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Editorial: Building the community of action research through publication

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EDITORIAL

Building the community of action research through publication

Many governments around the world seem to have been infected by what Pasi Sahlberg termed “GERM” – the Global Education Reform Movement (2012) - with emphasis on increased privatisation, competition, standardised tests, strong accountability through ‘policy by numbers’ (Lingard 2011) and large-scale statistical studies. This does not create a context conducive to local, qualitative, or action research studies. Yet, despite – or perhaps because of - such policy ‘infections’, action research studies continue to be undertaken, on both small and large scale, as demonstrated in the pages of this journal, among other sources. As Stenhouse (1975) defined it, research is systematic inquiry made public; the continued publication of reports of action research studies provides a counter-narrative to the dominant emphasis on large-scale statistical studies, as well as complementing the wide range of research methodologies that need to flourish for robust educational research across the globe.

A key means to sustain such studies is the ‘imagined community’ (Anderson 1991) of action researchers and educators who are the ‘public’ for our reports. This edition of *Educational Action Research* embodies a global group of researchers – with Turkey, Spain, Colombia, Malaysia, Australia, Norway, USA and the UK all represented – whose work is put out there to engage with others through a virtual community. Many action researchers do not take that final step to ‘meet’ through writing and build this ‘larger community’ – for a range of reasons, including privileging the local community or the ethical need to protect participants. However, we need to appreciate the efforts put in to public sharing that both symbolise and develop these communities.

Susan Noffke has been a key global community builder around education and educational action research, including a stint on the editorial board and book reviews editor for this journal. Sadly Sue died on June 1 2013. A small group of her colleagues and friends remember and appreciate her work, both published and lived out, in the first section of this volume. Bridget Somekh, who co-authored and co-edited with Sue, starts off by sharing the text of her personal memories originally developed for a video presentation sent to the memorial service at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign where Sue worked for twenty years. Marilyn Cochran-Smith, a former president of the American Educational Research Association, offers her opening talk from the memorial symposium at AERA 2014, which gives a professional overview and appreciation of Sue’s contribution to the field and the USA education research flagship organisation. The three following short papers were also presented at that symposium. Marie Brennan, who co-authored with Susan since 1987 – including a forthcoming entry in the Action Research Handbook – notes Sue’s local and international activism as a scholar. David Hursh remembers Sue as a ‘quiet’ and ‘unpretentious’ radical, committed to democracy in and through education. Ana Maria Sierra, a former student of Sue, finishes up the section by honouring Sue’s commitment to social justice and how action research fits with her approach to education.

All the other articles in this volume emerge from higher education settings – again a statement about the spaces people find/make inside a sector that is dominated internationally by statistical competition through the use of league tables of institutions. The studies cover several domains: the teaching of English, teacher education, doctoral dissertations using action research, and integrating fund-raising as part of undergraduate curriculum.

In the first paper, on the teaching of academic writing using English in a university in Malaysia, Alison Abraham explores issues of power in teaching. The second paper has many resonances with the first, although quite differently designed in relation to data; Mehmet Uztosun, Nigel Skinner and Jill Cadorath consider how to negotiate with students to support speaking in classrooms in a Turkish university English language classroom. Both studies provide important data for teachers and endorse the importance of working *with* students around language since language is so important to identity and the social.

Deborah Zambo in the third paper reports on the use of theory in action research EdD dissertations, looking both at the range of theories and their link to the focus for action. This paper deepens discussions about the role of theory in action research, including when and how decisions about theory might be made. Moving from examining doctoral dissertations to pre-service teachers' reports on their projects, the next paper by Marit Ulvik reflects on facilitating two cohorts of pre-service teachers' projects conducted around their practicum placement, examining the utility of the project to the incoming professional and specifying the conditions needed to make the most from the opportunity. Another paper on pre-service teacher education, also focussed on a Masters cohort, is organised around expanding reflection and reflexivity for the teaching profession as collaborative dialogue. Here Luis Villacañas de Castro actively explores what he terms 'meta-action research' under tough conditions – both the socio-economic and the teaching conditions. The final article in the volume presents a case of how a project on fund-raising might enhance the student undergraduate experience, highly topical in many universities. Lastly, Terry Locke provides a helpful analysis in his book review of Andrew Townsend's text on the challenges of understanding and changing practice through action research.

Finally, we would like to thank all the reviewers, on behalf of our global community. The journal cannot operate without this voluntary work of the journal, often through several iterations of feedback to authors. Readers, writers and reviewers help form and support the direction of local action research, large and small in scale. Our appreciation for one another's contribution needs public articulation. Thanks, all.

Marie Brennan,
On behalf of the Editors.

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