

Editorial

TEN YEARS OF ACTION RESEARCH WITH OAR

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With this issue, the *Ontario Action Researcher* celebrates ten years of being in business as a purveyor of action research projects and a lightning rod for discussions in this field of study. That this journal was founded in the first place may be chalked up to a special alignment of the stars. And that this journal has survived this long is perhaps a testament to the tenacity of grassroots researchers in the face of rather inhospitable conditions.

Few may remember the founding of this rather quiet, unassuming periodical, and fewer still may be able to track its history as it has slowly grown in readership and stature. Now may be a good time to reflect on these events and take stock of how far we have come.

The *Ontario Action Researcher* came to fruition in 1998 during the annual conference of the Ontario Educational Research Council (sadly, an organization that the OAR has now outlived). This association, dedicated to providing opportunities for grass-roots and university researchers to meet and discuss their similar passions and professions, had been running the conference for forty years. Each one had employed a theme to drive the discussion, and for this “ruby” anniversary the OERC had dedicated the event to *Action Research*. Numerous speakers from around the province attended to share their class- or school-based research. Discussions abounded: Jack Whitehead, Thomas Ryan, Fran Squire, Lindy Zaretsky, Tom Russell, and Lynne Hannay all lent credence to this field of study. Two researchers, Jackie Delong from the Grand Erie District School Board and Ron Wideman from Nipissing University showcased their new publication funded by the Ontario Public School Teachers’ Federation *Action research: School improvement through research-based professionalism - professional development kit*, and inaugurated a new journal that they hoped would be a continuation of this venture.

During the preparation for the conference, it had been decided that there existed such a thriving action research community in Ontario that an instrument should be created to promote and broadcast these findings. To this end, three stakeholder groups initially pledged support to create an on-line journal. The Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario (ETFO) and the Grand Erie District School Board (GEDSB) contributed funding, coordinator personnel and meeting space. Nipissing University’s input was the perpetual use of website space and webmaster support.

Using their book as a first step, Jackie and Ron took the initiative and worked quickly to create the journal and mark out its parameters. It was decided that the journal would publish 3 issues a year, each containing an editorial, one article on a general topic of action research and a number of specific studies. All articles would be reviewed by at least two members of a board that included academics and practitioners (who were chosen based upon their proven expertise as action researchers at the university or school board level). The initial structure of the journal’s bureaucracy consisted of two co-editors (one from the GEDSB, one from Nipissing), a coordinator provided by the ETFO, a review panel, and a webmaster by Nipissing. From 1998 to 2001, the two co-editors were its founders, Jackie Delong and Ron Wideman, and the journal proceeded apace.

As anyone who has lived through the past ten years will attest, it has not been a particularly pleasant time for the teaching community in Ontario. After a particularly nasty strike action in 1998, divisiveness has been the byword between the various research stakeholder groups in this province. Teachers became increasingly isolated within their classroom, principals were given more of a managerial role than “lead teacher”, school boards seemed like hazy apparitions in the distance for most schools, unions fought harder for their members’ security than research projects, and the universities were increasingly seen as more and more out of touch by all these groups.

It may come as no surprise that the OAR has not been immune from the vagaries of this suspicious atmosphere. By 2000 the partnership of research stakeholders had reached the end of the line. At this time, the ETFO took great umbrage with the fact that Nipissing University was providing professional learning program (PLP) courses as part of the Ontario Conservative government's mandate to take over professional development for in-service teachers. ETFO, arguing that they should be the sole providers of this service, cut most financial ties with Nipissing University at this time, including its continuing funding of the OAR. With this, OAR's ear-marked coordinator was lost, to be replaced by the goodwill of Nipissing's research coordinator, Jan Ross. Financially, the Grand Erie District School board followed ETFO's lead, although Jackie Delong remained on as a co-editor.

In early 2001, with no funding or assigned coordinator, the OAR suffered another blow. Jackie Delong, already a full-time superintendent, decided to pursue doctoral studies, and Ron Wideman took on the onerous job of associate dean at the faculty of education. Both made the decision to step down as co-editors. At this time, Cheryl Black (a vice-principal from the Grand Erie Board) and I were recruited to fill the positions.

A rather naïve dilettante in the world of action research, I accepted the job thinking I would merely be choosing themes for issues and writing the occasional pithy editorial. The adage of fools rushing in where angels fear to tread now comes to mind. From the moment I took on the job, I entered a roller-coaster ride of editorial decisions and work that I had never anticipated.

The dark days hit pretty quickly. Within a year, Cheryl made the decision to pursue a doctorate, act as the new president of the OERC, and take a lessened role at the OAR. At this time, no official money was forthcoming from external sources and Jan had more pressing university duties than helping run a journal. Reviewers began to disappear or were hindered by other work. Finally, our webmaster, Mickey Sandula retired. As anyone perusing the journal at that time would notice, issues came out sporadically (only 2 issues in 2001, and 1 issue in 2002). But still the submissions came in – from university researchers who wanted a peer-reviewed forum to display their work, and from practitioners who wanted someone to see what they had discovered in their classrooms. This was heartening and the decision was made to keep the journal alive.

