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Innovations in the Dissemination of Action Research

Rhetoric, Media, and Communication

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> *The difference between theory and practice is, in theory, somewhat smaller than in practice.*
>
> Frank Westphal

> *Knowledge is not simply another commodity. On the contrary. Knowledge is never used up. It increases by diffusion and grows by dispersion.*
>
> Daniel J. Boorstin

18.1 Introduction

"If a tree falls in a forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?" is a thought experiment often raised by philosophers interested in the distinction between observation and perception. A similar question can be asked about educational research. "If a piece of research is published in a journal and no practitioner reads it, does it have an impact?"

It is often taken as a given that research has (or at least, should have) impact on practice. But, the question remains, what does impact actually mean? The standard way of measuring the impact of a piece of research – by counting the number of times the piece (usually a journal article) is cited by others – is known as citation analysis. The idea here is that more important research will be cited more often than research that is less important. Citation analysis is typically used by governments, funding agencies, and university tenure and promotion committees to evaluate the productivity and quality of a piece of research – and, via that measure, to judge a researcher's work (Klavans & Boyack, 2017).

Matters, however, are not that straightforward; consider what we know about overall patterns of citations. Meho (2007) reported that some 90% of papers that have been published in academic journals are *never* cited. Further, he argued that as many as 50% of papers are not read by anyone other than the authors, referees, and journal editors of a piece. If this is indeed the case, even given possible

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challenges to these specific numbers, this speaks to a broader pattern that raises important questions about the value and meaning of much research that is conducted today (Guldberg, 2017).

This become more complicated in practitioner-oriented fields like education, where the gap between research and practice is a substantive concern (Wilson, 2017). This makes the dissemination of research (to other researchers, but more importantly to other practitioners) all the more important. There are systemic reasons why this crucial dissemination and impact of research on practice does not always happen, and the research–practice gap remains strong.

In this chapter, we begin by framing the issue of dissemination of action research by considering what the educational research–practice gap means and why it is important, along with related issues of rhetoric, transferability, and dissemination. We assert it is vital that more action research be disseminated to the field. This allows innovations, lessons learned, and empirical research findings to move beyond a local context, to benefit other practitioners, scholars, and the field overall. There are multiple ways to approach this dissemination and various considerations for action researchers. We review traditional scholarly and practitioner modalities of publishing and presenting, as well as suggesting new forms or approaches of dissemination through new digital and networking media. Finally, we conclude on a discussion of strategy and forward-looking considerations for dissemination and implications for action researchers seeking to make their mark on the field.

18.2 Scholars, Practitioners, and the Spaces Between

Donald Schön (1995), in his influential work on the epistemology of practice, spoke of the dilemma of *rigor* vs. *relevance*. He wrote:

> In the varied topography of professional practice, there is a high, hard ground overlooking a swamp. On the high ground, manageable problems lend themselves to solution through the use of research-based theory and technique. In the swampy lowlands, problems are messy and confusing and incapable of technical solution. The irony of this situation is that the problems of the high ground tend to be relatively unimportant to individuals or society at large, however great their technical interest may be, while in the swamp lie the problems of greatest human concern. The practitioner is confronted with a choice. Shall he remain on the high ground where he can solve relatively unimportant problems according to his standards of rigor, or shall he descend to the swamp of important problems where he cannot be rigorous in any way he knows how to describe (p. 28).

This dilemma emerges primarily in what is typically called the gap between research/theory and practice – a gap that may be largely attributed to the different priorities of scholars and practitioners.

Scholars are interested in extending the knowledge base of the field, often focusing on sometimes minute distinctions in research designs or outcomes, or between theories and frameworks (Ladwig, 2016). For instance, a certain difference of statistical significance might be of importance to researchers, yet relatively unimportant in terms of applied impact. Researchers seek to be well-respected within the research community, where theory and rigor garner greater attention than impact on practice (evidence of this can often be seen in the conclusions section of most research articles, with the mandatory "we need more research" paragraph of implications). The language used by researchers in their writing – driven by a need for precision in terms, or the requisite technical language in a discipline – often comes across as jargon, and becomes a barrier to practitioners for applying or understanding the meaning and relevance of the work (Zhu, 2004). The pressures of immediate publication for reasons of tenure and promotion can hinder long-term research studies built in partnership with practitioners. The research and peer-review publication process is often long and prevents practitioners receiving the information they need in a timely manner (Hartley, 2008). All of this means that published research is often not relevant for practitioners or even readily available to them when they need it.

