Practitioner Research in Education: Beyond Celebration

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ABSTRACT
This paper will examine the burgeoning of practitioner inquiry in
Australia against the background of the notion of action research
as an emancipatory project. This requires that the work move
beyond a utilitarian function, important is that may be in terms
of enhancing practice, and develops a greater capacity to critique
underlying policies. It will argue that if those engaged in
practitioner inquiry, and those who support and sponsor them, are
to move beyond a celebratory mode then it is critical that a set
of criteria are developed that may be used to govern quality; both
the quality of the research and the quality of the policies at the
local and state levels. The case will be made for developing such
a platform founded upon principles of ethicality in the interests
of all stakeholders and will clearly have implications for policy
and practice.

Practitioner Research as an Emancipatory Project
Thirty years ago Lawrence Stenhouse advocated teacher professional
autonomy and suggested it could be achieved by:

> autonomous professional development through systematic self
> study, … and through questioning and testing of ideas by
> classroom research procedures (Stenhouse, 1975, p.144)

Autonomy should not be taken to mean teachers exercising professional
judgement in isolation from their peers, but rather that they develop
their professional learning through systematic investigation rather
than by fiat. While the term 'community of practice' had not been
coined at the time of his writing Stenhouse strongly subscribed to the
notion of 'self-study', or what we shall refer to as 'practitioner
research', as being conducted in the company of others.

Practitioner research, in one form or another has been with us for
around a half a century following the initial influence of Lewin
(1947)[1]. The process has been seen to serve a variety of knowledge
interests (Habermas 1972) ranging from the technical rational interest
-how do we solve this problem? through the interpretive/hermeneutic
interest - how do we understand this practical problem? to the rarer
emancipatory interest – how can we locate this problem in a wider
social discourse and address it such that we enhance the opportunity
for participative democratic engagement with it?

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[1] For a helpful series of essays on action research or practitioner research, both phrases
being used interchangeably see Hollingworth, 1997).

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Some decade on from Stenhouse's work in the Humanities Curriculum Project and Elliott's in the Ford Teaching Project (Elliott, 1991) Carr & Kemmis' publication of Becoming Critical (Carr & Kemmis, 1986) developed the notion of practitioner research as an emancipatory project or what they called 'a critical social science'. Even so, today, there continues, at the beginning of a new millennium, to be a dominance of treating educational problems as technical, and thus able to be resolved objectively through a rational assessment of evidence gathered within a positivist research paradigm. The effort of the research is to identify how and what ends can be achieved rather than investigate, in any way, what those ends ought to be. This is well recognised by Kemmis (2004) who has indicated:

> The truth is that most of the people it (Becoming Critical) aimed to challenge and persuade simply continued to do the kinds of positivistic and interpretive social and educational science that they had always done. And they still do. (p.2)

In their seminal text Carr and Kemmis point out that the absence of debate regarding values and means leads to positivist social science "making a shibboleth of 'truth' – as if it stood above social life, could be objectively ascertained and could prescribe wise practice without understanding the human, social, economic, political, historical and practical constraints within which real practice occurs" (Carr & Kemmis, 1986 p. 145). We argue that practitioner research, with its focus upon local inquiries designed to address and ameliorate local problems, necessarily should be concerned not only with solutions, but with the conditions that produced the problems in the first place.

Questions about values raise issues about virtues and are inescapable. Pring (2004) makes a distinction between moral virtues such as courage, kindness, generosity of spirit, honesty and a concern for justice and intellectual virtues comprised of a concern to seek out the truth (as it is understood), openness to criticism, and an interest in clear communication based upon evidence (p. 145). In developing emancipatory conditions for practitioner research we would assert that both moral and intellectual virtues and the values with which they are infused must become part of the discourse of practice.

