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Research practice partnership for schools and universities

Andrew J. PEREIRA and Yanping FANG

Abstract

This paper aims to review the research paradigms of action research, narrative inquiry, and teacher research, mainly through the writings of John Elliott; F. Michael Connelly and D. Jean Clandinin; and Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Susan Landy Lytle respectively, for conceptual possibilities for fruitful schoolteacher and university researcher partnerships. This study seeks to survey the focal points relevant for the concerns of practice, theory and partnership to give the reader an introduction with an intention to further develop these practitioner research with the possibility of encouraging more fruitful school and university partnerships. This is with a view that teachers need to engage in educational research and that researchers' perspectives can also contribute especially within partnerships. The literature review aims to survey the current stances of the research paradigms along with their features, research foci, methods, outcomes, and others. These are then conceptualised for possible research-practice partnerships (RPP) within educational research in terms of definitions, conceptualisations, organisations, practice, and enactment. The review also investigates possible partnership issues, problems, and tensions of the research paradigms to suggest resolutions, guiding questions, and recommendations for researchers and practitioners.

Keywords

Action research, narrative inquiry, teacher research, research-practice partnership, boundary crossing

Introduction

As articles of this special issue highlight the enabling role of university-school partnerships behind the global spread of lesson study, to better support understanding of this enabling role, a more coherent understanding of what it takes to foster such partnerships across teacher-directed practitioner research traditions is needed. In this review paper, we situate RPPs in the context of three traditional approaches to teacher research – action research, narrative inquiry, and teacher research. We examine how possible dynamics of synergistic partnerships contribute to teacher and researcher professionalism, that is, how they support the partners involved in gaining mastery and expertise of the teaching craft, as well as research excellence. The context of this review is aligned with teacher and researcher professionalism needed to navigate issues related to preparing students for the volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) future as well as its present manifestation in the Covid 19 pandemic. More specifically, we answer the questions regarding what it takes to enable successful partnerships, what are the political and power tensions involved, and what are the support mechanisms that are in place in resolving key issues in addition to identifying mutual benefits. By identifying the principles, trends, patterns, processes, and relationships within and across each of the three partnership approaches, the review aims to make recommendations for partnership conceptualization, organization, and enactment.

In terms of current and situated context of practice, the trend of practitioner research has been steadily growing for over 40 years (Suleiman et al., 2021) with development going beyond mere practice to interrogate practice itself (Vaughan, 2020), and for teacher professional development (Edwards, 2021). However, some headwinds are faced where schools increasingly face under managerial systems that prioritize measurable performance indicators while eroding

teacher professional autonomy (Lambirth et al., 2021). Such systems are argued to regard teachers as technicians to implement a certain syllabus, mostly for skills and job training that erode the democratic dimensions of being a teacher (Lambirth et al., 2021). These technocratic performance systems present a challenge to practitioner research as the measured teaching quality is ultimately a “distance-from-experience” which is opposed to the intangible “experience-near-understandings” obtained from practitioner research that becomes “practically embodied knowledge” that is both cognitive and emotional (Elliott, 2019, p. 11)

At first glance, these three approaches may seem similar. For instance, action research, as conceived by practitioners like John Elliott following Lawrence Stenhouse, draws its roots from psychological approaches. Narrative inquiry, as championed by F. Michael Connelly and D. Jean Clandinin, draws inspiration from Dewey’s principles of educative experience and the literary theories behind the power of personal stories. Also, teacher research represented by Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Susan Landy Lytle advocates social justice teacher research drawing inspiration from Deweyan notions of progressive and democratic education. It must be emphasized that this article does not intend to provide a synthesis review of these practitioner-oriented research approaches, of which there are already many in existence. Instead, it explores the under researched area of school and university partnerships for these practitioner-oriented research to identify possible areas for synergies and mutual enhancements. The inclusion criteria for this paper thus includes these practitioner-oriented research approaches that are amenable for partnership considerations and implications. Included in this special issue is another review study examining university-school RPPs in lesson study in Asia, therefore, in this review study, lesson study will not be included except when it is discussed in a few places in relation to action research.

This review is guided by the following questions: What does the literature suggest for the enactment of fruitful and synergistic school-university partnerships? What are the uses and significance of action research, teacher research, and narrative inquiry for RPP? And what is the (present and) future direction for such research practices and partnerships? This study focuses on the concerns of practice, theory, and partnership to give the reader an introduction to develop these practitioner research while encouraging more fruitful school and university partnerships. The review is on selective work of the three traditions and given our purpose to tease out the embedded RPP themes, we choose to focus on the classic work in the three research practitioner areas. This tradition focus may privilege more historical sources as these are the seminal voices. The focal points are selected based on relative commonality among the practitioner research types to allow for meaningful survey and comparison. They are also selected for practice, theory, and partnership relevancy. This article complements other studies in this SI indicating that historically, RPP practices have a long tradition in the East, such as Japan, especially in lesson study involving school-university partnerships. This article also dialogues and complements the four other articles in this SI that uses boundary work and crossings to examine lesson study partnerships such as the role of academics and curriculum specialists in enacting expansive learning through boundary crossings.

