

Get Writing!

In 2011, I traveled to New Orleans to attend a meeting of the American Educational Research Association, a national research society, to participate in what felt like an underground movement. I was a teacher, at a meeting of educational researchers, and when I introduced myself in sessions, I was greeted with bemusement. It was difficult to find other teachers there, but we did, if only because **Jodie Galosy**, Lead Senior Research Associate for KSTF knew where to look! We attended a meeting of the Special Interest Group (SIG) Teacher as Researcher, the only SIG in the organization “whose core purpose is the articulation and representation of classroom teachers’ perspectives by the classroom teachers themselves” (“Teacher as researcher SIG 126,” 2016.).

This dissenting view—that teachers’ perspectives are crucial and worthy of inclusion in the discourse of education research—is one that is of the utmost importance. And it is a stance that is uncommon, to the point of being radical.

If we start with the premise that teachers are experts in teaching, it follows that they have specialized knowledge of curriculum, pedagogy and of their students which no one else has. However, we exist in a world where the stated goal of education researchers is to “**produce** and disseminate knowledge, refine methods and measures, and stimulate **translation** and **practical application** of research results” [emphasis added] (“Who We Are,” 2016). Just reading that sentence makes me irate.

We as teachers have been “trained” into a system which removes our agency as knowledge generators and experts in our craft. With researchers out there producing all the knowledge, and translating it for teachers so we may apply it in a practical fashion in our classrooms, there isn’t much room left for agency. I imagine we have all had experiences where professional development was delivered for us.

Sitting in the meeting of that SIG, you could feel the energy and tension in the room. Here were a group of K-12 teachers, dedicated to doing work that turns this paradigm on its head. These teachers employ strategies all along the spectrum of **action research** to **practitioner inquiry** in order to understand themselves, their teaching and their students better so that they may be better at their craft and better advocates for their students’ needs. And yet, the majority of

the presentations associated with this SIG are done by education researchers. I couldn't help but feel a little hopeless about teachers' opportunity to publicly share their research from their classrooms. Here was a national platform, seemingly dedicated to this cause, which was not delivering on its promise.

In taking an inquiry stance toward our teaching we generate a huge amount of deep local knowledge about our practice. But this knowledge truly has power when teachers share knowledge they have generated with a broader audience that includes other teachers. Teachers have knowledge that is unique and relevant to other teachers' classrooms. Who knows better than teachers what students need and how to design a classroom to meet those needs?

Yet, getting our voices out there continues to be a daunting task. In the last few years, I've taken a keen interest in how to encourage and support other teachers to get their voices out into a public forum. In my conversations with teachers, it is apparent that the structures of knowledge dissemination are a huge deterrent to sharing with a wide audience. We say things like: I don't think that what I have to say is significant; This is about my classroom, why would someone else find it useful?

Our knowledge is significant to others. To echo Diane Wood, Professor and Chair of the Department of Instructional Leadership and Professional Development at Towson University, and **Susan Lytle**, Professor Emerita of the Literacy, Culture and International Education Division of the University of Pennsylvania, with whom I have worked through KSTF's **Practitioner Inquiry for the Next Generation (PING)** initiative, our deep local knowledge is generalizable because it is evocative. It calls up in others a feeling of solidarity, of community when we see our own story in someone else's words. I am not arguing that there is no place for formal, academic study in education. Education research has an invaluable role to play in education. However, educational researchers are not the only stakeholders capable of, and responsible for, generating knowledge about teaching.

We as teachers need to shoulder our responsibility by writing about our experiences. When we write about our failures, our successes, our moments of consternation and triumph, our frustrations with a sometimes broken system and our creative and effective solutions, we not only learn more about ourselves and our work, but we add to the collective knowledge of our teacher community. As

we lift our own voices, we empower others to do the same. As we grapple publicly with the reality of teaching in our myriad contexts, we elevate our whole profession.

I'll just keep saying it: What you have to say is important. It is significant. If it is important to you and to your students, it will resonate with others. So get writing.

REFERENCES

"Teacher as researcher SIG 126." (2016). Retrieved from: <http://www.aera.net/SIG126/Teacher-as-Researcher-SIG-126>

"Who we are." (2016). Retrieved from: <http://www.aera.net/About-AERA/Who-We-Are>

*Each week, beginning on September 12, members of the KSTF community will be **writing about one of the characteristic actions of teachers acting as primary agents of educational improvement**. This week, we're writing about teachers acting as primary agents of educational improvement when they generate and share knowledge in ways that support educational improvement in classrooms, schools, districts and beyond. This blog post is the culminating post in our five-week series on the characteristic actions of teachers acting as primary agents of educational improvement.*