Today we are faced, once again, with a regressive stance on what kinds of research should inform educational practice. We need only to look at the Bush policy in the United States of America, articulated through the Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002 (http://www.ed.gov/offices/IES) - a policy that is having ramifications across the English Speaking World including Australia. The view of science written into law by the Bush administration is clearly a positivist one with its exclusive emphasis upon the employment of randomised controlled clinical trials precisely designed to solve those 'technical problems' to which Carr and Kemmis referred. Slavin (2002) in his support of the policy argued:

> The experiment is the design of choice for studies that seek to make causal conclusions and particularly for evaluations of educational innovations. Educators and policy makers legitimately ask, 'If we implement Program X instead of Program Y, or instead of our current program, what will be

the likely outcomes for children?' For questions posed in this way, there are few alternatives to well-designed experiments. (p.18)

It is clear that Slavin has utmost faith in one particular form of scientifically based research. Although US scientists themselves have a far more catholic view of how systematic inquiry can take place. As Yates (2004) in her powerful account of these and similar developments indicated, a report by scientific experts from the National Academies in the United States were less wedded to one particular form of investigation, setting out instead the following principles that all science should follow and which can be applied across the range of social services, not only education:

- Pose significant questions that can be investigated empirically,
- Link research to relevant theory,
- Use methods that permit direct investigations of the questions,
- Provide a coherent and explicit chain of reasoning,
- Yield findings that replicate and generalize across studies,
- Disclose research data and methods to enable and encourage professional scrutiny and critique. (Feuer, Towne & Davidson, 2002, quoted in Yates, 2004 p. 25)

Slavin's position has not gone unremarked. As Berliner in his rejoinder noted:

Doing science and implementing scientific findings are so difficult in education because humans in schools are embedded in complex changing networks of social interaction…Compared to designing bridges and circuits, or splitting atoms or genes, the science to help change schools and classrooms is harder to do because context cannot be controlled. (2002:19)

It is unfortunate that practitioner research, has barely moved beyond satisfying those technical knowledge interests that we outlined earlier in this paper. It has been popularized, domesticated and appropriated as an implementation tool instead of as a liberatory social change method with far reaching implications. As Pring (2004) indicates:

There is a danger that such research (action research, or as we name it practitioner research) might be supported and funded with a view to knowing the most effective ways of attaining particular goals – goals or targets set by government or others external to the transaction which takes place between the teacher and learner. The teacher researches the most efficient means of reaching a particular educational objective… (p.134)

In Australia this is most recently evident in relation to the Quality Teaching Program (http://www.qualityteaching.dest.gov.au) a National Government Program that aims to extend teacher professional learning in the key areas of literacy, numeracy, mathematics, science, information technology and vocational education and training. Mediated through state-based agencies, in both the government and non-government sectors, the conditions for grantees are highly specific with little room to vary from what is required. Thus the iterative cycle of problem identification, reflection, action, problem reconceptualisation is effectively denied as there is no provision for a critique of any

features of the policy itself. The problem is the government's problem, not that of the practitioner. As Carr and Kemmis put it, action research, within their conceptualization of a critical social science:

> … not only attempts to identify contradictions between educational and institutional practices, it actually creates a sense of these contradictions for the self-critical community of action researchers. It does so by asserting an alternative set of values to the bureaucratic values of institutions" (1986 p. 197)

So are we to be tramelled with the idea that emancipatory practitioner research is an impossible goal. What is it about the communicative environment that makes it so difficult? To discuss this difficulty we turn to a Habermasian construct - the Ideal Speech Situation (Habermas, 1979). The concept of the ideal speech situation (ISS) revolves around a notion that ideally all participants must have an equal opportunity to participate; they must have right to assert, defend or raise questions regarding factual or normative claims that are made; the communication should not be constrained by status differences; and, the motivation should be to reach a consensus about the truth of the statements and the validity of the norms. The ISS is just that – an ideal. It is a powerful tool with which we can think about how distorted communication is, whether it is taking place in a school, a policy environment or the public sphere itself (Wyatt, Katz & Kim, 2000).

