

Editorial Introduction: The Power and Promise of Counter-Narratives

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As educators, practitioner researchers, and Co-Editors, we are especially excited for this winter issue of *Perspectives on Urban Education*, which includes a section devoted to the life and work of the renowned urban educator, critical pedagogue and activist, Jean Anyon. Our guest editor for the Jean Anyon tribute, Amanda Barrett Cox, along with University of Pennsylvania professor Janine Remillard, offer a moving editorial on the contributions of numerous scholars whose reflections touch on the impact of Anyon's scholarship and activism. Through her work in urban schools, Anyon used empirical data and qualitative methods to develop the early theoretical work on social reproduction. This work has influenced a generation of scholars, whose work, in turn, is critical to ongoing research on urban schooling. The stories that emerged from her research can effectively be seen as counternarratives that challenge dominant discourses both in and out of the academy.

Our first feature article, by Sharon Ravitch, is entitled "The Transformative Power of Taking an Inquiry Stance on Practice: Practitioner Research as Narrative and Counter-Narrative," and it makes a powerful argument for practitioner research. Drawing from Cochran-Smith and Lytle's seminal work on practitioner inquiry, *Inquiry as Stance* (2009), Ravitch describes how engaging in practitioner research means that learning emerges fully grounded in the particulars

of the context, rather than divorced from it. Instead of being an "imposition," Ravitch argues that research conducted by practitioners can "speak to what is useful, relevant and meaningful in specific contexts and with specific populations."

Ravitch's piece also offers crucial distinctions between the terms inquiry stance, practitioner inquiry, and practitioner research, which are often—and erroneously—used interchangeably. Her piece has great promise to be a catalyst for discourse about the nature of inquiry and practitioner research. To take an inquiry stance is to be critically reflective of one's practice as a core aspect of being a practitioner. With an inquiry stance one critically interrogates what emerges in a site of practice, and investigates various phenomena, data, or even one's own positionality. Practitioner inquiry entails a more active inquiry stance where a question is asked and then reflected upon during and after engagement in practice.

Practitioner research, most distinct from the other two terms, utilizes a deliberate research design to investigate an inquiry. Practitioner research is dynamic and iterative. Initial inquiries and research design can evolve as engagement with the data and the local setting influence the researcher's understanding, interest and direction. The key feature setting this term apart from the others is that practitioner research has

a defined methodology and a carefully considered research design while inquiry stance and practitioner inquiry refer to the adoption of critical habits of mind: critical reflection and critical interrogation.

We believe that many practitioners often claim to be doing practitioner research even as they eschew the use of any research methodology and fail to give proper consideration to concepts such as validity and trustworthiness of data. There is a need for practitioners to engage in dialogue to operationalize terms such as inquiry stance and practitioner research and to examine possibilities for practitioner research and inquiry stance to be generative to our understanding of phenomena occurring in sites of practice.

As Editors, we want Ravitch's piece to be a catalyst for further conversation within the Journal's online forum. We invite practitioner researchers, teachers of practitioner researchers, and those who value inquiry stance and practitioner inquiry to contribute pieces to our next issue that are a response, inspiration, or a connection to Ravitch's article. We feel strongly about the importance of practitioner research and we offer the Journal as a space where practitioners and academy researchers can be in conversation.

In an effort to maximize the possibilities represented by this online space, we emphasize our strong interest in a variety of representations of knowledge and hope that we will receive reader responses that span a range of formats.

These may include (but are certainly not limited to):

- podcasts
- blogs, vlogs, video
- storified Twitter feeds
- written reflections,
- more traditional formats such as academic articles, notes from the field, and commentaries.

In this issue

In their article, "A Racio-economic Analysis of Teach for America," authors Yvette Lapayese, Ursula Aldana, and Eduardo Lara use a critical race theory and interest convergence lens to present research that critiques Teach for America's (TFA) teacher preparation as being designed for whites and excluding the needs of teachers of color. Lapayese, Aldana, and Lara present counternarratives of several TFA teachers of color, raising crucial issues related to class and race. Is TFA's approach to teacher education an aspect of social reproduction that reinforces distinctions between the classes of teachers and their students? By failing to consider the unique contributions of teachers of color and failing to utilize their "funds of knowledge" (Gonzalez, N., & Moll, L. C., & Amanti, 2005), might TFA's very structure potentially undermine the learning of its teachers and their students? What further opportunities might be missed with the exclusion of teachers of color? TFA has been critiqued for being exploitive of urban students and communities (Darling-Hammond et. al., 2005), and perhaps it may also be exploitive of its teachers by focusing on the development of white, upper class teachers to the exclusion of teachers of color.

If Teach for America is going to realize its promise to close the achievement gap and improve education, the authors argue, it must address whiteness and white privilege in its summer curriculum and structure, and throughout all aspects of its program. This interrogation must go beyond TFA's primary platform for race discussion—the "achievement gap"—and move towards a deeper critical multiculturalism (May & Sleeter, 2010) that examines the complexities of race and class instead of shying away from them. We hope that TFA as a learning organization might be inspired by these authors to begin by asking, "What do our teachers, students, and communities need?" We direct interested readers to the authors' suggestions for improving the experience of teachers of color in TFA.

Our Vision for the Future

With this editorial we hope to outline the aims of the Journal as we move forward. Our vision for the future includes harnessing the power represented by our online format, in particular, the opportunity to represent more (and a more diverse set of) modalities. Our primary innovation for the Journal will be the introduction of a dialogic journal construct: one issue will always connect to the next. Each will feature a piece intended to inspire reactions, generate connections, and spur conversation within the next issue. We hope to consider, as a community, the question of how a journal submission—whatever its format—can invite and sustain interaction. How can we explore, interact, invite through the medium of an online journal? The Ravitch article on Practitioner Research is the inaugural dialogic response

piece. We encourage contributions that reflect upon, act upon, and even those that depart from the author's perspective (deadline March 15, 2014).

Upcoming Issues

Finally, we submit to you the list of planned issues and invite you to consider how your research and experience can contribute to our collective conversation.

Spring 2014: Multimodalities research; video, podcasts

Summer 2014: (Revisiting) the manufactured crisis in Philly schools

Fall 2014: The future of teacher education

Spring 2015: Neglected/marginalized spaces in urban education

~ Andy Danilchick and Cat McManus,
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