Methods

The review was carried out using the steps of: 1) defining the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 2) data collection, and 3) data analysis. The key word searches included terms like action research, teacher research, narrative inquiry, university-school collaboration, and research-practice partnership. This research employed cross referencing between searches derived on Google Scholar with the education databases of Science Direct, Taylor & Francis Online,

Springer Link, and Sage Journals. ProQuest, EBSCOhost, JSTOR, ERIC. Though always using advanced search in all databases, some keywords and search criteria could not be exactly the same, due to the need to adjust to the specificities and requirements of the Boolean operators within the search engines of each database.

With the topics of the research types and partnerships being very popular, it is expected that thousands of articles and books will be published each year. For manageability reasons, the search deliberately prioritized the seminal authors namely John Elliott; F. Michael Connelly and D. Jean Clandinin, and Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Susan Landy Lytle for the paradigms of action research, narrative inquiry, and teacher research respectively. Prioritizing the breadth of history to adequately cover notions of practitioner research, and to anchor the study temporally, a forty-year period stemming from the 1980s has been established to cover the works of Elliott, Cochran-Smith and Lytle, and Connelly and Clandinin. A twenty-year period till present has been established for research-practice partnership to prioritize conceptual currency. As this review privileges more historical sources for the tracing of origination, the coverage of the Anglo tradition is unavoidable as these are indeed the seminal voices of the tradition. Instead, the impetus for thinking richly with other regions is covered through the notions of cultivating hybrid practices and boundary crossings as covered extensively in this article. More importantly, cultural and ethnic sensitivities are emphasized especially through relationship building and communication choices in a partnership that is shared and not imposed in Tipa et al.'s (2009) research with the Māori community in terms of cultural rights and environmental customs.

This was to ensure representational theoretical accuracy from primary sources. This also provided a longitudinal consideration for the exploration of changes and evolution within each paradigm. The second prioritization included review articles on these specific paradigms, and

these were further prioritized through the prestige and rank of the journals according to the Scimago Institutions Rankings. The next level of articles and studies included those that had prominent focus on both the usage and theorization of the research types. Studies that merely deployed the research types while studying other phenomena were excluded. Also, the inclusion and exclusion criteria sought to restrict to works published in English. These also had to be relevant for the field of education. However, for the case of partnership, it was inevitable to refer to field of organizational and managerial studies. Still, these were reviewed for their relevancy for application within university and school partnerships.

Review of action research, narrative inquiry, and teacher research

Findings are presented for each of the three approaches – action research, narrative inquiry, and teacher research – under four dimensions: history and background, features, issues and tensions, and implications and examples for RPPs.

Action Research

Action research history and background

The origins of action research befit the many ancestors, many descendants' description. It is said to originate from psychologist Kurt Lewin's research process that involves "a spiral of steps, each of which is composed of planning, action and the evaluation of the result of action" (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1990, p.8). As social science research advocated to "understand and change certain social practices, social scientists have to include practitioners from the real social world in all phases of inquiry" (McKernan, 1991, p. 10). Now mostly applied in the educational field, action research also has its roots in the UK's curriculum innovation movement that sought to problematize traditional learning and encouraged students to search for meaning through the investigation of emergent issues (Stenhouse, 1971, 1975).

The various definitions of action research include: how it is a collective, collaborative, self-reflective, and critical systemic inquiry (McCutcheon & Jung 1990, p. 148) “undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, as well as their understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out” (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1990, p.5). Action research deals with an immediate problematic situation to contribute to practical concerns and social science by collaboration within a mutually acceptable ethical framework (Rapoport 1970 as cited in McKernan, 1991). Typically, action research consists of a spiral of steps like 1) identifying an area of focus; 2) developing an action plan; 3) collecting data; 4) analysing and interpreting data; and 5) reflecting” (Herr, Anderson, & Herr, 2005, p. 15). Notably for fruitful partnership which includes relationship building, multiple methods, flexibility, communication choices and wider support (Tipa et al., 2009), the cycle could also include the focus of 1) improvement; 2) cycle of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting; 3) group responsibility, 4) the widening of research participation; and 5) the maintaining collaborative control (Grundy & Kemmis, 1981). It is the cyclical improvement involving planning, acting, observing and reflecting shared by lesson study that Elliott (2012) calls lesson study as collaborative action research.

Reflecting its multifaceted nature, various types of action research have been identified. The first type reflects the *scientific-technical* view of problem-solving involving interventions based on pre-specified theoretical frameworks. The aim of such an approach is to accumulate predictive knowledge and validate and refine existing theories (Masters, 1995). The second consists of a *practical-deliberative* focus that seeks to improve practice through participants’ personal wisdom (Grundy, 1982, p. 357). This involves a mutual collaborative amongst practitioners to gain a new understanding of their practice and to implement changes for

improvement (Masters, 1995). The third consisting of a *critical-emancipatory* approach aims to gain better theoretical and practical understandings over the fundamental problems involved where the action orientated critique takes form with the phases of theory, enlightenment, and action (Grundy, 1982, p. 358 in Masters, 1995).

