ACCEPTING ACTION RESEARCH: SLOW & STEADY
An Editorial

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For much of my career in the world of Action Research, I have seen this methodology's fortunes rise and fall periodically depending on the vagaries of public perception and demands for accountability. For the past few years, therefore, after a steady growth in its stature in the academic community, I had been expecting the inevitable backlash I had seen in the past. To my surprise, this has not happened. Perhaps, this is due to the fact that action research is no longer seen as a novelty or fad among a critical mass of researchers anymore. Perhaps, people have become increasingly educated to its meaning and technique. I can only hope.

However, some of the facts are quite clear. If you take the Canadian government, for example, its acceptance of the methodology, in dollars and cents, is irrefutable: Federal funding has increasingly promoted action research through a series of grants and programs. Under the auspices of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), for example, monies have been offered to research institutes in the form of Insight (for research), Connection (for creating networks) and Partnership Grants in the area traditionally using the action research methodology. From a low of one hundred thousand dollars of grant money in 2000 to a ten-fold increase by the 2010s, it cannot be denied that action research has become a more mainstream, accepted methodology (see http://www.outil.ost.uqam.ca)

This must be coupled with the increasing number of research institutes that are applying for and receiving these grants. Another interesting facet of this phenomenon is that while the number of individual projects reached a peak in 2007 and has been slowly declining ever since, the amount of funds given has continued to rise. This would seem to indicate that the government has recently favored action research projects of grander scope and larger scale. Finally, there has been a gradual expansion of disciplines who have won grants of this nature. For the past decade Education and Community Service have tended...
to dominate, collecting over half of the grants. While Health has long-associated itself with a participatory method, it continues to garner only sporadic funding (perhaps due to the many other federal grants that exist for this field). The two areas that have become increasingly supported have been that of research into Aboriginal and Environmental issues (now accounting for more than 32% of the overall).

The research offerings found in this issue surely give testimony to this trend. They come from many different areas and disciplines of the research spectrum, but use the same methodology to find the answers they need. From Edmonton, Alberta, Monica Fraser and Marilyn Abbott examine the challenges and benefits of electronic readers in an adult ESL classroom. From across the country, and dealing with northern indigenous communities, Shelly Stagg Peterson, Laura Horton and Jean Paul Restoule draw from experiences from the Northern Oral Language and Writing through Play Partnership project. From California, Teresa D’addato and Libbi Miller look into an experimental “Flipped Learning” class in fourth grade mathematics. Finally, leading a team from MacEwan University, Colleen Maykut endeavours to understand how male nursing students cope in the largely female-dominated profession.

As one can see, while these studies may seem to be worlds apart in terms of focus, discipline and even location, they are part of the larger social science community that have now been giving greater recognition to action research in recent years. I can only hope that this proves to be an evolutionary process rather than a wheel of fortune!