



LEARNING

about Action Research



THE TEACHING AND LEARNING SERIES



LEARNING

*about Action
Research*

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LEARNING ABOUT ACTION RESEARCH

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Practitioners in the field of adult basic education and training have a crucial role to play in promoting the principles and practices needed to create a critical and creatively engaged citizenry in South Africa's still fragile new democracy.

In this turbulent time of transition, ABET practitioners, like all other educators are being asked to respond to a veritable avalanche of demands: learn to do more with less; contribute to the formulation of new education policy; prepare to implement outcomes-based education; create a culture of lifelong learning, enabling people to move flexibly across multiple sites of learning including the workplace, facilitate the development of information literacy that will enable learners to participate in global networks of knowledge production and reception. The list rolls on, and it takes tirelessly agile thought and action to avoid being buried alive, then to build something worthwhile with the falling rocks.

In this challenging context, Uswe's *Teaching and Learning Series* has become an invaluable and inspiring set of resources. *Learning about Action Research* will do much to realise the central aim of the series, which is to build critical, reflective and constructive practitioners. The book has a dual focus centring on two interlinked research projects one of which requires ABET practitioners to develop a learning programme with their students, and another which entails researching an aspect of their own practice.

Anyone working through this concise and stimulating book will see how emancipatory Action Research seeks to develop the skills and values central to democratic practice. These include a commitment to collaborative and participatory methods, particularly in the context of community projects, ongoing reflexivity involving the linking of systematic and informed knowledge production to transformative action, and an insistence on ethical and accountable conduct.

Learning about Action Research gives detailed and theoretically-grounded practical advice on how to proceed collaboratively through the various stages of the Action Research cycle, including building a repertoire of literacy practices and activities for teachers and learners to draw upon in the research process.

Although the book is clearly designed for ABET practitioners in particular, it is full of useful ideas for educators working in other contexts, and also for any group, organisation or community that would like to use Action Research to improve or transform its practices.

Terry Volbrecht

Chairperson, Academic Development Centre, University of the Western Cape

INTRODUCTION

What this workbook is about

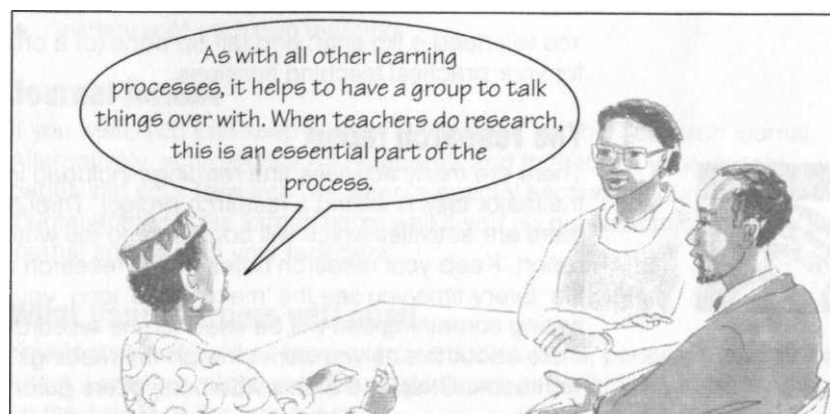
Welcome to this workbook on practitioner research. As you work through the book, you will conduct two interlinked research projects. The first one requires you to research and develop a learning programme together with your learners, involving them in uncovering their learning needs and developing a plan of action. The second involves conscious reflection on an aspect of your practice as a teacher and investigating ways of improving what you are doing in the classroom.

Why should teachers be researchers?

People who do research believe that research is the search for new knowledge. Many teachers think research is for people in white coats conducting experiments in laboratories. They think of research as a highly technical procedure that is difficult to understand and remote from their 'real job', which is deciding what to teach next and how to teach it. But research does not have to be mysterious or difficult, and it can also be very relevant to everyday teaching. Research is, in fact, something that every teacher can — and should — do.

Research support groups

Research can be a lonely road, so it is a good idea to set up a group of fellow teacher researchers. Members of the group help each other to analyse the information they collect, offer alternative interpretations of findings, and share problems, strategies and insights. Researchers can work in a team on the same project. This works well if two or more teachers are involved with the same learning group.



How to use this workbook

This workbook will take you through two research processes with activities, readings and reflections.

Useful forms

At the end of this workbook you'll find a section called 'Useful forms'. You may not need to use all the forms, but you may find them helpful for systematising your research, or for giving you some ideas and suggestions when you get stuck.

What you will need

You'll need a lever arch file in which to store your work. Ideally you should also have file dividers, which you can buy or make yourself with coloured card. We suggest you label the file dividers as outlined below, although you may prefer to work out your own filing system. You can add more divisions if you need to.

- ◆ Class notes.
- ◆ Needs analysis.
- ◆ Information collected.
- ◆ Action plans.
- ◆ Learning activities.
- ◆ Observation (or field) notes.
- ◆ Interviews.
- ◆ Research report.
- ◆ Research journal (if you decide not to keep a separate journal see below).

You may find that you prefer to use one or two small notebooks for observing your own or other people's lessons. These are unobtrusive and can be easily carried around.

If possible, you should try and have a tape recorder for at least a couple of weeks and enough batteries to go with it! Access to a camera and a video recorder will also be useful, but is not essential.

You will need a flip chart and felt-tip pens (or a chalkboard and chalk) for your practical teaching sessions.

The research report

There are many activities and readings included in this workbook, but the major task is writing a research project. Throughout this workbook there are activities which will contribute to the writing of the research report. Keep your research notes in the 'research report' section of your file. Every time you see the 'make notes' icon, you'll know that you are writing something that will be used for the research report. You'll find out more about this as you work through the readings and activities in this workbook. Chapter 6 of this workbook offers guidance on writing the report.

In order to ensure that your final report is of a high standard, use the following criteria to guide you. Your report should show:

- ◆ evidence of planning, effective time management, etc. (learning to learn skills);
- ◆ evidence of careful, well-documented research;
- ◆ evidence of analysis and consistency of findings with information or data collected;
- ◆ evidence of an ability to draw out implications of research findings and apply them in practice;
- ◆ evidence of your own learning and development as a practitioner; and
- ◆ an organisation of information and clarity of argument.

Research journal

The research journal is your most important learning tool in action research. In it you will record your thoughts, questions, concerns and comments as your research proceeds. It will serve as a record of your growing understanding of your own practice. You can also write down your reactions to any reading you are doing and comment on any difficulties you are having with this module.

Your journal is an excellent way to communicate with your facilitator, as you will get personal responses to any issue that concerns you. There are no right or wrong answers in journals, only explorations. Write up your journal regularly or it will lose its purpose. It's a good idea to hand in your journal to your facilitator every two weeks for comment and feedback.

Your journal will be assessed on the following criteria:

- ◆ thoughtful engagement with the research process and the content of this module;
- ◆ critical analysis of readings, based on your own experience;
- ◆ evidence of consistent and timely journal entries; and
- ◆ evidence of your own learning

Journal format

If you wish, you can keep a special notebook for your research journal. Alternatively, you can use A4 notepaper and then insert your journal pages into your research file. Keep a special section of your file for journal entries. This format works well if you do not want to share all your journal entries with your facilitator.

What your learners will need

Your learners should all have exercise books, pens, pencils, erasers and rulers. Learners might also need calculators and maths sets, depending on the nature of the curriculum.

Information resources

In research-based teaching access to information is vital. It is, therefore, important that you and your adult learning group pin a public library or resource centre close to your classroom.

Broad outcomes for this module

Skills

By doing the activities in this workbook you will develop skills in observation, analysis and interpretation, reflection and evaluation.

Knowledge

By doing the readings, reflecting on them and discussing them with your research group you will learn about the basic practitioner research methods, develop a greater understanding of your own practice and gain insights into your learners.

Values

The learning process involves developing values, including developing confidence in your own ability to find answers to your classroom dilemmas or problems, feeling competent in the area of practice that you choose to research and increasing your enjoyment and interest in your career as an ABET practitioner.

Transfer

By working on your research projects, you will be developing your ability to apply the insights gained from the activities and readings in your practice. You should also be developing the ability to contextualise learning appropriately.

Your learners should gain through being involved with you in a participatory action research project which has a direct impact on their lives and in a journey of discovery about how to improve your teaching.

Recommended reading

Throughout the workbook, we will be listing books for recommended reading. Here are two good introductory texts on the subject of action research:

Can, W. and Kemmis, S. (1983) *Becoming Critical: Knowing Through Action Research*. Victoria, Australia: Deakin University Press.

Lewis, I. and Munn, P. (1987) *So You Want To Do Research!* Edinburgh: The Scottish Council for Research in Education.



ARE YOU A REFLECTIVE ABET PRACTITIONER?

The central theme emerging from our review of ABET policy is that an outstanding practitioner is, in terms of the roles projected for practitioners by policy, always a *reflective* practitioner.

From: *Uswa/McLean (1996) 'A Profile of the Outstanding Practitioner'*. Unpublished HSRC report, p. 15.

Aim of this chapter

The above extract comes from recent South African research into what outstanding ABET practice consists of. The study concluded that outstanding practice is a complex mix of institutional, organisational, professional, contextual and personal factors. However, all participants in this research, across a wide range of education and training sites, identified reflective practice as the one constant feature of outstanding practice.

As you work through the tasks in this workbook you will be investigating and reflecting on various aspects of your teaching practice, both individually and with your learners. We hope that new insights, understandings and forms of knowledge will begin to emerge and enable you to transform — and go on transforming — your life as an ABET practitioner.

Outstanding practice

According to the report quoted above, researching your own practice is itself an important ingredient of outstanding practice. Research by practitioners has been seriously undervalued as a source of knowledge about teaching, not only in South Africa, but world-wide. We hope that the work you do — not only during this workbook, but throughout your career — will help to build this knowledge base.

Outstanding teachers are reflective teachers

A second important component of outstanding practice is knowing how to contextualise learning appropriately for your learners. This aspect will be the other major focus for this module: the participatory research you undertake with your learners will investigate way of building bridges between learners' needs and interests and formal requirements such as learning outcomes. We hope you will gain confidence in your ability to interpret national curriculum guidelines in ways that are meaningful for you and your learners

Outstanding teachers understand their learners' needs and contexts.

Finally, outstanding practice requires passion and commitment, although, there are other affective aspects that play a central part in reflective practice. One of these is the teacher's underlying values and belief structures. Becoming a reflective practitioner means making a deliberate attempt to become aware of your own beliefs about learning as well as those of people you will be interacting with.

Many teachers are deeply committed to and passionate about their work. This affective engagement interacts strongly with cognitive engagement: teachers who feel deeply about what they are doing will automatically reflect on what they have been doing and seek alternatives in order to solve pressing problems. This has been called 'high road' transfer and is the essence of reflective practice.

Adapted from: *Rural Education Facilitators Project*. (1996) 'Assessment and outcomes'. Unpublished report, Centre for Continuing Education, University of the Witwatersrand, p. 14.

What motivates ABET teachers?

Below is an extract from an interview with an ABET teacher, who was asked what advice she would give someone who wanted to be an ABET teacher.

before I GIVE THE ADVICE I WOULD ASK HER WHAT MADE *her* want to be an ADULT TEACHER AND IF SHE SAYS SHE WANTS TO HELP HER COMMUNITY, I WILL TRY and *find out more*. IF THE *person* becomes an ADULT TEACHER, SHE NEEDS RESPECT. SHE MUST BE a *person* WHO *people* can come to and SHE MUST *understand about patience and being able to* LISTEN TO PEOPLE WITHOUT GETTING TIRED. IF SHE TELLS ME SHE IS *committed*, I WILL ASK: HOW? BECAUSE IF YOU *are an* ABE TEACHER YOU MUST KNOW THAT YOU *are going to work* FLEXI HOURS, YOU CAN'T SAY — NO, I CAN'T DO THIS, BECAUSE I HAVE TO RUSH THERE. IF SHE DOES NOT QUOTE ANY OF THESE THAT I HAVE SPOKEN ABOUT, I WOULD NOT ADVISE HER TO BE AN ADULT TEACHER. AND THE OTHER ADVICE I WOULD GIVE HER IS TO CONSULT; THAT MEANS YOU DON'T SIT, YOU GO AND FIND OUT INFORMATION, YOU TALK TO PEOPLE YOU ASK FOR *advice*. YOU MUST BE a *person who doesn't only take; you must also give and be able* TO WORK TOGETHER. SHE MUST REALISE THAT SHE IS GOING TO WORK WITH OTHER *people and we* MUST COME TO THIS FIELD *prepared* THAT THERE ARE A LOT OF *sacrifices we* MUST *make*. IF YOU ARE AN ADULT TEACHER YOU DON'T HAVE A LOT OF TIME FOR YOUR FAMILY. *you come home late* — SOMETIMES I ONLY GET HOME *about 9.00 pm. and that does* NOT WORRY ME.

From: *Uswa McLean*. (1996) 'A Profile of the Outstanding Practitioner'. Unpublished HSRC report, p. 57.



Questions

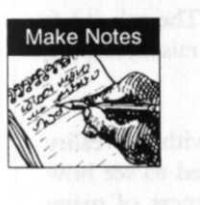
1. What beliefs about society and people is this teacher expressing? What values does she hold?
2. Are there other key values that you would identify for ABET practitioners?
3. This teacher works in a community night school. Would a practitioner in a different context need different values?

Values

As part of developing a critical reflective approach to learning and teaching, practitioners need to develop a set of core values. You need to ask: What am I doing? Who am I doing it for? Why am I doing it? How am I doing it? Formulating a value framework helps you evaluate your practice and that of your mentors and peers. Without such a framework, reflection often remains at the level of teaching techniques and rarely moves to deeper issues of the relationship between actions in the classroom and the broader purposes of education in society.

Teaching methods, like political strategies, are ways of acting out your beliefs about society and people.

Activity 1



Aim

The aim of this activity is to think about what motivates you as an ABET teacher.

Take 15 minutes to think about the following questions then jot down your answers in your research journal. These can be in the form of rough notes, but they must be clear enough for you as you will work with them through the year. You will need to return to your answers through the year to see whether your understanding has changed or deepened.

1. What caused me to want to become an ABET teacher?
2. Do these reasons still exist for me now?
3. Is the *teacher* I am the *person* I am?
4. Who has power in my classroom and how is it expressed?
5. How do power relationships in my classroom influence my interactions with students?
6. How does what I do *really* affect the opportunities my learners have in life?

Critical incidents

A 'critical incident' is an event which has significance because it helps us to see things in a new way and thus develop our understanding.

The extract below describes a critical incident. It was written by a practitioner reflecting on the values and beliefs about adult education that underlie her practice and some of the contradictions she has experienced in trying to implement them.

Up to a year and a half ago, I was a teacher because I thought people needed to think more critically about the social conditioning of their personal experience, to look underneath the myths that obscure our vision of what's going on in our lives and the world . . .

But the problem this notion began to raise for me is that the women where I worked often did view reality with a critical consciousness; they quite often did see the social conditioning of their own lives. John Gwaltney, in *Drylongso: A Self Portrait of Black America*, said that 'principled survival is a pre-eminently an analytical process'. A woman in one class once talked about how you have to lie to your caseworker to squeeze what you need out of welfare, but that having to lie in front of your children 'takes away your freedom'. Deciding which to trade off— your right to demonstrate your real integrity to your child, or getting her a decent looking coat so she doesn't feel humiliated at school — knowing that freedom is what hangs in the balance, is a pre-eminently analytical process'.

When I first wrote the paragraph above, I wondered if I should take it out. I shouldn't have to remind myself that the women I work with think analytically. But I have to painfully admit that sometimes my eyes aren't open to it . . .

I also began to realise that within the framework I'd used, there wasn't a place for me, as a teacher, with which I was comfortable. The role it left me was that of a facilitator whose consciousness was already raised, helping other people to raise theirs.

I was beginning to see that I couldn't reconcile that role with the reality of who the women in my classes really were. I also started to see how that premise didn't fit with the fact that my own awareness of many things still needed raising, or that even when my awareness of an issue is high, my actions don't always match it. In sum, I couldn't reconcile this role with the view I wanted to have of myself as a co-learner . . .

From: *Martin, R. (1989) Literacy from the Inside Out. Watertown, Massachusetts: Author, pp. 5-6.*



Questions

1. What is the most interesting part of this extract for you?
2. Have there been any 'critical incidents' like this in your own experience? Moments when you suddenly realised that what you

Were doing didn't make sense or when something completely unexpected happened and made you question your understanding of what you were doing? Or one of those rare times when you felt you had got it right? What triggered these moments? What impact did they have on your teaching? Did these events change your teaching practice?

3. After you have discussed these issues with your research group, write up a brief description in your journal.

The research question

RESEARCH STARTS WITH A RESEARCH QUESTION. A RESEARCH QUESTION IS SOMETHING THAT YOU WANT TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT. IT COULD BE SOMETHING THAT PUZZLES YOU, FRUSTRATES YOU OR INTERESTS YOU. DEVELOPING A RESEARCH QUESTION IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS. HERE ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF WORRIES OR INTERESTS THAT COULD BE EXPLORED IN A RESEARCH PROJECT.

It puzzles me that.....

What is causing this?

Although I try hard to, it never really seems to work. What can I do about it?

Some people in my group are unhappy about.....

..... What can I do to change the situation?

What is it about this particular kind of task that works so well in my group?

How can I transfer this success to other kinds of activities?

It worries me that no one seems to understand.....

What is really going on?

How can I improve.....?

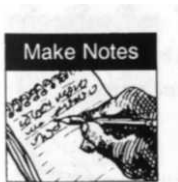
Adapted from: *Kemmis, S. and McTaggart, R. (1982) The Action Research Planner. Victoria, Australia: Deakin University Press.*

Activity 2

Aim

THE AIM OF THIS ACTIVITY IS TO THINK ABOUT A RESEARCH QUESTION.

WHAT WORRIES OR INTERESTS YOU ABOUT YOUR WORK AS AN ABET PRACTITIONER? THIS CAN RELATE TO ANY ASPECT OF YOUR TEACHING, IN ANY SUBJECT, AT ANY LEVEL. IT CAN BE AS BROAD OR AS NARROW AS YOU LIKE.



I feel that I am not really connecting with the skills and knowledge that learners bring to the class. How can I find out more about the kinds of things learners use maths for already, how they cope in situations that need skills and knowledge they don't have, what value they put on maths in various aspects of their lives?

I don't seem to be using the learners' first language very creatively. How can I draw on this resource to help them learn? Will using the mother tongue more help me draw on learners' cognitive skills more?

I'm worried that some of my learners face retrenchment soon. How could my ABET classes incorporate skills and knowledge which would help them? What kinds of knowledge could be helpful for people in their day-to-day lives?

I believe that mistakes are a very important part of learning but I'm not sure that the way I correct learners when they make mistakes actually helps them learn. What can I do to improve this?

LEARNING TO READ AND WRITE IS OFTEN FRUSTRATING. LEARNERS SEEM TO PROGRESS SLOWLY AND LOSE HEART QUICKLY, YET I KNOW THE GROUP IS LEARNING A LOT OF THINGS THAT AREN'T REFLECTED IN THE READING AND WRITING OUTCOMES. *How can I ASSESSTHESE OTHER KINDS OF PROGRESS IN A WAY THAT MOTIVATES LEARNERS AND MAKES MY SUPERVISORS SIT UP AND TAKE notice?*

Current ABET policy and learners' needs

An important part of any ABET research project will need to take into account the many changes that have happened with regard to ABET policy. Many reflective practitioners are trying to make sense of the new developments and to think critically about them. They are debating issues like the question 'To what extent do the specific outcomes meet learners' needs?'

Read the following extracts from recent ABET policy and research documents.

A vision for ABET in South Africa

Adult basic education and training have been successfully used and can be used to help promote the principles of co-operation, critical thinking and civic responsibility and equip people for participation in a high skills economy and society as a whole.

Adapted from: Department of Education. (1995) A National ABET Framework: Interim Guidelines. Discussion Document, August 1995. pp. 1 and 5.

ABET and development

The overwhelming majority of those in need of ABET fall outside the core manufacturing workforce. For this reason, it is crucial that ABET curricula provide the kinds of knowledge and skills that will encourage and sustain people in the creative pursuit of economic independence. What content framework can best encapsulate the prerequisite for development in South Africa, i.e. access to resources and power over choices? This concept lies at the heart of the social, political and economic transformation of South Africa.

Adapted from: Uswe/National Literacy Co-operative. (1994) 'A Development-driven Framework for the ABET Curriculum'. Unpublished report, p. 4.

Questions

1. How do you feel when you read these extracts?
2. Jot down two things that excite or worry you about these extracts, or any other immediate reactions you have. Do not censor yourself!
3. Read through your list of possible research questions again. Is there anything you want to add?





/ often feel that I concentrate solely on my learners' day-to-day needs and my teaching does not meet the goals that I set. To what extent are my goals relating to ABET for development clearly reflected in the syllabus I teach?

The aim of this activity is to clarify your research questions.

Work with a small group. Share your list of questions and try and

Activity 3

group

them according to whether they deal with 'curriculum' or 'process' issues, that is, whether they concern *what* you teach or *how* you teach.

Aim Are there any questions that fall into both categories? Why? Remember, you can add to your research questions again at this stage.



Curriculum and process

In Chapter 3, you will be investigating curriculum-type questions such as: 'How can I ensure that what I do in the classroom has meaning outside the classroom?' 'Who should decide on the content of the curriculum?' 'How can I make the national guidelines work for me?' You will also be researching and developing a curriculum together with your learners. In Chapters 4 and 5 you will be reflecting on and researching 'process' issues, that is, how you teach, why you teach in this way, and how you can improve your teaching.

The idea of reflection

Improvement of teaching may be achieved through reflection. Reflection is more than 'thinking' and focuses on the day-to-day classroom teaching of the individual teacher as well as the institutional structures in which teacher and students work. The description by Kemmis (1982:5) best summarises the meaning of reflection:

'Reflection is not just an individual, psychological process. It is an action-orientated, historically-embedded, social and political frame, to locate oneself in the history of a situation, to participate in a social activity, and to take sides on issues. Moreover the material on which reflection works is given to us socially and historically; through reflection and the action which it informs, we may transform the social relations which characterise our work and our working situation.'

Reflection, therefore, has a double meaning. It involves the relationship between an individual's thought and action and the relationship between an individual teacher and his or her membership in a larger collective called society. The first relationship involves the subjective meanings in teachers' heads. The second relationship explores consciously the relationship (which may be a part of unconscious knowledge) between individual teaching actions and the purposes of education in society ... 'This dual meaning of reflection may be described as "•critical".'

Reflective teaching as a form of critical inquiry is located in a socially critical orientation to teaching. Apple (1975:127) describes this:

It requires a painful process of radically examining current positions and asking pointed questions about the relationship that exists between these positions and the social structures from which they arise. It also necessitates a serious in-depth search for alternatives to those almost unconscious lenses we employ and an ability to cope with an ambiguous situation for which answers can now be only dimly seen and will not be easy to come by. Becoming a critically reflective teacher within this orientation therefore involves the realisation that as teachers, we are both the producers and creators of our own history. In practical terms this means we shall engage in systematic and social forms of inquiry that examine the origin and consequences of everyday teaching so that we come to see the factors that impede change and thus improvement.

References: **Apple, M. (1975)** 'Scientific interests and the nature of educational institutions' in Pinar, W (ed.) *Curriculum Theorizituj*. Berkeley, California: McCutchey.

Kemmis, S. (1986) 'Critical Reflection'. Unpublished manuscript: Deakin University, Australia.

From: Bartlett, L. (1990) 'Teacher development through reflective teaching'. In *Richards, J. C. and Nunan D. (eds). Second Language Teacher Education*. New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 204-207.

Questions

1. Brainstorm all the ways in which your daily practice is influenced by the context in which you work.
2. What would you change if you could?

Evaluation

Go back and read the first page of this chapter again. Can you list the three components of outstanding practice discussed? Is there anything you would add to this list? Reflect on any questions or worries that you have about this workbook and note these down in your research journal



Here's a suggestion on how to proceed.

Try to skim through the whole workbook to get a sense of what it contains. You might need to use some of the tools and techniques in this workbook before you discuss them with your facilitator or research group.

The next chapter provides a theoretical and historical background for practitioner or action research. You may want to move immediately to Chapter 3 and begin the process of identifying possible research topics with your learners. This can take 3-4 weeks. You can then work through Chapter 2 at your own pace while you are carrying out this phase of your research in the classroom.

Recommended reading

Kemmis, S. and McTaggart, ft (1982) *The Action Research Planner*
Victoria, Australia: Deakin University Press.

Richards, J. C. and Nunan D. (eds). (1990) *Second Language Teacher Education*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

2

WHAT IS ACTION RESEARCH?

Practitioner research has the potential to bring about change from the bottom-up and the inside-out.

From: *Anderson, G. L., Herr, K. and Nihlen, A. S. (1994) Studying Your Own School. California: Corwin Press Inc./Sage Publications, p. xxi.*

Aim of this chapter

In this chapter you are going to find out about different approaches to research and explore teacher action research, or practitioner research, in detail.

The first part of this chapter gives a general overview of two traditional approaches to research. The workbook in this series *Learning How to Research and Evaluate* provides a more in-depth discussion of these approaches.

The second part focuses on research done by practitioners themselves. It also discusses the history of practitioner research, which draws its inspiration and its theoretical foundations from thinkers as diverse as Dewey and Freire.

The third part illustrates two different kinds of practitioner research.

Activity 1

Aim

The aim of this activity is to think about ways in which being 'researched' could be alienating or disempowering.

Imagine that you are an ABET practitioner, working for an educational organisation. You are called to a meeting in which a team of 'experts' arrives to tell you about a new 'outcomes based' course that you will be teaching. They also tell you that they are going to 'research' your class — which means that they will observe you, they will monitor and assess your learners' progress, and their findings will be written up in a report.

How would you feel about this? Together with your teaching support group, discuss your feelings and the ways in which you would prefer to interact with the 'expert' researchers (if at all). What conditions would you set for your participation?

Research approaches

Research is about asking questions and finding explanations — and sometimes finding answers — to those questions. It is about creating new knowledge. The new knowledge that is produced will depend to a large extent on *who* is producing it. Within the field of educational research, there are two basic types of research approaches, which can be described as shown in the illustration.



