacit knowledge they possess
(2) articulate their tacit knowledge, and
(3) share their knowledge

The approach taken is narrative, and the ultimate goal is to build a knowledge base of anecdotal evidence that gives expression to and stores the tacit knowledge of practitioners, and that others could use so that the valuable tacit Modus 2 knowledge of educational practitioners is more widely shared in the field of education.

A narrative approach

Human thinking is narrative by nature, and we make sense of the world by constructing individual stories of it (Bruner, 1990, 1996). Through this process of storification and by the stories produced, we express our personal views on matters, how we think and feel about them and how we have experienced them. The Modus 2 knowledge that practitioners hold over their (classroom) practices is often said to have the character of narrative knowledge: “Anyone who has spent time in a school staffroom or attended a teachers’ conference will need little convincing that teachers are inveterate
tellers of stories. [...] Teachers and administrators, undergraduate and graduate students alike are telling anecdotes and stories of their experiences of schooling, a collective enterprise for which there are as many justifications as there are individual lives and stories” (Graham, 1995). One of the specific forms such narrative knowledge may take is the form of a ‘professional life cycle story’, (auto-)biographical stories about the careers of teachers or other practitioners. In this realm of narrative, many (auto-)

... biographical studies on the professional lives of teachers have been conducted (e.g., Huberman, 1995).

Because the nature of their knowledge seems narrative, a narrative approach that invites practitioners to engage in a process of storification and tell their stories, can help bring out their tacit ideas about and experiences with teaching and learning. But not only can it help bring out their individual stories. In addition, having the stories told and stored supports the ‘collective enterprise’ Graham talks about: the stories can get connected, with educational history in general and with experiential stories of others in particular.

Moreover, a narrative approach is not only expected to help make explicit and connect the stories kept inside individual practitioners, but also to provide practitioners with the opportunity to take a distance from the immediate act and think about it (again). In short, a narrative approach is expected to engage practitioners in storification about their first hand ideas and experiences, and by doing so to set of a process of reflection. Others have argued that narration helps practitioners to reflect on their life-history, for instance Huberman (1995) states that “[…] telling the story of one’s life is often a vehicle for taking distance from that experience, and, thereby, of making it an object of reflection. Cognitive psychologists call this ‘de-centering’, it allows, say, a teacher, to escape momentarily from the frenzied busyness of classroom life – from its immediacy, simultaneity, and unpredictability – to explore his or her life and possibly to put it in meaningful order” (p.131). He further argues that this reflection creates space for developing an attitude of change. Similarly, we suggest that engaging practitioners in a process of storification about issues related to their professional lives, not only leads to the articulation and connection of their stories, but at the same time might also raise their awareness of their roles as change agents in the larger field of education. Not only their knowledge (stories) will become available to others in the field, but in the act of narrating they themselves will be become apparent as co-designers and co-researchers.

What constitutes a narrative approach towards raising awareness, articulating and sharing narratives? First, a narrative technique needs to be chosen with which a process of storification, i.e. telling stories about a given topic, is induced. Many narrative techniques, both oral and written, have become available through the years. Especially in ethnography, techniques have been developed and proved valuable. For a more general overview of narrative techniques, and their uses in (qualitative) analyses, I refer to Richardson (2000), and Ellis and Bochner (2000). Examples of the use of narratives in research on teaching can be found with, among many others, Conle (2003) and McEwan and Egan (1995). Next, a way to have the stories shared needs to be found. Dialogical settings to discuss the stories can be appropriate for their immediate use (e.g., Boud, Keogh & Walker, 1985;
Conle, 2003; Li, 2005). However, in this project the aim is to make the stories available to the nation-wide field of education. Therefore, not only a way to share the stories but also to store them is needed. This, in turn, influences the choice for an appropriate narrative technique.

The technique that we chose was freewriting. Freewriting is a technique used for associative writing whereby individuals write without constraints about a given or suggested topic. The procedure is as follows: freewriting begins with several minutes of silent thinking about the topic; depending on the context this can be a couple of minutes only up to even half an hour. After that, the individuals are asked to start writing without stopping or thinking for a fixed time; again this could be several minutes up to half an hour or even longer. The individuals are told not to pay any attention to grammar, spelling, and stylistic matters, just to keep writing. In this way, their deepest flow of thoughts and emotions is expected to get on paper in a natural way. The freewritings can mark the beginning of a more structured process of rewriting and revising (Elbow, 1973). In this study, however, our first concern was the fluid content containing the tacit knowledge that is put on paper with the freewriting exercise. Next, we will describe the procedures followed in this particular study in its method, and present the first results.

