

Proposed Practitioner Research Presidential Session: 2016

Practitioner Research, Public Scholarship and Democratic Practice: *Toward A Theoretical Practice Framework for the 21st Century*

Submitted by the Practitioner Research Network at AERA – May 13, 2015

BACKGROUND

Practitioner Research is most commonly been undertaken by teachers in school environments who are searching for solutions to challenges that they encounter within their practice. It provides these professionals with a structured inquiry process for use in investigating and identifying solutions to everyday problems that are closest to them, and that they have some power to resolve themselves, without the help of outside researchers or specialists. Taught in most teacher education programs across the nation, Practitioner Research is one of the most democratic research forms available today. A key idea underlying Practitioner Research is the belief that science contributes best to educational progress through a process of sustained practitioner inquiry, rather than by being asserted, or having trickled down from professionalized study, emanating from post-secondary and research institutions. More needs to be done, however, to ensure that Practitioner Researchers live up to John Dewey' ideas about schooling, scientific inquiry and social progress, in which Dewey maintains that scholars must engage democratically with "publics" (in education and beyond) in ways that raise awareness about social problems impacting those that they serve, and that foster a democratic and public solving of those problems. This is a key challenge facing the field today, but one that must be addressed if we are going to create equitable education setting that provide all young with an excellent education that prepares them for our diverse nation and world.

As we move into the 21st Century and teachers take on distributed leadership roles that give them greater input into, and increasing responsibility for the shared running of the schools where they work, and they are held to greater public scrutiny/accountability for student achievement, Practitioner Research is more important than ever. It provides not only teachers, but in increasing numbers, other education and youth development practitioners as well, with a powerful tool to use to identify and solve problems within their areas and systems, and within themselves. Among these groups are activist - practitioners with a strong commitment to social justice, who are embracing critical frames and methodologies that increase the participatory nature of practitioner work and who often connect their work to communities as well as schools. This includes those practitioners who teach participatory action research as a tool for empowerment.

For the past twenty years at AERA, educational researchers, interested in both improving educational practice and in generating new educational knowledge via some form of Practitioner Research have been active in and have presented their studies through a host of Special Interest Groups, such as Action Research, Narrative Research, Self-study of Teacher Education Practices (S-STEP), Teacher-Research, and in sessions on ethno-methodology, socio-historical and sociocultural influences on learning, leadership and administration, and a number of other areas. There are ninety eight sessions listed in the 2015 annual meeting program, for example, in which one or more of the participants described their work as Practitioner or Practitioner Action Research. This is an impressive number that spans various divisions and SIGs, and that is growing. Despite this fact, Practitioner Researchers have yet to offer within AERA an accepted educational epistemology that can be distinguished from the traditional disciplinary research framework.

SIG leaders gathered for breakfast at the 2015 AERA Annual Meeting and decided to form a network, in order to support each other, and to co-sponsor a Presidential Session in 2016.

Practitioner Researcher Network of AERA Members

This network was established by SIG leaders at the 2015 AERA Annual Meeting in Chicago, Illinois.

- Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices (#109)
- Career and Technical SIG (#134)
- Workplace Learning SIG (#136)
- School – University Collaborative Research SIG (#107)
- Professional Development Schools SIG (#79)
- Teacher As Researcher SIG (#126)
- Action Research (#2)
- Qualitative Research (#82)
- Leadership For Social Justice (#165)
- Educational Change (#155)
- Constructivist Theory, Research and Practice (#25)
- Informal Learning Environments Research (SIG #49)
- Cultural Historical Research (#30)
- Studying and Self-Regulated Learning (#121)

2016 AERA Centennial Meeting

The AERA Centennial Meeting (2016) provides an enormous opportunity to bring Practitioner Researchers at AERA together for an unprecedented meeting to collaboratively examine and support one another's work, and to begin an open dialogue about the development of an epistemology that is grounded in public scholarship promoting democratic processes, and that meets the challenge set forth for educational researchers by Dewey in *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (1916).

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

The proposed Presidential Session will allow us to accomplish the following:

1. Increase knowledge among AERA members about the nature and benefits of Practitioner Research
2. Provide a common space for Practitioner Researchers to meet during the Annual Meeting to dialogue about emerging issues in the field.
3. Begin and model the process of a group of researchers within AERA (*who happen to represent a cross-section of SIGS and divisions*) while it grapples with the idea and realities of positioning public scholarship as a necessary and reflective component of its evolving epistemology.
4. Provide examples of trans-national public scholarship in practitioner research that support diverse societies' efforts/struggles to realize the goals of democracy and equity.
5. Explore/share research on existing and emerging frameworks (*i.e., intersections between Practitioner Research and critical frames*), methodologies, approaches to data analysis, and considerations for strengthening areas of validity and reliability in Practitioner Research.
6. Arrive at a set of recommendations for next steps.
Inspire researchers to embrace public scholarship, to integrate elements of Practitioner Research's new/emerging epistemology into their work, and to report on their progress at subsequent meetings, with an eye on continuously improving practice.

MEETING OVERVIEW
Guiding Discussion Questions

- 1) What would a model of Practitioner Research that makes public scholarship integral to its core principles and existing practices consist of/look like?
- 2) What opportunities and challenges exist related to making public scholarship an integral part of the scholarly enterprise of Practitioner Research –e.g., benefits, epistemological concerns, relevance to the field/practitioners, challenges to the integrity of Practitioner Research, and to building practitioner-researchers' capacity to do high quality public scholarship in diverse democracies.

