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Patching the Familial and the Scholarly

Can We Find Common Threads in Pursuing What Matters to All Teacher Educators?

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I am gratified and honored to join the editorial team for *i.e.: inquiry in education*, the National College of Education journal of the Center for Practitioner Research, at National Louis University (NLU). Reading the articles and book review for this issue transported me back to my first experiences with action research in my MEd program in interdisciplinary studies at NLU, which I thoroughly enjoyed. For a course assignment, I interviewed my mom about her experiences attending a one-room country schoolhouse for grades 1-8 near Champaign, Illinois during the Great Depression in the 1930s. Through this extended conversation with my mom, I gained many valuable insights about how educational issues and ideas change, but don't really change; rather, basic issues can reincarnate in successive generations, albeit with newer details and challenges. Mom reminisced about sitting in the first-grade row of school desks, and after finishing her schoolwork, eavesdropping on the children in the older grades giving their recitations and how much she learned from that—another variation on the “multiage classroom.”

Mom also related how every student attending her one-room country schoolhouse came from the rural farming community around the school. She knew that her family was struggling, but the Great Depression made times especially tough for families that were “worse off” than her family, like one girl in the first-grade row, Sally. Sally went to school wearing oversized, patched hand-me-down clothes; mom's clothes were patched, too, so that wasn't the crux of Sally's situation, according to my mom's first-grade mind. Sally arrived at first grade not knowing her letters or numbers, or how to read anything at all. Mom was already reading the basics by the time she started first grade. Through our interview, I learned about how mom saw both of her parents read and write “every day,” and many other details that illuminated the reasons behind three generations of our family being voracious readers—her parents, herself and our dad, and all of the six children they had. Literacy, I learned, was one of our family values.

This theme of literacy—in its various permutations—is one that runs throughout the pages of this issue of *i.e.: inquiry in education*, as in Lavalley's article describing her action research focused on eighth-grade students in Chile who are learning English as a second language. According to Lavalley, in 2003 the Chilean government instituted a national educational goal that Chilean students in grades 8-12 would learn English as a second language. As Lavalley explains, “In a contemporary and highly competitive society, countries around the world need to ensure that their citizens receive a quality education. Therefore, a national language policy is often

considered as fundamental to ensure that citizens of a given country have the necessary tools to become competent professionals” (p. 2). It would appear that literacy is a national “family value” for Chile. To assist her fledgling students’ English acquisition, Lavallo engaged in action research, wherein she asked duos of students to enact a scenario, supported with graphic prompts, in an effort to facilitate developing English vocabulary and conversational skills. The data she shares from the focus groups with her eighth-grade students suggests promising possibilities for supporting student engagement in the learning process, as well as student motivation to persist in acquiring a new language.

Boulden, Hurt, and Richardson present action research involving second-grade students in a Title 1 school immersed in many challenging school and community issues. In an effort to facilitate student learning about good essential questions, the authors investigate: “How can digital tools be leveraged to scaffold second graders’ recognition of productive versus nonproductive questions?” (p. 2). The authors give an excellent account of the action research process, challenges, and insights in a high-needs school, touching on a second theme for this issue: the pernicious effects of poverty on a child’s education.

In the third article, Lac describes her action research investigating emancipatory practices of critical race pedagogy with high school students enrolled in a Future Teachers Program (FTP) serving inner-city and historically marginalized populations. She provides a cogent look at “levers to promote racial consciousness,” as well as “how issues of race and class shape the opportunity gap in [her] school district” (p. 13-14).

The themes of race and class and the intersection with education are further evident in Mohan’s review of the book, *Taking Action with Teacher Research* (Myers & Rust, 2003), with six vignettes of teachers engaging in action research.

I hope you will enjoy reading this issue as much as I have. Returning to my opening reflections on my first experiences with action research: Toward the completion of my study and interviewing mom, I truly internalized that as the sixth child in the family, with a gap in age between myself and the next child in the birth order, I really was “an unplanned surprise.” My siblings had often teased me about that, but now as an adult woman, this has taken on completely new meaning, with new alarming implications. I asked mom what on Earth she thought when she learned at the age of 40 that she was pregnant with her sixth child, after getting the fifth child started in school and restarting her own career as a nurse. Mom said the first thought that entered her mind was, “Ooooh, nooooo! Not that *damned* first-grade reading book again!” Mom rarely swore, so I recognized this as an expression of genuine angst. She went on to discuss how learning to read is essential and foundational for a child to succeed at school, and to develop into a productive, successful, and happy adult, and therefore is imperative; however, the task is daunting and required time and patience that she was unsure she could muster one more time. I remember her teaching me to read as a young child, and I am grateful that she persevered. This issue of *i.e.: inquiry in education* examines many educational matters that seem to reappear with new twists, and educators who rise to the challenge; I hope you find the accounts of these educators as inspiring as I do.

References

Meyers, E., & Rust, F. (Eds). (2003). *Taking action with teacher research*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.