Action research features

Action research is both an art in inquiry and experimentation (Stenhouse, 1988). For Stenhouse, good teaching involves the construction of a view of the world as an expression of a view of knowledge or field of activity to give learners access to insight. Therefore, action research is “systematic inquiry made public” (Skilbeck, 1983. p.11) and this is where a naturalistic ethnographic methodology is employed where teachers work together with external partners to test the feasibility of curriculum proposals in practice and learn from the experience of inquiring through reflection while immersed in practical activities. Relevant for RPP, while good teachers must be autonomous in professional judgement and that good art is an inquiry and an experiment, the relevance of educationists outside of the classroom should serve teachers rather than to derive abstract educational precepts.

Partnership areas of focus can also find common ground between the shared areas of educational theory, practical philosophy, and action research. According to Elliott (1987), it is a matter and importance of moral practice expressed in the maxim of how best to realize “fundamental educational values in action” (p. 164) that allows for such shared areas to be realized within a context of collaboration between teachers and researchers in curriculum development. Elliott (1987) advocates such collaboration to focus on processes rather than specified outcomes as well as a movement from discipline-based considerations towards action research. Elliott (1987) further differentiates and specifies that a practitioner’s action research is

“aimed at generating and testing specific action strategies” (p. 165) while a specialist to develop ideas and constructs of the situation which can be reflectively appropriated in action-research.

Action research’s implication and impact on knowledge becomes that of knowledge generation, rather than knowledge application (Elliott, 1994). This stems from the rationale of involving teachers as researchers of their own practice that is connected to the aspiration of giving them control over what counts as knowledge about practice (Elliott, 1994). From the pedagogical aim of embodying an educational ideal, action research is then about changing practice to make it more consistent with the ideal pedagogical aim through the gathering of evidence about the extent to which the practice is consistent or inconsistent with the aim. It aims to identify inconsistencies between aspiration and practice while problematizing assumptions and beliefs. It is thus teacher reflexivity that generates and tests new action within reconstructions of practical pedagogical theories. However, the teacher should be seen as the ultimate arbiter over what is to count as useful knowledge and the extent to which theory misrepresents educational practice (Elliott, 1994).

Action research issues and tensions

This section reviews the tensions of instrumentalist performance appraisal rationality; outsider-insider issues; and the theory-practice mismatch as these issues have been highlighted by existing research and continue to be of perennial concern.

Where earlier definitions of action research include instrumentalist performative concerns, these can be at odds with practical and moral inquiry concerns (Elliott, 1989a). Under instrumental performance, the notion of “good teaching” is argued to consist of achieving pre-specified targets that are however, “ideological construction which serves the purpose of hierarchically controlling performance” (Elliott, 1989a, p. 19). This is problematic as

“objectivity”, “rationale”, and “honesty” performance indicators presuppose a value perspective expressed in judgements about qualitative aspects of performance which are not purely technical (Elliott, 1989a, p. 22). These foster mediocrity and stifles teaching excellence as indicators reinforce a dissociation of research from the practical problems and dilemmas (Elliott, 1989a). Based on the maximization of utility, instrumentalism leaves no space for the rational scrutiny of the appropriateness of these goals and values (Elliott, 2006). It also fails to afford proper care and respect for students as persons in terms of their potential as self-actualizing and self-determining beings (Elliott, 1989a). Elliott (2006) advocates having some instrumental and utilitarian goals but there should not be an undue focus on the science of measurement. Instead, research should refrain from shaping teachers’ judgments in compliance with preselected, context-independent axioms or canonical specifications of proper objectives and values (Elliott, 2006).

Another action research partnership issue revolves around the notion between the so-called insider versus outsider access to research insight. Indeed, perception gaps were observed such as teachers perceiving outsiders attempting to promote dependency by apparent superior knowledge, as well as insiders being judged by external criteria (Elliott, 1991). Other perception gaps include how university departments of education had failed to create and disseminate usable knowledge or to foster good practice (Baumfield & Butterworth, 2007), as well as perceptions of previous experiences of partnership resulting in members bringing with them pre-conceived ideas (Klar et al., 2018). Nevertheless, the literature is clear that both practitioners and researchers have the understanding that the closer integration of theory and practice can raise standards in teaching and learning, and that teachers value the access to research experience while having the opportunity to work with a university (Baumfield & Butterworth, 2007). Also,

this is a growing perception to establish robust school university partnerships to improve the quality of teacher education, and to promote learning outcomes for school students (Brady, 2002).

The oft-cited theory-practice mismatch stems from the view that theory remains separate and irrelevant for the particularity of practice. However, when viewed from a standpoint of reflective agency, the dichotomy becomes less stark (Elliott, 1989a; Elliott, 2004). Conceiving theory and action being inseparable, action research moves from a situation towards greater particularization in representing the possibility of action using self-reflectiveness to improve understanding while finding solutions (Elliott, 2004). The next section illustrates further these resolutions especially with implications and examples for partnership.