Session Features (In-process)

**A highly interactive session where multiple points of view are shared and heard.*

**A set of recommendation/action steps will be provided to attendees 2 weeks after the session.*

- **Session Overview/Introductions/Instructions: Practitioner Network Facilitator (7 minutes)**
Proposed Opening/Motivational Speaker: Dr. Pedro Noguera - *Topic: Practitioner Research, Public Scholarship and Equality in Education: Reflections from the field about 21st Century Practitioner Research addressing multiple democracies.* (10 minutes)
NOTE: Dr. Noguera has done significant work in the area of integrating social justice and action research method/frames.
Citation: Noguera, P. A. (2008) "Research that Matters: The Role of Participatory Action Research in Promoting Educational Equity" in Qualitative Inquiry, Special Issue.
- **Cross-SIG Discussion Tables:**
Participants share ideas/views in response to separate, but related assigned – topics or questions, leading to a key recommendation. Process Steps: 1) A prepped moderator will be placed at each table who is tasked with prompting and facilitating the discussion and with listening and documenting key conclusions. He or she will remain at his/her table throughout the process. Other participants will change tables three times. 2) Participants will select a table and engage in discussions. After 12 minutes, they will move to another table where they will be provided with some background and will discuss a second topic. This takes place for three rounds. During the third round, after some discussion table mates will have the responsibility to create a key recommendation for next steps regarding the topic under discussion, which the moderator will record. Moderators will report out on any pressing questions, concerns, opportunities, possibilities, aha moments, and the key recommendation coming from his/her table. (40 minutes)

Potential Table Discussion Questions:

1. "How can I/we improve and/or build upon existing practices to transform 21st Century schooling/educational practices and/or contexts in ways formerly unimagined with respect to the student diversity that exists within our schools and the democracy that we live in?"
2. How does/can our practice serve to address systemic impediments that undermine students' academic and social progress?
3. How are practitioners utilizing their research to improve their practice with diverse students and communities? Is it making a significant difference? Why? Or Why not?
4. What are some challenges in Practitioner Research in terms of the emerging epistemology that we've been discussing? How can these challenges be addressed?
5. What would a model of Practitioner Research look like with the positioning of public research as an integral part of Practitioner Research processes?
6. What are some of the opportunities associated with the emerging epistemology that we've been discussing? How can these opportunities be addressed?
7. How do we improve/respond to the demand for stronger research validity and reliability in Practitioner Research? What are some emerging methods that you feel offer promise to the field?

8. What should be the next steps for AERA Practitioner Researchers in our efforts to develop a distinct educational epistemology that will stand up to rigorous critique?

- **Closing Address: “Public Scholarship to Educate Diverse Democracies: Practitioner Research Leading the Way.” A Practitioner Interview/Collegial Discussion with Practitioner Scholar -- Dr. Jackie Delong (20 minutes)**

An Introduction to Dr. Delong.

Delong’s contributions to knowledge have focused on educational knowledge with a clear distinction between this knowledge and the knowledge generated by education researchers. Her scholarship focuses on the nature of educational knowledge as distinct from education knowledge.

Delong is a particularly powerful communicator on practitioner research and on its intersections with public scholarship to educate diverse democracies. Delong has presented to expert audiences at annual conferences of AERA and at the British Educational Research Association, as well as broad audiences in the UK, Canada, Japan and Brazil. She has a capacity to acknowledge and respect indigenous knowledges whilst having an educational influence with in diverse democracies.

Significance of Dr. Delong’s Work:

The significance of Dr. Delong’s publications is that they show how an educational epistemology has been generated, validated and accredited. This focus on ‘educational’ raises questions about a slippage in meaning between ‘education’ and ‘educational’, in statements from Presidents of AERA for AERA annual conferences over the past five years. For example we have the statement on the AERA website from Jeannie Oakes, Kevin Weiner and Michelle Renée:

We encourage all researchers, divisions, and SIGS to propose innovative, thoughtful papers and sessions that focus on and deliberate about public scholarship as a necessary and reflexive component of education research.

In her self-study of her educational influences as a Superintendent of Schools (see above url), Delong makes an original contribution to public knowledge in bringing the embodied expression of ontological and relational values, as explanatory principles in her explanation of educational influence, into the Academy. This original contribution includes a form of democratic evaluation related to John Dewey’s principles and a conceptual understanding of cultures of inquiry in generating and sustaining practitioner-research.

Selected Works:

- i) The website <http://www.spanglefish.com/ActionResearchCanada/> with its access to 8 volumes of Passion in Professional Practice at <http://schools.gedsb.net/ar/passion/index.html>. These kinds of non-accredited narratives from teacher-researchers are the bedrock of public scholarship in my area.
- ii) Delong’s (2002) doctoral thesis. How Can I Improve My Practice As A Superintendent of Schools and Create My Own Living Educational Theory? Retrieved 11 May 2015 from <http://www.actionresearch.net/living/delong.shtml>
- iii) The December 2013 issue of the Educational Journal of Living Theories. Retrieved on 11 May 2015 from <http://ejolts.net/node/209>

Reception to Follow.