Renewing classroom practices through collaborative action research

Anne Burns

University of New South Wales, Sydney
Thank you!

Beni davet ettğin için teşekkür ederim
For me [AR] is really a quest for life, to understand life and to create what I call living knowledge – knowledge which is valid for the people with whom I work and for myself.

(Marja Liisa Swantz, in Reason and Bradbury, 2001: 1)
‘...creating new forms of understanding, since action without reflection and understanding is blind, just as theory without action is meaningless.’

the participatory nature of action research...
‘makes it only possible with, for and by persons and communities, ideally involving all stakeholders both in the questioning and sense making that informs the research, and in the action which is its focus.’

(Reason & Bradbury, 2001: 2)
Features of classroom action research

• a self-reflective, systematic, participatory and critical approach to enquiry

• participants are actors in the classroom (teachers and learners) but also researchers

• aim to identify ‘problematic’ situations or issues

• bring about critically informed understanding and change

• underpinned by democratic principles
  (Burns, 2010)
Action research cycle

- Develop a **plan** of critically informed action to improve what is already happening
- **Act** to implement the plan
- **Observe** the effects of the critically informed action in the context in which it occurs
- **Reflect** on these effects as the basis for further planning, subsequent critically informed action, [etc.] through a succession of stages.

(Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988:10)
The impact of action research

...action research has implications of three kinds. First it can serve to improve problematic social situations. Second, it can enhance the personal understanding of the researcher. Third, it can serve to illuminate the researchers’ social surroundings, or the environment and conditions in which he or she works... (McKernan, 1991: 30)
Pam: ‘Opening the door’

At a time when I was searching for solutions, the invitation to join an action research project seemed to open a door to a new way of problem-solving. I was not unfamiliar with action research, but the attraction of this particular project for me was its collaborative nature. I saw it as an opportunity to explore my difficulties and to discuss strategies for dealing with these issues with peers who were experiencing similar concerns.
Why teacher collaboration matters

- Most classrooms are isolated/isolating places – ‘island states’
- Teachers don’t typically get to share their ideas with each other
- Good teaching depends on an active ‘community of teacher practice’
- Teachers have great ideas for changing/improving practices in the school
## Different types of collaboration in AR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research pairs</td>
<td>Two teachers work together on an area of mutual interest</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research teams</td>
<td>Based on an existing team, teachers work together on a selected topic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research groups</td>
<td>Teachers in pairs or individually come together to work on a similar issue</td>
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</table>
Your experience?

• Have your conducted any action research?

• Have you been involved in any of these types of collaboration:
  – Research pairs
  – Research teams
  – Research groups

• What were the benefits of collaboration for you?
On-going support is critical so that those involved have access to work-in-progress discussions on a regular and frequent basis, as well as coordination support where necessary. While teachers may be individually in the classroom, action research is a collaborative venture and other people are important for bouncing ideas off.
Collaboration in AR involves

• Collectivism: joint researching and sharing of ideas in progress
• Reciprocity: equal access to information and data-sharing
• Mutuality: shared ownership and investment in the research and its outcomes
• Affirmation: evaluation and validation of each other’s research
Lenn’s views on involving her students

This classroom-based action research was carried out with the involvement of students in my...course. My...class also participated in the research. I shall refer to my students as co-participants in the research because they have actively provided me with data.
Collaboration involves

- **Sustainability:** team members keep each other focused and on-task
- **Equality:** roles differ (teachers/students/facilitators) but participation is democratic
- **Sociality:** inquiry can be shaped by awareness of broader social and educational context
- **(Re)generation:** dialogue becomes a source of creative reconstruction of practice

(Burns, 1997: Teachers’ Voices 2)
The action research group members not only listened attentively to my ‘discourses’ but were also most constructive in their advice. I found our discussions very extending—they gave me a broader perspective on my teaching role with this type of group. Being in a ‘neutral’ environment away from my teaching centre helped me to reflect on my classroom practice in a much more objective way and I found it stimulating to work with teachers from other centres. The project gave me a better understanding of [ X] as an organisation endeavouring to adjust to changing educational demands.
Collaborative AR in Australia

2010

2011

2012

2013
English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS) – General English, EAP, ESP, exam preparation

- 124,600 students (12.3 weeks of study – 270 accredited colleges)
- 2,500 + teacher required to undertake professional development