Method

Participants
The participants of five kick-off meetings of knowledge creating schools projects in the Netherlands participated in the study (n=94). The meetings marked the beginning of five projects in which HAN professional university and several schools for primary and secondary education collaborate for the purpose of establishing an exploring and investigating attitude in the schools so that they become knowledge creating schools. Knowledge creating schools are schools that take a lead in their own professional development, and become true partners for universities in educational research and in teacher education programs (cf. Hargreaves, 1999). The meetings were attended by representatives of HAN University (researchers, teacher educators), representatives of the schools (school leaders, teachers, student teachers), and representatives of external partners (researchers, trainers/coaches). All the participants of the meetings took part in the study.

Procedure
Freewriting was conducted at the beginning of each meeting, after a short introduction on the meeting in general. At that moment, no topics related to ‘knowledge creating schools’ or ‘teachers as designers and co-researchers’ were discussed yet, so that the participants were free to express their own personal thoughts and feelings in their freewritings. The freewriting exercise took about fifteen minutes. First, the freewriting exercise (goal and procedure) was explained. Then the participants were asked to think about ‘knowledge creating schools’ and their role in it for three to five minutes. After that, they started
writing for ten minutes. After closing the freewriting exercise, the writings were assembled, and some
general thoughts were exchanged in the group to start the rest of the meeting. This discussion was not
included in the data collection. The writings were stored digitally and prepared for further analyses.

Analysis
The freewritings are analyzed for their form and their content. In this paper, we report on both form
and content in an exploratory way since analyzing the writings is still in progress. The initial analyses
aimed at getting a global picture of the length, style and topics of the freewritings. The analyses were
conducted bottom-up. Based on those first bottom-up impressions, further analyses will be conducted
with a top-down framework which relates specific design (research) activities to what is said in the
freewritings. In addition, we will then look in more detail at differences between groups of participants
and the elaborateness of their thinking on the topic of knowledge creating schools and practitioners’
roles in design and design research.

Results
Form of the freewritings
Three groups of participants were represented by the data: practitioners (i.e., teachers, student
teachers, and teacher educators, n=72), intermediates (i.e., school leaders, and trainers/coaches, n=15),
and researchers (n=7). Together, they produced 94 freewritings with an average length of 90.3 words
ranging from 12 up to 200. Most of the participants worked in education as practitioners (n=72), being
either involved in teaching pupils in primary and secondary schools, or in teacher education. Their
freewritings had the widest range (12 to 200 words), with an average length of 87.9 words. The
freewritings of the intermediates (n=15) and researchers (n=7) were slightly longer, with an average of
94.1 words and 108.7 words respectively. When we take the length of the freewritings as an indicator
for people’s elaborateness of thinking, the differences may suggest that, not unexpectedly,
practitioners find it more difficult to think about designing and design research as a professional part
of their jobs than intermediates and researchers. The latter two groups are more experienced with
designing and researching, and may have more explicit and elaborate ideas about how design research
could function within the schools.

Conducting design research in school settings with the schools and their teachers as active
participants is rather new to most of the schools. The schools participating in the five projects are
initiating a broader national movement towards becoming (academic) knowledge creating schools, and
as such have only started. In teacher education, a change towards educating “reflective practitioners”
cf. Schön, 1983) was started several years ago, and changes to the curriculum have been made. One
important change is more room for reflection in the curriculum. But still also for the teacher educators
and their students viewing teachers as designers and design researchers is fairly new. However,
practitioners in teacher education may by now have developed some ideas about how being a designer is or will be part of a teacher’s profession in the future. That they might already have more elaborate ideas about this, was confirmed by the data as we found that the freewritings of the teacher educators and their students (n=28, m=100.9 words) are longer than those of the teachers who work in primary and secondary schools (n=44, m=79.4 words).