The research continuum.

Definitions

positivist.: the positivist approach is one which states that only observable and measurable data should be taken into account in research. Positivism is an approach developed in the natural sciences, which has been transferred to human and social studies,

critical research: this approach focuses on a critical understanding of the situation or practice being researched in order to plan for transformative action.

The critical approach is situated within the 'real world' of actual people and practices — the implication is that critical understanding will lead to social transformation. The positivist research approach, on the other hand, is situated within a technical world of measuring and testing instruments, the research 'results' and the researcher's interpretation of them. The critical and the positivist approaches are opposed because they are informed by very different values and beliefs.

Our position in this workbook is a critical one, as we do not believe that a positivist approach is appropriate in the field of education. We also believe that research about teaching and learning practices should not only involve 'expert' researchers, but teachers and learners as well. The reading below provides a rationale for this position. It is taken from a research report to the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and describes a critical approach to research.

Knowledge is made by people

As researchers, we understand that knowledge is 'socially constructed'. In other words, knowledge is made and shared when people come together, talk about and explore their ideas and their personal experiences. There is no 'one truth'. Different people have their own ways of thinking about their lives and their work. It is, therefore, important to understand and respect that people have their own perspectives and their own knowledge.

It is also clear that people with access to information and knowledge are in more powerful positions to make new knowledge. They can more easily determine social structures, because they can get their version of knowledge listened to, and can influence how things are organised and done. On the other hand, people with little or no power are usually silenced by their oppressors. This means that their understanding of their situation is not heard or valued.

Because we believe that knowledge is socially constructed, we see the search for new knowledge is socially constructed, we see the search for new knowledge – that is, research – as a social activity. We can find and make new knowledge by learning from the ideas, perspectives and experiences of the people involved in the research process. There are other ways of looking at research, but this is the way in which we have decided to tackle our research.

The people who live and work in the situation where the research is happening could be affected by the research – in positive or in negative ways. Thus, it is critical that the research process is as democratic as possible, and that the people who could be affected by the research are actively involved in the research process. They need to be active agents in the research, not passive objects of study.

If research is to help change the social structure for the better and to correct the distortions of the past, then it is very important to include the knowledge of the people who have been oppressed in that situation in the research process.

To summarise what we have argued: social research is one way of doing research. It is a process that draws on the life experiences of people in the context, in order to create new knowledge and new understandings. It recognises that research is a political process that can be used to silence or to give a voice to particular people. If the main purpose of the research is to find new, fairer and better ways of organising the workplace, then the research must be undertaken in partnership with workers.

From: Lugg, R. and Burroughs, E. (1996) 'National Union of Mineworkers ABET Research Part 2: Draft Final Report.' Unpublished report for NUM.

Questions

1. Explain in your own words what you understand by the concept that knowledge is 'socially constructed'.
2. Think back to Activity 1. How could you use the notion that knowledge is 'socially constructed' to critique this type of research?
3. This extract comes from research that was done for the National Union of Mineworkers. Do you think it is applicable to teachers? Why?

Research methodology

Within a critical research model, there are two main ways of doing research. These are known as quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative approach involves collecting data, facts and figures; the qualitative approach focuses more on trying to understand and interpret processes, responses and contexts. It is tempting to think of quantitative research as being more 'objective' than qualitative research but this is not really true because facts and figures are analysed or interpreted by researchers, who are as subjective as most other people. Quantitative methods are often associated with positivism, but in fact they can also be used critically. On the other hand, qualitative research has often been criticised as seeking only to interpret and not to change. This is true of some studies but others use qualitative methods to expose fundamental problems or contradictions, and to motivate for far-reaching changes. In many research projects a combination of methods is used.

Research methods are only tools and can be made to serve many ends — more important questions concern who does the research, where and why.

Quantitative research

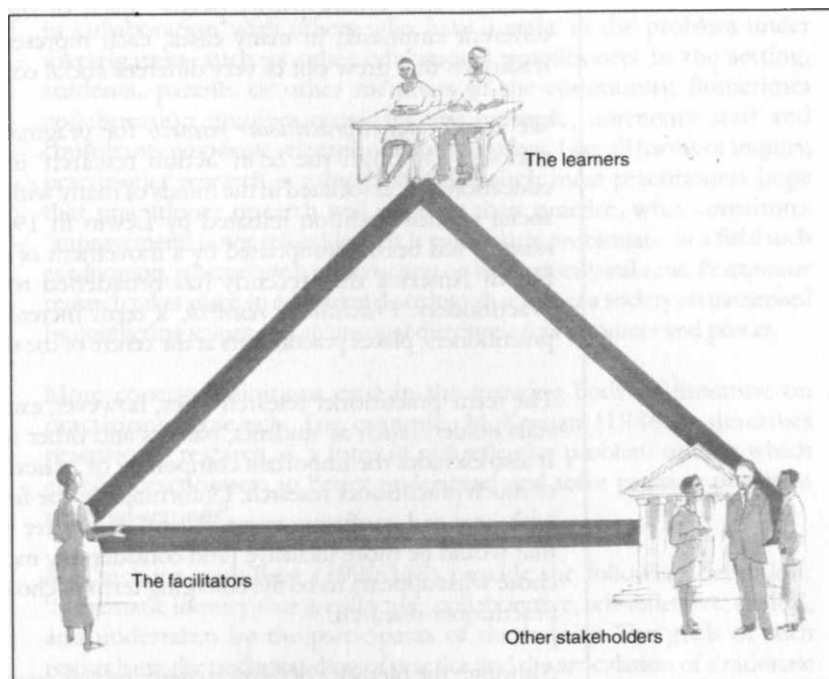
Quantitative methods rely on data collection. This might consist of test or examination results out of which graphs or charts are drawn, or answers to questionnaires which are collated and analysed. One of the main difficulties with quantitative research in an educational context is that it is often inappropriate to think of the learning process as small, fragmented bits that we can analyse and study in isolation. It is even more problematic when a positivist approach is involved, for example, setting up 'control' groups or taking scientific 'samples' of teachers and learners. In education we deal with many different contexts and complex processes of learning and development. Everything that happens in the classroom can be interpreted in many different ways, depending on who is doing the interpreting or on which theory they base their interpretation on. So it is more difficult to use quantitative methods to make claims about how adult learners acquire literacy most effectively, for example, than it would be to show how the electricity supply can be made more effective.

Qualitative research

It is usually more appropriate to use qualitative research methods for finding out about aspects of the learning process or to assess the impact of different ways of teaching and learning. Qualitative research involves finding out about people's perceptions, the ways in which different people respond to educational innovation, the way they understand their contexts, etc.

In qualitative research, researchers attempt to involve all stakeholders in the research process. Stakeholders are people, organisations or institutions who play a role in the issues being researched and who might gain (or lose) from the findings. The more people that are involved

with the research process, the more accurate a reflection of the 'reality' will be achieved. In qualitative research different voices should be heard. The researcher's voice is one voice among many, and she or he is thus less likely to interpret events in a simplistic or biased way. Trying to balance the researcher's opinion or interpretation against those of other participants is known as 'triangulation'.



Triangulation is the process of gaining different perspectives on the same event.

What is action research?

Now let's look at the origin of the terms 'action research' and 'practitioner research', and define their key characteristics. This section gives an overview of the history of research by teachers. This history is both long and varied, despite its relative lack of recognition by academics and so-called 'scientific' researchers.

Although action research is similar in some ways to qualitative research, it differs in several important ways:

- ◆ Knowledge is not produced for a scientific community but for other practitioners and those who share their daily reality.
- ◆ Unlike qualitative research, which involves the observation, description and interpretation of educational settings, action research aims to transform these settings.
- ◆ Unlike qualitative research, action research is done in an action-oriented setting. Reflection on action is the driving force of the research. This is why the term traditionally used to describe this kind of inquiry is 'action research'.

What is practitioner research?

Several terms in current use describe research done on site by school practitioners. The most common ones are 'action research', 'teacher research', 'practitioner research', 'site-based research', 'action science', 'collaborative action research', 'participatory action research', 'educative research' and 'emancipatory praxis'. Each of these terms connotes a different emphasis; in **many** cases, each represents different research traditions that grew out of very different social contexts.

We use the term *practitioner research* for pragmatic and philosophical reasons. Although the term 'action research' is still **widely** used in education, it is associated in the minds of many with a particular academic social science tradition initiated by Lewin in 1946. The term *teacher research* has been appropriated by a movement of teacher researchers in North America that recently has broadened to embrace all school practitioners. *Practitioner research*, a term increasingly used by school practitioners, places practitioners at the centre of the enterprise.

The term 'practitioner research' does, however, exclude other important stakeholders, such as students, parents and other community members. It also excludes the important component of 'action', which is the essence of much practitioner research. Unfortunately, the field is already cluttered with new and confusing terms. Therefore, rather than coin a new term that would be more inclusive (and considerably more cumbersome), we chose what appears to be the emerging term of choice in North America: practitioner research.

Although the plethora of terms to describe this research also reflects wide disagreement on many key issues, we provide a working definition of practitioner research, as well as a few of our working assumptions, that are used throughout the book. Practitioner research is a living, growing movement that is in the process of evolving; it is this evolution that we describe in subsequent chapters.

Defining practitioner research

In attempting to provide a working definition of practitioner research, we want to make it clear that every point in the following definition is hotly debated in the burgeoning literature on practitioner research. Thus, we attempt to provide a 'snapshot' of how the definition is taking shape.

In basic terms, practitioner research is 'insider' research done by practitioners (in this book, those working in educational settings) using their own site (classroom, institution, school district, community) as the focus of their study. It is a reflective process, but is different from isolated, spontaneous reflection in that it is deliberately and systematically undertaken, and generally requires that some form of evidence be presented to support assertions. What constitutes 'evidence' or, in more traditional terms, 'data', is still being debated.

Most practitioner research is oriented to some action or cycle of actions that practitioners wish to take to address a particular situation. For this reason, the term action research has traditionally been used for this type of research.

Some, including the authors, argue that practitioner research is best done in collaboration with others who have a stake in the problem under investigation, such as other educational practitioners in the setting, students, parents or other members of the community. Sometimes collaboration involves outsiders, for example, university staff and consultants who have relevant skills or resources. Like all forms of inquiry, practitioner research is value laden. Although most practitioners hope that practitioner research will improve their practice, what constitutes 'improvement' is not self-evident. It is particularly problematic in a field such as education, where there is no consensus on basic educational aims. Practitioner research takes place in educational settings that reflect a society characterised by conflicting values and an unequal distribution of resources and power.

More concise definitions exist in the growing body of literature on practitioner research. For example, McKernan (1988:6) describes practitioner research as 'a form of self-reflective problem solving which enables practitioners to better understand and solve pressing problems in social settings'.

McCutcheon and Tung (1990:148) provide the following definition: 'Systematic inquiry that is collective, collaborative, self-reflective, critical, and undertaken by the participants of the inquiry. The goals of such research are the understanding of practice and the articulation of a rationale or philosophy of practice in order to improve practice.'

Kemmis and McTaggart (1982:6) provide a more radical definition. They describe it as: 'a form of collective, self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, as well as their understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out. Groups of participants can be teachers, students, principals, parents and other community members – any group with a shared concern. The approach is only action research when it is collaborative, though it is important to realise that the action research of the group is achieved through the critically examined action of the individual group members.'

We prefer to remain as eclectic as possible with regard to a definition. However, we would like to lay out a few assumptions that form the foundation for this book.

Working assumptions

Following are a few assumptions that we share about practitioner research. We feel that these assumptions are also widely shared within the practitioner research community.

Practitioner research differs from academic research

Although practitioner research can borrow appropriate methods from academic research, it is fundamentally different from academic research in that it represents insider or local knowledge about a setting. There is no way an outsider, even an ethnographer who spends years as an observer, can acquire the tacit knowledge of a setting that those who must act within it daily possess. This creates obvious advantages for the practitioner researcher, but it also makes it harder for the practitioner researcher to 'step back' and take a dispassionate look at the setting. This subjectivity is one of the reasons that some recommend that practitioners do research in collaboration with outsiders or with a 'critical friend'. This critical friend may be another insider, but one who plays a devil's advocate role.

Practitioner research is political

As mentioned in our definition, we believe that no research is neutral. Therefore, researchers should not be naive about how their research will be received within their setting. Although practitioner researchers need techniques for gathering and analysing data, they also need an understanding of the ways in which practitioner research often threatens the vested interests and ideological commitments of some groups and individuals.

We will attempt to discuss epistemological and political issues in a straightforward and clear manner. Many books that deal with these issues, although excellent accounts that are valuable resources for academics, tend to turn practitioners off because their discourse is pitched at academics rather than practitioners. We want language to serve as an aid rather than an obstacle to understanding for practitioners.

On the other hand, we are disturbed by a growing anti-intellectualism on the part of some, who assume that educational practitioners only want a nuts and bolts, 'what-I-can-do-on-Monday' recipe for answering 'safe' and narrow questions limited to the four walls of a classroom or school. We find this trend toward 'deskilling' insulting to educational practitioners, who, in our experience, desire a better understanding of their practice and its social effects. We are also beginning to understand, thanks to Argyris and Schon (1974), that there is no such thing as practice that is non-theoretical. Many of the recipes and tips for teachers that appear in practitioner journals are dripping with theoretical and ideological assumptions of which even their authors may be unaware. Part of the task of practitioner research is to strip away the unexamined theoretical baggage that has accumulated around almost everything we do in schools. To do this, we must make the familiar seem strange, the very task of much qualitative research.

There are many valid ways to do practitioner research

Many practitioners are 'blocked' from doing research because they have a particular image of research, acquired from a research course they took during their undergraduate or graduate studies. In all likelihood, this

course taught students to do quantitative, statistical research in which representative samples, significance levels, and confounding variables were the order of the day. It is only in recent years that introductory courses present students with a fuller range of research traditions. It is hard for most practitioners to imagine doing quantitative, statistical research in their own settings. Although much research in education is of this kind, it represents only one of many options available to practitioner researchers. Some questions may be best pursued with statistical research and there are books available that address this kind of practitioner research. However, the emphasis in this book is on qualitative methodologies, which tend to be appropriated from anthropology, sociology, history, linguistics and the humanities.

By qualitative research, we mean anything from ethnographic methods to journals and essays. We have no interest in policing what 'counts' as research and what does not. Our sense is that practitioners themselves are beginning to develop criteria for distinguishing rigour from sloppiness in practitioner research.

Practitioner research can empower and include a greater number of voices

Practitioner research has the potential for empowerment and the inclusion of a greater diversity of voices in educational policy and social change. We see practitioner research as an opportunity to make the voices of those who work closest to the classroom heard. This includes not only those practitioners who work at school sites, but also the students who study there and the people who live in the school's community.

We see practitioner research not merely as individual practitioners trying to improve their practice, but as part of a larger social movement that challenges dominant research and development approaches that emphasise an outside-in, top-down approach to educational change. In other words, we believe that empowerment begins with a group of educational practitioners who view themselves not merely as consumers of someone else's knowledge, but as knowledge creators in their own right. Unless educational practitioners who are committed to empowering themselves and their students begin to take over school reform movements, practitioner research will be co-opted by those very movements, which are led by special interests more concerned with 'national competitiveness' than with the welfare of children.

Although these goals are not inherently incompatible, too many children are currently viewed as socially expendable from a purely economic perspective. We personally know and work with many practitioners with a commitment to social justice working at school sites. These practitioners, through their research, are beginning to challenge the mythologies and institutional and social arrangements that lead to school failure for a disproportionate number of poor and minority students.

Practitioner research is best done collaboratively

We believe that practitioner research is best done as part of a collaborative effort. Ideally, collaboration is done with others who have a stake in the problem under study. However, it may also be done with a group of other practitioners who are also engaged in research. These other practitioners may or may not work at the same site, but they provide the practitioner researcher with an emotional support group, a group of critical friends who can critique one's work within a context of support.

Although we do not wish to discourage isolated practitioners – many of whom may have limited access to other practitioner researchers – from engaging in research, the many advantages of collaboration are becoming increasingly apparent. In fact, many practitioner research projects have emerged unexpectedly from teacher study and support groups.

Conclusion

These are exciting times for practitioner research. It has the potential to bring to light important theories about practice that have been too long discredited as informal theory or 'teacher lore'. It can empower school practitioners by helping them discover their voices and resist attempts at deskilling. It can build collegiality and a common community of learning among practitioners, which in turn provides a model of inquiry for students. On the other hand, it can also become one more teacher in-service scheme that can be packaged and taken on the road – another implementation strategy cooked up by management to 'build ownership' in schools for the latest centrally mandated reform. It can become just one more expectation – one more thing teachers are expected to do.

However, practitioners are beginning to build their own research networks. When they invite so-called experts to participate, it is increasingly on their own terms. It remains to be seen whether this movement will lead to empowerment or be co-opted as the latest teacher in-service scheme by a top-down reform movement.

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Questions



1. The reading above has three sections to it. Read each section through again. Then for the section headed 'Defining practitioner research' choose one keyword for each paragraph and write it in the margin next-to the relevant paragraph. For the part headed 'Working assumptions' choose a key sentence for each sub-section and underline it.
2. Share your keywords and underlined key sentences with your study group and see if you can reach agreement. If not, record the reasons for the disagreement. Make a note of the keywords and sentences or make a summary of the reading for quick reference.

You will revisit these keywords at the end of your research project.

What does action research look like?

Although there are many approaches and forms of practitioner or action research in this workbook we will concentrate on two approaches. Both have the essential component of 'reflection on action' as the driving force of the research.

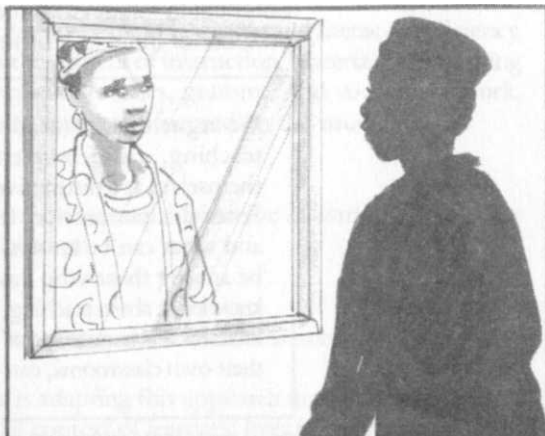
Definitions

action research for participatory curriculum development: this is a process where research, planning and action are connected to bring about positive social change. This form of action research involves the facilitator and the learners in deciding what to learn, collecting and organising information, creating many of their own reading and learning materials and jointly evaluating their progress. The aim of the research, however, is to use the learning process in the classroom to equip learners to act on a problem of their choosing outside the classroom,

action research for reflective teaching: in this form of action research, teachers choose an aspect of their own teaching to investigate and improve. Issues are identified and the teacher — or teacher and learners together — work out ways of addressing these.

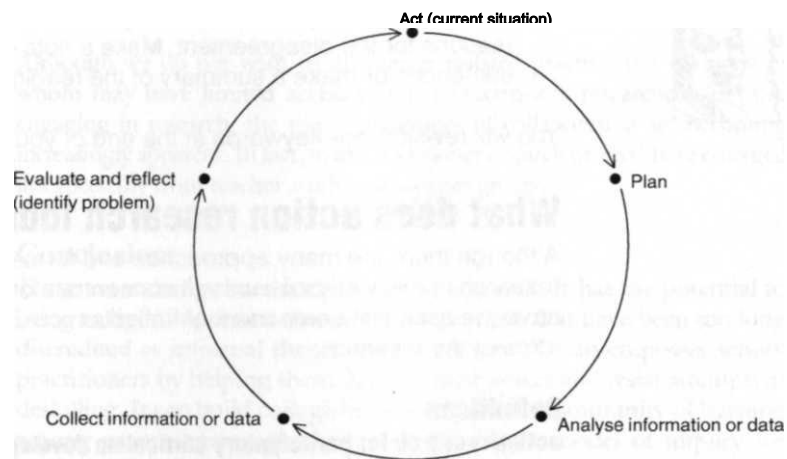


Action research builds participatory learning.



Action research develops reflective teaching practice.

All forms of action research follow the same cycle of reflection and action. Many teachers intuitively follow this cycle when they notice that something is not working as well as they would like it to: they consider the situation based on the information they have, they look for alternative ways of dealing with the problem, they select one way and try it out, they then observe the results and if necessary adjust what they are doing or try something else. Does this cycle remind you of anything?



The action research cycle

Action research: problem-posing/problem-solving

Action research converts the informal process of inquiry and reflection into a more systematic one that lends itself to problem-solving as well as to possible dissemination to a larger audience.

Practitioners use research that they carry out themselves to solve dilemmas or questions that they experience in their practice. Although this research is primarily for themselves and their learners, it has the potential to influence education on a wider scale — to have an impact on teacher training, curriculum and ultimately on policy.

We argue that we need to develop a different theory of knowledge for teaching, a different epistemology that regards inquiry by teachers themselves as a distinctive and important way of knowing about teaching. From this perspective, fundamental questions about knowing, knowers and what can be known would have different answers. Teachers would be among those who have the authority to know — that is, to construct knowledge about teaching, learning and schooling. And what is worth knowing includes teachers 'ways of knowing' or what teachers, who are researchers in their own classrooms, can know through systematic subjectivity.

Examples of action research

Typically researchers do not begin with any fixed plan about how the research will proceed. Rather the plan evolves as the research takes place. However, some planning is obviously necessary to get started. This involves careful consideration about teaching and learning topics to investigate and also making preliminary decisions about how the information is to be collected.

We include two examples of practitioner research. The first example describes a process of participatory curriculum development used by teachers in an adult literacy project in Boston (USA). The second case study describes teachers reflecting on teaching and learning in a prison environment.

Case study 1: Action research for participatory curriculum development

'The learners' lives are the curriculum'

This participatory curriculum development process involved the following components:

Investigation and identification of themes

Teachers investigated the social conditions of learners' lives with them in order to identify their concerns and goals.

Re-presentation and dialogue

As teachers discovered what was important in learners' lives, they created or selected materials to present the themes back to students as lesson content. Participants then discussed these issues in terms of how they experienced them, their root or social causes and possible strategies for addressing them.

Extension

A range of tools was utilised to extend language and literacy proficiency, exploring these issues as the content of instruction. Materials and learning activities (language experience, stories, grammar and vocabulary work, reading and writing, role plays, etc.) focused on the issues.

Action

Learners applied what they learned inside the classroom to address concerns outside the classroom.

Evaluation

The class evaluated the learning process and the actions they have taken.

Of course, the challenge is adapting this approach to particular groups of learners. When the social context of learners' lives is incorporated in

instruction, relevance is ensured. As learners participate in identifying themes that are important to them, in developing learning tools they will use and in evaluating what they have learned, they gain a measure of control over their own learning which extends to their lives outside the classroom.

Adapted from: **Auerbach, E. (1996)** *From the Community to the Community: A Guidebook for Participatory Literacy Training*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Questions



1. The process of participatory curriculum development was based on Freirian 'praxis' in which the teachers guides a problem-posing/ problem-solving process. Do you agree?
2. Discuss the above research approach using the keywords you identified in the questions on page 25. Look back at the list of keywords you identified and use each in turn to evaluate the research process described in case study 1.

Case study 2: Action research for reflective teaching

Correctional Services have schools in 38 prisons in South Africa. The prison schools cater for juveniles and adults and are staffed by Correctional Services personnel.

In addition to my own observations, I have used contributions from facilitators and Correctional Services personnel. I have also quoted from material which has been written by prisoners. Permission to use the material mentioned was obtained by me from all concerned. The office of the Commissioner, Correctional Services, Pretoria evaluated and approved the publication of this document, subject to two changes being made.

While gathering information, I asked the question of facilitators and warders: 'What single factor struck you most forcibly when you first encountered the prison environment?'

The answers ranged from prisoners being so thin, to the deep emotional and material needs of prisoners, to the lack of hostility between learners and facilitators, to the prisoners behaving like ordinary citizens where extraordinary behaviour has been expected. A warder expressed his feelings like this:

When I first came to work in the prison I was struck by the hundreds of prisoners, more especially the young ones. Most of them didn't come here because they chose to, but were *forced* by circumstances to *commit crimes*. For this I felt and am still very *sympathetic and hate myself* because I can't help them with anything. The *prisoners have no autonomy*. *Here a human is told when to play, when to eat and when to sleep. They*

ARE PROVIDED WITH *anything that the* **AUTHORITIES DEEM NECESSARY. THEY cannot object. Many STAFF MEMBERS STILL THINK THAT A PRISONER POSES A THREAT TO US AND** *we* **TREAT THEM SHABBILY.**

Seeing teenagers in leg irons as I entered the prison for the first time jolted me into realising where I was. The young men in our Project are serving sentences of 2-11 years. Their crimes range from 'pavement roof (mugging) to housebreaking and armed robbery to rape and murder.

In a prison environment, nothing is as it appears to be. There are wheels within wheels and layers upon layers. Now and then, one gets a glimpse of life 'inside':

IF I AM HERE IN LEEWKOP MY FAMILY cannot come to VISIT ME BECAUSE THEY HAVE NO MONEY. THIS PLACE IS *notgood* **BUT ONE DAY I WILL LEAVE AND START A NEW LIFE. AT THE END OF MY SENTENCE I WILL FORGET ABOUT CRIME. OTHER PEOPLE DO NOT KNOW WHAT PRISON IS. PRISON IS A PLACE WHERE YOU FIND ALL THE CRIMINALS.**

(Isaiah, Medium B prison, October, 1994.)

Those of us working in the prison walk a fine line between natural human trust and involvement and what we perceive as the prison situation. Learners, facilitators and the prison authorities interact in a mesh of constraints, tensions and contradictions.

There seem to be two different worlds in a prison. That which is revealed and that which is hidden. The daytime world in the binneplaas and the grounds shows itself as disciplined and well run but surprisingly relaxed and informal.

Within the prison grounds prisoners move around fairly freely, guarded by lookout posts. A prisoner may open the gate for a facilitator or come to the car to earn* books. Visitors and facilitators have remarked on the friendly and happy atmosphere in the classroom.

The night-time world is hidden and frightening. Gang warfare and prostitution are common practices and it is an unnerving aspect of working in a prison environment that one cannot be certain of anybody.

