

‘I’ is for ‘Insider’: Practitioner Research in Schools

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In this paper we five teachers and teacher educators draw upon our personal classroom experiences in order to explore the definitions, descriptions, and nature of educational practitioner research, what we call teacher research. We highlight the tensions that can exist between and among teacher research, institutional needs and macro-policies, and argue that as both stance and method, teacher research can complement traditional, outsider-driven social science research. Further, practitioner research can check the errors and inequitable outcomes which may result from educational policies strictly reliant on the large-scale quantitative research designs currently dominant in the United States.

Key words: teacher research, educational action research, teacher inquiry, practitioner research in schools, insider research

These are tough times for educators in the United States. Politicians and pundits of various stripes seem to agree that schools are flailing and failing. And teachers? We are characterised as unwitting participants in the system, lazy, not so bright, unwilling to accept responsibility for our failures, or sometimes, in ways taken up by Hollywood screenwriters, isolated and heroic. The current and most frequently suggested fix is to use tests and standards to make practitioners more accountable and offer “research-based” guidance to those willing to improve.