Design-Based Implementation Research: An Emerging Model for Transforming the Relationship of Research and Practice
Barry J. Fishman, William R. Penuel, Anna-ruth Allen, Britte Haugan Cheng, Nora Sabell

Reviewed by: Rishabh Devgon

Critical Review:

Through their paper, Barry J. Fishman et al. [1] lay focus on the need to move on from traditional research practices onto those that mitigate earlier design barriers, are effective, sustainable and scalable. They thus introduce a research approach called design based implementation research (DBIR). DBIR tries to bridge the gap between educational research and educators through an iterative, collaborative effort that addresses systemic problems in academia with a focus on change in the future. The paper explores systemic challenges, existing educational research theory, principles of their approach, and its development. The research presented is not novel, but rather it consolidates and scales the existing literature and makes a shift to a more proactive integration into the existing systemic educational structures.

The research method used in this paper is a critical literature review. This method is justified given that the aim of the paper is to amalgamate previous literature and synthesise a research approach for the domain. A few drawbacks that I found within this methodology was that the authors have not quite specified their selection criterion for the reviewed literature, which seems important given that this is a survey type paper. They have also not addressed the process of how this approach was developed and why specific reviewed strategies were included/ excluded. The authors have not provided their positionality within this paper, and thus any organisational/ economic motivations can not be gauged. I felt that the paper could have also benefited from the author's perspective on the shortcomings and limitations of their research.

I really enjoyed how the paper described the various existing methodologies within this research sphere to give people without expertise in this domain more context. However, I felt that the paper took a very passive stand and did not quite highlight the drawbacks of the previous research. Hence, I think that the paper does not quite satisfactorily justify the need for a new approach. The paper did not seem very well structured, and the use of sections and subsections was not very apparent, thus making it difficult to read. The paper also lacks continuity and flow without clearly indicating how a particular section ties up with the research goals or other sections.

I felt that the paper explored very academic and theoretical themes, and thus I think that it strays from its primary goal of bridging the gap between academia and research. An example is that the paper talks about how researchers, district leaders and educators need to develop a coordinated system but does not explore the dynamics, roles and responsibilities, representation or structure of this system. A more practical, hands on approach through a case

study could have provided a better realisation of the paper's objectives. There was also a lack of clarity in the taxonomy of the stakeholders, with none of them being explicitly defined. The themes explored within this paper are also very vague, not systematic and not action oriented. Thus, deployment of this approach on the field could be a daunting proposition.

I personally feel that the paper was rather shortsighted in its approach, with a lack of focus on the access to education and sustaining learning opportunities for the underprivileged or minority groups. In a developing country like India, this is one of the significant factors that come into play. Thus, the approach is not universal in nature. The research lacked an investigation on the subjectivity of learning and evaluation models for different students which is one of the most pressing issues in research on contemporary academia. I also felt that a lack of representation of the student's perspective within this approach could be detrimental to the education system that is essentially designed for them. Thus, it is imperative also to give students, who are the primary stakeholders, a voice within this approach.

To conclude my review, I would say that the paper highlights several key themes and approaches that could benefit the academic institution at a more systematic level. But, the paper in its current form also lacks a lot of critical points, as highlighted by me throughout this review. I feel that it could be a little premature to incorporate this approach into our education systems directly, and it needs further exploration, using a more participatory approach to be widely adopted.

References:

1. Barry J Fishman, William R Penuel, Anna-Ruth Allen, Britte Haugan Cheng, and Nora Sabelli. 2013. Design-Based Implementation Research: An Emerging Model for Transforming the Relationship of Research and Practice. 21.