

Enabling Professional Development via Tertiary Action Research Praxis

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Abstract: This integrative review argues that professional development is accomplished within action research with its stepwise acting, reflecting, and revision not unlike praxis. Praxis, or the application of theory while practicing requires committed pedagogical action. I ask: Can praxis and action research be managed within professional development? Secondly, is there enough support within the literature to prove the supposition that AR can be praxis and vice versa? Findings suggest that within tertiary education, many teachers act as researchers of self, and practice, as there is an on-going need for professional development.

Keywords: Action research, professional development, praxis

Facilitando desarrollo profesional mediante la investigación-acción en la educación superior

Resumen: Esta revisión integradora argumenta que el desarrollo profesional se logra dentro de la investigación-acción con su actuación, reflexión y revisión paso a paso no muy diferente de la praxis. La praxis, o la aplicación de la teoría durante la práctica, requiere una acción pedagógica comprometida. Pregunto: ¿Se puede gestionar la praxis y la investigación-acción dentro del desarrollo profesional? En segundo lugar, ¿hay suficiente apoyo dentro de la literatura para probar la suposición de que AR puede ser praxis y viceversa? Los hallazgos sugieren que dentro de la educación terciaria, muchos maestros actúan como investigadores de sí mismos y de la práctica, ya que existe una necesidad continua de desarrollo profesional.

Palabras clave: Investigación-acción, desarrollo profesional, praxis.

1.0 Introduction

At most tertiary educational institutions there is language within collective agreements and within various administrative tasks such as one's annual report that encourage and, in many cases, require that educators make efforts each year to professionally develop. I believe and have written about professional development (PD) as professional learning that results in alterations of teacher knowledge, practices and advances in student learning (Ryan, 2021b; Ryan, 2019). Professional learning and development can be a product of externally provided and job-embedded activities that increase teacher knowledge and can help improve teacher instructional practice in ways that support and enrich student learning. However, PD "enshrined in standards does not necessarily support and nurture praxis development for teachers and there is a real danger that it may even constrain praxis development by supporting and embedding a performance culture within education" (Francisco, et al., 2024, p.1). Addi-

tionally, “PD may not always be meaningful at the time it is experienced due to the change in the meaningfulness of the material. . .” (Ryan, 2019, p. 3). Therefore, I address reflexively professional development and my current position which has been shaped by my past and present experiential learning while teaching within the tertiary level.

As an instructor of research methods at the graduate level in education and Health and Physical Education at the undergraduate level I require students to investigate and study related literature, attend to theory that illustrates and demonstrates how to research, and apply new knowledge. Many of my students who are educators come to realize that most teachers want to investigate who they are and what they do daily to improve and develop personally and professionally. At the end of the research methods course many students who are teachers conclude that action research (AR) is a good method to investigate praxis while developing professionally. Praxis involves reflective action that can lead to change and transformation (Kemmis, 2011; 2012). Praxis involves experience and engagement with content that is transformational (Kemmis, 2012). Praxis within AR is necessary and creates a belief that AR is a complementary research mode because “action research combines a substantive act with a research procedure; it is action disciplined by inquiry, a personal attempt at understanding while engaged in a process of improvement and reform”(Hopkins, 1993, p. 44). Many of the educators interested in their role seek out a means to efficiently investigate their teaching while professionally evolving on the job to enhance their knowledge, praxis and identity (Ryan, 2021b; Vaughan, 2020).

Teacher knowledge is within oneself and only need be reflected upon, processed and documented to enable recursive revisitation and repositioning within the landscape of education. Being able to see oneself from any angle is a perspective and awareness that can overwhelm and obscure teacher identity. This is due to educators who consistently absorb and employ extant data to understand their role and themselves. Teachers work to realize curricular expectations and outcomes and often fall short as pedagogical outcomes may not meet personal expectations. It could be that there is too much data to process, comprehend and reflect upon while teaching. This is why PD is linked to praxis and curriculum; to help teachers manage. In one year, the PD target may be evaluation or mental health and in another it changes as societal pressures and educational trends emerge. I have learned via my experiences and listening to others that the PD approach utilized by institutional leadership is often just trendy, ill-timed and wanting.

To better understand our current position in tertiary education, it is necessary to investigate teacher training. I believe teacher education in Canada is somewhat standardized, yet no prescription exists instead teacher training programs present opportunities for Faculty to fill voids with personal theory and experience-based reflections (story). Pre-service teachers listen and learn about human communication which permeates pedagogical experiences (Murphy, 2008). “Pragmatists remind us that knowledge is an activity constructed within the context of our experience and therefore, knowledge cannot be predetermined or static; therefore, pedagogy cannot be predetermined or prescriptive” (Brown Varona, 2021, p.39). Student teachers investigate communication, experience pedagogy and work to document personal growth and change. These praxis-based actions illuminate personal beliefs and enhance perspectives (Fairclough, 2011) as practitioners and researchers. I have for some time now believed that these student teaching actions and experiences are impactful as teachers learn with their students and craft their practice (Ryan, 2021b). Many experienced teachers