Actual research partnership implications and examples

The examples of practitioner research and partnerships also feature the concerns and problematic situations of instrumentalism, equity relations, theory-practice gaps, and others. The first example from Elliott (2007) demonstrates a large-scale partnership in the form of the Norwich Area Schools Consortium (NASC) that involved secondary school teachers, where teachers initially felt unease as they were not able to generate a tidy set of findings about how to deal with disaffected students. Yet, with reflection and questioning, teachers came to realize that assumptions of clarity from levels of indicators bore underpinnings of instrumentalist and objectivist rational thought that renders action research merely as a mode of technical reasoning. This renders action research as a matter of gathering evidence about the most effective means of bringing about some measurable improvements that can be pre-specified in advance of the research. Instead, teachers saw a greater use of value in action research in challenging existing conceptions of the problem wherever they prevail like the ability to challenge the blanket

description of disaffection, and to see the problem more of social skills and language learning engagement (Elliott, 2007).

Narrative inquiry

Narrative inquiry history and background

Narrative inquiry uses stories from research participants to understand social cultural phenomena in education. First used by Connelly and Clandinin (1990) as a methodology to study stories of teachers and their personal practical knowledge this approach was largely inspired by Dewey's ideas on the educative nature of lived experience. From the standpoint that personal interaction is crucial for investigating interactions with others, Clandinin and Connelly advanced Dewey's ideas in the areas of the personal and social viewing them as embodied in *interactional* terms; the past, present, future as *continuity*; and place, which corresponds to *situation*, context or setting (Wang & Geale, 2015). Narrative inquiry also draws from *literary criticism* (Mitchell, 1981) in focusing on the temporal thread arising from past towards possible future outcomes; *psychology* (Polkinghorne, 1988) in terms of narratives relevant for human science; *education* (Schon, 1983) featuring reflective practice and teacher voices (Bell, 2002); *human sciences* and the *humanities* (Bruner, 1986) where narrative is seen as a way of knowing in addition to traditional positivistic social science research based on paradigmatic knowing (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007).

Narrative inquiry features

Narrative inquiry investigates the dimensions of experience that include the personal-social which sees the temporal unfolding and the situated nature of place of the stories to live by such as school landscapes as places intimately textured with a multiplicity of life-story possibilities (Clandinin & Huber, 2002). Conceptualised as both phenomenon and method,

narrative inquiry is more than the retelling of stories where it focuses on teachers' own teaching practices within the interplay of temporality, sociality, and place. The design elements include, 1) the justification for the study; 2) the need to name the phenomenon, the "what" of inquiry; 3) methods; 4) analysis and interpretation processes; 5) the positioning of narratives in relation to other research even of different epistemological and ontological assumptions; 6) the uniqueness of study for illuminating present phenomenon, 7) the ethical considerations; and 8) the process of representation and the kinds of research text (Clandinin, Pushor & Orr, 2007). Narrative inquiry shares similarities with action research but is set apart by the focus on the narrative where the focus on living the storied life becomes a "portal through which a person enters the world" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 477).

Narrative inquiry's contribution to knowledge lies in gaining insight into teachers' personal practical knowledge (PPK) which consists of personal background and characteristics of the teacher and expressed by situations (Clandinin, 1985). It is revealed through interpretations of observed practices over time and is given biographical, personal meaning through reconstructions of the teacher's narratives of experience as found in practice. Relevant for theorists and practitioners are the imaginative processes by which meaningful and useful patterns are generated in practice as a guide to making sense of future situations. The study of PPK is deemed necessary as curriculum innovation is often not seen to produce intended changes as teachers are viewed as implementing somebody else's research or curriculum intention and therefore often lack ownership and agency instead of viewing the teachers as active holders and users of PPK (Clandinin, 1985). The recognition and conceptualization of teachers' PPK thus enhances their professional status by recognizing it as emotional and moral knowledge which can be used as a language and perspective *image* for viewing school practices (Clandinin, 1985).

The implication then for partnership is the need to build on PPK of teachers when working with them for school improvement.

Partnership can co-investigate within narrative inquiry as a way of knowing, Pinnegar and Davies (2007) suggest examining the relationship between the researcher and the researched as well as who the researcher is and what is being researched as emerging in the interaction. The co-investigation can problematize the assumption of objectivity from numerical measurement, as well as the assumption of what is being studied having properties separate from the researcher. The research can also shift from the general to the particular that rebalances the worth of the particular where personal stories can add to scholarly richness ignored by positivist inquiry. Rather than the supposed truth arising from an objective relationship based on measurement in controlled setting, partnership can be more concerned with the desire to understand rather than to control and predict the human world (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007).

