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Editorial Introduction

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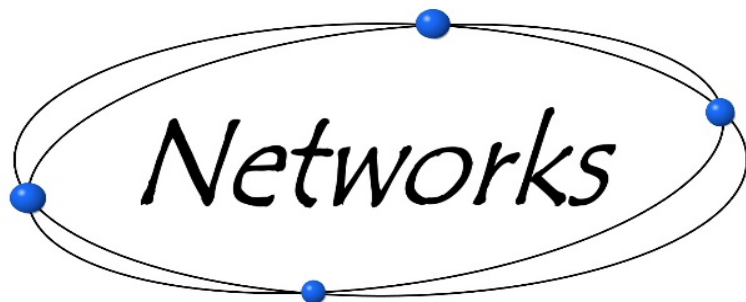


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An Online Journal for Teacher Research

Editorial Introduction

Suzanne Porath - Editor - Kansas State University

“Teacher research enables me to investigate one of my wonderings in a deliberate fashion. I used the tools of a researcher to investigate my own environment. Teacher research provides the impetus for teachers to find various solutions to their own questions. By definition then, it is relevant inquiry” (Borst, 1999, as quoted by Dana and Yendol-Hoppey, 2014, pg. 5)

At the heart of action research and teacher inquiry is a deep desire to improve one’s practice. This issue of *Networks: An Online Journal for Teacher Research* highlights educators at a variety of levels reflecting on their work, asking hard questions, examining data, drawing conclusions, and making improvements to their practice. Through their narratives, you are invited into their classrooms and non-traditional learning spaces to witness the messiness of research and the additional questions any good project generates. It is my hope that you will move past witnessing action research and commit to designing your own inquiry into your practice to improve teaching and learning. Then, of course, submit your inquiry to *Networks*!

Being a non-Spanish speaking teacher in a classroom of multilingual students created discomfort for **Stephanie Lynn Abraham**, who “understood the power relationship that could exist between languages.” This prompted her to consider how to open up spaces in her classrooms where her students’ home languages were not only acknowledged, but valued and used in the classroom. Beginning with herself, she examined and documented her practice and made both conceptual and concrete changes in her classroom to support her multilingual students and implement more critical pedagogy.

Literacy in the 21st century is more than traditional reading and writing; it includes making meaning of multimodal texts. This led **Diane Barone** and **Rebecca Barone** to consider how 5th grade students interpreted a film translation of the book *The Red Tree* by Shaun Tan. Without explicit instruction on viewing film, the researchers examined the students’ written responses to the film to discover how they made meaning of the film.

They discovered that the students thoughtfully considered various aspects of the film and learned how they could help their students develop the language and concepts of the visual arts to enhance their viewing experience and continue to develop critical thinking about multimodal texts.

Inquiring about inquiry is the focus of the article by a teacher educator, **Paul Betts**, and two teacher candidates, **Michelle McLarty** and **Krysta Dickson**. The teacher candidates were introduced to inquiry learning in the mathematics classroom through the math methods course taught by Paul, who also introduced action research to the teacher candidates. As a result, Michelle and Krysta conducted a collaborative action research project on their own use of inquiry learning in their practicum classrooms. Through their inquiry, the teacher candidates began linking theories of both inquiry learning AND action research to their practice and how to manage the messiness of implementing inquiry learning and conducting research on their practice.

Differentiation is a common word in PK-12 teachers' vocabularies. Even pre-service teachers are constantly reminded to include differentiation strategies on their lesson plans. However, how differentiated is teacher education? How do teacher educators model these strategies? There were the questions that concerned **Nykela Jackson** and **Lesley Evans** and through examining their own past teaching experiences and expectations, they defined what differentiation could look like in teacher education courses and considered what challenges differentiation at the college-level might entail.

Bridging the theory to practice gap was a goal for **Janet McIntosh** in her literacy methods course for pre-service teachers. Acknowledging that pre-service teachers need to be introduced to theory but that "internalizing it can be a challenge for those new to the teaching profession," she developed a writing strategy she called quote card reflection to support the understanding of professional readings. Through her analysis of the pre-service teachers' writings, she realized the time and space needed to be provided in class for the pre-service teachers to truly understand and apply the readings to their practice.

This issue returns to a little-used section of the journal for short articles, which will now be called *Reflections*. This section was originally intended to provide space for pieces that "might describe work in progress, raise issues arising from such work, or discuss general issues related to methodologies, ethics, collaboration, etc. in educator inquiry." This departs from a traditional empirical article, but will provide insight on some of the challenges and issues that arise from engaging in action research and practitioner inquiry. The articles in this section still need to connect to the aim and scope of *Networks*, which is for educators at all levels to "use inquiry as a tool to learn more about their work with the hope of eventually improving its effectiveness."

The first *Reflection* comes from **J. Spencer Clark** and focuses on his experience with facilitating a collaborative problem-based inquiry project with eighty-three secondary students. He reflected on how he and the classroom teacher managed the challenges the students faced in having to work collaboratively and tackling the open-ended nature of the project. Through this reflection, he developed strategies to support students in future collaborative problem-based inquiry projects. Self-reflection is critical in practitioner inquiry to uncover the past experiences and events the frame current practice. **Stephanie**

R. Burns' narrative about her journey of becoming a teacher offers a voice and vision that stands against the teacher-as-technician model and warmly narrates how a novice teacher learns to value and build on students' lived experiences. Her reflection highlights the importance of having strong mentor teachers and the time and space to reflect on everyday classroom events.

The last piece in this issue is **Suzanne Porath's** book review of the third edition of a classic action research text - *The Reflective Educator's Guide to Classroom Research* by Nancy Fichtman Dana and Diane Yendol-Hoppey. (The second edition was reviewed by Christopher B. Crowley for *Networks* Vol. 11 Issue 2.) With new chapters and a companion website, the third edition updates knowledge about action research and continues to encourage and support educators in embarking on teacher inquiry.

To end this *Editorial Introduction* and invite you to become an active participant in systematically inquiring into your own practice, I want to highlight a quote from Dana and Yendol-Hoppey's text. They believe that teacher inquiry is important because "Through embarking on the inquiry journey, you break boundaries. You redefine life. You redefine teaching itself" (2014, p. 250). It is my hope that this issue of *Networks* will inspire you to break boundaries in your spaces and redefine teaching itself!