The ISS has not gone unchallenged, initially by Gadamer (1976) and then by various subscribers to poststructuralism. Gadamer's attack on Habermas's position lies in the effects and influences of culture and tradition that themselves act to distort individual understanding. It is not our intention to more fully discuss this complex and dense debate in the context of this paper. However, we do assert that it is as important today as when Becoming Critical was first written that we continue to subscribe to a knowledge interest that is emancipatory, difficult as it may be to obtain. Teachers can and should be able to hear each other out; bureaucrats can and should be able to engage with the profession in more liberatory ways; governments can and should seek more consensual routes. It is not that the very idea of an emancipatory knowledge interest may be a misconceived one, but that we are not yet ready to reach for the radical resocialisation that would be required to realize that ideal goal. The crux of our argument will rest on a belief that the first steps forward, whereby we can transcend the technical/rational and interpretive interests must first come through a more insightful and careful analysis of ethical practice, a discussion of which follows.

Practitioner Inquiry and Ethics
Elsewhere we have written of ethics as one of the "three basic tests" of quality for any practitioner research project (Groundwater-Smith and Mockler, 2002). While there has been a significant spotlight shone on the connection between (and indeed, interweaving of) ethics and quality in qualitative research generally over the past ten years (for example, Lincoln 1995, Olesen 2003), particularly with regard to feminist and participatory research paradigms, relatively little has been produced relating specifically to the issue of ethics in practitioner research.

In their introduction to practitioner research methods, Altrichter, Posch and Somekh (1993) establish four criteria for evaluating the quality of action research. They are:

1. Considering alternative perspectives: *Have the understandings gained from research been cross-checked against the perspectives of those concerned and/or other researchers?*
2. Testing through practical action: *Have the understandings gained from research been tested through practical action?*
3. Ethical justification: *Are the research methods compatible with both educational aims and democratic human values?*
4. Practicality: *Are the research design and data collection methods compatible with the demands of teaching? (pp. 74-81)*

While we agree that their criteria is both sensible and effective, we wish to argue here for the intrinsic and fundamental relationship between ethics and quality within practitioner research aiming towards an emancipatory goal. Indeed we suggest a hierarchical relationship where ethical issues form the primary criteria for quality in practitioner research, and the establishment of a number of 'implications for quality' which naturally flow from a framework of ethics. Clearly ethics are informed by values which assemble into a values system. On the one hand, in our view, values are those constructs held by individuals, they may differ from person to person, move towards stability and indeed become habitual; they are personal and influenced by social context. On the other hand, ethics are part of a broader social discourse governing the rightness or wrongness of action, and as such belong in the realm of the collective and the public. We should not confuse ethics with efficiency. In the end, ethics is associated with morality, which again is informed by values.

Anderson & Herr (1999) have suggested that we consider five validity criteria, which resonate to the criteria of Altrichter et. al. above: Outcome validity; process validity; democratic validity; catalytic validity and dialogic validity. Outcome validity refers to the impact that the inquiry has on practice – has it led to a resolution or re-framing of the problem? Process validity points to the appropriateness of the methods that have been adopted to the question being investigated. Democratic validity, as the name suggests, refers to the extent that all stakeholders are consulted and engaged in the inquiry. Catalytic validity points to the transformative potential of the research, while dialogic validity refers to the kind of intersubjectivity upon which Stenhouse insisted. It is in relation to the last of these that Mishler (1990) develops his considerable and powerful arguments in that he forcefully puts the case that "trustworthiness" must be a central tenet of research, in his case in medical and mental health studies, and that such trustworthiness is best tested through ongoing discourse among those who participate in it.

In her work on 'the ethical teacher', Elizabeth Campbell (2003) makes a case for the use of ethics as a primary framework for thinking about teachers and teachers' work, (although her argument can be readily applied to any occupation or profession). Such a framework, she posits, has the potential to provide a renewed sense of professionalism (through providing a focal point for the rethinking of the profession in ethical terms), a basis for renewed school cultures (through using the moral basis of teachers' work as a 'touchstone' for school reform,

and a catalyst for renewed teacher education and professional learning. For Campbell, the project of developing ethical teacher professionalism relates closely to the greater project of working towards civil society, through the harnessing of the 'moral purpose' (Fullan, 1993) implicit in the teaching enterprise. In this, she echoes Sachs' (2000, 2003) conceptualisation of an 'activist teaching profession', where the aim is to "improve all aspects of the education enterprise at the macro level and student learning outcomes and teachers' status in the eyes of the community at the micro level" (Sachs 2000:77).