One thing seems sure and that is that young prisoners do not want to be imprisoned ever again.

I WILL BE RELEASED FROM LEEWKOP ON 23 FEBRUARY 1999. IT WILL BE A WONDERFUL DAY FOR ME AND MY FAMILY. I WILL NEVER COME BACK TO PRISON.

(Godfrey, Medium B prison, October, 1993.)

There is a high instance of absenteeism among certain of the learners. Unavoidable absences are caused by illness or events in the prison affecting the school attendance of individual learners. However, some learners stay

away because of loss of motivation or because incidents in the cells have distressed them.

Attending our programme is a free choice for the learners but we encourage them to come to school and to commit themselves to seeing out the two year period. If they choose to leave the project, we do not try to stop them. The drop out numbers have been low, however. Two learners have dropped out over the whole project.

Motivation of the learners on a daily basis has proved to be the single most important aspect of the success of our education programme.

Observing and attempting to understand the impact of imprisonment on the daily lives of our learners has led us to realise that continuous encouragement is essential to keep them going on the difficult path they have chosen.

A facilitator who gained the trust of the prisoners in the early weeks of the project writes:

HERE I WAS TEACHING GUYS WITHOUT HOPE IN LIFE TO READ AND WRITE. WAS THIS GOING TO BE OF VALUE TO THEM? WHAT COULD I DO TO HELP THEM SEETHE OTHER SIDE OF LIFE, THE SIDE THEY DID NOT KNOW? I WAS *forced* TO HAVE A STRATEGY.

WHAT I DID WAS TO LOVE THEM. I RESPECTED THEM. I MADE THEM FEEL VERY IMPORTANT AND PRAISED THEM FOR ANY GOOD THING THEY DID. I LOOKED FOR GOOD POINTS IN THEM AND CONGRATULATED THEM. ON THE OTHER HAND, I WAS VERY FIRM WITH THEM. I REBUKED THEM POLITELY BUT STRONGLY WHENEVER THE DISOBEYED BY INSTRUCTIONS.

IT WAS MY SONG TO EMPHASISE THE NEED FOR THEM TO FEEL AND KNOW THAT THEY ARE IMPORTANT IN LIFE, THAT THEY HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY, THAT THEIR LIVES COUNT, THEY HAVE COSMIC SIGNIFICANCE AND THAT THEY CAN MAKE IT. I TOLD THEM THAT KNOWING HOW TO READ AND WRITE WILL CHANGE THEIR LIFE STYLE, BUT THIS IS A STEP IN THE *adder*. HAVING THE RIGHT ATTITUDE TOWARDS LIFE WILL MAKE THE REAL *difference*.

Project Literacy facilitators have not experienced any feelings of personal danger at Leewkop. On the contrary, the classroom atmosphere is friendly and peaceful. A warder is always on duty outside and the prison grounds are guarded by lookout posts.

However, in a prison tight security has to be observed. Facilitators are reminded not to take money or valuables into the classroom. Any object that can be made into a weapon such as scissors, utensils and even metal file clips cannot be used in the classroom. Facilitators may not post letters for the learners, unless they have been censored. We do not make our personal addresses or telephone numbers known to the learners, but supply Project Literacy's business address and telephone numbers.

The awareness of security rule does affect the teaching relationship. The facilitators and learners build up trust between them, yet one must not trust.

The elements of trust and mutual respect are important in any teaching and learning relationship, but in a prison environment their significance is heightened and adds stress to the situation. Facilitators have to be tactful and sympathetic, tough and resilient. They have to be aware of the harsh conditions that prisoners suffer and yet have to dissociate themselves from emotional involvement with the prisoners.

Adapted from: *Project Literacy/Noble, T. (1996) 'Adult Basic Education and Training in a prison context.'* Unpublished paper presented at the SAALA Conference, University of Zululand, July 1996.

Questions

1. How do you think that reflecting on their teaching and on the situation in which they found themselves helped the facilitators in this project? Explain.
2. Discuss the above research using the keywords you identified in the questions, page 25. Look back at the list of keywords you identified and use each in turn to evaluate the reflections described in case study 2.

Activity 3

Aim

This aim of this activity is to find and critique an example of practitioner research.

Find an article describing practitioner or teacher action research in any journal that you know of relating to the subject you are teaching. For examples of professional development journals, see the list of recommended readings at the end of Chapter 6.

Write a few paragraphs explaining and critiquing the research described in the article that you have found.

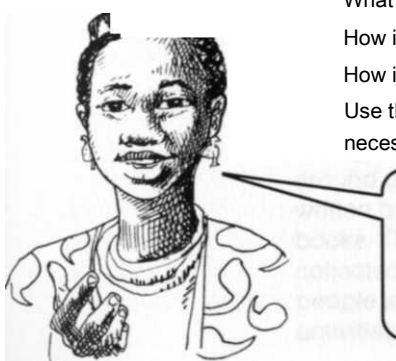
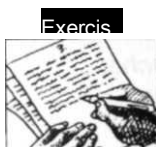
What strikes you about the research?

How is it different from the case studies described above?

How is it similar to the case studies?

Use the keywords from the questions on page 25 to help you, if necessary.

Anyone planning a research project, however small and localised, needs to consider the ethical principles guiding their work. Discuss any worries you may have with your group or facilitator.



Guidelines for ethical research practice

- ◆ Always get the consent of all people who will be involved in the research project.
- ◆ Keep the research confidential. Do not disclose the names of people involved, unless they wish to be identified.
- ◆ Treat the people you are researching, or who are involved in your research project, with respect.
- ◆ If you tell them that you will inform them of the research process and findings, keep your word.
- ◆ Do not publish, disseminate or discuss the research findings without the permission of the people involved in the research project.

Evaluate this chapter

Think back over the chapter. What did you learn about research and research approaches? Did you develop any skills while doing the activities in this chapter? Explain what skills you developed? Was there anything that you disagreed with in the chapter? Make a note of things that you disagreed with — or found confusing — and discuss these with your teaching support group, mentor or facilitator. Is there anything that you want to find out more about? Make a list. If these are not covered in the coming chapters, consult the suggested readings below.

Recommended reading

Anderson, G. L, Herr, K. and Nihlen, A. S. (1994) *Studying Your Own School*. California: Corwin Press Inc./Sage Publications.

Cochran-Smith, M. and Lytle, S. (1993) *Inside/Outside: Teacher Research and Knowledge*. New York: Teachers College Press.

3

ACTION RESEARCH AND PARTICIPATORY LEARNING

The knowledge that we teach has been won through research, and I have come to believe that such knowledge cannot be taught correctly except through some form of research-based teaching. The grounds for this belief are epistemological. Knowledge of the kind we have to offer is falsified when it is presented as the results of research detached from an understanding of the research process . . . In teaching there is always a retaining of power as well as a conferring of power. Research-based teaching, conceived as enquiry-based teaching, shifts the balance of power towards the student. It is his/her own research or enquiry which gives the teacher the strength to do this.

From: *Stenhouse, L. (1979) 'Research as a basis for teaching' in Rudduck, J. and Hopkins, D. (eds). (1985) Research as a Basis for Teaching: Readings from the Work of Lawrence Stenhouse. London: Heineman, p. 116.*

Aim of this chapter

In the previous chapter we said that an action research approach could help teachers and learners find ways of making learning relevant to learners' lives and needs. This will help to make learning more effective. In this chapter you are going to develop skills in using action research to analyse learners' needs and interests. You are also going to find out about different ways in which you can facilitate activities that will involve learners in a participatory learning process. In participatory learning, teacher and learners negotiate what they are going to learn. They learn together by drawing on the knowledge and experience of the group. They learn by finding information to extend and develop their prior knowledge and skills and they collectively decide on a course of action. In this chapter you are going to find out about different strategies for participatory learning and we'll provide guidelines for blending them together to create a dynamic learning programme.

What is participatory learning?

One of the basic reasons why we need research skills in our daily lives is so that we can collect and organise information about the world around us. Learning is not merely knowing how to read information written by experts. Learning is not limited to information that comes from books. There is a great deal of information and knowledge waiting to be collected, discussed, organised, analysed and written down by ordinary people in their communities and places of work. Effective learning activities are those in which learners ask and answer questions, collect

information from many sources, discuss the meaning of what they have found, and write and think about what they have learned. This is the basis of research: identifying problems or topics to study, collecting information, analysing, developing understanding and then writing about what was found.

Action research should focus on finding out important information about learning and using literacy in families, communities and workplaces. Literacy teachers, for example, need to find out who does the reading and writing, what literacy materials are available and how the 'literate world' impacts on families where adults can't read or write.

Teachers as researchers

Teachers are often excluded from the process of curriculum development. It has traditionally been held that teachers are *practitioners* — that is, people who put into practice what has already been developed by someone else, somewhere else. Teachers find themselves more often the 'objects' of research, for example, by being asked to implement a new course or approach and then having their practice scrutinised and analysed by researchers. Because being 'researched' in this way is alienating and disempowering, teachers frequently tend to reject these 'innovations' and regard the research process as not useful to their daily work.

But, in fact, teachers themselves have an important role to play in educational research. And it is gradually being recognised that teachers have significant contributions to make to both educational theory, course development and practice.

Learners as researchers

How do you think learners would feel about being objects of someone's research: having a particular programme imposed on them, being observed, having their progress monitored, etc.? Learners would probably feel the same way as you felt in Activity 1 of Chapter 2 (page 15). This is why a participatory approach to research is important. This is what some literacy researchers have to say about the significance of adult learners doing research:

In recent years, people have broadened their ideas about who can do research and why research is done. Many development workers and literacy educators are realising that local people and literacy learners are very capable of researching their own communities and families. Local people have the information; they simply need training on how to identify specific-problems and topics, collect information systematically and analyse their findings. They may also need encouragement to recognise the significance of their effort and the value of using their own ideas to improve their homes and communities. With a few simple research skills, literacy practitioners and learners can identify their community's needs and make

their own recommendations for programmes, policies and learning strategies. As community members they are motivated to use the information at the local level to create change.

From: Dixon, J. and Cohen, J. (1996) Literacy and Learning in Families and Communities Action-Learning Manual: A Guide for Literacy Practitioners. Amherst, USA: Literacy Linkage Program.

Questions

- 1 Which do you think would make a richer, more effective learning experience: participatory learning or following a set learning programme? Explain your reasons
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each approach?

Action research is a learning process in which skills and knowledge are developed.

Teachers and learners as action researchers

When teachers and learners share and discuss their needs and find ways of addressing them, their involvement in action research can contribute to both teachers' and learners' development. In the research process knowledge is produced and skills are acquired. The research process parallels the learning process: there is problem posing and problem solving, information finding, analysis and the application of knowledge in action. Through the development and acquisition of greater knowledge about what makes for effective educational practice teachers and learners will also be more able to improve the partnerships between themselves, their learners and their communities. Action research for participatory learning means that teachers and learners are better equipped to evaluate the materials that they are working with as well as the methodologies required to teach these materials.

Research for transformation

Action research for participatory learning sets out not just to understand the causes and effects of present circumstances, but to effect change. In other words, you are not only asking research questions, but implementing changes according to your findings. This is the power and usefulness of action research. It is a critical enquiry into past and present circumstances which is directed at future action for change.

Strategies for an action research approach to participatory learning

In the next section we are going to discuss strategies that you can use to implement an action research approach to participatory learning with your learning group. The process has five basic components:

LEARNING ABOUT ACTION RESEARCH

- ◆ Identifying a research question.
- ◆ Data collection/information finding
- ◆ Data/information analysis.
- ◆ Planning.
- ◆ Action.
- ◆ Evaluation.

It is important to plan the research process, using these strategies as a guide, but we have found that in real life the process is not quite as neat cut, in fact, it is considerably more 'messy'. Problems tend to arise that need to be addressed, the development of learners' reading, writing and other skills should not be neglected, teachers will need to think about how their practice impacts on the learning, teachers' and learners' research skills need to be developed, there will be many external course requirements or organisational constraints, etc.



Identifying the research topic

Collecting data/information

Analysing data

Planning

Action

Stage 1: finding a research topic

Like other forms of research, action research usually starts off with finding a research question or identifying a research topic. The action research process will consist of finding ways to address the research question. Before you get to the stage of taking action or implementing changes based on your findings, action research goes through various stages. The first is defining your research topic. Action research questions are open questions — in other words, they generate further questions and there are many ways of addressing these questions.



Don't expect a 'right' or a 'wrong' answer to a research question!

Before we go on and look at the process of developing a research topic in more detail, let's remind ourselves of what we're trying to achieve. We're trying to use an action research approach to build skills in participatory learning. Participatory learning is a process where the facilitator and the learners negotiate a learning programme. The facilitator is also involved in the process — she or he will help the learners to develop skills while they are researching. If there are formal course requirements, the facilitator negotiates these with the learners. The facilitator and the learners then develop learning activities that help the learners study the topic that they want to find out about, while developing learning skills, reading and writing abilities, etc. The learners are involved as partners in the research process: by defining the research question, collecting and organising the information, etc. They may, for example, create many of their own reading materials by writing about their own experience or about important topics. The learners can also be involved in evaluating and assessing their own progress.

Using an action research approach to participatory curriculum development means combining elements of both research and curriculum development as teachers and learners work together to understand their local situation and to design learning activities and materials to meet their needs.

Identifying possible research topics

It is a good idea in the first meeting with learners to discuss their expectations of the course, to tell them something about the action research process and to explain how researching can build many skills.

Brainstorm areas of concern, things that the learners want to find out more about, their needs, the needs of their communities, their concerns, difficulties, etc. You can interview the learners individually or in groups about their needs and interests and the skills and knowledge they already have.

If you prefer, you can ask learners to fill in needs analysis questionnaires (see the 'Useful forms' section at the back of this workbook). Before you can finally decide on a topic to research with your learners you will need to find out about the formal course requirements (if your learning group are registered to do a formal course or write a national examination) in order to ensure that you will be able to facilitate the development of the required skills during the research process. Ask yourself questions such as:

- ◆ What literacy or language skills would learners develop by participating in the activities described?
- ◆ Which activities would you like to do with your learning group? Why?
- ◆ How can you adapt activities for a community literacy project or for a workplace setting'?

Action-learning activities which help to identify research topics

Each of the action-learning activities below can be used with adult learners to help identify problems or topics for research.

Family diagrams

Asking learners to draw pictures or diagrams of their family is an interesting way to introduce a discussion of many issues and problems that families face. For example, the diagrams may show that husbands are working in distant cities, that families are caring for aged grandparents, that women are raising children alone, or that the extended family is too close or too far away. The diagrams will also show how family members support each other and provide an important source of experience, knowledge and wisdom for advising each other about daily living.

Family literacy survey

Collecting information about existing literacy materials and practices in families will help you to identify problems family members face when they need to use reading and writing skills in daily life. It will also help you identify how family members use existing resources and informal sources of knowledge in creative ways.

Family history

Helping families explore their family history will help you identify problems family members face in linking the different generations and members of their extended family. This activity will also help you to identify the rich source of information that many elders possess that should be valued, shared and documented.

Local knowledge

Observing how families work together and teach others can help you to identify problems related to passing on traditional knowledge as well as sources of local knowledge that can be shared and documented.

Community mapping

Making a map of the family's relationship to institutions and resources in the community can be used to collect information on needs, resources, problems and opportunities in the community.

Access analysis

Interviewing individuals can help to identify problems and analyse barriers related to age, gender, class and ability that certain people face in gaining access to community resources. The interviews will also help to identify people who have ideas about ways to improve the community situation.

Hopes and fears discussion

By talking with family members about hopes and fears concerning how literacy might affect family relationships and individual lives you can identify problems related to human relationships and interactions. The discussions in this activity can also help you to identify motivations and constraints for literacy learning.

Adapted from: Dixon, J. and Cohen, J. (1996) *Literacy and Learning in Families and Communities Action-Learning Manual: A Guide for Literacy Practitioners*. Amherst, USA: Literacy Linkage Program.

Who is going to do the research?

It needs to be clear from the start that learners will be involved in the research project. The teacher is not going to do the research for the learners; she or he will be a co-researcher *with the* learners. Select key issues and prioritise.

Why is the research going to be done?

It is very important to ask what the research is *for*. There must be clarity around why a topic is going to be researched and what the learners hope to gain from this approach. In problematising the research topic learners will start the process of learning by deepening their understanding of what they are doing and why they are doing it.

Where is the research going to be done?

Researching community needs will mean visiting different people and organisations. Finding information may require site visits to workplaces, resource centres and libraries. As the facilitator you will need to be responsible for the logistics of all this: arranging site visits, trips to the library, etc. All these will need to be planned and arranged well in advance.

How is the research going to be done?

Some initial thinking about what the research will entail will help to narrow down the research topic. For example, if an initial idea for a research topic has to do with finding out about what skills people need for employment, you may find that when you start thinking about how you are going to do this research that the topic is too broad: there

are too many different kinds of industry and business and not enough learners to research them all! So you might decide on a more manageable topic, such as finding out about skills needed for employment in a particular industry like the clothing or building industry. Even these are rather large areas for research and will need to be narrowed down further, such as skills needed to make a garment or to build a house.

How will the research link with the formal course requirements?

If learners are enrolled for a particular ABET course, such as English Communications level 3, or a similar course, they might see the research project as unimportant or as a distraction from the business of 'studying' and getting a qualification. It is, therefore, important that learners understand that the action research process is a learning process and that skills and knowledge will be developed much more effectively than sitting in a classroom and studying from a book. Book learning and reading skills are also important skills to develop, but should be integrated with the action research process.



You will need to monitor learners' progress in literacy, language or other skills as the research proceeds.

Defining the research topic

Once the above steps have been taken, the teacher and learners should

be ready to state what their research is going to consist of, who is going to do it, how it is going to be done, where it is going to take place, and why it is important.



r *Let's summarise the process thus far:*

]

The process of developing and defining a research topic

Brainstorm initial areas of concern

Modified by

_____ 5 _____

Other sources

- ◆ Colleagues
- ◆ Course requirements
- ◆ Literature survey

Describe participants

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ The learners◆ The teachers◆ Others (specify) |
|--|

Provide location

- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Classroom◆ On site (specify)◆ Other context (specify) |
|---|

Refine purpose

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Course development◆ Evaluation◆ Monitoring◆ Understanding |
|--|

Produces

Research topic

Activity 1

Aim

The aim of this activity is to develop a research question with your learners and to write up this activity for your action research report.



Follow the steps outlined in the flow chart on page 41. This may take three or four lessons with learners, especially if you do some of the activities recommended in the reading above. If your learning group is going to write a formal examination at the end of the year in Communications, Mathematics or another subject, you will need to find out what the course requirements are so that you can negotiate these with the learners to ensure that the required skills and content areas are developed in the course of your action research project.

Write up a report on how you developed a research question or research topic with your learners. Keep your writing in your file in the 'Research report' section.



Here's an extract from my research journal.

Example

CONTEXT: THE LEARNERS ARE PACKERS IN A FISH FACTORY. THEY ARE ALL WOMEN AGED from 15-35. MOST HAVE PRESCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN.

RESEARCH TOPIC: THE LEARNERS ARE *concerned about child care*. THEY WANT TO *find out* IF IT IS FINANCIALLY POSSIBLE TO ESTABLISH A CRECHE AT THEIR *workplace*, and to *find out what facilities should be provided by the creche to ensure good child care*.

WHY: *Doing THIS RESEARCH WILL HELP LEARNERS TO understand ISSUES IN CHILD CARE; by finding out what a creche WILL cost and by finding OUT ABOUT THE effect of a workplace creche on workers' productivity learners WILL BE ABLE TO PRESENT THIS Information to management and be better able persuade them to ESTABLISH A CRECHE ON THE premises.*

LEARNERS' ROLES: TO FIND *information* ABOUT THE FACILITIES *required for a creche*, the SKILLS *needed* BY THE CAREGIVER, AND THE COSTS INVOLVED IN ESTABLISHING A CRECHE.

TEACHERS' ROLE: TO FACILITATE THE PROCESS, TO ASSIST LEARNERS IF THEY GET STUCK, TO FIND *additional sources of Information on*



CHILD CARE AND *workplace creches*, TO arrange SITE VISITS AND TRIPS TO RESOURCE CENTRES, AND TO ISSUE INVITATIONS TO GUEST SPEAKERS; TO ENSURE THAT *learners are developing* SKILLS IN *reading, WRITING AND NUMERACY*.

WHERE: THE RESEARCH WILL BE DONE AT THE *workplace learning centre, site* VISITS TO A WORKPLACE *creche, library*.

SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE AND VALUES DEVELOPED SO FAR:

- * LEARNERS HAVE FOUND OUT *about what research is*.
- * *Learners are developing problem-posing and problem-solving* SKILLS
- * LEARNERS ARE *developing planning and organising* SKILLS.
- * LEARNERS ARE WORKING *together in groups*.

Syllabus planning

Because the research project is also a learning project it is important for the facilitator to map out an initial syllabus plan. Your organisation or institution may have provided you with a detailed syllabus outline, in which case your task is to find ways of including the research project in the syllabus or contextualising the syllabus within the scope of the research project.

You will need to start finding appropriate readings and thinking about tasks and activities that will meet both the project and syllabus requirements.

Do you remember what you learned about developing and contextualising a learning programme in the second work file in this series, *Teaching Adults 21* You may need to refer back to this to refresh your memories.

Stage 2: collecting data and finding information

Once the teacher and the learners have defined the research topic, the second stage of the action research process consists of data collection and information finding. The data and information you'll collect and the way you'll collect it depends on your specific research topic.

Identifying sources of information

Together with your learning group try to think of all the different people and places from whom you could find information for your research topic, for example:

- ◆ fellow learners, teachers, colleagues, friends;
- ◆ people with expert knowledge or skills;
- ◆ community leaders;

- ◆ workplace managers or trade union officials; and
- ◆ libraries and resource centres.

Ways of finding information

The following are methods of data collection or information finding. You will probably have to engage in most of these activities during the data collection period.

Observing

You can learn a lot by just watching what people do and listening to what they say. If you write down some key points, you can think about them later on.

Listening

Listening to a knowledgeable person talking about the research topic can be an important learning experience. Learners can also develop their listening and note-taking skills.

Interviewing

Interviewing people who work in or who have experience in the area that you are researching can help you to understand more about your topic. People can pass on some of their knowledge and skills to learners and can give them useful advice on how to go about tackling the topic.

Doing

Some educationalists say that we learn more from doing than from any other activity. The same applies to data gathering. If, for example, your learners want to find out about what skills are needed to get work in a supermarket, ask a learner, or a small group of learners, to 'shadow' someone who works in a supermarket. Spending a day watching, helping and doing will enable the learner to learn a great deal about what the job involves.

Reading

There is a wealth of information in books, newspapers and journals, and in reports about other people's research projects. Learners will need to develop good reading skills so that they can gain access to this information.

Discussing

Discussing issues as a group can get the learners generating their own information about the research topic.

Thinking

Everyone has knowledge. Make sure that learners have enough thinking time so that they can come up with their own ideas or make up their own minds.

Keeping written records

The information that learners collect from field work or interviews needs to be written down. This is the way in which literacy and learning skills are linked to the research process. Maps, charts, stories, observations, interview responses all need to be written down. For beginner level learners, the documentation may be very simple – a few keywords to remember important things. As learners build more skills, they can work together to fill out a chart, write down a story or make a questionnaire. A facilitator can keep a more detailed written record for the learning group. However, each learner should also keep their own notebook of important information that they have collected by themselves or with the group. Enthusiasm for an action research project is a good motivator for learning to keep written records.

From: Dixon, J. and Cohen, J. (1996) Literacy and Learning in Families and Communities Action-Learning Manual: A Guide for Literacy Practitioners. Amherst, USA: Literacy Linkage Program.

Activity 2

Aim

The aim of this activity is to implement the data gathering stage with your learning group and to write about the data collecting or information finding process for your action research report.

Once you have identified a research topic with your learners, spend a lesson brainstorming what data or information to find and where to find it. Discuss in groups how data gathering tasks will be allocated. The process of getting the data will probably take the equivalent of two or three lessons. You could also arrange for a guest speaker to address the learners and they can take notes from the discussion.

You will need to find suitable informative texts for the learners to read and discuss. You can arrange a library visit for the learners. Data gathering and information finding is a process that can go on for as long as time allows, so it is a good idea to set a time limit on this phase.

When you and the learners have decided that you have collected sufficient information, write up this part of the process and file it for your action research report. Explain which resources were used and how the information was obtained.

EXAMPLES:

OBSERVATIONS: WE VISITED A WORKPLACE *creche* and THE LEARNERS *observed* WHAT THE *children and caregivers* were doing. *They took notes during the OBSERVATION and we discussed these in class.* \

LISTENING: WE ALSO INVITED THE *owner of a creche* to SPEAK TO THE LEARNERS ABOUT THE COSTS INVOLVED IN SETTING UP AND RUNNING A *creche and the salary structures OF different educare professionals*. Learners asked the *speaker* LOTS OF QUESTIONS.

INTERVIEWS: THE LEARNERS INTERVIEWED EACH *other to find out what their child care needs were*. THESE WERE LISTED.

DOING: *Some learners volunteered to work as child minders at a creche for a day*. THEY WROTE *down what they experienced and presented THIS TO THE class*.

READING: I *arranged for a trip to THE LIBRARY AND A LIBRARY TOUR*. THE *librarian gave A SHORT TALK ON THE CHILD CARE section and showed us where to find books*. THE LEARNERS JOINED THE LIBRARY AND EACH *learner took out a book on creches, RUNNING A playgroup or other aspects of child care*.

DISCUSSING: WE DISCUSSED *reading STRATEGIES and how to find Information* IN A BOOK. LEARNERS PRACTISED READING AND EACH *learner gave a SHORT TALK ON WHAT SHE HAD FOUND OUT*.

THINKING: EACH *learner had to work on her own to make a list of her own child care requirements*.

SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE AND VALUES DEVELOPED SO FAR:

* *Finding and USING information*.

* *WRITING AND note-taking*.

* *Respecting each other's opinions and understanding each others needs*.

Collecting data: using learner diaries

Different research questions will need different kinds of data. Thus, the kinds of research questions asked in 'interpretative' research are likely to require different questions than those asked in 'confirmatory' research. In this and the next article we will focus on two of the principal ways of collecting data widely used in interpretative research: self-report and observation.

