

December 2007

# ARC News

## Action Research Center Launches Partnership with the University of Puerto Rico

On September 28, 2007 ARC Director Mary Brydon-Miller facilitated a day-long workshop for faculty and students from ten campuses of the University of Puerto Rico system titled "Action Research and Appreciative Inquiry: Developing Strategies for Positive Change on your Campus and in Your Community". This workshop marked the beginning of a partnership between the ARC and the UPR Center for Access and Success located on the UPR Mayagüez campus.

University of Puerto Rico Mayagüez faculty members Dr. Rima Brusi, in the Department of Social Sciences and Dr. David González, from the Department of Industrial Engineering, recently co-authored a white paper examining the issue of access for disadvantaged students at the UPR Mayagüez campus. Their study shows that students from low-income families, and especially those living in local housing projects are less likely to enter the UPR, less likely to graduate, and less likely to take part in majors such as engineering that lead to higher paying jobs. Brusi, González, and their colleague Dr. Sandra Dika from the University Office of Research and Planning, along with colleagues from across the UPR system are focusing their efforts on recruiting and retaining more students from low-income neighborhoods.

They decided that Action Research would provide an effective strategy for addressing this concern and have established a multicampus project dedicated to using "participatory projects to involve active students from low income groups and other stakeholders in the process of identifying the obstacles to access and success and ways to mitigate or eliminate those obstacles"

The workshop provided those attending the opportunity to learn more about action research and to begin to develop projects targeted at addressing this common concern regarding access and success within the distinct contexts of the ten UPR campuses and their surrounding communities. Brydon-Miller and other ARC members will provide support to these projects through a weblog designed to facilitate the sharing of resources and dialogue among action research teams at each campus and their partners at the University of Cincinnati. The projects will focus on developing effective strategies for addressing the issues of recruitment and retention of disadvantaged students at each UPR campus. The results of their efforts will be presented at a conference to be held next spring and plans are currently underway to develop a publication based on this important work.

### Inside this issue:

- **ARC Launches Partnership**  
Page 1
- **"Picturing" Health Through the Eyes of Latina Tweens & UPR Partnership (cont'd)**  
Page 2
- **The Thrills, Spills, and Chills of Community Service- Learning & Building a Network of Action Researchers**  
Page 3
- **Round Table Discussion with Emily & Building a Network of Action Researchers (cont'd)**  
Page 4

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 2)

## PHOTOVOICE: “Picturing” Health Through the Eyes of Latina Tweens

Lisa Vaughn, Ph.D. recently conducted a community-based research project funded by Harmony Garden. The Latina Tweens Photovoice Project recruited seven Latina girls (tweens ages 8-12) from community organizations. The purpose of the project was to conduct a participatory needs assessment to better understand Latina girls’ perceptions of health and immediate health concerns. The girls attended an information session where they received disposable cameras and training on the research method. The girls spent 3 weeks photographing their lives according to the assignment. At the end of each week’s assignment, researchers collected the cameras and developed the film. The girls then engaged in a photo discussion session where they participated in free-writes, sharing, and reflection upon their photos.

The girls composed two sets of presentation boards—a theme-based set and personal boards with their favorite pictures—with captions throughout that represented the group’s discussion about particular photos. The girls identified eight themes about what being healthy means to them: *Dealing with Difficulties; Being Environmentally and Politically Aware; Limiting Health No-No’s; Doing the Right Thing; Being Safe—Being Secure; Having Everything in Balance; Using Positive Coping Skills; and, Having Support.*

On December 2, 2007, the girls presented the Photovoice gallery to the public in the lobby of Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center. They were available to answer questions about the project and a guest book was provided for comments at the greeting table.

Conducting a needs assessment which concentrates on the voices and needs of school-age Latina girls is the first step to creating sound, cost efficient and successful programs and interventions specifically suited to this group. The power of such a project is that the ultimate prevention program will be informed by and specifically designed and implemented based on the assets, needs, and voices of the Latina tweens themselves. An added benefit is that in the process of the participatory needs assessment using Photovoice, the Latina tweens are likely to become more empowered to make positive choices in their lives and their health-related behaviors.

This project was conducted in collaboration with Dr. Liliانا Rojas-Guyler of the Harmony Garden and Ms. Ligia Gomez of the Norwood Babies Milk Fund.

## Action Research Center Launches Partnership with the University of Puerto Rico—(cont’d)

While faculty and students from the UPR campuses are developing AR projects designed to address issues of access and success for disadvantaged students, Luisa Seijo and her colleagues Dr. Francisco Maldonado Fortunet and Ann Macpherson at the University Institute for Community Development have been conducting participatory action research projects in a number of sites across the island. During her visit Mary had the chance to visit two of these sites. The first was a community garden project in the town of La Playa led by nutritionist, Macpherson. The second was a project designed to increase community engagement in planning and participating in events at the Museo y Centro de Usos Múltiples dedicated to the life and work of Puerto Rico’s most famous sociologist, Eugenio María de Hostos. This beautiful museum located in the mountains above Mayagüez includes a permanent exhibit focusing on Hostos’ career and temporary exhibits dedicated to the issues to which he dedicated his life—social justice, women’s rights, and Latin American unity and independence from colonial rule.