Bell (2002) provides a useful summation of its advantages and limitations in research usage. Where most traditional research looks at outcomes and not experiences per se, an advantage of narrative inquiry is its focus into the impact of experience itself that allows for hidden assumptions to surface from what people do not consciously know of themselves. Not a naïve conceptualization of experience, narrative inquiry captures the temporal notion of experience and how it can shift. The affordance thus lies in capturing important intervening stages. Still, not all approaches are suitable for all kinds of inquiry. Chiefly is the issue of time commitment needed and the compounding difficulty in working with large numbers of partners and participants. The friendship based on the revealing of narrative may render the disengagement at the end of the project difficult. Also, where researchers take people's stories and place them into a larger narrative, there is some imposition on the participants' lived

experience given that participants are never free of the researchers' interpretation of their lives. Further, some stories are rather subjective due to multilayers and ambiguity.

Practitioners of narrative inquiry like Cheryl Craig and colleagues have broadened the inquiry into areas like embodied knowledge, rural teachers' emotions and identity, and online knowledge communities. From a novel cross-study analysis of funded projects on narrative inquiry, Craig et al.'s (2018) research found that embodied knowledge is more visible in small stories rather than policy narratives, and is evident in reflectively lived and told, as well as relived and retold stories. Embodied knowledge also sits at the heart of teaching and teacher education as it attends to cognitive knowing while attending to experiences, feelings, and interactions. In a narrative inquiry into a rural teacher's emotions and identities, Li & Craig (2019) contrasted the policy and macro view of teacher education and retention from a statistical lens whereas micro-stories yielded insights into rural impoverished contexts within a test-oriented and professionally challenging landscape. Zhong & Craig (2020) also advance the notions of the narrative-bridging time and space afforded by online teacher-knowledge communities in helping novice teachers cultivate and refine their selves and identities. Such narrative-bridging time and spaces allowed for safe reciprocation with mentors, self-reflection, and the refining of personal practical knowledge.

Narrative inquiry partnership implications and examples

Notwithstanding such limitations, a critical understanding of narrative inquiry's appropriate research usage goes a long way to ensure the countering of such limitations. The following are some suggestions for its fruitful usage. This includes school-based research where issues like practical inquiry, practitioner knowledge, insider-outsider research issues, enhanced professionalism, transformative pedagogy, practical inquiry, and others, serve as rich areas for

the experiential study of experience (Xu & Connelly, 2010). Significant for partnership, abstract boundaries can be done away where “[A] researcher’s task is how best to become part of the life space of those studied and how best to enter into their daily work” (Xu & Connelly, 2010, p. 351). Thus, when a story is taken as a starting point as a portal to experience that has web of historical meaning and significance, narrative inquiry is as much a way of thinking as a theory of the practical, a practice driven from theoretical idea of the practical, and a means to scrutinize phenomena (Xu & Connelly, 2010).

An example involving the study of practical school-based setting includes Xu & Connelly’s (2010) investigation in how a school principal who was interested in the prospects faced by immigrant Chinese education professionals. Illustrative of the issue of the theory-practice mismatch, the narrative inquirer, Mei Lian, who wanted to balance narrative inquiry with Frankfurt school philosophy, shifted to the practical in the sense of the situation confronted by immigrant teachers (Xu & Connelly, 2010). This was upon reflection how the researcher could become part of the life space of the studied. Mei Lian thus shifted to Confucian thought as the beginnings of a theoretical frame for inquiry given how its ethos had guided her life and thinking. The use of Frankfurt theory would have only been an interpretative frame used after-the-fact from what would have emerged but not within the experience itself (Xu & Connelly, 2010).

Similarly, Bell’s (2002) narrative inquiry to develop Chinese literacy using a narrative approach, highlighted the unexpected impact of the research experience itself which is often overlooked in research given the focus on outcomes. It was through narrative inquiry that allows for the access to information that people do not consciously know themselves that allowed the reflexive researcher to scrutinize notions of western literary for its assumptions about its goals,

purpose, and methods (Bell, 2002). It also allowed the researcher to gain first-hand insights into the difficulty in adult literacy learners over such western research claims and assumptions of the transfer of L1 literacy skills. Subsequently, this led to Bell's shifting of interpretation of teaching actions along with the changing of good teaching practice notions.

Teacher research

Teacher research history and background

Known by many names – teacher research, practitioner research, insider research – teacher research involves classroom teachers in a cycle of inquiry, reflection, and action. Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Susan L. Lytle (1993) are prominent proponents of teacher research. While they do not claim to be originators of the term and concept of teacher research, their writings have indeed given impetus to for teacher research to culminate in a movement. Their earliest writings on teacher research include clarifying the concept of teacher research (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1989) and detailing the divisive issues that scholarly opinion on teacher research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990) including issues mainly centring upon the improvement of curriculum and practice, and teachers' inquiries into reading, writing, and oral language in their own schools and classrooms. They share critical and democratic concerns focused on the activism involved in rejecting the exclusive authority of professional and university generated “scientific” research and knowledge based for teaching. They emphasis on an inquiry stance entails teacher research as a systematic and rigorous process designed to explore and extend teacher knowledge. Relevant for partnership, teacher research is also spurred on by commitments towards progressive education that unites school and university-based teachers and researchers (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999).