There are a number of ways in which self-report data can be collected. The learners can be asked to fill out a questionnaire. Or individual learners can be interviewed. Or selected learners can be asked to keep a diary in which they record what they do to try to learn the language and how they feel about their progress.

Diary studies are becoming an increasingly popular way of obtaining self-report data as they provide interesting information about the personal factors that influence how successful individual learners are. In particular they can show how affective factors, like anxiety and competitiveness, influence learning. Of course, diaries will provide more interesting and revealing data if they are not intended for the learner's teacher!

This is what you need to do to earn' out a diary study:

1. Choose the learners. It is best to choose learners who you think will be willing and reliable diarists. Volunteers write the best diaries.
2. Collect as much factual background information about the learners as possible: age, language-learning history previous test scores, etc. It may help to ask them to fill out a short questionnaire.
3. Give clear instructions about how you want the diary to be kept. Sometimes it is best to make the instructions open and unstructured:

Write down your comments about your language learning experiences in and out of the class. Try to write comments every day.

But at other times it will be helpful to indicate what kinds of topics you want the learners to write about (for example, their views about different classroom activities, their personal reactions to the teacher and other students, how they think they are progressing, what motivates them, what contact they have with speakers of the language outside the classroom and their preferred learning strategies).

4. Monitor the diaries carefully. This is best done by collecting the diaries regularly and photocopying them. Sometimes it will be necessary' to issue further instructions if the diaries do not provide the necessary information you want.

A few years ago a researcher carried out an interpretative study of adult beginners of German as a foreign language. Her research question was very general: 'How do learners approach the task of learning a new language in a classroom setting?' She invited six learners to keep a diary for a six month period, giving them fairly detailed instructions about what to write about. She intended to take in their diaries once a week but once she missed one of the learners for two weeks running and when she next asked him, he had lost his diary! The other five diarists varied in how diligent they were but overall their diary entries were interesting and insightful.

The diaries revealed enormous variation in the way in which learners set about learning German. Some seemed to experience very little anxiety and to relish the opportunity to try out German in their class. Other learners suffered from a lack of confidence and felt acute anxiety whenever the teacher asked them a question. Some learners preferred to learn by 'studying' while others preferred to learn by 'doing'.

One thing that all the diarists agreed on, however, was that they enjoyed writing the diaries and felt that it had helped them with their language learning. So diaries may be good for learners as well as a useful source of data for researchers.

Adapted from: *Ellis, R. (1993/5) 'Do-it-yourself classroom research.'* Cape Town: Saala Communiqué.

Stage 3: analysing data

You will probably start to analyse the information that you receive from learners as you are collecting or listening to it, but it is a good idea to be systematic in your analysing process.

Document collection

Collect all your information and store this in your file or other containers. Collect reading materials, learners' interviews, field notes — anything that you consider to be relevant should be stored for future reference. Collecting the information provides you with an opportunity to gain an overview of what has been achieved so far and to further define the research topic. Some of the data or information you have collected will probably be discarded because it is not relevant to the research topic.

Labelling the data

Sort the data into groups: interviews, field notes, maps, charts, handouts from speakers, etc. You can use colourful suckers to flag problem areas or particularly important pieces of information. Reading matter can be catalogued under separate headings and stored in files. Make a table of contents for each file so that you know what it contains and so that the data is accessible.

Summarising the data

Ask the learners to work in groups to summarise the main points or implications of the data. For example, a group of learners could work on interviews. They could summarise the main points of similarity and difference. Another group could work on financial documents. A third group could summarise the main ideas or concerns expressed in the field notes of particular observations, etc.

Summary writing skills are very important skills for learners to develop and developing them in the context of action research is extremely effective.

Organising the data

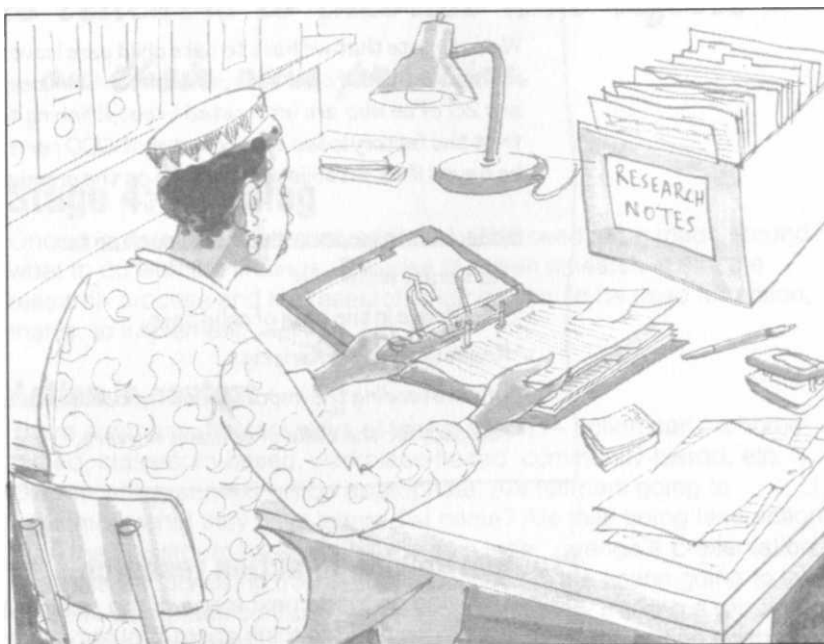
There are many ways of organising data: making lists, mind maps, tables, flow charts, maps, time lines, etc. The process of organising is a learning process — it helps you to focus on the information and see it in different ways.

Comparing data

Making comparisons is a good way of deepening understanding. By comparing the advantages and disadvantages of a particular solution you will develop your understanding of it.

Finding patterns

A 'pattern' can be a repeated event, a common problem or concern, or a 'theme' that several different people iterate. These patterns will emerge as you organise and compare data from different sources. Sometimes patterns seem to grow out of readings on your research topic and these patterns can be isolated and investigated as part of the data gathering.



Activity 3

Aim

The aim of this activity is to analyse the data that you collected with your adult learning group and write up the research process so far.

You will need to spend several lessons analysing your data. Go over the steps outlined above: categorising, labelling, summarising, organising, comparing and finding patterns. Learners will be developing many skills as they go through this process. Help learners to isolate the main points of the research. These are your research 'findings'.

Write up the process of data analysis. Explain what techniques you used and what your findings were.

Example

WE FOUND THAT THE SALARY OF A QUALIFIED EARLY *childhood educator* IS APPROXIMATELY R3000 *per month*. IN *orderto pay her salary each mother* WOULD NEED TO *contribute R100 per month*. IN *addition, we* WOULD NEED APPROXIMATELY 100 SQUARE METRES OF INSIDE SPACE, OR THE *equivalent of two* OFFICES. TWO *Indoor* SPACES ARE BETTER THAT A SINGLE *epace*. ONE *epace* CAN BE USED FOR QUIETER ACTIVITIES, FOR RESTING *and as a sick bay*. THE *child minder can also have her office* IN THIS *space*. WE ALSO NEED ABOUT 100 SQUARE METRES OF OUTSIDE *space*. THE *fencing of this area would cost |* R2000. THE COST *of outdoor play equipment would come to about R6000*.

WE ESTIMATE THAT WE HAVE TO TAKE CHILD CARE LEAVE ON AVERAGE ONE DAY PER *month because of child care problems, children being sick, and so on*. THERE ARE 20 OF US WHO ARE INTERESTED IN *establishing the creche*. THIS MEANS THAT THE FACTORY LOSES APPROXIMATELY R1000 PER *month*. THIS MONEY COULD BE SAVED IF WE ESTABLISHED A CRECHE ON THE PREMISES.

SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE AND VALUES DEVELOPED SO FAR:

- * NUMERACY SKILLS.
- * KNOWLEDGE IN THE AREA OF CHILD CARE.
- * READING AND SUMMARISING.
- * UNDERSTANDING THE *Importance of good child care.* /§
- * *Respect for the* SKILLS OF EDUCARE WORKERS.

Problem solving in action research

Before moving on to the next stage of the participatory learning programme, we need to think about problems that might have come up in the previous stages. Here are some problems that might arise during the data gathering and analysing stages, and some suggestions for how to deal with this:

- ◆ If you find that a certain individual in your class does most of the talking, try asking others to do the reporting or specifically ask others questions and if the main contributor insists on answering, ask him or her not to answer for others.
- ◆ If you find that you tend to do most of the talking, tell your group that you are going to be quiet in the next lesson and ask them to do the talking.
- ◆ If you find that you need more resources, set about trying to locate additional material for your class.
- ◆ If you have identified a problem reflect it back to the class. Ask 'Why is this a problem?' The class can try to identify possible reasons, try to understand the issues and then brainstorm solutions.

The above are only some of suggestions for how to tackle problems that arise during action research. Problem solving is an important part of action research and in Chapter 4 you are going to find out more about different action research approaches to problems or concerns that might arise in the classroom or as a part of the research process. In the 'Useful forms' section at the back of this workbook you'll find some examples of questions that you can ask learners and yourself in a problem-solving process.

Action research is grounded in practice, but it also frees teachers to theorise and reflect on their own practice

Stage 4: planning

Once the data has been analysed, decisions need to be made around what to do with the findings. The idea of action research is that the research process and the research findings should be used for action, that is, to implement.

Action in context

There are many different ways of taking action — action can be home-based, classroom-based, workplace-based, community-based, etc. Decide which context will be appropriate. Are learners going to implement what they have learned at home? Are they going to take action from the classroom base, such as write a letter, arrange a presentation, organise a fundraising event, start a petition? Is the action going to take place in workplace context — arranging a meeting, making a request, planning a workshop or giving a presentation? Will the action be located in a particular community? Will community leaders be consulted? Will a community venue need to be arranged for a workshop, demonstration or discussion forum? Combinations of all the above might be necessary for effective action.

What kind of action?

Action could involve meetings, workshops, letters, memos, requests, presentations — and following up on these activities. For example, if a request is made, that is taking action, but it is not enough to merely make a request. This will need to be followed up, negotiated, alternatives suggested, etc.

Who is going to take action?

Everyone in the learning group should be involved in the action. People have different strengths — some are better at writing, others are good at speaking, others are good organisers, etc., but everyone should contribute.

When?

Establishing a realistic time frame for the action is very important, particularly if there are other people or organisations who will be involved. Diaries and planning calendars are useful tools for planning.

How are they going to take action?

This will need to be carefully planned. For example, it is often a good idea to consult and get advice from others who might have taken similar action. While it is always a good idea to write things down, it is often more effective to approach people personally at a meeting than just to present them with a formal, written request. Your learning group will have to decide on the best method or approach to take.

What resources are needed?

Taking action often means resources: gaining access to a meeting room, using an overhead projector, etc. Make sure you identify all the resources that you'll need well before you implement your plan.

Activity 4

Aim

The aim of this activity is to use the findings from the data analysis to develop an action plan with your adult learners.

You will probably need two or three lessons to discuss the research findings and to brainstorm ways in which the findings can be used. Learners should make as many suggestions as possible and these suggestions should be discussed and compared. The class should reach consensus on a way forward.

When an appropriate action has been decided, you will need to develop an action plan. There is an example of an action plan on the next page.



You can photocopy the form in the 'Useful forms' section to help your learners plan what they are going to do, who is going to do it and when they are going to do it.

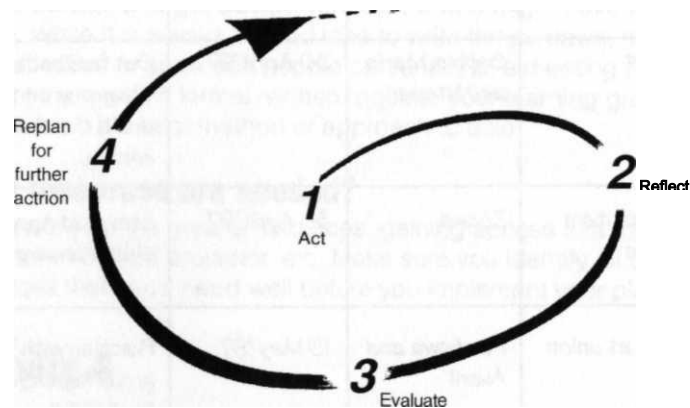
Example

ACTION RESEARCH: PARTICIPATORY LEARNING

ACTION PLAN				
Aims: To convince management of the need for a creche at the fish factory.				
ACTION	WHO?	WHEN?	How?	RESOURCES NEEDED
FINALISE REPORT	SOPHIE, MARIA AND NTOMBI	30 APRIL'97	GET FEED BACK FROM THE GROUP ON THE DRAFT. GET HELP WITH EDITING.	ARRANGE FOR TYPIST.
ASK FOR AGENDA ITEM ON TRADE UNION MEETING	<i>Zodwa</i>	30 APRIL'97	<i>Zodwa TO approach shop steward.</i>	–
PRESENTATION AT UNION MEETING	FUNDISWA AND AVERIL	19 MAY'97	PRACTISE WITH LEARNING group first. Get FEEDBACK/SUGGESTIONS FROM UNION.	<i>Overhead projector, transparencies, FELT-TIP PENS.</i>
ASK FOR MEETING WITH SUPERVISORS	MAVIS	26 MAY '97	MAVIS TO WRITE A <i>memo to MR STEENHOF.</i>	–
PRESENTATION TO SUPERVISORS	PHUMZILE AND PAM	9 JUNE'97	PRACTISE ON CLASS FIRST.	<i>Overhead projector.</i>
ASK FOR REPORTBACK	MIRIAM	20 JUNE'97	MIRIAM TO SEND <i>memo, IF WE HAVE not got a response from management.</i>	

Stage 5: action

The final stage of the action research consists of taking the action. Start off by following your action plan, but be flexible. Reflect on the progress that you have made and what you have achieved. You may, of course, find that the action has not been effective. You will need to evaluate it and re-plan a new course of action.



Act, reflect, evaluate and re-plan further action.

What counts as 'taking action'?

Taking action usually involves taking steps to meet a need or address a problem. There are many ways of taking action. The action which is taken will be as varied as the issues that need to be addressed. Here are few examples of what 'taking action' might involve:

- ◆ Writing a letter to a community leader or to a newspaper.
- ◆ Developing a funding proposal or organising a fundraising event.
- ◆ Staging a protest or demonstration.
- ◆ Organising a petition.
- ◆ Attending a community meeting or lobbying before a meeting.
- ◆ Organising a programme.
- ◆ Joining an association, forum or union.

Stage 6: evaluating the process

Evaluation should not only happen at the end of the research project. Ongoing evaluation is essential for the success of an action research project. This type of formative research will help to ensure that the project is meeting needs and achieving the goals that it set out to meet. The evaluation process should involve the following steps:

- ◆ Identify the stakeholders: teachers, learners.
- ◆ Negotiate criteria for the different stages of the process.
- ◆ List the achievements of the project.

- ◆ Measure the achievements against the criteria.
- ◆ List the difficulties experienced.
- ◆ Think of ways to address these and develop plans.

To find more about evaluation, consult the workbook in this series called *Learning How to Research and Evaluate*.

Action that includes reflection and evaluation is an important part of learning.

Recommended reading

Auerbach, E. (1992) *Making Meaning Making Change: Participatory Curriculum Development for Adult ESL Literacy*. McHenry, USA: Delta/CAL.

Dixon, J. and Cohen, J. (1996) *Literacy and Learning in Families and Communities: Action Learning Manual*. Amherst, USA: Centre for International Education.

4

ACTION RESEARCH FOR REFLECTIVE TEACHING

Many are becoming convinced that practitioners have a lot to gain through systematic observation and intervention in our own sites of practice; in addition, there is a growing sense that practitioner researchers can help inform the larger knowledge base of education through our findings. The challenge is to create ways to do the research without overwhelming ourselves in the process; to make research an integral part of what we already do, rather than an 'add-on'.

From: *Anderson, G. L., Herr, K. and Nihlen, A. S. (1994) Studying Your Own School. California: Corwin Press Inc./Sage Publications, p. 175.*

Aim of this chapter

In the previous chapter you discussed and began to implement a participatory learning programme with your learners. You will continue this participatory action research process throughout the course. But you now need to add a second dimension to the process, that of critical reflection on your own performance as teacher or ABET practitioner. This is a second but linked research project — a mini research project within the participatory action research project. The next two chapters will take you through the process and equip you with some basic skills for data gathering and analysis. In Chapter 6 there are some suggestions to help you write about this project as part of your final report.

While the research in the last chapter was largely concerned with curriculum issues, during this part of the module you will be using action research to discover more about 'process' issues, that is, about the way you teach, the effects it has on your learners, and what you can do to improve.

Educators need to develop a different theory of knowledge for teaching, a different epistemology that regards inquiry by teachers themselves as a distinctive and important way of knowing about teaching. From this perspective, fundamental questions about knowing, knowers and what can be known have different answers ...

From: *Cochran-Smith, M. and Lytle, S. (1993) Inside/Outside: Teacher Research and Knowledge. New York: Teachers College Press, p. 447.*

The action research cycle

You will remember this cycle from Chapter 2 (see page 26). In the next two chapters, you will move through this cycle with guidance and support.

In the first phase, you will build a detailed picture of your current practice using various information or data gathering tools. You might then compare your practice with others' — by observing classes or reading articles. In the second phase you will begin to analyse and interpret the data you have collected. You will share your interpretations with others and invite alternative interpretations.

Once you think you understand what is happening in your classroom, you will plan how to improve it, try out your ideas and evaluate the results.

While it is possible to plunge right into planning for change, action research is likely to be more effective if time and effort is spent on describing and analysing current practice in order to properly plan the change. This is similar to the theory which underpins the problem-posing cycle. Too often researchers have assumed they know exactly what needs to be done to solve a problem, only to discover that the real issue was something completely different.

Remember that all elements of the action research cycle form part of the process of reflective teaching, but the elements are not necessarily linear or sequential. In reflecting on your teaching, you may pass through the cycle several times — this is what is meant by 'reflexive'. However, one element is not always followed by the next element in the cycle; and an element may be omitted in moving through the cycle, especially when different courses of action are adopted.



Make sure that anyone who might be affected by your research knows what you are doing and why. This might include other teachers, learners, co-ordinators, union or community organisers. Wherever possible, involve them in the research process itself.

to



Skim the next two chapters and pick out key phrases in this action research project. These will form the main components of your research and make up the content of the second part of your research report.

Before you begin the process of action research, it might be useful to remind yourself of the beliefs and values you discussed in Chapter 1.

In Chapter 2 you were asked to write a statement outlining the values you bring to teaching ABET. Go back to this statement now and see if there is anything you would like to add or revise now that you have been through Chapter 3 and have begun to try out some of the ideas.

Activity 1

Aim

The aim of this activity is to develop a research question.

In Chapter 2 you drew up a list of possible research questions — things that interested, puzzled or worried you about what happens in your classroom. Go back and read through your questions again. Take some time to read through your journal, observation notes or any other documents that you have written or collected while working through Chapter 3. You will need to take 2 or 3 hours to do this. Think about what has been happening in class as you try out participatory action research with your group.

- ◆ What questions occur to you now?
- ◆ Are there new ones?
- ◆ Do the first ones still apply?
- ◆ Do they need to be revised or refined?

You do not have to begin with a specific problem. All you need is some idea of what you would like to improve. You may have read about a new way of teaching something or be aware that you are not meeting your own expectations in a particular area of your teaching.

- ◆ What is happening now in my group?
- ◆ Why do I find it problematic?
- ◆ What can I do about it?



The following are some examples of issues that I and other teachers have researched.

I UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANCE OF LESSON PLANS IN THEORY, BUT WHEN IT COMES TO MY OWN TEACHING I REALLY BATTLE. WHAT MAKES ME RELUCTANT TO PLAN PROPERLY? WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE LESSON PLANS I *do draw* UP BEFORE CLASS AND WHAT *actually* HAPPENS IN CLASS? HOW OFTEN DO I REALLY SET GOALS, CHOOSE APPROPRIATE ACTIVITIES AND *evaluate*? *How much* IS AD HOC? IS THERE A *difference in learner motivation*? *What events* IN THE CLASSROOM MAKE ME DEVIATE FROM MY *planned* LESSONS?

WE SEEM TO FOCUS A LOT IN CLASS ON PROBLEMS IN LEARNERS' LIVES. I KNOW THIS IS IMPORTANT BUT I FEEL THAT I AM NOT ENCOURAGING MY LEARNERS' CREATIVITY ENOUGH. HOW CAN I HELP THEM DEVELOP *confidence* IN THEIR OWN IMAGINATIONS AND THEIR ABILITY TO EXPRESS THEMSELVES IN ENGLISH?

I FIND IT HARD TO CONNECT THE CURRICULUM I AM TEACHING WITH LEARNERS' OWN KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE. ARE THERE WAYS OF *drawing on* LEARNERS' CULTURAL RESOURCES THAT WOULD STIMULATE *learning and improve motivation*?

WHEN I TRY AND OPEN UP DIFFICULT ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION, *invariably the discussion* FALLS FLAT AND EVERYONE LOOKS *uncomfortable or the discussion becomes very heated* and I DON'T KNOW HOW TO DEFUSE IT WITHOUT TRIVIALISING IT. HOW CAN I *facilitate* THESE *discussions more effectively* AND USE THEM BETTER AS *learning tools*?

Note: See *Auerbach, E. (1992) Making Meaning, Making Change* for an in-depth discussion on the question of how to facilitate discussions more effectively and use them better as learning tools.

A research question should have two important characteristics: a recognition of what is currently happening as a basis for thinking about issues and the need for strategic action to improve existing practice.

Reflect

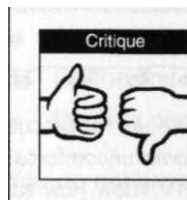
Write down four or five ideas which you think you would be interested in researching. Try to link the idea, your present practice and thoughts about possible action which will lead to improvement. Write about thirty words for each.

Keep the issue fairly small. It will throw up many other issues as you work on it and you can extend it as far as you like. It is easier to work outwards from a well-defined idea than to cut down an over-sized project.

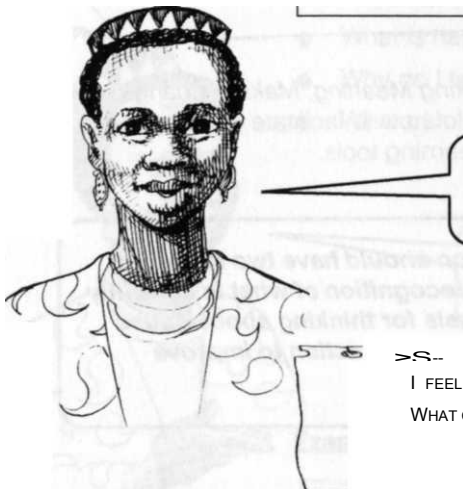
Select

Now select one of these ideas to act upon. Use the following criteria to help you decide:

- ◆ How important is the issue to you? Will it motivate you to put in extra time and effort to find a way of improving it?
- + How important is it to your students? How will you know?
- + Whose interests will it serve?
- ◆ What opportunities are there to explore the issue?
- ◆ Who might be interested in helping?
- ◆ What are the practical and political constraints of your situation?
- 4 How manageable is the task?



Remember that research projects that hope to investigate larger social processes or change institutional practices can take several years. Choose something about your own practice that you really want to know more about and improve, but that you feel is manageable. You never know what the long term impact may be. Ask your facilitator or an experienced researcher for advice if you are unsure about the scope of your question.



A teacher in our research group started with the statement below.

I FEEL THAT I AM OFTEN NOT LIVING UP TO MY BELIEFS AND VALUES IN MY PRACTICE.
WHAT CAN I DO?

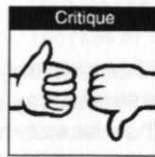
THIS QUESTION WAS MUCH TOO BROAD FOR A SHORT ACTION RESEARCH *project*. WITH THE HELP OF THE *facilitator and research group*, THIS TEACHER *explored what he meant* BY NOT LIVING UP TO HIS BELIEFS AND VALUES. EVEN THOUGH HE *started* WITH ONLY A VAGUE SENSE OF WHAT HE *meant*, BY THINKING OF SEVERAL *concrete examples*, he was able to *narrow* HIS QUESTION *down* to something more manageable that STILL addressed HIS PROBLEM.

I KNOW THAT IF I BELIEVE IN MEETING MY LEARNERS' NEEDS AND *encouraging them to take control of their own learning*, I NEED TO EVALUATE MY LESSONS PROPERLY WITH THEM OR BY MYSELF. BUT I HARDLY EVER BOTHER TO DO IT. WHAT IS *stopping me*? Is it *only lack* OF TIME? IS IT BECAUSE I STILL DON'T REALLY KNOW HOW TO DO IT EFFECTIVELY? Or IS IT *something* DEEPER? WHAT HAPPENS WHEN I TRY? HOW CAN I *improve*? How can I MAKE *lesson evaluation* a LIVELY AND ESSENTIAL PART OF EVERY LESSON? HOW CAN I ENCOURAGE LEARNERS TO TAKE GREATER RESPONSIBILITY FOR EVALUATION?

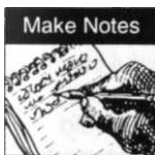


When you have selected your idea, share it with your facilitator or members of your research group. Ask for help in refining or improving it.

Are you choosing a research question to please yourself, your learners, your facilitator or your institution? Are you researching something you think will be acceptable rather than something that is really important?



Activity 2



Aim

The aim of this activity is to write your research question.

Write your research topic and research question and explain why you chose it. Explain what criteria you used to help you. This will form part of the introduction to your final report. You will find help to write your research report in Chapter 6.

Gathering data

The purpose of gathering data is to record what actually happens, rather than what you think happens, and to find out different perspectives on the same events. It also serves as a means of valuing and legitimating practitioners' knowledge of their own classrooms.

There are many tools for information gathering. These include:

- ◆ reading
- ◆ discussion with peers, mentors, learners, communities

- ◆ self or peer observation
- ◆ writing a research journal
- ◆ transcribing
- ◆ interviewing.

A key factor in deciding which tools to use is feasibility, that is, the availability of time, energy and resources. In this workbook we will focus on three main tools as these are likely to be the most accessible in ABET contexts. Other tools are discussed in the recommended reading list.

