

Editorial

The present issue of the *International Journal of Action Research* presents articles from a variety of social contexts and theoretical perspectives. This is quite in line with action research and especially with this journal's guidelines, as stated in its front page: "IJAR is problem driven; it is centred on the notion that organisational, regional and other forms of social development should be understood as multidimensional processes and viewed from a broad socio-ecological, participative and societal perspective". The problems that drive researchers are as diverse as social reality, and the authors who join us in this issue will guide us through some interesting and challenging paths.

The first paper, "Stable Flexibility –Long-term Strategic Use of Temporary Agency Workers in Sweden", by *Kristina Håkansson, Tommy Isidorsson, and Hannes Kantelius*, deals with the exchange process between the temporary work agency and the user firm, trying to explore how the use of blue-collar temporary agency workers has become a long-term strategic use of the user firm's staffing strategy in Sweden. This is today a global situation in the work place with distinct nuances, revealing profound changes in the job market and in the meanings classically attributed to jobs. The dichotomies: flexibility/inflexibility and stability/instability, are taken by the authors as their basic interpretative tools. Although written from the organisational and managerial perspective, the small voice of the workers reveals what may be the weak end of the exchange between the user firm and the temporary work agency. According to the findings, job insecurity is highly prevalent among agency workers, which raises the question whether this should be seen as just a natural development of today's globalised capitalism.

Using symbolic interaction as an interpretive framework, *Courtney Ann Vaughn and Daniel G. Krutka*, in their article "Self-Reflections, Teaching, and Learning in a Graduate Cultural Pluralism Course" analyse how students

wrestled with identity issues in a graduate course on Cultural Pluralism. Each day's activities and the reflection sessions are presented as detailed narratives. Among the conclusions the authors point out that "to varying degrees students came to understand and appreciate that their personal soul searching was inevitably culturally entangled." The article presents an interesting description of a process of perspective taking and self-understanding, even if within a relatively short period of time. As action research is largely based on collective self-reflection, the content should be of interest for dealing with sensitive issues as gender, ethnicity and race.

The article by *David Coghlan* could be read in connection with the above one. In "What Will I Do? Toward an Existential Ethics for First Person Action Research Practice" the author explores how action researchers may engage with the process of making value judgements regarding to what may lead to actions that are ethically "worthwhile" or "truly good". Underlying the author's first person approach is the assumption that all articulated values are located within a tradition, and that inquiring into and engaging in appropriating our own process of valuing enable both rich personal understanding and fruitful dialogue with others, and collaborative action. As the author suggests, "the article is an invitation for readers to engage in their own first person inquiry and to verify for themselves how, while we engage in action research and attempt to make our choices transparent, we are working from the realm of interiority whereby we are able to experience, understand and judge how we make value judgements, and thereby understand how our subjectivity works."

In the review of Henri Bortoft's book *Taking Appearances Seriously: the Dynamic Way of Seeing in Goethe and European Thought*, John Shotter portrays action researchers as "participants caught up in already ongoing processes who must produce *from within them*: in the face of both the constraints and limited resources their circumstances offer them, recognisable utterances and actions, recognisable sounds and movements." This type of "witness-thinking" finds support in the reviewed book, where Shotter emphasises the metaphor of upstream and downstream thinking. Positioned on a bridge, downstream thinking means turning the back to the place where the stream originates and comes from, while upstream thinking, on the contrary,

means paying less attention to well established concepts, and being open to more diffuse, “still-to- be- differentiated” terms and realities.

We thank the authors for choosing to share their research and reflections with IJAR, and all our readers for their interest in this journal.

Danilo R. Streck

Editor-in-chief