At the heart of this scholarly research worldview is the idea of "technical rationality" (Schön, 1995) – the idea that professional practice is seen as the application of systematic knowledge to instrumental problems. As Schön (1995) continues, the emergence of technical rationality in universities, which privileged certain kinds of "pure" knowledge over others, has led to the research–practice gap. Technical rationality suggests a purely instrumental view of practice, where practice consists of adjusting technical means to ends that are *clear, fixed*, and *internally consistent* – descriptors which may hold in controlled experiments, but not in laboratories of practice. He states:

> Technical rationality fostered a separation between research and practice. Research of the kind that was viewed as proper to the "higher schools" – rigorously controlled experimentation, statistical analysis of observed correlations of variables, or disinterested theoretical speculation – finds little place to stand in the turbulent world of practice, which is notoriously uncontrolled, where problems are usually ill-formed, and where actors in the practice situation are undeniably "interested." (Schön, 1995, p. 29)

Practitioners, in contrast to scholars, are deeply enmeshed in this "turbulent world" seeking immediate answers to the issues that they face at the moment – answers that respect the complexity of the contexts in which they work, and value the knowledge and experience they bring to the table (Tabachnick & Zeichner, 1999). Uncertainty, complexity, uniqueness, and conflict between perspectives among the stakeholders they serve are central to the world practitioners live in (Buchanan, 1992). For them, research designs, or methodological and theoretical tools, need not be perfect or optimal. Instead, they must address the pragmatic and applied goals or problems practitioners face daily.

This disconnect between research and practice has long been a criticism of scholarly work in the field of education (Bradley, 1999; Levine, 2005, 2007). Academia is often viewed as disconnected from the everyday life of classrooms and the real-world constraints of teaching or educational contexts in practice

(Lovitts, 2001). At the same time, practitioners are often criticized for not employing the most effective research-based strategies or findings in learning contexts (Perry & Imig, 2008; Sullivan, 2005).

Schön's substantive body of work suggests that the frequently held norm of privileging academic knowledge over practical knowledge needs to be turned on its head. In this approach, practice is not just the setting for application of knowledge, but instead is the site for its generation. This viewpoint privileges the kinds of knowing that are embedded in competent practice and sees research as generating and testing new knowledge for action. Schön argues that knowledge "generated in, for, and through a particular situation of action" (1995, p. 29) can, if made explicit, be represented in ways that are transferable to other situations. Thus this "newly generated practice knowledge may be modified and incorporated into the practitioners' repertoire so as to be available for projection into other situations."

This is the argument for action research *and* its dissemination. It is at heart research that is conducted by practitioners to inform their own work, and through this, can impact the work of others as well. Speaking specifically of educators, Mertler (2014) notes that action research is characterized as research that is done by teachers for themselves. Thus, action research makes a determined and purposeful choice to see value in working within Schön's swampy lowlands of practice – by embracing uncertainty, complexity, uniqueness, and conflict. In action research, we see a cyclic process in which the researcher undertakes multiple iterations to identify problems, take action to improve outcomes, and reflect on the results, through data collected along the way (Mertler, 2008). Learning and change are the consequence of these moves, through what Schön describes as design for reflective professional practice – as reflection both *in* and *on* action. The researcher has a special place in the action research cycle, being intimately involved with the problem they are seeking to resolve (Mertler, 2017). Thus, the knowledge generated is first and foremost important to the practitioner themselves.

However, without a further push toward dissemination of that knowledge, the benefits of the research may stop at the boundaries of the context within which it occurred. For some action researchers, this may be enough. If the goal is to transform their immediate practice alone, that is still a worthy goal and worthwhile endeavor. But for many action researchers, having engaged in the deep and rigorous process of inquiry – having learned or created something that can transform practice – it is worthwhile to share their research and innovations through dissemination. This promotes the spread and transfer of their ideas from a single local context into other educational contexts and venues that may also learn and improve.

If action research is to have larger impact and value, we must consider ways to mobilize and disseminate this knowledge for other situations and contexts. Action research can result in perspectives, viewpoints, practices, evidence, and knowledge that can be transferred to other contexts – making communication crucial to the transfer of innovation. The kernels of dissemination start within the rigor and rhetoric of the study itself, and spread via the notion of transferability.

18.2.1 Proof of Concept and the Value of Transferability

Action research dissemination capitalizes on the research principle of transferability (Herr & Anderson, 2014). Transferability respects the wide variability of educational practice and uniqueness of local contexts, inviting the reader to consider what ideas might transfer to their context and how this might look or be valuable in their own setting.

It is important to distinguish between transferability and the idea of generalizability. Generalizability is the extension of research findings from the group being studied to the population at large. It is typically used when researchers describe how a statistically sufficiently large sample is representative of the larger population, and thus can claim that findings generalize to a broader population (Lee & Baskerville, 2003).

Transferability, on the other hand, is applied not by the researchers, but by the readers of the research. The readers make connections between the study described and their own or other contexts, situations, times, and populations, to improve or change their own practice or apply new ideas to it (Misco, 2007). Transferability claims are narrower and may represent local contexts, but provide readers with greater flexibility in how to apply them. Thus, the applicability of an action research study can actually be broad based on how thoroughly the researcher communicates the findings and delineates the details of the study's context. This is part of making the case for results and impact (Yilmaz, 2013).

This emphasis in how transferability is applied by *readers* of research is an important component of communicating and disseminating the results of action research. As a researcher, it is impossible to prove or identify where the study's findings would or could be applicable. Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 316) write: "It is … not the naturalist's task to provide an index of transferability, it is his or her responsibility to provide the data base that makes transferability judgements possible on the part of potential appliers."

The emphasis on the action of the readers vs. that of the researcher does not reduce the responsibility of the researcher in disseminating the findings of their work. If anything, it raises the stakes for action researchers, since it suggests that the meaning of the research is not completely in the control of the researchers. This makes it even more important that the manner in which they present the research be lucid and clear for the audience to clearly understand where ideas may apply. This suggests that researchers need to better understand just how ideas (particularly innovations) spread through society, so that they can maximize the impact of their dissemination strategy.

