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The Center for Practitioner Research (CFPR) at National Louis University

The Center for Practitioner Research (CFPR) at National Louis University (NLU) was established in 2008. The Center was an interdisciplinary effort of multiple departments within the National College of Education at NLU, and the leadership team drafted a mission statement, asserting the center's aims as follows:

1. To support, promote, nurture, and celebrate the use of practitioner research as a viable means for the enhancement of teaching and learning in schools and other educational organizations, and
2. To encourage collaborative scholarship of practitioners within and across educational institutions (CFPR, www.nl.edu/cfpr/about; n.d.)

The center was formed after seven years of the college hosting an increasingly successful, yearly practitioner research forum. The forum continues to be a major, annual event of the center. Though not a physical space, the center maintains a virtual space that seeks to connect practitioners across institutional boundaries.

Over the last four years, the two inaugural directors have sought to expand the presence and connections of the center through a variety of outlets. We instituted an annual colloquium, which was designed to be a professional development opportunity focused on some aspect of practitioner research. We started the journal *i.e.: inquiry in education* as a peer-reviewed, online/open-access journal dedicated to promoting and highlighting practitioner research (<http://digitalcommons.nl.edu/ie/>). We helped practitioners connect with scholars, realizing that both (academics and the practitioners in context) had much to learn from each other. We also continued the annual research forum, offering space for practitioners to share and create new collaborations with their peers in an informal, research conference-like setting. The following is a brief overview of our annual colloquium, peer-reviewed journal, webinars, balanced-sharing partnerships, and annual forum.

Annual colloquium. The annual colloquium, begun in January 2009, provides a professional development experience to practitioners and university faculty in the conceptualization, implementation, and use of practitioner research to improve practice. Our first colloquium featured Frances Rust (professor of early childhood at the Erickson Institute and author of many works devoted to practitioner research), who spoke about practitioner research in early childhood settings; Joe Senese, retired high school administrator, who spoke about a school-wide action research initiative; and two public school teachers, who discussed their own

action research projects. Subsequent colloquiums included practitioners “in the field” in order to provide an experience with which all audience members could relate. We held our first colloquium on campus, our second at Harold Washington College (one of the city colleges of Chicago), the third at District 73½ (a local school district with whom we have long partnered), and the fourth again on our campus.

Professional development webinars. In the third year of the center, our second director added a series of webinars to the professional development offerings. These webinars were recorded via Centra web conferencing, which allowed visitors to attend the conference live *virtually* or to access the conference via recording at any time after the original date.

Peer-reviewed journal. When we established the center in 2008, a primary goal was to launch a peer-reviewed journal. Throughout 2008 and 2009, we gathered together editorial board members, created a mission statement, aims and scope for the journal, and established a format that we thought would function well for both higher education professionals and practitioners in the field—that is, a peer-reviewed, open-access format. We wanted to provide space for higher education professionals who are familiar with publishing and need to publish for their professional scholarship. We also wanted to provide open access for all and a nurturing approach for novice authors, so that practitioners would also feel welcome to publish. Although we strive for high-quality articles in every issue, we are willing to work with authors to hone their writing skills and help them to express their thoughts clearly and concisely, removing jargon where possible. With this issue, we have our THIRD volume of *i.e.: inquiry in education*.

Balanced-sharing partnerships. The center also continues to work to connect with practitioners, using a balanced-sharing approach that recognizes that higher education professionals and practitioners each have something to teach the other. Through our website’s “contact us” feature, through word-of-mouth, and through existing partnership within the university, we continue to try to provide needed connections. For instance, a long-standing partner with NLU—Baker Demonstration School (a P–8 school devoted to progressive education)—sought the center’s assistance in carrying out a two-year initiative of school-wide practitioner research projects. The center provided an initial start-up workshop, monthly support at teacher work meetings to listen and engage in questioning with Baker faculty, and, finally, a connection to other NLU faculty who were interested in partnering to engage in “research about the research.” Together, Baker faculty and NLU faculty have presented talks about this project at several conferences nationwide.

Annual practitioner research forum. This year, we changed again—collaborating with the Civic Engagement Center at NLU to cosponsor our annual practitioner research forum. With a focus on “engaged research for constructive change,” our presenters and keynote speaker emphasized that substantive change

comes from within—from the people “on the ground.” Their presentations emphasized our belief that practitioner research—by practitioners to improve teaching, learning and practice in context—offers real hope for reform efforts, both within schools and within diverse community organizations.

Change that is conceived of, implemented, and carried out within context by the practitioners is the change that we believe is most sustainable.

Change that is conceived of, implemented, and carried out within context by the practitioners is the change that we believe is most sustainable. Our hope is to continue this work, but always be cognizant that we are serving the needs of practitioners. Although we lack a physical presence for the center, we have endeavored to create a virtual presence that allows us to tailor our offerings to the needs of our practitioner partners.