Within teacher research, classroom teachers play the role of knowledge generators defined as a systematic, intentional study of one's own professional practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). Teacher research draws from the Deweyan (1910) requiring suspension of judgement until inquiring on progressive problem solving for improving teaching practice over time. This also involves the questioning of one's practice as an integral part of teaching and teaching culture (Dana & Yendol-Hoppe, 2019) to take charge of one's learning to better understand, inform, shape, and reshape standard school practices (Cochran-Smith, 1991).

Teacher research features

A major teacher research concern is to rebalance or restore the voices of teachers to the knowledge base for teaching (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990). These include the difficulties that university researchers face in understanding teaching research as well as the lack of incentives, funding, and supporting networks. Teacher research also suffers from the biased perception that it lacks methodological rigor due to its purported lack of scientific methods and statistical testing. It is also said to lack generalizability in terms of individual teacher experiences, as well as how teachers' knowledge is seen as mere lore instead of theoretical frameworks. Yet, for methodological rigor, teachers' research questions may emerge from the discrepancies between what is intended and what actually occurs, and that positivistic paradigms may not be so useful for investigating educational phenomenon too. Providing useful recommendations and solutions, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1990) argue that teacher research needs to be valued for its role in theory generation, perception transformation, resource building, critical development, student collaboration, as well as for the academic community in terms of its rich data for theorization and the understanding of teacher seminal issues about learning and cultures of teaching.

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1990) argue that teacher research is an important way of knowing that contributes to knowledge. Here, teacher researchers draw on interpretive frameworks built from their own histories and intellectual interests uses one's own knowing to stand in a different relation to knowledge about teaching. This leads to the empowerment of adolescents to make choices; the derivation of a conceptual framework for students' and teachers' roles in constructing classroom knowledge; and the understanding of the inseparability of teaching and inquiry in the enactment of a critical pedagogy (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990). Relevant for partnership, teacher research should be seen as making important contributions to public knowledge. This entails work and knowledge dissemination requiring the network of practitioners and researchers reading and critiquing each other's work. Collaboratively and equitable use of teacher research as data may resolve ethical and epistemological concerns (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1992).

Another important feature of teacher research is the inquiry stance (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). This is where research is regarded as a worldview, a critical habit of mind, a dynamic and fluid way of knowing and being in the world of educational practice that carries across professional careers and educational settings arising from a constructionist framework (Darder, 2015). Rather than connoting a rigid, inflexible, position, the inquiry stance is a disposition that is active; meditative; focused on existence, being and reality; concerned with the theory of knowledge in terms of methods, validity, and scope, investigative of both micro and macro issues, as well as both the personal and political (Benade, 2015; Fitts Fulmer, 2012).

Teacher research partnership implications and examples

Under the teacher research paradigm, practice is seen as expanded and transformative with communities involved in democratic purposes and endeavours. Such partnerships constitute

the way forward as a challenge and a talk back to linear views of reform to advance greater engagement about education in a democratic society.

Although Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1990) conceive teacher research and the inquiry stance through the perspective of the teacher or teacher educator, school-university partnerships can still be conceived. Indeed, Cochran-Smith's (2012) notion of the research life largely involves the notion of collaboration and partnership. This involves locating and positioning oneself within conversations with others to nurture long-term partnerships by talking through ideas, jointly interpreting and critiquing the issues, as well as making new connections to new and different ideas. There is also a need to theorize an integrated perspective of practice and theory while challenging the idea that useful knowledge about teaching can only come from outside of schools. While working on what one believes and cares about, there is also a need to collaborate across multiple fields, methods, paradigms, and cultures.

An example of what a teacher research partnership could look like can be also extrapolated from Ermeling's (2013) case study of a collective teacher research. Over a 14-month period, a group of high school science teachers used collaborative teacher research with the aims of identifying important instructional problems, connecting theory to action, utilizing evidence to drive reflection, and working toward detectable improvements. Their work and experiences involved the challenge of fostering students' conceptual understanding of scientific phenomena by adopting an approach called the "struggle/scaffold" script and working through two iterations of collective planning, implementation and analysis to investigate the impact of this approach on student learning, focused on the documentation and analysis of the teachers' collective work and individual implementation efforts; and a search for evidence that participation had a specific effect on classroom practice. New understandings about instructional

choices include suspending verbal guidance, withholding reference materials, and providing small groups with different variations of the same experiment. These were found to influence students' opportunities to explore and understand scientific concepts (Ermeling, 2013). Rather distinctly, teacher research is focused on the democratic and emancipatory life and struggle imbued within a professional positioning that questions one's own practice (Cochran-Smith, 1991).