18.3 Understanding the Diffusion of Ideas

Action researchers seeking to disseminate their work into the field might consider Rogers's (1962) landmark Diffusion of Innovation theory. Rogers's (1962) theory explains how ideas or products gain momentum and become diffused over time, through a population, field, or system. Social scientists and other designers and planners use this to seek an end result (diffusion) in which people in a social system adopt a new idea, behavior, initiative, program, or product.

In this theory, "adoption" means that people now do something differently than they did before. The key to adoption is that other people must recognize the idea, behavior, or product as new or innovative – and through this recognition, diffusion becomes possible (Di Benedetto, 2015). We suggest this is important for action research, because it implies that action researchers must communicate and disseminate their work in ways that highlight, for an educational audience, just what is new and valuable in it. This requires a rhetorical move, to help the audience with the initial stage of Rogers's diffusion process – which is *awareness* of the need for an innovation.

Whether in writing, presenting, or other modes of knowledge sharing, the process begins with the action researcher understanding and communicating what is important, valuable, and new about their work. These are things an audience must be made aware of to begin the process of diffusion. This means asking and answering key questions, such as: What issues could this research address for others in education, and why would they be interested? What is new in the work (even if only relatively or incrementally)? How can the innovation be positioned and reported so as to be more transferrable to others? What is the big-picture value of the idea?

If an action researcher can answer those questions, it is feasible to begin to craft an argument that positions the work for possible acceptance in and diffusion through the world of research and practice. But not all messages are created equal. There is an art and a craft to designing messages to maximize their spread, which goes beyond just describing how it is important. It has to do with how the message is crafted – i.e. researchers must develop an understanding of and a sensitivity to the rhetorical aspects of presenting information, particularly to different and diverse audiences, each of whom bring their own differing perspectives to the research presented.

18.4 The Rhetorical Nature of Knowledge Mobilization

To disseminate research findings for greatest impact, we must go beyond single outlets or outputs to a broader strategy known as *knowledge mobilization* (KMb). KMb, "in essence, consists of all the activities and outputs that builds awareness, and enables use of the research" (Community First: Impacts of Community Engagement, 2015). This may include a wide range of products, processes, and relationships between researchers, users, and mediators. Mediators include any individuals or organizations that are involved in the dissemination of knowledge. The goal of KMb is bridging the research, policy, and practice gap in a bi-directional manner – i.e. to move research results into society and bring new ideas into the world of scholarship and research (Gainforth, Latimer-Cheung, Athanasopoulos, Moore, & Ginis, 2014).

The end result is to share knowledge in accessible and useful ways so that adoption and application of the knowledge is more likely (Gainforth et al., 2014). Thus, KMb is not restricted to one audience or approach or medium. An academic journal article or a presentation of research findings at an academic conference are just a few of many options possible. Other KMb avenues might include developing a policy brief or news release. More non-traditional possibilities might involve creating infographics, websites, social media posts, television shorts, radio interviews, or even street theater, or other creative outlets. The medium of distribution may be face-to-face in small or large groups, or in online communities, blog posts, webinars, or messages on social media. Whatever the mode or medium, it is important to understand one's audience, and to have a sense of their general context, interests, needs, and trusted sources of information.

Researchers can expand the impact and reach of their findings in multiple media or modes, formats, and strategies, so they must consider the strengths and weaknesses inherent in different media (Briscoe, Pollock, Campbell, & Carr-Harris, 2016). They must also have a sense of the rhetoric of communication and persuasion.

Persuasion and rhetoric have rich and hallowed histories going back to Aristotle, who was among the first to describe the value of these elements in communication. Aristotle defined a rhetorician as someone who has the ability to persuade (Kennedy, 2015). Rhetoric, therefore, is the "ability to see what is possibly persuasive in every given case" (Rapp, 2010). Aristotle's greatest contribution was arguing that logic, although powerful, was not enough to *persuade*. He argued that communicating one's message to the public was a matter of persuasiveness greater than knowledge or logic (though both do play an essential part). This is particularly important for researchers and scholars who are typically schooled and trained in a certain kind of argument, one based on rigor and methodology – the strategies most valued in traditional scholarship like dissertations or peer-reviewed journal articles. But it is important to remember that the kinds of strategies researchers use are rhetorical moves as well – merely targeted to specific audiences that are amenable to these rhetorical moves. Communicating with other audiences, or using other media, requires understanding strategies that best fit that specific audience and particular medium of communication (Rice, 2007). Aristotle denotes three key strategies for persuasion – Logos, Pathos, and Ethos.

According to Aristotle, the rhetorical moves most valued by scholars and researchers are *Logos* – i.e. appeals to logic or reason (Braet, 1992). This absorption with Logos is why scientific papers construct logical arguments, build on facts and statistics, describe rigor in methodology, and cite authorities (harkening back to the citation analysis mentioned earlier).