Finally, in the spring of 2004, grant money was given to procure a part-time coordinator. Paula Millard, a young graduate of the B.Ed. program replaced Jan Ross and threw herself into the job. At the same time, the university's new web technician, Christine Ferguson, agreed to act as webmaster for the site and quickly renovated it to its present design. Between the three of us, we managed to restructure the journal by Spring of 2005. Rather than co-editors, an Editor-in-Chief was created to oversee all activities of the journal. To lend advice for larger strategic planning (i.e., scope, policy, controversial submissions) a three-person editorial board was created. Eventually, three active and enthusiastic researchers were recruited to the job. Dr. Janet McIntosh of Nipissing University was the first to lend support. I approached Dr Julian Kitchen at the 2004 OERC conference as he was accepting an award for action research project of the year. He first agreed to submit his work in the OAR and then was happy to sit on the board. Finally, just last year, I met Krista Walford at a Ministry of Education conference. Having done a great deal of action research at OISE and at the ETFO, she was happy to donate her time and expertise to the OAR. For the first time, I felt confident with a solid, knowledgeable advisory body behind the journal.

In late 2006, ear-marked funding and perquisites were finally given (albeit quite modest) from Nipissing University. A webmaster now has the assigned responsibility for posting new issues and maintaining the site, while the duties of a coordinator have been outlined (readying submissions, correspondence, promotion and maintenance) and ratified by the university administration. After years of seeking out the best action-research specialists from across the country who were willing to serve, the journal now boasts a 24-member review panel of solid referees. Sadly, (or gladly) Paula left us for full-time employment, and has been replaced by Linda Payne.

When I began in 2001, I had no idea about our readership numbers. I only knew it was small. Over time, however, our impact has consistently grown. Through much discussion and paperwork, the OAR is now part of the *EBSCO network* (<http://search.ebscohost.com>), and has just signed an agreement with *ERIC* (<http://www.eric.ed.gov>). OAR is presently accessible through the *Ontario Scholars Portal* (<http://www.scholarsportal.info>), a consortium of 18 Ontario universities, and linked to countless on-line data bases and research-related resource pages for various societies. To name a few:

- Phi Delta Kappa (<http://www.pdk-ut.ca/research/index.php>)
- *NewJour: The New Journal and Newsletter Announcement List* (<http://library.georgetown.edu/newjour/index.html>)
- Td-net for Transdisciplinary Research. (http://proclim4dpubli.scnat.ch/4dcgi/td-net/en/Detail_Journal?ontario%20action%20Researcher)
- The Living Action Research Website (<http://www.living-action-research.org/writings/links.htm>)
- The Action and Research Open Web (AROW) at the University of Sydney (<http://www2.fhs.usyd.edu.au/arow/w/links.htm>)
- Action Research SIG of the American Educational Research Association (<http://coe.westga.edu/arsig/ejournals2.htm>)
- The Center for Scholarship of Teaching, the Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI (<http://www.educ.msu.edu/cst/onlineresources.htm>)
- The University of Saskatchewan Library System (<https://library.usask.ca/ejournals/view/1000000000108457>)
- The Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm (http://search.kib.ki.se/miks/bin2/tidpost.exe?&kib_id=332692)
- The National Writing Project (<http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/resource/465>)

Through these connections (and Linda's soliciting) we now have a list of over 400 dedicated subscribers, and a monthly readership of about two thousand.

For me, the role as editor has become one of the most educational experiences of my life. Dealing with shoestring budgets, temperamental reviewers, submissions, subscriptions, correspondence, complaints, web designs, cap-in-hand poses and endless editing have had a humbling effect on my character. This, of course, has been tempered with the great rewards that I have found with this job: Meeting people who are truly passionate about the subject of Action Research, helping to create a unified voice for the subject and bringing people together as a community. I have come to understand how necessary a peer-reviewed journal like the OAR has been to add legitimacy and grounding to an important and neglected form of research. Presently, the OAR is the only Canadian journal exclusively dedicated to this area. As well, it is one of the few journals found world-wide that bridges the academic and practitioner communities through the use of scholarly dialogue and debate.

Most important, this journal has given me the chance to help give voice to those researchers who have something to say. This special anniversary issue is no different. It gives me pleasure to introduce three action research projects who are worlds apart, yet all share the zeal for examining their situation with the desire to better it through study and improved practice. **Tamara Thorpe** in her report, "Youth Learning from the World, Leading in their Community", looks at a special group dedicated to the ongoing promotion of peace through education. At the university level, **Nathalis Wamba** and his class of educators turn their own course into an action research project and explain it in their article "Learning by Doing: An Action Research-Based Pedagogy." Finally, **Geraldine Van de Kleut** studies gender roles through a rather dramatic research project with her grade 2 class in "I Know! It's Backwards Day' Gender Roles and *William's Doll*".

I wish to thank all the submitters, the reviewers, support staff and readers for enabling this journal to continue for 10 years. I can only hope that, with your continued interest, it is still in its infancy!