Implications for university-school partnership: Some recommendations

The value proposition of possible model and partnership principles that could improve practice is the overall notion of having the right structures in place for research and partnership to contribute to professional development through sharing, collaboration, reflection, and inquiry (Hairon, 2017). These principles include a shared and not imposed agenda (Tipa, et al., 2009), boundary practices and crossings, where all parties involved can become more fluent in each other's knowledge and practices (Barrett & Oborn, 2018), the creation of communities of value and support (Evans, et al., 2000), the integration of a partnership nucleus that retains each other's identity whilst having the fluidity and flexibility to respond to changes in the environment, as well as the ability to make better use of existing resources while adding value through bringing together complementary services (Baumfield & Butterworth, 2007), the hybridization of practices and knowledge (Hamza et al., 2018), the development of social capital amongst partnerships to bridge cultural boundaries (Klar et al., 2018), and others.

It is timely to suggest how university and school partnerships can be enacted through sound guiding philosophical, theoretical, and practice principles. Here we consider two major strategies, namely, boundary crossings and hybridization of practices; as well as the democratic ethos that enables dialogic, mutualistic, and collaborative partnerships. We start with a

definitional grounding for research practice partnership (RPP) by following Coburn et al., (2013) who regard RPPs as “long-term, mutualistic collaborations between practitioners and researchers that are intentionally organized to investigate problems of practice and solutions for improving district outcomes” (p. 2). It is not mere coincidence that the principles are inherent in the definition. Indeed, emphasis is given on partnership work that requires mutual engagement across multiple boundaries (Penuel et al., 2015), a long-term focus, and a vision that goes beyond just addressing gaps in existing theory or research, to that of focusing on the problems of practice that include key dilemmas and challenges that practitioners face (Coburn and Penuel, 2016). There needs to be strategies then to promote such partnerships that include carefully designed rules, roles, routines, and protocols that structure interaction that are jointly negotiated (Coburn and Penuel, 2016).

The notion of boundary crossing is important for partnership to bridge the gulf between school-based practitioners and university researchers. Boundary crossing refers to transition and interactions across different sites of practice (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011). For different participant researchers, it entails “encountering difference, entering onto territory in which we are unfamiliar and, to some significant extent therefore, unqualified” (Suchman, 1994, p. 25). Penuel, et al., (2015) provide the useful examples of two long-term partnerships in which district leaders, principals and instructional coaches came together to analyse, inform, and codesign strategies for the improvement of mathematics instruction. While boundary practices (that of stabilized routines that are established and sustained over time) were maintained between researchers and practices, crossings (the recognition and navigation of differences and new territories) to new routes occurred to reframe, align, and advance the work of the partnership. Other evidence of crossings included the yearly production of a theory-of-action report—a

hybrid report not usually done by researchers or practitioners. Consisting of visions and priorities for instructional improvement, this is hybrid or intersectional as it is unfamiliar to both researchers who usually publish for other researchers while district leaders are not used to having external representation from a research term of their theory of action (Penuel, et al., 2015).

Further boundary crossings can lead to the hybridization of practices that is not so much the emergence of new practices, but the increased appearance and deliberate use of elements from other domains of practices which could not have occurred easily without the encounter between the two (Hamza et al., 2018). This involves not the merging of the two practices, but the conscious and deliberate inclusion of various elements from one practice while continuing to work within the other. In a study involving research and middle-science teacher teams in Sweden investigating teacher professional growth in collaboration with researchers on research based didactic models and change processes, hybridity changes were recorded in the increased appearance and deliberate use of elements from one discourse within another (Hamza et al., 2018). Significantly, the researchers argue that hybridization could not have developed within either practice alone but depended on the encounter between the two.

Another important partnership factor is that of dialogism. Not simply talking or engagement in conversation, dialogism involves the reframing of roles to engage from positions of hybridity. An example, as argued by Freire (1970), involves the reframing of teacher and student relationships for a more democratic ethos where both student and teachers adopt or incorporate the role of the other for greater interdependence and engagement. With the aim of enhancing lives through education, and not about imposition, the hierarchical gap is reduced where authority becomes shared and reciprocal with respect confirming the collaboration (Evans, Lomax & Morgan, 2000). Bruce and Easley Jr (2000) specify a supportive dialogic framework

entitled Dialogues in Methods of Education (DIME) where partnership aims to improve teaching practices through research, the sharing of ideas and mutual support. Within the DIME process, participants exchange information and define the participation of the members through supportive dialogue. It consists of specific rules for interaction that include how everyone has something to contribute and that no standpoint is privileged. Also, no one can make a second point until the group has a chance to discuss the first point. With the belief that good learning activities can foster dialogue, teaching does not consist of imitation but helping the learner build a knowledge base whilst continuing to ask important education questions pertaining about the *what, when, where, why* and *how* of various phenomenon (Bruce & Easley Jr, 2000).