Aristotle, however, argued that persuasion goes beyond Logos. Specifically, he described two other forms of "artistic proof" that can be used to persuade audiences: *Ethos* and *Pathos*. Ethos is the ethical appeal, an attempt to convince the audience of the credibility of the author. This typically means selecting language appropriate for the audiences to demonstrate the unbiased and credible nature of the speaker (McCroskey, 2015). Credibility is also enhanced by the use of correct grammar and syntax (in the written word or medium of choice), and language that denotes knowledge of the genre or discipline.

Finally, Pathos speaks to the emotional appeal of the argument being made, to generate sympathy or to make the audience feel what the author wants them to feel. Pathos is a particularly significant strategy when one seeks to generate empathy (a word, incidentally, derived from pathos) to get the audience to understand and identify with the perspective of another, so as to move the audience to action. Pathos can be generated by the use of appropriate language (or symbols), emotional tone, powerful stories or examples, and even implied meanings (Gross, 2017).

There is much more known today about the psychology of persuasion than was initiated by Aristotle. It is a well-studied area in social psychological research with a slew of robust findings (Petty, Ostrom, & Brock, 2014). For instance, Cialdini's work on persuasion and the six principles of persuasion (based on research conducted in both laboratory and real-world settings) should be essential reading for all those who are interested in KMb (Cialdini, 2001, 2004). Covering this area of persuasion would be impossible in a single chapter. It is an area of study replete with rich resources, books, and sources of information. We point to this merely to suggest it as a direction for further consideration for action researchers interested in impact and dissemination.

To summarize, we offer the following key ideas. First, there is no one right way of disseminating the findings of research, since this can span multiple audiences, methods, and media for communication. Second, scholars and researchers are often unaware of these rhetorical modes of persuasion, and this is a major bottleneck for the dissemination of their ideas. Third, much is known today about how persuasive messages can be crafted, and this knowledge should be examined for a researcher's toolkit in communicating their work for impact. Finally – and this is particularly true of action research, but applies to other forms of applied research as well – KMb does not begin when the research is done and the findings are established, but rather should be a key part of the process, from the very beginning.

Participatory action research by its very nature includes KMb at the inception of the research to develop buy-in for the intervention or innovation. For instance, a meeting bringing together researchers, educators, and parents to identify the social-emotional needs of children and develop strategies to meet those needs is both central to the research project and part of a KMb strategy. Connecting with and communicating to other practitioners and stakeholders happens throughout the action research process, and building a network of connections along the way can further build a network for an audience later (Venkitachalam & Bosua, 2014). Moving strategically and thoughtfully in rhetoric and communication of ideas is woven into the process of action research, but it is also part of public dissemination modes later in the process. In the next section, we review key options as modes for sharing action research, through traditional and non-traditional means.

18.5 Scholarly Dissemination: From Practice to Print or Presentation

Scholarly modes of research dissemination are often held up as the gold standard of academia, yet they are also criticized as disconnected from diffusion into practice or for having a narrow, specialized appeal (Berliner, 2002). Hence, when it comes to scholarly dissemination of action research innovations, a key question might be "why?" If the immediate goal of action research is to impact practice, one might wonder what the value is in targeting traditional modes of scholarship. The research–practice gap itself may be reason enough for practitioners to consider aiming their work for scholarly outlets, as it can bring a much-needed practical take on research into academia (Stringer, 2008).

Action researchers are uniquely poised to overcome the research–practice gap, since their very nature bridges this gap. They possess both hard-won contextual knowledge of practice and the training to engage systematic inquiry (Wesley, 1957). This requires a certain amount of translation and fluidity in moving between methodologies, theories, research, and real-world contexts and innovations (Perry & Imig, 2008). Thus, they can bring a much-needed sense of practice-based research into academic journals.

Here, we transition into a more pragmatic discussion of the goals, benefits, and challenges of traditional scholarly modes, with practical considerations for action researchers considering dissemination through these modes.

18.6 Traditional Scholarship

Types of traditional dissemination can be roughly split into two key domains: publications in journals and presentations at conferences.

We begin with publications, in which there are different options for sharing research, including (but not limited to): peer-reviewed journal articles, practitioner journal articles, or books. There are also different types of articles that a researcher might consider publishing from an action research study, including (but not limited to): theoretical foundations or literature reviews, scholarly research, exemplars in practice, or other topical learning pieces arising from the study. We provide a brief overview of each of these considerations, as possibilities for more traditional modes of dissemination, before moving on to other, less traditional modes of dissemination later in the chapter.

18.6.1 Peer-Reviewed Academic Journals

Peer-reviewed academic articles are often thought of as the touchstone of quality research (the gold standard, as it were). A peer-reviewed article is a piece published in a refereed journal after it has been subjected to multiple rounds of review and critique by scholars with expertise on the topic. The goal of peer-review is to ensure that published articles reflect solid scholarship that can contribute to progress or the state of knowledge in a discipline.

This description might lead one to assume that this is the best mode of scholarship for an action researcher – which may, or may not, be true, depending on the goals of the research and researcher and who their audience is. Peer-reviewed academic journals offer an opportunity to connect one's research with academia, which does allow a certain type of diffusion into the field. Since such journals are typically read or referenced most often by academics and scholars, they position one's work within the field of research and academic inquiry. This is a beneficial goal in terms of staking out a position in scholarly circles. Yet, while there may be no drawbacks to publishing action research in a peer-reviewed journal, and benefits to doing so, there are also key considerations to factor in before aiming work at such a venue.

