

Brief Encounter with the Taos Institute

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In this *Brief Encounter with the Taos Institute*, we want to highlight the recent issue of the *AI Practitioner*, August 2014. The focus of this AIP issue is dear to all of us at Taos because it features graduates of our PhD program and it was supported by a grant from the Taos Institute.

This issue, *Bridging Research and Practice: Illustrations from Doctoral Research*, offers practitioners inspiring ways in which practice and research are united in support of positive change and encourages us each to think about how our work is research, even though we may not think of it as such. Seeing research as a form of inquiry makes visible the ways in which we are all researchers and expands the value of research to practitioners, communities, and the world.

When reading the issue, you are invited to reflect on these questions as you think about your practice.

1. How can your practice be seen as research?
2. How is it creating positive change?
3. How can you engage with principles of research to strengthen your work?

“Designing Research”, a term embraced by the issue editors Kristin Bodiford and Celiane Camargo-Borges, focuses on co-creation of knowledge and practices that are useful, that support generative change, and that intimately connect research to practice. This perspective focuses on innovation through creative processes that involve a community of people constructing and re-constructing knowledge and practice (Beckman and Barry, 2007). Having the word “designing” before research connects knowledge development as actionable knowledge (Romme, 2003; van Aken, 2004) engaging and inviting research into practice and practice into research (Mohrman, Gibson and Mohrman, 2001; Rynes, Bartunek and Daft, 2001).

Designing research invites a reflection on how aspects of the world that are often taken for granted are socially constructed, opening space for alternative constructions to be forged and for new ways of engaging in research. The following 4 principles of designing research are based on constructionist assumptions and presented as resources for how we might engage in research as a daily practice.

1. Designing research as relational and collaborative

Designing research holds relationships as central in a collaborative journey. A relational and collaborative stance offers a resource where all participants bring skills, knowledge, interests,

experiences and stories together to co-create. In this endeavor, there is a movement of the researcher-as-expert to the researcher-as-offering-expertise and a shift from researcher and subjects toward research co-designers and co-participants.

2. Designing research as useful and generative

This principle encourages researchers to engage in inquiry with an intention to co-create new possibilities. It invites questions such as, “How is this useful? How will this create positive change? How will this generate new meanings?” The creative process of design research is to produce meaningful solutions where each system is seen as unique, past experiences are highlighted, and future possibilities are embraced (Brown, 2008; Kimbell, 2011).

3. Designing research as dynamic and organic

Embracing research as a dynamic, fluid, and continuous practice emphasizes the act of doing research as a journey, allowing an unfolding as participants engage. Thinking about research as emergent and organic does not however mean there is no framework to conduct the inquiry. Having an articulated purpose, principles, and direction are important to support people in collaborative inquiry with participatory practices co-created throughout the process, involving researchers, participants, theories and methods.

4. Designing research as engaging complexity and multiplicity

Designing research avoids causal or dualistic positions and engages complexity and multiplicity as rich resources for action. Doing so with a relational sensibility expands our view and involves a whole system in ways that multiply possibilities by welcoming and appreciating the many different voices and points of view involved. Researchers are also mindful about how people are supported and empowered to participate, actively asking questions such as “Whose voices are privileged?” and “Whose voices are left out?”

Throughout the inquiry, patterns begin to become visible from the interactions among people in a specific space and time. We begin to see the relatedness and appreciate the interconnections that enrich possibilities.

Bridging research and practice: igniting positive change

When we think of research as a transformative daily practice, it expands who can be considered a “researcher”, liberating research processes to the public sphere. This amplifies possibilities for positive change through democratizing knowledge by encouraging all involved to co-create the type of change that is most meaningful and impactful for their lives and their communities. By engaging in inquiry and mutual, collaborative engagement there is already transformation happening where all participants are changed throughout the process.

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