Campbell draws on literature relating to ethical professionalism within occupations and professions other than teaching in her discussion of the development of the ethical teacher. Larry Colero, for example, of the Centre for Applied Ethics at the University of British Columbia, offers a framework for thinking about professional ethics which sees principles of personal, professional and global ethics as overlapping but discrete elements of ethical thinking for individuals (Undated). Such a framework holds interesting potential for the discussion of the ethics of practitioner research, as does Mark Somerville's warning about taking an 'ethical approach':

> "Many people believe that the beginning and end of doing ethics is to act in good personal conscience. They are right that this is the beginning, but wrong that it is the end. We all need to do ethics and, therefore, to learn how to do it. But doing ethics is not always a simple task: It is a process, not an event, and in many ways, a lifelong-learning experience." (2000: 284)

The notion of ethical teacher professionalism, then, holds a number of important implications for practitioner research. In the first place, it sits well with Lewin's assertion that the defining characteristic of Action Research should be that it is "research leading to social action" (Lewin 1946: 203), and subsequent conceptualisations of the emancipatory nature of practitioner research such as those discussed at length above. Indeed, the enterprise of practitioner research has a reflexive relationship with the ethical or activist professional in that it both provides a tool for engaging with the larger goal of such professionalism and "can contribute to the larger political project of creating an activist [and ethical] teaching profession" (Sachs 2003:92).

While only one of Altrichter, Posch and Somekh's criteria relates explicitly to ethics, it could in fact be argued that all four emanate from a framework of ethics. The first through its call to transparency and triangulation, in our opinion a key facet of ethical operation within practitioner research, the second through the call for 'action' emanating from practitioner research, which is highly congruent with Campbell's notion of the ethical professional, and the fourth through an implicit highlighting of the importance of teacher agency within the framework of practitioner research. Similarly, Anderson and Herr's validity criteria embrace ethical principles at their core.

We wish to pose here a series of broad, over-riding 'ethical' guidelines for practitioner research, some of which are linked to a traditional conceptualisation of research ethics, while others flow from the discourse of the 'ethical professional':

- *That it should observe ethical protocols and processes*: Practitioner research is subject to the same ethical protocols as other social research. Informed consent should be sought from participants, whether students, teachers, parents or others, and an earnest attempt should be made to 'do no harm'.

- *That it should be transparent in its processes*: One of the broader aims of practitioner research lies in the building of community and the sharing of knowledge and ideas. To this end, practitioner research should be 'transparent' in its enactment, and practitioner researchers accountable to their community for the processes and products of their research. Publication, whether to the 'village' or to the 'world' (Stenhouse, 1981:17) is part of this transparency.

- *That it should be collaborative in its nature*: Practitioner research should aim to provide opportunities for colleagues to share, discuss and debate aspects of their practice in the name of improvement and development. The responsible 'making sense' of data collected from within the field of one's own practice (through triangulation of evidence and other means) relies heavily on these opportunities.

- *That it should be transformative in its intent and action*: Practitioner researchers engage in an enterprise which is, in essence, about contributing to both transformation of practice and transformation of society. As Marion Dadds (1998) writes:
    "At the heart of every practitioner research project there is a significant job of work to be done that will make a small contribution to the improvement of the human condition in that context. Good practitioner research, I believe, helps to develop life for others in caring, equitable, humanising ways."
  Responsible and ethical practitioner research operates in such a way as to create actionable, actioned outcomes.

While we have to this point made observations relating to practitioner research generally, we now turn to a number of 'Implications for Quality' in educational action research.