The first is to consider for which journals the research might be a good fit. If it is submitted to a journal that is a poor fit, it is likely to be rejected, but only before getting held up in the review process for a time that the piece could otherwise be in consideration for a more suitable journal. Journals vary widely in their focus and range. Some focuses are quite broad – such as teacher education, educational psychology, or higher education – meaning that a range of different study topics could fall within these categories. Other journals have a more specific focus, such as around specialized areas of pedagogy or practice (for example, computer-supported collaborative learning, or adult vocational behavior). An action researcher must consider the topic and scope of the study to choose an appropriate publication fit. They may do so by reviewing journals in the field through access in an institutional library, through general internet searches, or by reviewing lists published by journal indexing companies like Scopus or Scimago.

But, in addition to considerations of topic, a researcher seeking to publish in a journal should ensure it is open to action research methodologies, or to studies of the scope and type that they have to offer. In some cases, highly competitive scientific journals may only publish studies with certain experimental methodologies and/or claims to large-scale generalizability. While these journals may initially appear desirable based on reputation or impact-factor, one must consider whether they are likely to publish a local or action research study. This is not to say that local studies or action research approaches are not worthwhile. Our position is that such studies have a great deal to offer. The point is to note the issue of article-to-journal fit, and to recognize that some journal venues are limited in the types of works that they publish. Importantly, there are also countless respectable or high-quality journals in any field that are open to varied methodologies and approaches, including action research. In order to identify good potential journals for one's article, there is an element of investigation that goes into first finding journals that look like a potential fit in terms of topic, scope, and research approach (based on library or internet searches), then reading over the journals' stated information and background, and looking over articles in their recent issues, to better determine if there is a possible fit.

Once a journal is identified, one way for a researcher to increase the possibility of getting an article accepted is to become familiar with the conventions of the journal, by attending to author instructions for the journal and reading over other or similar articles published there. Beyond the considerations we have already noted, what will make an article attractive to an audience goes back to the awareness issue in Rogers's (1962) Diffusion of Innovation theory. This requires a rhetorical move in the writing – to position the work to open up the audience (by convincing the key gatekeepers, namely the editors and reviewers of the journal) to an awareness of the need for this study and the innovation it offers. Beyond this, the conventions of academic research writing may be structured based on the study and the journal itself.

Peer-reviewed academic articles offer an opportunity for action researchers to diffuse their work into the arena of scholarly thought and writing. We have noted some factors that may help to guide action researchers in considering when, where, or how to approach bringing their work into an academic journal setting.

18.6.2 Practitioner Journal Articles

Another key and important consideration for publishing action research is practitioner journal publications. In many ways, these publications offer an ideal venue for bringing quality action research to practitioners. Practitioner publications are journals that are aimed at a particular professional market. They are often selective about choosing quality content that the journal believes would be of interest to, and influential for, practitioners. For that reason, they become an attractive venue to a practitioner action researcher, because such publications present an opportunity to disseminate what one has learned directly into practice, as a leader or exemplar to other peers and colleagues in their professional arena.

Such articles are also published in print and/or online databases, thus increasing dissemination. They are not aimed at an academic market of higher education faculty, but instead seek to influence professionals or offer them work of interest to their development. Writing for such publication means, again, considering the audience and what they need, as well as the appropriate rhetorical moves for this audience and genre. There is significantly more emphasis on providing practical implications than there would be in a peer-reviewed academic journal, and less emphasis on empirical research methods or rigor in argument, theory, or study design. Practitioner pieces are sometimes peer-reviewed, but more often may be selected by the journal's editor, and thus may move faster into print, providing the possibility of relatively quick impact.

Many of the same general points of publishing described in the previous section on academic journals apply to practitioner journals, as well. For instance, practitioner journals may have a broad topical scope, such as being targeted to the whole field of teaching, or a narrower scope, such as being targeted to a niche area of education. Also, many professional associations publish their own journals, which often have wide readership among members. So again, it becomes important to consider the topical fit of a study for a journal, and perform due diligence in researching to see where a piece of action research might best fit.

The most straightforward way to understand the journal's audience is to look over a range of recent articles from the journal. While the articles may be varied, there will also likely be some similarities in structure, style, tone, length, voice, and approach – the rhetoric of it, as it were – based on the conventions of the journal. This can help an author to craft the writing in order to increase the likelihood that editors will consider and accept the work.

Writing to a practitioner audience means providing useful and practical takeaways or new understandings gleaned from the research, in clear and relevant terms. Again, understanding the norms of the journal and being sensitive to what is important and valuable in the study will support this. Identifying these points aligns it better with practical focuses of such journals – and, thus, offers one more key mode of dissemination through important traditional means.

18.6.3 Types of Article Publications

There are multiple possibilities for article types that might come out of an action research study. We have noted that there are both academic and practitioner venues – but beyond this or considerations of topic, there are options for genres of articles.