David González and  
Sandra Dika

## **The Thrills, Spills and Chills of Community Service-Learning: Lessons from the East St. Louis Action Research Project Featuring Dr. Kenneth Reardon**

By Bernard Young

When I had decided to attend the presentation and subsequent discussion featuring Dr. Kenneth Reardon on the East St. Louis Action Research Project, an effective University – Community Partnership, I had expected a discussion focused on the development of a primary relationship between the academic community and a depressed urban community. As a person who lived in a depressed neighborhood, I stereotypically come dressed in blue jean pants and jacket. I held the expectation that the majority of those present would also be casually dressed. I was a bit off the mark. While I did not feel particularly out of place, I did feel that with all the dress suits and the attendance of members of the university community, there was a broader show of interest in the idea of a University/community coalition than I had initially anticipated.

I had also anticipated that the presentation would focus on how academics and their associated institution brought a process to the community on its own terms and was able to redirect community leadership, advance cooperation, and improve success rates within a neighborhood. OK, I was wrong again. Dr. Reardon was not focusing on his success or the success of what the institution could bring to the community. In fact, he took a position that was very opposed to this. The ideas that Dr. Reardon was most excited about moved the center of focus to the community. Dr. Reardon was able to describe how a process developed through a partnership between the community and university created the conditions by which the university became accountable to the persons being serviced for the services and outcomes that would be produced. Dr. Reardon was excited about the strength gained by supporting a structured relationship that went beyond just being respectful and acknowledging the strengths and wisdom that preexisting in the urban neighborhood's leadership. The St. Louis Research Project incorporated the skill and knowledge of urban leaders to define issues, starting points for resolution and identifying concerns that should be included in program evaluation.

## **NAARA Summit II North American Action Research Alliance Building a Network of Action Researchers**

By Bernard Young

The University of Notre Dame was the site of the NAARA Summit II. The University, a teaching and research university offered an atmosphere that was supportive of a lively discussion among experts and novices who were interested in the theme "Building a Network of Action Researchers." This meeting was the second meeting that focused on the concerns of building such an association. Twenty-seven professors, graduate students, and project managers of diverse disciplines and experiences came from locations in the Midwest and northeastern United States. The organizations represented included New York University, St. Mary's College, University of Illinois/ Urbana Champaign, University of Cincinnati, Bowling Green State University, University of Kentucky, Robinson Community Learning Center, University of Toledo, University of Louisville, Montclair State University, Children's Hospital Medical Center-Cincinnati, Goshen College, University of Wisconsin, Loyola University and our host the University

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 4)

## ARC Hosts Round Table Discussion with Emily

On November 12, 2007, the Action Research Center hosted Emily Nelson. Emily is an educational researcher and professional development facilitator in Hawke's Bay New Zealand and recently completed her M.Ed. Her thesis research in 2004 used auto-photography (e.g., Photovoice) and elicitation interviews to find out more about how early adolescent students perceive school and learning, their identity as learners and young people, and how they feel about the world in which they live. She was traveling with a colleague from the University of Vermont, Penny Bishop, a renowned middle schooling educator and image-based researcher.

Ms. Nelson's thesis research won the AERA Middle Level Education Research Graduate Student Award. Emily came to the US in November 2007 to receive an award and present the findings of her research to the Middle Level SIG during the NMSA conference. Afterwards she traveled to the University of Vermont to speak to the staff and students there.

Emily's visit in Cincinnati included a discussion about her research as well as what the UC ARC community is doing. Ms Nelson was thrilled to meet other researchers who use image-based methodology coupled with listening to students. The conversation lasted a good two hours and later Emily recorded a podcast that will be posted on the ARC Web Site at a later date. Several people indicated that they would like to see this group of researchers meet on a quarterly basis. Steve will be coordinating those efforts. Stay tuned.

## NAARA Summit II North American Action Research Alliance Building a Network of Action Researchers—(cont'd)

of Notre Dame. The purpose of the summit was to continue a process of defining, organizing, and gaining commitment to establish a regional association that might serve as a USA model leading toward a truly national association collaborating with the World Congress of Action Research.

Dr. Mary Brydon-Miller, University of Cincinnati, and our host Dr. Mary Beckman, University of Notre Dame, drew on the skills of the attendees to move the process forward through a procedure of discussion groups and open debate. The summit identified three primary areas of unification for the development of an association. In general, the areas are 1) academic career development supporting Action researchers, 2) ways of communicating knowledge and best practices, and 3) legitimate support of action research as a research methodology in community regardless of academic discipline. The summit formed working committees around these areas of concern, expecting that the committees would report on their work during a future conference call.

## UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI ACTION RESEARCH CENTER

### Steering Committee:

Flavia Bastos  
Kathy Burklow  
Thembi Carr  
Wayne Hall  
Stephen Kroeger  
Helen Meyer  
Mary Brydon-Miller  
Lisa Mills

## Action Research Center Membership Report 2007

The University of Cincinnati Action Research Center membership has increased by 30% this year. The total membership stands at 61 individuals. This community includes faculty, teachers, community health researchers and workers, students, community activists, and national and international action researchers. Center members are involved with the Action Research Center in multiple ways, including receiving newsletters, planning and presenting at center meetings and active extension work at national and international forums. Approximately 60% of the members are associated with UC, as faculty or students. The remaining members are divided between community organizations, consulting services, and local schools.

Membership in the Action Research Center is open to all interested parties and is free of charge. Members can determine their level of involvement and interests in center activities. Please invite individuals you believe would be interested in the Center's activities to contact Helen Meyer, membership coordinator at: [Helen.Meyer@uc.edu](mailto:Helen.Meyer@uc.edu)