

Editorial

ACTION RESEARCH AND THE ROLE OF THE "MIDWIFE"

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Well, my art of midwifery is in most respects like theirs; but differs, in that I attend men and not women, and I look after their souls when they are in labour, and not after their bodies; and the triumph of my art is in thoroughly examining whether the thought which the mind of the young man brings forth is a false idol or a noble and true birth.

Plato, *Dialogues, Theaetetus*, p. 150

With a few glaring differences, these words, spoken by Socrates and transcribed by Plato in the fourth century B.C., may very well apply to the authors of this issue of the *Ontario Action Researcher*. Each article represents a segment of the educational community that does not give birth to ideas at the grade-school classroom level, but through dialogue, aid, and mentorship, eases the delivery. Indeed, this segment of the action research process too often fades into the background once the bustle is finished. Quite frequently, myths begin to emerge that action research is a sole activity, or something that can only be engaged in between peers. While lone action research is indeed an achievable (and heroic) endeavour, it can also lead to a number of difficulties that may endanger the project: You, the lone researcher may indeed have a "false idol", or a project that you may feel of great use, but in actuality may be off-base when helping students learn; Your project may wither away due to lack of attention as other aspects of your job take priority; Your project may become stunted due to the confines of your four classroom walls; Because you may want to get the implementation over with quickly, you may not realize the steady pace needed for a project to develop; and finally, at times you may need someone with expert knowledge to console you that this project is actually needed; not just a symbol of more work. These issues have been raised by a number of researchers in the past (for example, see Arnold, 1998; Daresh & Playko, 1991, 1992; Fullan, 1991; Lieberman, 1995; Little, 1990, Merenbloom, 1996; Tyack & Tobin, 1994).

This volume will look at the activities of people who, from the side, attend to these problems as they help teachers deal with classroom delivery. In the first article, "Self-study in Action Research: Two teacher educators review their project and practice", **Julian Kitchen** and **Diane Stevens** close off their award winning four-part series with an internal examination. They look at how effective their project was in helping new teachers become reflective on their actions at the classroom level. The second article welcomes Professor **Thomas Ryan** back to ask a question of classroom teachers worthy of Socrates himself: "When you reflect are you also being reflexive?" The final article, "Teacher research as a mode of delivery for professional development" allows us a ring-side seat of the work done by **Elizabeth Kreuger** and her colleagues at the Eastern Townships School Board as they struggle with helping classroom teachers deliver quadruplets. Her role was to guard against that most deadly of implementation afflictions: Initiative overload.

To end his metaphor, Socrates remarks that

...I am barren, and the reproach which is often made against me, that I ask questions of others and have not the wit to answer them myself, is very just - the reason is, that the god compels me to be a midwife, but does not allow me to bring forth. And therefore I am not myself at all wise, nor have I anything to show which is the invention or birth of my own soul, but those who converse with me profit. (Ibid, 150)

Here, there exists a metaphorical difference between our contributors and Socrates – it rests on their relation to the people who benefit from their labours. Socrates professes a lack of wisdom, and this is due to his desire to remain uninvolved. He helps his students learn, but they do not touch or change him. This is clearly not the case with these three authors. They have not merely helped to mentor their students along, but in doing so have changed their own thinking and have become fertile contributors to the larger dialogue.

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