If you are engaged in a serious conversation about Action Research with someone in the teaching profession, the chances are this person is either a pre-service candidate or an educator who has just emerged from some form of related in-servicing. Of course, this is a terribly broad and perhaps clichéd overstatement. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that this methodology easily finds a home in these two areas of a teacher’s education. In all probability, teacher educators may introduce this practice as a way of counter-balancing people’s past experiences. Ever since the statement “apprenticeship of observation” was made by Lortie (1975), an abundance of research has shown that most students entering teacher education programs do so with a fairly ingrained conception of the role of teachers and the nature of the students they teach (Hollingsworth, 1989; McDiarmid, 1993). These beliefs may vary with people’s histories and circumstances, but there is now little doubt that, for good or ill, they are highly stable and complex, unchangeable even in the face of new experiences or strong outside arguments. Depressingly, Kenneth Zeichner’s work has further shown that most new information or techniques taught during traditional teacher education programs or in-servicing courses quickly “wash out” in the face of past experience (Zeichner & Tabachnik, 1981).

With this fact in mind, education in the past few decades has shifted away from trying to merely pass on information through traditional programs and courses: Authors like Wubbels (1993) argue that these are poorly suited to tap into students’ images of the world. Instead, this has been replaced by a desire to know more about student teachers’ preconceptions (e.g., Weinstein, 1989), and find ways to integrate them with new knowledge and understanding of the educative process. A key to this is the elimination of transmission as the sole approach to education, largely replaced by the students’ own sense of self-inquiry and personally motivated research. As well, it has been maintained that this type of learning must not live in a sanitized bubble with no consequences outside of a mere grade on a transcript or a checkmark on a board-directed in-servicing program.
For this reason, Action Research has been seen as a good means of building this bridge during pre-service and in-service education. Rather than overtly threatening students' previous experience by some authority figure, it takes a more constructivist approach: Allowing the researcher to actively place the pieces together and come to independent conclusions. It may also help break the wall between student and teacher, scholar and researcher. Not just engaged in the solitary act of learning, the Action Researcher also sees the process as contributing to the greater knowledge, providing intrinsic motivation. Action Research, when properly embedded in pre-service and in-service programs should help people protect their own notions, but in such a way that also leaves them open to evolutionary change as they grow in their careers – if this process is sustained. In the end, the desire is to first have teachers see this as a part of each educator’s commission. Then, the next generation of “apprentices” may observe and internalize this expanded role.

The articles in this issue are excellent examples of how this boundary-breaking change has taken place in North America today among some educators. The team from the University of Calgary (Dr. Brown, Ms. Hartwell and Thomas) shows how pre-service and in-service teachers can work together to study, create and research interdisciplinary units. They also show the common challenges both sides may face. Dr. Song’s work then builds on the idea of understanding pre-service teachers’ conceptions, endeavouring to find ways of connecting these views with their placement in a service-learning setting. Drs. Berg, Bradford, Robinson and Mr. Wells’ study looks at the British Columbia school district “Got Health?” initiative, especially the effectiveness of student-led inquiry in the area of mental well-being in school settings. Finally, Drs. Stack and Wang expand on this idea of student-led inquiry through the University of British Columbia/School District “Belonging Project” that included 22 youth co-researchers.

References