Observation

This is often the first and most popular form of data gathering for practitioners. It can be done in many different ways and makes it easier for busy teachers to find a method that suits them.

Observations can focus on what is happening in a classroom or outside it, in an institution or organisation, or on what a learner or group of learners does over a particular period of time. Careful observation can help a practitioner see what is really going on as opposed to what she hopes or assumes is going on.

There are a number of techniques that researchers can employ to observe language lessons. The traditional way in ethnography is to take field notes. The researcher sits in the classroom and makes detailed notes about the physical setting, individual learners, what is said to whom and by whom, the various activities that take place and, in particular, any 'noteworthy' or 'special' events. In addition, the field notes include the observer's reflections on what is observed — comments on the way the students and teachers relate to each other, the prevailing atmosphere in the classroom and how 'problems' are dealt with.

The goal is to discover the values and norms at work that underlie the participants' behaviour by treating the classroom as a strange and exotic culture (which in a way it is). This approach is very fruitful in helping us to understand why particular classrooms are the way they are. Somewhat surprisingly, though, few researchers have used field notes to investigate foreign language classrooms, perhaps because this data collecting technique is time consuming. However, even a period of two to three months spent observing can be richly rewarding.

Basic rules for observation



1. Observe the entire event (activity, sequence of activities or lesson). This is called a 'stream of behaviour'.
2. Describe only. Do not interpret or evaluate. Try and create a vivid picture of what you see.

3. Record observations carefully and in as much detail as possible in a field notebook. In the early stages of observation, \ our notes should be completely unfocused.
4. Try to be as objective as possible. Try to recognise when you are finding it difficult to be objective or unbiased and record this — it may help you to understand the reasons why you act in certain ways in certain situations.

The culture of the classroom

In the text below a South African researcher investigates some of the ways in which immigrant children and their parents were socialised into a new culture, both through the family literacy program and the special ESL classes for children in a primary school in the United States.

FIELD NOTES: 51, JAN 19,91

NOISE OF SPANISH VOICES AS I WALK *down the* PASSAGE — THEY ARE COMING THROUGH THE OPEN *door halfway down, along* WITH A STREAM OF BRIGHT LIGHT.

THE REST OF THE SCHOOL IS SILENT, *bright orange card covering* THE TABLE AND ON WALLS AS *backing for* PHOTOS, DRAWINGS. FOUR KIDS ARE PREPARING VISUAL AIDS FOR THE ADULT ESL CLASS (CASTULO AND CYNTHIA'S AUNTS ARE IN THIS CLASS). THE LANGUAGE STRUCTURE IS: 'SHE IS.....' (CUTTING, WRITING ETC): LOTS OF ACTIVITY, CHAT. JASMINE GETS UP AND PUTS ON A TAPE OF SPANISH MUSIC: POP STYLE, FAST, LIVELY. PICTURES FOR THE ACTIVITY ARE BLACK AND WHITE, OLD-FASHIONED, LONG DRESSES, CAREFULLY STYLED HAIR.

T (TEACHER): OK, WE'RE GOING TO GO *round in a circle and* SEE WHO KNOWS THESE.

Holds UP picture.

J: O, MODELO!

T: SHE'S *modelling, good!* SHE'S *modelling clothes. Children learn forward, sideways to see the card shown; feet wagging under table, SHIFTING back and forth. "Picture of woman SEWING UP wound IN MAN'S LEG causes much LAUGHTER AND EXPRESSIONS of disgust. Griselda SUGGESTS USING A RED PEN TO MAKE IT MORE graphic.*

After each child has had a turn, THEY ARE PUT IN A pile to test what has been learnt. Kids raise hands and answer In a MIXTURE of Spanish and ENGLISH.

G: *She IS SWISHING (HAND movements to Indicate PUSHING DUST IN A heap) she IS SW—*

T: **SHE IS SW — - sweeping.**

OTHERS TRY OUT DIFFERENT CARDS. THEN ALL TROOP OFF TO LAMINATE THE CARDS.
S. DRAGS TOE OF LEFT SHOE ALONG THE FLOOR.

11.55. ALL ARE TALKING AT ONCE. THE TOPIC IS THE AGE AT WHICH YOU SHOULD
HAVE BOYFRIENDS AND GIRLFRIENDS. JASMINE: 'YO TENGO SIETE PERO YO NO
QUIERO'. I DON'T LIKE BOYFRIENDS. I'M SEVEN YEARS OLD BUT I *don't want one*

From: *Kerfoot, C. (1991) Unpublished field notes. Albuquerque, New Mexico.*

Questions

1. What are your reactions to these observation notes?
2. How would you judge these notes against the following criteria:
 - Descriptive, does not attempt to interpret or analyse.
 - Clear, unbiased language; no value judgment attached to people or behaviour.
 - Unfocused, tries to record as much detail as possible.
3. What suggestions do you have for improvement?
4. What issues can you identify that could form the basis for future research?
5. This researcher is watching someone else teach. Would you be able to take such detailed notes of your own practice? What strategies could you use?

Using research notes

Because this researcher was interested in processes of socialisation, as she continued observing she began to identify different aspects of socialisation and to focus more on them. For example, she paid attention to the way the teacher organised activities, the implicit and explicit value attached to certain kinds of behaviour and how this was signalled to children, as well as the ways the children interacted among themselves (topics, body language, groupings, etc.). However, if her research question had been different, she would have picked up on very different aspects of her notes.

Activity 3

Aim

The aim of this activity is to prepare you to begin observing as soon and as much as possible.

Get going! Start observing as soon as you can. The more often you do it, the more you begin to see. Imagine that you are a stranger in your own classroom and view yourself and your class as a stranger would — you

will become aware of the astonishing complexity of what goes on in your classroom. If possible, pair up with a partner. Maintain contact with your research group for regular discussion.

Record your observations in a field notebook — A4 spiral bound works best. Some researchers keep a wide margin on every page — they use this margin for comments or preliminary questions they might have about what they have observed, and later for coding or categorising the data. Try and write down exactly and only what happens. *Do not try and analyse, explain or interpret at this stage.* Create a scene which you can see in your mind's eye when you review your notes several weeks later. This helps you understand what happened, not what you think happened.

Many teachers find it useful to keep an open notebook on their desks in which they jot down a quick observation or keyword; these short notes jog their memories when they write their observations more fully later. Have your field notebook with you at all times so that you can record unexpected conversations with colleagues, learners, administrators, etc.



Tips for successful observations

If you are unable to write full notes during the class, write down keywords or short phrases. Then write up your notes the same day while the event is still fresh in your mind. The longer you wait to do this, the harder it is to recreate the event accurately. You will find that you forget key details and the richness of your observation is lost.

In the first few weeks, make your notes as extensive and unfocused as possible because the most important issues may not be known to you yet. Writing promotes reflection — when you re-read, you will begin to notice recurring themes and patterns.

Don't record only interesting events or situations. For example, you might be studying a writing class. You may be tempted to focus only on positive feedback that the teacher gives but this will not give you a holistic picture of the dynamics of the group or of the teacher's ability to help learners write. Remember, if an event is truly significant it will occur again. If it doesn't, then focusing on this event and excluding others will lead you down the wrong path.

When you make notes as you observe, try not to use words like 'nice', 'pretty', 'angry' — which already carry some sort of bias or value judgment. Let the words that you use paint a clear picture of the event for the reader, or for you when you look back at your notes.

Be open to change

Often as you gain greater understanding of what is happening in a particular situation, you will find that your initial reaction to it has totally changed. You might well interpret someone's behaviour entirely differently after a few weeks.

For example, all teachers are aware of 'silent' learners in their class. A hasty judgement might describe them as shy, dull or bored. Often, after careful observation of these learners, for example, when they are silent (in what sort of group situation, for what sorts of activities, at what time of day), what they actually do when they are silent, and how they interact with other learners, the teacher discovers that these learners have very different reasons for staying silent and she can begin to explore appropriate strategies for bringing them more into the class. She might also discover that they are not really 'silent', but that they participate in all sorts of other unexpected ways.

Labelling a learner 'shy' from the start puts him in an artificial category that may have no basis in reality and may prevent you from seeing clearly. Carefully observing a learner's behaviour will gradually give you greater insight into what is happening in your class.



After you have done several observations of your own or other people's classes, you may decide that you want to change your research question.

Opening up new paths for exploration is part of what makes research exciting

Activity 3

Aim

The aim of this activity is to evaluate your observation notes.

Bring your observation notes to class. Work with a partner or the research group and evaluate your notes using the criteria given in the box on page 62.

Additional observation tools

Tape recorders, cameras and video cameras can all provide valuable extra information on what is happening in your classroom and help you

see things from a new angle. Try, if possible, to access a tape recorder, at least for a few lessons. This can provide excellent back-up to your observations. It means you have to pay less attention to what is said and can concentrate on describing what people do, where and when they move about the room, their body language, expressions, etc. However, transcribing tapes takes a long time so be sure that you plan for this.

Here is how "one group of researchers in a family literacy project in Boston (USA) used tapes. Read through the extract then make a note on the planning sheet at the end of this workbook if you intend to try any of these ideas.

Tape recording

Taping classroom interactions can provide raw data for future analysis. Cathie Wallace, a British reading researcher who worked with our project for several months, said that she regularly taped her interactions with students.

When she started the taping, she wasn't looking for **anything** specific. Later, she went back and listened to the tapes, without having formulated research questions or hypotheses in mind, but rather to see what was interesting and what classroom activities seemed to reveal reader/ teacher strategies.

She said the value of the taping was that it gave her a chance to listen to herself and see how her comments as a teacher shaped the way students read; in addition, it enabled her to see the positive strategies that 'problem' readers used. The tapes later became the basis for research on second language reading.

Madeline used a tape recorder to monitor small group discussions (to get a sense of how one group was doing while she was working with another); listening to the tapes revealed both interesting student issues and areas for language work. Madeline decided to share the tapes with the whole class, representing the issues in the form of transcriptions of the tapes. Students could thus reflect on the interactions themselves, exploring both the content and linguistic aspects together. In this way, the documentation fed into instruction and students were involved in the analysis.

Tapes served a third function in our curriculum development process: they provided a basis for comparing student reactions to materials and activities. Since children's homework was an issue for most classes, they developed a homework code to be used with several classes. Andy taped each class on the day it was used and transcribed the tapes as a basis for teachers to analyse and compare responses and reasons for them.

Each group reacted differently depending on the way the lesson was introduced and who the students were, projecting its own interpretations

and analyses onto the code. Follow-up and new issues varied from class to class. The transcription enabled teachers to see concretely how the context of students' lives and of the lesson shapes responses.

Adapted from: Auerbach, E. (1992) Making Meaning, Making Change: Participatory Curriculum Development for Adult ESL Literacy. McHenry, USA: Delta/CAL, p. 232.

Once you have observed for a few weeks and want to do a quick check on something you notice, you can also use a more structured observation technique. This could take the form of a list of different ways in which a teacher handles error. The reading below will help to clarify.

Teacher error correction

Armed with a list like the one below, the researcher enters the classroom and records each incidence of the behaviour that is the focus of the observation on a chart. Thus, in the case of error correction, the observer would have to identify each time the teacher or another student corrects an error and then enters ticks on the chart to show the type, time and manner of its correction.

<i>TYPE OF TREATMENT</i>	
1.	Error corrected by teacher
2.	Corrected by another student
3.	Not corrected
<i>TIME OF TREATMENT</i>	
1.	Immediate.....
2.	Delayed
<i>MANNER OF CORRECTION.</i>	
1.	Overt.....
	– fact of error indicated
	– location of error indicated
	– error type indicated
	– remedy provided
	– explanation provided
2.	Covert.....

Together with some of my students I used a chart similar to the one above to investigate this question: 'Do teachers have clear policies about how to correct errors and do they act in accordance with their stated policies?'

We carried out an observation of one EFL teacher's lesson using a chart similar to the one above. A few days later we interviewed the teacher to find out his views about error correction. We found out that this teacher had very definite views about how correction should take place, but when we looked at what he actually did, we saw that he did not act in accordance with his own views.

For example, he said he thought it best if students corrected each other's errors, but in the lesson he did nearly all the correcting himself. He also thought it best to delay correction rather than to correct immediately, but in fact he usually corrected an error as soon as it occurred.

This study reveals why observation is so important. Teachers do not always do what they say they do. The same is almost certainly true for learners. The only way to find out what actually happens in a classroom is through observation.

From: *Ellis, R. (1993/5). 'Do-it-yourself Classroom Research.'* Cape Town: Saala Communiqué.

Question

1. Did you find any part of the article particularly interesting or informative? Explain why.
2. Are there any action research activities that you would like to engage in with your own learning groups?
3. Do you think that asking adult learners to keep a journal or diary that documents their own learning progress will be useful? Explain your reasons.
4. Do you think the author has a positivist or a critical research approach? Why?

Interviews

A second tool for gathering information which is often used is the interview. Interviews are a good tool to use when you wish to know how a person feels about events that have happened or are happening. They are also important in gaining a perspective on how others understand and interpret their reality. Interviewing assumes a skill in listening and a non-threatening manner in asking questions.

Transcription of interview

Emerson Elementary School, New Mexico

Family literacy project

- C. And then, if you think about accountability which you mentioned last time. Could you just talk about the ways in which you hold yourself accountable?

A. To the school?

C. Or to the kids, or you know just anything ...

A. Accountability. I guess I kind of figure my accountability is coming prepared with lessons that I'm happy with. And since I really expect a lot from my groups, I think I work really hard. I think about, how is this going to give them ... (inaudible) ... and how are they going to work together? Is it going to be a varied activity? What will it encourage? And so I think about that a lot. If I came, and I guess I've sat through so many terrible classes, so many bad professors, that I see that as a very serious commitment, to not make a class boring.

C. Are there ways that the school holds you accountable?

A. Yeah. But that's the other part too, like, accountability is also like ... ah ... when I don't deal with the situation the way I would have liked to, I feel I have to come back and correct it. I deal with a kid, I don't give him enough attention, I'll compensate, I'll think I have a responsibility to the whole class, and if they need help another time of the day, I'm like, OK, come to me. [...]

I feel accountable to other teachers who have these kids. I try to keep a good connection, like, what do you think this learner needs? Is she having a hard time in class? Can I do something? As far as the school as a whole, I'm not totally accountable to certain things, like, duty people are supposed to wear their red pinnies [aprons] out. I don't wear my red pinny and I know I'm supposed to, I just don't.

What other things don't I do? Things that look as if I'm not accountable, like, I don't have a desk in my room, so I leave everything in the hall. Well, it looks like I'm not accountable, like I don't read my stuff in my box. And people laugh about it, it looks like Amy doesn't read her stuff, but I don't have a desk.

C. I know what that's like.

A. Yeah, so it's like, I have a feeling people think I'm less accountable than I really am ...

12 April 1991

From: *Karfoot, C. (1991) Extract from interview. Albuquerque, New Mexico. Unpublished.*

Questions

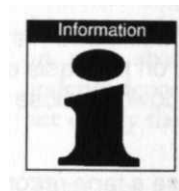
1. What is interesting to you about this extract?
2. What was it about the researcher's question that generated such a rich response?
3. What values does this teacher hold? What would she define as 'delivering the goods'?
4. This teacher mentions several different types of accountability. If you were asked to sort them into categories, what categories would you

come up with? Try to look beyond the obvious categories of 'kids' and 'school'. Might there be other sorts of accountability that she has not mentioned? How could you find out?

5. Do you think there might be differences between the way the school defines accountability and the way the teacher does? How would you check this out to be sure?
6. How would you follow up this interview?

Different types of interviews

There are several kinds of interviews. The above example is of an open-ended interview; other kinds of interviews include questionnaires, checklists and rating scales. Successful open-ended interviews usually ask people to remember what they did, why certain things happened, or what they might do. They are like shared conversations, not one-sided interrogations. The goal is to understand the other person's perspective, what it is like to view the world through her eyes. Remember: the more you prepare, the better the quality of your interview will be.



Kinds of questions to ask in open-ended interviews

- ◆ Tell me about your experience in this workplace/ institution/ organisation ...
 - ◆ Can you describe ...
 - ◆ Can you give me an example of ...
 - ◆ What other kinds of ... can you think of?
 - ◆ Tell me the difference between ... ?

Avoid leading questions. For example, ask: 'How do you find the new Maths syllabus?', not 'The new Maths syllabus is hopeless, isn't it?' You want to know the other person's thoughts and feelings, not feed them your own.

Time

Interviews are time-consuming, especially to transcribe: it can take four hours to transcribe a one-hour interview. Remember to label the tapes clearly with the date, interviewee's name and topics covered. Use interviews sparingly and for a very clear purpose, for example, to obtain a participant's perspective or to explore a tentative hypothesis you have formed. One strategy is to listen to your tapes and transcribe only bits that strike you as significant; however, doing this may prevent you from seeing hidden patterns as you review your research later.

Some disadvantages of interviewing

- ◆ It is difficult to get a list of good sequential questions together.
- ◆ People may be reluctant to talk due to lack of anonymity, especially within an institution, workplace or organisation, and about 'hot' issues.
- ◆ It can take a long time to build up trust and confidence.
- ◆ Some people do not answer questions honestly and, therefore, skew the data.

Adapted from: *Anderson, G. L., Hen, K. and Nihlen, A. S. (1994) Studying Your Own School. California: Corwin Press Inc./Sage Publications, p. 115.*

Other researchers' use of data gathering tools

Below is an extract from an intensive two year research project into the relationship between literacy, people's power and state formation in post-independence Mozambique from 1985-1986. The research took place in a factory. This extract comes from a chapter in which the researcher describes her methods of collecting data.

The researcher describes how her interviews with learners were done using an interview form developed on the basis of several unstructured discussions. Answers were jotted down as close to the speaker's original words as possible.

The researcher had expected to use a tape recorder but found that the level of anxiety about speaking with a stranger — and speaking Portuguese, the official language, a second or third language for most people — was so high that a tape recorder, however unobtrusive, would intimidate people. She, therefore, decided to work without a tape recorder.

Interviewing learners

The interviews were generally very positive experiences, with feedback from various students, particularly among the women, commenting with satisfaction on my interest in their lives. I soon realised that most of them did not know that, once literate in Portuguese, they could begin to tackle reading in their maternal languages. I used the interview to help them discover this — often a very emotional moment. Unfortunately, it was difficult to follow this up and to know how much they actually put it to use.

For me, this was yet another indication of how seriously off the track literacy was. Far from being a process of acquiring skills that allowed greater communication in one's own social world, using newly learned language skills to write letters, read street signs and hospital forms or speak in public gatherings, the language skills acquired through literacy seemed to focus only on passing an exam and having access to the next level of the schooling system.

Once the interview had taken place, the daily contact with the worker interviewed changed dramatically. There was now a basis of contact. The interview included space for the students themselves to pose questions and the invariable query was why I was asking all these questions. I explained that I was also a student and wanting to do a study on literacy, in order to see what worked and what didn't so it could be done better. I did not pick up any negative reactions to being analysed for somebody's research project – in part, perhaps, because my roles of support and encouragement, both in the classroom and larger factory context, were already so well established.

The interview with Domingos Nofre, head of the tailoring unit, in upstairs shop was indicative of worker response to the interviews. The interview included a lengthy discussion about how he had learned tailoring – also maths and reading and writing – while working in the shop of an Indian family during his late teens.

The shop was in Maxixe, a district of Inhambane right next to Morrumbone district where I had recently spent the Christmas vacation. I had visited small localities, where shops like the one he had apprenticed in, were abandoned by the Africans who had taken them over after independence. They had fled from attacks by the bandits but I could still see clearly the architecture of colonial exploitation.

There was a spacious shop area, with broad shelves for displaying the goods desired by peasant producers and a large floor area for sacks of cashews and copra. Places for weighing scales and tailoring were pointed out. Attached to the shop was a comfortable living area for the owner and his family. The walled courtyard behind was cemented for drying the cashews and copra bartered from the peasant producers, with large storage sheds along the back wall. The beauty of a large mango tree and several orange trees gave a strange respite from the nakedness of the exploitation and sadness of abandonment.

It was easy to imagine Domingos Nofre as a young apprentice in such a scene and I plied him with questions about how it had been. He spoke of learning maths by leaving his sewing machine to serve peasants bringing in their harvests. Nofre would have had to calculate what quantities of capulanas (African cloth), shoes, kerosene lamps, blankets and needles could be traded for the sacks of copra or cashews hauled in.

At the end of the conversation, we were both on a high. I felt as if I had been close to the hub of the rural economy in colonial times, a reality the more interesting to reconstruct in the present crisis where commercialisation of peasant crops has so totally broken down, in part by the bandits but also for lack of an effective form to replace the trader and his family, so finely tuned to locality desires. Nofre was clearly pleased to have had a chance to tell about it.

Thank you very much, senhora, for coming to talk to me. Nobody has ever asked me about all of these things since the time I came here to work. I think people here at CIM think that I began working when I came here — when in fact I had already done a lot of things before I came here. (Interview with Domingos Nofre, Head, Tailoring Section March 21, 1986).

I felt uneasy at times, wondering if I was being manipulative by presenting such a smiling presence, such attentiveness to both the profound and the trivia of multiple lives, very much aware that I wanted their trust in order for them to open up. At another level, I felt that I had proved my commitment with many years of hard practical work in literacy behind me. Undue qualms about using people for my 'academic career' seemed best put to rest.

From: Marshall, J. (1990) *Literacy, State Formation and People's Power: Education In a Mozambican Factory*. Cape Town: Centre for Adult and Continuing Education, University of the Western Cape, pp. 153-154.

Questions

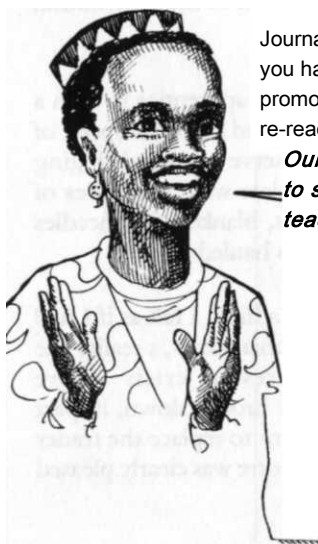
1. What interests or surprises you about this extract? Why?
2. Are there any data gathering approaches in this description which could be used in your situation? Explain.

Research journals

The third tool we discuss in depth is teacher or research journals. Although many teachers find journal writing both time-consuming and difficult, remember that in teacher research, teachers themselves are the main research tools. They must constantly analyse their own feelings and reactions to what they see.

Journals offer an effective way of bringing to a conscious level all that you have observed and absorbed during the day. In addition, writing promotes reflection — it forces you to organise your thoughts. When you re-read, you will begin to notice recurring themes and patterns.

Our research group of researchers met regularly to share their research. This is what one of the teachers wrote.



PUTTING OUR EXPERIENCES DOWN ON *paper forced* US TO REFLECT ON THEM AS WE MAY NOT HAVE PREVIOUSLY DONE. IN THIS WAY, *we've learned not* ONLY FROM EACH OTHERS' WRITING BUT FROM OUR OWN AS WELL.

Research report: problems with literacy provision

The major preoccupation of the national, provincial and district education offices was to monitor attendance at literacy classes. Workers could not sit for the exams unless they had attended a certain percentage of classes. Education officers visiting literacy centres assessed the classes in terms of 'participation' – not the active teaching-learning activities but physical presence in the classroom.

The second method of evaluating literacy was through national exams which tested only reading and writing and maths skills. The repertoire of literacy skills turning on questions of communicative competence and critical consciousness were completely lost to view. In Mozambique, as elsewhere, the teachers themselves taught to the exam. A conversation with Aurelio, the school director, about the difficulties the teachers were having with the oral work and their tendency to jump over it for the reading and writing exercises brought the observation that the oral part wasn't on the exam. For Aurelio, too, this was a valid reason to leave it out.

After some time getting into the real world of how literacy was working, teaching in a way that interacted with the actual lives of the students began to seem illusory, a fantasy of mine not connected with the real world. An incident along the way, however, rekindled the hopes for a different approach. Pedro was ill one day when I had brought another colleague along to observe classes. Instead of cancelling the class, there was a decision made to take advantage of the presence of Henrique N'Guiraze who was on a visit to Maputo. N'Guiraze at the time was the head of adult education services in Cabo Delgado province.

Field notes

I SAT IN ON N'GUIRAZE'S AFTERNOON SESSION. ABSOLUTELY FASCINATING. IN THE HANDS OF A TEACHER WHO KNOWS WHERE SHE WANTS TO GO WITH A PARTICULAR SESSION, AND HAS A GENUINE INTEREST IN THE STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES; THE CLASSROOM ATMOSPHERE IS TOTALLY DIFFERENT, WITH GENUINE PARTICIPATION, INTEREST, HUMOUR. THE LESSON WAS ON SCIENCE AND ITS CONTRIBUTIONS TO AGRICULTURE — IMPROVED SEEDS PESTICIDES AND INSECTICIDES, ETC. I TRIED TO TAKE IT DOWN VERBATIM.

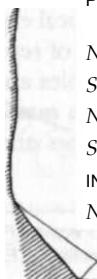
N'Guiraze: So HOW MANY SEEDS DO YOU USUALLY PLANT IN ONE HOLE?

Student: THREE OR FOUR SEEDS.

N'Guiraze: WHY?

Student: WELL, YOU CAN'T BE SURE IF THEY'RE GOOD SEEDS. BUGS GET IN them. Some won't germinate.

N'Guiraze: BUT that's with local SEEDS ISN'T IT? WITH treated seeds, how many do YOU PLANT IN ONE HOLE?



