ACTION RESEARCH: NOT JUST FOR THE CLASSROOM
An Editorial

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When it comes to action research, some people seemed convinced that classroom teachers have a corner on the market. There does seem to be a natural fit. Research questions emerge all the time when students are involved, and they seem prepared to act as willing participants in any project that one might throw at them (providing it gets them away from a boring routine). Traditionally, teachers have toggled between purveyors of knowledge and educational leaders, so a fertile ground exists as the classroom becomes a nursery for researcher empowerment. However, in focusing on this area of action research, meta-analysis can, at times, overshadow the many other disciplines and workplaces that employ action research as standard practice.

With only the slightest prodding into the world of action research, for example, names begin to spill out – seminal names inextricably linked to the roots of the methodology. I have never met an action researcher who doesn’t refer back to Kurt Lewin in some way or another. Most educators embrace him as their own, never suspecting that Lewin was hardly connected to public education. Rather, a modern pioneer in the area of social psychology, he would have been more comfortable dealing with group dynamics between former occupants of displaced persons camps, than in a grade school classroom. Many original action research theorists fall into this same situation: Chris Argyris was concerned with organizational dynamics in the world of American business; John Heron pioneered the use of participatory research methods as a means of social encounter; and Orlando Fals-Borda, a mainstay of “participatory action research”, was principally interested in political activism rather than the mechanics of classroom practices.

In looking at the thick canon of action research, therefore, it important to realize that the area of education constitutes just a chapter in the larger book. While it may make many educational researchers feel less unique, it should also give solace that they are not alone in their use of this methodology. In the arenas of nursing, medicine, marketing,
administration, management, social work, psychology, sociology, anthropology and politics (to name only a few), action research can play a vital role to unearth answers and to empower the many participants who engage in this form of study.

In this issue of the journal, we welcome a number of articles that break the boundaries of pedagogical, classroom management or test-score research. Paul Watts and Maravic Pajaro from DALUHAY, the international group interested in ecological issues, examine coastal “ecohealth” through collaborative action cycles between Canada and the Philippines. David A’Bear, a vice-principal from the Surrey School District looks at ways that technology can aid students who are intermittently absent due to chronic illness. From SUNY New Paltz, Mary Ellen Bafumo and Andrea Noel, also study how technology can support pre-service teachers as they prepare for conducting social studies classes. Finally, from the University of Calgary, Christine Ann Walsh and Liza Lorenzetti discuss the benefits of weaving a feminist epistemology into participatory action research.