

## Teaching, Research, Service and PAR

Upon joining the AINA board last year, Letha MacLachlan, a Calgary environmental lawyer, commented that *Arctic* does not expose our readers to what the institute itself achieves in teaching, research, and service from its University of Calgary base. Over the past decade, AINA has contributed in all three areas, benefiting from association with its host university. We are now a nationally recognized centre of teaching and practice for participatory action research (PAR), known for our innovative combination of undergraduates, graduate students, and research associates in the conduct of international PAR projects.

The last few years found our PAR teams in the Kola Peninsula of Russia, the back country of Nicaragua, the tundra of Holman Island, the Dene heartland of the Northwest Territories, and the boreal forest zone of northern Alberta and British Columbia. AINA students benefited from all of these projects, through direct involvement in Theme School in Northern Planning and Development Studies internships, thesis research, or classroom instruction. The three AINA professors who directed the work, Joan Ryan, Mike Robinson, and Karim-Aly Kassam, have all recently enjoyed national recognition for their labours. Joan and Mike have both won the Weaver-Tremblay Prize for exceptional contributions to Canadian applied anthropology, and Karim-Aly has been awarded the first Murray Fraser Professorship in Community Economic Development. Working with them in the spirit and reality of community initiative and partnership, research associates Allice Legat and Martha Johnson have made major contributions in the Dogrib communities of Wahti and Rae Lakes, where Dene traditional medicine and Dogrib traditional governance systems have been the topics of PAR projects.

In each of the above cases, a community (or regional group of communities) initiated the project, invited AINA to provide a trainer or resident principal investigator, created a community advisory committee, structured ethics reviews of project proposals by community elders, selected community trainees to conduct the research, and controlled research results for local benefit and application. For its part, AINA provided the trainers, undertook the training, aided with significant fundraising, and helped with publication of the final research products. The books *Doing Things the Right Way* (1996) and *Sami Potatoes* (1998), two recent products of this work, extend its insights to AINA students and others across Canada.

While the communities themselves have played the key roles of host and instigator, regionally active cultural institutes, such as the Dene Cultural Institute, led by Joanne Barnaby, and the Sami Associations of Lovozero, Jona, and Murmansk, led by Larisa Avdeeva, Tat'yana Tsmykailo, and Nina Afanas'eva, respectively, have partnered with us on numerous fronts to sanction the work, raise funds for its performance, troubleshoot in the realm of local politics, and share in the review and validation of written material before its publication.

Collectively we have all benefited from the PAR methodology, and now we are sharing our methodological experience and participatory competence with several research and advocacy organizations in different parts of the globe. Chief amongst these at present are the International Foundation for Socio-Economic and Political Studies of the Gorbachev Foundation of Moscow, the David Suzuki Foundation of Vancouver, and the Instituto de Medicina Tradicional Y Desarrollo Comunitario of Nicaragua.

We are always ready to share our experience with you, the readers of *Arctic*, and I am always attentive to e-mail, snail mail, phone, and fax inquiries. Is there a PAR project in your backyard?

*Mike Robinson*  
*Executive Director*  
*The Arctic Institute of North America*  
*University of Calgary*