- Student:* OH, JUST ONE.
- N'Guinze:* WHY?
- Student:* WELL YOU CAN BE SURE IT WILL GROW.
- N'Guinze:* BUT IF YOU DON'T HAVE SEEDS YOU CAN COUNT ON, YOU HAVE TO PUT IN THREE OR FOUR. IS THAT IT?
- Student:* YES, OR MAYBE EVEN FIVE.
- N'Guinze:* BUT NOW WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU PLANT FIVE AND FOUR GERMINATE. YOU'VE *got four* STALKS OF MAIZE COMING FROM THE SAME HOLE. WHAT DO YOU DO?
- Student:* YOU DO *nothing!* You just wait for them to grow and GIVE YOU PLENTY OF MAIZE.
- N'Guinze:* BUT DOESN'T THE *agricultural technician* ADVISE YOU TO LEAVE JUST ONE, SO YOU CAN GROW ONE *strong, HEALTHY PLANT?*
- Student 1:* You mean take shoots of new maize and PULL THEM OUT?
- Student 2:* BUT IF FOUR GERMINATE, YOU'LL HAVE MORE MAIZE.
- N'Guinze:* BUT WON'T THEY *crowd each other out? Isn't It better to have one HEALTHY STALK?*
- Student:* You mean THROW OUT SHOOTS OF NEW MAIZE? *That's unthinkable.*

FINALLY A REAL DIALOGUE ABOUT SOMETHING OF *Importance* IN THEIR LIVES. ALL DISCUSSING. ALL ANIMATED. THE DESIRE TO GET INTO THE *discussion outweighed the* INHIBITIONS ABOUT *Portuguese.*

Conclusions

1. *The teacher is a huge factor.*
2. THESE WORKERS *are truly peasants.* I'M ALMOST CERTAIN NO DISCUSSION *about urban Industrial matters could* HAVE GENERATED SUCH INTEREST.

Field notes June 26, 1985

The moments of reaffirming a pedagogy of empowerment, however, were few. In general, the institutional organisation of time in the CIM 'school' tended to rule out biography and local experience in favour of a graded curriculum taught for the purposes of reproduction in an exam. It also placed workers in a situation of complex and competing demands for their time, forcing them to work out a *modus vivendi* between the pressures of school and shop floor superiors and their own and their family's survival strategies.

Question

1. What are the differences between the 'report' section and the 'field notes'?
2. What is the relationship between the field notes and final report?

Journal entries

You will have read other examples of journal entries Chapter 2, under the section 'What does practitioner research look like?' (page 25) Reread these if you need some ideas on how to get going. The main thing is just to do it. There are no right or wrong journal entries. Write whatever comes into your head as you think about your class — gradually you will find it easier and easier.

You can also try involving your learners and get a perspective on how they perceive things, by asking them to keep diaries about what happens in class, what problems they have, what they enjoy or dislike. If you do this with learners below ABET 4, you will probably have to start with structured questions for learners to answer in their diaries, and offer them the choice of writing in the mother tongue. Diary writing by learners should be voluntary — how could you motivate learners to try?

TO ME THIS RESEARCH IS SOMETHING THAT I HAVE *never done before*. TO ME IT IS VERY INTERESTING ... IT HAS STIMULATED ME BECAUSE I FIND MYSELF WRITING A LOT WHICH IS SOMETHING WHICH I DON'T USUALLY DO TO SIT *down and write and reflect*.

From: *Uswe/McLean, D.* (1996) *A Profile of the Outstanding Practitioner*. Unpublished HSRC Report.



_____ \

Read through the following list of benefits. Tick the ones you have experienced for yourself. Cross off the ones that do not apply to your situation. Put a question mark next to those you would like to know more about. Discuss them with your facilitator.

_____)

<i>BENEFITS OF USING JOURNALS</i>		
Students can get help with areas of course content where they are having difficulty with.		
Journals promote autonomous learning — developing own ideas, taking responsibility for learning; also involves critically evaluating course content.		
Students gain confidence in their ability to learn, to make sense of difficult material and to have original insights.		
Encourages more productive class discussion.		
Encourages connections between course content and their own teaching.		
Makes the class more process-oriented, matching training methodology with teaching methodology we wish to promote.		
Can shape the curriculum.		
Deeper context for evaluation of student.		

From: *Richards, J.C. and Nunan D. (eds),(1990) Second Language Teacher Education. New York: Cambridge University Press, p. 231*

To get maximum benefit from your journal, write in it regularly and discuss your notes with your research group

Triangulation

You saw in Chapter 2 how triangulation is necessary to include multiple perspectives. It can also refer to using a variety of methods e.g. observations and interviews, so that a researcher is not limited to only one kind of data source.

Planning your data gathering

Throughout the research project you will be mapping your current practice, monitoring your implementation of plans to improve and writing in your journal to provide evidence of emerging understandings and change. It is important to lay this process out in detail — you need to

know where you are going and what your time commitments are. Other people may also need to know. You will want to change your timetable as you go along but it will make it easier if you start from an existing plan. Think through the following questions:

What information do I want?

Don't panic.— it may take several observations or loops of action research cycle before you begin to be clear about exactly what you are looking for. Observing, talking to colleagues and reading all help. Will you need to get at people's views (your learners, other teachers, etc.) or examine their actual practice? Is the background important? Is it likely that there is a wide range of views and of practice?

Why is this information important?

How will the kinds of information specified help you to answer a particular research question? Are all the possible sources necessary? Are some more vital than others?

When do I need it?

Is there an order of priorities for data collection? Is certain information only available at particular times in the year?

How do I collect it?

Will you need to observe situations? Sit in on discussions? Interview those involved? Take photos? Tape record or take notes or both?

Where can I find it?

Classrooms, staffrooms, passageways, meetings, filing cabinets, official documents, journals, private contact with individuals? Other?

From whom do I get it?

Who are all the people who might hold a stake in the problem you are researching? Colleagues, learners, supervisors, trainers, co-ordinators, administrators, community organisations ...

Getting started

Now select the appropriate techniques for your project. Use the criteria below to help you. Remember to be realistic; you must be able to sustain your data gathering over a period of 3 to 6 months. Remember that shorter loops of action and reflection will be easier to sustain. Fill in the planning sheet on page 121 to help you structure your research.

Keep a record all the information you collect — you will need this for writing up your report and for analysing your data. Start a list of references now. Make file dividers as needed — timetable, lesson observations, journal, notes from readings, notes from discussions, interviews, references ...

RESEARCH PLANNER (DATA GATHERING)				
WHAT INFORMATION DO I WANT?	WHY DO I WANT IT?	WHERE CAN I FIND IT?	HOW DO I COLLECT IT?	HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE ME?
What actually happens in my classroom?	to link to my research question	my learning groups	tape <i>record and transcribe critical incident/s</i> ; journal	4—6 weeks teaching plus 2 hours a week to transcribe
How others <i>Interpret what happens</i> in my classroom	to get other perspectives ... understandings ... triangulate	lecturer, <i>mentor</i> , colleague	ask <i>someone to observe</i> my teaching	1 or 2 lessons plus discussion before and afterwards; write up notes 3-4- hours
		learners — <i>individuals or group</i>	interview	group discussions 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ hours for each interview
How <i>other</i> teachers deal with this problem	to get new insights and ideas	colleagues classes, teacher journals	observe or <i>discuss</i>	2 classes of: 2 hours each; write up <i>notes</i> : 6 hours
			<i>read case studies</i> , make notes	6—fi> hours
What 'experts' say about this issue/ advice they give/ theory	to match my experience with	library: journals, books	read and take notes	10 hours +
		lecturer/ university-based experts	consultation	1-2 hours

Criteria for choosing data gathering techniques

- ◆ Is it one that you can comfortably do?
- ◆ Do you need a colleague to assist?
- ◆ Will it provide information useful for reflection? For the next phase of your research ?
- ◆ Will a different technique be more appropriate?
- ◆ How soon will the technique provide data?
- ◆ With what technique should you combine this one?
- ◆ Can you set aside the time to gather data and process it.
- ◆ What are the physical implications of your techniques? Is there enough space to use it regularly? Can you get the equipment regularly (and easily) ?

- ◆ How useful is the technique for group reflection? For personal reflection?
- ◆ Has the technique the potential to become second nature in your daily routine-?
- ◆ What will be the political effects of gathering this data in your classroom, institution, workplace, organisation, or community?
- ◆ Who should know (not know) about it?
- ◆ What are the risks to you or others through you having the data?

Adapted from: *Kemmis, S. and McTaggart, R. (1982) The Action Research Planner*. Victoria: Deakin University, p. 28.

Evaluation

The aims of observation as a technique for data collection are described by Bogdan et al (1992) as:

- ◆ To increase your ability to describe before evaluating. Often the meaning of what you are seeing emerges much further down the line.
- ◆ To create a higher level of self-consciousness about your own values and perspectives.
- ◆ To encourage you to see more clearly the perspectives of others in different roles in the institution or organisation.

Adapted from: *Bogdan R. C. and Biklen, S. K. (1992) Qualitative Research For Education: An Introduction to Theory and Methods*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.



Be very careful with the question of *time*. If you want to observe a colleagues' class in order to see how she handles the same issues or how her group responds to the same task, this will need to be negotiated and may require two or three weeks of visits, fitted into your free time. Analysing data and investigating new lines of thought that appear takes time. Writing a report can take several weeks.

Recommended reading

Bogdan R.C. and Biklen S.K. (1992), Qualitative Research For Education: An Introduction To Theory And Methods. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Marshall, J. (1990) Literacy, State Formation And People's Power: Education in a Mozambican Factory. Cape Town: Centre for Adult and Continuing Education, University of the Western Cape.

5

CREATING KNOWLEDGE

Teachers' ways of knowing include how teachers treat the data of school life as diverse texts to be connected and interpreted, how they see the events in their classrooms, how they think through issues and raise questions, and how they interpret student's actions. These ways of knowing also include the questions that teachers consider unanswerable, the kinds of information they consider problematic, where they look for evidence to document and explore particular issues and which bodies of knowledge they bring to bear on particular situations.

If teaching is regarded as an intellectual activity and teachers are among those who have the authority to generate knowledge about teaching, then this means that teachers need to be not only critical consumers and interpreters of other people's knowledge, but also knowledge-makers who formulate analytical frameworks, pose problems of practice and develop conjoined ways of collecting and connecting evidence in order to make decisions about teaching.

Adapted from: *Cochran-Smith, M. and Lytle, S. (1993) Inside/Outside: Teacher Research and Knowledge. New York: Teachers College Press, pp. 184-5.*

Aim of this chapter

In this chapter you will begin to work with the data you have collected. You will experiment with ways of coding and analysing data, share interpretations and implement changes based on these interpretations.

Coding and analysing data

It may be misleading to have a separate chapter on analysing data since data analysis is an ongoing process in qualitative research. Data collection and analysis go hand-in-hand. When you begin your research, it is important to realise that you must stop every so often and reflect on the data you have so far. For example, you may have been observing the ways in which learners interact with each other in groups. After a few weeks, you may want to stop gathering data and read through all your observation notes to get a sense of where you are and see what kinds of information you are getting. There are three things you need to consider during these phases of reflection.

First you need to consider whether your research question still seems worth asking or whether another question seems more important. Secondly, you need to check whether your data gathering techniques are giving you the sort of information you want.

In the previous example, you might realise that you are unable to capture the quality of the interactions by taking notes because you can only be in one group at a time. So you might decide to negotiate with learners to have a tape recorder placed near one group while you are with the other. Or you might realise that you are not keeping track of your own movements in class and how these might be affecting group interactions. You might decide to focus more on what you say and do in relation to the groups for a while. Reading through your interviews may show up things that you do not fully understand or that could be pursued in more detail, and you need to check with the person concerned.

Thirdly, you need to start looking for themes or patterns in your data. Throughout their observations, interviews and other data gathering techniques, researchers read and reread their field notes or transcripts. Unique patterns are created in the researchers' mind as a combined result of the collected data and their own experiences. This is called the 'discovery' process. These patterns which emerge from the data are tentative hypotheses, that is, initial attempts to make sense of what is going on. As researchers continue with their studies, they begin to focus their research interests, to look more closely at particular aspects of their classrooms and follow up hunches.

Definition

hypothesis: a statement made as a basis for further reasoning or research ; sometimes described as an 'informed guess' about something. The word 'informed' signifies that one has good reason to make the guess, that is, that one has some evidence to support one's hypothesis.

From: *Craig, A. P. et al (1994) Conceptual Dictionary. Durban: University of Natal/Juta, p.100.*



At this stage you could revisit your original research question and see if you still find it interesting and worthwhile.

Getting an 'outside' perspective

If at all possible, get someone else, a partner, colleague or supervisor, to read through your data. Ask your partner or other critical friend to think of alternative interpretations of your data — even outlandish ideas can sometimes trigger new insights and keep you from getting caught in the groove of your own thinking.

Example

IN MY OBSERVATION NOTES I HAVE NOTICED THAT MY ATTEMPTS AT ;
FACILITATING DISCUSSIONS ARE NOT AS SUCCESSFUL AS I WOULD LIKE. I THOUGHT
THE DATA SHOWED THAT I RESPONDED IN A SYMPATHETIC AND ENCOURAGING !
WAY TO MY LEARNERS' COMMENTS AND OPINIONS IN CLASS.

I ASKED A COLLEAGUE TO OBSERVE ME AND SHE NOTICED, HOWEVER, THAT THE
CONVERSATION ALWAYS ENDS AFTER I HAVE SPOKEN. AFTER I SPEAK, SHE SAYS
THE *learner* USUALLY TURNS AWAY OR LOOKS *down*. SHE SUGGESTED THAT, IN
FACT, I WAS SHUTTING OFF THE CONVERSATION BY RESPONDING IN THE WAY THAT
I DID, BECAUSE LEARNERS ARE NOT GETTING THE SORT OF FEEDBACK THEY NEED
TO CONTINUE SPEAKING.

WE REVIEWED MY DATA TO SEE WHETHER I AGREED THAT THERE WAS ANY BASIS
FOR THIS HYPOTHESIS. AS I THOUGHT IT MAY BE VALID, I CHECKED IT BY REPEATED
OBSERVATIONS AND TAPING OF MY INTERACTIONS WITH LEARNERS. THEN I
OBSERVED OTHER TEACHERS TO SEE WHAT I COULD LEARN ABOUT THE WAY THEY
HANDLED THESE SORTS OF INTERACTIONS. I *decided* TO TRY A STRATEGY THAT
I SAW A COLLEAGUE USING.

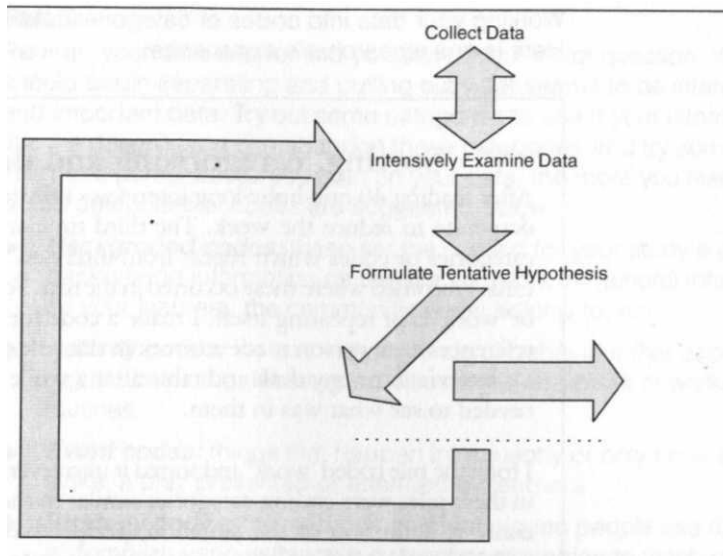
I ALSO READ ARTICLES ON CONSCIOUS LISTENING, *conflict resolution*, *empathising*,
facilitating discussion, and so on. I DECIDED TO TRY A STRATEGY THAT I FOUND IN AN *article*.
Then I *observed the learners' responses and compared them with my original data*.



If the results are not what you expect, you may decide to try another strategy or to use both sets of data to see if there is something completely different going on that neither you nor your partner have 'seen' in the data.

Processes involved in generating hypotheses

Re-read the above example of practitioner research on responding to learners and then see if you can fill in the gaps in the following diagram.



Adapted from: *Brause, R. and Mayher, J. S. (eds). (1991) Search and Re-search: What the Inquiring Teacher Needs to Know. Hampshire, UK: The Falmer Press, p. 190.*

Collect, code, analyse, compare

As soon as you have started collecting data, whether by observation, interviews or from documents, you can begin to code it and examine it in the light of new data you collect. Researchers are constantly collecting, coding, analysing and comparing data. As you compare new data on events in your classroom with your earlier notes, you will begin to see new issues emerging and new relationships between these issues.

Coding data

This means choosing a set of categories into which to sort your data. You can give each category a heading and make notes in the margin each time you come across something that falls into that category. You might, for example, be looking for events that illustrate a particular coping strategy that learners in your class use. In the margin next to each one you could write 'C' for 'coping'.

If you have not already done so, start trying to code the data you have collected so far. In qualitative research, coding is a systematic way of developing and refining interpretations of the data. The coding process involves bringing together and analysing all the data. What were initially vague ideas and hunches are refined, expanded, discarded or fully developed during this stage of analysis.

Developing coding categories

Coding systems help you to see categories emerge from what may seem to be a mass of unmanageable data. Every researcher will have different categories depending on the research question under investigation.

Working your data into codes or categories takes time and thought. Here is one researcher's experience:

Sorting, categorising and discovering

After reading 40 one-hour-long interviews fully transcribed you become desperate to reduce the work. The third time around I began to mark categories or codes which repeat from interview to interview. On index cards I recorded where these occurred in the text. For example, the category of 'work' kept repeating itself. I made a code for 'work', and put all the references each person made to work in this pile. I had many piles of cut up interviews on my desk and table after a while and I began to think I needed to see what was in them.

I took the pile coded 'work' and sorted it into several more codes. Included in these piles were coding categories similar to the above such as setting/context, definition of the situation, perspectives held by participants, participants' ways of thinking about people and objects, process codes, etc.

One coded pile which struck me I labelled 'kinds of work'. This could be an activity code. Under 'kinds of work' I listed 8 jobs they talked about including canning (collecting cans), giving blood, signing (holding up a sign asking for work or money), and begging.

These codes and sub-codes helped me see that the homeless people I talked to were working, only at jobs that I had not considered as 'real' jobs and, therefore, did not see until I was coding my data. These kinds of discoveries occur as you unpack your data in as many different ways as possible.

From: *Anderson, G.L., Herr, K. and Nihlen, A.S. (1994) Studying Your Own School.* California: Corwin Press Inc./Sage Publications, pp. 160-161.

Questions

1. What code words or theme words do you think the researcher might write in the margin of these observation notes?
2. Obviously your research will be much more limited, but if you reread all your data do you see what kinds of patterns are emerging?

Activity 1

Aim

The aim of this activity is to experiment with coding data.

This activity has two parts. This is an activity for you to do on your own, although getting feedback on what you have done from a learning partner, your research group or your facilitator is a good idea.



Part 1

Re-read your data and remind yourself of your initial question. You should begin separating and pulling out what seems to be interesting and important data. Try out some categories to see if your information fits; if it doesn't, you can abandon these categories and try some others. The more perspectives you gain on your data, the more you learn. Some broad categories of codes are suggested below:

- ◆ **Background codes:** these set the context for your study e.g. background information on the site you work in, general information on your learners, the communities they belong to, etc.
- ◆ **Activity codes:** include various kinds of behaviour that occur on a regular basis e.g. learning activities within the class or workplace routines.
- ◆ **Event codes:** things that happen infrequently or only once eg. a strike, a play presented or attended by learners
- ◆ **Strategy codes:** the methods and techniques people use to accomplish various things e.g. teacher strategies to teach reading, learner strategies to avoid having to answer questions.
- ◆ **Relationship and social structure codes:** regular patterns of behaviour not officially defined by the organisation or institution e.g. friendships, informal mentors, cliques. Also formal relations such as teacher, mentor, administrator, union or community organiser.
- ◆ **Perspective codes:** what people think of each other and/ or their understanding of their situation.
- ◆ **Methods codes:** researchers' comments about processes, joys, and problems.

Adapted from: Anderson, G. L., Herr, K. and Nihlen, A. S. (1994) *Studying Your Own School*. California: Corwin Press Inc./Sage Publications, pp. 158-161.



These are only suggestions — use any categories that make sense to you!

Include your observation notes or transcriptions, notes or transcriptions of interviews, any comments from your research journal, as well as any journal articles you may have read or made notes on, minutes of any meetings, memos, learner dairies if available, and so on — in fact any document that may be relevant to your research question. Jot down in the margin any code words or themes that occur to you as you read.

Part 2

Next make a list of the categories you have developed so far and begin to sort your data into these categories. One simple way is to label a blank A4 page with the name of each category or sub-category, and make a pile of the appropriate documents under it. Some documents will

fall into two or more categories; in this case, you could put a note on the cover page of the second and further piles to remind you that other relevant data exists in other piles. You can keep these piles in simple folders when you are not working on them.

Every single researcher goes through periods of confusion as she struggles to group and categorise data. Keep some record of your thinking, the questions you have about the process, any doubts or worries in your research journal. Discuss them with your mentor or lecturer, and revisit them when you write your final research report. This will probably be the richest source of insights into how your thinking developed over time and the impact it had on your practice.

Analysing data

You will be beginning to get a sense of the themes emerging from your data. You will be making tentative hypotheses about your findings.

Who should be involved in analysis?

Remember from the list you made in Chapter 1 that one of the key features of practitioner research is its collaborative nature. This means that wherever possible your research should reflect the perspectives of others who played a role in your research. Share your findings and your interpretations with other 'stakeholders' as you go along, check that what you are saying is consistent with their understanding of their world.

The learners' analysis

Just as you sorted data with your learners in your participatory action research project, you may find it rewarding to discuss your findings with them — they might see connections you have not thought of. It is sometimes possible for learners to have a quite different view of events and reactions than their teacher-researcher. Feedback from students can be revealing, not only of their own feelings, but of how they think the teacher is getting on. There is often a gap between the two perceptions.

Learners can be the most critical, and also the most rewarding of monitors, and although it takes courage to involve them in interpretations of teacher actions, such involvement can be very heartening and stimulating.

In an ABET research project with the National Union of Mineworker, Lugg and Burroughs used group interviews as part of their process of data analysis. They describe how they asked workers to help analyse and draw conclusions from the things they had said to:

- ◆ explain their own experiences and how they see that experience relating to the research issues, e.g. ABET, health and safety, etc.;
- ◆ comment on other people's ideas and explanations (both in and outside of their context).

They also fed their research reports back to each group of workers that they interviewed so that workers could check that the reports were consistent with their understanding of their situation and point out any 'blind-spots' in the research.



Adapted from: Lugg J and Burroughs E. (1996) *National Union of Mineworkers ABET Research Part2: Draft Final Report*. Unpublished report for the NUM, pp. 15-16.

Think about who else you should share your findings with.

By searching for different interpretations, observers and teachers are thrown back to the data lists and categories, not to seek support for what they thought when they started, but to seek support for the seemingly outlandish new interpretations. Seeing our own teaching differently is not going to happen if we are simply looking at lessons and interpreting them in the same way we have been looking at lessons and interpreting them all our lives.

From: Fanselow, J. F. (1990) "'Let's see": contrasting conversations about teaching' in Richards, J. C. and Nunan D. (eds). *Second Language Teacher Education*. New York: Cambridge University Press, p.190.



If you have no-one to work with, no-one who can offer you different perspectives on your data, try using the notion of opposites to provide alternative interpretations. For example, if you have interpreted a smile as a positive communication, try it from the opposite point of view. Ask yourself: 'What are some of the disadvantages of smiling?'

J

When is enough data enough to end the research? Usually when you run out of time, finances or, more appropriately, when you begin to see duplications and repeats in the data. The ending point can also reflect the action research spiral of planning, acting, observing, reflecting and revising. If you have studied your site sufficiently and have changed curriculum or structure, and your research work is paying off in your role of teacher or principal, then you may choose to stop. This section is for those who wish to continue with the analysis of their data.

If you have collected data over a school year or throughout an entire year, then you have a large amount of notes, interviews, maps, observations and the like with which to work. You have periodically stopped data collection and reviewed where you are going, perhaps going forward in a straight line or perhaps changing direction to answer the question better. You have filled in gaps in data to create the most holistic picture you can. You have a good start on the final analysis of the data.

The first step is to put all your data together, reread your initial question and then reread all your data, starting with observations and then going to field notes, your journal and interviews. Wander through the data, making notes of items that strike you.

A comprehensive scanning of all the data in one or two long sittings will provide some emerging patterns with which to begin the process of analysis. Take these initial emergent patterns and see what fits together, what converges. It is here that you begin to match, contrast and compare the patterns or constructs in the data in earnest. Hunches or intuitive leaps are very important and usually extremely significant in the process of analysis and should not be ignored.

From: *Anderson, G. L., Herr, K. and Nihlen, A. S. (1994) Studying Your Own School*. California: Corwin Press Inc./Sage Publications, pp. 156-157.

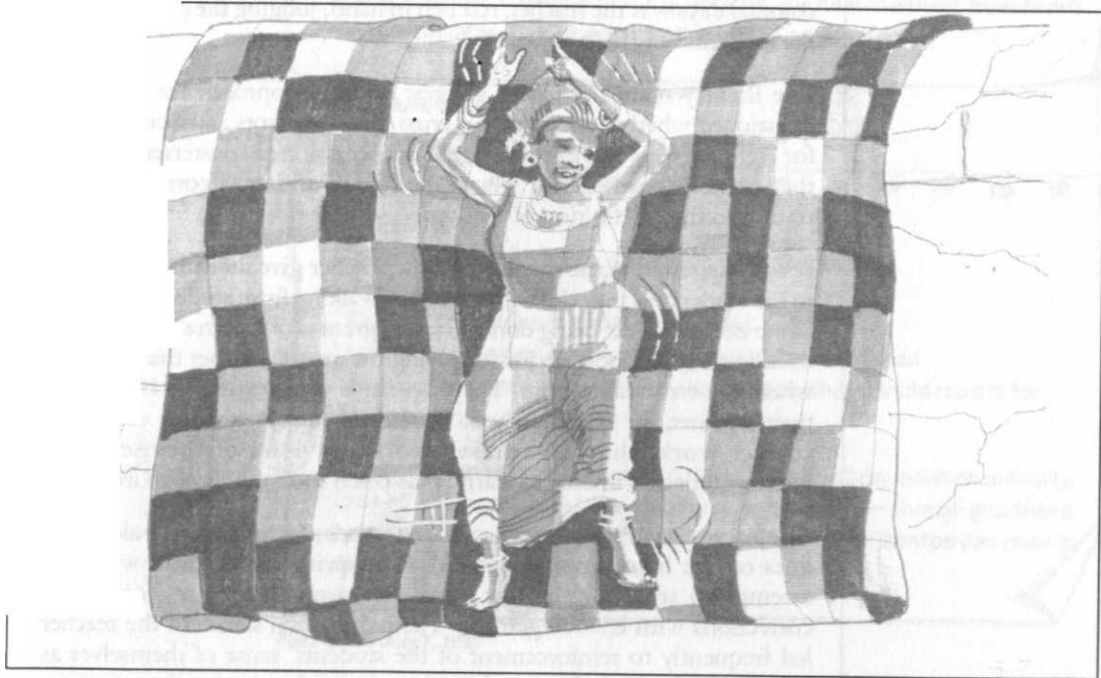
The final analysis

Sometimes when researchers are doing their final analysis, that is, when they decide they have enough data, they photocopy and then cut up key sections of their data in order to be able to move the information around more easily and become aware of unexpected relationships.