In general, two styles were discerned in the freewritings: (1) an enumerated style in which thoughts were numbered or otherwise tagged, and hence written down one after the other without or by loosely connecting them; and (2) an anecdotal style in which the freewriting took the form of a very short story. In the enumerated style, people expressed very different matters such as the aims they can see for doing (design) research in the schools, their concerns, envisioned role divisions, and concrete research topics without relating them to another. Often, incomplete and very short sentences were used, which were bulleted or put right behind each other. Their content is descriptive and ‘distanced’ in the sense that they sum up important matters, but do not name personal appreciations. In a quick way, many aspects of doing (design) research in schools are mentioned, and in that sense they are rich of content. The items contain both statements and questions. In the anecdotal style, something else seems present: a personal motivation. The thoughts given are introduced as opinions (‘I think’, ‘According to me’, ‘In my school’) rather than distanced concerns. The authors take time and space to follow their thoughts. The tempo is therefore more slow, and less items are discussed, but in a deeper and more personal way. In Table 1, two examples from the data are given that were found to be typical for both styles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enumerated narrative</th>
<th>Anecdotal narrative</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Associations with research:</td>
<td>I was educated as a researcher, but haven’t had the chance to do research in my career. It is an old love of mine that I have neglected. The love has gone through the years, but now, at the end of my career as a teacher educator, I get the chance to pick it up again. I look forward to support what I do as a teacher educator and designer with research. It makes my goals much more concrete and doing research in and with schools in my view will be a step forwards for teacher education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- extending knowledge by research</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- learning to use methods</td>
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<td>- learning to do research</td>
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<td>- learning to analyze</td>
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<tr>
<td>- which information is important</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- where do I get this information</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- learning to classify</td>
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<tr>
<td>- share information</td>
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<tr>
<td>- discuss research</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- what is the end goal</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- what do I want to proof</td>
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<tr>
<td>- developing skills</td>
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Table 1: Two typical style examples from the freewritings.

Most of the freewritings are written in the enumerated style (n=58=61.7%). This may suggest that the ideas people have about doing (design) research in the schools are rather fragmented and not thought through yet. Following this line of reasoning, one would expect that teacher educators, their student teachers, intermediates and especially researchers write about it in an anecdotal style more frequently.
as opposed to the teachers in primary and secondary schools for whom the topic is the most new. Indeed we found that about 70% of the freewritings of teachers are in the enumerated style opposed to only 14% of the researchers’ freewritings. The intermediates, however, also write mainly enumerated (70%), and half of the students’ writings have the enumerated style. In general, the findings on style suggest that people are able to brainstorm about the role of schools and teachers in designing and design research, but their ideas are exploratory and not yet coherently connected in a clear vision.

Content of the freewritings
We explored the freewritings bottom-up to see which aspects of doing (design) research in the schools, and teachers’ roles in it, were illuminated by the participants. We found three main topics expressed in the freewritings: (1) research process: statements and questions about how schools and teachers could become knowledge creating and sharing by conducting their own research; (2) research goals: statements and questions about what schools and teachers should investigate; and (3) role divisions: statements and questions about who should do what in the schools, and how collaboration between practitioners and external others should be like. Table 2 gives examples of (abbreviated) statements and questions on each of the three main topics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research process</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘learning by posing questions’</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘reflection based on research findings’</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘Orientation and finding information about the topic you want to investigate, posing questions, planning the research, finally presenting the research’</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research goals</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Doing research is a way to find and try new things’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Students develop themselves by doing research in a quicker way’</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘The school should not be an island, let’s bridge to other parts of the field’</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘Find out what works in practice and what doesn’t’</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role divisions</th>
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<tr>
<td>‘Student teachers doing research that is of relevance to the school’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘May not come at the cost of primary tasks of teachers’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘My role will be to participate in several small research projects’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Collaboration between teachers and students beyond disciplines’</td>
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Table 2: Statements and questions about three main topics from the freewritings

Two final comments about the content of the freewritings can be made in this phase of the analyses. First, the participants do not write very elaborately or explicitly about the process of doing research in the schools. There is almost no mentioning of the full cycle of conducting (design) research, neither with the practitioners nor with the researchers. Other matters seem to be of interest to the participants. The practitioners air their opinion about which research topics related to school improvement and innovation, should be the focus of research conducted with and in the schools. They mention, among others, continuity of learning across the different school types, children’s motivation to learn, and
which innovations work for which groups of pupils. The researchers and intermediates seem to be concerned with arguing about the necessity to turn schools into knowledge creating ones, and they often explain what this means in general for the activities that the school undertakes. Their writings are often definitional. In short, the practitioners become practical and start doing by focusing on what should be researched, whereas the researchers and intermediates provide theoretical arguments about why and how in general.

