

1-19-2012

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Recommended Citation

. (2011). On Assessment and Reflection: Looking Back to Move Forward. *i.e.: inquiry in education: Vol. 2: Iss. 2, Article 1.*

Retrieved from: <http://digitalcommons.nl.edu/ie/vol2/iss2/1>

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i.e.: inquiry in education is published by the Center for Practitioner Research at the National College of Education, National-Louis University, Chicago, IL.

On Assessment and Reflection: Looking Back to Move Forward

As we publish the current issue of *i.e.: inquiry in education*, we come to the close of another calendar year. Many of us seem to spend a fair amount of time in December looking back over the other eleven months of the year. During this time of assessing our progress toward goals and aspirations, we often consider the value of our efforts throughout the year. This appraisal frequently leads to reassessing our goals and formulating new ones – sometimes referred to as our New Year’s resolutions.

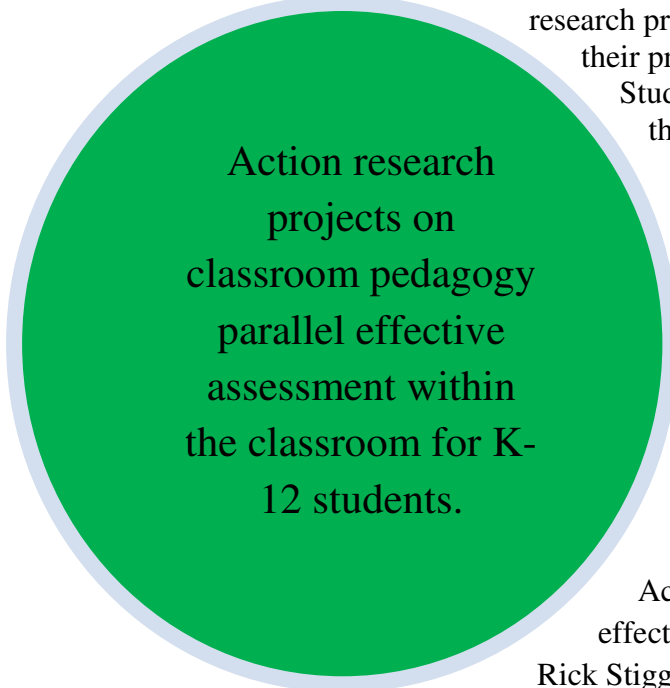
This process of personal assessment mirrors what Schon (1983) refers to when he defines a “reflective practitioner.” Schon challenged practitioners to continually ponder, question and study their own practice. Not for the mere research method, but to add the artistic element of perfecting one’s craft. He was undoubtedly influenced by his wife, Nancy, who was an accomplished sculptor. The art of reflection makes us better at what we do.

We encourage all of our teacher candidates to become reflective practitioners through various reflective strategies and through modeling appropriate methods, approaches and attitudes. Many of our students are current practicing teachers. We strive to inspire deeper reflection in these teachers and promote inquiry through action research projects within their classrooms. In this issue you can read about Luz Carime Bersch’s action research project, as a university professor, with three of her students. All of her students designed and implemented an effective action

research project within their own classrooms in Florida. Read about their projects in “Action Research for Improving At-Risk Students’ Literacy Skills: The professional development of three Florida teachers through their journeys integrating technology, poetry and multiculturalism for literacy intervention.”

Yet another literacy intervention project is manifest in Sheila Klich’s article, “A Secondary Intervention in Reading: Word Skills for Junior High.” Klich provides an in depth look at her action research project of the Response to Intervention (RTI) she delivered to students at a parochial school in Chicago as the Reading Specialist.

Action research projects on classroom pedagogy parallel effective assessment within the classroom for K-12 students. Rick Stiggins (2007) offers us a look “through the students’ eyes” in



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order to advocate for more meaningful assessment of our students. Stiggins promotes assessment *for* learning, rather than the assessment *of* what was learned. He tells us that “Assessment for learning turns day-to-day assessment into a teaching and learning process that enhances (instead of merely monitoring) student learning.” (Stiggins 2007 p 3). I’m reminded of the East Indian admonition that in order to see the elephant grow, you must continually feed it rather than repeatedly weigh it.

The cyclical process of formative assessment that Stiggins and others promote for enhanced learning in K-12 classrooms corresponds to the cyclical process of meaningful action research. Cecelia Travick-Jackson reminds us of this spiraling process in her article, “Empowerment Research or Equivalent Research: One University’s Journey into Action Research.” In addition to elucidating the experiences within her university as they expanded their repertoire in teaching research methods, Travick-Jackson articulately explains the nature of the action research paradigm.

Hermeneutics and phenomenology would have us explore the roots of a phenomenon in question. If we go to the root of the word *assess*, we find that it is derived from the Latin *assēssus*, which means “seated beside.” Stiggins (2007), Wormeli (2006) and others encourage us to observe or “sit beside” our students to properly assess them. Wormeli urges us to then *do something* with the new data obtained through this process. Such assessment is meant to improve teaching and learning.

The practitioner allows himself to experience surprise, puzzlement, or confusion in a situation which he finds uncertain or unique. He reflects on the phenomenon before him, and on the prior understandings which have been implicit in his behavior. He carries out an experiment which serves to generate both a new understanding of the phenomenon and a change in the situation. (Schon 1983, p 68)

In his article, “Recovering the Ontological Understanding of the Human Being as ‘Learner’: Exploring the Authentic Teacher-Pupil Relationship through a Phenomenological-Hermeneutic Approach,” James Magrini takes us on a phenomenological journey reflecting on “authentic educational practice.” His rich depiction of the curricular path traveled by student and teacher together is inspiring.

Finally, our book review by Heather Lattimer gives us a glimpse at the newly revised third edition of one of the most widely read authors in the field, Craig Mertler, by reviewing the new edition of his book -- *Action research: Improving schools and empowering educators*.

We hope the current issue of *i.e.: inquiry in education* provides you with reflective moments of your own as you ponder the array of ideas as they relate to your own practice. We invite you to submit your own action research for upcoming publication. Please note the special theme for the spring issue on the use of video in research. Let us hear from you!

Happy New Year!

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