One trainer working with a group of rural practitioner researchers in the southern United States found that it helped new researchers to think of the process of analysing data in the same way as making a quilt or weaving cloth: the quilt-maker can choose to use her colours in many different ways, each combination of colours creates a different and often surprising effect; finally she will choose the combination that has the most significance for her. Your data can also be organised in many different ways — experiment as much as you can and see how many different combinations and patterns of meaning your data can reveal. Can you think of an analogy for coding and analysing data that would be more appropriate for South African researchers?

Definition

analogy: comparison of two things in order to illustrate key features of one.

**Putting it together**

Here is an example of how Judith Marshall wove her data and her interpretation of the data together in her research report. Remember her research investigated the relationship between literacy and people's power in a factory in newly independent Mozambique.

First read only the extracts from her field notes marked 1 to 5. What theme or themes do you see emerging? Now read the full text. Notice how she has grouped together three examples (Field notes 1-3) from her classroom observations, analysed them and found a distinct theme emerging from them. She then revisits all her field notes to check for other evidence to support this theme (Field notes 4 and 5). Finally in her research report she wove all these examples together to illustrate the relationship between teaching and learning.

Teaching and learning are related

Many of the language exercises, particularly the comprehension questions in second and third year, had the potential for several answers. The teachers, however, discouraged a diversity of answers. Answers were given in the teacher's manual as an aid for inexperienced teachers, but these tended to reinforce the tendency to accept only one reply and further reinforce the authority of the teacher as arbiter of 'The Answer'.

The relations of authority and obedience were reinforced even more by the style of corrections. One of the dearest codes of authority intact from colonial days was the teacher, red pen in hand, judging the correctness of the students' work day by day.

The literacy manual tried to suggest another approach for adults. It questioned whether a red slash or cross through errors and a correct sign for right answers was appropriate. This occasioned consternation from the volunteer teachers, for whom the role of arbiter of correctness was central to their definition of teacher.

It was suggested in the manual that the teacher give individual attention to the students as they did their exercises, walking from student to student as the exercises were being done. The meagreness of their training showed itself in their predilection for supplying the answers rather than probing where the error came from. They were also often extremely brusque in their manner, far more ready to pounce on errors than to commend correct work, thus reinforcing workers' views of themselves as incompetent and unable to learn. This often took the form of irony.

Confronted with a correct exercise, the standard comment was along the lines of 'see how simple that was'. Faced with errors, there was little attempt to seek out the few correct answers for praise, tempering corrections with encouragement. The judgmental stance of the teacher led frequently to reinforcement of the students' sense of themselves as failures but both students and teachers seemed to accept the, at times, almost dictatorial stance of the teacher, as entirely normal.

The class sessions observed gave ample opportunity to watch teachers not validating students' efforts. The repertoire for creating distance, silencing and putting students down was intact from the authoritarian classrooms of colonialism, expected from both sides.

1. FIELD NOTES

OBSERVATION OF LESSON 24, THIRD YEAR PORTUGUESE

* 15 PRESENT.

* *Dialogue* THEME about donating blood.

Pedro [THE TEACHER] SUGGESTS *those WHO DON'T GIVE BLOOD ARE 'LUCKY'*

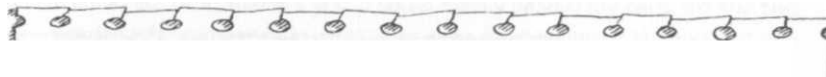
PEDRO ASKS FOR *volunteers to read and two are forthcoming*

BOTH ABLE TO GET THROUGH THE PASSAGE WITHOUT TOO *many difficulties*.

When THEY FINISH, PEDRO GIVES HIS JUDGMENT: 'NOT VERY GOOD!' PEDRO THEN HAS THE WHOLE CLASS READ TOGETHER. LATER SENHOR JOAO TRIES TO READ ALONE AND HAS DIFFICULTIES. PEDRO MAKES HIM STOP. SENHOR BANZE *reads 'I WAS' (ast/Vff) Instead of he was' (esteve). Pedro makes HIM STOP. SENHORA ANA READS 'I HAD' [tiveete] Instead of (estiveste). Pedro makes her stop.*

NONE OF THEM HAS ANY IDEA WHAT S/HE DID *wrong*, *later people succeed In giving answers to several of the questions. The final comment from Pedro on the lesson Is: you're doing badly. This Is a crisis.*

Field Notes June 15, 1985



2. FIELD NOTES

OBSERVATION OF LESSON 50, SECOND YEAR PORTUGUESE

* 7 PRESENT.

* PHOTOSTORIES DONE IN 1964 DISTRIBUTED.

* LOTS OF SPONTANEOUS ENTHUSIASM TO GET THEM AND READ.

* AURELIO *dampened* THIS A LITTLE BY SUGGESTING THEY *should read It for* HOMEWORK!

THE *photostories were just given cut* LIKE THAT — AT MY INSISTENCE FINALLY TO WHAT END EXCEPT INDIVIDUAL PLEASURE, I'M *not sure* — THOUGH GOODNESS KNOWS A BOOK JUST FOR PLEASURE IS NO BAD THING. SENHOR SANTOS CAN READ
I
RIGHT THROUGH WITH NO PROBLEMS.

Field Notes July 7, 1985

3. FIELD NOTES

OBSERVATION OF LESSON 4S, second year PORTUGUESE

* & present

* *Senhor Alexandre was concentrating so hard on the LESSON, copying a TEXT INTO HIS notebook, that he didn't even see Carlos, the teacher, approach him*

* **SENHOR AIEANDRE TOOK AGES TO WRITE HIS name, 'ALEXANDRE'**

* **CARLOS'** reaction when it was done was to say: '*Goodness - such handwriting. I REALLY DON'T KNOW...!*'

SENHOR ALEXANDRE SITS, ALL THE TENSION GONE OUT OF HIS BODY, leaving only a deep weariness. THE BODY language expresses FRUSTRATION AND DEFEAT.

Field Notes August 7, 1985

The teachers' repertoire for encouragement and support, to begin to construct a new sense of self in the students as able, competent, articulate, with life experiences that are valuable and important, was just not there. But then how could it be! What experience had Carlos or Pedro ever had of a pedagogy that wasn't rigid, top-down, based on the transmission of knowledge. And it was all reinforced for them daily in their own night school classrooms.

I found myself torn between the students and the teachers. My feelings of sympathy for the teachers, blowing what their own experiences in the classroom had been and how little the literacy teacher training programme had done to question such authoritarian styles, were real enough. They were usually far surpassed, however, by my outrage at what they did to the students.

4. FIELD NOTES

Afternoon session

Am I being bitchy or are they being impossible? After an excellent day yesterday, today is a misery. While at one level it was useful to sit observing this *morning*, at another level the whole thing was *ridiculous*. The rigidity is what really drives me *bananas*. Carlos this *morning* with *Incessant* drilling on a word like *artesanato* (handicraft) that is hardly essential to the workers' day to day *needs*. He seems to have a special dislike for Senhor Alexandre so even what little he manages to do right is never praised.

This *afternoon* it's a session with just two *students*, *Senhor Santos* and *Senhora Isabel*. He romps through the text from the lesson *having been Interrupted* by *Carlos* from reading the photostory. She has *difficulties* reading the text and gets *harassed* by both *Santos* and *Carlos* together.

Carlos is working with them on the difficult *words*. *Senhora Isabel* is not able to read them. *Carlos* chides her. This is very bad. We can't have only *Santos* reading. *Senhora Isabel* is also here. She has to read too.'

Then *Senhor Santos* gets in on the action. He also harasses her. She just gets more quiet still and almost seems to grow smaller in front of our eyes as she withdraws into herself. Self-fulfilling *prophecies* fulfilled *once again*

Field Notes July 7, 1985

5. FIELD NOTES

The test

The women students seemed to be particular targets of these put *downs* by the teachers. I *observed* an amazing *scene* in one of *Fedro's* third year Portuguese classes *oneday*. He had given the students a test, meant to help them *prepare* for the real test at the end. The men all managed to do it fairly readily. Three of the women stayed on long after most had gone, trying to complete the answers.

PEDRO, WHO MUST BE ABOUT SIX FEET TALL, CAME IN AND HOVERED OVER THEIR DESKS IMPATIENTLY AT THE END, DEMANDING TO KNOW IF THEY WERE FINISHED. THE WOMEN, LOOKING SOMEWHAT DEFEATED, SAID THEY WERE AND HANDED IN THE TESTS.

GLANCING OVER THEIR PAPERS, PEDRO COMMENTED: 'WELL, YOU'VE MADE A REAL FRUIT SALAD OF IT, HAVEN'T YOU'. I COULD HARDLY BELIEVE MY EARS. SO THE TWO WOMEN LEFT, CONFIRMED IN WHAT THEY ALREADY KNEW ABOUT THEMSELVES AND LITERACY — HOPELESS CASES.

I WAS FURIOUS WITH *Pedro today and the way he treated the women* IN THE CLASS OVERTHE EXAM. I CAUGHT UP WITH HIM *outside* AND TOLD HIM IN MY BEST *national training* STAFF AUTHORITATIVE *manner* THAT THIS WAS ABSOLUTELY NOT THE RIGHT WAY TO WORK IN *literacy and to correct students*.

IT'S STRANGE. WHENEVER WOMEN ARE PUT *down*, I FIND *myself reacting very* FIERCELY, WITH NONE OF THE QUALMS *about whether I should Intervene and how*. ANYWAY, *Intervention* WITH PEDRO TO WHAT AVAIL? THIS ONE I JUST *happened to overhear*, BUT I *Imagine the use of authority to* PUT people *down* IN THIS WAY IS *common enough*.

THE *problem is, Pedro himself doesn't believe they can learn. The notion of support and encouragement to tackle their shame and Inhibitions is not* his FIX ON HOW TO BE A TEACHER AT ALL. HE'S THE TEACHER. HE GAVE IT. *They didn't get it. CLEARLYTHEYARETHE problem.*

Field Notes June 16, 1985

Throughout the period of my field work, there were regular discussions about how to link the classes with real life experiences of the workers and move them from being mini-lectures by the teachers or ritualized questions and answers. Aurelio, the school director, was part of many of these discussions and finally came to me one day to work out how we could enrich the second year lessons.

The decision seemed to stem from the response by Abdul Carimo, Aurelio's director, to the study document. Carimo had included a comment to the effect that the teachers should break out of monotonous lesson routines and introduce new teaching methods like slides. Aurelio was now authorised to innovate.

We set up a time and then sat down and went through the units one by one, adding an additional activity to each unit. The unit on health care was to include a visit from health extension staff with their new video on diarrhoea. The unit on tea production was to include real photos of Gurue tea plantation. The unit on colonialism was to include the wonderful

photos from the CIM archives showing overweight, cigar-smoking settlers with their families at lavish parties in the dining room for whites only, while the blacks who slaved with endless sacks of flour and maize meal ate from tin plates in a warehouse. The unit on people's power was to include a video on people's tribunals in urban Maputo. The unit on textile production was to include a visit to the neighboring Texlom factor)'.

Aurelio seemed doubtful about how it would all work. I tried to steer us towards manageable things. I also arranged to take him around to the Ministry of Health and the Social Communication Office from where we were to get newspaper subs for the students of a simple newspaper for newly literates.

I calculated that by taking him on these rounds, he would be able to put faces to the people working in the various sectors. Once he had experienced their enthusiasm at the prospect of getting their resources out to places like CIM he would be more determined to make it work. I also tried to alert DNEA colleagues so that he might get some additional support from them. Subsequent to that he might get some additional support from them.

Subsequent letters, however, showed how hard it proved to be.

Marshall, J. (1990) Literacy, State Formation and People's Power: Education in a Mozambican Factory. Cape Town: Centre for Adult and Continuing Education, University of the Western Cape.

Questions

1. What is the main theme that emerges from this extract? Are there any sub-themes?
2. How do you think the teacher concerned would have interpreted the behaviours that the researcher describes? Why?
3. Critique these field notes in terms of the criteria developed on page 62:
 - Descriptive
 - Does not attempt to interpret or analyse
 - Clear, unbiased language
 - No value judgement attached to people or behaviour
4. Did you notice that the researcher combines both observation notes and her own thoughts, comments and reactions in the same 'field notes'? What are the possible disadvantages of doing this?

Note

These extracts have been especially selected from a vast collection of data to illustrate an emerging theme: this researcher is at an advanced stage of her research and has begun to focus on specific issues that emerge from her data — the third criterion of 'unfocused', therefore, does not apply at this stage.

Triangulation

Triangulation is a term used by researchers to describe a way of checking and clarifying the interpretations they have made of their data. Triangulation involves the use of at least three data sources, for example, interviews, repeated observations, lesson plans, writings on the blackboard, test questions. This is done in order to get multiple perspectives on the same events and to check tentative or working hypotheses. When you form a hypothesis based on one source of data, cross-check it with another. Another way to test your hypothesis is to see whether or not you can use it to predict learners' behaviour in a certain situation.

Planning and action

There is no clear separation between the stages of action research — you might already have been through many mini-loops of observation, analysis, planning and action.

By now you should have a good idea of what is emerging from your research and you should start to decide how to act on it. For example, you may design two or three learning activities to try out your findings and ideas. If at all possible, link these to your participatory learning programme (see Chapter 3). Then observe the results and evaluate with your learners. Think about the following questions:

- ◆ Did you do what you planned to do?
- + If not, what happened and why?
- ◆ What were the intended effects?
- 4 What were the unintended effects?



_____ (*Write this section of*
 _____ *your research report.*
 \ _____)



Ideas about teaching, once tested through practice, must lead to some course of action. There is a tension between idea and action which is reflexive; once it is tested the action rebounds back on the idea which informed it. Hence, reflexive action may be transformed into new understandings and redefined practice in teaching.

From: *Bartlett, L.* (1990) 'Teacher development through reflective teaching' in *Richards, J. C. and Nunan D. (eds). Second Language Teacher Education*. New York: Cambridge University Press, pp.214.

Reflection and further planning

This is the final phase of your project, a time to reflect on everything you have done and what you have learned. Your final evaluation should follow roughly this format.

- ◆ This is what I thought I wanted to know.
- ◆ This was the research opportunity I had.
- ◆ This is what I learned.
- ◆ This is what was wrong with it.
- ◆ This is what I'm going to do next.

Activity 2

Aim

The aim of this activity is to brainstorm all the barriers that you have encountered so far in your attempts to implement action research, both for participatory learning and for reflective teaching. Consider also anything that facilitated your research.

Discuss



Think about:

- ◆ Factors related to who you are: previous experience, beliefs about teaching, previous experience of learning and teaching, values — reason for this career, struggles to change, own personality and teaching style.
- ◆ Factors related to the contexts in which you learn and teach (political and practical constraints, time, resources, access).
- ◆ Factors related to the profession as a whole: access to resources, mentors.

Write an account of the barriers you personally encountered for your research report. Below are some barriers to change that others have experienced.

Exercise



Experienced teachers who have been teaching for some years will have developed ways of doing things which they have found to work for them in their situations. Consequently they may be reluctant to abandon tried and tested methods for new ones which they may be afraid will fail.

From : *Sikes* (1992) in Pennington, M. (1995) Unpublished thesis, p. 47.

When the teacher-researcher [Vivian] first came across the approach, she did not expect much from it and even questioned its workability. Though she decided to try this method to see if it could solve her problems, she expected herself to give up after a few trials because she was uncertain about the approach itself, its applicability, and the right way of implementing it. Yet, the ideas of drafting and redrafting in a recursive manner enlightened her. Fortunately, the outcomes of the implementation were very encouraging and she was delighted when she realised that the approach really worked. Her confidence and self-awareness in teaching writing increased and so did the quality of her teaching.

From: *Li, M. K.* (1993) in Pennington, M. (1995) Unpublished thesis, pp. 26-27.

Although all of the teachers could write about the theory of process writing in a fairly sophisticated way at the beginning of their project, when it came to actually implementing it in the classroom, they were quite insecure and unsure of how to proceed. In other words, they had not made the link between the more abstract level of approach and the more concrete level of procedure. The problem seemed to be that the schema or subjective theory of teaching **which** they had built up over their lives as students and teachers in Hong Kong prevented them from fully comprehending what process writing meant in practical terms.



From: *Pennington, M. (1995) 'The teacher change cycle'. TESOL Quarterly 29, 4, p. 724.*

We don't always have opportunities to reflect on our teaching, but once you have started, you will be thirsty to go on.

Evaluation

In the last two chapters we have concentrated intensively on developing skills of observation and analysis as these skills are central to good research. Writing up your observations will help you to gain new perspectives and reward you with a career that is continually interesting. Developing the habit of careful observation and critical analysis in the classroom can be the start of a lifelong career as a practitioner researcher. However, these are also transferable skills. Once you have acquired them, you will be able to apply them in many areas of your life and work.

- ◆ How do you think you could apply your ability to observe and analyse outside the classroom'?
- ◆ What would the benefits be?
- ◆ What other skills and knowledge have you acquired during this module?
- ◆ What skills and knowledge did you need for this research that were not part of this module?

Recommended reading

Brause, R. and Mayher, J.S. (eds). (1991) Search and Research: What the Inquiring Teacher Needs To Know. Hampshire, UK: The Falmer Press.

Cochran-Smith, M. and Lytle, S. (1993) Inside/Outside: Teacher Research and Knowledge. New York: Teachers College Press.

6 BUILDING A COMMUNITY OF RESEARCHERS

What counts as outstanding practice cannot be specified outside the contexts of ABET practice, but needs to be discovered – through practitioner research – within each context.

From: *Uswe/McLean, D. (1996) A Profile of the Outstanding Practitioner*. Unpublished HSRC Report, p. 12.

The aim of this chapter

This chapter focuses on the final stage of your research, writing it and sharing it with others. It also considers the question of validity in practitioner research. Throughout the course of this work file you have been asked to write up sections of your action research projects. Now you will use these notes, your research journal, observation notes and other documentation to write a report on your action research project.

Researching ABET, making history

The importance of investigating and recording what works in the classroom is critical at this stage in South African education. ABET, in particular, faces enormous challenges, but it also offers huge possibilities for exciting research. As practitioners have a unique position from which to solve problems.

As you carry out research in your classroom and perhaps even beyond it, you will, for example, be creating new knowledge about the factors that encourage or demotivate learners, innovative ways of dealing with problems, and the knowledge and skills needed by ABET learners in various contexts.

The classroom, like other workplaces, is a site of constant and complex thinking and learning. Investigating and reflecting on what happens in your classroom enables you to engage with problems at a far deeper level than those who look from the outside in. It enables you to move constantly between the theory and the reality and to push out the boundaries of both.

In many work contexts, skill often depends on a pool of localised knowledge that is initially distributed across a number of individual workers, but becomes shared as a result of informal social interactions and communication (discussions, comparing approaches and solutions to work problems, and so on).¹

Adapted from: *O'Connor, P. (1994) 'Workplaces, as sites of learning' in O'Connor, P. (ed.) Theoretical Perspectives on Workers' Literacies. Sydney: ALBSAC.*

It is important to regularly share your work with other practitioners and learn from what others are doing and thinking. Together you can build a solid research base which has the potential to influence national debates on a wide range of issues: teacher education, learner curriculum, learning outcomes, developmental indicators for successful ABET projects, sustainability, and a host of others.

What is important is your own understanding and analysis of what you have been doing.

Unique perspectives of teacher research

Efforts to construct and codify a knowledge base for teaching should not ignore the significant contributions that teacher research can make to the academic research community and the community of school-based teachers. We propose that teacher research, defined as systematic, intentional enquiry by teachers, makes accessible some of the expertise of teachers and provides university and school communities with unique perspectives on teaching and learning.

From: *Cochran-Smith, M. and Lytle, S. (1993). Inside/ Outside: Teacher Research And Knowledge.* New York: Teachers College Press, p. 83.

This does not mean that there is no role for researchers who are located outside of the teaching profession. But there needs to be a balance. At the moment, very little practitioner research has been written down or shared with others. We urge you, therefore, to share your work.

You have seen as you work through this book that few of the examples of research are from South African ABET contexts. South African needs more practitioner researchers.

Activity 1

The aim of this activity is to evaluate your research.

Reread the extract 'What is practitioner research?' on page 20. Look at the key words or sentences you chose from the extract.

- ◆ Do these words mean any more to you now than they did when you started this module? Explain.
- ◆ What strengths and weaknesses do you see in your research in relation to these key features?



Validity

Part of evaluating your research before you write it is considering its validity, that is, whether your interpretation of your data 'rings true' to you and to others who participated in the research. The extract below will give you an idea of the ways in which practitioner researchers are thinking about validity.

Criteria for 'validity' in practitioner research

Practitioners do research in their sites for different reasons. If the purpose of practitioner research is to produce knowledge for dissemination in fairly traditional channels (for example, dissertations, journals), then the criteria for a 'valid' study may be different than the criteria of practitioners who organise their research around specific problems within an action context.

Furthermore, whereas social science research often fetishises method, practitioner research is less dependent on research method for its validity criteria. Less dependence causes what Greene (1992) identifies as 'a blurring of the boundaries between ways of knowing offered by social science and by literature and other humanities' (p. 41).

The following criteria are tentative, and they are best applied to action research that is transformative in nature (that is, research linked to some kind of action to change educational and/or institutional practices).

Democratic validity

To what extent is the research done in collaboration with all parties who have a stake in the problem under investigation? If not done collaboratively, how are multiple perspectives and material interests taken into account in the study? For example, are teachers and/or administrators, through practitioner research, finding solutions to problems that benefit them at the expense of other stakeholders? Are students and their parents seen as part of the insider community that undertakes this type of research or are they viewed as outsiders by practitioner researchers?

Another version of democratic validity is what Cunningham (1983) calls 'local' validity', in which the problems emerge from a particular context and solutions are appropriate to that context. Watkins (1991) calls this 'relevancy' or 'applicability' criteria for validity (that is, 'How do we determine the relevance of findings to the needs of the problem context?') (p. 15).

Outcome validity

According to Cunningham (1983), one test of the validity of action research is the extent to which actions occur that lead to a resolution of the problem under study. In this sense, validity is synonymous with the 'successful' outcome of the research project. This begs the question raised in the section on democratic validity: successful for whom? Moreover, it ignores the fact that most good research, rather than simply solving a problem, forces us to reframe the problem in a more complex way, often leading to a new set of questions/ problems.

Nevertheless, the notion of validity as successfully completing an action research spiral of problem solving seems to make sense. Watkins (1991) points out that 'man]' action research studies abort at the stage of diagnosis

of a problem or the implementation of a single solution strategy, irrespective of whether or not it resolves the presenting problem, (p. 8)'

Process validity

In discussing the process of action research, Watkins (1991) refers to the 'dependability' and 'competency' of the stud v. She raises the question: 'To what extent are we able to determine the adequacy of the process and are problems solved in a manner that permits ongoing learning of the individual or system?' (see Argyris et al, 1985). Outcome validity, therefore, is dependent on process validity. If the process is superficial or flawed, the outcome will reflect it.

Whereas democratic validity depends on the inclusion of multiple **voices** as a social justice issue, the notion of triangulation, or the inclusion of multiple perspectives, guards against viewing events in a simplistic or biased wax: Triangulation can also refer to using a variety of methods, for example, observation and interviews, so that a researcher is not limited to only one kind of data source.

Process is not, however, limited to method. In narrative and essayist forms of inquiry, there are distinct criteria for what makes a good empirical narrative (as opposed to fiction). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) warn that: 'not only may one "fake the data" and write a fiction but one may also use the data to tell a deception as easily as a truth' (p. 10). Thus, criteria, like verisimilitude, plausibility and intention, become important for judging narratives. (See Connelly and Clandinin (1990), for an elaboration of these criteria.)

Catalytic validity

Catalytic validity is 'the degree to which the research process reorients, focuses and energizes participants toward knowing reality in order to transform it (Lather (1986) p. 272). In the case of practitioner research, not only the participants, but the researchers themselves must be open to reorienting their view of reality as well as their view of their practitioner role.

All involved in the research should deepen their understanding of the social reality under study and should be moved to some action to change it. The most powerful practitioner research studies are those in which the practitioners recount a change in their own and their participants' understandings.

This reinforces the importance of the role of a research journal, in which practitioner researchers can monitor their own change process and consequent changes in the dynamics of the setting. For example, Richards' (1989) account of street people includes powerful examples from her reflective journal documenting her changing sense of her role and her changing perceptions of her students.

Dialogic validity

In academic research the 'goodness' of research is monitored through peer review. Research reports must pass through the process of peer review to be disseminated through academic journals. Many academic journals even provide opportunities for researchers to engage in point/counterpoint debates about research. A similar form of peer review is beginning to develop within and among practitioner research communities. Many practitioner research groups are forming throughout North America, as practitioner researchers seek dialogue with peers.

To promote both democratic and dialogic validity, some insist that practitioner research should only be done as collaborative inquiry (Torbert, 1981). Others suggest that practitioner researchers participate in critical and reflective dialogue with other practitioner researchers (Martin, 1987) or work with a critical friend who is familiar with the setting and can serve as devil's advocate for alternative explanations of research data. When the dialogic nature of practitioner inquiry is stressed, studies can achieve what Myers (1985) calls 'goodness-of-fit with the intuitions of the teacher community, both in its definition of problems and in its findings' (p. 5).

