

TEACHERS LEARNING TOGETHER: THE MATH JOURNEY **An *Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO)* Initiative** **Editorial**

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Guest Editors

Welcome to the first of two special issues of the *Canadian Journal of Action Research* (CJAR) arising from the *Teachers Learning Together* (TLT) project of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO). Over a period of three years, beginning in 2007-2008, ETFO supported teams of teachers across Ontario who conducted action research for the purpose of improving teacher practice and student learning. Education faculty members from a number of Ontario universities provided facilitation and guidance to these teacher teams. The Ontario Ministry of Education provided the funding for the *Teachers Learning Together* initiative.

In the first year (2007-08), the approximately 40 elementary teacher teams were granted considerable latitude in their choice of subject and topic on which to focus their action research. Five university researcher teams were each assigned several teacher teams to support during the year. In addition, they conducted case study research on some of the teacher teams with whom they worked.

In the second round of TLT (2008-09), mathematics was added as the main focus, with the project otherwise maintaining the spirit of giving teacher teams substantial local decision-making power. The project then became known as *Teachers Learning Together: The Math Journey*. The first major experience of the project was a summer symposium, during which all participants came together to be introduced to the project and to each other. The Introduction section of the handbook (ETFO, 2008) that was distributed to all participants at this meeting described *The Math Journey* as

an exciting initiative allowing for groups of teachers from the same school or similar roles to come together in an action research project relevant to their specific needs and circumstances. . . . to explore an action research question they created focused on mathematics. (p. 7)

In each of these first two years there were opening and closing symposia, and all teams—teacher and university faculty—were asked to write a final report of their experience and research. Some teacher teams continued their mathematics collaborative action research into a third cycle, the second half of the 2009-2010 school year.

ETFO chose action research as a major professional learning model that they wanted to support during this time because it provided teachers with greater opportunity to control their own professional growth. They wanted to move away from models in which teachers were the passive recipients of received expert wisdom. In contrast, action research was “job-embedded and connected to [one’s] classroom.” As the handbook (ETFO, 2008) added in the “What is Action Research?” section:

Action research is a powerful learning tool for teacher learning. It is grounded in classroom practice and enhances teachers’ satisfaction in their professional work and contributes to the development of the teaching profession. Teachers intrinsically question, observe, take notes, collect data, learn and reflect. Teachers also have an intrinsic desire to improve their practice. Action research allows teachers the opportunity to formalize this process in a purposeful, systematic way.

The three of us, Franks, Jarvis, and Wideman, took part in the second year of the project as one of the university groups charged with facilitating the local mathematics-based action research of several teacher teams in north-central Ontario, and with conducting our own case study research of three of these teams. With so many Ontario teacher groups experiencing at least some degree of success with their research projects, it seemed natural to explore the possibility of encouraging the teams to go beyond their final reports and present their research in an academic journal, thus extending their readership. We were subsequently invited as guest editors with the *Canadian Journal of Action Research* (formerly the *Ontario Action Researcher*) to do just that, and in the late spring of 2010, a call for papers went out to all teachers and researchers involved.

In the two issues devoted to the TLT collaborative action research we are pleased to be able to present articles that speak to the experiences of all of the major constituent groups involved—ETFO project coordinators, teacher researchers, and university researchers. This present issue begins with an interview with the two principal ETFO project leaders. This is followed by two teacher team articles in which they explore their respective efforts to deepen students’ mathematics understanding, as well as their own, through stronger mathematics communication in the classroom.

Jane Bennett and Ruth Dawson took the lead on the *Teachers Learning Together* project right from the beginning. In the interview they offer their often candid and passionate insights into what went right (much), as well as where the challenges and lingering questions lay.

Di Teodoro, Donders, Kemp-Davidson, Robertson, and Schuyler asked themselves, what makes a good mathematics question? and, how does one distinguish between *surface* and *deeper* questions? Most important, how does deepening one's ability to ask good questions, whether teacher or student, promote greater mathematics understanding? These four participants are all Primary level teachers at four different schools, but their article shows how they were able to work together, including co-teaching, to develop substantial insight into their research question.

Friedman, Kazerouni, Lax, and Weisdorf, all teachers in an elementary school with a substantial ELL population, choose geometry, with its challenging and substantial vocabulary, as the content focus of their action research. They wanted to see how they might improve students' mathematics conceptual understanding by strengthening their ability to communicate mathematically. They share how, as a team, they were able to achieve some level of success through the development and implementation of Personal Math Concept Charts in a wide range of grade levels.

The second issue will relate research from the other teacher teams, as well as reactions from the university researcher teams as they share their experience in that capacity through an innovative combination of text and multimedia presentation. Whether you are an experienced or novice action researcher, we hope that you will find in this two-issue special edition of the *Canadian Journal of Action Research* practical ideas and insights into collaborative action research that will have you wanting to explore the research possibilities with your colleagues.

REFERENCES

Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario. (2008). *Teachers learning together action research guide*. Toronto: Author.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE:

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