

Welcome to the Fall 2012 issue of *Washington State Kappan*, sponsored in part by the University of Washington Bothell Education Program and the Goodlad Institute for Educational Renewal. This issue, “Continuous Improvement through Action Research: Moving Forward, Staying Positive,” explores action research from multiple perspectives. According to Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009), action research “is commonly used to describe collaborations among school-based teachers and other educators, university-based colleagues, and sometimes parents and community activists. Their efforts center on altering curriculum, challenging common school practices, and working for social change by engaging in a continuous process of problem posing, data gathering, analysis, and action” (p. 40). In this current time of accountability, high-stakes testing, and teacher quality measures, action research is more important than ever as a way to engage in inquiry across levels of education.

This issue begins with a guest commentary by Bradley Portin, who ponders what it means to know something. He observes that teaching is a profession of questioning, and that asking, “How do I know?” is an invitation to shared learning, a process of inquiry through which educators may develop collaborative professional learning as well as a deep understanding of practice.

In the second piece, “Urban ELL Facilitators Inquire into their Leadership Practice: Teacher Leader Action Research,” Chrysan Gallucci and colleagues examine three action research projects conducted by teacher leaders working as English Language Learner (ELL) facilitators. These authors assert that teacher leaders exercise leadership when they see themselves as researchers. Stephanie Forman describes the first project, titled, “Inquiry into Student Experiences: Using Student Surveys to Inform General Education Teachers about Their English Language Learners.” Shawnda Fukano outlines the second project, titled, “Data-Driven

Planning for English Language Learners: Utilizing ELD Data to Support Classroom Instructional Decisions.” Rachel Hoff describes the third project, titled, “The ELL Specialist and the Classroom Teacher: Providing Support for Newcomer English Language Learners.” These action research projects illustrate the diverse and powerful connections that can be made between action research and inquiry-oriented teacher leadership, resulting in shared inquiry and collaborative professional development.

In the third article, “Sharing Ownership of Secondary Literacy Instruction: An Action Research Study,” Rachel Johnson and Dixie Massey examine an action research project focusing on improving literacy instruction among an interdisciplinary team of ninth-grade teachers. Their work describes initial teacher misconceptions about students’ literacy skills and documents positive changes in teacher perceptions and knowledge over time. Johnson and Massey continue this discussion of action research in the companion article, “Is it Worth It? Reflecting on the Impact of Action Research,” in which they consider the utility and sustainability of action research. These authors suggest that to be sustainable, action research must move beyond the individual and become part of an integral culture of inquiry at the school level—a culture that must include administrators as well as teachers.

In the fifth article, “Lesson Study as a Form of Action Research for Instructional Leaders,” John Gebert and Margery Ginsberg describe a research project conducted by Gebert, a school principal. Working with a group of colleagues, he examines the effectiveness of using a Lesson Study process to design staff meetings where teachers experience the same conditions for learning they seek to create for students. This article illustrates the benefits of action research for administrators, and reminds us that a culture of inquiry and innovation may be cultivated at a district level as well as within a school.

In the sixth article, “Leading from the Classroom: The Effect of Collaboration on Improving Content Area Literacy Instruction,” Kari Wilson describes an action research project focused on informational text reading strategies and teacher collaboration. Her work with a team of high school teachers highlights the benefits of action research at the classroom level such as increased teacher knowledge and changes to instruction, while also pointing out obstacles such as time constraints and the need to ‘cover the curriculum.’

The seventh article explores action research from the perspective of both university professors and high school students. In “‘I am the Master of My Fate’: Professors and Teenagers Conduct Action Research on Student Motivation” Fred Hamel and Michael Hillis describe a project examining the effects of an educational reform model on students’ academic motivation. This collaborative effort emphasizes the power of action research as a means of shared inquiry. It also illustrates the impact action research may have across levels, from student learning to teacher knowledge to the research and practice of teacher educators.

The eighth article, “Partnering with Families on School Improvement Inquiry,” expands the discussion of action research to include parents. In this piece, Margery Ginsberg describes three forms of family partnership that help support the learning of diverse learners. From home visits to shadowing students to classroom information gathering, Ginsberg helps us think about ways to develop school-parent connections and to involve parents in collaborative action research.

A new feature of *Washington State Kappan* is a section providing reviews of books and other recently-published professional materials of interest to educators. For this issue, Kristin Courtney has provided a thoughtful review of Ellin Oliver Keene’s recent book, *Talk About Understanding: Rethinking Classroom Talk to Enhance Comprehension* (2012). This text is an

excellent resource for teachers wanting to utilize classroom conversation to help students more deeply understand what they read. We look forward to additional reviews in upcoming issues.

In all, this issue explores action research from multiple perspectives, illustrating its importance as a means of shared inquiry as well as its role in sustained and meaningful professional development. The next issue of *Washington State Kappan* will be an open call, so I encourage you to develop and submit a manuscript that explores an issue of research, leadership, or practice that would be of interest to educators in Washington State. Please see the full call for manuscripts on the last page of this issue.

About the editor:

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