Second, in many freewritings, especially those of the intermediates and practitioners, the necessity to collaborate school-wide is emphasized. Many freewritings explicitly mention the importance of teachers collaborating across traditional boundaries (e.g., beginning teachers with experienced teachers, across departments and disciplines in the schools, across schools, and with a national audience of other practitioners and designers). Some freewritings suggest ways to do that, for instance embedding the research questions that student teachers have in the school ambitions as expressed in the school plan, sharing findings by opening the doors of the schools, and opening up to already existing research communities. The following freewriting gives expression to this envisioned collaboration which is described as a school-wide learning community:

‘The knowledge creating schools should be aimed at ‘learning’ in its broadest sense. Learning by posing questions, good and investigating ones. The questions, and the information that is collected around them, should become visible and knowable within and outside the school. Learning and posing questions goes from pupil to pupil, pupil to teacher, pupil to student teacher, student teacher to pupil, student teachers to each other and to teachers, teacher educators and school leaders, teachers and educators to pupils and student teachers, and school leaders to pupils and student teachers’

Summarized, the participants have expressed their initial thinking about knowledge creating schools, doing research, and teachers’ roles in enumerated and anecdotal writings. The content is dominated by ideas about what should be investigated in schools, and that it should be done in collaboration between teachers, student teachers, school leaders, and even pupils. The researchers add arguments as to why the establishment of knowledge creating schools is deemed important. In the freewritings, not much attention is paid yet to the exact research activities that will take place, and the skills needed for that.

**Conclusion and Discussion**

*Some general findings*

Once practitioners have learned to express their thoughts and experiences, - of which we have tried to show the fruitful possibility in this explorative study by using narrative techniques - , their Modus 2 knowledge becomes available to the field. Armed with this explicit knowledge, practitioners can start to function as co-designers or even co-researchers in shared projects between universities and schools. Being aware of and having articulated their tacit knowledge, schools can now become knowledge creating schools (cf. De Vries & Pieters, in press; Hargreaves, 1999), and become serious partners in
the creation of practical and theoretical insights in the education field together with researchers and intermediates. Similarly, others have argued that researchers and practitioners should get together as co-researchers in so-called ‘communities of enquiry’ (Christie et al., in press). However, we expect that, if no additional action is undertaken, in such communities the differences between knowledge and expected outcomes remain. In this paper, we have suggested that more space should be created for practitioners to bring in their Modus 2 knowledge, which is local, experiential, and often tacitly stored within the practitioners themselves instead of on paper or in laid-out theoretical assumptions. Introducing narrative techniques to communities of enquiry in which researchers and practitioners collaborate, or in any other initiative that seeks to bring both parties together, is recommended based on the findings of this preliminary study. In their research on teachers and researchers in collaboration, Bickel and Hattrup (1995) conclude that “Establishing a dialogue that integrated the research and practitioner knowledge bases was a painstakingly long process” (p.50). We suggest that making room for teachers’ anecdotal evidence might help the process of integrating Modus 1 and Modus 2 knowledge becoming easier and more effective.

Based on the findings, we further suggest that the role divisions between researchers and practitioners seem to be complementary rather than similar or even competing for leadership (as is suggested by Bickel & Hattrup, 1995, among others). They each could have their own leading roles in what they are good at. In the freewriting, the practitioners strongly express their ideas about issues that should be investigated, worries that should be resolved by research, and, to a lesser extent, the importance of doing research in schools. When it comes to the exact process of designing and researching, their freewritings are less elaborate. They do emphasize the importance of collaboration within the school, and sometimes between the school and external researchers and intermediates. But hardly any practitioner mentions how to actually conduct the research. They seem not to be aware of the stages of researching, for instance, and in general do not mention the need to formulate research questions, design a study, collect and analyze data, and draw conclusions. The researchers and intermediates do express such concerns albeit in a more general definitional way without mentioning the details of conducting research activities. In addition, they argue why it is important that schools participate in research activities. In return, they give less expression to the topics that they think should be investigated. We conclude that the focus of practitioners and researchers in the research process seems to be different, but both sides of the coin are needed. Practitioners and researchers could work together in a complementary way as co-designers and co-researchers. This suggests they should develop an eye for the expertise of the others. Clearing the way for anecdotal evidence seems among the first challenges that the educational field finds on its way, since it breaks with the dominant Modus 1 tradition that finds that knowledge which is usable for others, is generalized and formal knowledge stripped from its immediate context.

A short word of critique in relation to the findings is in place here. We used freewriting in a rather limited way in this study by starting every meeting with it without an introduction to the topic they
were to write about. For some of the participants, especially the practitioners, the topic of designing and design research in schools was new, and they found it difficult to start thinking about the topic just like that. The ideas they have expressed might have been more elaborate if we had given them some kind of starter to warm up their thinking. At other occasions, we used freewriting at the end of a learning cycle as a tool to reflect, rather than for the purpose of orientation at the beginning (De Vries & Van der Meij, 2003; De Vries, Van der Meij, Boersma & Pieters, 2005). Our impression is that this induced a more detailed and vivid process of storification than we saw now. The narratives are rather short, dry and unimaginative. We can not be sure that this is because practitioners have no elaborate or vivid ideas about doing design research in their schools. We therefore suggest that freewriting as an isolated technique aimed at orientation and exploration at a fairly new topic was not fully appropriate to elicit all the tacit knowledge of the participants. Other written narrative techniques, such as diary writing, might have been more fruitful, or oral techniques could have been used in addition to the freewriting exercise.