Supported by English Australia
• to equip teachers with the skills to enable them to explore and address identified teaching challenges in the context of Australian ELICOS

• to share outcomes of this research.
Program outline

- Introductory workshop
- Workshop 2
- Workshop 3

Projects

SHARING OUTCOMES

- Presentations
- Publications

- English Australia Conference
- wiki
- Skype
- email

6–7 months

20
Preparing students to answer connected speech questions on the Cambridge English TKT ‘Knowledge About Language’ module

Martin and Arizio

Encouraging students to diagnose and resolve their grammar problems in speaking autonomously

Jenny
Harnessing formative feedback for oral skills development

Preparing students for a spoken academic presentation in six hours

Angie and Emily

Simon
Using Web 2.0 synchronising technologies to provide better feedback on spoken academic texts

Tim and Selena

Using Web 2.0 technologies to enhance speaking fluency

Jess and Becky
Central questions in this innovation

- (How) does action research facilitate renewal in practice?
- (How) does it do this in the context of a national ELT program?
Factors in introducing innovation are constructed by a ‘system of variables that interact to determine success or failure’ and cannot be isolated from each other.

(Fullan, 2001:46)
I’ve looked closely at how I teach speaking as well as at existing courses and curriculum at my centre. I’ve developed my skills in the classroom at an accelerated rate. I’ve gained an appreciation of how to improve as a teacher.
2. Knowledge of learners and learning

It’s brought home to me how important it is that the students decide. I’ll keep the lines of communication open with students to better inform my teaching.
Reflecting on our teaching and making systematic changes is vital for continuing professional development.

I have been very interested in doing a PhD for some time. Perhaps this project could be the basis of that.
3. Research skills

It’s a wonderful opportunity to look at research in a practical way.

[I ended up with] more knowledge of learner autonomy and goal setting theories and research skills.
Seeing the broader context

Too often staff only see things that they do and this gave them the chance to step outside their daily role...
Enhancing organisational professional development

The program fitted neatly into our own PD for the year.
Most [other] teachers also became involved with the project, allowing their classes to be included in the research.
Motivating other teachers to do CAR

Their experiences became very motivating to others, who applied [to be part of the next year’s program].
Impact of the program

- new reputational dimension
  - rejuvenation of practice
  - career options
  - program dissemination

- strengthened practice
  - institutional engagement/motivation
  - enhanced PD & professionalism
  - ‘ripple-effect’

- teaching/research skills & knowledge
  - professional development
  - longer-term impact

Diagram:
- Individual
- Institutional
- Sectoral

'ripple-effect'
CAR with UK modern language teachers
The project involved the team in three workshops held at Aston University in 2012-13 as well as a continuing process of action. During the first workshop, in November 2012, each teacher researcher identified an area of particular relevance to their own teaching context that they would like to investigate during the project.
In the second workshop, held in March 2013, each teacher reported on their initial findings, and the team discussed the next steps to continue the research process.

At the final workshop in June 2013, each teacher presented their reflections on what their research had achieved and the effect on their professional development, as well as their experiences of working with each other.
Collaboration in action
Some tips for working collaboratively

- Plan to work in pairs or teams
- Identify a common theme/themes that everyone is interested in researching
- Set yourselves common starting and end-points for your inquiries
- Work out a series of agreed meeting/discussion times
- Give everyone equal ‘air’ time during the discussions
- Share ideas/comment on each other’s research
Some tips for working collaboratively

- Be frank, open and respectful in sharing your ideas
- Plan realistic deadlines for reporting the research (written/oral/visual)
- Invite other teachers to a session where you can present your research together
- Aim to publish the research in a teacher–friendly form if possible (newsletter, journal) and support each other to do this
Research Notes
Issue 56 May 2014

Issue 56 presents six research projects completed by teachers working in the ELICOS sector in Australia.
See issues 44, 48 and 53 for previous projects
I am deeply indebted to the members of the action research group who encouraged, advised and supported me at all my ‘crisis points’ and who inspired me by their own dedication and integrity to be proud of the professional standards upheld by [the organisation’s] teachers.
Thank you

For more information please visit:
www.englishaustralia.com.au
www.cambridgeenglish.org

Contact:

anne.burns@unsw.edu.au
References


*Research Notes* issues 44, 48, 53, 58: www.cambridgeenglish.org/rs_notes/