

Why Do “We” “DO Research”?

By

Ann Nevin, Ph. D., Visiting Professor, Florida International University &  
Professor Emerita, Arizona State University

Keynote Address for Barry University 2006 Research Conference

January 21, 2006

Abstract

What are the many and varied reasons that motivate us to do this work called “research?” In this paper, we will ponder this phenomenon and discuss the reasons why ten researchers in the field (some veterans, some novices) “do” research. The outcome? Hopefully we will gain one more source of motivation to continue our individual and collective research efforts.

I appreciate Dr. Victoria Giordano, the President, and other members of the Executive Board of Barry University’s Phi Delta Kappa chapter for inviting me to serve as keynote for the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual research conference. Thank you for the opportunity to share this small research study with you, novice and veteran practitioners and researchers, consumers of both practice and research. And it’s a special pleasure to welcome new attendees of Barry U’s 2nd Annual Research Day Conference and the veteran attendees!

I know how busy you are and appreciate you spending time with me. I invite you to be comfortable and enjoy yourself. Will you listen for information that you can use to form your own opinions as to how valuable my comments might be to you personally and professionally? There won’t be much quiet, reflective time. The quiet time may come during break or when you drive home after the conference. We’re going to have some fun too - some fun activities. But the bottom line is that when you leave today, you may be more motivated to “do” research. Let’s get to it!

You may be wondering why Dr. Giordano and the Board recommended me. I wonder, too, but I suspect it’s because I have served in many roles—practitioner, researcher, teacher, teacher educator, consumer of research, and advocate for including people with disabilities as co-researchers. .Currently I enjoy the roles of *professor emerita* at Arizona State University and Visiting Professor at Florida International University where I have been working with doctoral students and school personnel to research the impact of co-teaching on the roles of teachers and the academic achievement of their students. I am

considered to be a scholar and teacher educator in the area of collaborative consultation and inclusive education. I have co-authored books, research articles, and numerous chapters. I graduated from the University of Minnesota with a Ph.D. in educational psychology. My doctoral research focused on how teachers and administrators can integrate students with special learning needs. I have also earned advanced degrees in special education and educational administration and I have participated in the development of innovative teacher education programs since the 1970s. I realize anew that my advocacy, research, and teaching activities spans more than 30 years of working with a diverse array of people to create environments where students with disabilities and those without disabilities can work together towards their mutual success.

I know we are more than our roles, and I also know our roles can dictate, constrain, or motivate us to “do” research. Let me poll you! Will you please raise your hand if you are ... a classroom teacher or administrator? a teacher educator or inservice trainer? a doctoral or master’s degree student? a person who has been the subject of a research study? involved in a research project at the present time? *Thank you!* Did I omit any role? Other roles included funding agent and policy maker. Of course there is room for other roles, but now we have a sense of who is most interested and thus most likely to identify with the multitude of reasons that “we” in *this* community “do” research.

Before I share the results of my own research on this topic, I’m interested in your reasons. Will you please take a moment to write down 2 or 3 reasons that motivate you to do research? Then, will you please ask the person sitting next to

you to share one of her reasons? And be sure to listen because I might ask you to tell me what her reason is! I'll also be asking you to compare your list with the list that was generated by my sample. I conducted an informal survey of 10 researchers in the field of teacher education (2 males, 8 females)--4 professors, 2 associate professors, 2 assistant professors, and 2 adjunct professors. I asked in an email query, “What are 3 reasons you “do” research?” I received 30 responses from the 10 people. I conducted a ‘theme analysis’ and I believe I detected 4 clusters or categories as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Emerging Themes

1. TO MEET NEEDS OF CHILDREN, TEACHERS AND CLASSROOMS.
2. TO FULFILL PERSONAL NEEDS
3. BECAUSE OF OTHER PEOPLE
4. TO ADD TO THE KNOWLEDGE BASE

Theme #1: TO MEET NEEDS OF CHILDREN, TEACHERS AND CLASSROOMS. Within this theme, some verbatim remarks that represent this theme include: to gain new insights that affect instructional practice and the children; because it's useful to teachers; to improve my practice; to move programs/practices by bringing new information to the table for deliberation; my passion for teaching drives me to research anything that will help my students succeed; to listen to and honor the voices of those in the field.

Theme #2: TO FULFILL PERSONAL NEEDS. Within this theme, some verbatim remarks that represent this theme include: to survive in Academia,

because it's fun, because it's interesting and fun, because it's interesting and meaningful, because I'm interested, because I enjoy discovering new things, because I'm curious, because I need to learn and grow. One personal need offered by Dr. Cap Peck from the University of Washington is captured by the phrase “Divine Dissatisfaction”-- because doing research is a means of coping with what Martha Graham once described as "a divine dissatisfaction" with the world as given that drives all creative work.

Theme #3: BECAUSE OF OTHER PEOPLE. Some verbatim remarks that represent this theme include: to work with others who share interests, to work with my buddies, and my advisor convinced me that applied research is important.

