

Reclaiming and Redefining Research

Suzanne Porath – Kansas State University
Editor of *Networks*

At my institution, we have a table that models for undergraduate students the process and phases of understanding research in terms of little “r” research to big “R” research (see <https://coe.k-state.edu/research/student-research.html>). Some components include awareness of research, guided practice of research, conducting research, and dissemination of research. Under each component are dispositions and activities that exemplify each component such as “developing wisdom of practice” to “writing for publication.” The continuum seems to indicate that the ultimate goal is to move closer to the big “R” research.

Too often educators get inundated by the traditional big “R” Research, conducted by outsiders who attempt to control for variables and ground the work deeply in theory. However, the research conducted by teachers is extremely valuable because of its contrast to the big “R” Research. It is conducted by the educators in authentic classroom and provides practical applications and conclusions grounded in specific contexts that can be used by other educators to reflect on their own practice and contexts. Dewey stated in 1929:

It seems to me that the contributions that might come from classroom teachers are a comparatively neglected field...an almost unworked mine... For these teachers are the ones in direct contact with pupils and hence the ones through whom the results of scientific consequences of educational theory come into the lives of those at school.
(Wallace, 1997, pp 27-28)

Unfortunately, Dewey’s sentiment still rings true 90 years later. Action research, also known as teacher research, practitioner inquiry and a dozen other names, is still an untapped mine that can yield rich rewards for the practitioner and the field. This issue of *Networks* provides some evidence of the rich rewards of educators, across grade levels and subject areas, reclaiming research for themselves with the intent to improve their practice.

The power of action research is that it provides intentional and systematic methods to examine the effect of new instructional strategies or pedagogical techniques. Another important aspect of action research is the influence of the context on the inquiry. Collaborative learning may be common-place in higher education in the United States, yet not all colleges or countries have embraced this pedagogy. As he introduced collaborative learning in his college-level

English course, **Joshua Cohen** wanted to know how this new format would impact his Japanese students' attitudes and preferences toward individual, pair, and larger group activities and their ability to learn English in the class.

Using self-study methods, **Christy M. Howard**, **Ran Hu**, and **Johna Faulconer** explore how their own literacy identities were shaped and how sharing these identities, experiences and beliefs in meaningful professional dialogues influenced their instructional practice with pre-service teachers. Despite differences in ethnicity, and professional and educational experiences, they shared commonalities in their identities and experiences. In addition, through the questioning of critical friends, they considered which beliefs were not being enacted in their practice.

Jamie McDaniel investigated the impact of using online math programs Dreambox and Education Galaxy in conjunction with class instruction. The article focuses on the data from six students who showed limited engagement in math prior to the implementation of these programs. Using pre/post assessments, online assignments, traditional quizzes, and anecdotal notes, McDaniels found that the students increased their engagement, enjoyment, and understanding of the math concepts. As an educator, McDaniels learned that preparing the students for the purpose, procedures, and use of the programs was an essential part of supporting learning through the programs.

Play is an essential component of early childhood education, yet it continues to be replaced by teacher-directed instruction. Despite including play literature in course readings and discussions, pre-service teachers expressed their inability to apply ideas regarding the importance of play to their own teaching experience. **Meredith Resnick** and **Ane T. Johnson** examined how using discussion-case analysis as an occasion for exploring play supported their pre-service teachers in making connections between theory, research, and practice.

I want to close this editorial introduction with a quote from **Catherine Lammert's** book review of *The Power of Practice-Based Literacy Research: A Tool for Teachers* by James V. Hoffman and Misty Sailors. She writes, "The authors conclude with a powerful reminder that it is a moral imperative that our teaching informs our research and our research informs our teaching." According to Lammert, the authors encourages educators to "reclaim and redefine what constitutes legitimate, powerful research" and the text provides both background on practice-based research and methods for conducting it.

Action research, practitioner inquiry, self-study, scholarship of teaching and learning, or practice-based research – there are numerous names for this work. Yet, whether you are new to action research or a veteran of classroom inquiry, I hope this issue of *Networks* continues to inspire you to “reflect on classroom practice through research ventures... alone or in collaboration, [to] use inquiry as a tool to learn more about your work with the hope of eventually improving its effectiveness” (from the mission statement of *Networks: An Online Journal for Teacher Research*).

Reference

Wallace, J. (1997). A note from John Dewey on teacher research. *Teacher Research*, 5(1), 26-28.