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LEAD PRESENTER/ORGANIZER:

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SYMPOSIUM CO-PRESENTERS:

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Affordances and Constraints in Practitioner Research: Connecting Theory and Practice

Theme IV: Practices of Language Teacher Education

Symposium Abstract

This symposium explores tensions between practitioner research's commitment to developing localized understanding and its contributions to broader theory development in language education. Panelists representing different practitioner perspectives (teachers, curriculum designers, teacher educators, and journal editors) discuss affordances and constraints in conducting, disseminating, and sustaining practitioner research in culturally responsive ways.

Panel:

Practitioner research (PR) has long been advocated as a way for language teachers to develop deeper understanding *of* their pedagogical practices and learners' experiences (Allwright, 1992; Burns, 1999; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). As a broad cover term for various teacher inquiry frameworks, including action research and exploratory practice (EP), PR aims to empower teachers to theorize their instructional practice and explore new educational theories.

Despite widespread acknowledgement of PR's value for teachers' professional learning (e.g., Borg, 2013; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Zeichner & Noffke, 2001), various obstacles remain for teachers in conducting and disseminating their research, including a lack of time, resources, and respect in the field for this work (Borg, 2013; Burns, 2005; Hanks, 2017). At the same time, as practitioner researchers seek to report their work in professional venues such as conferences and publications, more discussion within applied linguistics and language teacher education is needed to understand and clarify expectations surrounding this research

(e.g., Barfield, Cleminson, & Stewart, forthcoming). Because PR resides in a space of interconnected theory and practice, several questions emerge: What should PR look like? What form(s)/genres should it take on? Whom does this research serve? And where and how can the research be shared with others?

This symposium explores the tensions between PR's commitment to developing localized understanding and its contributions to broader theory development in language teaching and learning. Taking on different practitioner perspectives, including language learners and teachers, curriculum designers and teacher educators, and journal editors, panelists discuss how practitioners can conduct, share, and sustain PR work in culturally responsive ways that support practitioners and do not lead to burnout.

The session opens with a short introduction to the symposium topic and its speakers, brought together through professional *communities of practice* (most notably a global research network and editorial teams on PR). Five presentations follow, bringing unique perspectives to the role of PR in practitioners' professional learning and in broader language learning theory development:

Paula Golombek draws on experience as editor of an upcoming special issue on PR to highlight the inherent practical and ethical contradictions in publishing inclusive PR that fosters praxis. They argue that evaluation criteria and the nature of reviewer feedback must be reimagined to consider who the practitioner is, and why they are doing PR personally and professionally.

In **Inés Miller** and **Assia Slimani-Rolls**' paper, teacher educators, discuss the impact that a pre-service EP-based LTE program had on Brazilian school teachers' practice. The teacher educators found that the teachers used EP differently—many in order to consider their students' needs and respond to their immediate professional lives rather than disseminate their understandings through research publications.

Cori Crane discusses, from a language program director (LPD) position, the opportunities program coordinators have in working with teachers and students to develop deeper local understanding about learners' needs across language curricula. Analysis of learners' reflections (EP 'puzzles' on grammar), written for an advanced German course, helped an LPD see how students had experienced learning grammar in lower-level instruction.

Anna Costantino draws on recent editorial experience for an applied linguistics journal devoted to practitioner-driven research. They describe how classroom inquiry and dissemination efforts allow language teachers to integrate multiple perspectives (learner, teacher, and materials developer) and build the teaching artistry necessary to navigate complex educational environments.

Judith Hanks focuses on a project involving teachers and teacher educators creatively engaging in EP in Viet Nam. They theorized their practice, puzzling about student engagement and working to incorporate culturally relevant pedagogy using EP principles. A question arose, though: how/where might these practitioners disseminate their work?