An action researcher might immediately consider one of the most common and straightforward genres for writing up a study – the *research-based academic article*. These articles are the bulwark of the academic writing genre and are common in scholarly peer-reviewed journals. Their format varies a little from journal to journal, but there are common foundations. They often suit the structural conventions of a dissertation or typical research study report, by introducing the problem, reviewing the literature, and sharing methods, results, and discussion. These commonalities may make this article format seemingly intuitive as an output of a completed action research dissertation, thesis, or study. Yet it again requires careful planning as an author, to extrapolate, condense, and synthesize the key points or findings from the study – in a way that offers scholars, reviewers, and journal readers something compelling and scholarly. Practitioner journals also allow for research-based articles, but the style and tone are often more succinct, applied, and practical, with less focus on methods or theories. Reviewing other articles in the journal being targeted for authorship is key to understanding these styles, tones, and structures – both for academic or practitioner journals.

A perhaps slightly less common, but also valued, type of article is a *literature review* or *theoretical foundations* piece. These types of articles do not aim to report on a study's findings, but instead review the literature and/or offer new models or theoretical considerations to consider. Action research dissertations or theses inherently require a section or chapter that reviews theory or literature. In order to write this into a full-fledged journal article, it is not enough to merely summarize the literature review chapter or section of a study. It is essential to frame the rhetoric so as to help the reader understand what the review offers and what is new or interesting in its analysis. Further, while most action research studies do not aim to generate new theories or models in a field, some do result in such new ideas. This offers potential for *theoretical foundations* articles, which offer up new ideas, theories, or models to the field of research or practice. While many practitioner journals do not focus on standard scholarly literature review pieces, some may be interested in articles that offer up such new models or ideas that are framed to impact practice.

Finally, *perspective, opinion*, and/or *commentary* pieces are a genre found in some research or practitioner journals. These pieces are often shorter in length, sharing a perspective or authorial voice on a topic. These may involve essays offering a personal point of view critiquing widespread notions in the field; they may share opinions informed by research or scholarship on a subject; or finally, they may offer commentary on current or prevailing issues in the field. These types of articles emerge differently across journals. Given that they are less common, they may not be a first consideration for publishing action research. However, if an action researcher has findings, innovations, or other resultant work from their study that could inform such commentary or thought pieces, this genre is certainly an option. Considering the journal before writing and submitting such a piece is key. This is because some journals may offer these opportunities only by invitation to established scholars, while other journals are more open to well-grounded, research-informed, and thoughtful commentary from any author with ideas that have impact.

18.6.4 Practitioner Books

Practitioner-oriented books allow publication and dissemination of action research in a more in-depth way with broader implications, space to elaborate, and discussion of applications for other practitioners. Such books differ from typical scholarly handbooks or edited academic books, which feature collections of articles or chapters from academic experts on particular topics.

These practitioner books are more practical-knowledge types of books that are aimed at extending knowledge for professionals in a discipline. For instance, such books for teachers might focus on any range of topical areas relevant to schools and classrooms. They are written to be accessible to wider audiences than articles in journals (which may either have limited membership or circulation, or be limited by access). Practitioner books from reputable publishers are sought out by professionals wishing to learn and improve their practice. These points make them an excellent means of dissemination of research. However, since writing a book is a much more involved process than writing a journal article, the bar to entry for authors can be higher and requires more thought, planning, and work on the researcher's part. This includes identifying a potential publisher, crafting a proposal, and writing the manuscript. An action researcher must first consider if there is enough material in their study for a book. This means mapping out a potential chapter structure that effectively communicates ideas in clear, applicable, and compelling terms to be readily consumed and applied by professionals. Identifying similar books in the genre is a helpful start, and this may also help in identifying some key publishers to approach. Reviewing those publishers' websites helps identify their required process for proposing a book, as well as key points of contact with the publisher and/or possible templates for writing up a book proposal.

The same considerations of rhetoric and strategy that go into positioning an article are also needed for a book – but often in different ways. Publishers seek to know up front who the intended target audience is for the book, some titles of comparable books in the genre, and how the book will fill a need or an interest in the market. They will also require an outline of the book, possible sample chapters, and more. In short, proposing and writing a book requires a clear and mapped-out strategy for how the ideas will be communicated and how they will add value for an audience.

This is an exhaustive process of crafting a rhetoric that communicates research in accurate, compelling, useful, and digestible ways – a rhetoric that is both in-depth and packaged for professionals. As it must be clear, it also requires considering all three aspects of Aristotle's ways of persuasion. Yet for the motivated action research writer, it may be a path worth considering, as it could have the momentum of the publisher and an interested market to promote dissemination. Entering into the authorial process for a book is not necessarily the first publication mode for any author – in fact, a practitioner journal article may be a good first step toward identifying an audience for a book. However, for researchers who can plot out a detailed and persuasive argument from their research – with enough applicable and practical material for a book – it is a compelling way to disseminate work and make a space for it on the professional market.

