WHO CARES? YOU'D BE SURPRISED
An Editorial

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There was a time, and not too long ago, that when you wanted to discuss your Action Research project, you usually found yourself talking into a mirror for company. This was due to the severe constrictions by the research community on scale, scope and interest for something that had little generalizability or transnational relevance. In short, if you were seeking answers to a question in your board, school, or classroom, it was of limited appeal to just about everyone not intimately related to the project. Connections could simply not be made. And if those who engaged in Action Research had waited around for government initiatives or high academia to lead the charge, we all still may be presenting only to our shadows. It is to our great benefit, therefore, that in the last few decades, strides have been made at the grassroots level to provide forums for discussion, debate, support and revenues for Action Research. Through these endeavours an authentic web of connections has been created between individuals, communities, and even countries. And in doing so, small scale Action Researchers may now find their place in the larger network: Where what they have discovered and what they have to say are valued as much as any other members of this loosely-coupled community. This is largely due to the very porous nature of the relations between the individual, the locality, the country and the global situation.

In Canada, much credit has to be given to the influential roles played by educational groups as they have sought to help teachers through the conduit of professional development. With Federations, for example, Action Research became a by-product of their activities. The Alberta Teachers’ Association, for example, provides regular conferences and support for teacher learning. The Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario has also contributed a great deal to the pursuit of Action Research through its Women’s Leadership Institute in a summer program entitled “Reflections on Practice”. Each year, most Federations across the country hold conferences, give awards, and provide grants for teachers wishing to pursue a research program.
Numerous volunteer organizations have also come into existence over the years throughout the country. Most have remained community focused, but some have become more interested in spreading the word to a larger audience, such as province-sized, on-line networks. The Nova Scotia Action Research Movement (NS-ARM) and the Saskatchewan Action Research Network (SARN), for instance, are both dedicated to Research in Practice. Researchers at Manitoba’s five faculties of education with provincial funding, the Manitoba Education Research Network (MERN), profess the goals of facilitating a province-wide education research community, promoting professional learning through collaborative inquiry (see http://www.mern.ca).

As these organizations become more interconnected and inter-communicative, country-wide and continent-wide networks have been created, with many people sliding between these levels. In the past five years, this has become the case. This past May, the Canadian Association of Action Research in Education (CAARE) was created and hosted its first annual conference in Ottawa. Closely tied to CJAR, it is hoped that this will be the start of a foundational network for Canada-wide discussion and partnership. In a Pan-American initiative, a representative from CAARE now sits on the board of executives of the Action Research Network of the Americas (ARNA), another grassroots organization that was born in 2012. On an even larger scale, this association is connected to the Collaborative Action Research Network (CARN), a British research group that was founded in 1976, and has grown to become an international network drawing its members from educational, health, social care, commercial, and public services settings.

Finally, of truly global proportions is Action Learning, Action Research Association Inc (ALARA), a worldwide network of programs, institutions, professionals, and people “interested in using action learning and action research to generate collaborative learning, training, research and action to advance social change and to transform workplaces, schools, colleges, universities, communities, voluntary organizations, governments and businesses” (http://www.alarassociation.org/pages/about-us). All in all, therefore, rather than hiding research under a bushel, there are almost countless places to distribute research findings. Whether or not they are heard, however, is another story – but the networks have been provided for those who care to talk and those who care to listen.

One place that we hope you will be heard is at CJAR – and coincidentally, all the voices in this issue come from higher education. In this issue we hear from Eileen Piggot-Irvine from Royal Roads University who discusses how she acted as a coach for six school leaders as they engage in an 18-month project to enhance performance. Sonia Hamel from Concordia University then deliberates on the “blind spots” found in a Forum Theatre experiment as the troupe endeavours to emphasize the narratives of the homeless. Then, at Ferdowsi University of Mashhad in Iran, Vahid Rahmani Doqaruni reports on an action research project concerning students’ confidence as they work through English as a Foreign Language (EFL) course. Finally, out of the University of Calgary, Barb Brown, Roswita Dressler, Sarah Eaton and Michele Jacobson explore action research as a collaborative process for instructor reflection, professional learning and collaboration. We will leave it to the readers to make the connections.