A database of anecdotal evidence

Stories are personal, in that they give expression to what a particular person thinks and feels. But in society, they also function as the glue between individuals. Expressed and exchanged stories become part of a socially shared cultural knowledge base. According to Bakhtin (1986), all human utterances, being either literary or related to other genres, spring from and reflect socially situated contexts and cultures. Stories reflect as well as feed those cultures everytime they are told or written down. In other words, expressed stories become part of an ongoing dialogue between individuals in shared cultural contexts (cf. Wertsch, 1998). In the domain of arts and literature, the social nature of dialogue and storification have been studied under headings such as ‘intertextuality’ and ‘multivoicedness’ (e.g., Bakhtin, 1986).

To make Modus 1 narratives a more structural part of the process of collaborative knowledge creation between practitioners and researchers, it would not only be important that individuals express and share their thoughts and feelings once, but also that those narratives are stored in such a way that others have access to it structurally. For that purpose, an electronic database of anecdotal evidence is developed within this project. The database contains the narratives from the freewritings. In addition to the rudimentary narratives themselves, the stories will be tagged and annotated in an extended process of bottom-up qualitative analysis (cf. Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The database stores the Modus 1 knowledge of different groups of practitioners in the field of education, that can then be explored and searched by others by using key words. The database can be extended through time and filled with new narratives. The database will be accessible through the web so that access is easy.

It is expected that storing the freewritings in a database of anecdotal evidence is expected to help present and future teachers in their jobs in several ways. First of all, it can help (student) teachers become and stay aware of the value their tacit knowledge has to others in the field. Second, being a
teacher becomes more of a collaborative effort when their stories are in a shared database. By being able to get to know the experiences of other practitioners, their job as a teacher becomes less isolated than it used to be. Becoming a teacher means becoming part of a community of teachers nation-wide. By revealing the community of teachers by the shared knowledge they hold, (student) teachers learn to work and cooperate in teams instead of rule in their private classrooms. And third, the database of anecdotal evidence can be of great use to researchers and intermediates, who can either explore their initial ideas or check findings by searching the database for relevant experiences. This way, the dialogue between Modus 1 and Modus 2 knowledge goes on, even outside specific projects.

Using the database of anecdotal evidence

Storing narratives in a database and putting the database on the web will not do. There are many examples of databases like this that are hardly ever used, or don’t get the credit they deserve. It seems important not only to create the database with the use of narrative techniques, but also to let others use it by narrative means. Only then will the database give rise to fruitful and effective dialogue, between practitioners of all kinds on the one hand, and practitioners and researchers on the other.

Many narrative techniques are available that aim for such a dialogue. See for instance overviews of the application of dialogical narrative techniques by Conle (2003), Ellis and Bochner (2000), and Richardson (2000). In addition, the technique of freewriting that we used in this study, could be applied more extensively in a dialogical setting. Participants could be asked to read aloud their own or each others writings, and discuss them (Elbow, 1973). Finally, the use of (computer-enhanced) narrative learning environments could give us some ideas how to use narratives in a wider range of possibilities, for instance by letting groups of people act out each others stories (e.g., Dettori, Gianetti, Paiva & Vaz, 2006; Fusai, Saudelli, Marti, Decortis & Rizzo, 2003).

For the purpose of bringing practitioners and researchers together as co-designers and co-researchers, there are some contexts for use of the anecdotal database that seem interesting starting points. First of all, new collaborative design projects that involve universities as well as schools, could use such a database. The participating schools may feel invited to bring in their knowledge in turn. In addition, all involved could explore design ideas with the database, to increase the successfullness of the design. Second, within school innovation programs could access the database to explore and check their ideas about the upcoming innovations. This could induce an internal dialogue about ideas and goals, and hence secure the effectiveness of the knowledge-creating process in the school. Third, teacher education programs could implement use of the database in their teacher training so that student teachers develop a sense of teacher community and get access to first-hand experiential knowledge about issues that concern them when to are about having their own experiences. In the next few years, we will explore the use of a database of anecdotal evidence in the contexts mentioned.
References


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