Editorial

The meaning of research as inquiry for discovery and educational improvement

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The articles in this issue of Brock Education: A Journal of Educational Research and Practice feature innovative educational inquiries that are designed to explore answers to sets of problems that if better understood stand to improve the quality of educational experiences for both students and educators. For example, a theme consistent across the articles is commitment to sustained research inquiry. Albeit within a broad range of educational contexts. Nonetheless these research articles make known the fact that the educational issue they each tackle requires sustained inquiry to arrive at meaningful discovery that makes a difference.

In their coauthored article, Savage and DiBiase highlight the negative psychosocial outcomes highly relationally aggressive female middle school students, so-called ‘mean girls’, face. Using a multistage statistical clustering procedure, the researchers identified a group of highly, yet almost exclusively, relationally aggressive female students. They then compared this group of students to a matched group of non-aggressive female students on a variety of behavioural, social, psychological and personality variables. The authors report that high levels of relational aggression in these female students, even in the absence of physical and verbal aggression, are correlated with numerous maladaptive behaviours, personality patterns and social functioning deficits. Savage and DiBiase discuss the possible interventions for this group of young women but caution a condition that should be met includes recognition on the part of the individual that the intervention is in their best interest. The implications of their research include a call for longitudinal studies to begin in early childhood and continue to adulthood to give an accurate picture regarding the stability of high levels of relational aggression.

According to Lock et al, in the second article of this Brock Education Journal issue, co-teaching holds many positive benefits for instructors in higher education. Supported by institutional funding for research design based on the Scholarship of Teaching Learning (SoTL) the team of instructors documented their investigation of coteaching a ‘Nurse as Educator’ course, over a period of two years. The notion was the instructors were to model their co-teaching practices so nursing students could apply that understanding to their own co-teaching assignment. The train the trainer approach held possibilities for nursing instructors to grow professionally through critical dialogue with their colleagues regarding their own teaching practice. As the coauthors argue, “the strength of co-teaching informs educators’ understanding of their own teaching practice and fosters a rediscovery of their passion for teaching.” The inquiry produced four recommendations for practice and two implications for educational development and administration.

In their coauthored contribution, featured as the third article, Portelance, Caron and Martineau examine collaboration between student teacher trainers, the cooperating teacher, and the university supervisor. They argue that these relationships involve sharing of respective knowledge through interprofessional collaboration and collaborative dialogue but they need specific competencies. Their investigation poses searching questions such as, “Does their discourse reflect sharing and co-elaboration, or even co-construction of knowledge?” The
authors explain that the study is informed by the Quebec Government policy to prioritize collaboration between stakeholders in educational setting. However, it is the perceived importance of that collaboration that impacts on the quality of training provided. They believe that, "it is vital for both trainers to position themselves as co-trainers of the future teacher and as professionals who work together and support one another. Their comments, suggestions, and questions greatly influence the student’s professional development." Their research is particularly useful in gaining insight into collaborations that demonstrate commitment toward assisting the student teacher in the development of their professional abilities. They further recommend that action research be instated in the collaborations in order to dialogue between student teacher co-trainers.

Hallman and Meineke’s research article, featured fourth in this issue, is informed by a US based nationwide survey of English language arts teacher educators. The coauthors conducted focus group interviews with a sub-section of the participants in a follow-up to the survey. The purpose of their focused study was to gauge how English language arts teachers view teaching ELLs as part of related disciplinary fields. The inquiry is important because while national census has projected that by 2030 over 40% of the K-12 population in U.S. schools will be children whose first language is not English; teacher education programs have differing views on how best to include ELLs. Some programs include the teaching of ELLs in separate coursework, others believe knowledge about how to teach ELLs should be infused in content areas (e.g. English language arts). Using the work of Nagle (2013) the authors embed a teaching learning framework for effective teaching of ELLs within the questions that form their inquiry as well as the analysis of the data from the focus group interviews. The coauthors align their inquiry with Nagle’s work because it acknowledges the importance of professional development that will enhance teacher educators understanding of teaching ELLs. The findings from their research provides a set of overarching themes regarding teacher educators’ views on teaching ELLs in teacher education programs.

Niemczyk research article is fifth in this issue. It closely examines the three national funding research agencies in Canada; the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC), and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) to ascertain how each conceptualizes the role of educational institutions in providing research assistantship opportunities to graduate students as a vehicle for cultivating succeeding generations of new researchers. Niemczyk’s study included semi-structured interviews with three groups of participants—13 doctoral students, five research supervisors, and two administrators and makes known the challenges and constraints embedded within institutional structures that limit part-time students’ access to research assistantships positions relative it full-time graduate students. Niemczyk’s study, “offers quality recommendations to improve full- and part-time students’ access to RAships within and beyond the program under investigation.” According to Niemczyk, “the findings may help students understand access to RAships, assist academics in hiring research assistants, and inform administrators and academic program committees about possible organizational changes to be made.”

In the sixth and final article for this issue, Pounder discusses research he conducted over two academic years at the University of the West Indies with entrepreneur educators. The article investigates the teaching practices of leading entrepreneur educators to provide a discussion about the variety of quality teaching approaches that support the learning needs of students. Pounder’s argument regarding the importance of studying entrepreneurship education fits within
current debate that has shifted from questioning if entrepreneurship can be taught toward questions on how entrepreneurship can best be taught. Pounder’s article contributes to the shift in thinking among researchers.

Together the articles provide multiple lens through which to appreciate the scope and aims of Brock Education Journal with its “interest in the research and practice of teaching, teacher education and teacher development.” Even more broadly using a variety of perspectives the research articles in this issue support the main purpose of the journal with its intention “to foster practitioner inquiry (in schools, post-secondary institutions and beyond) and promote a deeper understanding of the experiences of educators and learners.” Readers both nationally and internationally stand to gain from the careful research on educational concerns that have consequences for educators and students broadly.