

But I'm A Practitioner!

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VEXATION

Casper the Friendly Ghost ... was always trying to get people not to be afraid of him, but it never worked. In the end, they always discovered he was a ghost and went screaming. And Casper always went away sad. But then the next time, he was hopeful again. And then sad again. It went on and on like that. It made me think of the Jesus Boy. The way people kind of stayed away from him just because. I ... imagined him running after us, yelling, "But I'm a friendly ghost!" (Woodson, 2007, pp. 74 – 75).

"But, I am a practitioner!"

Spoken as the character Megan Bloomfield does in *But I'm A Cheerleader* – "I get good grades, I go to church, I'm a cheerleader" (Creel, Sperling, & Babbit, 1999) – I don't know if I get or got good grades, but at least grades good enough to earn a Doctor of Philosophy degree; I did go to church, but I don't go to church; I do teach; I do (science education) research; I do service as a Professor of Education at a University, "but I'm a practitioner!"

A practitioner is a person who teaches science to children or "kids." Within the science education community, practitioners derive cultural and social capital from their existence, participation and immersion in and control of preschools and kindergarten through grade 12 schools, classrooms, and students as well as their objectification by those who study, research, describe, know, understand, train, teach, educate, pity, and fix them and even make a living off and "cheerlead" for them. In other words, the practitioner is the hero – one who

ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man (Campbell, 1949/1968, p. 30)

Their boon is sought, worshipped and beckoned into a conversation by those at a post-secondary institution of education, from a governmental agency, and/or some other entity, for-profit or non-profit groups, be they educational consultants, or policy wonks who believe the practitioner holds some juju, "Let's ask a practitioner!"

My position – the what I do as if that is who I am – is a quest to publish because my name, creativity, problem solving and other 21st century skills leads to my being quoted by peers, invited to write more chapters, to craft and to publish the books used in all science education classrooms at all educational levels – in short, to become the hero who "had wrought or suffered in some extraordinary way and had thereby significantly enlarged the scope of humanity" (Hadas & Smith, 1969, p. 10 – 11), I teach, I research, and I serve. But who asks about my practice? Ostentatiously, I showcase, flaunt, champion my research to my supervisors, peers, and the oppressed and the disinherited, but I want to be a practitioner. However, I wonder if I might be one of "those scholarly types that come to visit as if they had revolutionary truth by the tail. You know, the ones that come looking for us to teach us that we're oppressed and exploited and to tell us what to do" (Freire, 1994, p. 63)

I don't want to say to a practitioner: "Maybe you can do this in your classroom" because I feel that I too do what practitioners do. I want to say, "But I'm a practitioner!" I want to hear "You are a practitioner!" In other words, I, as a practitioner, say "I need to do this in my classroom". As a researcher, can I be a practitioner as much as salt is the "partialities" of the seasoning – a totality (Freire, 1994). If my research becomes my pedagogy – "the deeply social or dialogic situation of subject formation, the processes of how we make ourselves through and against other" (Luhmann, pp. 153 – 154) – then, am I a practitioner? (A practitioner of what?)

Why is education, that praxis of curriculum and pedagogy, the friendly ghost? I vex the type of school that is educative and what is meant by educative. I vex that school – practice and practitioner – and science education research(ers) are not about education. In other words, why have I, as a researcher and practitioner, not created a world and a classroom of dignity, identity, and loving and caring (Gaines, 1993). "So finally let the truth be spoken/here and now for all to hear/finally let the truth be said/.../a death to lies and my deceit/a death to all my furtive hiding/a death to my dishonesty" (X, 2005, p. 230).