The ideas of boundary crossings, hybridization, and dialogism can be syncretized with the various philosophies of action, narrative, and teacher research. From Elliott's (1983) exhortation, the notion of praxis can guide both researchers and practitioners in realizing a way of life within research that actualizes ideals and values with appropriate research action. Bringing a praxiological theory of understanding of university and school partnerships, collaborative actions should be based on how information about human acts and situations could be made relevant to the responsible judgement for individuals. No doubt, such praxis could serve as a guide even during pandemic and uncertain times as educational worthwhile ideas are still adhered to that will also be supplemented by further practitioner research into such uncertainties and vulnerabilities. Through praxis, collaborative pragmatism and democratic rationality are harnessed to achieve the unity of theory and practice that arises in the context of practice where its warrant is determined in that very practice (Elliott, 2005). The collaboration is enacted where academic researchers, collaborate with educational practitioners to construct and test practical strategies with the intention of creating and maintaining the conditions for an autonomous self-

critical practical discourse (Elliott, 2005) while the enactment of democratic rationality ensures that research refrains from shaping teachers' judgments in compliance with preselected, context-independent axioms or canonical specifications of proper objectives and values, as well as to accommodate a diversity of reasons for valuing education (Elliott, 1983).

Indeed, there is a need for a balance of teacher agency and curriculum control, flexibility and the co-existence of structures, directions, and accountability. Teacher autonomy in these areas also go a long way to equip teachers and researchers with the wisdom of practice to respond ethically to uncertain and novel situations like the pandemic which made official performance teaching metrics irrelevant given the advent of remote teaching. Elliott (1990) reminds us that the issue is not with accountability itself but of bureaucratically expedient performance indicators which reinforce a dissociation of research from the practical problems and dilemmas. The issue then is that political systems do not constrain what teachers do because they are not the source of power over their activities but rather, power originates in the principles which underpin systems (Elliott, 1993b). Thus, a balanced accountability could give autonomy to teachers for a professionalism characterized by experiential learning that is studied from real practical situations which are problematic, complex, and open to interpretation; developed from reflective capacities; and where knowledge acquisition interacts with practical reflection (Elliott, 1991). The performative nature of schools today means that they are busy places where time has always been a constraint to teachers (Hairon, 2017). Bruce & Easley Jr. (2000) identify institutional constraints that often hamper collaboration needed for theory and practice improvement. These are on top of challenges including divergent priorities, schedules, and capacities, as well as hierarchies of knowledge (Fransman & Newman, 2019). Nevertheless, as practitioner research is an important aspect of professionalism, and as partnership can lead to

school and teaching improvements, this study makes the case for freeing up institutional constraints to allow for more research and collaboration.

Measures of success and evidence of professional growth may arise through the establishing of criteria to record the antecedents, processes, and outcomes of partnership and professional growth (Stokols et al., 2005). However, there is also the concern that such observable performance indicators may reflect more of performative and hierarchical work culture rather than autonomous professional learning (Hairon, 2017). Elliott (1990) goes so far as to argue that performance indicators foster mediocrity and stifles excellence and instead posits that educational research is not for propositional knowledge but of gaining professional practical wisdom. It may also be unavoidable to use performance indicators for accountability purposes, but researchers point of the need for self-growth for the important reasons of participating in the social world and not just to demonstrate a set of skills on a test (Bruce & Easley Jr., 2000). Bruce & Easley Jr (2000) argue there is no point at which one can say whether a method has been perfected and that instead, teachers and researchers should continually share their insights, questions and frustrations to help each other develop a richer and more fruitful understanding of teaching and learning. Specific to an evidence based-practice, researchers like Evans et al., (2000) make a case for teachers own practice to serve as evidence to inform policy that arise from personal testimony that ‘rings true.’ Such evidencing will also give more credence and conviction to practitioner decision making in an ever-uncertain world where it would not be feasible to wait for policy reaction and formulations which may take a long time. As in lesson and learning study, this is where teachers have the autonomy to be engaged in open access and self-identified professional development rather than to received training to resolve needs identified elsewhere.

The limitations of this article include lack of empirical evidence of the efficacy of such a proposed research practitioner partnership. However, this is understandably so for such empirical evidence is beyond the scope of this review article. Also, the focus on certain literature to build an understanding leading towards the RPP success is admittedly highly selective as we bias towards more historical forms of literature to generate a sound base of theoretical understanding from historical precedent. Nevertheless, the follow up research is logically that of enacting and trailing such a partnership. This present research contributes by its very hybrid theorization and review of hybrid practices itself which thus lays the ground for future researchers to derive new research products and outcomes (Stokols et al., 2005). By considering the three paradigms of action research, teacher research, and narrative inquiry, this research also contributes to building conceptual frameworks as well as to adding to the knowledge base (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1992). By drawing these paradigms together for possible partnership configurations, this research is also contributing to the widening of engagement (Barrett & Oborn, 2018), as well as the harnessing of collaborative expertise in making wider contributions that is part of the Research Impact and Contributions To Knowledge (RICK) framework encapsulated in the dimensions of critical distance, deeper engagement, prescience (anticipate future challenges) and achieve hybrid practices (Barrett & Oborn, 2018). Even then, it must avoid the pitfall of prescription but crucially, involve the democratic and dialogical engagement of potential partners in educational research.

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