Implications for Quality

Quality should not be taken to be an all-embracing term. It requires close interrogation in relation to matters of evidence, concerns regarding purpose and the nature of the outcomes that are produced. If indeed we are concerned with "quality assurance" with respect to practitioner research, we must attend to all three.

Quality of Evidence

'Evidence' is not an innocent construct. It may be: "ground for belief which tends to prove or disprove any conclusion"; "information given to establish a fact or point in question"; that which is "admissible as testimony in a court of law"; something which presents as conspicuous"; (all in the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary) or, "the available facts, circumstances, etc. supporting or otherwise a belief, proposition etc. or indicating whether or not a thing is true or valid" (The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary).

Struggling with the term is not a new occupation.   James Bradley Thayer, considering the mass of confusion created by laws of evidence in the nineteenth century and cited in Cowan & Carter (1956, p. 267) wrote:

> I found I was in a position of a person, who never having seen a cat is instructed about them in this fashion, 'Lions are not cats in one sense of the word, nor are tigers, nor leopards, though you may be inclined to think they were'. Show me a cat to begin with and I at once understand what is meant by saying the lion is not a cat, but why it is (still) possible to call him one. Tell me what evidence is and I shall be able to understand why you say this or that class of facts are not evidence. The question of what is evidence therefore gradually discloses the ambiguity of the word.

Laws of evidence, in practice, are rules about kinds of discourse; what discourse is to count as potent and effective and in what form and, alternatively, what is disqualified. The quality of the evidence lies both in its substance and in its argument. We have only to reflect on the 'history wars' in Australia (MacIntyre & Clark, 2003) or the case made for the invasion of Iraq on the grounds of the existence of weapons of mass destruction to see how problematic the issue of evidence is.

To further complicate the matter there is the issue of testimony, whose account counts? Laub (1992) in her searing discussion of it with respect to the holocaust indicated that there are three distinct and separate levels of witnessing:

> the level of being witness to oneself within the experience;
> the level of being the witness to the testimonies of others;
> and the level of being witness to the process of witnessing itself (p. 75).

It is also the case that new evidence is emerging all of the time. Beliefs about how the body operates, for example, are constantly being challenged by new evidence arising from research, and not necessarily randomized control trials at that. Returning for a moment to the matter of history research, Davis (2001) applied contemporary knowledge regarding climate to examine nineteenth century colonial policies. He developed an argument that policies with respect to famines in the Indian subcontinent, Africa and China, were based upon precepts that argued that the indigenous people were indolent and unsatisfactory land managers and did not deserve support because they brought about the famines themselves. By re-examining the data on climate through an understanding of El Nino he has argued that the policies were morally unsustainable.

Clearly, then, in launching into a discussion regarding the quality of evidence in the context of transformative practice we need first and foremost to be cautious about the term itself. What may at first glance appear transparent, following close and careful analysis may prove to be opaque. Certainly, we believe that the concept "evidence based practice" is a powerful and useful one; however, we also believe that we need to make some important distinctions both in terms of the context in which the phrase might apply, and in terms of the purposes to which it is to be put. As it has been argued elsewhere (Groundwater-

Smith & Dadds, 2004) we can characterize evidence as being used for adversarial purposes, in an attempt to "prove" the viability of a particular social practice; or we can conceive of it being of a forensic kind where the purpose is to understand a particular phenomenon with an intention to "improve" the practice.

Our argument in this paper is to focus on the quality of evidence that is required to transform practice rather than to inform large systems based policies, after all as Ball (1997) put it:

> Policies do not normally tell you what to do; they create circumstances in which the range of options available in deciding what to do is narrowed or changed or particular outcomes are set. A response must still be put together, constructed in context, offset and balanced against other expectations. (p. 257).

In the end, the quality of evidence, for us, will rest upon the ways in which it has been collected and the purposes to which it will be put – in effect, as we argued above, that it first and foremost meets the ethical tests that we have set out.

Thus, evidence collected under duress, evidence collected covertly, evidence that is not validated by triangulation and evidence that has not been debated, in our view is evidence that is invalid.

