1. For researchers or students who have never encountered *Educational Action Research*, what is the journal about in a nutshell?

CMG: We have in the back of the journal the main aims, and we’ve put there something that actually reflects the history of the journal, which is exploring the dialogue between research and practice in educational settings. Originally, the journal was targeted at teachers and teacher practitioners, but we have now expanded the journal so that it actually covers a variety of different areas. We’re interested really in any kind of action research that’s related to educative practices, and that could be also community development, health and social care, business, design...

AT: ...higher education. So the educational side of this is a generic purpose about the action research which is being conducted, but there is also a sense that action research, the use of the term, is open and inclusive, it isn’t intended to be limiting. So you’d consider applications of action research which are broad and apparently quite different, but also might consider the conduct of practitioner research or the facilitation of practitioner research as part of that as well.

CMG: I think what we’re saying is that they all share in common trying to end the dislocation of research from practice, we’re talking about research being fundamental to and informing practice development.

PT: The connection that most research has to practice is that people do a research project and then they make a set of recommendations about what should happen in practice. Action research is different in that the research and the action occur simultaneously, so the research is actually about change at the same time, rather than change as a result of the research, and I think all of the traditions of action research – of which there are many – share that as a kind of fundamental characteristic, and all of the traditions share a commitment to cycles of practice and action and reflection on that action, and for action and about action. And so there is a bringing together of intellectual and practical activity in what in action research is known as praxis, and all of the traditions I think are built on that, although it’s been developed differently in different countries. There are distinctive traditions in the US, in parts of Europe, in Australia and in England, and if you look at the journal you can see those traditions mirrored and sometimes we even have Special Issues that discuss those. We recently had a Special Issue which looked at the history and current state of action research where people from those various traditions discussed the state of the art.

CMG: I think the other fundamental thing is, it’s actually about the role of, and who is the researcher, in action research. Traditionally it would have been academic researchers going out and doing the work and, if you want, looking down a microscope at other people and describing what they were doing and making recommendations, not somebody who was part of that situation of practice, whereas if you look at the accounts in the journal you will see either they are by the people who are facing the situation themselves – whether that’s a teacher, a police officer, a social worker or a nurse – or it may also be that a trained academic researcher with a passion, an interest in action
research acts as a catalyst or a facilitator in that process. So it’s a different set of skills and a different role for the researcher.

AT: Which in turn raises questions over the nature of participation and the production of knowledge and the understanding of that context. So there is an argument about locating the research around practitioner research, or action research, which is about a complex understanding of a particular context. But there is another, more principled view, which is that the people whose praxis is being informed or developed through these kinds of processes should have a big part to play in them, in the production and knowledge about them and in the decision about what praxis actually occur. And that is then sometimes extended, so there was another Special Issue looking at voice for example, and how voice might occur within action research or through the process of action research. In some of those cases, what you could see was extended participation of an action research, working with a group of participants and wanting to engage with their voices through this process of change.

2. What do you think are the most contentious issues in contemporary debate and research in education which Educational Action Research seeks to address?

CMG: One issue that I feel very passionate about and relates to the earlier point, is about whose voice is being heard in action research accounts. In the field of, for example, health and social care there has been a big issue not only about practitioners undertaking action research but involving people who are on the end of care or involved in a social care situation, often called service users. We’ve had a Special Issue on health and social care that brought attention to that in particular, and there was an article by Phil Cotterell who gave a very interesting account of involving service users with life-limiting conditions throughout the research process, but particularly focussing on the data analysis stage and looking at the different kinds of things that people who are actually confronting that situation bring to the floor when they’re looking at data, vis-a-vis somebody coming in with an outsider perspective.

