

Editorial

THE BIRD'S "I" VIEW OF RESEARCH

Kurt W. Clausen, Editor

When one reads an action research report, one is apt to find the word "I" strewn around quite a bit. One of our articles in this episode is a prime example: Jonathan Pitt and Kris Kirkwood write, "How did I learn...". Elsewhere you will see frequent use of personal pronouns such as "me", "we", and "us". To any traditional researcher this is blasphemy indeed! Should the researcher not give a bird's eye view of the situation? Rather than being mired in the woods where you can't see the forest for the trees, would it not be better to rise above bias and fly in the cool air of objectivity?

For the past few generations, convention within the university walls has insisted that authors take this advice and write with minimal intrusion of personal pronouns, insight or commentary. Perhaps, this movement has been due to the influence of science and logical positivism into almost all forms of scholarly treatises. Regardless, the desire has been to see work presented as "objective", dispassionate and disinterested. That way, the researcher would be seen as unbiased and the work of greater validity. This has led to a strange dichotomy – everyone wants to hear what a writer thinks, but what a writer says must be seen as logical and rational. For this reason, the emotive style of writing has been eschewed as an untenable ladder to "the truth". Instead, facts must be gathered, reasonably presented, and then left to "speak for themselves".

Of course, a lot of tricks have been created over the years to get around the "I" in article writing. The first is to let the inanimate creature of your creation do the talking (i.e., "the report concludes that...", "the survey of literature revealed", or "the results indicate the following..."). The second is to take the passive approach, fade back into the scenery and make it seem like the research handled itself (i.e., "the survey was administered...", or "a random sample was taken..."). Finally, you may continually defer to some well-known third party to make the statements you wish to make in the first place (i.e., "Renown (2002) makes the similar argument that...").

However, never using the first person in a research article can sometimes be as false a rule as never using a conjunctive adverb to start a paragraph. Sometimes, raw emotion and genuine idiosyncrasy must trump convention and gentility. A few logical reasons for using an "I" throughout a research report do exist. First, "I" allows the author to speak in a more assertive tone. Rather than hiding behind various blinds to make a point, s/he may take ownership of the statement being made. This may sound too bold for an academic, but, at certain points Walt Whitman must be given due diligence:

"I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you."

In this way, the personal pronoun should be the only one to use, as only we can know our own experiences, and only we can sing about them. And, in doing so, the author traverses the artificial separation of writer and reader.

In a similar way, it allows the reader to understand where the author situates him/herself within the project being described. Is the author a participant? A reporter? An onlooker or intimately involved? What authority can the author claim? This can only be understood when the author makes a greater connection to the writing.

Finally, when an author tries to avoid the "I" (or if s/he completely embraces the "I") at all costs, s/he can be led to unnecessary literary gymnastics: it becomes too vague or too direct, too impersonal or all too personal, stuck-up or far too familiar. Either way, the writing style inevitably deteriorates into an awkward and artificial piece.

In my first reference to myself in this editorial, therefore, I would like to turn the tables on those who prefer the rationality of “the bird’s eye view” over all others. Is it not just another perspective (albeit one with more altitude than attitude)? From the lofty perch, does not this view also present only one biased take on a subject? In fact, I would venture a guess that from where the cat-bird sits, it is difficult to tell whether the forest is living or petrified. In the end, does it not take all forms of fauna to fully understand the flora?

In this issue, three sets of “I”s will be looking at the trees in order to navigate the forest. Specifically, all three articles outline the projects that they undertook at an action research level to examine non-traditional and previously untried techniques within the school setting. First, **Jonathan Pitt** and **Kristian Kirkwood** of Nipissing University look at constructivist teaching methods to aid a mathematics course in a split-grade junior classroom. **Liyan Song** and **Jeffrey Kenton** from Towson University then study the effectiveness of the action research model in school through their experiences as teacher educators. Finally, **Mark Dollard** and **Kate Mahoney** from SUNY Fredonia, use a quasi-experimental approach to weigh the success of the jigsaw method when applied to a grade 8 science class.