18.6.5 Conference Presentations

Finally, conference presentations provide action researchers with an excellent traditional means of disseminating their ideas to the field, as well as networking for social-professional connections with others interested in this work. High-quality action research is an essential fixture at academic/scholarly conferences, practitioner-centered conferences, and conferences that blend both. Conferences that feature action research may be organized broadly for the whole field of education, such as the American Educational Research Association conference, or more narrowly, such as local, regional, or national conferences that feature specific topics such as educational technology or special education. It is essential to start by identifying what kind of audience one wishes to present to. Certain conferences offer excellent opportunities for more applied and practical discussions or sharing of usable knowledge with practitioners. These professional conferences bring ideas directly into the space of people who may use and adopt them. Academic conferences may allow for more traditional scholarly sharing of research findings, giving the action researcher an opportunity to situate their work further within the field of scholarship. Such conferences may also publish proceedings, which allows presenters a further opportunity to publish their work as a text. Either or both approaches have clear benefits for sharing, networking, and disseminating work into research and practice. As with the other modes, we suggest to begin with the strategy of deciding some key things: To what audience should the work be presented? (e.g. who would care about this and who would be interested?); Where should the work go? (e.g. what kind of venue to aim for?); and, what are the key ideas and takeaways to emphasize? (e.g. what is compelling here that this audience in this venue would seek?).

Action research studies are rich and detailed, living at the intersection of research and practice – meaning they may have many audiences or potential places for dissemination. The key for a motivated author, presenter, and disseminator is to take all of this into consideration and plan out a strategy for publishing and presenting. This requires a mindset that does not become disheartened if work initially gets rejected from one venue. Many works that later became excellent published articles or presentations were initially rejected from one place before finding a good home in another journal or conference. It is essential to use feedback to revise or simply re-strategize to reconfigure a piece or identify a more fitting venue. Like action research itself, the dissemination process is cyclical and requires patience and willingness to regroup and revise.

18.7 Non-Traditional Media or Approaches to Impact

While traditional modes of scholarship provide one obvious but important path toward dissemination, other less traditional modes exist and are constantly emerging as new media evolves. Traditional scholarship remains and may always be of great value in the field. However, as new approaches and media emerge on the scene, so do the options and modalities for heightening the connection of action research to the world.

18.7.1 The Changing Landscape of Non-traditional Approaches

It takes time, effort, and iteration to prepare even one journal article and have it accepted. Peer reviewers and editors function as gatekeepers in such arenas, deciding what does or does not make it into print or out into the field. There is nothing inherently wrong with this, and in the genre of traditional scholarship, gatekeepers make sense and are necessary. But it presents a somewhat higher bar to entry than other more emergent forms of dissemination, such as social networking, social media, blogs or websites, video and content sharing, and more. The benefit to those who wish to share ideas and content online is that there are fewer (or maybe even no) gatekeepers, and few bars to entry beyond digital access and a computer. The audience is the decider of what ideas they wish to engage with, rather than editors or peer reviewers. In some ways, new media democratizes the opportunity to connect with audiences.

Henriksen and Hoelting (Henriksen, Hoelting, & Deep-Play Research Group, 2016) suggest that new media offers much to the landscape of creative sharing, as seen in approaches such as crowdsourcing of data or ideas, or the constant new stream of applications for sharing video, audio, images, or text. For example, YouTube, Vimeo, or podcasting applications allow users with basic audio and video technology to craft their messages in audio narratives or video discussions and share them with the world. Given the range of web hosting and building services available today, websites or blogs can be created with basic technology skills and limited resources, offering opportunities for action researchers to craft a public identity online and share their scholarship openly with other professionals. Regularly updated blogs that communicate new, interesting, or compelling ideas, resources, or applications for an audience often generate interest and readership over time. There is a certain amount of strategy that goes into using any of these media effectively. The same logos, ethos, and pathos described previously for crafting a message may help to communicate ideas compellingly in various forms. Generating an audience requires both understanding and experimenting with the medium you are using, and building and maintaining a network through connections with other relevant professionals, channels, or accounts online.

We do not present an exhaustive list or description of specific tools and new media offerings – mainly because this would not be possible, as new technologies are essentially a moving target. New ones enter the scene constantly and old ones drop away, and patterns or trends in usage are akin to shifting sand (Zhao, 2012). For an action researcher wishing to engage in new media for dissemination, we suggest that a mindset open to engagement and technology fluency (not expertise, by any means, but simply a basic comfortable level in trying out new tools or media) is more important than knowing an inherently changeable list of tools or categories.

18.7.2 New Technologies and Social Scholarship

James Gee (2004) speaks to the importance of shared affinity spaces and the role that new technologies can play in developing what Veletsianos and Kimmons (2016) have called "social scholarship." Social media tools such as Twitter, argue Veletsianos and Kimmons, allow scholars to construct virtual spaces to share work, insights, and findings around matters of shared interest. As they note, "Researchers need to explore a wider range of scholars' activities to fully understand their online lives and participation" (Veletsianos & Kimmons, p. 8), and through that develop identities as public intellectuals who "write" across multiple digital genres. Semingson, O'Byrne, Mora, and Kist (2017) make a similar argument for the importance of becoming part of this new learning/scholarly ecosystem for scholars and researchers.