PT: I think there’s also been, in some countries more than others, over a period of time quite a concerted policy move to remove from various professions recognition of the knowledge-producing capacities and responsibilities of the professions, and I think that action research in particular and practitioner research stand fairly and squarely against that trend and asserting and supporting the rights and responsibilities of professionals to be engaged as active knowledge-producers. I think if we had to think of a crisis around education – and by that I mean the discipline of education or the field of education, and I suspect also nursing and social care as well – then these are professions which in some places have been systematically for some time been given blueprints and recipes and scripts by people who are deemed wiser and they, and I think that’s something which the community of people involved in and around this journal and some others devoted to action research and practitioner research stand fairly solidly against. But a further complication is that sometimes action research and practitioner researcher is mobilised by policy makers in very instrumental ways, and they want it to portend to designated outcomes and aims, and again I think that is something that has been quite some commentary on in the journal over time. I can certainly recollect a keynote that Stephen Kemmis gave at CARN which was published in the journal, after it had been through a peer review process, which drew attention to the dangers of a narrow, instrumental view of what action research might be about. I guess that draws attention to one of the other fundamental axiological premises of action research which is that it is generally intended to
be, in one way or another, transformative and liberatory. It’s not intended to create change for its own sake but change which actually makes things better for people for whom circumstances are not as favourable as they might be; people who are vulnerable, people who are de-powered and powerless are the kinds of communities that action researchers have typically focussed on and worked as part of.

CMG: There’s a very interesting article in the journal that was written by Jayne Crow, Lesley Smith and Iaín Keenan, where they talk about a project where they were, in the first instance, developing a curriculum around dignity and respect in a university setting with comparative autonomy, and there was an action group that developed out of it from people throughout a hierarchy in the health service who took it into a health service setting. They talk about those different contexts and the way in which they can impinge on some of the very philosophy and ethos of action research, and about some of the challenges that people meet when they’re in highly bureaucratised organisations. But it also is a very positive article because it shows what can be done when people are creative in the way that they actually undertake it. And I think that’s the other thing about action research, people have tended to pull on a variety of different methods, particularly around the creative and arts methods, in a way that other types of methodologies have yet to venture.

3. **Who do you feel are your readership, your core audience?**

AT: I think this is extremely broad, actually, and particularly for a journal like *Educational Action Research* it would potentially extend beyond traditional groups of readership you might think about for an academic journal. But the obvious candidates initially of course are students studying further or higher education who might be using action research as part of that process; academics who use action research to facilitate or support their students; but it may well extend beyond that to practitioners working in the kinds of settings that might be concerned with challenging some of the political ideologies that we talked about earlier on, developing their practice and having a part to play in the generational knowledge about those practices. We mentioned earlier on the link between the journal and CARN. CARN is the Collaborative Action Research Network, it’s collaborative in the sense that it spans more than just one field or tradition, but it’s an action research network of people who come from all sorts of walks of life and all sorts of backgrounds who have an interest in the process of developing and understanding and then representing and changing the context.

4. **What do you look for when considering articles for submission?**

PT: Firstly they need to be about action research or practitioner researcher. When I say that, I don’t just mean it’s something that a practitioner has done in their setting – the article has to be framed as a piece of action research or practitioner research and there needs to be a discussion of what tradition of action research or practitioner research is being mobilised in the article, because we want to understand how the people writing the article actually understand what it is they thought they were doing. So that’s number one for me, that it actually needs to fit the aims of the journal. And as I know a number of other editors of journals say, you would be surprised the number of articles we get that aren’t action research or practitioner research, and they really do just get sent back at the outset.
AT: But similarly, we get articles which are about action research or about practitioner research without explicitly associating the writing with that kind of traditional approach or perspective. It might have arisen from something that someone had been doing which could well fit within the aims of the journal, but because there’s no explicit link or even reference to some sort of core materials or other publications in the journal, it doesn’t actually fit because it doesn’t make a contribution to the action research or practitioner research component of this work.