Theme #4: TO ADD TO THE KNOWLEDGE BASE. Some representative remarks that are associated with this theme include: to build on my preparation as a researcher, to create new knowledge, because discovering the HOW is just as important as the WHY, my area (integrating technology into higher education teaching) is only just beginning, to make information known to others in accessible understandable language, to share through presentations, to present at conferences and write for various audiences.

I'd like to ask the following question. Are there any reasons on your lists not yet expressed by the informants in my sample? Please share some of the reasons on your list that did not show up on these lists!

At this point, I'd like to pose the question, “So what!?” After compiling this list and noticing that the reasons did not appear to be associated with rank or tenure, veteran or novice status of my informants, I realized that my own reasons

were similar. And yet I noticed that some of the reasons that I “do” research are controlled by the constraints of the research paradigm that I learned. It wasn’t until I went “outside the box” or research paradigm I learned in graduate school that I began to “do” research that was motivated by my own curiosity.

If the “truth is inside us,” then why do we need research and researchers? I believe we need them so they can hold up a mirror for us to better see ourselves. I also agree that “Most people do not know the glory of their own lives.” Calamity Jane says this about her colleagues, Wild Bill Hickock, Annie Oakley, and Chief Sitting Bull in Larry McMurtry (1990) *Buffalo Girls*. I hope in some small way I’ve been able to hold up a mirror for you to better see your own glory<sup>1</sup> as researchers.

---

<sup>1</sup> Special thanks are extended to my informants: Mary McNeil, Assistant Dean, Chapman College, Orange, CA; Maria Cardelle-Elawar, Arizona State University; Cap Peck, University of Washington; David Scanlon, Lynch School of Education (Boston College); Robin Smith, SUNY New Paltz; Jacque Thousand, Toni Hood, Fran Chadwick Cal State University San Marcos; Andrea Liston, Professor, Point Loma Linda University; Deb Teudt, Poway District, Resource Specialist.

Epilogue

A research assistant collected the 3x5 cards on which members of the audience wrote their reasons for doing research. There were 47 respondents out of approximately 65 people who attended the keynote session. The table below the

MEET THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN, TEACHERS & CLASSROOMS	FULFILL PERSONAL NEEDS	ADD TO THE KNOWLEDGE BASE	BECAUSE OF OTHER PEOPLE
<p>To develop improved methods and strategies to produce students with disabilities (EBD) to become as successful as their peers                      To make changes in the way my students learn                      To make learning more fun and less stressful                      To be a more effective teacher                      To help my classes improve                      To teach better                      To know my subject better                      For my students                      To improve my practices.                      To improve                      To help teachers improve student learning                      To help my students                      To use research procedures that give those without a voice, a voice to be heard.                      To benefit children that I work with                      My class needs me to do research.                      To teach my students.                      To address events in my classroom                      To stimulate my thinking/intellect                      To make what I do better</p>	<p>To make better decisions                      To make decisions as I implement policies                      To better myself or my family                      To convince myself                      To validate my belief                      To learn; To learn more information.                      To be better informed                      To find satisfaction in discovery.                      To empower myself                      To know myself better (spiritually)                      To improve                      I enjoy it; I enjoy looking at parts and pieces of a puzzle and putting the pieces together.                      My love for learning                      To solve problems I encounter on a daily basis                      Curiosity; Curiosity; Curiosity; I’m curious about the question                      It’s interesting; My interests in adolescents;                      My interest; My interest in topic                      To gain rank and promotion                      To improve myself professionally                      To stay competitive in my field                      Professionalism compels me                      To fulfill professional responsibilities</p>	<p>Passion for the topic                      To overcome ignorance and bring wisdom to light                      To add to the research                      To discover                      To understand a phenomenon                      To know, understand, explore                      To acquire new knowledge                      To prove a theory or idea                      To find answers to questions                      To solve problems                      To contribute to the knowledge base                      To add to the knowledge base                      To add to the knowledge base                      To inform practice                      To discover what works and what does not                      To find true answers                      To prove that ‘teaching less is more’                      To share my findings                      To advance the field by sharing findings with others                      To learn new things and to help change old things                      To solve social problems                      To apply research findings to achieve valuable goals</p>	<p>To help others                      To improve the lives of others                      To fulfill an assignment for class.                      To earn credit in my research class.                      I learn from others’ mistakes and from others findings.                      To complete assignments.                      To help people achieve the best for them.                      To help people solve problems.                      To impact policy makers                      To respond to others’ requests                      To become an expert in other people’s eyes.                      To promote professional development of others in the profession.                      To be a good role model for my students                      To participate and interact with colleagues in a positive way</p>

reasons listed by the people in the room who fulfilled the following roles:

classroom teacher, administrator, teacher educator, inservice trainer, doctoral or master’s degree candidate, subjects of a research study, currently Involved in a research project at the present time, seeker of funds to support research, and consumer of research information to make data-based decisions.