VENTURE

Practitioners are said to engage in pedagogy that:

takes place when there are two learners who occupy somewhat different spaces in an ongoing dialogue. But both participants bring knowledge to the relationship, and one of the objects of the pedagogic process is to explore what each know and what they can teach each other. A second object is to foster reflection on the self as actor in the world in consequence of knowing (Aronowitz, 1998, p. 8)

If this is true, then, in order for me to claim to be a practitioner, my research must record, tell, and story the dialogues in which I interact, what I know, what I teach and who I am as well as what the Other knows. But this can occur only if the Other records, tells, and stories the interactions with me and my learning and forces me to know who I am. A practitioner participates in a relationship with people mediated by the world – a word which impresses and challenges both parties” (Freire, 1970/2000, p. 93). Therefore I must be a “who am I” rather than a “what I do” *with* my students, but to be with my students I must “come out.” For me, coming out is “to stand up and tell the truth and to hell with the consequences” (X, 2005, p. 207). Additionally, it “is at once an act of self-acknowledgement, self-acceptance, self-affirmation, and self-revelation intimately linked to how he views himself and how he interacts with the world” (Merla, 1996, p. xvi). My venture is to be the researcher that I want, need, and must be. It is to me that I want them to direct the statement: “Let’s ask a practitioner!” I want my writing to be that of a practitioner. Therefore, I must come out as a practitioner. I must acknowledge, accept, affirm, and revel in my research publications as if I am the practitioner I want to be. This would be instead of the researcher who is a recorder, an interpreter, and a teller of the stories and narratives of others. I want to claim “a lot of you, over the years have called me certain things—a certain kind of person, and I think I don’t need to say what it is. Well, you might as well know. That’s the kind of [person I am]” (Murphy, 1997, p. 320). I am a practitioner.

As I come out as someone else (Delany, 1996) – the researcher now called the practitioner – what do I look like? Is my capital as a researcher limited to social capital associated with action research? Research as the person who speaks, but is not, the empirically objective, the outside, and is not what the practitioner champions. I strive to create the research that is who am I rather than what I did.

Doug, one of my current research peers, was engaged with me in an exploratory research project concerning moments in his teaching when Link, a pseudonym for a male kindergartener, sat in Doug’s lap. Doug was an undergraduate teacher candidate at the time of the event and was enrolled in a course with me in which learning to teach occurred by placing him in a classroom with a “practitioner.” During the class, Doug kept a journal and it is through this journal and other reflective writings that we draw data. Traditionally, Doug was the practitioner with Link and worked with a practitioner – the classroom teacher to whom he was assigned by me. How do I write this research so that the reader sees me as a practitioner? Surely whatever form the communiqué takes Doug will be seen as the practitioner? I venture to suggest that Doug and I write this as pedagogy. As a researcher, I hazard, in order to be a practitioner, to take the subject position which means the research becomes a dialogue with, about, and through Doug (and me, if practitioners engage in pedagogy). I story my feelings, understandings, and changes as if Link sat on my lap. Meanwhile, Doug would be negotiating what it means to be a male in an early childhood classroom and being the object of research and the subject of pedagogy. Together we would explore the texts of Doug’s “supervising” teacher. As research practitioner, I create a dialogic narrative of exploration – “travel[ing] over or through a particular space for the purpose of discovery and adventure” (Stebbins, 2001, p. 2).

Most simply and directly stated why, in practice and as the adhesive that makes school educative, is learning not “a conscious search for some kind of coherence, some kind of sense ... [and] a process of effecting new connections in experience, of thematizing, problematizing, and imposing diverse patterns on the inchoateness of things” (Greene, 19, p. 3); curriculum not “defined as what is ultimately structured in the *child’s mind* – that is, what is remembered, understood, used, and enjoyed” (Sizer, 1999, p.163); and pedagogy as a fluid, unstable, and mobile identity that does not negotiates (and understands) “what counts as knowledge; how what counts as knowledge is organized and produced; how is such knowledge transmitted; who has access to such knowledge; [and] whose interests does such knowledge serve”(Giroux, 1980/1999, p. 18)? In other words, why has science education research not made school educative and why do practitioners, researchers and students not learn, perform curriculum and engage in pedagogy With the insight that “the protagonist of democracy is the ‘common citizen, the man [sic] in the street’; whereas, the scientist-specialist is the protagonist of industrial [capitalist] society” (Brosio, 1994, p. 61), I, like my students, especially graduate students, and as one of many teacher educators, ask how can schools, as the master’s house (Lorde, 1979), not be oppressive (Freire, 1970/2000)?