Quality of Purpose
The issue of purpose is significant within any discussion of quality guidelines for practitioner inquiry, predominantly because of the potential for the 'research agenda' to impact in considerable ways upon the collection, analysis and reporting of data and the outcomes and 'action' of the research itself. In terms of quality of purpose, we see three key tensions at play within the arena of practitioner inquiry, namely:
- The autonomy and freedom of internally-fuelled projects vs the 'lure' of external funding
- Teacher research as a catalyst for improved classroom practice vs whole-school inquiry as a catalyst for school improvement
- Practitioner inquiry for professional transformation vs 'action research' as a vehicle for compliance.

While we wish not to present these tensions as bi-polar dichotomies, we offer them as a useful heuristic and 'way in' to this discussion of the agenda and purpose of teacher inquiry.

Sachs (2003) has written at length of the question of 'whose questions get asked?' in the context of school-based practitioner research:

> "A central but unacknowledged dimension of school-based research, whether conducted by teachers and academics collaboratively or individually, is the issue of whose questions get put on the research agenda? This issue stands at the core of many successful or failed research attempts. If the research questions are posed by outsiders, in many cases academic researchers, then the research outcomes often have little effect on the classroom practices of teachers and the learning outcomes of students in schools. Alternatively, research that is undertaken on an equal basis

between teachers and academics, where the research questions
are posed collaboratively, can have a significant impact on
classroom practice." (pp.83-84)

While her examples are limited to those where an academic-driven agenda
has the potential to hijack the practitioner research enterprise, Sachs
draws an excellent depiction of the problems inherent in research
responding to questions imposed by an outside agenda. Indeed, it is in
the realm of this issue that the three key tensions outlined above
exist.

The external funding for practitioner research projects represented
(for example) in the NSW New HSC Program of 2000-2001 and the
Australian Government Quality Teacher Program of subsequent years can
provide opportunities for in-school professional development which
would not otherwise exist. There is, however 'no such thing as a free
lunch', and teacher researchers can sometimes find themselves caught up
in an externally imposed implementation agenda rather than an agenda of
personal and community transformation which might otherwise drive the
project. The key to navigating this tension, we suspect, is to draw
the impetus for the project from the local needs and requirements of
the school and teachers while at the same time meeting the requirements
of the funding. Such an approach, however, relies on a commitment on
the part of the school executive as well as the practitioner
researchers to such transformation.

Finally, practitioner research fails the 'quality of purpose' test when
it is implemented in a 'top down' way which denies teacher agency and
is aimed at serving the school or system hierarchy. While practitioner
research can be a highly effective and transformative method of
developing professional learning for whole school change, we agree with
Sachs' assessment that "first and foremost, the desire to engage in
teacher research must be a choice, it cannot be mandated from the top
down" (2003:89). Whether the motivation for such 'top down' impetus is
merely a benign belief in the power of practitioner inquiry or a more
sinister push for compliance and regulation, such efforts are more
likely to breed cynicism and discontent than development and
emancipation. The key to navigating these tensions, we believe, lies
in working slowly, engaging teachers with a will and interest in
practitioner research and encouraging them to share their learnings and
new understandings with their colleagues, building trust and adding new
opportunities for engagement along the way.

Quality of Outcome
Given, then, that purposes for engaging in practitioner research in
education settings will greatly vary, with some more oriented to an
emancipatory knowledge interest than others, how are we to judge the
quality of the outcomes? Our first yardstick for making such judgements
is grounded in our earlier discussion of ethical practice and the
quality of the discourse. In many ways we could do no better than turn
to the norms espoused by the National Schools Network, these being:
- Adopt a sense of responsibility in and for the group
  (participating in the inquiry)
- Attend to others and listen
- Cooperate in good faith

- Aim for consensus decision making
- Confront problems respectfully
- Allow and give no 'put downs'
- Accept where others are 'at'
- Share ethically
- Suspend judgements. (www.ansn.edu.au)

If those engaged in practice based research adopted these 'norms' as the ways in which they conduct their inquiry they would already have provided an environment where there is an authentic desire to understand a particular phenomenon, problem or challenge.