Conclusion

These validity criteria for practitioner research are tentative and in flux. We agree with Connelly and Clandinin (1990), who, in discussing validity criteria for action research, state, 'We think a variety of criteria, some appropriate to some circumstances and some to others, will eventually be the agreed-upon norm. It is currently the case that each inquirer must search for, and defend, the criteria that best apply to his or her work' (p. 7).

References

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- Cunningham, J. B. (1983) 'Gathering data in a changing organization' in *Human Relations* 36(5), pp. 403-420.
- Greene, J. (1992) 'The practitioner's perspective' in *Curriculum Inquiry* 22, pp. 39-45.
- Lather, P. (1986) 'Research as praxis' in *Harvard Educational Review* 56 (3), pp. 257-277.
- Martin, N. (1987) 'On the move: teacher-researchers in Goswami, D. and Stillman, P. (eds). *Reclaiming the Classroom: Teacher Research as an Agency for Change*. New Jersey: Boynton/Cook, pp. 20-28.
- Myers, M. (1985) *The Teacher-Researcher: How to Study Writing in the Classroom*. Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Richards, M. (1989) 'A teacher's action research study: The "bums" of 8H (A humanistic view of motivational strategies with low achievers) in *Peabody Journal of Education* 64(2), pp. 65-79.

Torbert, W. (1981) 'Why educational research has been so uneducational: The case for a new model of social science based on collaborative inquiry'⁹ in Reason, P. and Rowan, J. (eds). *Human Inquiry: A Sourcebook of New Paradigm Research*. New York: John Wiley, pp. 141-151.

Watkins, K. (1991) 'Validity of action research'. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago.

From: Anderson, G. L., Herr, K. and Nihlen, A. S. (1994) *Studying Your Own School*. California: Corwin Press Inc/Sage Publications, pp. 29-33.

Questions

Exercise



1. Skim the extract and underline one or two key sentences in each sub-section.
2. Then go back and select at least two kinds of validity which you feel are suitable for evaluating your research.
3. Write a couple of paragraphs assessing your research in terms of each type of validity. Discuss your assessment with your mentor, and rewrite if necessary. Then incorporate these assessments into your final report under.

Writing your research report

Good research should be systematic and public. 'Systematic' means having a clear idea of what the research is about. It also means working out sensible ways of collecting and analysing the information you collect.

'Public' means that there has to be some form of report about the research. The report should explain what motivated your research, how you collected your information, how you analysed the data and what your conclusions are. Research should be public so that other people can learn from your research and be inspired to try their own research project with adult learners. Presenting your findings in a report will also enable others to evaluate your research project.

Writing up a research report is a process, just like any other writing task. It can take several weeks so be sure to give yourself enough time. It involves discussion of the research project with your teaching support group, your mentor and your adult learners in order to get their input on the project and to get their input on what aspects of the project you should report on (the pre-planning stage). If your study or research group has been meeting regularly to discuss research in progress and you have been handing your journal in to your facilitator for comment and feedback, you should by now have a sense of what needs to go into your report. Look at the sample outline on pages 107-108 and see whether it will work for you. Do you need to add new sections? Do you have information on all the sections given?

Plan

The next stage is to begin filling in the report outline with the details of your research process and findings. Start by filling in sub-headings under each section or just note down key words or sentences under each. This will serve as a checklist to make sure you have everything covered in your final report. It will also help you organise information and make links between different sections.

Write

Finally begin writing up sections of the report using your plan. Add all the bits you have already written during this module, revising and adding to them if necessary. Write up any sections you have not already dealt with. You will probably write and rewrite some sections several times.

Edit

Finally, you will need to edit the report before it is presented as an assignment or in a public forum. You will find an editing checklist on page 112 of this chapter.

WRITING A RESEARCH REPORT

Pre-planning

Planning the report

Writing and re-writing the report

Editing the report

Stage 1: the pre-planning stage

This stage is on-going throughout the process. Arrange a regular time slot for everyone in the research group to discuss their research.

Giving and getting feedback

At this stage of your research, when you are trying to make sense of your research and write it up in a way that will make sense to others, the following questions can be very useful in group discussion:

- ◆ Do you have too much data? How can you narrow your focus to make it more manageable?
- ◆ What other factors should be taken into account?
- ◆ What other ways are there of analysing the research data?
- ◆ Are there alternative explanations for the research findings?

The last question is perhaps the most important. Your aim in giving feedback should be to help co-researchers look at their findings from as many different angles as possible. In this way they can be sure they have chosen the interpretation that best fits their data, not the data that best fit their interpretations.

Revising

Your teaching support group may have many useful suggestions to offer. You could try these out and report back to them. Try reading sections of your report to learners — they may point out gaps or additional points.

Action research requires the researcher to take many different perspectives into account.

Stage 2: planning

Planning writing is very important. How coherent and readable your final report is will largely depend on how well it was planned.

Activity 3

Aim

The aim of this activity is to plan your final research report.

Go over your research plan and read over the brief reports that you wrote in the 'Research Report' section of your Practical Teaching file. Now, using the example below as a guide, plan what should go into each section of your report.

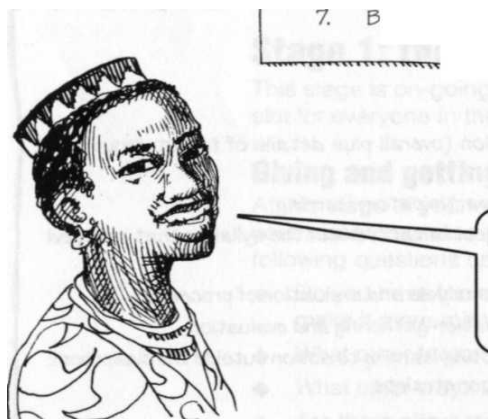
Example

PROJECT OUTLINE

LENGTH: 15-20 TYPED PAGES

1. *Introduction*
2. *MY teaching situation* (OVERALL PLUS DETAILS OF TARGET GROUP AND NEEDS)
3. *Action research for participatory learning*
3. BRIEF OVERVIEW OF *project: an account of the SYLLABUS THAT emerged from THIS RESEARCH*
 - 3.2 PHASE 1: NEEDS ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION OF PROCESS
 - 3.3 PHASE 2: *information* GATHERING AND *evaluation*
 - 3.4 PHASE 3: CONNECTING LEARNING TO ACTION OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM: *achievements, constraints*

- 3.5 FURTHER PLANS: BRIEF SKETCH OF SKETCH *future* LEARNING AND RESEARCH POSSIBILITIES
- 3.6. *Evaluating outcomes:*
 - SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE DEVELOPED (OWN AND LEARNERS), *relationship to IEE3 OR OTHER NATIONAL OR LOCAL GUIDELINES*
 - *other gains*
4. ACTION RESEARCH FOR *reflective teaching*
 - 4.1 RESEARCH QUESTION, HOW IT LINKS TO 3 ABOVE AND HOW IT CHANGED OVERTIME
 - 4.2 WHO WAS INVOLVED IN THE RESEARCH AND HOW
 - 4.3 DATA GATHERING PROCESS AND EVALUATION OF PROCESS
 - 4.4 INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS: WHAT MEANING DID I FIND IN MY DATA, WHAT DID I LEARN ABOUT MYSELF
 - 4.5. PLANNED CHANGE AND *Implementation – Intended and unintended outcomes*
 - 4.6 *Reflection and evaluation — POSSIBLE NEXT LOOPS of action research; THINGS THAT FACILITATED THE RESEARCH; BARRIERS TO change (personal, contextual, institutional, professional)*
 - 4.7 *Validity (see pages 101-104)*
- 5 OVERALL *conclusion and evaluation: what I HAVE learnt from THIS RESEARCH, GO BACK TO THE OUTCOMES FOR THE module In THE Introduction and In Chapter 1. Evaluate my own growth AS A PRACTITIONER.*
7. APPENDICES E.G. SYLLABUS *created WITH YOUR LEARNING group, CLASS reflection forms, COMMUNITY MAPS, LESSON PLANS, RESEARCH planning SHEETS, SAMPLES OF learning activities, or anything else YOU THINK IMPORTANT. YOU SHOULD weave EXTRACTS FROM THE WORK YOU have done overtheyear, Including your observation notes and research journal, Into your report as evidence FOR YOUR FINDINGS.*
8. BIBLIOGRAPHY



Did you learn anything more about the relationship between the values and beliefs you have as an ABET practitioner and your daily practice in the classroom?

Stage 3: writing and re-writing

IF YOU HAVE BEEN DOING ALL THE ACTIVITIES IN THIS WORK FILE, YOU WILL HAVE ALREADY WRITTEN A CONSIDERABLE PART OF YOUR RESEARCH REPORT WHICH SHOULD BE FILED IN THE 'RESEARCH REPORT' SECTION OF YOUR PRACTICAL TEACHING FILE. PRESENT YOUR DRAFT REPORT TO YOUR TEACHING SUPPORT GROUP FOR THEIR COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

THE READING BELOW WILL PROVIDE YOU WITH SOME IDEAS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR WRITING UP A RESEARCH REPORT. THE AUTHOR IS JANE MACE, AN ADULT LITERACY RESEARCHER. THE REPORT BELOW DESCRIBES A WRITERS' WORKSHOP HELD AT THE ADULT LITERACY RESEARCH NETWORK CENTRE OF LA TROBE UNIVERSITY IN AUSTRALIA.

'Who am I writing this for?': the researcher-writer in adult literacy

Research writing has often been characterised as 'writing up something we do when everything else has been done'. In reality, as a group of researcher-writers agreed during a workshop at La Trobe University in November 1995, we are writing from the moment we begin: and often the most important kind of writing to keep to is that which is almost invisible in the final public result.

Sixteen colleagues joined me for this workshop to look at the issues and questions that arise for those who decide to embark on research in the field of adult literacy, by which I take to mean both literacy in adult life and the educational practice of literacy teaching and learning with adults. The participants included ALBE teachers who are engaged in research as graduate students and university staff (some former ALBE teachers themselves) who are seeking ways both to help these colleagues and to develop their own research writing for publication.

Of all the seminars, workshops, meetings and lectures which I have been invited to give during my ten weeks in Australia, this was one of the most interesting and enjoyable for me. I recall the vitality of a group of people talking, laughing, working in pairs and/or groups and comparing notes. I also recall my own feeling of working experimentally. The day itself represented a research activity: I was acting out the role of the teacher-researcher, trying out a particular set of strategies that I had designed to elicit the experience and ideas from a group of people I was working with, of interest to me, as well as to them.

In presenting the plan for the day, I offered a sample of some of my own research writing: not the finished, published kind, but the writing involved in the research process itself — letters, questionnaires and so on. The discussion collected brief accounts of the research projects in which people were engaged; people worked on a 'writing wheel' of the different kinds of writing this engaged them in; and together, we worked on criteria for good research writing.

At the beginning of the day I invited the group to note the questions and hopes they had brought and at the end, to log the kinds of ideas and questions they were taking away. The preoccupations these represented fell into three areas:

- + The meaning and value of research: What 'counts'? Who is it useful to? What value does research have for its subjects?
- ◆ The balance between 'proper' research writing and writing that reaches a wide readership: Who, for instance, is the reader of writing from research into literacy and workplaces? What kind of published formats might be appropriate?
- ◆ The mystique of research and research writing: How can it be demystified? How can the barriers to the public writing be overcome?

My emphasis during the day was on writing at the beginning and end of a research project. Two examples that I gave of the first were:

1. The brainstorm writing at the stage of identifying the research question itself. The group worked on ways in which any of us might find it useful to corner a friend or colleague (or use a tutorial or seminar) to talk over our research ideas at an early stage, to write a range of possible questions, and arrive at a research outline. This may be no more than two pages in length. It is more than the 'topic' itself and it is less than the 'research plan'. But it is a valuable writing exercise to engage in (and a necessary one for those of us who have to write eventual applications for research grants, or abstracts of research papers, for that matter).
2. The writing which tells research subjects why you want to meet them, interview them, or observe them. I call this the 'introductory letter'. It overlaps with the more formal document which colleagues discussed at this workshop known as the 'code of ethics' which universities now require researchers to show to anyone they wish to interview. We talked about the importance to anyone we are meeting having some clear understanding of why we want to talk to them, and what we are going to do with our notes and audio tapes – not to mention the research report itself.

As to this, the completed text – which could be a published article or thesis – the discussion we had about what makes for a 'good' piece of public research writing led people to think a lot about what kind of academic writing they themselves find interesting and useful to read. A number of people voiced a feeling of frustration with the kind of research writing which is cumbersome and 'over-jargoned'. Others felt it was important that researcher-writers be exact and, if necessary, technical in what they wrote.

We agreed that a research writer needs to both tell the research story and locate the story in relation to others. We discussed the way in which studies are often autobiographical. We talked about how research itself is a process of detection and my suggestion that good research reports, like

good detective novels lead you as a reader into curiosity to find out what happened next.

And we thought about how research writing can be literary writing, with the writer entitled to recognise herself as creative and **even** poetic in the way in which she logs her research methods and findings. The discipline, we all agreed, is to combine the observation log with the reflective note: the 'what happened/ what I saw' with 'what I think about it/ what it might mean'.

All this work, in one day. Some people who took part in the workshop went away saying they felt stimulated; others, that they felt more confident. It had given all of us the opportunity to talk over issues that we often have to struggle with alone. Several noted that they felt more 'motivated' to talk over their research ideas with others, and to think about the people who would be the subjects of their research **inquiry**. One idea seemed to strike a chord with several people. I had spoken about how, at the start of a research project, once we think we've got our topic straight, we can feel quite clear about what we want to know and **why**; but that often, periods of terrible confusion and **uncertainty** can occur and that this is alright – if it's part of the process of discovering surprises, or arriving at a redefinition of the original idea. It's a moment which is rather like the one which Australians call 'losing the plot'.

For us working in adult literacy research, that expression seems especially apt. I suppose when it happens to us, the message we need to give ourselves is the one we give our students. When you get really stuck, write about it. It's the personal, rough, provisional writing – outlines, brainstorming, notes, journals – which helps us find the plot again. From that kind of research writing can grow the other kind – for other readers. The plot is there to be found. As one participant noted at the end of the workshop: 'I'm going to type up "Feeling safe in confusion" and hang it on my wall'.

To finish, these were the criteria arrived at by the group for what we thought made for good public research writing. Such writing is good when it:

- ◆ uses clear language;
- ◆ explains any jargon;
- ◆ reflects on sources used, whether oral or written;
- ◆ acknowledges the partiality of the researcher;
- ◆ makes connections with other research;
- ◆ reflects the writer's journey and facilitates reading;
- ◆ tells the story of the research process;
- ◆ provides a historical context for the research;
- ◆ interweaves ideas and generates insights;
- ◆ influences the reader; and
- ◆ provides evidence for the researcher's claims.



Questions

1. The author states that writing at the beginning of a research project is as important as writing at the end. Do you agree? Explain why you agree or disagree.
2. Are any of the topics or suggestions discussed in the article relevant to your report writing process? Explain.
3. Read over the criteria which the workshop participants negotiated. Do you want to add to or modify this list? Do you think these are important criteria to use for evaluating a research report? Explain.
4. A writers' workshop can often help teachers with writing up their research, do you think it would be a good idea to organise a writers' workshop with your teaching support group? Ask your mentor to arrange for someone from your institution's Writing Centre or Language Department to facilitate the workshop.

A research report usually goes through many revisions before the researcher is satisfied with it.

Stage 4: editing

The final part of the writing process is editing your report. It is very useful to have the help of a colleague for this. It is usually much easier to spot someone else's gaps in logic or spelling mistakes than to spot your own.

Checklist for revising/editing your research report

- ◆ Have you completed all the sections of the report?
- ◆ Have you evaluated the content of your report.
Have you made sure all parts of the discussion are relevant and can be backed up with evidence from your research? Does it say what you want it to say? Do you need to add, delete, reorder or alter anything?
- ◆ Does your introduction provide a clear statement of the purpose of your research?
- ◆ Do your main findings emerge clearly? Are they in line with your research purpose, even if this changed over time?
- ◆ Does your conclusion flow logically from your findings?
- ◆ Have you attached a full list of references?

- ◆ Have you attached samples of lesson plans, activities, extracts from your research journal, your observations and/ or interviews, etc. as appropriate?
- ◆ Have you used your knowledge of your own grammatical weaknesses to identify and correct grammatical errors?
- ◆ Have you checked punctuation?

Assessment criteria

Whether you submit your research report to a journal, a conference or hand it in to your facilitator for assessment, your final report will be judged on the following criteria:

- ◆ evidence of planning, effective time management, learning to learn skills;
- ◆ evidence of careful, well-documented research;
- ◆ evidence of analysis, consistency of findings with information or data collected;
- ◆ evidence of ability to draw out implications of research findings and apply in practice;
- ◆ ability to contextualise learning appropriately for learners;
- ◆ evidence of own learning and development as a practitioner; and
- ◆ organisation of information and clarity of argument.

Disseminating your research

The audiences of your research can be as many and as varied as you choose. See if you can add to the following lists of possible audiences:

Inside your institution or organisation

- ◆ other teachers in your institution or organisation;
- ◆ other staff in your institution or organisation;
- ◆ learners: you will have shared your findings with learners during the course of your research but they might like to participate in more public presentations of the work;
- ◆ new students on the course you have just completed; and
- ◆ you might choose to share your findings informally with a few colleagues and to continue your research for a while.

Outside your institution or organisation

- ◆ community organisations or union structures;
- ◆ local education authorities;

- ◆ special interest groups; and
- ◆ ABET curriculum or materials developers.

Other ways of disseminating your research

You could disseminate your research:

- ◆ in organisational or interest group newsletter or journal e.g. *SAALA Communique, Bual*;
- ◆ in a newspaper article;
- ◆ at a community or union meeting;
- ◆ at a workshop;
- ◆ at a conference; or
- ◆ in a play dramatising key findings.

You may think of others. Your purpose in presenting your findings will change according to your audience.

Presenting your research findings

Plan to make two presentations of your research findings. One could be a formal presentation to the local Education Department; the other a workshop with members of the Trade Union in the factory where you work, or with members of the local community organisation.

What would be your purpose in each case? Would you select different parts of your research to highlight for each? Use your own research as a basis for discussion.

Conferences

Every year in South Africa and internationally groups of teachers, including adult educators, get together to share experiences, discuss research findings and contribute to the development of knowledge in their profession. This is an opportunity to present research reports to a larger audience and to get feedback from people who can bring a different perspective and understanding to your work.

If you have worked through the activities and readings of this workbook you will have been involved in an action research project, which has been written up in the form of a report. You could summarise this report, if it is too long, and present it at an appropriate conference. If this is the first time that you are going to attend a conference, you may prefer not to present a paper, but rather attend the workshops and presentations that interest you.

South African national conferences

There are many conferences for teachers to attend. Every year South Africa holds a conference for Language teachers and Language researchers; this is the 'SAALA Conference'. For information about how to attend this conference write to:

SAALA Secretary
Language Education Centre
School of Education
University of Cape Town
Private Bag
Rondebosch 7700

Every year there is a conference of teachers of mathematics, known as the AMESA Conference'. To find out where this conference is held and how to attend, write to:

The AMESA Secretary
P O Box 12833
Centra Hill 6006
Tel 041-560275
Fax: 041-563519

Local conferences and seminars

Local conferences and seminars are usually arranged by institutions and organisations in a particular area. Contact the educational institutions in your area to find out how to attend conferences or seminars that are of interest to you.

International conferences

South Africa has hosted several international conferences in the field of adult education and literacy. There are also many conferences in this field all over the world. Adult education journals will usually provide you with information about these.

Journals

It is not always possible to attend national or international conferences because of the expense involved in making travel and accommodation arrangements.

You can write off to the secretary or conference organiser and ask for copies of papers. Many conference papers eventually get published in journals. Reading conference proceedings and journal publications is a way of keeping up to date with the developments in action research and teacher education.

Many of the teachers' journals contain inspiring suggestions and good tips for practical teaching. If you want to submit your research report to one of the teachers' journals, write to them asking for guidelines. They will provide you with information on how long the article should be and how they want it presented. Some journals require the article to be written on a word processor and submitted in hard copy and on disk, others require on a neat, readable text.

On the next page are some journals that are useful for ABET practitioners:

<i>Literacy Link</i>	Centra Hill 6006	<i>TESOL Quarterly</i>
Forum for Adult Education	Tel 041-560275	3501 Market Street
P. O. Box 469	Fax: 041-563519	Philadelphia
Wits 2050		Pennsylvania
	<i>Good Practice</i>	19104 USA
<i>Active Voice</i>	Adult Literacy Action	
ELP	Campaign	<i>Voices Rising</i>
314 Dunwell House	452 Elizabeth Street	ICAE Women's Programme
35 Jorrisen Street	North Hobart	Office
Braamfontein	Tasmania 7000	Avenue Bourguiba
Johannesburg 2001	<i>Basic Skills</i>	Villa No. 4336
		B. P. 5996
<i>BUA!</i>	Basic Skills Agency	Dakar
P. O. Box 378	Commonwealth House	Senegal
Salt River 7924	1-19 New Oxford Street	
	London WC1A 1NU	<i>Convergence</i>
<i>Upbeat</i>	England	
P. O. Box 11350		720 Bathurst Street
Johannesburg 2000	<i>RAPAL</i>	Suite 500
	Bolto Royd centre	Toronto M5S ZR4
<i>Forum</i>	Manningham Lane	Canada
United States Information	Bradford BD8 7BB	
Service	England	<i>Adult Education and</i>
10 Plein Street		<i>Development</i>
Cape Town	<i>The Teacher Trainer</i>	D. V V.
	8 Vernon Place	Rheinallee 1
<i>Pythagoras</i>	Canterbury	D-5300 Bonn 2
The AMESA Secretary	Kent CT1 3YG	Germany
P. O. Box 12833	England	

Recommended reading



Try to read some of the practitioner research in the journals listed above. Some of these journals are available free of charge and others are quite expensive. Write for information on how to obtain them. Perhaps your teaching practice group could club together to subscribe to one or two journals and share them. Or lobby your institution to subscribe to them. They are good tools for teachers and researchers. Conference papers and research publications are becoming more important than formal degrees for career progression.

We hope you have enjoyed this workbook. Please send your evaluation of this workbook to the course developers. And be sure to inform them if you publish any of your research!

Mowbray 7705

USEFUL FOR



PHOTOCOPY THESE FORMS, PUT THEM IN
YOUR FILE AND USE THEM FOR
CLASSROOM ACTION RESEARCH

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PRELIMINARY RESEARCH POSSIBILITIES

<i>ACTION RESEARCH: PARTICIPATORY LEARNING</i>		
<i>SYLLABUS PLANNING</i>		
THINGS THE LEARNERS WANT TO STUDY WHICH ARE EASY TO ACCOMMODATE	THING THE LEARNERS WANT TO STUDY WHICH ARE DIFFICULT TO ACCOMMODATE	COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND OTHER COMMENTS

<i>ACTION RESEARCH: PARTICIPATORY LEARNING</i>				
<i>ACTION PLAN</i>				
<i>Aims:.....</i>				
ACTION	WHO?	WHEN?	How?	RESOURCES NEEDED

ACTION RESEARCH: REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

CLASSROOM OBSERVATION

Classroom observation is a common way of gathering data. Sometimes it may be more appropriate to tape record or video tape classes. This form is useful for data gathering immediately after you have taught or observed a class of learners.

THINGS WHICH DISRUPTED THE LEARNING PROCESS	THINGS RELATED TO LEARNERS' ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT
THINGS WHICH ENHANCED THE LEARNING PROCESS	THINGS THE LEARNERS ENJOYED
THINGS RELATED TO LEARNERS' SOCIAL/ECONOMIC NEEDS	THINGS THE LEARNERS DID NOT LIKE

<i>ACTION RESEARCH: REFLECTIVE TEACHING</i>		
<i>REFLECTING ON THE LEARNING EXPERIENCE</i>		
THINGS THE LEARNERS DID WHICH I INTENDED	THINGS THE LEARNERS DID WHICH I DID NOT INTEND	GENERAL COMMENTS

<i>RESEARCH PLANNER (DATA GATHERING)</i>				
WHAT INFORMATION DO I WANT?	WHY DO I WANT IT?	WHERE CAN I FIND IT?	HOW DO I COLLECT IT?	HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE ME?

SYLLABUS PLAN

<i>THEME</i>	<i>SUBJECT AREA</i>			
	LEARNER'S NEEDS AND EXPERIENCE (WHAT WILL I USE TO DRAW THIS OUT?)	GATHER INFORMATION NEEDED (HOW? WHO FROM? WHERE FROM? USING WHAT SKILLS?)	SKILLS FOR TAKING ACTION (WHAT LANGUAGE SKILLS WILL LEARNERS NEED? WHICH LANGUAGE WILL THEY USE?)	REFLECT/EVALUATE (WHAT WILL WE EVALUATE? WHAT CRITERIA WILL WE USE?)
TOOLS OR ACTIVITIES				
MATERIALS AVAILABLE				
LANGUAGE, LITERACY OR OTHER SKILLS INVOLVED				
OUTCOMES FOR THIS PHASE				

The Teaching and Learning Series

Ideal for tertiary students who are learning in English as a second language, these workbooks are also suitable for learners in other contexts. They offer an introduction to many different subjects, from literacy and numeracy to science, technology, history and primary health care. Teachers and students at any level will find these user-friendly workbooks invaluable in developing content knowledge and encouraging participatory learning within different disciplines.

The series was developed collaboratively by experts in the field and has been piloted at both Peninsula Technikon and Port Elizabeth Technikon. While the workbooks are intended for supported distance learning, they can also be used as textbooks for the classroom situation.

Learning about Action Research

Any reflective educational practitioner will constantly be seeking to improve their own classroom practice and to make the classroom experience more valuable for learners. *Learning about Action Research* is a practical guide to researching classroom practice and researching learners' needs in order to improve the classroom experience.

Uswe's Teaching and Learning Series has become an invaluable and inspiring set of resources. Learning about Action Research will do much to realise the central aim of the series, which is to build critical, reflective and constructive practitioners.

Terry Volbrecht, Chairperson of the Academic Development Centre,
University of the Western Cape

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