CRITICAL ISSUES, CRITICAL APPROACHES
An Editorial

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I do not think it would be a surprise to most readers if I were to mention that the Action Research community is not a particularly unified one. In fact, I am of the belief that the very philosophy and methodology that typifies this movement prevents us from becoming a solid vanguard of like-minded researching replicas. The bricks and mortar of Action Research are just too porous for this to happen. Instead, we in Action Research seem to be more interested in using it to serve different purposes rather than concerning ourselves with being members of any specific gang. Some members of the Action Research movement examine a class they are teaching to find ways to make student learning more efficient, integrated or accessible. Others are more committed to engaging in larger Action Research projects where stakeholders work together to create a learning community.

The four studies that make up this issue are somewhat removed from the types of projects just mentioned. Rather, what hold them together are the issues which they study, the approach which the participants use, and the ultimate larger goals they desire. All four come from a central taproot of Participatory Action Research (PAR), separated from other forms of Action Research by its overarching aim of empowering all the members of the study. And, rather than seeing this as a mere “value-added” supplement to any researcher-defined goal, these studies use empowerment as the mortar which holds the project together.

Our first article, led by members of Memorial University in St. John’s, Newfoundland, follows a strong PAR paradigm to understand a youth-adult team’s partnership. Entitled Connecting the Strength of the Research to the Strength of the Team Partnership, the study shows how important deep relations need to be within a team environment to enhance the research process (of course, they also show how woolly, unpredictable and
rich this type of study can be). A similar approach is employed by Drs. Mogadime and O’Sullivan as they endeavour to collaborate with Latino-Hispanic children in the Toronto Catholic District School Board. The participants tell their own stories as they deal with the school situation they must face on a daily basis.

From the critical issue of student drop-out to the equally critical issue of illicit drug use, our third article examines the underlying power and privilege differentials concerning the role of knowledge brokers. Finally, Amber Clarke and Darryl Bautista focus on creating a more critical reflective approach that would be appropriate for an Arts-Based Action Research situation.

Ultimately, therefore, these four versions of Participatory Action Research, regardless of their espoused specific goals, have the larger vision of empowering the people they serve, and utilizing a methodology that is the most effective way of serving this cause. By their own descriptions, I feel that they have indeed been successful in their attempts.