


Editorial

he origins of action research have been attributed to American social psychologist Kurt Lewin, who developed a theory of action research in the 1930s, which served as a basis for legitimizing this type of work (Adelman, 1993). After a number of studies in neighbourhoods and factories, he posited that participatory research, or what he termed action research—rather than top-down research—produces greater productivity and satisfaction among participants because it encourages involvement and, as a result, creates an ethical and democratic means for making change. Lewin believed that action research, “develops the powers of reflective thought, discussion, decision and action by ordinary people participating in collective research” in specific contexts (Adelman, 1993, p. 8). Action research in education came about in the late 1940s and early 1950s when it was used largely for addressing complex problems such as inter-group relations and prejudices (McKernan, 1988). Subsequently, action research became the basis for the teacher research movement in the U.K. which was precipitated by Stenhouse in the 1970s. Proponents of this movement believed that all teaching should be research based and carried out by teachers themselves. In the late 1980s and the 1990s, the work of Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Susan Lytle did much to develop the teacher research movement in the U.S. In their widely acclaimed book entitled “Inside Outside: Teacher Research and Knowledge” (1993), they argued that

Teacher research is a form of social change wherein individuals and groups labour to understand and alter classrooms, schools, and school communities and that this project has important implications for research on teaching, preservice, and inservice teacher education ... Because teacher research interrupts traditional assumptions about knowers, knowing, and what can be known about teaching, it has the potential to redefine the notion of a knowledge base for teaching and to challenge the university's hegemony in the generation of expert knowledge for the field. (p. xiv)

Since these early beginnings, action research has continued to expand into many types of research contexts. More commonly known as “participatory action research” or PAR, it is carried out by researchers who strongly believe in the participatory nature of the work, and the need for social justice and change. The term “action research” is used less interchangeably with “teacher research,” probably because teacher research has most often referred to school-based work, although both have common roots, and are based on similar ideologies. Recently, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) have used the

term “practitioner inquiry” as a substitute for teacher research in order to embrace and include researchers in universities, as well as educators in schools, who carry out alone, or in collaboration with others, participatory research predicated on the early tenets of Lewin’s theory of action research. For the purposes of this issue of LEARNIng Landscapes, and after careful consideration, we chose to use the term “teacher research” because we thought it would attract contributions from a wide variety of educational contexts. We are pleased that our call for submissions did just that. We have five very interesting commentaries and 17 articles that provide, through examples, excellent nuances of teacher research. As usual, these contributions are arranged alphabetically, but they are addressed thematically in the editorial.

Invited Commentaries

In a compelling commentary, **Susan Groundwater-Smith**, Honorary Professor at the University of Sydney, Australia, urges the academy to recognize and affirm teacher research with open and hospitable arms. She argues that this reflective research is what needs to become a form of knowledge that has currency in the university system, and that teacher researchers have a right to belong to the research-based community of practice. **Judith McBride**, a retired special education teacher from the Riverside School Board in Quebec, discusses in an interview how she first became interested in action research while attending a two-week professional development course with Jack Whitehead, the well-known action researcher from the U.K. He challenged the educators he was working with to examine their values and, as a result, Judith describes how in the process she underwent a total transformation of her perspectives on teaching. She became a staunch teacher researcher and advocate for action research, and shares examples of how, over many years, she has worked and published with educators from different schools conducting research in this field. These experiences have proven to be professionally transformative and engaging. **Karin Rönnerman**, Professor of Education at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden, draws parallels between teacher research and the collaborative learning that was part of the early 20th century Nordic tradition of group knowledge produced in “study circles.” In study circles, people met regularly to reflect together and expand their knowledge in a process that was based on voluntary participation, informal leadership, open access, and a belief in informal learning. In the 1970s, study circles evolved into “research circles” which were partnerships between universities and communities and/or schools. They focused on praxis and were predicated on the same tenets that were part of Lewin’s action research theory. She illuminates her analysis by sharing some recent examples that emphasize the importance of developing teacher leaders in the context of teacher research. **Sarah Schlessinger**, Lecturer and **Celia Oyler**, Professor, both at Teachers

