

Editorial

EFFICACY IN ACTION RESEARCH

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At first glance, there may seem to be little connection between the three articles in this issue of the *Ontario Action Researcher*. However, upon closer inspection, there clearly is an overriding theme of efficacy (the power to produce a desired effect or result) that runs through.

In the first article, "Enhancing Reflection by Pre-Service Students through Action Research", **Julian Kitchen** and **Diane Stevens** use the notion of self-awareness as a means to efficacy. The authors set out to examine the degree to which engaging in action research heightens self-awareness among pre-service teachers. Arguably, the terms self-efficacy and self-awareness can be used interchangeably. In fact, John Creswell (1998), a leader in the field of qualitative research and inquiry uses the two terms to define reflexivity, a key attribute to knowing oneself, identifying strengths and weaknesses and making changes in practice to effect positive change.

In the second article, "Increasing Student Motivation in the Middle School Classroom", **Mary Lou Shears'** study, although clearly set within the parameters of middle-school mathematics, also relies heavily on the notion of efficacy. She uses relevant literature to identify four key features of self-efficacy; namely, self-regulation, risk-taking, intrinsic motivation and mastery goals.

Authored by **Jennifer Jilks**, the third and final article, "Split-Grade Classes" takes a very different stance from the first two. Yet it too addresses efficacy, in that she attempts to create an "exemplary curriculum, despite the challenges of a high needs, diverse group" of children in a split-grade class.

The notion of efficacy no doubt lies at the heart of action research. As seen in all these studies, it is often the catalyst that propels researchers into action to change their current practice. A variety of vehicles may be used for capturing the concepts and processes that might effect these changes in one's own related environment. For example, Kitchen and Stevens use self-awareness, Shears uses self-regulation, risk-taking, intrinsic motivation and mastery goals, while Jilks uses professional reading of the literature. All of these ideas are highly esteemed and well used by action researchers. In fact, they are all components of reflective practice integral to the practice of action research.

Creswell (1998) uses the idea of self-awareness to describe what it means to be reflexive (p.9). Self-regulation and intrinsic motivation are necessary for reflection while professional reading provides fodder for thought for connection making. In this vein then, it could be argued that efficacy is also closely aligned with reflective practice. Reflection in action research allows one to name practices, to identify areas of concern, to attempt to identify reasons for these concerns, to identify potential solutions and finally to implement the solutions. This process forces one to problem-solve at a level that encourages the internalization of thoughts and ideas in a deeply meaningful and sustainable way. Finally, effecting change that can produce a desired effect, or efficacy, is based on self-knowledge. Parker Palmer in *The Courage to Teach* (1998) reminds us that "good teaching also requires self-knowledge: it is a secret hidden in plain sight" (p.3).

In essence, this edition of the *Ontario Action Researcher* contains three very different articles that use different avenues, each relevant to the individual authors, to demonstrate the promotion of efficacy in teaching. Enjoy!

References:

Creswell, J. W. (1998) *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions*. London: Sage.

Palmer, P. J. (1998) *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc.