GETTING TO KNOW ME: THE POTENTIAL OF ACTION RESEARCH TO PROMOTE ETHICAL REFLECTION

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Adorning the typical conference attendee badge, the “Values Mug Shot” sparked conversation and we dare say “envy” of those who did not attend the session on first person action research at a recent Association of Practical and Professional Ethics (APPE) conference. These mug shots were part of a discussion and participatory session on how one class of doctoral students chose to reflect on our own ethics and values, and how these tactics could be used in the classroom to encourage others to do the same. Due to a class exercise meant to create deep introspection on values, we stood before a group of conference goers, confident in our ability to share personal reflections on values and ethics. We were eager to share with others our experiences because we believed the methods we had learned—and in some cases developed—could be used in other classes to help students deeply, personally explore the “living out” of ethical positions. Our presentation incorporated experiential elements, allowing attendees to try out some of our methods. Now, this article takes another step, as we put into written form our project, including its theoretical foundations, specific examples, and implications for further use of this approach to ethics education.

All education can be seen as attempting to produce changes—cognitively, affectively, behaviorally, or some combination of these—and in ethics education this may be an even more central and crucial concern. Success seems to require change in all three areas, as students engage cognitively with the subject matter, which produces affective development, all resulting in modified actions. But such
ambitious goals require powerful pedagogical methods. Here having “covered the material”—or "teaching"—seems less important than students’ engaging with the material—that is, “learning.”

Logically, personal ethics provides a foundation for developing and exercising professional ethics. If this holds, then ethics education must at some level concern itself with personal ethics, something requiring individual reflection. Abstract approaches to a subject can promote personal reflection, assuming students extend their thinking into personal application. But how can reflective application can be built into education? How can it be translated into educational experiences?

What this necessitates is self-exploration: essentially, that means research into oneself. There is difficulty here, since one typically conceives of research as objective, third-person, distant—all traits impossible to apply in reflection. Reflection and personal application, then, seem to venture into treacherous—and, for many, uncharted—territory, a squishy area of subjectivity, lacking clear definition, accepted standards, evaluative criteria, the comforts of a widely known and practiced scientific method or research process. And how can personal reflection, something inherently internal, be reified into a classroom product?

We believe first-person action research provides an answer to these questions. Far from uncharted territory, action research provides educators with an established but flexible framework for engaging students in first-person, reflective work. Action research provides not only theoretical underpinnings for such endeavors, but also brings methodologies that can guide students in the process. After all, faculty are not alone in discomfort or unfamiliarity with subjective research: students have spent an educational lifetime learning that research is impersonal, removed, objective, codified. Action research can open doors into the self for students, as well as out into public for documentation and dissemination of the learning experience’s results. Here we present an introduction to this approach, along with examples from our own first-person action research projects.

**ACTION RESEARCH**

Action research (AR) is often seen as a third social-scientific methodological approach, along with traditional qualitative and quantitative methodologies. But another way to view AR seems more aligned with the AR field itself: rather than seeing AR as a methodology,
it may be helpful to see it as a research philosophy, a research point of view. Certainly qualitative and quantitative methodologies carry philosophical backgrounds, foundations and implications. AR differs, though, in that one may see the philosophy as the method—in Sue Noffke’s words, as “a moral and ethical stance that recognizes the improvement of human life as a goal” (4). Rather than its philosophical foundation ruling certain methods or practices “out” or “in” for AR, the movement’s philosophy frames the entire research situation. And while primarily qualitative in its practices, AR has room for quantitative data and techniques as well, when they serve the research purpose and situation (Stringer, 2007).

Rooted in an array of disciplines, AR arose as researchers sought to integrate their sociopolitical activism into their research and may be seen as having three key traits or elements. Rather than seeing research as “objective and value-free,” AR practitioners “embrace the notion of knowledge as socially constructed” (11) and explicitly recognize their work as value-laden. For action researchers, the question is not whether or not research connects with personal values, but rather what specific values do and should motivate the research. From its inception, then, AR has emphasized ethics, with research seen as a path to create not only social change, but social improvement. Social improvement is, of course, a highly contextual matter, and AR concerns itself not with generalizability but with “specific situations and localized solutions” (Stringer 1), which are seen as generating transferable, rather than generalizable, knowledge. This value-centered commitment to social improvement implies a second key commitment, to democratic processes and social justice. A third key element of AR is an “abiding respect for people’s knowledge and their ability to understand and address issues confronting them and their communities” (14).

Radically, AR revises—literally re-sees—the research process. Respect for peoples knowledge and abilities means that rather than study “subjects,” AR practitioners work with co-inquirers, co-researchers. Rather than approach a research situation having determined the “problem” and formulated it in “research questions,” AR practitioners facilitate their partners in identifying problems and raising questions, as well as in performing research to address those problems. This is not a question of “service” in the conventional sense: instead, research partners are valued for the knowledge and experiences they bring to the process, knowledge that arises from their identity as members of the community in which the research takes place (Reason, 2001). Used well,
AR empowers its participants, recognizing them as potential change agents who could help to create the better reality they envisioned together. Thus AR both changes its participants and makes change through them (Reason, 2001).

A recursive, cyclical process of action and reflection occupies AR's methodological center. Researchers recognize all they do as action, from the development of research relationships to the dissemination of knowledge gained through the process, which requires reflection to determine its efficacy. This reflection should generate further action, and so on. Reflection may be seen as “data analysis,” while action both creates and collects “data.” In practice, drawing a sharp line between the phases may be difficult, as reflection itself is a form of action, promoting changes in participants’ perceptions and ideas. As this process description demonstrates, AR’s commitment to change drives its processes, for all aspects of the research process necessarily make some change, even if only internal change in participants and researchers—who are themselves participants in AR.

Not surprisingly given its social-improvement focus, AR has tended to work especially with at-risk and disadvantaged populations, and academy-based researchers tend to develop long-term relationships with communities. But AR has also made its way into the classroom. Our own research sequence conducted by Mary Brydon-Miller is based on AR’s philosophy and methods of discovery: students live AR in the classroom before they implement it in an applied research situation.

**ETHICS IS ACTION RESEARCH**

Due to past research-associated atrocities, and the subsequent writings of the Helsinki Declaration (originally published in 1964) and the Belmont Report (1979), three ethical principles have been identified to offer protection to human subjects. These are autonomy, justice, and beneficence. Brydon-Miller (200-206) suggests that merely asking researchers to complete Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) training is not enough to ensure that research is “ethical” and is certainly not enough to inspire the researcher to conduct any type of self-reflection or encourage personal growth that would benefit both the researcher and the research participants. The call to move beyond the three ethical principles engrained in the minds of academic researchers has been made by Brydon-Miller (203), who maintains that by knowing ourselves from a value-based perspective, we can participate fully in AR.
She states, “Becoming aware of our own core values allows us to respond to unexpected ethical challenges or issues with a similar sense of being morally grounded and confident in our actions. It also gives us the opportunity to re-examine these values and to confront contradictions in our ways of understanding the world” (205).

Tying personal research ethics to AR is no impossible exercise of cognitive gymnastics. With the belief in social justice as an underlying premise of AR, the connection to the researcher’s ethics and values is paramount to the true success of any AR project. How can we, as researchers, be community partners, be trusted members of the community, without first discovering the ethics and values that bring us to want to conduct AR? More importantly, how do we know we are conducting research based on our personal values, since AR is heavily value-laden, without first exploring what those values are through reflection to understand better our own ethics and values? But researchers using AR are certainly not the only beneficiaries of personal reflection, nor should the idea of evaluating one’s own ethics and values be limited by the type of research being conducted. Any current or future researcher would be well served by having a well-developed reflection of personal views, values, and ethics.

It is fair to say that reflection is essential to critically dissecting our values and that it is only through this reflection that we can face the discrepancies between what we think are our values and how we live our lives and conduct our research. Do we display continuity between thoughts and actions, or is there a disconnection between the reflected value and deeds done? This discovery of potential breakdown between values and actions can prepare the researcher to resolve this disconnection prior to moving forward with research involving groups or communities that could be directly affected. We could ask the question, then, “How do you come to ‘know thyself?’”

**USING FIRST PERSON ACTION RESEARCH FOR ETHICAL REFLECTION**

One response to this question can be seen in first-person AR, which calls on practitioners to research themselves by engaging in critical reflection, particularly reflection into the relationship between one’s values/beliefs and one’s actions (Heen, 2005; Reason, 2001). First-person AR employs the action-reflection cycle so that critical reflection becomes the foundation for implementing personal change, which may then be reflected upon, leading to revised or additional change endeavors.
(Reason, 2001). Reason (2001) argues that first-person AR is not really separate from other AR endeavors: all AR calls on participants to engage, however implicitly, in this critical exploration of oneself and one's practice, so first-person AR may be seen as foundational to all other AR.

**OUR CLASS EXPERIENCE WITH ACTION RESEARCH**

In the first quarter of our AR sequence, Mary Brydon-Miller challenged us to identify some ethical aspect of our personal or professional practice that we wanted to change, to improve. Then, we were to seek to make that change, monitoring our process and ourselves. This enabled us to explore our values prior to creating and executing an AR project with other groups. The literature is sparse regarding strategies for conducting first-person action research, necessitating students’ reliance on our own creative thinking for exploring values. The value reflection in our class varied from person to person with a range from those exploring what kind of person they are, to those who know what value is most personally important, to those who are in touch with any discrepancies between what value is important and its connection to their actions.

While first-person AR can be conducted in many ways, we created various artifacts to track our project or to reflect on it, which we then shared with our classmates at quarter's end. It should be noted that this sharing, making public one’s private research, can be seen as an important and necessary component of first-person AR (Reason, 2001; Torbert, 2000). In a sense, using techniques such as we describe below provides one with some distance from self—perhaps the most difficult instance of estranging the familiar. The concept of “estranging the familiar” is drawn from literary studies, where this distancing action is seen as one function of literature: a literary work determines the approach to or frame of its subject matter and thereby forces a reader to see the subject in a particular way. This can present readers with a novel point of view, taking even a familiar subject (person, relationship, idea, object) and making it “strange” in the sense of new, thus enabling the reader to see it in new ways, to see new aspects or features of the subject. Similarly, by exploring our own thoughts and actions by writing, photography, collage or some combination of these, we were able to see ourselves with some critical distance.

Our process reflects a critical principle for using AR in education: AR’s nature locates its educational use solidly on the “learning” side of
the teaching-learning paradigm conflict (Barr and Tag 13). Using first-person AR is not about teaching students to be ethical, or what ethics looks like; it is about students’ learning about their own ethical practice, about how ethics appears in specific situations, about how to apply ethical practices. The process is experiential and student-directed—that is, self-directed.

LEARNING STRATEGIES FOR ETHICAL REFLECTION WITH FIRST-PERSON ACTION RESEARCH

Our endeavors began, implicitly, with first-person inquiry into past first-person practice, since our starting point was identifying an ethical aspect of personal or professional practice we wished to improve. At this point, individual projects diverged. Some of us continued to engage first-person AR into past first-person practice, reflecting on past experiences or behaviors and exploring their causes and implications for future change. Others engaged in first-person AR into present first-person practice, implementing changes in our lives and practices and observing the changes’ effects in an ongoing (and even simultaneous) action-reflection cycle. And some turned to first-person AR into future first-person practice, developing possible future actions or states and exploring both their causes (how to get there) and their implications (how this would differ from past/present).

At the quarter’s end we briefly presented our projects to each other. This extended our work to second-person AR, as we experienced understanding and positive feedback from each other. This also enabled us to make some evaluation of our projects—that is, of ourselves, of how we had changed or not changed through the project. Developing artifacts to present was an important step, as it gave physical embodiment to the project. This not only made communication about our inquiries easier, but was in itself a reflective activity and served to establish a benchmark with which future growth or action could be compared.

The following sections present a selection of projects resulting from our reflections. Not only are the projects themselves diverse but they demonstrate the different paths we followed in our first-person AR—an obvious but important trait of such personal research. First, Maureen, a visual artist and teacher of history at the School for Creative and Performing Arts in Cincinnati, presents a personally developed methodology, which we have called “illustrative journaling.” Second, Fawzeyah, a third year doctoral student in Educational Studies, describes
photovoice, a participatory AR technique using photographs to discover meaning through “a process by which people can identify, represent, and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique” (Wang and Burris 369). Photovoice has been used in a broad array of settings including at-risk students (Kroeger et al., Zenkov & Harmon), college students (Goodhart et al.), teenage moms (Dole), and numerous others and involves individuals taking photographs, analyzing them through discussion of their meaning(s), writing captions, and discussing photographs with others, or choosing photos to personally reflect upon and to assign meaning.

Third, Kate, a third-year doctoral student in nursing, presents her use of collage to explore and evaluate her lived values. Collage is the positioning of various items on a single surface, including photographs, magazine clippings, letters and words, pieces of textiles, and found items, which can be used to create a meaningful piece of art or illustrate a certain concept (Collage n.p.). Fourth, second-year doctoral student Courtney describes how she developed her own method to respond to our assignment, developing a playbook, not unlike those in football and other sports, to work through multiple imagined situations that highlighted values in action. Finally, Meredith describes her creation of a mobile that visually represents the reflection of her values and serves as a daily reminder of what is important in her life.

Illustrative Journaling (Maureen)

I started this project knowing that I would need to articulate what the things were that I valued. Little time for contemplation had left me thinking I knew what I valued and believed in, but the reality was that I wasn’t sure I had ever put a name to the principles that I was supposedly living by. Consequently, my first step was to write down the things I valued, define those things and see if I could visually articulate them in a way that was meaningful to me.

I liked the idea of using a symbol because I find it can be an organizing way of gathering information. Because the picture of my daughter Fia’s little hand in mine has been a daily reminder for me of the strength of the bond we share, I immediately went to the hand as the image to use as my symbol to photograph. It was a perfect fit because for me hands are expressive and can communicate feelings that are often left unspoken. When I think of “me” I strangely think of my hands, perhaps because when I look out at the things I do each day, I mostly see my hands doing the activity. Even in my dreams I am typically looking out
and the only part of me that I see is my hands. With a framework of symbolism to guide my picture taking, I started snapping away. While the pictures were not wholly random (I was, after all, looking for hands) they were open for interpretation once I started reviewing the images.

I decided to assess how the things of value were present (or not) in my life. Initially I wrote lists under each topic in a running journal. I have not successfully journaled in years and this was a good exercise to get me back to something that I do in fact value as a tool for keeping track of my musings. I carried the journal with me and noted any time I became cognizant of an activity that either did or did not fit with the photos and topics.

I chose three items to focus on: family, vision, and knowledge. These were not necessarily the items that I had written the most about, but they were the ones that I felt I had explored the most. I explored how to show evidence of my embracing these beliefs in my daily life. I usually need very little encouragement to create something visual, but this time I was stuck. Themes were established and what I wanted to say about them was becoming clearer, and I finally decided on a makeshift collage where I could add words and pictures to expose my thoughts. I pinned images and text to the three panels of a 60-inch-tall folding screen. The piece sat in my living room for several weeks and I often found myself staring at the screens and reorganizing items as I felt moved. Once the images were set, I wrote a running stream of thoughts about the photos’ content and how the pictures fit into the themes.

Through this process of writing, taking photographs, and interpreting the images while physically arranging and annotating them, I developed a presentation that reflected my process of taking actions and reflecting. The screen maintains a kind of fluidity by putting images and text together, yet preserving the distinct nature of each grouping. This is reinforced since the screen has three panels and two sides, making the whole presentation a single object but at the same time a collection of individual visual and written artifacts. The “product” really does show the “process,” and it allows others to actively engage as they explore my musings. Viewers can start and stop anywhere on the screens, as well as move around at will.

**Photovoice (Fawzeyah)**

Introducing photovoice to my research techniques was an overwhelming process. To explore my ethical standpoint and vision through photovoice was exciting, yet as I look back at the pictures I
chose to use for my first-person AR project and read my comments, another door opened to my understanding of the importance of reflection.

AR’s importance is embodied in the techniques that make a person venture into her or his own psyche to understand what underpins a particular position he/she took once, and why. Though value systems are constructed mainly in a child’s early years, I was not taught how to articulate them: I was taught simply to act. Photovoice clarified for me why I act and think the way I do. It made me better understand who I am.

We were asked to take photos, then to determine what they really signify. We discussed the images in small groups in class and I was paired with classmates whom I least knew. Given the fact that we come from two different cultures—I from the Middle East and my two colleagues from the U.S.—I was surprised during discussion of our photos to see so many connections present among our ethical positions. We all agreed that our families are the basis of our ethical perspectives. This made conversation easier in the following days, for I was able to explicitly connect with other members of the class and not be considered totally as the stranger.

When we were asked to start writing reflections about our photos, I hesitated to begin due to fear of disrespecting some of the family figures whose pictures I used. I was afraid that through my personal interpretation of their pictures I would disfigure their moral status in my own vision. I sorted the pictures into three categories: abstract, nature, and family. I first reflected on the abstract entries, describing the pictures and finding connections to my ethics as a mother and teacher. Here I give two examples.

The picture that brought a break-through was of a gas station’s price board. It ignited discussion of what it means for us to focus on these boards. What makes that group of numbers so important to us? Is it fair to have them posted to distract people? Is it fair to project our chances of being able to purchase it today? Is it fair to show disparities between gas station prices that may exemplify disparities in socioeconomic classes? I found myself very much concerned with the issue of fairness, where it should be planted and nurtured. After some exploration of who I want to be fair to, I found that I wanted to be fair to my daughters, the same way I wanted to be fair to my husband and my dreams, and when I thought about my dreams I thought I should start with being fair to myself.
After working with photos from the other categories, I was more confident to venture into the five family pictures. Still afraid, I started with myself. I noticed in a picture how happy I was with my daughters when I visited my family in the summer. The reason behind my happiness was the mere cooperation among my sisters and me in taking care of the children. It was the cooperative spirit in the family that made me happy. So, collaboration in performing tasks is an ethical pillar that I strongly believe in.

What I truly got out of photovoice was a better-shaped self-consciousness. My first-person AR project has provided me with a different medium of expression and led me to some of the inner voices that I suppressed due to societal duties. When I knew that there was a way to revisit areas of myself that I had silenced, and to redeem what I had done in taking away my own voice, I was glad. I am thankful for being here at the right time for me, in the right place, and with an extraordinary group of friends and educators exploring my ethical standards.

Collage (Kate)

I chose to explore the value of respect in the context of “having it” rather than “expecting it” through collage. I identified this value easily, as it came to my mind in the first seconds of knowing about this assignment. Respect is in line with my other core values of service, community, and commitment, and I felt very drawn to this concept. For me, the first step of identifying the value was easy. The next step involved exploring how I live the value of respect. I identified person, self, humanity, culture and tradition, all creatures, and nature as recipients of my respect. In this process I also identified what I do not respect, which are bigotry, racism, and intolerance. New photos, personal archived photos, and found images were used to depict each of the entities.

The photos that I included in my poster were the following: my nephew, niece, and me in a protest march in Washington DC (person - respect for personal thoughts and ideas); me standing in tree pose on top of a rocky cliff in Maine (self - respect for myself by balancing mind, body, and spirit); President Obama’s inauguration showing a sea of people on the Mall (humanity - respect for the human race as a whole); a grouping of home-grown food canned by my dad (culture and tradition - respect for family, the means of sustaining one’s self, provision to family); me brushing my cat (all creatures - respect and caring for all living things); and a huge tornado on a Midwestern plain
(nature - a healthy respect for the power of Mother Nature). For an example of reflection on one photo, I'll choose the picture of President Obama's inauguration. The number of people standing in the cold to watch the first African American president be sworn in gave me chills. I thought about my patients at the community clinic where I work, particularly George, a 55-year old African American man who voted for the first time because as he put it “I had something to vote for.” I thought about the videos of celebrations around the world when President Obama was elected. I thought about the reputation of the U.S. at that time and I thought with optimism about how things could change for humanity now that someone I believed in was in office.

After this exploration of what I did and did not respect, I realized that my dilemma revolved around not respecting people with polar opposite views from my own although I claim to respect person and humanity. This became a barrier to fully embracing the value of respect. It was a struggle that at first I could only acknowledge. I studied the images for some clarity, for a way that didn't contradict my resolve to have respect for all. My final resolution was to enlighten, expose, educate, and accept myself and those with whom I disagree, understanding that this is not a closed reflection, but an ongoing process of growth and change that will affect my interactions with others and my ability to truly perform AR.

Playbook (Courtney)

I decided to present my values project based on approachability with scenarios consisting of what I would most likely say prior to my reflection and what would be the more approachable way to respond, which I based on my experience as a second-year doctoral student in nursing. I had scenarios with students, co-workers, neighbors, and friends and used the “playbook” idea as a guide for more friendly responses. Being an approachable researcher is a crucial component in the research process. Approachability refers to being easy to meet or deal with; in research, this refers to the researcher’s attribute of being easily approached by both research subjects and participants. Many people do not evaluate their own approachability and therefore could be forfeiting valuable friendships and/or opportunities.

For my first-person AR project, I developed a playbook—a set of written strategies used in business, politics, and sports. This playbook of vignettes illustrated efforts to monitor and disclose my personal efforts towards becoming more approachable to many who are in my life.
found, after reflecting on the many roles I hold in life, that my role as a PhD student is a somewhat tentative one. This role seems to evoke a variety of responses from the many people I interact with and cause some defensiveness on my part, which could be seen as unapproachable or aloof. Since the role of Ph.D. student is only one of the many I hold (mother, wife, professor, friend, neighbor, etc.), I decided to role play on paper a variety of conversations reflecting how being a Ph.D. student affects relationships with those who are in my life. I called this playbook “The Two Faces of Approachability,” and each vignette included both my unapproachable side and my approachable side. The following examples show two scenarios from the playbook.

- **Neighbor:** “I don’t know how you go to school and work with small kids, you are crazy!”  
  Unapproachable Courtney: “I have always been a high achiever and am very organized. It is not that difficult to balance my many demanding roles.”  
  Approachable Courtney: “I take it one day at a time and only do what I can.”

- **Staff nurse:** “I didn’t even know nursing had a Ph.D.…what does a nurse with a Ph.D. do anyway?”  
  Unapproachable Courtney: “Of course nursing has a Ph.D. It is the terminal degree in the field of nursing. Ph.D.—prepared nurses are the future of the nursing profession. They grow the profession by conducting research related to nursing science.”  
  Approachable Courtney: “A Ph.D. in nursing has only been around for about 40 years, and I didn’t know about the program until I started teaching clinical classes. Ph.D.—prepared nurses basically conduct research in academic settings, but recently a Doctorate in Nursing Practice has been developed to bridge the gap between research and practice.”

After completing this first-person AR assignment, I discovered that approachability is both a crucial component and a conscious decision one makes in life. Being approachable is an important trait not only in research but also in the many relationships throughout a person’s personal life and career. This exercise facilitated understanding my role in becoming and being a more approachable person to those around me.
Mobile (Meredith)

The opportunity to improve myself through this First Person Action Research project proved to be beneficial. The goal: to look at myself in an analytical way. Time rarely permits this level of introspection so I took full advantage of this exercise. As a full time PhD student and an Adjunct Professor at Northern Kentucky University, I have struggled with cultivating and maintaining relationships. It is challenging to prepare lesson plans for two courses, teach four courses, be a student in four courses, and produce academically rigorous work; all while being an attentive mother, loving wife, supportive friend, and pristine housekeeper. When one of the assignments became to look at self and create an action plan through data gathering, analysis, planning and reflection, I was thrilled. It was through this work I took myself from posture to practice.

Knowing that the actual creation of my project could be the perfect start to this journey of strengthening relationships, I enlisted my children and two of my friends to help me make a mobile. This mobile is my ideal way of being; a litany of my goals. This mobile represented one of the major things I value: relationships. Specifically, family, friends, and sustaining a healthy me. First, we constructed from large colored paper large shapes with those ideas and hung it from a hanger. Second, we cut out smaller shapes with thoughts of ideas to cultivate the primary ideas. For example, under family, a small shape reads “Eat as a family at the dinner table every night.” Another small shape reads “take at least one family vacation a year.” The more we discussed, the more my children expressed what they desired. They wanted undivided time with me in the evening. So we agreed to “a bedtime routine that included a fun activity,” represented by a smaller shape under family. To be well-rounded, my friend suggested that I consider how important it would be to budget my time. So one of the large shapes reads “sustain my soul.” Subsequently, the smaller shape says “take at least 30 minutes a day for self (i.e. long bath, massage, read, walk etc.).” Another reads “put appointments in my cell phone so it will ring to remind me of important dates and commitments.”

The mobile still hangs in my home to remind me to take time for the things I value. It serves as a visual reminder of my commitment to myself as well as a visual actualization of who I strive to become. The language is specific so those who enter my house can remind me to be the best I want to be. It also allows me to reflect and create changes. This First
Person Action Research proved to be a very important activity that sparked a renewed commitment to myself and my integrity.

Discussion

Our first-person AR projects were learning tools that helped us reflect on our ethics and values in an experiential way. Different learning strategies were developed or applied, including photovoice, collage, playbook, and illustrative journaling. Photovoice combines photographic images and students’ explanations or reflections. Collage makes a connection among different pictures. Playbook enables thinking and acting through different scenarios. And illustrative journaling creates a new way to reflect the ethics, values and development of a student. These methods develop students’ higher-level cognitive skills such as critical thinking, but also call for creative engagement with one’s thoughts, feelings and actions. These learning tools motivate and engage students, calling on them to explore and develop answers for themselves. Because students own the process, they become active learners and try to relate this knowledge to their real lives—something that happens easily through first-person AR and something that moves ethics from theory to grounded practice. Students are thoroughly involved in the process and the product, making the learning more meaningful.

First-person AR allows students to reflect on their own ethics and values while simultaneously providing them with chances to make changes. At the start of this learning process, we experienced some confusion and felt challenged about engaging with this project. During the development/introspection phase of this project, the thought of having to “create” a project based on personal reflection was daunting to a number of students. There were varying degrees of concrete versus abstract thinkers in the class, those who were comfortable in accepting the challenge the “creating” a project without boundaries, while others stressed about the daunting task of developing their own expression of value exploration. But through sharing, discussing, engaging in classroom activities, we were able to concentrate on our own values with confidence. Importantly, the nature of AR is flexible, and Mary Brydon-Miller incorporated this into our class, allowing us freedom in revising the assignment to fit our own situations. The goal, then, of our first person AR, to contribute to our ability to conduct more ethical research projects by centering us in our values and strengthening our ethical framework was successfully met.
CONCLUSION

First-person AR enables powerful experiential learning. It provides an ongoing learning experience in exploring, as well as changing, ethical beliefs and values, and it does so in the lives of participants, something very different from textbook cases or other third-person projects. Bringing first-person AR into the classroom through the sharing of the process of discovering ethical principles and values can lead students to a better understanding of themselves and of those in the class. This provides an opportunity for students to research themselves, to reflect upon what values they bring to the class as well as what they might bring to future research projects.

The materials required for this type of reflection are few. Providing students with some examples of prior first-person action research projects, as well as the assurance that the classroom is a safe place to share their personal reflections, are all that is needed to create rich, thoughtful reflections and explorations of values and ethics. Ample time should be allotted for this project, as the mere identification of values is not enough. Exploring how these principles are shaped, changed, challenged, and ever-evolving is ethics in motion rather than their fixation at a single point in time, which requires a thoughtful, unhurried process.

The first-person AR is ethics in action. It is a way to facilitate the learning of ethics and values that is firsthand and real, rather than an abstract concept whose definition is memorized and soon thereafter forgotten. It is hoped that we will not soon forget what values and principles were identified and will carry this new self-discovery process with us through our academic careers and beyond.

NOTE

*Authorship for this article was determined as follows:
Kate York coordinated the development of the article and contributed to the writing, Aaron Profitt acted as editor and contributed to the writing of the article, Fawzeyah Alawadhi, Maureen Andreadis, Courtney Hamilton, Qinghua Huang, Kareem Moncree Moffitt, and Meredith Smith contributed to the writing of the article, and Mary Brydon-Miller conceptualized and coordinated the activity that led to the ethical reflection.
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