College, Columbia University, describe an action research project in which “action teams” for K-12 educators in New York City provided an engaging and safe space in which educators shared their work, explored their pedagogical beliefs, and analyzed power relations in classrooms and schools. These teacher researchers were validated by this work, and developed greater agency to act more definitively for social justice and inclusion in their school contexts. In the final commentary, **Ken Zeichner**, Boeing Professor of Teacher Education at the University of Washington, provides in a passionate interview, the need for teacher educators to develop an inquiry orientation among preservice teachers, in order to foster a teacher researcher stance from the outset. In an example, he describes how this may best be done in a third space independent from the bureaucracy of the university. He argues that failing to do this will ultimately remove the responsibility of teacher education from universities. These thought-provoking commentaries provide an excellent backdrop for the articles that follow.

Inquiry as Stance

In an important article included here as a reprint, **Cochran-Smith** (cited above), a main contributor to the teacher research movement in the U.S., juxtaposes the stories of two novice teachers, Gill, who learns to teach successfully and thrive over time, and Elsie, who leaves teaching after just one year. Among several factors that contributed to Gill’s success were finding a supportive peer group, sustaining high expectations for students, participating in nested communities of practice, and having an inquiry stance mindset. Cochran-Smith calls for much needed and increased attention to the complex, multiple, and interrelated factors that affect teachers, and the ways to acknowledge and support the varied identities, roles, and ways of knowing of teachers. **Fichtman Dana** outlines the important differences between “inquiry as project” and “inquiry as stance.” This is brought to life with the inclusion of a short video that follows the work of one teacher who embraces the idea of inquiry as stance. The video highlights the important dimensions of this stance, which include data collection as an integral part of teaching, the seamless blending of teaching and inquiry, and the commitment to creating a more equitable classroom.

Practitioners as Researchers

Haling and Spears, in a collaborative teacher researcher project, show how when the focus was shifted from reading accuracy to reading comprehension, the understanding of student abilities was modified. It became apparent that oral miscues were not related to loss of meaning, and specific instruction with students on miscues demonstrated how meaning making occurs and validated the students’ strengths as readers.

The authors suggest how action research can overcome the limitations of evaluation criteria. **Campano, Ngo, and Player** describe a collaborative practitioner research project that focused on second-language immigrant youth conducting inquiry projects in the context of a community centre. These youth researched their families and neighbourhoods. They illustrate with two interesting examples how the youth gained from the experience, and also how the practitioner research process helped these researchers to challenge some of the previous suppositions they held about second-language immigrant youth at the beginning of the study, and to rethink curriculum as a result. **Casey** studied her own practice as she integrated social and participatory media into her high school classroom. She discovered that the unique qualities of media engendered participation and student-to-student learning. This dynamic process necessitated that she redefine her ideas and values about teaching, and that both she and her students shift their perceptions about what constituted “good” teaching. **Schechter, Arthurs, Sengupta, and Wong** describe how their practitioner research enabled them to attain new and important insights about a lack of awareness about parents’ migration narratives among generation 1.5 language minority students, which produced language transmission discontinuities and complicated their social lives. They argue that what they gleaned in this process enabled them to consider promising pedagogical approaches to help foster academic success and identity reconciliation among these youth. **Roberts-Harris and Sandoval** share how what started off to be a collaborative, voluntary teacher research project with elementary school teachers in a charter school was so successful in providing valuable reflections and insights into teaching that it became a mandatory practice for all teachers in the school and a substantial part of teacher evaluation. Yearlong teacher research projects culminated in a festival of the work shared among teachers, administrators, and community members. The sharing validated these research efforts, and extended the learning among staff and beyond. The study showed how this type of rigorous, reflective practice enhances learning, and makes teachers credible insider experts. **Nelson** relates her experience in a collaborative practitioner research project, or what she refers to as a collaborative action research (CAR) project that she conducted with three middle school teachers interested in enhancing student voice in their classrooms. The teachers did this by partnering with their students and including their input into the classroom pedagogy. The teachers learned immensely from the students in the process. Nelson notes, however, that this teacher research works well and is accepted in low-stake areas of the curriculum, but runs into difficulty in the high-stake curricular areas where prescription, accountability, and student scores dominate and teachers have limited influence.

