Editorial

VALUING THE COLLABORATIVE NATURE OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Janet E. McIntosh, Guest Editor

> Professional learning communities are exemplified by collaborative reflective exploration of issues and problems with the intent of generating strategies which will bring about positive change.
> Ontario Ministry of Education (2005), *Education for All*, p. 53

Participation in professional learning communities is an integral part of conducting action research. The collaborative nature of these groups is of foremost importance. Research reveals that positive change occurs in classrooms when one engages with others in such learning communities. When given opportunities to engage in dialogue and research with others, professional practitioners are exposed to new ideas and theories. Through active reflection, they ponder them and often consider embracing them into their own practice. Collegial support is a necessary and beneficial aspect during this process. "Engaging in dialogue with another professional will heighten your awareness of knowledge you've generated about teaching and that you now take for granted, making what you know more visible to yourself and to others … in talking to others, you are able to generate possible alternatives to practice as well as consider different interpretations" (Dana & Yendol-Silva, 2003, p. 51).

Currently, in the province of Ontario, there is a prevalence of professional learning communities being established for educational research, both in schools and university settings. By taking a closer look at research conducted within these structures, we can gain a better understanding of why they are valued by teacher-researchers. Exploring the nature of collaborative learning communities is a focus for this volume.

The first article, **Jack Whitehead's** Keynote Address, "Living Inclusive Values in Educational Standards of Practice and Judgment" examines creating knowledge in living theories of our lives in education. Reflected in his research is the University of Bath's emphasis on the education of professional practitioners and promoting original inquiry and collaboration. Whitehead views "practitioner-researchers as knowledge workers who are creating and sustaining learning communities in their organizations".

Brock University's **Arlene Grierson** and **Vera Woloshyn**, "Transforming Literacy Assessment Practices through an Action Research Professional Learning Community", provide article two. A professional learning community's effects on teachers and how the support provided assists with facilitating sustainable change is examined. During the action research study, participants' perspectives are legitimized and the collegial support provided contributes to changes in classroom-based assessment practices.

The final article, "The Genesis of a Hybrid Writing Instruction Approach through Action Research", written by **Alison Engemann** and **Tiffany Gallagher** (Brock University), involves a collaborative research study of a grade 2 teacher and a university professor. Teaching formative writers to communicate through two writing instruction approaches – trait-based and genre-focused is the focus. The classroom teacher's reflective practice is nurtured through the process of action research; the university researcher's role as supportive colleague is valued.

Creating and sustaining collaborative learning communities is of value to many teacher-researchers. Collegial sharing and encouraging one's research partners contributes to the

positive changes that occur. As we reflect on our current practice, we might wisely consider how engaging in professional learning communities could impact our own research programs.

References

Dana, N.F. & Yendol-Silva, D. (2003). *The Reflective Educator's Guide to Classroom Research*. Thousand Oaks: Corwin Press.

Ontario Ministry of Education. (2005). *Education for all: The report of the expert panel on literacy and numeracy instruction for students with special education needs, kindergarten to grade 6.* Toronto: ON: Author.