PT: It’s got to be situated within the ongoing conversations of the journal. So if somebody’s writing about reflective practice for example, then there will have been 20 years worth of discussion on reflective practice that needs to be taken into account. Journals are not simply reports of what it is that somebody’s done. What any journal tries to do – and ours is no different – is to build a body of knowledge about a particular approach, in our case to doing research and changing practice. And so if people are going to make a contribution to what it is that that community actually knows, then they need to refer to the kinds of conversations that the community has already had. So people have to understand that they’re entering occupied territory, it’s not like nobody’s ever had a discussion about this before. And for me, I think the other things are pretty standard about what makes a good article. You don’t try and say too much, you’ve got one or two points that you want to make, the argument’s clearly made, it’s logically sequenced, it’s clearly written, the referencing is in the appropriate format. The secretarial things might seem trivial, but they are in a sense politeness, this is how you behave in this particular writing community, you follow these kinds of conventions. And while we’re open to a range of different writing approaches – we have recently published things which have got pictures, and things which have got bits of poetry and stories, and we have a Special Issue on Narrative coming up – at some point things do actually have to be sufficiently well-argued and well-signposted for readers to follow what it is that the writer is trying to say. Be clear about the topic and why it’s important, be clear about the way that the reader is going to find their way through the article, say what’s said elegantly and economically and as correctly as possible. I’m afraid for people whose first language is not English that does sometimes mean getting some additional help with proofing and with editing. While we’d like to be able to help people whose first language is not English, there is a limit to what we can do because we all have full-time jobs as well – this is a kind of gift economy in a sense, the refereeing and editing process – so it is incumbent on people if they’re publishing out of their first language to actually get the kind of support they need because I’m afraid that, while we can do a bit, we just can’t do enormous amounts.

CMG: I think it’s really helpful for people who are newer to publishing – as well as people who are not so new, in fact – to look through back copies of the journal, and look at the way in which things are structured, the way that they’re laid out. Think about what’s engaging – if they find an article that is engaging, why is it engaging to them? Try and follow some examples of published work that give them the hints, really, about what needs to be in a piece of work that’s going to be accepted.

5. What are your aspirations for the future of the journal?

PT: What we’d probably like to see I think is it becoming more and more inclusive of different disciplines, continuing that move away from simply looking at the field of education but understanding action research and practitioner research as being an educative process in itself. Seeing how the journal could support that kind of research and practice activity across a number of different professions and a number of different settings. We already have quite an international
audience and quite a diverse set of writers, but we could always do more in that area – we have recently added people from Japan, for example, to our Editorial Board – so we are obviously interested, as most journals are, in that kind of expansion. For me, one of the things about this journal is that, in a sense, we don’t have to worry about impact in the way that some other journals do because by the nature of what it is people are doing – action and change – they are already creating impact for their research, and what we are doing is carrying the narratives and arguments about what that actually might mean. This is not an arcane kind of work, even though there might be quite philosophical discussions and also highly nuanced practical accounts, this is all work which has very tangible manifestations in real workplaces.

6. What educational and/or policy developments do you feel have particularly shaped the journal and its content in recent years?

AT: I would come back to the discussion about the effect on practice communities, and the settings in which they work, of highly-prescriptive policy and seeing this journal as not necessarily a reaction against that but having a different point of view which is to challenge that. And I think the increase of the former, in other words the increase of prescription or an external intervention, means that this journal is more relevant than ever, and increasingly is becoming so.

7. How do you see action research and its effects on education developing in the future? Are there any particular questions and/or issues which you feel will come to the forefront for researchers, academics and practitioners?

CMG: I think something we’ve already seen debate about in the journal, that I imagine because of the economic context will become more prominent, are issues around sustainability in action research. There’s an ongoing conversation about how much autonomy practitioners have in the highly prescribed context to actually enable change within their own practice area, and whether they’re able to do that just as a group of peers or whether they’re able to effect something that’s more systemic that would have a larger scale of change. I think those sorts of issues, given that we’re seeing cuts and we’re seeing economic problems at the moment, will come more to the forefront in terms of the strategies that people adopt to try and embed the kind of developments in practice that go beyond the individual, or beyond groups of practitioners that are working together.

