SEEING THE CHILDREN FOR THE TREES
An Editorial

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Anyone who has read my editorials in the past has seen my rather terse responses to those who question Action Research’s place in the span of research methodologies. However, I am just as frequently approached by scholars who ask me what I think sets Action Research apart from other types of inquiry in general. Some are quite the jokesters, musing whether we stand at our desks doing deep knee-bends and arm curls as we analyze our findings. More frequently, questioners are truly curious as to the details of what Action Researchers actually do, and why they are considered pseudo-scholars by some segments of the Academy. In the past, I have argued that methodology is not what really sets it apart from any other type of research. The methods it uses are those that are tied to the questions being asked and the answers being sought. Now, I will argue that what really differentiates Action Research from any other form is the scope of questioning and the intended utilization of the study’s results.

For many scholars there is an artificial line in the sand in these two areas. Seeing an issue in your locality, studying what to do, and doing something about it, is NOT research to this group. Rather, it is considered problem-solving. In this instance, true research can only be of general use based on more general observations and general findings. A healthy detachment must also be maintained if the business of research is to move forward.

In my mind, those who focus on the peer-reviewed article, the book, the paper report, in many ways only have a partial understanding of research (and, as a journal editor, I am aware of the irony and blasphemy of this statement). In both terms of commerce and research, I believe Marley’s ghost said it best as he chastised Scrooge for narrow perceptions:
Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, benevolence, were all my business. The dealings of my trade were but a drop of water in the comprehensive ocean of my business!

In such a way, researchers must have this goal at the back of their minds at all times. What affect will my results bring? How can I make a situation better through this study? How can I act based on the study’s recommendations? Here, published results must be seen as a by-product rather than the ultimate prize of research. For that reason, the eyes of the researcher should be firmly focused on the betterment of each student’s situation. Of course, the narrower its focus, the more specific a study’s uses will remain. However, if the author has no beneficiary in mind, the study will remain of only general interest to a general public.

In this issue, four action research studies represent a good spread of investigators who have endeavoured to understand their contexts, and act upon their findings as they see best. I mean no offense when I refer to these 4 pieces as excellent by-products of their business, for each give insight into the more central intentions of their work. The first study, undertaken by Lauren McNamara of Brock University examines the various factors that may make recess a less than pleasant experience for elementary students in four Ontario schools. In the second study, Jill Munro, Marilyn Abbott and Marian Rossiter from the University of Alberta explain how they endeavoured to help two teachers support English Language Learners in their classrooms. Elaine Ball and Paul Regan, in the third study of this issue, outline two British projects and explain how an ill-fitting methodology can lead the goals of a study astray. Finally, Joyce Heskial and Nathalis Wamba from Queens, New York, display how action research projects can humanize a system that has adopted common core learning standards.

And now, gentle readers, I ask you to not merely receive these articles for the sake of mild interest and perusal, but to use them as a means of reaching the true goal of action research - benefiting those who need it most.