There are, of course, challenges to this. It requires researchers and scholars to consider their digital identity and footprint and its relationship to their "offline" identities, and to become comfortable navigating these boundaries. This is particularly important since different social media often involve engaging with different audiences, where authenticity of voice is key. As Semingson et al. write, "Social scholarship as a process connects formal scholarship with informal, participatory internet-based civic practices while espousing specific values, e.g. openness, collaboration, transparency, access, sharing" (p. 361). Curating one's digital identity, digitizing a workflow for efficiency, and connecting with others on a continual basis to establish and maintain relationships take time and effort. There is little guidance to researchers on any one best way to do this. A final challenge is how such digital, networked social scholars demonstrate the impact that their presence in these spaces has on actual practice. There are no metrics like citation analysis or Google Scholar h- and i-indices (however imperfect those metrics may be) to describe impact, which makes it challenging to untenured faculty or busy working professionals seeking a measure.

18.8 The Need for Strategy

As must be clear, action research dissemination is an important but complex process. While some may think of dissemination as beginning when the research ends, it is actually essential along the way for communicating with and convincing other practitioners or stakeholders to participate. For example, a classroom teacher trying to implement a teacher professional development program throughout her school will need support from other teachers and administrators.

Similarly, any local context for action research involves multiple stakeholders who may participate in, give permission for, evaluate, or otherwise be part of the intervention. Crafting a narrative and research process that supports transferability is also part of this. Thus, action researchers must consciously think of communication strategies at every stage of the process.

That said, we have focused much attention on dissemination that occurs later in the research cycles or after they are complete. Once a study and its innovation are complete and the data evaluated and reported, the researcher has something to offer even beyond their local context. Local dissemination is still key, because practitioners may share their findings with the immediate stakeholders – via presentations to colleagues, written reports, professional development, or forms of sharing within the organization or institution. However, because action research can serve as a bridge between research and practice, post-research dissemination strategies help spread findings and innovations more broadly to the field or other interested practitioners.

The word *strategy* becomes key, referring to a plan of action designed to achieve a major or overall aim, which can help to guide dissemination. A researcher's strategy need not be lengthy or formal – it might be written up in a set of personal notes or sketched out in any simple format. Strategy is an essential concept that speaks to the need for forethought and planning in deciding how, when, where, what, and to whom the research will be disseminated.

Given the vast possibilities of audiences, media, publishing forums and formats, and presentational strategies (of which we have only scratched the surface here), it is important to make decisions and map out a basic plan of the details or directions for dissemination. New opportunities may arise along the way and the researcher can stay nimble and open to these. But starting with a general strategic plan – of what material to publish, for what audience, in what venues, and how to structure and shape it – helps to avoid the pitfall of wandering or throwing ideas out ad hoc (Whittington, 1996).

Beyond answers to basic questions that shape a strategy for dissemination, we return to the manner in which innovations diffuse across society, identifying *why* research is important, the broader construct of KMb, and the rhetorical moves that are needed for different genres of dissemination. If we consider KMb as the activities and outputs that build awareness and enable use of the research, this provides a framing device for strategy. In particular, the rhetorical moves and modes of logos, ethos, and pathos are again important for considering the creative devices and narrative moves that the researcher makes in authoring, presenting, or packaging their work for broader use and consumption. The affordances and constraints of a blog post versus a journal article versus a tweet are vastly different, and thus the rhetorical moves of an author must be different. This means thinking about when to appeal to logos via logical argument, when to appeal to ethos through an ethical case for credibility, and when to appeal to pathos by tapping into an empathetic or emotional connection for an audience. Each of these modes may be used in different blends and balances based on the norms of the mode (e.g. scholarly journals will often seek more logos and ethos, while a presentation to teachers might include these but also weave in some pathos as emotional or empathetic appeal). These moves of rhetoric, alongside the pragmatic concerns of authorial strategy, become part of the larger strategy for KMb and can help flesh out a fully realized and forward-looking approach to action research dissemination.

18.9 Conclusions

In this chapter, we have pointed to the importance and value of dissemination in action research. Action research at its heart is an approach that, as Mertler (2014) notes, is conducted *by* practitioners *for* practitioners. This means that innovations, findings, and lessons learned from any action research study are inherently connected to practice, and other practitioners can find value in them. Action research is also a scholarly process of systematic inquiry and thus has much to offer in academic or research settings. Given this, we reiterate that action research is well positioned to address the challenges of the research–practice gap in the field of education. But this positioning is most advantageous when the researcher is thoughtful, active, and strategic about dissemination. This means attending to the value of KMb and to how rhetorical principles can help communicate the work for impact, in appropriate modalities.

We have covered some essentials of different types of dissemination modes – both traditional and non-traditional, scholarly and practitioner-centered. They key point is the need for an action researcher to be strategic about where and how to place their emphasis for dissemination. Taking stock of the essentials of what, when, where, how, and for whom to publish are helpful for starting to lay out a strategy. This converges into a well-crafted approach to improve the impact and heighten the potential for effective dissemination.

Looking ahead, the challenges for the field of practice in any area are significant, but this is particularly true for education, where the complex problems of the twenty-first century are keenly felt by thinkers, teachers, and learners of all ages, across many contexts. Action research has the power to make changes that allow for powerful improvements felt at the local level, and across these local contexts, there is great collective power. But this power becomes multiplicative when researchers find ways to disseminate the work and share it out for even broader impact, so that other practitioners and scholars can benefit and feel the effects too. Strategy, rhetoric, KMb, and, of course, high-quality action research processes are all part of this – bringing the world of local scholarship to meet the larger world of research and practice.

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