PT: At the same time there’s also, in a lot of places, a kind of credential creep in a sense. People in professions are getting more and more highly-educated, more people are taking up postgraduate options after their initial foundational education. A lot of those postgraduate courses turn to action research and practitioner research because people often come into postgraduate education wanting to do something that’s relevant to their workplace. I think that presents both particular opportunities and challenges, because it obviously creates increasing numbers of sites and occasions when people might undertake more systematic inquiry into their own work practices. But at the same time it also creates increased pressures to get a quick fix or to use action research or practitioner research as something which is going to answer: ‘what works in this situation?’ Action research actually is fundamentally about supporting ongoing inquiry and curiosity, and a kind of permanent state of investigation. If you are an organisation for example which mobilises action research and practitioner research, you’d want people not to be saying in the first instance: ‘how can I fix this up?’, but ‘what’s going on here and why is this the case, and how can I find out?’, and it’s that kind of stance that action research and practitioner research supports – that notion of a
permanent and ongoing quest to do the work better, understanding that it’s not just about doing and it’s not just about thinking, it’s about the way the thinking and the doing actually work together. That, at its heart, is actually what professional practice is about, that process of permanent dissatisfaction and permanent curiosity. I guess that’s an ontological sort of position, and an epistemological position, which we often do debate in the journal.

AT: In connection with that, you can then see why there would be so many people submitting articles about using action research in professional development and in professional development settings. And what it continues to do, this journal, this work around action research, is to challenge notions of professional development that are very instrumental, that are driven externally, that are presented as a solution to a pre-identified problem, or perhaps even presented as a solution without ever identifying a problem, and continuing to challenge that kind of perception of the way in which professional development and changes to professional practice occur. And I think that is as relevant now as I think it’s ever been, and increasingly so, I would suggest, with all sorts of changes in all sorts of sectors, not least the financial.

CMG: I think it raises issues of ethics as well to the fore. By which I don’t mean bureaucratised ethics but I mean the philosophy, the practice of ethics, and what it is that action researchers are really attempting to do, which we’ve drawn on in our earlier discussions. And that relates to the earlier point about policy context, for example in health and social care is very much around participation and involvement which can have a very positive side and be very supportive of action research, but can also end up in a situation where people are being asked to do a piece of participatory research in three months, which would be unethical often, with children or something. You just can’t do those sorts of things well in that time span. So I think you will see those bubbling through as well.

8. **Looking to the future, which countries or world regions do you feel will feature ever more prominently as areas of study in the journal?**

AT: This seems to be something which has been expanding and increasing recently, in terms of the readership of the journal and the people interested in it. As a journal, it’s got its history very much in Western, English-speaking countries but it has spread enormously since those origins and continues to do so. We’ve seen more involvement in Spanish-speaking countries, with a number of submissions from those sorts of areas, and we have recently had people joining our international editors from Japan, for example, so that geographical spread is continuing. And so is downloads as well actually, so there are many more students accessing this from all over the world.

PT: I think that means though that when people write, they need to understand they’re writing for a journal which is going to be read in a number of different places, and so things that are highly parochial are not really acceptable. People need to be able to situate what they’re doing and explain their context in ways that people, regardless of where they are, will actually be able to understand and to get the relevance of what this might mean for them and what it means for the body of knowledge that the journal supports. For me, it’s not simply about an expansionist view of the journal but an increasingly cosmopolitan understanding with which the journal operates and from which the writers also need to work.

9. **Are there any significant events on the academic calendar that you see being of strategic importance to *Educational Action Research***?
CMG: The annual CARN conference is a global gathering of people involved in action research from different countries debating contemporary issues. It’s very representative of a number of different professions now, so it’s an important annual event where people are encouraged to put forward papers for Educational Action Research.

PT: There are also a number of disciplinary conferences. There will be Special Interest Groups or strands of papers around action research, and I think you would expect to see that in education and nursing in particular and perhaps some other social care sectors, you’d expect there to be a substantial number of papers which are based around practitioner or action research, so it’s not that hard to locate the work going on if you’re interested.

AT: CARN’s got a number of spin-off associate networks as well which operate around the world, which will also have their local conferences. In addition to which there are study days as well and CARN has study days, in fact there is a plan to hold one about the journal which will be happening next Spring, which will celebrate 20 years of the journal and we’ll include more information about the journal which potential authors might find useful as well as a broader discussion of how it fits within action research.