

Editorial

ACCLIMATIZING PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS TO ACTION RESEARCH: WORTH THE EFFORT?

Kurt W. Clausen, Editor

Like many western countries, Canada (and especially Ontario) has seen its curriculum increasingly prescribed in the last decade. Resources billed as “teacher-proof” (I can almost hear the ring of “idiot-proof” in my head), and an augmented amount of content to cover have also proven to be recurrent themes of our era. These facts of life seem to reinforce the underlying drive by authorities to impose a business model on the school system, whereby principals manage teachers in the output of knowledge to a client-base (of students, presumably - or is it parents, or is it multinationals?). The higher powers outline and eventually tests what must be known at the end of the conveyor belt, and teachers have to insert this knowledge at a speed set by grade levels. And as the expectations keep moving in a downward spiral from grade to grade with each new iteration of curriculum documents, this whole process begins to resemble an academic version of Chaplin’s *Modern Times*.

In short, events of the last decade have led many educators to feel disempowered as professionals and have softened them up to the idea of seeing themselves as mere line-workers. Dedication to educating and experimenting has been replaced by a desire to be accountable and follow orders. This has meant bad news for the field of action research in general. This is due to the fact that for this technique to succeed, teachers have to believe that their situation is unique, with a special set of circumstances, connections and individuals. As such, they must also believe that they are the best (nay, the only) specialist that can deal with this particular site. Finally, as a professional, they must feel unfettered in their ability to weigh the evidence, look at what’s really going on at a micro-level, and decide on the best course of action.

Sadly, the conditions of the action researcher and of the contemporary classroom travel in different courses a great deal of the time. For that reason, it would be rather naïve to believe that, left to their own devices, teachers will naturally become action researchers. In the past, this might have been so, but as the present climate has changed, so has the species *teachus omnibus*. Without warmth from administration, without time to do anything but prepare for the next day, without professional development from anybody outside their classroom, and with little encouragement from any corner of the educational world these days, this poor creature can no longer evolve beyond transmitter to become a researcher as well.

It is precisely for this reason that the responsibility of teaching about action research and self-study rests on the backs of the university. From the outset, when there is time and when a teacher’s habits of mind have not been set in stone, teacher candidates must understand the high priority that this aspect of teaching should be given throughout the educational community. Only from this source and through grassroots maintenance will this technique flourish. From this, professionalism will hopefully evolve from caretaker. This is, of course, if teacher empowerment is what is desired by the school system and universities.

In this issue of the *Ontario Action Researcher*, we present three university-based academics who focus on bringing pre-service teachers (and faculty members) into a larger realm of action research so that as they enter their careers they will be more attune to it. **Dereje Tadesse** from Haramaya University in Ethiopia, examines English as First Language student teachers as they deal with Schön’s and Brookfield’s approach to practitioner inquiry. At the University of Windsor, **Dr. Zhang** tries out an on-line method of action research to aid his students in a teacher education course. Finally, **Dr. Peterson** and her research team brings together the university and the public classroom as her team endeavors to come up with innovative ways to aid teacher-based research out of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.