But as we have already indicated, understanding, in and of itself is not sufficient. An important outcome is that the knowledge that has been developed is acted upon. Knowledge must be put to good use. There is an interesting parable to be found in Funder's *Stasiland* (2002) where she details the extraordinary lengths to which the GDR went in order to gather information of the doings of its citizens. And yet with all that 'knowledge' it could not predict the fall of the Berlin Wall. Knowing what is happening in education settings is not enough to change them. There must be a will to step into the 21st Century and re-think schooling anew.

One of the difficulties in achieving such an outcome is the current inclination to celebrate practice rather than develop an authentic critique. 'Sharing' conferences, where participants come to discuss their achievements in such programs as the Australian Government Quality Teaching Program rarely report ways in which the investigations have challenged existing and established policies that all too often govern practice. When the French students sprayed the walls of Paris with that memorable phrase "Let the Imagination Seize Power" their plea was for a material transformation of the world in which they lived; a world in the grip of the cold war; a hierarchical world in which a bureaucratic elite largely determined how things were to be managed with little consultation with those charged with bringing policies into practice. A significant quality outcome, in our terms, would be one where the education bureaucracy, itself, has the courage and fortitude to listen and attend to critical insights that those working at the 'chalkface' may have. It is unlikely that we shall see any great departure from celebratory accounts while practitioners feel that their critique will go unremarked, at best, or receive negative attention, at worst. Learning about practice through research is a powerful hammer, we must take care that we do not use it only to crack very small nuts.

A quality outcome for well conducted, ethical, practitioner research in the context of education is an affirmation of the scholarship of teaching. In many ways we see teachers having been deprofessionalised by the KISS principle – Keep it simple, stupid. Too often complex and competing ideas are reduced to ten-minute soundbites. Already there are templates and companions being published to enable teachers to put together strategies to engage students in the kind of higher order thinking advocated as a result of the Queensland Productive Pedagogies and New South Wales Quality Teaching Paper initiatives. In the meta-evaluation of the New South Wales Priority Action Schools Program (PASP) Groundwater-Smith & Kemmis (2003) noted the capacity of teachers to engage in sustained professional conversation and action around

practices in some of the state's most challenging schools. The very nature of the program, that gave agency to teachers, created conditions where it was possible, even desirable to work around some of the existing 'roadblocks'.

An interesting feature of PASP, and other state-wide and national programs, was the matter of working with academic partners from the country's universities. Which brings us to another quality outcome, that being that practice based knowledge can also inform academic knowledge – that by engaging with the field, the university based practitioners can also increase the depth of their knowledge and understanding of the field.

Towards Desiderata for Practitioner Research
As a means of clarifying our thinking with respect to this paper, we presented an earlier draft to the regular research seminar conducted by the Centre for Practitioner Research at the University of Sydney. One of the participants suggested to us that it sounded as if being celebratory in reporting practitoner inquiry was something of an achilles' heel for practitioner research. In many ways, this is the case, but we are also mindful that for many embarking on this journey, that such celebration is both necessary and developmental. All the same, as the central argument in this paper suggests, being celebratory is not in itself sufficient. Therefore in this conclusion, we would like to articulate the conditions that we believe will contribute to a more emancipatory purpose.

In conceiving of this paper we have eschewed as far as possible a technical-rational discourse. It would be curious then if we concluded by generating a set of standards that pose as conditions designed to govern practitioner research. It is rather our wish to reiterate what we see as desirable for achieving emancipatory goals.

The term we have chosen is 'desiderata' (not to be confused with the poem (Ehrmann 1952) of the same name). It encapsulates both our will to transcend celebration and our desire to support that change with and for practitioner researchers.

Desiderata for Practitioner Research

Be prepared for disputation and vigorous debate
Shun the veneer of politeness
Take the time to take risks
Be bold
Trust and be trustworthy
Seek for action which transforms rather than that which reproduces
Remember that there may be more power in critique than in celebration

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