Teacher Research in Higher Education

Preston, Jakubiec, Jones, and Earl examine B. Ed. student experiences when incorporating Twitter into an undergraduate course, and how the learning gained by these students enhanced collaboration with the instructors. These authors suggest that acquiring digital literacy in undergraduate courses is a key component for developing digital practices in future classrooms. **Luke and Rogers** describe how they studied their collaborative planning, reflection, and teaching with 90 elementary education students. Although they experienced some moments of discomfort and distress in this process, they emphasize how collaborative reflection greatly deepened their professional growth, and led to more effective and practical solutions to problems as they arose. **Burbank, Goldsmith, and Bates** used a format of teacher research to study the accreditation experience at their university. Their findings emphasize the need to view the accreditation process as an important time for meaningful and useful self-reflection, rather than as just a “hoop-jumping” exercise.

Teacher Research Projects Among Higher Education Students

Professors in higher education, who are proponents of teacher research, frequently encourage their students, who are often teaching while studying, to embark on teacher research projects. **Heinrichs**, a recent M. Ed. graduate, examined how children, parents, and teachers can benefit from the coordination of home visits. She concluded that knowledge gained from home visits can help to enrich curriculum, create a more inclusive classroom environment, and remove deficit notions about children based on erroneous assumptions about children and their families. **Conway, Hansen, Edgar, and Palmer** describe how seven high school music teachers implemented action research projects in their classrooms over the course of one school year. They conclude that teacher research is an excellent way to bridge the gap between theory and practice, but cautioned that in some instances, the burden of conducting research while responding to the immediate classroom demands, can be onerous. For some, this resulted in abandoning the project. **Jamieson** developed a teacher research study of her grade eleven English classroom for her M.A. thesis. She focused on how to help students who were struggling with reading. She believed that through teacher research, empathy would help her to better understand and empower these students. She describes with examples how some of her students were able to make strong connections with the characters in the novel *Oliver Twist* by learning to take another’s perspective, and as a result, enhanced their literacy skills. **Mitton-Kukner**, a higher education teacher, studied retrospectively the experience of three graduate students as they individually conducted teacher research projects for their M.A. degrees. She found that while there was a good deal of engagement and learning in

their work as teacher researchers, they faced considerable challenges in the amount of time involved in this type of work, in the complexities of the tasks, and in balancing the teacher and researcher roles. She cautions that with the increasing workloads in teaching, it is important to ask how teacher research might be shaped to make sure it can be a sustainable process for teachers.

Two Sides of the Same Coin

It is a fitting conclusion to this powerful issue to discuss the contribution of two authors. **Gade** describes her own teaching and schooling experiences in India and subsequent teacher researcher collaboration in Sweden. She proposes that teacher research should be seen as both an invaluable process of self-study and of increased opportunity for collaboration taken on by those who have inquisitive minds, who get as close as possible to concrete practitioner action, use relational and imaginative approaches for realistic problem-solving, and ask important and pertinent questions. She suggests these “two sides” can then draw on and inform the much needed educational action in a timely and viable manner. **Currin** uses the villanelle, an ancient Italian and pastoral form of poetry, as a metaphor for practitioner inquiry which, “living at the overlap of theory and practice, is an excellent resource to that end, a framework not unlike the villanelle ...” (p. 158). The recursiveness and structure of the poetic form reflect the inquiry cycle as well as the simultaneous dynamic and static qualities of teacher research, and provide a rhythm to highlight and/or disrupt at pertinent junctures. This metaphor engagingly affirms the long-held beliefs about teacher research, and stretches our ways of thinking about it.

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