THINKING GLOBALLY, SPEAKING LOCALLY
An Editorial

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Most Canadians today are familiar with the term “the Global Village”. It is a catch-phrase loaded with positive connotations of unity, familiarity, and humanity on an international scale. Through the modern miracle of electronic networks, most now believe that very personal linkages can be created between just about anyone in any part of the world, regardless of the distance. In short, it means that no-one need be a stranger anymore. However, this is a bit of an incomplete reading of what Marshall McLuhan meant when he originally coined the term. While to the modern urban-dweller a village rustles up images of tire swings, porch doors and the time to sit and talk about the “important things” of life, McLuhan would admonish this perspective as mere nostalgia from people who never actually lived in a village. To him, a village is more claustrophobic, people not as caring as one would think. Instead, it is a place where nosy parkers know your business, the crack in your drapes is a focal point for snoopy neighbors, and a non-stop stream of gossip is purveyed at the local post office. To McLuhan, life in the Global Village was a life lived vicariously. He did not condemn this, but just discussed this facet of the future with a sense of inevitability.

Perhaps more than anything for me, this is what makes McLuhan a prophet of the modern age. He displays both the wonders of a greatly expanded circle of communication, but also the perils. The dangers are numerous. First, there is the potential that so much information now comes into our sphere it all blends together as a white noise. We lose our sense of discrimination, and everything becomes likewise important to us. From this, with all things being equal, our vitality is drained and we are afraid to act. Second, to keep things communicable on the global scale, everyone in the global village must maintain a common base of language, implicit knowledge, cultural reference, and so on. This destroys
a sense of diversity and robust differences, which are just as important as maintaining surface similarities. There are only people who are plugged into the sphere and the barbarians outside of this new *Pax Romana* who have no seeming existence.

It would seem odd, therefore, that Action Research, an intensely personal and local form of inquiry should play any role at all in this Brave New World. However, with its constructivist approach to viewing things, I can think of no greater counterbalance to the forces that wish to turn human thought into a mental blancmange. In reading case studies from around the world, one can, at once, see differences and accept them for what they are rather than trying some overarching formula for solving it. According to the principles of Action Research, people will have to try to solve their own problems in their own setting. And what may work for one may not work for another. This does not detract from the fact, though, that their thoughts *may* be of some aid to your situation. They are not immediately transferrable. Neither are they discounted. It is up to the reader to decide. This is the power that can be found in the global village. If you remain discriminating, it can aid you immensely.

This issue touches on this theme like no previous CJAR. The contributors literally span the globe, each giving their individual conclusions on certain matters of action research. **Shalini Wickremesooriya** from the University of Sheffield discusses the importance of directly listening to the voices of students with special language needs rather than merely treating them as a subject of study. In a similar vein, but a continent away, **Jason Fuqua** of Sam Houston State University struggles to understand the reasons behind the imbalance of Arabic-speaking students’ language learning progress at the university’s English Language Institute. At Jiaxing University, Professor **Wang Ping** investigates ways of coping with a passive silent class of students, a common problem for Chinese teacher trainers, based on his experience at the College of Foreign Languages. Finally, Dr. **Ruth Otienoh**, a lecturer at Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology, relates her personal experiences of conducting action research in two Kenyan primary schools. In the end, these contributors represent four diverse voices, yet seem strangely familiar.

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**REFERENCES TO THE “GLOBAL VILLAGE” BY McLuhan**

