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Editor's Foreword

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Because individuals, their families and communities are faced with the challenges of daily life, solutions and support need to be found to overcome these challenges. For social transformation to take place, and in particular educational changes, the involvement and participation of all role players in educational research is needed. As O'Hanlon avers: "Without personal involvement in learning we simply reproduce the existing hegemony through the repetition of traditional orthodoxy" (2003:101). He adds that: "There is a need for an interpretive, discursive, inclusive and democratic investigatory process to keep abreast of necessary social change." (O'Hanlon 2003:117). Participatory educational research is committed to developing knowledge through mutual co-construction.

Participatory research is an action agenda for reform that may change the lives of participants, the institutions in which they live and work or even the researchers' lives. Issues facing marginalized groups such as oppression, domination, suppression, alienation and hegemony are of paramount importance. The researcher, in conjunction with participants, provides a voice for these participants in improving their lives and focussing on bringing about change in practices. Individuals are helped to free themselves from constraints in the media, language, work procedures and relationships of power in educational settings. Such research has the intention of being emancipatory from unjust structures that limit self-development and self-determination. It creates a political debate so that change can occur. It is practical and collaborative as participants are active collaborators in researchers' inquiries (Cresswell 2007:21-22).

It is important that university-based colleagues who work with those in schools should challenge the "current testing regime" and rethink what the purposes of schooling are in a democratic society (Cochran-Smith & Lytle 2009:117). Teachers' views of practice should be transformed and expanded beyond what they do when they teach. Teachers should be forming and re-forming frameworks to understand practice and should take into account that teaching is about constructing the curriculum with learners, using their experiences, cultural and linguistic resources and interpretive frameworks. Teaching also includes how a teacher's actions are part of understanding learners, and being aware of culture, class, gender, social issues, communities, curricula, materials, texts and histories. It is critical that teachers should work together in order to develop questions and frameworks which are informed by

considering the situation from various angles and the specific learners they are teaching and making sense of social, economic, political and cultural contexts they are working in. Teachers should thus take an inquiry stance on practice where they do research on their practice and that their roles should be co-constructors of knowledge and become creators of curriculum, becoming theorizers, activists and school leaders, resulting in transformed relationships with their colleagues and others. This in turn offers learners and their families expanded opportunities and good connections with communities, organizations and school-university partnerships. This orientation calls for a different approach to professional development where teachers have access to many resources but at the same time do not neglect their duty to generate knowledge from their own practice and make informed decisions. As the teacher learns differently, so the learner learns differently, where the teacher asks questions, the learners ask questions and engage with ideas (Cochran-Smith et al. 2009: 84-85).

According to Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009:93,95,96) practitioner research is considered as a “theoretical hybrid” which is deeply grounded “in the dialectic of critical inquiry and practice”. Inquiry and practice have a relationship which is reciprocal, recursive and symbiotic, and where inquirers can take both the role of the researcher and the practitioner at the same time. Hence when university or school-based educators work the dialectic of inquiry and practice, then they do not work just as researchers or just as practitioners because the activities and their roles are integrated as well as dynamic. Practitioner research thus is grounded in identifying and empirically documenting everyday practice which leads to the development of new conceptual frameworks and theories and thus leads to improvement in practice, locally and further resulting in an “epistemological hybrid”. In broad terms it can be called a conceptual-empirical inquiry/empirical-conceptual inquiry. This type of research is a rich resource for generating new knowledge as university academics and teachers study and theorise their practice. As we teach and evaluate programs we learn from those who have done practitioner research.

The *Participatory Educational Research* journal aims to publish works which have employed participatory methodologies contributing to the generation of knowledge in the education field. It includes the role of the teacher as co-researchers in community development and also involving other stakeholders in addressing the challenges in order to facilitate social transformation.

References

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