

2016

## Book Review of "Practitioner Research in Early Childhood: International Issues and Perspectives"

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### Recommended Citation

Ward, Jennifer (2016) "Book Review of "Practitioner Research in Early Childhood: International Issues and Perspectives";" *Journal of Practitioner Research*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 1 , Article 4.

<https://www.doi.org/>

<http://doi.org/10.5038/2379-9951.1.1.1037>

Available at: <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/jpr/vol1/iss1/4>

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## Book Review

Newman, L., & Woodrow, C. (Eds.) (2015). *Practitioner research in early childhood: International issues and perspectives*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Reviewed by Jennifer Ward

There is a growing emphasis on promoting practitioner research as a mechanism for examining new issues and perspectives in the field of early childhood. This book “Practitioner Research in Early Childhood: International Issues and Perspectives” edited by Linda Newman and Christine Woodrow seeks to provide examples from different countries and contexts, in which academics and practitioners partnered to evoke change in practice and challenge a societal status quo.

The opening chapter of the book, *Recognising, Valuing and Celebrating Practitioner Research*, presents an overview of practitioner research presented by the editors. This chapter aims to build readers’ understanding of how practitioner research is being used within early childhood policy and research across international settings. From here, the editors identify distinct attributes of the methodology, including the creation of context specific knowledge, focus on the collaboration between researchers and practitioners, the simultaneous learning that occurs by participants, and nuances between variations of practitioner research. The following six chapters introduce powerful practitioner research conducted in different countries such as Chile, Sweden, and South Africa, as well as different contexts such as Muslim community, Aboriginal community within Australia.

In the second chapter, *Collaborative Capacity Building in Early Childhood Communities in Chile*, researchers from Australia and practitioners from Chile partnered together to explore a cross-national action research project. The four co-authors partnered together to chronicle the development of the project and how their learning changed as a sociocultural approach to early childhood education was integrated into the curriculum. University researchers reflected on the relationships built through the work and how this process led to opportunities for further collaboration. For the practitioners, the process allowed their work to be acknowledged and made visible to others within their own community.

Muslim practitioners working in an early childhood setting in Australia reported their research experience in *Insider Islamic Spaces of Inquiry: Muslim Educators Producing New Knowledge in Sydney, Australia*. The chapter focuses on authors’ inquiry related to teaching music in Islamic schools, the professional identities of educators within a Muslim setting, and the process of engaging in practitioner research. Through engagement in these inquiries simultaneously, the team developed a better understanding of the power behind a collaborative effort and appreciated a safe space in which they could share issues and concerns. Additionally, the importance of taking change slowly was highlighted as one of the biggest lessons learned by the authors.

Seeking to contribute to research on the play of Aboriginal children, the co-authors of *What Is Play For, In Your Culture? Investigating Remote Australian Aboriginal Perspectives*

*Through Participatory Practitioner Research* sought to reflect on the learning gained when they engaged in a participatory practitioner research project. Authors represented both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal groups looking to inform more culturally appropriate play resources for Aboriginal children. The co-authors implored children and families as participants, appreciating their own play experiences and capturing their unique perspectives on play. From this, the team noted their evolutions as both learners and researchers within the community and the necessity to exist as both during the project.

Working with a team of early childhood teacher in Sweden, a university researcher focused on how mind mapping was used to promote inquiry into educators' own practices in *Developing Collaboration Using Mind Maps*. Survey data found that teachers reflected on the collaboration and learning that resulted between the team of teachers and researchers. They also reported about the benefits and challenges of using the mind-mapping tool when reflecting on their own instructional practices and modifications.

Reflecting on a multi-phased action research project in South Africa, *Reconceptualising Services For Young Children Through Dialogue In A South African Village* features a conversation between the authors regarding their participation in an inquiry focusing on decision-making practices about early childhood education at the village level. Authors' reflections and findings are presented in a dialogue form, with emphasis on the fact that learning cannot always be easily measured, but rather it is evident when time is allowed for learning to unfold and small steps are taken. Furthermore, the authors highlighted the critical elements to their own reflections, including a mutual trust and relationship building, which is a theme emanating throughout the book.

*Sustaining Curriculum Renewal in Western Sydney: Three Participant Views* presents the stories of practitioner research team members' evolution to becoming academics. Through their participation in a group tasked with problematizing localized early childhood pedagogies and curriculum, the authors witnessed how a small inquiry can evolve into a larger scale, how practitioners can develop into researchers, as well as how academic personnel can view themselves as practitioner researchers.

The final chapter, *(In)Sights from 40 Years of Practitioner Action Research in Education: Perspectives from the US, UK and Australia*, presents learning gained from the use of this methodology within educational settings across multiple international contexts. The authors begin with brief historical summaries of practitioner action research from the US, UK and Australia. They noted a shift to research based practices and how such emphasis began to motivate researchers to engage in practitioner research to create this evidence base. From here, authors present a brief overview of their own engagement in practitioner action research.

As this book presents practitioner research that stems beyond classroom educators to their university partners as co-authors in the process, it highlights the potentiality of collaborative inquiries across school-university boundaries. In this way, practitioner research stands to move from a study which works to inform localized practice, to one which can begin to inform policy reform at multiple levels. Throughout the book, the themes emerging from several practitioner researchers were consistent: the need to take time and be patient for findings to become evident;

the power of collaboration between practitioner researchers engaged in similar work; the ripple effect of engagement in this process such that systematic change and learning can become apparent; and finally the simultaneous development of both practitioners and researchers as they investigate their wonderings.

The final chapter provided a coherent synopsis of practitioner research across settings, noting how this work is done in multiple countries as well as how educators' wonderings and problems of practice drive this work. The historical background of practitioner research across countries helps provide an understanding about how this form of research is framed in varying places.

While the book highlights practitioner research from various countries and contexts, each chapter's focus is a part of a larger study where the authors were studying their own practice while simultaneously studying something else. This made reading some of the chapters more difficult, as information presented related to a larger study was unfamiliar to readers, or in some cases lacking. Findings sometimes connected back to elements or events within the larger contexts that were not familiar to the readers, resulting in lingering questions about how these findings were informing the author's learning.

This book presents varying exemplars of practitioner research being conducted within international early childhood contexts. The varying backgrounds of authors, from university personnel to classroom educators, provide multiple insights into how one can engage in this work. University researchers who actively work with classroom teachers, early childhood practitioners, and those familiar with the methodology of practitioner researcher and its varying forms would greatly benefit from reading this book.

### **About the Book**

Title: Practitioner Research in Early Childhood: International Issues and Perspectives

Editors: Linda Newman & Christine Woodrow

Publisher: SAGE

ISBN: 9781446295342

Year: 2015

### **About the Author**

Jennifer Ward is currently a doctoral candidate at the University of South Florida. She has been engaged in conducting practitioner research as a course instructor and university supervisor, while at the same time supporting pre-service teachers to embrace inquiry as part of their teaching and learning process. Her areas of research interest include improving early childhood mathematics instruction through a social justice lens.